

Springing from the heart of medieval France, *The Romance of the Faery Mélusine* tells the story of Raymondin of Poitiers who accidentally kills his uncle while out hunting, and is deep into the forest until he encounters a faery fountain. Struck by mutual soul-love, the faery Mélusine agrees to help him, and to become his wife, on condition that he makes no attempt to see her between dusk and dawn each Saturday. On this basis the house of Lusignan thrives in mysterious opulence, but a treachery tempts Raymondin to violate his promise and shatter the magic which holds his faery to the human world.

Rendered into written form in a text by Jean Leclerc in 1393, the legend of the Faery Mélusine was well established in France, where she is credited with having founded the family, town and castle of Lusignan. This new translation by Gareth Knight captures the freshness of Lebey's retelling of the legend and brings the benefit of Knight's expertise in French literature and in the esoteric faery tradition.

Gareth Knight is the author of *The Faery Gates of France* and *Mélusine of Lusignan and the Cult of the Faery Woman*.

André Lebey (1877-1938), born in Dieppe, was a poet, historian and intellectual who authored a number of books on French history.

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PRESS

THE ROMANCE OF THE FAERY MELUSINE

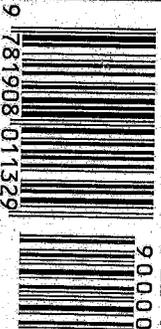
THE ROMANCE OF THE  
FAERY MELUSINE

ADAPTED FROM A NOVEL BY ANDRÉ LEBEY



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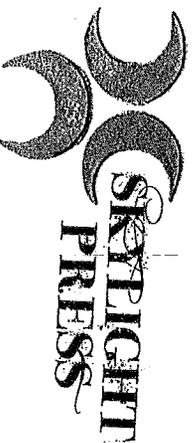
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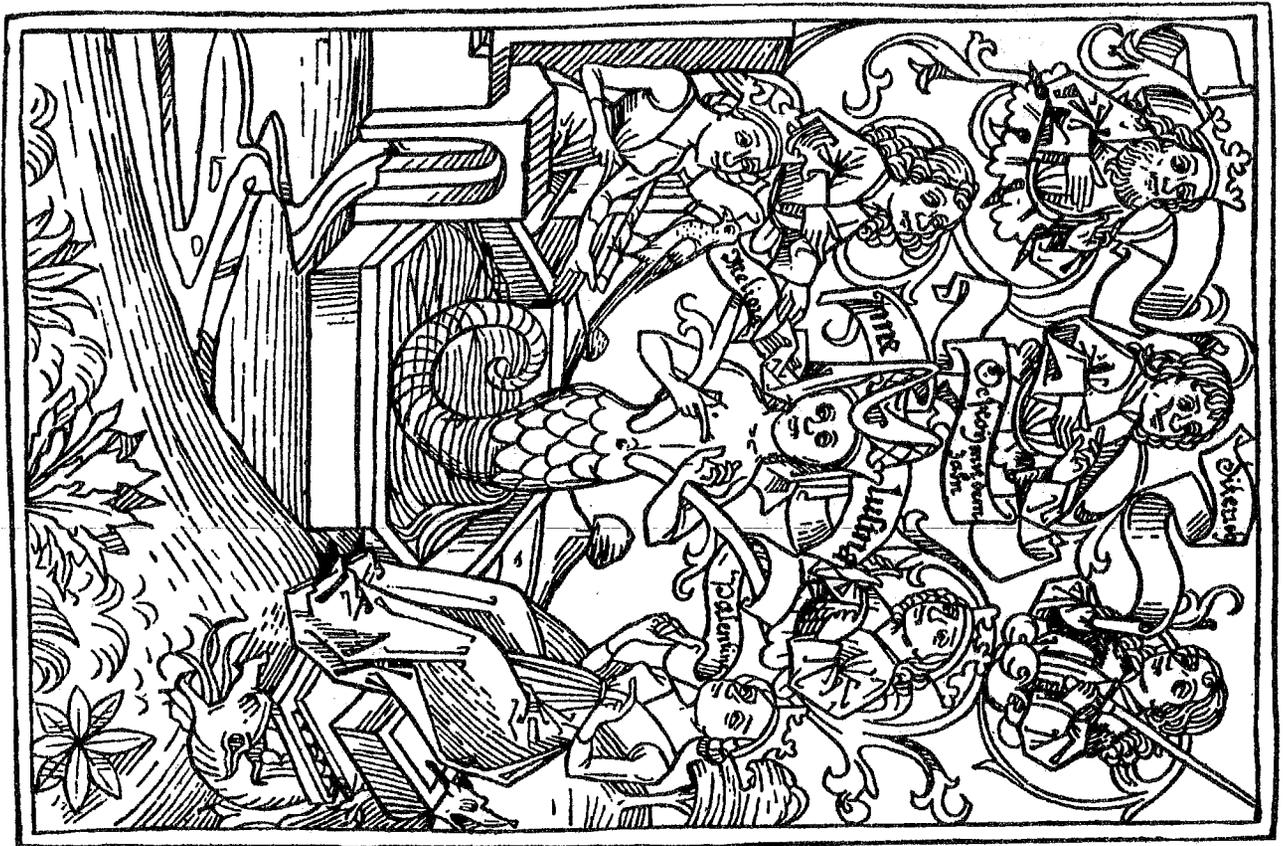
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# The Great Owl Hunter



ur story begins with a great hunter of long ago, now legendary, none other than Aimery, Count of Poitiers.

They lived close to nature in those days, even in towns. Fields came right up to the walls and the forest was close by. In hamlets and villages wild animals in their lairs could watch unseen all that went on around human dwellings. Foxes and wolves knew just when to raid. God help any child left playing on the doorstep, forgotten of an evening. On winter nights, in times of famine, packs ran through the streets, howling under the cold moon. Arrows, stones or spears were useless against them, as their numbers lent ferocity to their hunger during the night, and only the first light of dawn saw them depart.

They came down in a sudden rush. The peasants sighed and townsmen huddled for comfort against their wives in their warm beds as they heard the scampering of clawed feet on the paving stones. In narrow alleys where the houses leaned against each other, with bowed windows and gable ends overlapping or set back like monks' cowls, the passing of the dense pack, cheek by jowl, brushed the walls, iron studded oak doors, bars of lower windows with their leaded panes, to make a strange rustling sound which seemed somehow diabolic. Any who heard them pass and raised the oiled paper of a window flap to see the last go by, crossed themselves, consigning them to the Devil. A strange wild smell, something like sulphur, hung in the frozen air, stinging the nostrils, as in a room where a fire, smoking before going out, has left a scorched smell like He of the cloven hoof.

The forest stretched beyond, menacing and dangerous, full of the unknown, concealing the surprising and the supernatural. Great wildcats like small tigers abounded there, and when they prowled into lordly parks might leave with a white or multicoloured peacock, its cries choked within their maws of gleaming teeth. Between the lines of fir trees on the heights, bears licked with long tongues the honey from the nests of bees, which splashed in drops of golden liquid down their white or grey fur. All along the bushes by the pathways the eyes of lynxes burned, watching the old women, bowed under loads of kindling. Children who followed claimed to see stars at the tips of their tufted ears.

From a juniper thicket in a gully of the Rhine in the Black Forest, Charlemagne had once seen an old auroch of the Gauls, the European bison, emerge; and had not the fair warrior Hildebrand the good Duke of Souabia, not put all her weight on the lance by which she pinned his leg to the ground, her father's guest would have been dragged by the beast, disembowelled, into the forest. The charcoal burners crossed themselves when they spoke of the rancorous howling of the great lone beasts that roved through the woods.

Yet all through the land, evil reigned only if heroes failed to confront its dangers. It seemed that the one existed to give rise to the other, for humans do not show their mettle if left to themselves.

In the forest of Broceliande in the heart of Blue Brittany, in the talons of a hawk on a golden perch, the Code of Love was to be found. Bound in crimson leaves, it held the bold and tender rules that guide knights and noble ladies through all the delicate stages of exquisite favours up to the great joy of shared passion. But a minstrel will later sing for us about that.

In those days men identified with things that could lead them further into the unknown; they sought in all directions the extension of their physical and spiritual power. So they believed and so they lived, sure of themselves and strong at one moment, at the next deflated and weak, falling to their knees for restoration from another source, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And things, animals or people, trees or weapons, were more themselves. Man developed without dissociating or abstracting himself from the world. In short, he knew how to love it, to give and to take in many ways, as he needed. And the law of God prevailed over all.

Hunting, so different from our own, more justifiable because more difficult and necessary, maintained the extension of human power. Under the protection of St. Hubert it was held sacred. The complex rules of venery and falconry detailed its elements. None knew them better than Count Aimery. Everyone said this who knew him. How to train a pack of hounds, to leash the dogs, assemble them, set them off; to fly or moul a bird, to hood it, offer it the lure and the glove, be it wild falcon or peregrine.

In deep gorges or wide plains, in forest or river, he always knew what best to do. Not content only with lords of the air, sparrow hawks and falcons with the speed of barbed arrows, he had dogs of all kinds, spaniels, brachets, terriers, great dunes to hunt his lands, even Tartary hounds like those of St. Louis, whose breed resisted rabies.

In aerial hunting his wings quested everywhere as his servants beat on drums to make the prey rise. He ruled the fate of all creatures on his

land including the birds of the air. To enter a wood, search it, raise a stag, sound a horn, were things that ever gave him pleasure.

Although he strictly preserved his rights, he was just and good and never cruel. Not like the Bishop of Auxerre, Lord of Inteville, who crucified one of his guards for having stolen a few merlins. On the other hand, perhaps he would have been like a certain Saracen prince, as told in the chronicle of Eleanor of Aquitaine, who, when a great hearted falcon attacked a royal eagle and, helped by two others, brought it down at the feet of all the court, had it immediately put to death. Because, he said, it had been an act of treason to attack its natural superior.

Taming birds of prey pleased the Count of Poitiers. Fine proud heraldic and handsome, noble rulers of the sky, he made obedient and faithful like dogs. He saw a masterpiece of the will in this conquest of tireless wings and powerful steel-like talons, which flying high beyond the range of the human voice would, at a sign, a gesture of the hand, return to table or cage. For the falconer moulded his instruments to his desire, recomposed eye and feather, transformed habit and instinct, as if by enchantment. From the summits of wild rocks he plucked the autours, the falcons, and used them as he chose.

And what is finer than a hunt of this kind when women take part? Everywhere *en fête* without and within, when hearts beat faster in beasts and men. All colours shimmering in fabric and in feather, in the gold of gems and the steel of arms. The pretty distraction of a long evening, flowering like a rose on the cheeks of a châteline, as a bird rests on her tendered glove, docile to her gentle voice, as is sung in the Lay of the Golden Land:

*She sang a lay so beautiful and sweet  
That birds who came to hear her song  
Soon after sang it too.*

The eyes of some beautiful fair ones are blue but there are others of a golden brown, like their hair, and warmer. Whose eyes, wide open, great and singular, are the best rulers of a bird, which cannot pull away when those eyes are affixed to its own. They are magnetic, like those attributed by the poet Homer to Juno, the wife of Jupiter.

It can only be marvelled how a bird, be it sparrow hawk or gertalcon, rustles all its feathers on a female glove - with raved ruff embroidered with fine pearls - as the lady looks at him and speaks to him. He is beautiful himself, with crested hood of silk and a silver bell. A greyhound, standing by the horse, becomes jealous, raises its long head and with a furtive look bares its teeth, then jumps, despite itself, when she launches the falcon

into the light wind and calls to it. Finally turning its head in disgust when the bird returns with prey intact, neither dead nor even wounded.

Ladies like to fly them against the grain-eaters of the plain; quail, partridge, wood pigeon, as well as thrush, bustard and doves, but Aimery liked above all to contend with herons, storks, even swans, curlews with their long plaintive cry, wild geese and water-birds of wide wingspan whose wiles and courageous defence increased the drama of combat. He never tired of seeing them gloriously cut the wind. His gervfalcons, goshawks and sparrow hawks were always of great enterprise, all well mewed, lively and vigorous. Aimery would not tolerate a bird with feathers in disorder or broken quills. He had them painstakingly and minutely prepared.

The roads of France in those days were travelled by wandering bird catchers with hawks of all kinds for sale. The great falconer levied a tax on them, but they met with great welcome at his castle in Poitiers where they sold rare birds, such as those employed by Saracens against the ibis, ostrich or gazelle. But the rarest, the most powerful, were the white falcons of the north, like those that Bajazet demanded for the ransom of Jean de Nevers.

Townsmen, imitating the lords, possessed some fine hunters on the perch, and girls of modest upbringing even equalled the châtelines in dressing a fine crested bird on the glove. It was the simple daughter of a tradesman of Chalus in Champagne, a good and beautiful maiden, who gave to Gerard de Nevers the famous hawk hooded with fine gold surmounted with a glowing ruby, that was so well disposed that it took all birds, however small they might be, without harming them in any way. One day, it even brought to Gerard a skylark that carried round its neck an amulet of love.

A curious thing, if quite natural, that all occupied with birds will know, is that with them the law of the sexes is reversed; the females big, strong, majestic, used mainly by men; the males small, capricious, fantastic, more difficult to prepare, but which women prefer. They like male hawks, lanners, sacers and merlins, not only for giving good service but for being less tiring on the wrist.

Count Aimery also liked to hunt the deer, roebuck and the stag, especially the stag, whose flesh comforts the sick, and whose hide, smooth to the touch and supple, covers great manuscripts under wooden panels with a velvety greenish-yellow fur that never splits. What is more, it is sacred flesh, and the excellent monks of St. Denis use it to make shrouds for the kings of France.

These are like the stags that Aeneas killed with arrows and ravenously ate after his shipwreck on the African shores of Queen Dido, who built

Carthage. Nor let us forget the rarest of all, the white stag, whose pursuit and capture was always marked by prodigious events. All knew that the knight whose blade brought down the rare beast had the right to choose the most beautiful from all the maidens ranged about and kiss her on the mouth. This was often the cause of duels, as happened in the full court of King Arthur at Cardigan on the edge of the famous Broceliande, despite the advice of Merlin.

However, above all it was the boar which tempted and tested the count. It seemed to him that in killing one he achieved a work of piety. The black beast, charged with excretions, was in his eyes the symbolic figure of the Antichrist.

When one of his hunters arrived to announce the presence of an enormous boar in the woods of Colombier, he decided without further ado that next day they would leave to hunt it at dawn.



deserving of a shameful death, as the vilest of sinners. To think that my lord said that I would be the most honoured of my line! Hollow dreams, lies, for that secret science never revealed to him his sudden danger; neither that nor the owl's cry that I forgot as quickly as it came. Alas! He deceived himself and deceived me in good faith. I will be the most dishonoured of men, that is what all will say. So now I must fly from here, find a life elsewhere, and perhaps, please God, make amends for my involuntary crime!"

He saw the Count's horse nuzzle its master's body and that of the boar, and then look at him with great round eyes. Then his own horse did the same, and the two beasts looked at one another with a fearful questioning air.

He seized his own steed, leaped upon its back, and spurred it into a wild gallop he knew not where, even faster than he had ridden in the hunt. This time as if he were being hunted himself by someone or something unseen. Desperate to escape, he felt no other wish than to meet with sudden death, perhaps at a sudden blow, smashed against a tree.

Thus, all but bereft of his senses, he rode madly through the forest into the night.

## The Faery at the Fountain

About midnight Raymondin saw a fountain that he recognised, for he had often passed by. It was called the Fountain of Thirst, although some called it the Faery Fountain. Women spinning by the hearth fire on winter evenings told stories about it, like threads of gold spun from their distaffs, sparkling through the fatigue of their work.

The fountain was at the head of a pleasant oval lake as seductive as the stories to which it gave rise. The place seemed made for cool water and stories in much the same way that the stories evoked such enchanting waters and their surroundings. Anything seemed possible here. The beauty of the place had a presence that became more vivid the more one gazed upon it.

Despite himself, too broken to have any pressing need for the unknown, Raymondin gave himself up to it, and through his eyes something entered from beyond himself. Reflected in the mirror-like waters, hardly disturbed by a light breeze, a great rock, solid at the base but divided at the top, rose like the image of a dark and mysterious castle. Beyond the lake a meadow appeared golden in the pale light of the moon, drawing his gaze to quest into the far distance for things that could not be seen. To right and left rose the forest, tall, massive, full of shadows, unfathomable too, if in a different way from the plain. Under the vague light neither revealed its secrets any more than the far horizon.

The landscape near to him was clearer under the moon, but in so far that it defined things better, his first impressions left him and his fears came flooding back. The fatal spear had not only pierced the boar and the Count, it had transfixed his heart. He felt it there as a pang of remorse. It would always be there wherever he went, heavy as a gravestone, barring him forever from peace of mind.

However, rising more brightly than that of forest, rock, plain or fountain was his own reflection, shimmering at the edge of the pool, that descended to mysterious depths where ancient fish, pale with age, could be seen clear under the pure and magical twinkling of the starlight. Raymondin wished he could stay. To be helped in some way by these things to forget the sorrow that lay so heavily upon him.

Failing that, why not sleep? He let his heavy eyelids droop as if he were going to sleep. For a few seconds he even lost consciousness, and his weary horse, which divined the state of its master as he sat more heavily in the saddle, proceeded to a walk.

Now three white ladies, standing still until now, began to dance on the grass before the Fountain. One of them seemed to be their leader, for the others copied her movements in great sweeping curves. She leaped lightly, the veils of her sleeves rising around her, accompanied by her two followers. They turned so quickly at the moment Raymondin passed by that his horse, suddenly aroused, took fright, shied, and set off at a trot.

"By my faith, he who just passed looked like a gentleman but did not act like one! Making no greeting when he met fine ladies!"

She spoke as if she did not know the rider, for she did not want the other two maidens to know that she did, nor what she intended.

Then she added: "As he said not a word in passing us by, I shall go after him!" And she ran as rapidly as the goddess Artemis, and stopped his horse with her hand on its bridle.

"Sir vassal," she said, her voice sweeter than the sweetest song, "from where do you get this great pride, or even rudeness, to go past three ladies without saluting them as you should?"

Half asleep and half in dream, Raymondin said nothing, and did not even touch his cap. Did he hear her? Only he knows, the story teller thinks not, for he remained silent as if he had ceased to exist, until she said in a louder voice:

"Why, sir dawdler, are you so disdainful as not to answer?"

As he remained silent she seized his hand and pulled.

"Good sir, are you really asleep?"

He must have been, for starting like someone suddenly awakened, he grabbed for his sword, thinking the Count's men were upon him.

"Sir knight," cried the maiden with a silvery laugh, "who are you going to fight, and with what? Do you take *me* for your enemy?"

Suddenly coming to himself at the sound of her melodious voice, he opened his heavy eyes, and before such beauty smiling upon him in the milky light, now so bright that it seemed like another day, another world, he wondered if he were still alive. Realising that indeed he was, he leaped from his horse. Standing before the maiden, whom he saw was as real as himself, he was filled with wonder and bowed low before her.

"Lady, pardon my unintended discourtesy. I lay my apologies at your feet, more numerous than the drops of falling dew that, reflecting you, take on the aspect of pearls. By the faith of my mouth and my heart, that do not lie, I was possessed, body and soul, by a dark affair that grieves me cruelly."

She stood before him, seemingly transparent, as if her flesh shone with the force of light. She gazed at him. He gazed at her, and was transported by her beauty.

"I believe you willingly," she said. "But where are you going at such an hour? Don't be afraid. You can tell me. If you have lost your way I can guide you. There is no path in this forest that I do not know."

He lowered his eyes and sighed.

"I thank you lady, I lost my way and have been riding through these woods all day since dawn. And to tell the truth I hardly know where I am."

Seeing he lacked faith in her and would not admit what it was that tormented him, she took it upon herself to say, "By God, Raymondin, do not try to hide from me the reason for your pain. That is quite useless, for I know it as well as you."

Too stupefied to know what to reply, he remained silent, overcome with anguish that his secret was known. Baffled by the recent events that had come upon him, and also perhaps a little bewildered to find himself not too unhappy that this being before him was aware of things that, up to now, he was sure had been known to no one.

"My good friend Raymondin," she murmured, as if it gave her pleasure to repeat his name, "I am the one who, next to God, can help you best to gain wealth and honour in this mortal life."

Dumbfounded to hear the same words that he recalled the Count of Poitiers saying, bound by sensations and obscure feelings that he had neither the strength nor the courage to explain, he listened with growing surprise and yet relaxing contentment.

"I know that against your feelings and intentions you have killed your uncle and your lord. You were flying because of that, thinking yourself a criminal, when I met you. Do not be afraid that I know all about you. And do not suppose that this knowledge came to me by evil ways. I am as faithful a Christian as you are. But Fate, for all that, is Fate. We can only control a part of it by our actions or the consequences that come from them. We have to take what is offered when it is to our advantage. Without me, without my counsel, you cannot escape being accused of murder when the Count of Poitiers was killed. On the other hand, if you listen to me, and take account of what I say, I promise to make you the greatest lord of your line and the wealthiest."

The words of Airney came back to him now with particular force. He found them almost exactly the same as those that had just been said to him. Lifting his head, he saw the same sky, the same stars which held the prophecy of his fate twinkling as if to reassure him of the invincibility

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of their teaching, which passed the understanding of men and put a seal of truth upon the words of the old lord. All this pressed upon him, powerfully, crushing. The way of Fate and its laws and the perils that threatened him, of which the least were exile and death. In any case his honour was lost for lack of proof, even if he were thought to be innocent. Time pressed. He had to make up his mind, come what may.

And so he decided.

"Lady, even though I do not know you," he replied humbly, "I thank you for your promise and accept your kindness. I will do whatever you ask, if it is possible, and what a good Christian can do with honour."

"That comes from a pure heart! Have no fear, I will never ask anything of you that is against your religion or mine. But that is not all - I have another request to make of you, so listen carefully."

Her light blue eyes, flecked with grey, that in the moonlight seemed like mother of pearl, held him with a penetrating gaze that had an air of promised happiness.

Was he going to be the victim of an illusion, or of an increasingly unforeseeable reality? She no longer looked at him dispassionately, while he, in return, found her delectable. In the warmth of her presence he no longer felt so tired or so desolate. He began to feel a man again, full of vigour. Something new had come upon him that was almost like desire as he realised how beautiful she was.

"Before going further," she murmured as if responding to his secret thoughts, "you must promise not only to take me as your wife, but never again to doubt - you understand, never, sir knight - that I would conduct myself honestly and in a Christian manner, beyond any sorcery."

Impassively, she waited in the quiet night, crystal clear, in which he could hear his heart beating, and then that of the lady. He was not surprised at first, that it responded to his, like an echo. For they had drawn together without being conscious of the fact, and he observed the rise and fall of her breast under her corsage, that seemed to him like a promised land. From her beautiful breast his gaze descended. Why not? Was it not done for every lady to show herself desirable? All the more reason for one who wanted all, including marriage and yet further sworn promises.

What went on in the very depths of his being, where the essential intimacy resides? On this point again, only he knew, and she, who knew all. She went on to the oath with firm grave voice, and even though he knew her not at all, he so much wanted her.

"Lady, I will loyally do all that I can. I accept you for wife, before God and in the face of ourselves, and will marry you as soon as you wish in a church."

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She replied as if she knew that all had been for ever decreed and would now come to pass.

"That is well, dear Raymondin, but there is something else."  
Surprised, he could not stop himself from blurting out "You have me at your mercy!"

"Not at my mercy, but at ours, above all, our mutual joy. May it last always, for ever. If I promise you all happiness so as to be happy myself, do you blame me?"

"Certainly not!"

"Then hear my request. It is that you must swear by all the sacraments you hold holy as a Christian that on each Saturday, from sundown till dawn on the following day, never - and I will say it again so there is no doubt about it - never must you try to see me in any way whatever, nor seek to know where I am."

Could he retreat, having come so far? It would have been to lose her, and she seemed even more beautiful to him, sweet and attainable. The promised happiness to which he looked forward concerned him less than she herself, whom he wanted to know more and more, and above all to possess. What minstrel can describe the irresistible power of feminine beauty when it gets under a man's skin? None can, and that is no doubt how things will remain till the end of the world.

The murderer of Count Aimery was conscious now only of his desire. His former sadness, his remorse, even his exhaustion he threw off in exasperation. Finally, to absolve himself of the slightest doubt that might arise from far down within him, he told himself that if he did not consent he would be lacking in gallantry.

He thus agreed solemnly to all.

"On my life, I swear that never on that evening or that night will I do anything that might be to your detriment, and that I will, in all goodwill and honour, seek to know nothing about your absence."

"That is good. I believe you," she said in her turn, in a tone in which joy was not untinged by melancholy. She said no more for a while, as, embarrassed a little by their mutual tenderness and the link established between them, they hesitated to hold hands. She was the first to risk it, and after a glance behind toward her companions, now discretely out of sight, she drew him to sit at the edge of the lake on a great stone which formed a seat against the trunk of a tall lone pine.

"It is a matter for you now," she said, "and for you alone. So listen carefully?"

After a pause, she explained to him what he must do concerning the death of the Count of Poitiers and advised him to say nothing about it. She

detailed the attitude he should take toward the children of the deceased, the young Count Bertrand and daughter Blanche. She went into further great detail that he promised to follow to the end, without fail. If some of this was inclined towards deception he did not notice but followed her willingly.

She smiled with satisfied grace, certain that he would be true to her from now on, and ended by giving him two little wands that she appeared to pull from the tree:

"Dear friend, I give you these two wands, whose stones have special virtue. The first, which has haematite, preserves from accidental death by weapons. The second, which contains carnelian and chrysolite, gives victory in any dispute or combat. Carry them with you always and you will evermore go safely."

He twirled the two little sticks, and they shone in the night with the different stones set into the wood. Nothing now surprised him. Nonetheless, feeling him not yet entirely confident in her, she added, looking up at the stars:

"The virtues hidden in the stones are set there by the order of Nature and the Stars under the will of God. Have faith. The spirit, humour, blood and soul that rules them is also influenced by what we imagine, and the stones do the rest. They correspond to the four elements of which they are made: water, air, fire and earth. Then by the slow mysterious process by which they were made, a resolution of earth in their particles and a condensation of very pure water, their existence is precipitated, in which nothing can ever change. You wear upon you talismans of the Sun, and of the Orient, where it shines with greatest strength."

He listened to her as if to a living poem, and by the first light of dawn realised that she was, for him, the most beautiful precious stone in the world, as she loosened her hair so the oval of her face was framed like a gem in its gold. Then she began to comb it, and as he admired the fine silky, deep and long tresses he saw the wooden comb that ran through them had carved upon it a beautiful naked woman also combing her hair. He wondered if this might be herself perhaps, and smiled to himself, which she noticed and interpreted well. She left the comb in her hair, where it stayed, and grasping his hand, with the other drew him to her.

He bent his head to her breast where her heart was beating firmly, sweet and strong, then raising his kisses the length of her neck, and then to her chin, he met her lips, to which she responded with great joy, for he felt them soon part. Thus they exchanged their first kiss, which we leave to themselves, and thus they remained for some time.

She was the first to break away - it was always she, indeed, who led - and in a soft voice that she forced to render resolute, she said, "Go now, so you can return to me the more quickly to tell me what you have done."

He wanted to stay, and said so, but she insisted.

"Time presses, and it is for your own good. If you stay longer your absence will be suspect. I do not want to lose you, my sweet friend, now that I have found you."

While he collected his horse she carried her left hand to the comb, and the other languorously stroked the stone in the place that was still warm from where Raymondin had been sitting. When he returned to hold her a little longer in his arms, he held back at first the better to admire her face, encompassed by her fair hair. But as her eyes were also filled with him, neither one nor the other could drag themselves apart.

"How I love you!" she sighed, almost in a whisper.

She rose and held out the stirrup for him.

"But it is for this that we must part."

Then when he had mounted, her head leaning against his leg, she said, laughing: "You won't forget me?"

He laughed in turn.

"You won't go back on your word?"

"No!"

Then suddenly he realised he did not know her name, and asked her.

Then as if the voice he heard came from the infinity of night and the forest, played on an enchanted harp like those of the bard kings of ancient Ireland, he heard:

"Melusine..."

Alas, because of wanting too much, so as to temper or even control Fate, one may bring about something worse, leading to despair and regret of that which inevitably comes to pass, without explanation. The necessary order for the world to exist is not perhaps that which men want, otherwise it would already be here considering the time they have sought and wanted it, unless their perseverance has failed at the critical moment through the natural perversity of those who undertook it, or those who no longer supported it. Thus the world becomes a game, and as nothing remains honest, a trick. And thus all being false, the game is unpredictable.

But then, who knows, of God or the Devil, which wants all this rectitude? Alone, no doubt, Our Lord Jesus Christ, who sought it for us and to save us. Again who knows all there is and to what it returns?

As, in 1121, visiting a convent in Burgundy, Peter the Venerable, Grand Master of Cîteaux, having heard the monks there maintain that they found no part of Scripture clearly say that Christ was God, in his noble prudence, appeared to hear nothing, and wrote to the Prior, Peter of St. John, his brother and his son, that he saw in this discourse a love of study and zeal for knowledge rather than lack or absence of Faith, but that he had better keep such talk to himself.

As for paradise, who knows what it holds?  
A trouvere once asked:

*Sire, do you know what they do in Paradise?*

*Do the ladies there dress in rich furs?*

*Are those who wish to drink well seated?*

*Are they served ploviers or roast capons?*

And Raoul de Houdence, in *The Dream of Hell*, saw Satan invite to his table clerks, abbots and deans, whom he served with flesh of monks, well fattened by laziness, and also roast usurer, nourished by the theft made from the goods of others, both well fricasséed.  
Who knows? Who can possibly tell?

*Petrarch*

*1121*

**I**n his room Raymondin paced up and down distractedly, such was his regret and his anguish. He gazed at a fine tapestry which showed birds surrounding a page, on the ground and in flight, in an orchard full of flowers in which the colours of wings and petals combined. But while he saw nothing of that, he noted in the frame, filigreed in thin golden wire, a lively faun with open legs, and on its forehead two long horns that seemed to mock him.

So why not seek vengeance? He ended by taking down one of the short swords from a rack on the wall reserved for arms, and passed it under his belt. It was a sort of carving knife and as the wide blade seemed a little thin, he added one of those short "pierce mails", in the form of a well tempered spike, a round dagger in a handle of hard polished redwood. At once he felt sure of the way to deal with whoever had ravished his honour. And whatever the nature of the struggle, when it came to the end, however perfect his armour, he could, if need be, kill him.

This thought calmed him for a moment, to the point of noticing on the writing desk in a corner of the room under a little window of glass bottle-ends, a closed parchment bearing his address, with the seal of Urian. He forgot all, broke the wax and read it. Urian and his brother, for they had both signed it, told their parents of their journey and their adventures, which had gone well. They ended not only by greeting their father and mother, but praying their father to take Melusine in his arms and embrace her long and lovingly, which would make them feel less far away, and express all their thoughts for her, and he himself would be present, dreaming of them at the same time. It was as if this recollection of so sweet a past had come at this point to stop him.

They had been successful in all their enterprises. One had become king of Armenia, the other of Cyprus, through their heroism and the aid of the Archbishop of Famagusta and the Great Prior of the Knights of Rhodes. They had undertaken extraordinary battles by land and by sea, and seen lying on the bottom of the sea, at places known only to themselves, ancient columns down there of incredible purity of line. They had increased their fleet, and formed relations and friendships all over the East. They were in alliance, notably, with the descendants of the

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famous Obeid Allah, the Mahdi, who founded the Fatimid dynasty, and they described not only the palace of the Calif of Errakada, but the Sahel, which had been built under the sign of the constellation of Leo, defying the sea at the cape of Africa, and extending into the water like a hand reaching out at the end of an arm. They spoke of ramparts thirty cubits high, of a port carved out of the rock, of an immense palace with gold windows, decorated with mosaics, which one entered through a dark vault with six doors, of which one, the last, was of solid iron, thirty spans high, weighing 2000 kintars, studded with enormous nails composed of images of leopards, tigers and eagles, and turning on pivots of glass. As they divined the surprise of their parents, they added to the description the text of the Arab historian who described it, by the name of Ibaï-Athir. They recommended a unique almagest, of which they gave only the title, which truly interpreted all dreams. Finally they announced their departure for a central African empire where, beyond seven rivers and seven mountains, the elephants which you led there broke down the defences at the threshold of lands full of gold, which had been brought there in pieces by ants as big as cats.

He paused, overcome. A ray of moonlight that passed through the ends of the opaline bottles of the window lit up the long letters full of arabesques, more than those of the West, as if his children, impregnated with the Orient, had taken a little to Islamic writing. And the cool clear light made some of the grains of gold dust glitter warmly in the ink, which, far from here, had dried it, in the kingdom of Cyprus or Armenia. How could one believe that all this had its beginning in some kind of unknown infamy, without which nothing like this would have been achieved? He saw again his first coming upon the Fountain of Thirst on that fatal night when he had met, known and come to love Melusine. He saw again the stars whose aspects his uncle had gazed upon, and at the same time was struck by the noble face of Count Aimery, so pale, so white, under the stars. Then like a terrible bristling tornado, the immense mass of the black boar, the fatal spear in his hand, his terror, his grief. Then even more terrible, the silence of the forest under the eye of God - who knows all.

But for now he knew nothing. Could not even imagine what was taking place in his soul.

It was as if his reason, blind to all other issues, was confined to a desperate will to know, which ended almost transforming him into another being. The rest was effaced, lost, for, not only he could no longer think of anything else, his reason had become unreason, and unreason his only reason, as if only this reason could exist. Something irresistible

and fatal, that even appeared to him as a necessity, welled up from within him. He could no longer understand why he waited. Suddenly frantic, he rose, pulled the bolt, and rushed through to the door that gave on to the bottom of the little tower. Where it led to he did not know, but it was what he needed to know. Up there, where Melusine went to some assignation, unknown to anyone except herself and her accomplice. The little door violently broken down, he began to climb the stair.

He climbed quickly in his eagerness to strike, his heart pumping under his coat of mail as he climbed the narrow winding stair, steeper and steeper, to the very top. There where he had never been before. Neither he, nor anyone, except her - and - who else? He believed there must be someone, but without entirely believing it. He thought he must get there from the other side. Very soon he would know!

Suddenly a terrible idea seized him. Suppose he came from the parapet, out of the high airs? Could it be the Devil...? The painful thought of what he might be undertaking, despite his grief and shame, slightly relieved his jealousy, and even strengthened him. Ah! If that should be the case he would be sure to win, since he fought on the side of God! And above all, to save her! It seemed to him that when he rescued her she would thank him for overcoming the evil. And with the thought of fighting for Melusine to restore her to herself, he felt elated.

But then he mocked himself cruelly for such folly. And then his original oath seemed to rise before him like the next step, which was almost his own height, and which appalled him in the form of an impossible thing of improbable reality. Stopped in his tracks and out of breath, he leaned against the wall. His heart, that he heard all the more because it beat so strongly, seemed ready to stop. What had happened to all the confidence he had put so spontaneously and naturally in his wife?

That they were the same and ever one flesh, each becoming the other to form a single being, to the point of he being everything to her, and she everything to him. And this making themselves one, including their sons, their lands, all the days of their lives, the nights, the hours, the joys and pains, their happy course. At one with the earth, the whole earth with its trees and flowers, its meadows and woods, its sweet and fruitful soil. At one with the sky and its infinite stars, all the heavens, without limit or end, profound, impenetrable, vast, without boundaries or edges. At one with the whole orb that God the Father holds in his hand, surmounted by a little cross bloodied by Jesus to save mankind.

So brusquely had he thrown himself from his room, only to be stopped here, as if paralysed, by he knew not what within himself. That seemed to want to petrify him like the stone all round him at the edge of this so very

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high step - put here providentially to preserve their happiness, to halt him here in spite of himself, to wait for Melusine.

But this strange step, Had Melusine passed it by leaping it? How had she cleared it, in what way could she have done? And after this step, he saw another rise beyond it, with others evidently to follow. The stairs turned again, always turning, so tightly, so steeply, so imperiously. He wanted to see how, by what steps higher yet, by what real, and above all singular magic, they led to the mysterious terrace, that he had imagined many times from below. That must be under a plume of the trees that fell back on it. Only leaves could be seen above the ivy and red vine that climbed up from below, with thick branches from which came dark points like flames. And the flames of these cypresses appeared like the tines of an enormous comb that, when clouds lowered towards the earth in stormy days or fine, split or divided them. For the first time he asked himself how they had been able to grow so high, and why? At the same time, his brother's brutal words came back to him, driving him to clamber up the step, hauling himself up by his arms. Then, striking his tinder box, he lit a little oil lamp with a long wick.

The last step was also high. Then three long flagstones, hardly marked, led to a sturdy wooden door. Enormous ironwork across its width passed into the wall as if to seal it. So tightly that the stone on each side of the door, like the wood between, could not be opened or raised, or so it seemed.

He sought in vain for a lock. There was none. No place in all the oak and iron for it to be concealed. No doubt about it. His brother had been right. This stunning certainty thrust into his heart like the knife he carried to stab whomsoever he discovered.

He did not think for a single second about going back. To see, to know, to be sure. All reduced itself to that.

He continued to examine the door over which he moved the little flame of his lamp. Then noticed an almost imperceptible line between two of the thick polished planks of which the door was made. Even though they were mortised into one another to make one seem like all the rest, there was a tiny space visible at the point of joining.

He pulled out his flat knife, and not daring to make any noise, held his breath as he started to slide in the blade and push it slowly, leaning on it with all his strength and weight.

The blade entered a little, so slowly that he almost began to despair. But he forbade himself to think what he would do next, for he could not, he saw, fully part the adjacent boards. But he might make a crack wide enough to see through! He would soon find out something, no matter how!

As he inserted a little more of the thin blade to enlarge the space he had with such difficulty obtained, it snapped with a dry, clear, crystal sound. Furious at the check, anguished by the noise, he listened, frightened. Then almost relieved by the thought that if he had been heard he would soon learn something, and all would be revealed.

But nothing. The heavy silence continued. He waited a little, then certain he had not been heard, and nothing would happen, drew his pierce-mail with the rough channelled blade, to continue his efforts against the wood, and as he went back to his work, feeling the sweat on his brow and down the length of his body, cold on his skin as it cooled.

What was behind this implacable door? What happened in there? Was it even the true way to Melusine? In the shadow where the flame of the lamp flickered, despairing at the resistance of the wood, he felt as if he was going mad.

However, nothing else came to mind that was possible for him to do in this place where he found himself. His successful progress so far led him to think that he had struggled well, and was even on the threshold of a new destiny, this time certain. This obscure instinct rose from the depths of the being, invaded it and even dominated his will.

The blade entered better, and engaged the length of three angles already. He had raised it, and putting it back he leaned against it with all his might. Then, wedged against it to get more leverage, he felt the wall suddenly give, heavily and slowly behind him. He had only just time to draw the pierce-mail that he carried with him towards the new destiny that seized him. For in his frantic efforts, he had started a device with his back. And as he followed through, he recalled the similar mechanism in the underground tunnels.

He found himself in a room lit by a pale light that defined nothing. All was golden sand underfoot between bare walls, and although he wanted to go back to fetch his lamp, he heard not far away, in a place that he could not yet see, a strange sound of splashing water. Then, as the wall that had snatched him up did not move any more, he forgot the lamp, and fearful of being seen, stretched out face down on the golden sand, waiting for his eyes to become adjusted to the semi-darkness, which already began to become more clear for him.

Soon, he could see almost everything, and thought himself in another world.

The room was quite large, with high bare walls pierced high and low with little niches which shone through interlaced branches of coral. Thousands of shells in unknown forms, thousands and thousands of

124 pebbles in all colours, including great rocks, were reflected irregularly in the thick glass of an immense rough window of uniform colour, its panes joined by fine strips of metal, that appeared like oxidised silver, shining in places. It was like a sheet of water, a sort of plane detached from the sea, then solidified, and through which passed the light of the shining moon outside, veiled, as if supernatural.

On the sand were black globular objects which attracted his attention. He reached out and picked up one that was close to him. It was heavy and round, but irregular, as if spherical clumps of different size had become stuck together. Looking at it closely he recognised it as one of the meteorites that Arbarel said fell from the moon or the stars - the material solidified, he said, from spinning stars - and were worshiped in Carthage under the name of abbadirs. As he held it in his hand, the sound of water came more strongly, very near. He kept still, to judge from which side it came.

Through a wall of glass behind him a form moved and appeared to lengthen. He noticed that the wall of glass opened at the centre in an arc, a little like the entrance to St. Pierre de Melle, between two high columns which jutted out of it, of bronze or black marble. He slid slowly forward toward one of them, over the golden sand with the scattered meteorites enclosed in their own night. And in the moonlight that made his coat of mail glisten, he had the appearance of a strange serpent with iron scales. Transported beyond himself, his brother's words already far away, frozen in a cold sweat, hardly alive, and yet held withal at the peak of his very being, sure of knowing from now on. The memory of his oath and of all his preceding life forgotten, he slid, fascinated, toward the unknown source of his misfortune and loss. Eventually he reached the right hand column and, more slowly still, raised his head as far as his eyes above the low wall ran the length of the window on each side of it.

But hardly had he seen than he closed his eyes again, retreating so as not to be seen himself, and in an impossible light, to dream of what he had never seen before, ever. A vision that he carried within him eternally until the end of his days.

So it was he alone who was culpable! It had come to that! He was sure of her now, but too late! The sweat that had cooled him now seemed to descend to his heart and to make it stop.

But before he died, he wanted to see it again. And as all was lost, he looked long, or believed he did, for a minute that seemed like an eternity to the point of preparing, even colder than himself, his coffin and gravestone. And before having seen all he wanted to see, he noted in mosaic flagstones before him, a great meteorite that, caressed by the rays of moonlight, seemed to take on a form of secret, interior existence. It

125 shone sweetly, polished like a mysterious otherworld fruit. But then the fruit disappeared, as if it had ever been only a dream.

In a long and wide pool set within the dark blue mosaic, decorated here and there with the green leaves of violet and black irises, was the flawless figure of a woman, forever young, whom he knew well. Her bent back magnificent in profile, her breasts raised, as she combed her long golden hair, and the exquisite flesh, more pale than usual, pearly almost to transparency. In her other hand she held a mirror, its crystal reflecting the moonlight on her face, which despite the life that animated it as she smiled to herself, gave it an almost lifeless quality. As she turned slowly, a tail of green scales stretched under the water made the water lilies move, and one of the points came out, streaming with water, like that of a fish.

All around the wall above, the pale purple of Virginia creeper cast shadows on the mosaic and over the water, against the clematis that fell back from all the walls, shining white among the green leaves with clusters of honeysuckle. And thick fine cypress, immobile except almost at the end of its fine points, climbed toward the starry sky. A natural cupola that seemed to break into the mysterious beauty of this extra-terrestrial place, where a subtle perfume floated in the air, unknown but impregnated with the Orient. And it was toward the sky now that Melusine, her mirror dropped into the dark water, that palpitated with the reflections of the stars, stretched up incomparable arms that shone like liquid gold.

He drew back, stretched behind the dark column, his face fallen into the fine sand, which penetrated his nostrils, his open mouth, and grated between his teeth like damp ashes.

## Departure

**L**ike them, she was appalled when she saw him, and became so pale she seemed near death. She realised that his happiness was finished, that his heart was broken, that he who had been Raymondin had ceased to exist.

She had returned with all speed seeking to remedy an unfortunate incident and to draw near once more to the one who was her reason for being and her future. But then saw her husband lying there glaring at her with a look of hatred. Although through the open window the scent of an orchard in flower and the fragrance of roses gave her renewed strength, she understood all immediately.

While she spoke he looked at her with eyes that turn and turn about were haggard and staring, or furious and sorrowful, or at times almost tender but quickly replaced with another evil look.

"My Lord, do not despise me! I have never ceased to be and I remain your wife. Do not torment me with this strange silence! Come back to yourself. This is madness, as you know well, and only brings thoughts that destroy you. As for Geoffrey, it is folly on your part, to persist in this distress, you who are rightly held to be the wisest prince living. I feel it myself, but something once done cannot be changed. We cannot go back to it. What is done is done and nothing in the world can undo it."

He still said nothing, but thought apart to himself: "And so she accepts, just like a woman, that which is but should never be! ... Ah Siren! ... or woman? What does it matter? Women do not know, know nothing of what we call Honour!"

"Yes," she replied, as if she did not notice his disagreement, "that which is done is no more. If Geoffrey, your son, our child, has committed this outrage, it is perhaps not his fault, but of his great courage misdirected, which nothing can stop from the moment that he has made a decision, be it bad ... Listen to me! Understand me! Believe me! He has only sinned through too much zeal, for the service and glory of your line, by too much obedience to his nature, which comes from you. He has too much spirit, and very fine spirit. As for you, you cannot blame him.

"He could not see without wrath one of his brothers, whom he loved, cast, abused, ignorant, too good and too naïve, too pious for his age, for

even piety has its times and seasons, its opportunities and its days. To see him in the midst of debauched monks, or that he truly believed to be so. And which he dreaded would be a bad example of an evil life, unworthy of us all in every way.

"On the other hand, you have, thank God - and with God's help - all that is needed, and more, to rebuild the novitiate that he destroyed. To enhance it, to renew it with perfect monks, better still than those whom he so cruelly condemned. Perhaps even for their own good - for who knows what is the will of God?"

"Geoffroy will amend himself before God and men. He will make them forget through his wisdom in his riper years. That is how things happen with anyone, the excessive fits of anger, immoderate, in youth... My good sweet friend, let go the sorrow that consumes you, and return to the sentiments more fitting to your princely estate, which is to be a shepherd of men."

These consoling words unleashed from him a reaction far from Melusine's expectation.

"False serpent," he whispered, avowing and breaking out with all that she could even pretend, from now on, not to know, or to doubt.

"Yes, serpent, serpent always," he repeated, with outraged harshness, "you are only a phantom, and so is your fruit! None of those who have come from your cursed womb know how to come to a good end, because of the sign of reprobation with which you have marked them by your sins. The only one justly issued from a good angel was poor Froismond, who could bring you pardon for the others. Now he has been burned alive, by his own brother, under I know not what diabolic inspiration. By another of your own sons, I tell you. This terrible and cruel Geoffrey who also carries the sign of his damnation on his face, with a tooth like a fang. And you seek what cannot be conceived, can never be understood, to forget the other to excuse him! Impossible to believe that Hell does not mix the good with the bad, and beyond, into our affairs. And that is how it would appear, you have dragged me down in your fall and I am lost!"

Melusine, by this time, found the cup too heavy, its contents too bitter. She could listen to no more. There is no language that has not its limits, more or less agreed, but he had gone beyond them. Carried past himself, and with all else, he could only believe that, as well as from Geoffrey, all evil came from her. The cruel and unjust reproaches achieved that which she had so persistently and sweetly refused to accept, but that had now been unleashed by the perjury of her husband. Decidedly, he had broken everything, destroyed all. Yes, all was finished between them.

And as she could not accept it, the fate that was now imposed on her, she felt everything uncertain, herself, the future, as if her heart was breaking, and she fell to the ground as if she were dead.

He called, and people ran from everywhere.

Frightened at the sight, in tears, for all adored her, they fussed about, and the leech who had replaced Hestin la Panouze, but whose name has not come down to us, sprinkled her with a special water that appeared to revive her. Very soon he gave her to drink, almost by force, a beverage of cold water in which he had mixed an elixir of herbs culled according to a rite known to him alone.

She came back to herself.

To complain, as her first words, that they should have let her die. And all were yet more saddened, for they felt that she avowed her own true thoughts. She insisted, what is more, on refusing to find in the act that had recalled her to life any charity. True charity, she murmured, would have been to abandon her to her fate, since all reality extended and weighed heavier on her now, more distressing than a nightmare.

"Ah, Raymondin," she sighed finally looking at him, her eyes full of tears, her beautiful face lamentably drawn, deformed, swollen by grief, "the day I first saw you was a sad one for me! Deceived, as women are and always will be, by your handsome body, your honest face, your sweet appearance, I did not suppose you capable of treason, however slight. Now you have foresworn me, you have broken the solemn promise you made.

"However, this treason, this lack of faith, I would pardon with a good heart, and perhaps I could have done, if you had said nothing to anyone. I was silent myself, remember... why, why did you not follow my example? Why, why, unhappy one, reveal to all the secret of the punishment imposed on me by my mother? Alas, sweet friend, you have been so much to me and we could have lived the same, even when our love turned to hate, to distress, to hardness, to tears, to sadness. If you had not broken your word I could have remained in this world and been saved from torment and misery in the other. I could have lived out my life like a normal woman. I could have died quite naturally, ministered by the sacraments, and God would perhaps have received me into Paradise where we would have been reunited, one after the other, you, then our children later..."

"On the contrary, I am now condemned to suffer bitter punishment until the Last Day of Judgment. To suffer without rest, nor truce, or hope of a provisional respite, until the end of time, without a tomb. For you have reduced me to miss my possible grave, though I ask for one on my knees, dream of it, weep for it, while knowing that my plaint on this

subject, like all other, is useless. But the cruel thing, the cruellest thing is that all this came from you, from you alone!"

Unable to bear her immense distress, so resigned, with so little reproach, he was filled with an anguish so poignant that, almost fainting, he knelt before his wife as if in prayer, and raised his joined his hands toward her.

"My life, my good, my hope and my honour, in the name of the glorious suffering of Our Lord Jesus Christ, in the name of the glorious pardon that the true son of God gave to Mary Magdalene, I beg you, forgive my misdeed and continue to live with me. There are enough days to live and tenderly forgive and forget what has come about, so small compared to all the rest."

Without replying, Melusine regarded him, and from her reddened eyes great tears fell onto her breast. Most happy to see him return to her, most unhappy at the thought of such lost happiness, failing this time to faint. And they stayed thus, he, crying with great sobs, she weeping also, more quietly and slowly.

She finished by pulling away from this last embrace where their unhappiness was kept between themselves, their suffering together, their sadness reconciled.

"Oh my tender Love returned again to me. May God forgive the fault you have committed, so demented, so useless, to the eternal loss of our mutual repose! He may, who is almighty, who is all forgiveness, the true fount of mercy and pity. As for me, know that I have forgiven you with all my heart, since I am your lover, your wife, and your companion. But alas, as for my living with you, all has come to an end. God, this same God, does not permit it!"

She rose so they could the better hold each other once more in each other's arms, and so remained a long time as one, and kissed and cried. Never were so many tears shed. And the more that they held together, the more deeply their feelings ran, until without knowing, their arms fell slack and both fell senseless to the ground.

The ladies and maidens, knights and squires, touched to the quick in the face of such distress began to weep in their turn, not unmindful that their customary life was also about to end, and cried:

"Fortune! How can you be so hard as to part such true lovers! We lose today the most wise, most just, and best of women! The heavens do not make many such in this world. One could search many countries for many years before finding another like her!"

The two knew no more than their distress and, in their dreams while swooned on the cold stones, they sought, without finding, how to return

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as they had been. But there was too great a distance between their former happiness and that in which they now lived, and they forgot that each one had been the cause of that. He through his curiosity, she, without it being her fault, by her very nature. And he no doubt threw the fault on her, and she told herself that they would still be happy but for his cursed curiosity.

And the leech, who was a philosopher, as he should be in so serious a profession as his predecessor Hemin la Panouze, felt that in this so impermeably solid world, two beings, although total Love had brought them together, perhaps through mutual blindness, perhaps no longer united them. They could not become again what they had been when they had begun. They were free of each other then, but were no longer, and could now only become more and more separated, even enemies. All that composed their coming together did not permit them any longer to be indifferent, and the less so the longer they had lived together. Thus a misunderstanding once begun could not end up on the side of Love, but accentuated itself, since each took sides one against the other, rather than returning to how things had been before with the aim of becoming one. Why was it that one persists at first, through bad times, locked in one's own being, one's sole being, instead of realising that these dark hours are one reason more to banish them, to give themselves again to each other, more than ever before, and for always.

Ladies and damsels, squires and knights lamented so much that they ended up forgetting the objects of their grief before their eyes, to dream about themselves and their own problems. Thus they wept between themselves without thinking any more of the two former lovers who lay at their feet.

Melusine came to her senses first.

She rose, turned toward her husband still lying there, and in a lost voice whispered to him what must be their fate.

"My sweet friend, believe me, I can alas no more live with you because of the fault you have so grievously committed, even though I forgive you with all my heart, remember what I say to you again with all my soul. Alas! God does not permit me to stay, so I tell you once more it is impossible for me to do so. But listen well to what I tell you before these people - since it is a hard truth and it is needful that you learn it. After you, my Raymondin, no man will be able to hold this country in such peace as we have seen and as it is held at present. After you, your heirs will have much success, but also punishing affairs, and some will be deprived of their heritage as well as their honour, by folly or by crime. But while you live, dear friend, I will help you from afar with all my power in all your needs and problems. Do not chase Geoffrey away from you; he will be a

valiant man. We have, on the other hand, two more children, Raimonnet the elder, who is only three years old, and Thierry, the younger, who is hardly two. Have them well brought up and looked after. Besides, I will watch over them myself, have no doubt about that. But you will never see me in the form of a woman again. It must be thus for our explanation to be complete."

Then standing apart with the highest barons she added in a muted voice:

"Good lords, hold to the honour of our union, of our name and our country. Promise me, as soon as I have gone, to put Horrible to death, that one of my sons who has three eyes, one of them in the forehead. Do not delay to carry out this important wish. For if you fail to do it, there will come much evil, misery, death and damage from him.

It was Raymondin who replied.

"My sweet Love, it will be done as you wish, since it appears that life is composed of dolorous necessities, to which we must submit! But, by the pity of God, do not drive me to death and dishonour! O Melusine, I pray you, stay! For if you do not I will never know joy in my heart again."

She began once more to cry.

"Who wants that more than I! But once more, remember, if that were possible, then believe me I would do it, with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my strength! What, in the world, could give me more pleasure than to be forever yours, in your arms, even - above all - to die? Alas! Alas! Alas! It cannot be. If you only knew - I feel a hundred times more the grief at our separation than you can ever feel yourself."

And, saying that, she kissed him hopelessly.

"Farewell, farewell, farewell, my friend, my good, my heart, all my joy! So long as you live, I will have, even though absent from you, a single comfort. That of seeing you, to look over you and make you happy. But do not seek for that which cannot be. For I tell you once more, never again will you see me in the form of a woman. Farewell, farewell, half my soul! Farewell, half my heart! Farewell, half my life!

And suddenly, as if she were constrained to do it at that very moment, poor Melusine threw herself toward the window which looked out over the fields and gardens towards Lusignan - for do not forget they were at Marmande. She moved as easily and lightly as if she had wings. And even them she had soon, as all were to see.

Poised there - for it was good place to see - she took a last long look at the world below. Finally, turning to the one she loved:

"My beloved, here are two gold rings which have the same virtue. Keep them safe for the love of me. Whenever you wear them, neither

you nor your heirs will be hurt in any battle as long as it in a just cause. Neither you nor they can be killed by any weapon if it is not the day of your destined death."

And he, who realised inexorable Fate, took them and kissed them, without saying more, except to himself.



Melusine looked out over the green meadows, and added in a voice so sad that everyone renewed their tears:

"Sweet and beautiful country, I must now leave you as well! I hope however to live until my end in loving you and admiring you, and being loved and admired by all myself... As for the present, those who see me will fear me as a venomous beast! Fate decrees it, and wills it to be thus. I must accept it, since there is no other!"

And she wept again at these last words.

"Farewell, farewell, each and every one of you. Pray devotedly to Our Lord to relieve my sufferings and shorten the time of my ordeal: Farewell my husband! Farewell my love! Farewell all loving! Farewell my all!"

Then tearing herself away, scratched and grazed by the frightful violence that she did to herself, she threw herself straight out of the window in the form of a winged serpent, about fifteen feet long. And there remained no more of her than the shape of her foot, imprinted in a small hollow on the window sill from which she had launched her rapid and despairing flight.

*Afterward*

André Lebey's version of the Romance of Melusine concludes a little before the description of her flying over the countryside of Poitou and occasional clandestine returning as reported by Jean d'Arras and Couldrette, authors of the original romance, in prose and verse respectively, in 1393 and 1401.

However, he includes the essentials of the original romance, and what he adds are evocative and detailed descriptions of high life in the middle ages. It may be a somewhat romantic and nostalgic pastiche as perceived through modern eyes but this is all to the good if it makes the story come alive for us. And this might not be the case if we had to rely only on a scholarly translation of the original texts. What is more, his modern psychological focus gives an added dimension to the main characters, of which the late 14<sup>th</sup> century authors would not have been capable.

We know that Jean d'Arras and Couldrette originally wrote to boost the claims of wealthy patrons, the Duke de Berry and the Lord of Parthenay respectively, who in the midst of the Hundred Years War had an interest in forwarding their real or imaginary connections to the castle of Lusignan. However, whatever the political motivation of their patrons, they built on genuine local faery traditions of the time.

There did already exist a legend of Melusine of Lusignan, as Pierre Bersuire (1285-1362) prior of the abbey of St. Eloi, had written about it at least a couple of generations before:

They say that in my country the solid fortress of Lusignan was founded by a knight and a faery he married, and that the faery is the ancestor of a great number of noble and great persons, and the kings of Jerusalem and Cyprus, as well as the Counts of la Marche and Parthenay, are her descendants... But the faery, they say, taken by surprise, naked, by her husband, transformed into a serpent. And today they still tell how when the castle changes master the serpent shows itself in the castle.

*Reductorium morale.*

This is the general outline of the Melusine story, and is also correct historically so far as it goes. For members of a cadet branch of the Lusignan family once ruled the crusader kingdoms of Jerusalem and Cyprus and members of the main family held the county of La Marche and lordship of Parthenay closer to home.