

# Melion

Anonymous

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### Melion.

In the days when Arthur reigned, he who conquered lands and dealt out rich gifts to knights and barons, there was with him a young lord whose name, I have heard, was Melion. Full brave and courteous was he, and made himself beloved of all; and he was of right great chivalry and goodly fellowship.

The king had a full rich following, and throughout all the world he was famed for courtesy and prowess, and bounty and largess. Now on that day when all the knights made their vows and know ye that well they held to them this same Melion pledged him to one that thereafter brought him sore mischance. For he said he would never love any maid, howsoever noble and fair, who had ever loved any other man, or had been talked of by any. For a long time matters went on in this wise:

those who had heard the vow spread it abroad in many places, and told it to the damsels, and all maids who heard it, had great hatred of Melion.

And they who were in the royal chambers and served the queen, and of such there were above a hundred, held a council concerning the matter, and swore they would never love him, or hold speech with him. No lady desired to look on him, or any maid to talk with him.

Now when Melion heard this he was right heavy thereof; no more did he desire to seek adventure, and no will had he to bear arms. Full heavy he was and sorrowful, and he lost somewhat of his fame. Now the king had news of the matter and had great grief thereof, and he called the knight to him, and spoke with him. "Melion," saith King Arthur, "what hath befallen thy wisdom and thy worth and thy chivalry? Tell me what aileth thee and conceal it not. If thou would have land or manor, or any other thing so that it be in my realm it shall be thine according to thy desire; for gladly would I lighten thy sorrow," so saith the king to him, "if that I might. Now upon the sea shore I have a castle, in all the world is not such another; fair it is with wood and river and forest which are full dear to thee, and this castle will I give thee for thy cheer; good delight may ye find therein."

So the king gave it to him in fee; and Melion gave him thanks thereof, and went away to his castle, taking with him an hundred knights. Right pleasant was that country to him, and so was the forest that he held full dear; and when he had lived there a year through, he grew greatly to love the land, for he sought no disport but he found it in the forest.

Now on a day, Melion and his foresters rode to the chase; with him he took his huntsmen, who loved him with true love, inasmuch as he was their liege lord, and all honour was found in him. Soon they came upon a great stag, and forthright let loose the dogs upon him. Thereafter it fell that Melion drew rein amid a heath that he might the better listen for his pack. With him was a squire, and in his leash he held two greyhounds; and anon, across the heath, the which was green and fair, he saw come a damsel on a fair palfrey, and right rich was her array. For she was clothed in scarlet samite, laced full seemly, and about her neck hung a mantle of ermine, never did queen wear better. Well fashioned was she of body, and comely of shoulder; her hair was yellow, her mouth small and

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shapely, and red as any rose; gray-blue were her eyes, and clear and laughing; right fair was all her seeming, full winsome and gracious; and all alone without fellows came she.

Melion rideth to meet her, and courteously he greeted her: "Sweet, I salute you in the name of the Glorious One, of Jesus the King; tell me of what house you are, and what bringeth you hither." And the damsel maketh answer: "Even that will I tell you in all truth: I am of good parentry and born of noble lineage, and from Ireland have I come to you.

Know ye that I am much your lover. Never have I loved any man save you only, and never will love any; so great praise have I heard of you that no other save you alone have I ever desired to love, and never shall I feel love for any other."

Now when Melion heard that his vows were fulfilled, he clipped her about the middle, and kissed her thirty times over. Then he called together his folk, and told them the adventure; and they looked upon the damsel, and in all the realm was none so fair. So Melion took her to his castle, and the people rejoiced greatly. He married her with great splendor, and made great cheer thereof, that for fifteen whole days the tourneys lasted.

For three years he dearly cherished her, and during those three years they had two sons, whereof he was right glad and joyful. And on a day he rode into the forest, taking with him his much loved wife, and a squire to carry his bow and arrows. He soon came upon a stag, and they pursued it, but it fled away with lowered head. Thereafter they came into a heath, and in a thicket the knight saw standing a right great stag; laughing, he looked down at his wife. "Dame," saith he, "if I would, I could show you a right great stag. Look ye, he is yonder in that thicket."

"By my faith, Melion," said she, "know ye that if I have not the flesh of that stag never more will I eat morsel." Therewith she felleth in a swoon from her palfrey. Melion raised her up, but might not comfort her, and bitterly she began to weep.

"Dame," saith he, "mercy in God's name. Weep no more, I beg of thee. Here in my hand I have a ring; see it now on my finger. Two gems it hath in its setting, one white and one red, never were any seen of like fashion. Now hear ye a great marvel of them: if ye touch me with the white, and lay it upon my head when I am stripped naked, I shall become a great wolf, big of body; and for your love I will take the stag, and bring you of its flesh. But I pray you, in God's name, that ye await me here, and keep for me my garments. With you I leave my life and my death; for I shall have no comfort if I be not touched with the other gem, for never again shall I become man." There with he called his squire to take off his shoes; the youth stepped forward and unshod him, and Melion went into the wood and laid aside his garments, and remained wholly naked, save that he wrapped his cloak about him. Now when his wife saw him stripped of all his raiment, she touched him with the ring, and he became a great wolf, big of body. So fell he into sore mischance.

The wolf set off running full swiftly to the place where he saw the stag lie; forthwith he set himself upon the track, now great will be the strife before he hath taken and caught it, and had its flesh. Meantime the lady saith to the squire: "Now let us leave him to take his fill of the chase." Therewith she got her to horseback; no whit did she tarry, but she took with her the squire, and straightway turned her towards Ireland, her own land. She came to the haven, where she found a ship; forthwith she addressed her to the sailors, and they carried her to Dublin, a city upon the seashore, that held of her father, the king of Ireland. Now hath she all that she asks. And so soon as she came to the port, she was received with great joy: with this let us leave her, and speak we again of Melion.

Melion, as he pursued the stag, pressed it wondrous hard, and at length he drove it into a heath where he soon brought it down. Then he took a great collop of it, and carried it away in his mouth. Swiftly he returned again to the place where he had left his wife, but did not find her, for she had taken her way towards Ireland. Right sorry was he, and knoweth not what to do when he findeth her not in that spot. But none the less, though he was a wolf, yet had he the sense and memory of a man. So he lurked and waited until evening fell; and he saw men loading a

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ship that was to set sail that night and go straightway to Ireland.

Thither he went, and waited till it grew quite dark, when he entered into it at adventure, for he recked little of his life. There he crouched down under a wattle, and hid and concealed himself. Meantime, the sailors bestirred themselves, for the wind was fair, and so they set forth towards Ireland, and each had that he desired. They spread aloft their sails, and steered by the sky and stars; and the next day, at dawn, they saw the shore of Ireland. And when they were come into port Melion tarried no longer, but issued out of his hiding place, and sprang from the ship to the sand. The sailors cried out upon him, and threw their gear at him, and one struck him with a staff, so that well nigh had they captured him. Glad was he when he escaped them; and he went up into a mountain, and looked long over the land where he knew his enemies dwelt. Still had he the collop he had brought from his own domain, but now, in that his hunger was great, he ate it; sorely had the sea wearied him.

And then he went away into a forest, where he found cows and oxen, and of these he killed and destroyed many. So began his war, and in this first onset he slew more than a hundred. The folk that dwelt in the greenwood saw the damage he wrought to the beasts, and ran flocking into the city, and told and recounted to the king that there was a wolf in the forest that wasted all the land, and had slain many of their horned beasts. And for all this they blamed the king.

So Melion ran through the forests and waste places, and over the mountains, until he joined company with ten other wolves; and he so cajoled and blandished them that they followed after him, and did all his desire. Far and wide they wandered through the land, and sore mishandled both men and women. So lived they a year long, and wasted all that region, harrying the land and slaying the folk. Well knew they how to guard themselves, and by no means could the king entrap them.

One night they had wandered far, and wearied and spent, they lay in a wood near Dublin, on a little hill by the sea shore. Beyond the wood was a meadow, and all round about was plain country. There they entered to rest, but there they will be ensnared and betrayed. They had been seen of a countryman, who ran forthright to the king: "Lord," saith he, "in the wood yonder lie the eleven wolves." And when the king heard him he was right glad, and spoke to his men of the matter.

Now the king called together his men: "Barons," saith he, "hearken to this: know ye of a sooth this man hath seen all eleven wolves in my forest." Then round about the wood they let spread the snares with which they were wont to take the wild boar. And when the snares were spread, the king went thither without tarrying, and his daughter said she would come with him to see the chase of the wolves. Straightway they went into the forest in all quiet and secretness, and surrounded the whole wood, for they had folk in plenty, who bore axes and staves, and some their naked swords. Then they cheered on their dogs to the number of a thousand, and these soon found the wolves. Melion saw that he was betrayed, well knew he that sore mischance had befallen him. The wolves were hard pressed by the dogs, and in their flight they came upon the snares, and all were torn to pieces and slain, save only Melion.

He sprang over the traps, and fled into a great wood; so by his wit he escaped them. Meantime the folk went back to the town, and the king made great joy. Greatly he rejoiced that he had ten of the eleven wolves; well was he revenged on them, in that one only had escaped. But his daughter said: "That one was the biggest. And yet will he work you woe."

When Melion had stolen away he went up into a mountain; full heavy and sorrowful was he because of the wolves he had lost. Great travail had been his, but anon he shall have help. Now at this time Arthur came into Ireland to make peace, for there was war in the land, and he was fain to bring the foes into accord, in that it was his desire to subdue the Romans, and he wished to lead these men with him to battle. The king came privately, bringing with him no great host; some twenty knights only had he in his train. Sweet was the weather, and fair the wind, and the ship was full rich and great; trusty was her helmsman, and full well was she dight, and plenteously

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garnished with men and arms. Their shields were hung along the side, right well Melion knew them. First he spied the shield of Gawain, then saw he that of Iwain, and then the shield of Idel the king; and all this was dear and pleasant to him. Then saw and knew he the shield of Arthur, and wit ye well, he had great joy thereof; glad and blithe was he, for he hoped yet to have mercy. So came they sailing towards the land; but now the wind was contrary to them, and they might not make the port, whereof they were right sorry. So turned they towards another haven some two leagues from the city, where, of old, had been a great castle which was now ruined; and when they were come thither, darkness fell, and it was night.

So the king is come into port; sore wearied and spent is he, for the ship had much discomforted him. And he called his seneschal: "Go forth," saith he, "and see where I may lie this night." The seneschal turned back into the ship, and called the chamberlain, saying: "Come forth with me, and let us make ready the king's lodging." So they issued out of the ship, and came to the castle; and they had two candles brought thither, and forthwith had them lighted; and they let bring carpets and coverlets, and speedily was the chamber well garnished. Then the king issued forth, and went straight to his lodging, and when he came therein right glad was he to find it so fair.

Now Melion had not tarried, but straightway went to meet the ship.

Near the moat he halted; right well he knew them all, and well he knoweth that if he hath not comfort of the king, he shall come to his death in Ireland. Yet he knoweth not what to do, for he is a wolf, and so hath no power of speech; yet none the less will he go thither, and set himself at adventure. When he came to the king's door, right well knew he all the barons; for nought staid he, but hath passed straight in to the king, though it be at the hazard of death. At the king's feet he cast himself down, nor would he rise; whereof, lo you, Arthur hath great wonder, and he saith: "A marvel see I; this wolf hath come hither to seek me. Now see ye well that he is of my household, and woe to the man who shall lay hands on or hurt him."

When supper was made ready and the barons had washed, the king likewise washed and seated himself. Napkins were spread before them; and the king called to Idel and made him sit at his side. And Melion lay at the king's feet, well knew he all the barons. Oftentimes the king looked down at him, and anon gave him a piece of bread the which he took and began to eat. Then greatly the king marvelleth, and saith to King Idel: "Look now, know ye of a sooth this wolf knoweth our ways."

Then the king gave him a piece of roast meat, and gladly the wolf ate it; whereat Gawain saith: "Lords, look you, this wolf is out of all nature."

And the barons all say one to another that never saw they so courteous a wolf. Thereupon the king let wine be set before the wolf in a basin, and so soon as he seeth it, he drinketh it, and certes, he was full fain of it; good plenty he drank of that wine, as the king well saw.

Now when they arose from meat and the barons had washed, they issued out upon the sands. And always the wolf followed after the king, and might not be kept from him, wheresoever he went. And when the king desired to go to rest, he commanded that his bed be made ready. So he withdrew him to sleep, for he was sore wearied; but with him went the wolf, and he lay at the king's feet, nor might any man dispart them.

Passing glad was the king of Ireland in that Arthur had come to him; great joy had he thereof. Early at dawn, he rose, and went to the haven together with his barons. Straight to the haven they came riding, and each company gave fair welcome to other. Arthur showed the king much love, and did him much honour. When he saw him come before him, he would not be proud, but raised him up and kissed him. And anon the horses were made ready, and without any tarrying they mounted and rode towards the city.

The king mounteth upon his palfrey, and good convoy he hath of his wolf, who would not be disparted from him, but kept always at his stirrup. Passing glad was the king of Ireland because of Arthur, and the company was rich

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and mighty. So came they to Dublin, and lighted down from their horses before the high palace. And when Arthur went up into the donjon tower, the wolf held him by the lap of his garment; and when King Arthur was seated, the wolf lay at his feet.

The king hath looked down at his wolf, and hath called him up close to the dais. Side by side sit the two kings, and right rich is their following; right well are the barons served, for throughout all the household great plenty is dealt out. But Melion looketh about him, and midway down the hall he saw him who had brought thither his wife; well knew he that she had crossed the sea and was come into Ireland.

Forthwith he seized the youth by the shoulder no stand can he make against the wolf but Melion brought him to the ground amid the hall.

And he would have straightway killed and destroyed him, had it not been for the king's sergeants, who ran thither in sore disorder; and from out all the palace they brought rods and staves, and anon they would have slain the wolf had not Arthur cried out: "By my faith, ill befall whoso layeth hands on him, for know ye, the wolf is my own."

Then saith Idel, the son of Irien: "Lords, ye misdo herein; the wolf would not have set upon the youth, and if he had not sore hated him."

"Thou sayest well, Idel," quoth the king; and therewith he left the dais, and passed down the hall to the wolf, and saith to the youth: "Thou shalt tell us why he set upon thee, or else thou shalt die." Melion looked up at the king, and gripped the youth so hard he cried out, and prayed the king's mercy, and said he would make known the truth. So now he telleth the king how the lady had brought him thither, and how she had touched Melion with the ring, and how she had borne it away with her into Ireland; so hath he spoken and told all, even as it befell.

Then Arthur bespoke the king: "Now know I well this is sooth, and right glad am I of my baron; let the ring be given over to me, and likewise thy daughter who stole it away; evilly hath she betrayed her lord." So the king went thence, and entered into his daughter's chamber, and with him went King Idel, and he so coaxed and cajoled her that she gave him the ring, and he brought it to King Arthur. Now so soon as Melion saw the ring right well he knew it; and he came to the king, and knelt down and kissed his two feet. King Arthur would fain have touched him with the ring, but Gawain would not so have it: "Fair uncle," saith he, "do not so, but rather lead him into a chamber apart where ye twain may be alone together, that he have not shame of the folk."

Then the king called to him Gawain, and Idel likewise he took with him: so led he the wolf into a privy chamber, and when they had come within, shut the door fast. Then he laid the ring upon the wolf's head, and all his visage changed, and his face became human. So turned he to man again, and he spoke, and fell down at the king's feet. They covered him over with a mantle; and when they saw him very man, they made great joy. But the king fell a weeping for pity, and weeping asked him how it fell that by sin he had lost him. And then he let summon his chamberlain, and bade him bring rich raiment. Fairly they clothed and arrayed him, and so led him into the hall; and all they of the household greatly marvelled when they saw Melion come in amongst them.

Then the king of Ireland led forth his daughter, and gave her over to Arthur that he might do as he would with her, whether it were to slay or to burn her. Saith Melion: "I will touch her with the ring, nor will I forbear." But Arthur said to him: "Do not so, rather let her be, for the sake of thy fair children." All the barons likewise besought him, and Melion accorded it.

Now King Arthur abode in Ireland until he had assuaged the war; then he went again into his own land, and with him took Melion; full glad and blithe was he thereof. But his wife he left in Ireland, and commanded her to the devil; never again would he love her for that she had done him such wrong; never would he take her unto him again, rather would he have let burn or hang her. And he said: "Whoso believeth his wife in all things cannot help

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but come into mischance at the end, for it is not meet to set your trust in all her sayings."

True is the lay of Melion, so all good barons declare.