

At the Palace of King Lot

OSCAR FAY ADAMS

Table of Contents

<u>At the Palace of King Lot</u>	1
<u>OSCAR FAY ADAMS</u>	2
<u>ARGUMENT</u>	3

At the Palace of King Lot

At the Palace of King Lot

OSCAR FAY ADAMS

This page copyright © 2002 Blackmask Online.
<http://www.blackmask.com>

ARGUMENT.

*The King was in the parlor, counting out his money:
The Queen was in the kitchen, eating bread and honey:
The Maid was in the garden, hanging out the clothes:
There came a little Blackbird and snipp'd off her nose.*

Lot, King of Orkney in the Northern seas,
Long ere the time when, fighting sword in hand
'Gainst Arthur in the barons' wars he made
His name to all true men a byword like
A thing of scorn, one summer morning sat
Within the presence chamber all alone,
For knights and squires that made his island court,
(A tiny court rul'd by a weakling king,)
Were absent at the hunting every one.
Far better had it suited with his mood
To ride with them in gay companionship
Than to have stay'd behind. But on that day
The butcher, baker, chandler, and the host
That prosper'd on the waste and riot made
At court, their bills had brought and, clam'ring, begg'd
Their dues.

As one who from his window sees
In early morning blue and cloudless skies,
And o'er him feels the breezes blowing soft,
While in his heart is peace, but later finds
The breezes risen to a gale, and dull,
Grey clouds fast shutting out the sun and sky
And in his bosom discontent is lord;
So was it with King Lot when from his chair,
After the morning meal which Bellicent,
His Queen, had with her maids prepar'd for him—
Since well she knew what meats would please him best—
He fain had had risen purpose—mov'd to pass
Without, but, rising, heard a dismal noise
And saw the door burst open while a throng
Of angry debtors clos'd him round about.
Shrill rang their voices 'mong the rafters high
O'erhead, and scarce the King could headway make
Against their loud—voic'd clamor, but at length,
When they had tir'd themselves with shriekings shrill,
He spake again and all attent they heard.

"Peace, fools, and leave me time to overlook
Your bills. This done, to—morrow at this hour
The seneschal shall see that all are paid."

This said, he wav'd his hand, and at the sign

At the Palace of King Lot

The rout of debtors vanish'd all at once
And swift, as oftentimes a chatt'ring flock
Of sparrows disappears before the sound
Of nearing feet, so quickly drew they off,
Each man communing with himself, the while
Their sharp heels clatter'd on the flinty floor.

Then like a wrathful sunshine smil'd King Lot.
"I go not to the chase to-day, it seems,
But weary hours must spend instead, forsooth,
In balancing accounts, since in my court
Of figures none knows aught, save I, the King."

At this the sullen Modred, eldest son
Of Lot, laugh'd softly to himself,—right glad
That any business kept the kingly eye
From him, for full of tricks and craft was he,
The Artful Dodger of an early day,
And often in an uproar set the court.

And now the knights and squires had gone without
Their King, while he, with anxious face and brow
All frown, sat 'mongst his money caskets lost
In calculations deep, and murm'ring low
Of pounds and shillings, and, at times, of pence,
And oft, for better aiming at results,
His fingers counting as do boys at school—
Like them perplex'd for want of fingers more—
So past his morning hours away.

Meanwhile

Had Bellicent, the Queen, her husband left,
And to the kitchen gone to oversee
The maids, for such her careful custom was.
Right bitter was her tongue when these transgress'd,
But to obedience was she all as sweet
As winds from off a perfum'd bank of flowers,—
And this her maidens knew and strove to please.
But on her brow this morn there lurk'd a frown,
And in her heart reign'd vague unrest, and why
She knew not, yet she held her peace and came
And went on household quests and would have still'd
The gnawing hunger at her heart, and all
In vain.

At last she to a cupboard bent
Her steps, an oaken cupboard built within
A niche, and wisely for such purpose made,
And open threw its doors. On oaken shelf
There gleam'd the glass and silver kept for days
Of pomp and show, for Bellicent, the Queen,
Had joy in burnisht silver as became

ARGUMENT.

At the Palace of King Lot

Her state, and on her treasure gaz'd she now
With proper pride, but on the topmost shelf
Her eyes, blue as the seas that circle round
Her island realm and dash against its crags,
Espied a wheaten loaf, and, close beside,
A jar of amber honey, of some hive
The luscious spoil. Beholding these the frown
From off her brow departed, and, therewith,
The gnawing at her heart, and putting forth
A slender arm to which a broider'd sleeve,
All of red samite, clung in shapely fold,
She graspt the jar of amber sweets and next
The wheaten loaf, and, all rejoicing, bore
Them to a corner window—lit by niche
Deep sunk and narrow as the zone that bound
Her robe of scarlet samite at the waist,
A curtain loosely drawn before kept off
Intrusive eyes, and here the Queen retir'd.
Upon a ledge beneath the window lay
A sharpen'd knife with silvern hilt whereon
The cunning artisan had made the dog
To chase the boar, and, seizing this, the Queen
From off the loaf broad slices cut in haste,
And o'er them pour'd the honey from the jar
With murmurs of delight half—heard from lips
That now in ecstasy essay'd to taste.
Then o'er her senses past a drowsy calm
As, slowly eating there alone, she grew
Forgetful wholly of her lord the King,
Forgetful of the honey on her gown,
Forgetful of the dinner to be cook'd,
Forgetful of the swift—approaching noon,
Forgetful of her kitchen and its cares.
And this forgetfulness was pleasant to her.

Behind the palace, in a courtyard small,
Hemm'd in by walls to which the lichen clung
In stains of gold and silver laced with black,
The moon—faced Edith paced with hasty tread,
Bearing the basket with the Monday's wash,
Bare to the elbow were her sturdy arms,
On which, all red with labor, shone the suds.
Low overhead an hempen network fine
In intricate confusion mingl'd, cross
And bar. Thereon the damsel deftly flung
The many motley garments of the court,
Diverse of shape and in strange order set,
Since here the mended hose of poorest squire
Hung neighbor to the night—rail of the King.
Glad was the maid to think her work was done,
And all her youth broke forth in gladsome song—

ARGUMENT.

At the Palace of King Lot

The song itself a thing of little wit
But humble and accordant with her toil—

"Rub, rub, and scrub! the soap is on the shelf!
There's many a one much wiser than myself;
But not an old man counting o'er his pelf.
"Rub, rub, and scrub! the soap is here by me!
And soap is such to me if not to thee;
And whether soap or soda let it be.

"Rub, scrub and rub! and the slack clothes—line blows:
Scrub, rub and scrub, and where is she? who knows?
From one wash to another wash she goes."

Loud sang the maid, and all the while behind
An angle in the courtyard Modred sat
Sullen, and crouch'd with mischief in his heart.
Beside him glossy—wing'd, and sharp of beak,
A blackbird skulk'd, with evil eye upturn'd
To meet the evil eye of Modred bent
On him, and one were these in purpose ill.
Scarce could the knavish Modred bide the time
When he the moon—faced, unsuspecting maid
Might harm, and oft the blackbird pertly peer'd
Into his face, as one that sayeth "Here
Am I," again, and "Master, is it time?"
At last it chanced that as the damsel mov'd
Among the garments that o'erhung the space,
And glisten'd in the sun, she turn'd her head
A moment toward the angle in the wall
All unregardful of the danger there.
Full roseate were her cheeks, but redder still
Her nose, wherefore, I know not, I but tell
The tale, and this, when wicked Modred saw,
He aim'd a villain's finger toward, whereat
The bird, upstarting, flew with direful speed,
And, ere the maid could frame a thought of ill,
Had nipt the crimson'd feature with his beak.
Sore was the hurt and loud the damsel shriek'd,
And wildly from the courtyard ran in haste
And pain, but ere she many steps had gone
A cord that Modred o'er the path had stretch'd,
Catching her feet low fell'd her to the ground.
All heavily she sank to earth and lay
As one whom fright and pain have overcome
At once and stol'n away the strength to move.

This saw the Prince, the while he prais'd the bird
For faithful service done, and then the twain
Departed by a secret way that none
But Modred knew. Within the damsel's breast,

ARGUMENT.

At the Palace of King Lot

Whenas she rose and gain'd her feet
And naught of bird or other creature saw,
Both rage and grief held riot bitter there,
But in the heart of Modred joy was lord.