CHILD CHRISTOPHER
AND GOLDFILD
THE FAIR

BY

WILLIAM MORRIS

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NOTE

Of this original romance but one edition was ever issued by its author. It is thus described in A Note by William Morris on His Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press: Together with a Short Description of the Press by S. C. Cockerell and an Annotated List of the Books printed thereat (MDCCXCIII):


The borders designed for this book were only used once again, in Hand and Soul. The plot of

1 "In the summer of 1895 he issued from his press a delightful prose romance which he had originally begun to write in four-foot trochaic couplets, but had desisted before completing the seventeenth line." (The Books of William Morris. By H. Buxton Forman. London, 1897.)
the story was suggested by that of Havelok the Dane, printed by the Early English Text Society.

At the Edelheim sale (March 7th, 1900), a copy brought $35.00, and at still later sales it has realized from $26.00 to $34.00.

CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I  Of the King of Oakenrealm, and his wife and his child</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II Of the King's son</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III Of the King of Meadham and his daughter</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV Of the maiden Goldilind</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V  Goldilind comes to Greenharbour</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI How Rolf the Marshal dreams a dream and comes to the Castle of the Uttermost March</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII How Christopher went a journey into the wild-wood</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII Christopher comes to the Tofts</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IX  Squire Simon comes back to Oakenham. The Earl Marshal taken to King in Oakenrealm</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X  Of Christopher at the Tofts</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XI How Christopher came to Little-dale to abide there a while</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENTS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xii</td>
<td>Of Goldilind in the May morning at Greenharbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiii</td>
<td>Of Goldilind in the garth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xiv</td>
<td>Goldilind goes free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xv</td>
<td>Of Goldilind in the wild-wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xvi</td>
<td>What Goldilind found in the wood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xvii</td>
<td>Goldilind comes back to Greenharbour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xviii</td>
<td>Earl Geoffrey speaks with Goldilind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xix</td>
<td>Earl Geoffrey speakesth with Christopher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xx</td>
<td>Of the wedding of Christopher and Goldilind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xxi</td>
<td>Of the wedding of those twain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xxii</td>
<td>Of the wood-land bride-chamber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xxiii</td>
<td>They fall in with friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xxiv</td>
<td>They take counsel at Littledale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xxv</td>
<td>Now they all come to the Tofts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xxvi</td>
<td>Of the King of Oakenrealm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xxvii</td>
<td>Of the Hustings of the Tofts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>xxviii</td>
<td>Of the Hosting in Hazeldale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| CONTENTS |
|----------|----------|
| CHAPTER  | PAGE     |
| xxxviii  | A council of Captains: The Host comes to Broadlees, and makes for Woodwall | 183    |
| xxxv     | Battle before Woodwall                      | 188    |
| xxxvi    | Of Child Christopher's dealings with his friends and his folk | 205    |
| xxxvii   | Of matters of Meadham                       | 211    |
| xxx     | Tidings come to Hazeldale                   | 162    |
| xxx     | Of the field that was set in the holm of Hazeldale | 167    |
| xxxi     | The Battle on the Holm                      | 175    |
| xxxii    | Of Goldilind and Christopher                | 180    |
CHAPTER I. OF THE KING OF OAKENREALM, AND HIS WIFE AND HIS CHILD

Of old there was a land which was so much a wood-land, that a minstrel thereof said it that a squirrel might go from end to end, and all about, from tree to tree, and never touch the earth: therefore was that land called Oakenrealm.

The lord and king thereof was a stark man, and so great a warrior that in his youth he took no delight in aught else save battle and tourneys. But when he was hard on forty years old, he came across a daughter of a certain lord, whom he had vanquished, and his eyes bewrayed him into longing, so that he gave back to the said lord all the havings he had conquered of him that he might lay the maiden in his kingly bed. So he brought her home with him to Oakenrealm and wedded her.
Tells the tale that he rued not his bargain, but loved her so dearly that for a year round he wore no armour, save when she bade him play in the tilt-yard for her desport and pride. So wore the days till she went with child and was near her time, and then it betid that three kings who marched on Oakenrealm banded them together against him, and his lords and thanes cried out on him to lead them to battle, and it behoved him to do as they would.

So he sent out the tokens and bade an hosting at his chief city, and when all was ready he said farewell to his wife and her babe unborn, and went his ways to battle once more: but fierce was his heart against the foemen, that they had dragged him away from his love and his joy.

Even amidst of his land he joined battle with the host of the ravagers, and the tale of them is short to tell, for they were as the wheat before the hook. But as he followed up the chase, a mere thrall of the fleers turned on him and cast his spear, and it reached him whereas his hawberk was broken, and stood deep in, so that he fell to earth unmighty: and when his lords and chieftains drew about him, and cunning men strove to heal him, it was of no avail, and he knew that his soul was departing. Then he sent for a priest, and for the Marshal of the host, who was a great lord, and the son of his father's brother, and in few words bade him look to the babe whom his wife bore about, and if it were a man, to cherish him and do him to learn all that a king ought to know; and if it were a maiden, that he should look to her wedding well and worthily: and he let swear him on his sword, on the edges and the hilts, that he would do even so, and be true unto his child if child there were: and he bade him have rule, if so be the lords would, and all the people, till the child were of age to be king: and the Marshal swore, and all the lords who stood around bear witness to his swearing. Thereafter the priest houselled the King, and he received his Creator, and a little while after his soul departed.

But the Marshal followed up the fleeing foe, and two battles more he fought before he beat them flat to earth; and then they crave for peace, and he went back to the city in mickle honour.

But in the King's city of Oakenham he found but little joy; for both the King was bemoaned, whereas he had been no hard man to his folk; and also, when the tidings and the King's corpse came back to Oakenrealm, his Lady and Queen took sick for sorrow and fear, and fell into labour of her child, and in
CHILD CHRISTOPHER

childing of a man-bairn she died, but the lad lived, and was like to do well.

So there was one funeral for the slain King and for her whom his slaying had slain: and when that was done, the little king was borne to the font, and at his christening he gat to name Christopher.

Thereafter the Marshal summoned all them that were due thereto to come and give homage to the new king, and even so did they, though he were but a babe, yea, and who had but just now been a king lying in his mother's womb. But when the homage was done, then the Marshal called together the wise men, and told them how the King that was had given him in charge his son as then unborn, and the ruling of the realm till the said son were come to man's estate: but he bade them seek one worthier if they had heart to gainsay the word of their dying lord. Then all they said that he was worthy and mighty and the choice of their dear lord, and that they would have none but he.

So then was the great folk-mote called, and the same matter was laid before all the people, and none said aught against it, whereas no man was ready to name another to that charge and rule, even had it been his own self.

Now then by law was the Marshal, who hight Rolf, lord and earl of the land of Oaken-

AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR

realm. He ruled well and strongly, and was a fell warrior: he was well befriended by many of the great; and the rest of them feared him and his friends: as for the commonalty, they saw that he held the realm in peace; and for the rest, they knew little and saw less of him, and they paid to his bailiffs and sheriffs as little as they could, and more than they would. But whereas that left them somewhat to grind their teeth on, and they were not harried, they were not so ill content. So the Marshal throve, and lacked nothing of a king's place save the bare name.
CHAPTER II. OF THE KING'S SON

As for the King's son, to whom the folk had of late done homage as king, he was at first seen about a corner of the High House with his nurses; and then in a while it was said, and the tale noted, but not much, that he must needs go for his health's sake, and because he was puny, to some stead amongst the fields, and folk heard say that he was gone to the strong house of a knight somewhat stricken in years, who was called Lord Richard the Lean. The said house was some twelve miles from Oakenham, not far from the northern edge of the wild-wood. But in a while, scarce more than a year, Lord Richard brake up house at the said castle, and went southward through the forest. Of this departure was little said, for he was not a man amongst the foremost. As for the King's little son, if any remembered that he was in the hands of the said Lord Richard, none said aught about it; for if any thought of the little babe at all, they said to themselves, Never will he come to be king.

Now as for Lord Richard the Lean, he went far through the wood, and until he was come to another house of his, that stood in a clearing somewhat near to where Oakenrealm marched on another country, which hight Meadham; though the said wild-wood ended not where Oakenrealm ended, but stretched a good way into Meadham; and betwixt one and the other much rough country there was.

It is to be said that amongst those who went to this stronghold of the woods was the little King Christopher, no longer puny, but a stout babe enough; so he was borne amongst the serving-men and thralls to the Castle of the Outer March; and he was in nowise treated as a great man's son; but there was more than one woman who was kind to him, and as he waxed in strength and beauty month by month, both carle and quean fell to noting him, and, for as little as he was, he began to be well-beloved.

As to the stead where he was nourished, though it were far away amongst the woods, it was no such lonely or savage place: besides the castle and the houses of it, there was a merry thorpe in the clearing the houses thereof were set down by the side of a clear and pleasant little stream. Moreover, the goodmen and swains of the said township were no ill folk, but bold of heart, free of speech, and goodly of favour; and the women of them fair, kind, and trusty. Whilest came folk journeying in to Oakenrealm or out to Meadham, and of
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10</th>
<th>CHILD CHRISTOPHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>these some were minstrels, who had with them tidings of what was astir whereas folk were thicker in the world, and some chapmen, who chaffered with the thorpe-dwellers, and took of them the wood-land spoil for such outland goods as those woodmen needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>So wore the years, and in Oakenham King Christopher was well nigh forgotten, and in the wild-wood had never been known clearly for King’s son. At first, by command of Rolf the Marshal, a messenger came every year from Lord Richard with a letter that told of how the lad Christopher did. But when five years were worn, the Marshal bade send him tidings thereof every three years; and by then it was come to the twelfth year, and still the tidings were that the lad throve ever, and meanwhile the Marshal sat fast in his seat with none to gainsay, the word went to Lord Richard that he should send no more, for that he, the Marshal, had heard enough of the boy; that if he throve it were well, and if not, it was no worse. So wore the days and the years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>11</th>
<th>AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter III. Of the King of Meadham and His Daughter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TELLS the tale that in the country which lay south of Oakenrealm, and was called Meadham, there was in these days a king whose wife was dead, but had left him a fair daughter, who was born some four years after King Christopher. A good man was this King Roland, mild, bounteous, and no regarder of persons in his justice; and well-beloved he was of his folk: yet could not their love keep him alive; for, whenas his daughter was of the age of twelve years, he sickened unto death; and so, when he knew that his end drew near, he sent for the wisest of his wise men, and they came unto him sorrowing in the High House of his chiepest city, which hight Meadhamstead. So he bade them sit down nigh unto his bed, and took up the word and spake: Masters, and my good lords, ye may see clearly that a sundering is at hand, and that I must needs make a long journey, whence I shall come back never; now I would, and am verily of duty bound thereto, that I leave behind me some good order in the land. Furthermore, I would that my daughter, when she</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
is of age thereto, should be Queen in Meadham, and rule the land; neither will it be many years before she shall be of ripe age for ruling, if ever she may be; and I deem not that there shall be any lack in her, whereas her mother could all courtesy, and was as wise as a woman may be. But how say ye, my masters?

So they all with one consent said Yea, and they would ask for no better king than their lady his daughter. Then said the King:

Hearken carefully, for my time is short: Yet is she young and a maiden, though she be wise. Now therefore do I need some man well looked to of the folk, who shall rule the land in her name till she be of eighteen winters, and who shall be her good friend and counsellor into all wisdom thereafter. Which of you, my masters, is meet for this matter?

Then they all looked one on the other, and spake not. And the King said: Speak, some one of you, without fear; this is no time for tarrying. Thereon spake an elder, the oldest of them, and said: Lord, this is the very truth, that none of us here present are meet for this office: whereas, among other matters, we be all unmeet for battle; some of us have never been warriors, and other some are past the age for leading an host. To say the sooth, King, there is but one man in Meadham who may do what thou wilt, and not fail; both for

AND GOLDFILD THE FAIR

his wisdom, and his might afield, and the account which is had of him amongst the people; and that man is Earl Geoffrey, of the Southern Marches.

Ye say sooth, quoth the King; but is he down in the South or nigher to hand? Said the elder: He is as now in Meadhamstead, and may be in this chamber in scant half an hour. So the King bade send for him, and there was silence in the chamber till he came in, clad in a scarlet kirtle and a white cloak, and with his sword by his side. He was a tall man, bigly made; somewhat pale of face, black and curly of hair; blue-eyed, and thin-lipped, and hook-nosed as an eagle; a man warrior-like, and somewhat fierce of aspect. He knelt down by the King's bedside, and asked him in a sorrowful voice what he would, and the King said: I ask a great matter of thee, and all these my wise men, and I myself, withal, deem that thou canst do it, and thou alone... nay, hearken: I am departing, and I would have thee hold my place, and do unto my people even what I would do if I myself were living; and to my daughter as nigh to that as may be. I say all this thou mayest do, if thou wilt be as trusty and leal to me after, I am dead, as thou hast seemed to all men's eyes to have been while I was living. What sayest thou?
The Earl had hidden his face in the coverlet of the bed while the King was speaking; but now he lifted up his face, weeping, and said: Kinsman and friend and King; this is nought hard to do; but if it were, yet would I do it. It is well, said the King: my heart fails me and my voice; so give heed, and set thine ear close to my mouth: hearken, belike my daughter Goldilind shall be one of the fairest of women; I bid thee wed her to the fairest of men and the strongest, and to none other.

Thereat his voice failed him indeed, and he lay still; but he died not, till presently the priest came to him, and, as he might, housed him: then he departed.

As for Earl Geoffrey, when the King was buried, and the homages done to the maiden Goldilind, he did no worse than those wise men deemed of him, but bestirred him, and looked full sagely into all the matters of the kingdom, and did so well therein that all men praised his rule perforce, whether they loved him or not; and sooth to say he was not much beloved.

MIDST of all his other business Earl Geoffrey bethought him in a while of the dead King's daughter, and he gave her in charge to a gentlewoman, somewhat stricken in years, a widow of high lineage, but not over wealthy. She dwelt in her own house in a fair valley some twenty miles from Meadhamstead: there abode Goldilind till a year and a half was worn, and had due observance, but little love, and not much kindness from the said gentlewoman, who hight Dame Elinor Leashowe. Howbeit, time and again came knights and ladies and lords to see the little lady, and kissed her hand and did obeisance to her; yet more came to her in the first three months of her sojourn at Leashowe than the second, and more in the second than the third.

At last, on a day when the said year and a half was fully worn, thither came Earl Geoffrey with a company of knights and men-at-arms, and he did obeisance, as due was, to his master's daughter, and then spake awhile privily with Dame Elinor; and thereafter they went into the hall, he, and she, and Goldilind,
and there before all men he spake aloud and said. My Lady Goldilind, meseemeth ye dwell here all too straightsly; for neither is this house of Leashowe great enough for thy state, and the entertainment of the knights and lords who shall have will to seek to thee hither; nor is the wealth of thy liege dame and governante as great as it should be, and as thou, meseemeth, wouldst have it. Wherefore I have been considering thy desires herein, and if thou deem it meet to give a gift to Dame Elinor, and live queenlier thyself than now thou dost, then mayst thou give unto her the Castle of Greenharbour, and the six manors appertaining thereto, and withal the rights of wild-wood and fen and fell that lie thereabout. Also, if thou wilt, thou mayst honour the said castle with abiding there awhile at thy pleasure; and I shall see to it that thou have due money to go with thee thither. How sayest thou my lady?

Amongst that company there were two or three who looked at each other and half smiled; and two or three looked on the maiden, who was goodly as of her years, as if with compassion; but the more part kept countenance in full courtly wise.

Then spake Goldilind in a quavering voice (for she was afraid and wise), and she said: Cousin and Earl, we will that all this be done; and it likes me well to eke the wealth of this

lady and my good friend Dame Elinor. Quoth Earl Geoffrey: Kneel before thy lady, dame, and put thine hands between hers and thank her for the gift. So Dame Elinor knelt down, and did homage and obeisance for her new land; and Goldilind raised her up and kissed her, and bade her sit down beside her, and spake to her kindly; and all men praised the maiden for her gentle and courteous ways; and Dame Elinor smiled upon her and them, what she could. She was small of body and sleek; but her cheeks somewhat flagging; brown eyes she had, long, half opened; thin lips, and chin somewhat falling away from her mouth; hard on fifty winters had she seen; yet there have been those who were older and goodlier both.
CHAPTER V. GOLDILIND COMES TO GREENHARBOUR

BUT a little while tarried the Earl Geoffrey at Leashowe, but departed next morning and came to Meadhamstead. A month thereafter came folk from him to Leashowe, to wit, the new money for the new abode of Goldilind; amongst whom was a goodly band of men-at-arms, led by an old lord pinched and peevish of face, who kneeled to Goldilind as the new burgreve of Greenharbour; and a chaplain, a black canon, young, broad-cheeked and fresh-looking, but hard-faced and unlovely; three new damsels withal were come for the young Queen, not young maids, but stalworth women, well grown, and two of them hard-featured; the third, tall, black-haired, and a godly-fashioned body.

Now when these were come, who were all under the rule of Dame Elinor, there was no gainsaying the departure to the new home; and in two days' time they went their ways from Leashowe. But though Goldilind was young, she was wise, and her heart misgave her, when she was amidst this new money, that she was not riding toward glory and honour, and a world of worship and friends beloved.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE</th>
<th>TEXT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>CHILD CHRISTOPHER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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CHILD CHRISTOPHER

rebuked; as bringing her flowers in the spring, or whiles a singing-bird or a squirrel; and an old man there was of the men-at-arms, who would ask leave, and get it at whiles, to come to her in her chamber, or the garden, and tell her minstrel tales and the like for her joyance. Sooth to say, even the pinched heart of the old Burgreve was somewhat touched by her; and he alone had any might to stand between her and Dame Elinor; so that but for him it had gone much harder with her than it did.

For the rest, none entered the Castle from the world without, nay not so much as a travelling monk, or a friar on his wanderings, save and except some messenger of Earl Geoffrey who had errand with Dame Elinor or the Burgreve.

So wore the days and the seasons, till it was now more than four years since she had left Leashowe, and her eighteenth summer was beginning. But now the tale leaves telling of Goldilind, and goes back to the matters of Oakenrealm, and therein to what has to do with King Christopher and Rolf the Marshal.

AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR

CHAPTER VI. HOW ROLF THE MARSHAL DREAMS A DREAM AND COMES TO THE CASTLE OF THE UTTERMOST MARCH

NOW this same summer, when King Christopher was of twenty years and two, Rolf the Marshal, sleeping one noontide in the King's garden at Oakenham, dreamed a dream. For him seemed that there came through the garth-gate a woman fair and tall, and clad in nought but oaken-leaves, who led by the hand an exceeding goodly young man of twenty summers, and his visage like to the last battle-dead King of Oakenrealm when he was a young man. And the said woman led the swain up to the Marshal, who asked in his mind what these two were; and the woman answered his thought and said. I am the Woman of the Woods, and the Land-wight of Oakenrealm; and this lovely lad whose hand I hold is my King and thy King and the King of Oakenrealm. Wake, fool ... wake! and look to it what thou wilt do! And therewith he woke up crying out, and drew forth his sword. But when he was fully awakened, he was ashamed, and went into the hall, and sat in his high-seat, and strove to
The dream dreamed again

Lord Rolf will see the youngling

The thorp of the Outer March

CHILD CHRISTOPHER

think out of his troubled mind; but for all he might do, he fell asleep again; and again in the hall he dreamed as he had dreamed in the garden: and when he awoke from his dream he had no thought in his head but how he might the speediest come to the house of Lord Richard the Lean, and look to the matter of his lord's son and see him with his eyes, and, if it might be, take some measure with the threat which lay in the lad's life. Nought he tarried, but set off in an hour's time with no more company than four men-at-arms and an old squire of his, who was wont to do his bidding without question, whether it were good or evil. So they went by flight and fell, by wood and fair ways, till in two days' time they were come by under within sight of the Castle of the Outer March, and entered into the street of the thorp aforesaid; and they saw that there were no folk therein, and at the house-doors save old carles and carlines scarce wayworthy, and little children who might not go afoot. But from the field anigh the thorp came the sound of shouting and glad voices, and through the lanes of the houses they saw on the field many people in gay raiment going to and fro, as though there were games and sports toward.

Thereof Lord Rolf heeded nought, but went his ways straight to the Castle, and was brought with all honour into the hall, and

AND GOLDFINN THE FAIR

thither came Lord Robert the Lean, hastening and half afeard, and did obeisance to him; and there were but a few in the hall, and they stood out of earshot of the two lords. The Marshal spoke graciously to Lord Richard, and made him sit beside him, and said in a soft voice: We have come to see thee, Lord, and how the folk do in the Uttermost Marches. Also we would wot how it goes with a lad whom we sent to thee when he was yet a babe, whereas he was some byblow of the late King; our lord and master, and we deemed thee both rich enough and kind enough to breed him into thriving without increasing pride upon him: and, firstly, is the lad yet alive?

He knitted his brow as he spake, for carefulness of soul; but Lord Richard smiled upon him, though as one somewhat troubled, and answered: Lord Marshal, I thank thee for visiting this poor house; and I shall tell thee first that the lad lives, and hath thiven marvellously, though he be somewhat unruly, and will abide no correction now these last six years. Sooth to say, there is now no story of his being anywise akin to our late Lord King; though true it is that the folk in this far-away corner of the land call him King Christopher, but only in a manner of jesting. But it is no jest wherein they say that they will gainsay him nought, and that especially the young
women. Yet I will say of him that he is wise, and asketh not overmuch; the more is the sorrow of many of the maidens. A fell woodsman he is, and exceeding stark, and as yet heedeth more of valiance than of the love of woman.

The Marshal looked no less troubled than before at these words; he said: I would see this young man speedily. So shall it be, Lord, said Lord Richard. Therewith he called to him a squire, and said: Go thou down into the thorpe, and bring hither Christopher, for that a great lord is here who would set him to do a deed of woodcraft, such as is more than the wont of men.

So the squire went his ways, and was gone a little while, and meantime drew nigh to the hall and sound of triumphant songs and shouts, and right up to the hall doors; then entered the squire, and by his side came a tall young man, clad but in a white linen shirt and deer-skin brogues, his head crowned with a garland of flowers: him the squire brought up to the lords on the dais, and louted to them, and said: My lords, I bring you Christopher, and he not over willing, for now hath he been but just crowned king of the games down yonder; but when the carles and queans there said that they would come with him and bear him company to the hall doors, then, forsooth, he yea-said

the coming. It were not unmeet that some shame were done him.

Peace man! said Lord Richard, what hath this to do with thee? Seest thou not the Lord Marshal here? The Lord Rolf sat and gazed on the lad, and scowled on him; but Christopher saw therein not that but the face of a great lord burdened with many cares; so when he had made his obeisance he stood up fearlessly and merrily before them.

Sooth to say, he was full fair to look on: for all his strength, which, as ye shall hear, was mighty, all the fashion of his limbs and his body was light and clean done, and beauteous; and though his skin, where it showed naked, was all tanned with the summer, it was fine and sleek and kindly, every deal thereof: bright-eyed and round-cheeked he was, with full lips and carven chin, and his hair golden brown of hue, and curling crisp about the blossoms of his garland.

So must we say that he was such an youngling as most might have been in the world, had not man's malice been, and the mischief of grudging and the marring of grasping.

But now spake Lord Rolf: Sir varlet, they tell me that thou art a mighty hunter, and of mickle guile in woodcraft; wilt thou then hunt somewhat for me, and bring me home a catch seldom seen? Yea, Lord King, said Christo-
CHRILD CHRISTOPHER

pher, I will at least do my best, if thou but tell me where to seek the quarry and when. It is well, said the Marshal, and to-morrow my squire, whom thou seest yonder, and who hight Simon, shall tell thee where the hunt is up, and thou shalt go with him. But hearken! thou shalt not call me king; for to-day there is no king in Oakenrealm, and I am but Marshal, and Earl of the king that shall be.

The lad fell a-musing for a minute, and then he said: Yea, Lord Marshal, I shall do thy will: but mesecmeth I have heard some tale of one who was but of late king in Oakenrealm: is it not so, Lord? Stint thy talk, young man, cried the Marshal in a harsh voice, and abide to-morrow; who knoweth who shall be king, and whether thou or I shall live to see him.

But as he spake the words they seemed to his heart like a foretelling of evil, and he turned pale and trembled, and said to Christopher: Come hither, lad; I will give thee a gift, and then shalt thou depart till to-morrow. So Christopher drew near to him, and the Marshal pulled off a ring from his finger and set it on the lad's, and said to him: Now depart in peace; and Christopher bent the knee to him and thanked him for the gracious gift of the ruler of Oakenrealm, and then went his ways out of the hall, and the folk without gave a glad cry as he came amongst them.

AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR

But by then he was come to the door, Lord Rolf looked on his hand, and saw that, instead of giving the youngling a finger-ring which he had bought of a merchant for a price of five bezants, as he had meant to do, he had given him a ring which the old King had had, whereon was the first letter of his name (Christopher to wit), and a device of a crowned rose, for this ring was a signet of his. Wherefore was the Marshal once more sore troubled, and he arose, and was half minded to run down the hall after Christopher; but he refrained him, and presently smiled to himself, and then fell a-talking to Lord Richard, sweetly and pleasantly.

So wore the day to evening; but, ere he went to bed, the Lord Rolf had a privy talk, first with Lord Richard, and after with his squire Simon. What followed of that talk ye may hear after.
CHILDE CHRISTOPHER

CHAPTER VII.  HOW CHRISTOPHER WENT A JOURNEY INTO THE WILDWOOD

NEXT morning Christopher, who slept in the little hall of the inner court of the Castle, arose betimes, and came to the great gate; but, for as early as he was, there he saw the squire Simon abiding him, standing between two strong horses; to him he gave the seal of the day, and the squire greeted him, but in somewhat surly wise. Then he said to him: Well, King Christopher, art thou ready for the road? Yea, as thou seest, said the youngling smiling. For, indeed, he had breeches now beneath his shirt, and a surcoat of green woollen over it; boots of deer-skin had he withal, and spurs thereon: he was girt with a short sword, and had a quiver of arrows at his back, and bare a great bow in his hand.

Yea, quoth Simon, thou deemest thee a gay swain belike; but thou lookest likelier for a deerstealer than a rider; thou, hung up to thy shooting-gear. Deemest thou we go a-hunting of the hind? Quoth Christopher: I wot not, squire; but the great lord, who lieth sleeping yonder, hath told me that thou shouldst give me his errand; and of some hunting or feat of woodcraft he spake. Moreover, this crooked stick can drive a shaft through matters harder than a hind's side. Simon looked confused, and he reddened and stammered somewhat as he answered: Ah, yea: so it was; I mind me; I will tell thee anon. Said Christopher: Withal, squire, if we are wending into the wood, as needs we must, unless we ride round about this dale in a ring all day, dost thou deem we shall go a gallop many a mile? Nay, fair sir; the horses shall wend a foot's pace oftenest, and we shall go a-foot not unseldom through the thickets. Now was Simon come to himself again, and that self was surly, so he said: Ay, ay, little King, thou deemest thee exceeding wise in these woods, dost thou not? and, forsooth, thou mayst be. Yet have I tidings for thee. Yea, and what be they? said Christopher. Simon grinned: Even these, said he, that Dr. Knowall was no man's cousin while he lived, and that he died last week. Therewith he swung himself into his saddle, and Christopher laughed merrily at his poor gibe and mounted in like wise.

Therewithal they rode their ways, through the thorpe, and at the southern end thereof Simon drew rein, and looked on Christopher as if he would ask him something, but asked not. Then said Christopher: Whither go we now?
Said Simon: It is partly for thee to say: hearken, I am bidden first to ride the Redwater Wood with thee: knowest thou that? Yea, said the lad, full well: but which way shall we ride it? Wilt thou come out of it at Redwater Head, or Herne Moss, or the Long Pools? Said Simon: We shall make for the Long Pools, if thou canst bring me there. Christopher laughed: Aha! said he, then am I some far-away cousin of Dr. Knowall when the whole tale is told: forsooth I can lead thee thither; but tell me, what shall I do of valiant deeds at the Long Pools? for there is no fire-drake nor effnit, nay, nor no giant, nor guileful dwarf, nought save mallard and coot, heron and bittern; yea, and ague-shivers to boot. Simon looked sourly on him and said: Thou art bidden to go with me, young man, or gainsay the Marshal. Art thou mighty enough thereto? For the rest, fear not but that the deed shall come to thee one day. Nay, said Christopher, it is all one to me, for I am at home in these woods and wastes, I and my shafts. Tell me of the deeds when thou wilt. But inwardly he longed to know the deed, and fretted him because of Simon's surliness and closeness. Then he said: Well, Squire Simon, let us to the road; for thou shalt know that to-night we must needs house us under the naked heaven; in nowise can we come to the Long Pools before to-morrow morning. Yea, and why not? said the squire; I have lain in worse places. Wilt thou tell me thereof? said Christopher. May happen, said Simon, if to-morrow comes and goes for both of us twain.

So they rode their ways through the wood, and baited at midday with what Simon bare in his saddle-bags, and then went on till night fell on them; then asked Simon how long they were from the Long Pools, and Christopher told him that they were yet short of them some fifteen miles, and those long ones, because of the marish grounds. So they tethered their horses there and ate their supper; and lay down to sleep in the house of the woods, by a fire-side which they lighted.

But in the midnight Christopher, who was exceeding fine-eared, had an inkling of someone moving afoot anigh him, and he awoke therewith, and sprang up, his drawn short-sword in his hand, and found himself face to face with Simon, and he also with his sword drawn. Simon sprang aback, but held up his sword-point, and Christopher, not yet fully awake, cried out: What wouldst thou? What is it? Simon answered, stammering and all abashed: Didst thou not hear then? it wakened me. I heard nought, said Christopher; what was it? Horses going in the wood, said Simon. Ah, yea, said Christopher, it will have been the
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When they arose in the sunshine to the horses while Christopher stood by the fire to light their victuals; he was merry enough, and sang to himself the while. But when Simon came back to Christopher’s voice; at last he raised his eyes, and looked on him steadily, and then asked divers questions of him concerning little matters as though he were far:—Well, far rather mine. And then, when Christopher looked on him sharply, but Simon would not meet his eye, then he said:—Well, thou keepest thy tidings so close. Wherefore, thou didst not last night? And therefore he kept to there, whereof I was nought grieving. May read of the wood whereof I was nought grieving. And the rad cried out aloud:—Well, thou keepest thy tidings so close. Wherefore, thou didst not last night? And therefore he kept to there, whereof I was nought grieving. But the lad cried out aloud:—Well, thou keepest thy tidings so close.
his feet and drew his short-sword, and with
three swift strokes sheared asunder an over-
hanging beech-bough as thick as a man's
wrist, that it fell crashing down, and caught
Simon amongst the fall of its leafy twigs, while
Christopher stood laughing on him, but with
a dangerous lofty look in his eyes: then he
turned away quietly toward the horses and
mounted his nag, and Simon followed and did
the like, silently; crestfallen, he looked, with
brooding fierceness in his face.

So they rode their ways, and spake but little
each to each till they came to where the trees
of the wood thinned speedily, and gave out at
last at the foot of a low stony slope but little
grassed; and when they had ridden up to
the brow and could see below, Christopher
stretched out his hand, and said: Lo thou the
Long Pools, fellow wayfarer! and lo some of
the tramping horses that woke thee and not
me last night. Forsooth there lay below them
a great stretch of grass, which whiles ran into
mere quagmire, and whiles was sound and
better grassed; and the said plain was seamed
by three long shallow pools, with, as it were,
grassy causeways between them, grown over
here and there with ancient alder trees; but
the stony slope whereon they had reined up
bent round the plain mostly to the east, as
though it were the shore of a great water; and

far away to the south the hills of the forest
rose up blue, and not so low at the most, but
that they were somewhat higher than the crest
of the White Horse as ye may see it from the
little Berkshire hills above the Thames. Down
on the firm greensward there was indeed a herd
of wild horses feeding; mallard and coot swam
about the waters; the whimbrel laughed from
the bent-sides, and three herons stood on the
side of the causeway seeking a good fishing-
stead.

Simon sat a-horseback looking askance from
the marish to Christopher, and said nothing a
while; then he spake in a low croaking voice,
and said: So, little King, we have come to the
Long Pools; now I will ask thee, hast thou
been further southward than this marish land?
That have I, said the lad, a day's journey
further; but according to the tales of men it
was at the peril of my life. Simon seemed as
if he had not noted his last word; he said:
Well then, since thou knowest the wild and
the wood, knowest thou amidst of the thickets
there, two lumps of bare hills, like bowls turned
bottom up, that rise above the trees, and on
each a tower, and betwixt them a long house.

Save us, Allhallows! quoth Christopher, but
thou wilt mean the Tofts! Is it so, sir squire?
Even so, said Simon. And thou knowest what
dwelleth there, and wouldst have me lead thee
<table>
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<th>38</th>
<th>CHILD CHRISTOPHER</th>
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<td>thither? said the lad. I am so bidden, said Simon; if thou wilt not do my bidding, seek thou some place to hide thee in from the hand of the Earl Marshal. Said the youngling: Knowest thou not Jack of the Tofts and his seven sons, and what he is, and that he dwelleth there? Said Simon: I know of him; yea, and myself I know, and that he dwelleth there; and I wot that men call him an outlaw, and that many rich men shall lack ere he lacks. What then? This, said Christopher, that, as all tales tell, he will take my life if I ride thither. And, said he, turning on Simon, this is belike what thou wouldest with me? And therewith he drew out his sword, for his bow was unstrung.</td>
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But Simon sat still and let his sword abide, and said, sourly enough: Thou art a fool to think I am training thee to thy death by him; for I have no will to die, and why shall he not slay me also? Now again I say unto thee, thou hast the choice, either to lead me to the Tofts, where shall be the deed for thee to do, or to hide thee in some hole, as I said afore, from the vengeance of the Lord of Oakenshield. But as for thy sword, thou mayst put it up, for I will not fight with thee, but rather let thee go with a string to thy leg, if thou wilt not be wise and do as thy lords ordain for thee. Christopher sheathed his sword, and a smile.

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<th>AND GOLDFILIND THE FAIR</th>
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<td>came into his face, as if some new thought were stirring in him, and he said: Well, since thou wilt not fight with me, and I but a lad, I will e'en do thy will and thine errand to Jack of the Tofts. Maybe he is not so black as he is painted, and not all tales told of him are true. But some of them I will tell thee as we ride along. And some thereof I know already, O wood-land knight, said Simon, as they rode down the bent, and Christopher led on toward the green causeway betwixt the waters. Tell me, quoth he, when they had ridden awhile, is this one of thy tales, how Jack of the Tofts went to the Yule feast of a great baron in the guise of a minstrel, and, even as they bore in the boar's head, smote the said baron on the neck, so that his head lay by the head of the swine on the Christmas board?</td>
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Yea, said Christopher, and how Jack cried out: Two heads of swine, one good to eat, one good to burn. But, my master, thou shalt know that this manslaying was not for nought: whereas the Baron of Greenlake had erewhile slain Jack's father in felon wise, where he could strike no stroke for life; and two of his brethren also had he slain, and made the said Jack an outlaw, and he all sackless. In the Uttermost March we deem that he had a case against the baron. |

Hah! said Simon. Is this next tale true,
that this Jack o' the Tofts slew a good knight before the altar, so that the priest's mass-hackle was all wet with his blood, whereas the said priest was in act of putting the holy body into the open mouth of the said knight?

Christopher said eagerly: True was it, by the Rood! and well was it done! For that same Sir Raoul was an ugly traitor, who had knelt down where he died to wed the Body of the Lord to a foul lie in his mouth; whereas the man who knelt beside him he had trained to his destruction, and was even then doing the first deal of his treason by forswearing him there.

And that man who knelt with him there, said Simon, what betid to him? Said Christopher: He went out of the church with Jack of the Tofts that minute of the stroke; and to the Tofts he went with him, and abode with him freely: and a valiant man he was . . . and is.

Hah! said Simon again. And then there is this: that the seven sons of Jack of the Tofts bore off perforce four fair maidens of gentle blood from the castle wherein they dwelt, serving a high dame in all honour; and that, moreover, they hanged the said dame over the battlements of her own castle. Is this true, fair sir?

True is it as the gospel, said Christopher: yet many say that the hanged dame had some-

what less than her deserts; for a foul and cruel whore had she been; and had done many to be done to death, and stood by while they were pined. And the like had she done with those four damsels, had there not been the stout sons of Jack of the Tofts; so that the dear maidens were somewhat more than willing to be borne away.

Simon grinned: Well lad, said he, I see that thou knowest Jack of the Tofts even better than I do; so why in the devil's name thou art loth to lead me to him, I wot not.

Christopher reddened, and held his peace awhile; then he said: Well fellow-farer, at least I shall know something of him ere next midnight. Yea, said Simon, and shall we not come to the Tofts before nightfall? Let us essay it, said Christopher, and do our best, it yet lacketh three hours of noon. Therewith he spurred on, for the greensward was hard under the hooves, and they had yet some way to go before they should come amongst the trees and thickets.

Into the said wood they came, and rode all day diligently, but night fell on them before they saw either house or man or devil; then said Simon: Why should we go any further before dawn? Will it not be best to come to this perilous house by daylight? Said Christopher: There be perils in the wood as
well as in the house. If we lie down here, maybe Jack's folk may come upon us sleeping, and some mischance may befall us. Withal, hereabout be no wild horses to wake thee and warn thee of thy foeman anigh. Let us press on; there is a moon, though she be somewhat hidden by clouds, and meseemeth the way lieth clear before me; neither are we a great way from the Tofts.

Then Simon rode close up to Christopher, and took his reins and stayed him, and said to him, as one who prayeth: Young man, willest thou my death? That is as it may be, said Christopher; willest thou mine? Simon held his peace awhile, and Christopher might not see what was in his face amidst the gathering dusk; but he twitched his rein out of the squire's hand, as if he would hasten onward; then the squire said: Nay, I pray thee abide and hear a word of me. Speak then, said Christopher, but hasten, for I hunger, and I would we were in the hall. And therewith he laughed. Said Simon: Thus it is: If I go back to my lord, and bear no token of having done his errand to Jack of the Tofts, then am I in evil case; and if I come to the Tofts, I wot well that Jack is a man fierce of heart, and ready of hand: now, therefore, I pray thee give me thy word to be my warrant, so far as thou mayst be, with this woodman and his sons.

At that word Christopher brake out a-laughing loudly, till all the dusk wood rang with the merry sound of his fresh voice; at last he said: Well, well, thou art but a craven to be a secret murderer: the Lord God would have had an easy bargain of Cain, had he been such as thou. Come on, and do thine errand to Jack of the Tofts, and I will hold thee harmless, so far as I may. Though, sooth to say, I guessed what thine errand was, after the horses waked thee and put a naked sword in thine hand last night. Marry! I had no inkling of it when we left the Castle yesterday morning, but deemed thy lord needed me to do him some service. Come on then! or rather go thou on before me a pace; there, where thou seest the glimmer betwixt the beech-trees yonder; if thou goest astray, I am anigh thee for a guide. And I say that we shall not go far without tidings.

Simon went on perforce, as he was bidden, and they rode thus a while slowly, Christopher now and then crying, as they went: To the right, squire! To the left! Straight on now! and so on. But suddenly they heard voices, and it was as if the wood had all burst out into fire, so bright a light shone out. Christopher shouted, and hastened on to pass Simon, going quite close to his right side thereby, and as he did so, he saw steel flashing in his
hand, and turned sidling to guard him, but ere he could do aught Simon drave a broad dagger into his side, and then turned about and fled the way they had come, so far as he knew how.

Christopher fell from his horse at once as the stroke came home, but straightway there-with were there men with torches round about him, a dozen of them; men tall, and wild-looking in the firelight; and one of them, a slim young man with long red hair falling all about his shoulders, knelt down by him, while the others held his horse and gat his feet out of the stirrups. The red-head laid his hand on his breast, and raised his head up till the light of a torch fell on it, and then he cried out: Masters, here hath been a felon; the man hath been sticked, and the deed hath to do with us; for lo you, this is none other than little Christopher of the Uttermost March, who stumbled on the Tofts last Yule, and with whom we were so merry together. Here, thou Robert of Maisey, do thy leechdom on him if he be yet living; but if he be dead, or dieth of his hurt, then do I take the feud on me, to follow it to the utmost against the slayer; even I, David the Red, though I be the youngest of the sons of Jack of the Tofts. For this man I meant should be my fellow in field and fell, ganging and galloping, in hall

and high-place, in cot and in choir, before woman and warrior, and priest and proud prince. Now thou Robert, how does he? Said the man who had looked to Christopher's wound, and had put aside his coat and shirt: He is sore hurt, but meseemeth not deadly. Nay, belike he may live as long as thou, or longer, whereas thou wilt ever be shoving thy red head and lank body wheresoever knocks are going. David rose with a sigh of one who is lightened of a load, and said: Well Robert, when thou hast bound his wound let us have him unto the house: Ho lads! there is light enough to cut some boughs and make a litter for him. But, ho again! has no one gone after the felon to take him? Robert grinned up from his job with the hurt man: Nay, King David, said he, it is mostly thy business; mayhap thou wilt lay thy heels on thy neck and after him. The red-head stamped on the ground, and half drew his sax, and shoved it back again into the sheath, and then said angrily: I marvel at thee, Robert, that thou didst not send a man or two at once after the felon: how may I leave my comrade and sweet board-fellow lying hurt in the wild-wood? Art thou growing over old for our wood-land ways, wherein loitering bringeth louting? Robert chuckled and said: I thought thou wouldst take the fly
in thy mouth, foster-son: if the felon escape Ralph Longshanks and Anthony Green, then hath he the devil's luck; and they be after him. That is well, said the young man, though I would I were with them. And therewith he walked up and down impatiently, while the others were getting ready the litter of boughs.

At last it was done, and Christopher laid thereon, and they all went on together through the wood-land path, the torches still flaring about them. Presently they came out into a clearing of the wood, and lo, looming great and black before them against the sky, where the moon had now broken out of the clouds somewhat, the masses of the tofts, and at the top of the northernmost of them a light in the upper window of a tall square tower. Withal, the yellow-litten windows of a long house showed on the plain below the tofts; but little else of the house might be seen, save that, as they drew near, the walls brake out in doubtful light here and there as the torches smote them.

So came they to a deep porch, where they quenched all the torches save one, and entered a great hall through it, David and two other tall young men going first, and Robert Maisey going beside the bier. The said hall was lighted with candles, but not very brightly,

save at the upper end; but amidmost a flickering heap of logs sent a thin line of blue smoke up to the luffer. There were some sixty folk in the hall, scattered about the end-long tables, a good few of whom were women, well grown and comely enough, as far as could be seen under the scanty candle-light. At the high-table, withal, were sitting both men and women, and as they drew near to the greater light of it, there could be seen in the chief seat a man, past middle age, tall, wide-shouldered and thin-flanked, with a short peaked beard and close-cut grizzled hair; he was high of cheek bones, thin-faced, with grey eyes, both big and gentle-looking; he was clad in a green coat welted with gold. Beside him sat a woman, tall and big-made, but very fair of face, though she were little younger, belike, than the man. Out from these two sat four men and four women, man by man and woman by woman, on either side of the high-seat. Of the said men, one was of long red hair as David, and like to him in all wise, but older; the others were of like fashion to him in the high-seat. Shortly to say it, his sons they were, as David and the two young men with him. The four women who sat with these men were all fair and young, and one of them, she who drank out of the red-head's cup, so fair, and with such a pleasant
slim grace, that her like were not easy to be found.

Again, to shorten the tale, there in the hall before Christopher, who lay unwotting, were Jack of the Tofts and his seven sons, and the four wives of four of the same, whom they had won from the Wailful Castle, when they, with their father, put an end to the evil woman, and the great she-tyrant of the Land betwixt the Wood and the River.

Now when David and his were come up to the dais, they stayed them, and their father spake from his high-seat and said: What is to do, ye three? and what catch have ye? Said David: I would fain hope 'tis the catch of a life that I love; for here is come thy guest of last Yule, even little Christopher, who wrestled with thee and threw thee after thou hadst thrown all of us, and he lying along and hurt, smitten down by a felon hard on our very doors. What will ye do with him?

What, said Jack of the Tofts, but tend him and heal him and cherish him. And when he is well, then we shall see. But where is the felon who smote him? Said David: He fled away a-horseback ere we came to the field of deed, and Anthony Green and Ralph Longshanks are gone after him; and, belike, will take him. Mayhappen not, said the master. Now, forsooth, I have 'an inkling of what this may mean; whereas there can be but one man whose business may be the taking of our little guest's life. But let all be till he be healed and may tell us his tale; and, if he telleth it as I deem he will, then shall we seek further tidings. Meanwhile, if ye take the felon, keep him heedfully till I may see him; for then may I have a true tale out of him, even before Christopher is hale again.

So therewith David and Robert, with two or three others, brought Christopher to a chamber, and did what leechdoms to him they might; but Jack of the Tofts, and his sons and their fair wives, and his other folk, made merry in the hall of the Tofts.
CHAPTER IX. SQUIRE SIMON COMES BACK TO OAKENHAM. THE EARL MARSHAL TAKEN TO KING IN OAKENREALM

NOW as to Squire Simon, whether the devil helped him, or his luck, or were it his own cunning and his horse’s stoutness, we wot not; but in any case he fell not in with Ralph Longshanks and Anthony Green, but rode as far and as fast as his horse would go, and then lay down in the wild-wood; and on the morrow arose and went his ways, and came in the even to the Castle of the Uttermost March, and went on thence the morrow after on a fresh horse to Oakenham. There he made no delay, but went straight to the High House, and had privy speech of the Earl Marshal; and him he told how he had smitten Christopher, and, as he deemed, slain him. The Earl Marshal looked on him grimly and said: Where is the ring, then? I have it not, said Simon. How might I light down to take it, when the seven sons were hard on us? And therewith he told him all the tale, and how he had risen to slay Christopher the even before; and how he had

found out after that the youngling had become guest and fosterling of the folk of the Tofts; and how warily Christopher had ridden, so that he, Simon, had had to do his best at the last moment. And now, Lord, quoth he, I see that it will be my luck to have grudging of thee, or even worse it may be; yea, or thou wilt be presently telling me that I am a liar and never struck the stroke: but I warrant me that by this time Jack of the Tofts knoweth better, for I left my knife in the youngling’s breast, and belike he wotteth of my weapons. Well, then, if thou wilt be quit of me, thou hast but to forbear upholding me against the Toft folk, and then am I gone without any to-do of thee.

Earl Rolf spake quietly in answer, though his face was somewhat troubled: Nay, Simon, I doubt thee not, not one word; for why shouldst thou lie to me? nor do I deem thou wouldest, for thou art trusty and worthy. Yet sore I doubt if the child be dead. Well, even so let it be, for I am alive; and full surely I am mightier than Jack of the Tofts, both to uphold thee against him (wherein I shall not fail), and otherwise. But may God make me even as that young man if I be not mightier yet in a few days. But now do thou go and eat and drink and take thy disport; for thou hast served me well; and in a little while I
shall make thee knight and lord, and do all I can to pleasure thee.

So then Simon knelt to the Earl and made obeisance to him, and arose and went his ways, light-hearted and merry.

But within the month it so befel that some of the lords and dukes came to the Earl Marshal, and prayed him to call together a great Folk-mote of all Oakenrealm; and he answered them graciously, and behight them to do as they would; and even so did he. And that Mote was very great, and whenas it was hallowed, there arose a great lord, grey and ancient, and bewailed him before the folk, that they had no king over Oakenrealm to uphold the laws and ward the land; and Will ye live bare and kingless for ever? said he at last. Will ye not choose you a king, and crown him, before I die, and we others of the realm who are old and worn?

Then he sat down, and another arose, and in plain terms he bade them take the Earl Marshal to king. And then arose one after other, and each sang the same song, till the hearts of the people grew warm with the big words, and at first many, and then more cried out: A King, a King! The Earl Marshal for King! Earl Rolf for King! So that at last the voices rose into a great roar, and sword clashed on shield, and they who were about the Earl turned to him and upraised him on a great war-shield, and he stood thereon above the folk with a naked sword in his hand, and all the folk shouted about him.

Thereafter the chiefs and all the mightiest came and did homage to him for King of Oakenrealm as he sat on the Hill of the Folk-mote: and that night there was once more a King of Oakenrealm, and Earl Rolf was no more, but King Rolf ruled the people.

But now the tale leaves telling of him, and turns again to Christopher the woodman, who lay sick of his hurt in the House of the Tofts.
CHAPTER X. OF CHRISTOPHER AT THE TOFTS

CHRISTOPHER was six weeks ere he could come and go as he was wont; but it was but a few days ere he was well enough to tell his tale to Jack of the Tofts and his seven bold sons; and they cherished him and made much of him, and so especially did David, the youngest son, to his board-fellow and troth-brother.

On a day, when he was well-nigh whole, as he sat under an oak-tree nigh the house, in the cool of the evening, Jack of the Tofts came to him and sat beside him, and made him tell his tale to him once more, and when he was done he said to him: Foster-son, for so I would have thee deem of thyself, what is the thing that thou rememberest earliest in thy days? Said Christopher: A cot without the Castle walls at the Uttermost Marches, and a kind woman therein, big, sandy-haired, and freckled, and a lad that was white-haired and sturdy, somewhat bigger than I. And I mind me standing up against the door-post of the cot and seeing men-at-arms riding by in white armour, and one of them throwing

an apple to me, and I raised my arm to throw it back at him, but my nurse (for somehow I knew she was not my mother) caught my hand and drew me back indoors, and I heard the men laughing behind me. And then a little after my nurse took me into the Castle court, and there was again, the man who had thrown me the apple, sitting on a bench therein, clad in a scarlet gown furred with brown fur; and she led me up to him, and he stooped down and chucked me under the chin and put his hand on my head, and looked at my nurse and said: Yea, he is a big lad, and growtheth apace, whereas he is but of six winters. Nay, Lord, said my nurse, he is but scantily five. He knit his brows and said: Nay, I tell thee he is six. She shook her head, but said nought, and the great man scowled on her and said: Mistress, wilt thou set thy word against mine? Know now that this child is of six years. Now then, how old is he? She said faintly: Six years. Said he: Look to it that thy head and thy mouth forget it not, else shall we make thy back remember it. Then he put his hand on my head again, and said: Well, I say thou art a big lad for six years; and therewith he gave me a silver penny; and even as he spake, came up a gay-clad squire to him and looked on me curiously. Then I went away with my nurse, and wondered why she was
CHILD CHRISTOPHER

grown so pale, whereas she was mostly red-cheeked and jolly. But when she had brought me into the cot again, she kissed me and clipped me, weeping sorely the while; wherefore I wept, though I knew not why. Sithence, I soon came to know that the man was the lord and governor of the Castle, as ye may well wot; but to this hour I know not what he meant by threatening my nurse.

Said Jack: And how old art thou now, Christopher mine? Said the youngling, laughing: By my lord the Castellan's reckoning I am twenty and two years; but if thou wilt row my good and kind nurse, that yet liveth a kind dame, thou must take twelve months off the tale.

Jack sat silent a little; then he laughed and said: Well, thou art a mickle babe, Christopher, and it may be that one day many a man shall know it. But now tell me again; thou hadst said to me before that thou hast known neither father nor mother, brother nor sisters: is it so, verily?

Said Christopher: Never a kinsman of blood have I, though many well-wishers. Said Jack: Well, now hast thou father and mother, brethren and sisters, though they be of the sort of man-slayers and strong-thieves and outlaws; yet they love thee, lad, and thou mayst one day find out how far thou mayst trust them.

Christopher nodded and smiled at him merrily; then he fell silent awhile, and the outlaw

AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR

sat looking on him; at last he said suddenly: Foster-father, tell me what I am, and of what kindred, I pray thee; for, methinks, thou knowest thereof; and what wonder, wise man as thou art.

Forsooth, son Christopher, I have a deeming thereof, or somewhat more, and when it is waxen greater yet, I will tell it thee one day, but not now. But hearken! for I have other tidings for thee. Thou art now whole and strong, and in a few days thou mayst wend the wild-wood as stoutly as e'er a one of us. Now, therefore, how sayest thou, if I bid thee fare a two days' journey with David and Gilbert thy brethren, and thy sister Joanna, till they bring thee to a fair little stead which I call mine own, to dwell there awhile? For meseemeth, lad, that the air of the Tofts here may not be over wholesome unto thee.

Christopher reddened, and he half rose up, and said: What is this, foster-father? Is it that there shall be battle at the Tofts, and that thou wouldst have me away thence? Am I then such a weakling?

Said Jack, laughing: Be still now, thou sticked one. The Tofts go down to battle at some whiles; but seldom cometh battle to the Tofts; and no battle do I look for now. But do my bidding, sweet fosterling, and it will be better for me and better for thee, and may,
CHILD CHRISTOPHER

perchance, put off battle for a while; which to me as now were not unhandy. If thou wilt but abide at Littledale for somewhat, there shall be going and coming betwixt us, and thou shalt drink thy Yule at the Tofts, and go back afterwards, and ever shalt thou have thy sweet fellows with thee; so be wise, since thou goest not perforce.

Yea, yea, said Christopher, laughing; thou puttest force on no man, is it not so, foster-father? Wherefore I will go, and uncompelled. Therewith came up to them, from out of the wild-wood, David, and with him Joanna, who was the wife of Gilbert, and one of those fair maidens from the Wailful Castle, though not the fairest of them; they had been a-hunting, for ever those three would willingly go together, Gilbert, David, and Joanna; and now Gilbert had abided behind, to dig the quarry for fetching home. Christopher looked on the two joyfully, as a man getting whole after sickness smiles on goodly things; and Joanna was fair to see in her hunter's attire, with brogues tied to her naked feet, and the shapeliness of her legs bare to the knee beneath the trussing up of her green skirts.

They greeted Christopher kindly, and Joanna sat down by him to talk, but Jack of the Tofts took his son by the arm, and went toward the house with him in earnest speech.

AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR

CHAPTER XI. HOW CHRISTOPHER CAME TO LITTLEDALE TO ABIDE THERE A WHILE

In about a week's time from this, those four fellows went their ways southward from the Tofts, having with them four good nags and four sumpter beasts laden with such things as they needed, whereof were weapons enough, though they all, save Christopher, bare bows; and he and the others were girt with swords, and a leash of good dogs followed them. Two milch kine also they drave with them.

Merry they were all as they went their ways through the woods, but the gladness of Christopher was even past words; wherefore, after a little, he spake scarce at all, but sat in his saddle hearkening the tales and songs and jests of his fellows, who went close beside him, for more often they went a-foot than rode. And, forsooth, as the sweet morning wore, it seemed to him, so great was his joy, as if all the fair show of the greenery, and the boles of the ancient oaks, and the squirrel running from bough to bough, and the rabbits scuttling from under the bracken, and the hind leaping in the woodland, and the sun falling through the rustling leaves, and the wind on his face, and the scent
of the forest, yea, and his fair companions and their loveliness and valiancy and kindness, and the words and songs that came from their dear mouths, all these seemed to him, as it were, one great show done for the behoof and pleasure of him, the man come from the peril of death and the sick-bed.

They lay that night in all glee under the green boughs; and arose on the morrow, and went all day, and again slept in the green-wood, and the next morning came down into a fair valley, which was indeed Liddledale, through which ran a pleasant little river; and on a grassy knoll, but a short way from its bank, was a long framed hall, somewhat narrow, and nought high, whitherward they turned them straightway, and were presently before the door: then Gilbert drew a key from out of his scrip and unlocked the door, and they entered, and found within a fair little hall, with shut-beds out from it on the further side, and kitchen and store-bowers at the end; all things duly appointed with plenishing, and meal and wine; for it was but some three months since one of Jack of the Tofts' allies, Sir Launcelot a' Green and his wife and two bairns, had left it till their affair was made straight; whereas he had dwelt there a whole year, for he had been made an outlaw of Meadham, and was a dear friend of the said Jack.

AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR

Now said David smiling: Here is now thine high house and thy castle, little King Christopher; how doth it like thee? Right well, said Christopher; and, to say sooth, I would almost that it were night, or my bones do else, that I might lie naked in a bed.

Nay, lad, said Gilbert, make it night now, and we will do all that needs must be done, while thou liest lazy, as all kings use to do. Nay, said Christopher, I will be more a king than so, for I will do neither this nor that; I will not work and I will not go to bed, but will look on, till it is time for me to take to the crooked stick and the grey-goose wing and seek venison. That is better than well, said David; for I can see by thine eyes, that are dancing with pleasure, that in three or four days thou wilt be about the thickets with us. Meantime, said Joanna, thou shalt pay for thy meat and drink by telling us tales when we come home weary. Yea, said Christopher laughing, that ye may go to sleep before your time.

So they talked, and were joyous and blithe together, and between them they made the house 'trim, and decked it with boughs and blossoms; and though Christopher told them no tale that night, Joanna and David sang both; and in a night or two it was Christopher that was the minstrel. So when the morrow came there began their life of the wood-land;
but, save for the changing of the year and the chances of the hunt, the time passed on from day to day with little change, and it was but seldom that any man came their way. When Yule was, they locked the house door behind them and went their ways home to the Tofts; and now of all of these wayfarers was Christopher by far the hardest and strongest, for his side had utterly forgotten Simon's knife. At the Tofts they were welcomed with all triumph, and they were about there in the best of cheer, till it was wearing toward Candlemas, and then they took occasion of a bright and sunny day to go back to Littledale once more, and there they abode till spring was come and was wearing into summer, and messages had come and gone betwixt them and the Tofts, and it was agreed that with the first of autumn they should go back to the Tofts and see what should betide. But now leave we Christopher and these good fellows of the Tofts and turn to Goldilind, who is yet dwelling amid no very happy days in the Castle of Greenharbour, on the northernmost marches of Meadham.

CHAPTER XII. OF GOLDLIND IN THE MAY MORNING AT GREENHARBOUR

MAY was on the land now, and was come into its second week, and Goldilind awoke on a morn in the Castle of Greenharbour; but little did her eyes behold of the May, even when they were fully open; for she was lying, not in her own chamber, which was proper, and even somewhat stately, and from whence she could look on the sky and green-wood, but in a chamber low down amidst the footings of the wall, little lighted, unadorned, with nought in it for sport or pleasure; nought, forsooth, save the pallet bed on which she lay, a joint stool and water ewer. To be short, though it were called the Least Guard-chamber, it was a prison, and she was there dreeing her penance, as Dame Elinor would call the cruelty of her malice, which the chaplain, Dame Elinor's led captain, had ordained her for some sin which the twain had forged between them.

She lay there naked in her smock, with no raiment anigh her, and this was the third morning whereon she had awakened to the dusky bare walls, and a long while had their
emptiness made of the hours: but she lay quiet and musing, not altogether without cheer now; for indeed she was not wont to any longer penance than this she had but now tholest, so she looked for release presently: and, moreover, there had grown in her mind during those three days a certain purpose; to wit, that she would get hold of the governor of the castle privily, and two or three others of the squires who most regarded her, and bewail her case to them, so that she might perchance get some relief. Forsooth, as she called to mind this resolve, her heart beat and her cheek flushed, for well she knew that there was peril in it, and she forecast what might be the worst that would come thereof, while, on the other hand, the best that might be seemed to her like a glimpse of Paradise.

As she lay there and turned the matter over in her mind for this many an hundred time, there came a key into the lock, and the door opened; and thereby entered a tall woman, dark-haired, white-skinned, somewhat young, and not ill-favoured: Goldilind still lay there, till the new-comer said to her in a hard voice, wherein was both threatening and mockery: Rise up, our Lady! the Dame Elinor saith that it is enough, and that thou art to go forth. Nay, hold a while; for I say unto thee that it is yet early in the day, and that thy chamber is not yet dight for thee, so thou must needs bestow thyself elsewhere till it be done. Goldilind rose up, and said smiling: Yea, Aloyse, but thou hast not brought my raiment: and thou seest! The maid stood looking at her a moment somewhat evilly, and then said: Well, since it is but scant six o'clock, I may do that; but I bid thee ask me not overmuch; for meseemeth Dame Elinor is not overwell pleased with thee to-day, nor our chaplain either. Therewith she turned and went out, locking the door behind her, and came back presently bearing on her arm a green gown and other raiment: she laid them on the stool before the Lady, and said: Hasten, my Lady, and let me go to my place: sooth to say, it may well be double trouble to thee to don thy clothes, for thou mayst have to doff them again before long.

Goldilind answered nought, but reddened and paled again as she clad her under the waiting maid's eyes. Then they went out together, and up a short stone stair, till they were level with the greensward without. Then the maid turned to Goldilind and said: And now thou art clad and out, my Lady, I wot not where thou art to go to, since to thy chamber thou must not go. Nay, hold and hearken! here we be at the door which opens on to the Foresters' Garth under the Foresters' Tower, thither shalt
CHILDE CHRISTOPHER

thou abide till I come to fetch thee. How now, my Lady! what else wouldst thou? Goldilind looked on her with a smile, yet with eager eyes, and said: O good Aloyse, wouldst thou but give me a piece of bread? for I hunger; thou wottest my queenly board hath not been over-loaded these last days. Ha! said Aloyse; if thou ask me overmuch I fear thou mayst pay for it, my Lady; but this last asking thou shalt have, and then none other till all thy penance thou hast dreeed. Abide!

Therewith she went up the stairs, and Goldilind, who now was but weak with her prison and the sudden light, and the hope and fear of her purpose of bewailing her story, sat her down on the stair there, almost, as it were, 'twixt home and hell, till her heart came back to her and the tears began to flow from her eyes. Forthright came back Aloyse, bearing a white loaf and a little pitcher of milk on a silver serving-dish; she laid them down, unlocked the door into the garden, and thrust Goldilind through by the shoulders; then she turned and took up her serving-dish with the bread and milk, and handed it to Goldilind through the door, and said: Now is my Lady served. It were indeed well that my Lady should strengthen herself this hour for the hour next to come. Therewith she turned about, and shut and locked the door; and the King's daughter fell
to eagerly on her bread, and thought of little till she had eaten and drunk, save that she felt the sweet scent of the gilliflowers and eglantine as it were a part of her meal.

Then she went slowly down the garden, treading the greensward beside the flowers; and she looked on the hold, and the low sun gilded the walls thereof and glittered in a window here and there, and though there was on her a foreboding of the hours of that day, she did what she might to make the best of the fragrant May morning and the song of birds and rustle of leaves, though, indeed, at whiles the tears would gush out of her eyes when she thought how young she was and how feeble, and the pity of herself became sweet unto her.
CHAPTER XIII. OF GOLDLIND IN THE GARTH

NOW, as she went in that garden with her face turned toward the postern which led into the open space of the green-wood, which was but two bow-shots from the thicket, she heard the clatter of horse-hoofs on the loose stones of the path, and how they stopped at the said postern; and presently there was a key in the lock, the door opened, and a man came in walking stiffly, like a rider who has ridden far and fast. He was clad in jack and sallet, and had a sword by his side, and on his sleeve was done in green and gold a mountain aflame; so that Goldilind knew him at once for a man of Earl Geoffrey’s; and, indeed, she had seen the man before, coming and going on ‘errands that she knew nought of, and on which nothing followed that was of import to her. Therefore, as she watched him cross the garden and go straight up to the door of the Foresters’ Tower, and take out another key and enter, she heeded him but little, nor did his coming increase her trouble a whit.

She walked on toward the postern, and now she saw that the errand-bearer had left it open behind him, and when she came close up to it,
CHAPTER XIV. GOLDILIND GOES FREE

THERE then she stayed the horse, and, flushed and panting, got lightly into the saddle and bestrode it, and, leaning forward on the beast's neck, smote his flanks with her heels; the horse was fresh, though his master had been weary, whereas the said messenger had gotten him from a forester some six miles away in the wood that morning, so the nag answered to her call for speed, and she went a great gallop into the wood, and was hidden in a twinkling from any eyes that might be looking out of the Castle.

Without checking the nag she sped along, half mad with joy at the freedom of this happy morn. Nigh aimless she was, but had an inkling that it were well with her if she could hold northward ever; for the old man aforesaid had told her of Oakenrealm, and how it lay northward of them; so that way she drifted as the thicket would suffer her. When she had gone as much of a gallop as she might for some half hour, she drew rein to breathe her nag, and hearkened; she turned in the saddle, but heard nought to affright her, so she went on again, but somewhat more soberly; and thus-

wise she rode for some two hours, and the day waxed hot, and she was come to a clear pool amidst of a little clearing, covered with fine greensward right down to the water's edge.

There she made stay, and got off her horse, and stood awhile by him as he cropped the sweet grass; and the birds sang at the edge of the thicket, and the rabbits crept and gambolled on the other side of the water; and from the pool's edge the moorhens cried. She stood half leaning against the side of the horse till she became somewhat drowsy; yea, and even dreamed a little, and that little but ill, it seemed, as she gave a troubled cry and shrank together and turned pale. Then she rubbed her eyes and smiled, and turned to the pool, where now a little ripple was running over the face of it, and a thought came upon her, and she set her hand to the clasp of her gown and undid it, and drew the gown off her shoulders, and so did off all her raiment, and stood naked a little on the warm sunny grass, and then bestirred her and went lightly into the pool, and bathed and sported there, and then came on to the grass again, and went to and fro to dry her in the air and sun. Then she did on her raiment again, and laid her down under a thorn-bush by the pool-side, and there, would she, would she not, went to sleep soundly, and dreamed not. And when she awoke she
deemed her sleep had been long, but it was not so, but scarce a score of minutes. Anyhow, she sprang up now and went to her horse, and drew the girths tight (which she had loosed erewhile), and so bestrode the good horse, and shook the reins, and rode away much comforted and enhearted.

CHAPTER XV. OF GOLDILIND IN THE WILD-WOOD

GOLDILIND rode on, hastening yet to put as many miles as she might betwixt her and Greenharbour. Within a three hours from her bathing she fell a-hungering sore, and knew not what to do to eat, till she found a pouch made fast to the saddle-bow, and therein a little white loaf, that and no more, which she took and ate the half of with great joy, sitting down by a brook-side, whence she had her drink.

Then again she mounted, and rode on till dusk overtook her just as she came to a little river running from the north from pool to shallow, and shallow to pool. And whereas she was now exceeding weary, and the good horse also much spent, and that the grass was very sweet and soft down to the water's edge, and that there was a thick thorn-bush to cover her, she made up her mind that this place should be her bedchamber. So she took saddle and bridle off the horse, as he must needs bite the grass, and then when she had eaten the other half of her bread, she laid her down on the green grass with her head on the
saddle, and when she had lain listening to the horse cropping the grass close anigh her for a minute or two, she fell fast asleep, and lay there long and had no dreams.

CHAPTER XVI. WHAT GOLDILIND FOUND IN THE WOOD

WHEN she awoke it was broad day and bright sun, and she rose up to her feet and looked about, and saw the horse standing close by, and sharing the shade with her, whisking his tail about lazily. Then she turned, and saw the stream rippling out from the pool over the clean gravel, and here and there a fish darting through the ripple, or making clean rings on the pool as he quietly took a fly; the sky was blue and clear, there was scarce a breath of air; and the morning was already hot; no worse than yesterday sang the birds in the bushes; but as she looked across the river, where, forsooth, the alders grew thick about the pool's edge, a cock blackbird, and then another, flew out from the close boughs, where they had been singing to their mates, with the sharp cry that they use when they are frightened. Withal she saw the bush move, though, as aforesaid, the morning was without wind. She had just stooped to do off her foot-gear (for she was minded to bathe again), but now she stopped with one shoe in her hand, and looked on the bushes keenly with beating heart, and
again she thought she saw the boughs shaken, and stood, not daring to move a while; but they moved no more now when she had looked steadily at them a space, and again a blackbird began singing loud just where they had been shaken. So she gathered heart again, and presently turned her hand once more to stripping her raiment off her, for she would not be balked of her bath; but when the stripping was done, she loitered not naked on the bank as she had done the day before, but walked swiftly into the shallow, and thence down into the pool, till nothing but her head and the whiteness of her shoulders showed over the dark water. Even then she turned her head about twice or thrice to look into the over-side bushes, but when she saw nothing stir there she began to play in the water, but not for long, but came splashing through the shallow and hurried on her raiment.

When she was clad again she went up to the horse, and patted and caressed him, and did bridle and saddle on him, and was going to climb upon him, when, of a sudden, she thought she would lead him across, lest there should be a hole near the other bank and he might stumble into it unwarily; so she bared her feet once more and trussed up her gown skirts, and so took the ford, leading the beast; the water was nowhere up to mid-leg of her,

and she stepped ashore on to short and fine grass, which spread like a meadow before her, with a big thorn or two scattered about it, and a little grassy hill beset with tall elms toward the top, coming down into the flat of the meadow and drawing round it nearly up to the river on the north side.

But now she stood staring in wonder and some deal of fear; for there were three milch kine feeding on the meadow, and, moreover, under a thorn, scarce a hundred yards from where she stood, was a tall man standing gazing on her. So stricken was she that she might neither cry out nor turn aside; neither did she think to pull her gown out of her girdle to cover the nakedness of her legs.

When they had thus stood a little while the man began to move toward her very slowly, nor did she dare to flee any the more. But when he was within half a dozen paces her face flushed red, and she did pull her gown out of its trusses and let it flow down. But he spake to her in a pleasant voice, and said: May I speak to thee, maiden? Fear was yet in her soul, so that she might not speak for a little, and then she said: O, I beseech thee, bring me not back to Greenharbour! And she paled sorely as she spake the word. But he said: I wot not of Greenharbour, how to find the way thereto, though we have heard of
it. But comfort thyself, I pray thee, there is nought to fear in me.

The sound of his voice was full pleasant to her, and when she hearkened him, how kind and frank it was, then she knew how much of terror was bient with her joy in her newly-won freedom and the delight of the kind and happy words. Yet still she spoke not, and was both shamefast and still not altogether unafraid. Yet, sooth to say, though his attire was but simple, he was nought wild or fierce to look on. From time to time she looked on him, and then dropped her eyes again. In those glances she saw that he was grey-eyed, and smooth-cheeked, and round-chinned, and his hair curly and golden; and she must needs think that she had never seen any face half so fair. He was clad but in a green coat that came not down to his knees, and brogues were tied to his feet, and no more raiment he had; and for hat he had made him a garland of white may blossom, and well it sat there: and again she looked on him, and thought him no worse than the running angel that goes before the throne of God in the picture of the choir of Meadhamstead; and she looked on him and marvelled.

Now she hung her head before him and wished he would speak, and even so did he, and said: Maiden, when I first saw thee from amidst of the bush by the river yonder, I deemed thou wert a wood-wight, or some one of the she-Gods of the Gentiles come back hither. For this is a lonely place, and some deem that the Devil hath might here more than in other places; and when I saw thee, that thou wouldst do off thy raiment to bathe thee, though soothly I longed to lie hidden there, I feared thee, lest thou shouldst be angry with me if I were to see thee unclad; so I came away; yet I went not far, for I was above all things yearning to see thee; and sooth it is, that hadst thou not crossed the water, I should presently have crossed it myself to seek thee, wert thou Goddess, or wood-wife, or whatever might have come of it. But now thou art come to us, and I have heard thy voice beseeching me not to bring thee to Greenharbour, I see that thou art a woman of the kindred of Adam. And yet so it is, that even now I fear thee somewhat. Yet I will pray thee not to be wroth if I ask thee whether I may do aught for thy need.

Now she began somewhat to smile, and she looked him full in the face, and said: Forsooth, my need is simple, for I am hungry. He smote himself on the breast, and said: See now, what a great fool I am, not to have known it without telling, instead of making long-winded talk about myself. Come quickly, dear maiden,
and leave thine horse to crop the grass. So he hurried on to the thorn-bush aforesaid, and she went foot to foot with him, but he touched her not; and straightway she sat her down on the root of the thorn, and smiled frankly on him, and said:

Nay, sir, and now thou hast made me go all this way I am out of breath and weary, so I pray thee of the victual at once. But he had been busy with his scrip which he had left cast down there, and therewithal reached out to her a mighty hunch of bread and a piece of white cheese, and said:

Now shall I fetch thee milk. Wherewith he took up a bowl of aspen tree that had lain by the scrip, and ran off to one of the kine and milked the bowl full, and came back with it heedfully, and set it down beside her, and said: This was the highest thing to hand, but when thou hast eaten and rested then shall we go to our house, if thou wilt be so kind to me; for there have we better meat, and wine to boot.

She looked up at him smiling, but her pleasure of the meat and the kindness was so exceeding, that she might not refrain from tears also, but she spake not. As for him, he knelt beside her, looking on her wistfully; and at last he said: I shall tell thee, that I am glad that thou wert hungry and that I have seen thee eating, else might I have deemed thee somewhat other than a woman of mankind even yet. She said: Yea, and why wouldst thou not believe my word thereto? He said, reddening: I almost fear to tell thee, lest thou think me over bold and be angry with me. Nay, she said, tell me, for I would know. Said he: The words are not easy in my rude mouth; but this is what I mean: that though I be young I have seen fair women not a few, but beside any of them thou art a wonder; ... and loth I were if thou wert not really of mankind, if it were but for the glory of the world. She hung her head and answered nought a while, and he also seemed ashamed: but presently she spake: Thou hast been kind to us, wouldst thou tell us thy name? and then, if it like thee, what thou art?

Lady, he said, my name is easy to tell, I hight Christopher; and whiles folk in merry mockery call me Christopher King; meseems because I am of the least account of all carles. As for what else I am, a woodman I am, an outlaw and the friend of them: yet I tell thee I have never by my will done any harm to any child of man; and those friends of mine, who are outlaws also, are kind and loving with me, both man and woman, though needs must they dwell aloof from kings' courts and barons' halls. She looked at him wondering, and as if she did not altogether understand him; and she said:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>82</th>
<th>CHILD CHRISTOPHER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Of his dwelling and friends</strong></td>
<td>Where dost thou dwell? He said: To-day I dwell hard by; though where I shall dwell to-morrow, who knows. And with me are dwelling three of my kind fellows; and the dearest is a young man of mine own age, who is my fellow in all matters, for us to live and die each for the other. Couldst thou have seen him, thou wouldst love him I deem. What name hath he? said Goldilind. He hight David, said Christopher. But therewith he fell silent and knit his brow, as though he were thinking of some knotty point: but in a while his face cleared, and he said: If I durst, I would ask thee thy name, and what thou art? As to my name, said she, I will not tell it thee as now. As to what I am, I am a poor prisoner; and much have I been grieved and tormented, so that my body hath been but a thing whereby I might suffer anguish. Something else am I, but I may not tell thee what as yet. He looked on her long, and then arose and went his way along the very track of their footsteps, and he took the horse and brought him back to the thorn, and stood by the lady and reddened, and said: I must tell thee what I have been doing these last minutes. Yea, said she, looking at him wonderingly, hast thou not been fetching my horse to me? So it is, said he; but something else also. Ask me, or</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>83</th>
<th>AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>**I cannot tell thee. She laughed and said: What else, fair sir? Said he: Ask me what, or I cannot tell thee. Well, what, then? said she. He answered, stammering and blushing: I have been looking at thy footprints, whereby thou camest up from the water, to see what new and fairer blossoms have come up in the meadow where thy feet were set e'en now. She answered him nothing, and he held his peace. But in a while she said: If thou wouldst have us come to thine house, thou shalt lead us thither now. And therewith she took her foot-gear from out of her girdle, as if she would do it on, and he turned his face away, but sighed therewith. Then she reddened and put them back again, and rose up lightly, and said: I will go afoot; and wilt thou lead the horse for me? So did he, and led her by all the softest and most flowery ways, turning about the end of a spur of the little hill that came close to the water, and going close to the lip of the river. And when they had thus turned about the hill there was a somewhat wider vale before them, grassy and fair, and on a knoll, not far from the water, a long frame-house thatched with reed. Then said Christopher: Lady, this is now Littledale, and yonder the house thereof. She said quietly: Lovely is the dale, and fair the house by seeming, and I would that they</td>
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**He tells what it was**

**They walk onward**

**They come to Littledale**
may be happy that dwell therein! Said Christopher: Wilt thou not speak that blessing within the house as without? Fain were I thereof, she said. And therewith they came into the garth, wherein the apple trees were blossoming, and Goldilind spread abroad her hands and lifted up her head for joy of the sight and the scent, and they stayed awhile before they went on to the door, which was half open, for they feared none in that place, and looked for none whom they might not deal with if he came as a foe.

Christopher would have taken a hand of her to lead her in, but both hands were in her gown to lift up the hem as she passed over the threshold; so he durst not.

Fair and bright now was the hall within, with its long and low windows goodly glazed, a green halling on the walls of Adam and Eve and the garden, and the good God walking therein; the sun shone bright through the southern windows, and about the porch it was hot, but further toward the dais cool and pleasant,

So Goldilind sat down in the coolest of the place at the standing table; but Christopher bestirred himself, and brought wine and white bread, and venison and honey, and said: I pray thee to dine, maiden, for it is now hard on noon; and as for my fair fellows, I look not for them before sunset, for they were going far into the wood. She smiled on him, and ate and drank a little deal, and he with her. Sooth to say, her heart was full, and though she had forgotten her fear, she was troubled, because, for as glad as she was, she could not be as glad as her gladness would have her, for the sake of some lack, she knew not what.

Now spake Christopher: I would tell thee something strange, to wit, though it is little more than three hours since I first saw thee beside the river, yet I seem to know thee as if thou wert a part of my life. She looked on him shyly, and he went on: This also is strange, and, withal, it likes me not, that when I speak of my fair fellows here, David, and Gilbert, and Joanna, they are half forgotten to my heart, though their names are on my tongue; and this house, doth it like thee, fair guest? Yea, much, she said; it seems joyous to me: and I shall tell thee that I have mostly dwelt in unmerry houses, though they were of greater cost than this. Said Christopher: To me it hath been merry and happy enough; but now it seems to me as if it had all been made for thee and this meeting. Is it therefore no longer merry to thee because of that? she said, smiling, yet flushing much red therewith.

Now it was his turn not to answer her, and she cast down her eyes before him, and there was silence between them.
Then she looked at him steadily, and said: It is indeed grievous that thou shouldest forget thine old friends for me, and that it should have come into thy mind that this fair and merry house was not made for thy fair fellows and thy delight with them, but for me, the chance-comer. For hearken, whereas thou saidst e'en now, that I was become a part of thy life, how can that be? For if I become the poor captive again, how canst thou get to me, thou who art thyself a castaway, as thou hast told me? Yea, but even so, I shall be too low for thee to come down to me. And if I become what I should be, then I must tell thee that I shall be too high for thee to climb up to me; so that in one way or other we shall be sundered, who have but met for an hour or two.

He hung his head a while as they stood there face to face, for both of them had arisen from the board; but presently he looked up to her with glittering eyes, and said: Yea, for an hour or two; why then do we tarry and linger, and say what we have no will to say, and refrain from what our hearts bid us?

Therewith he caught hold of her right wrist, and laid his hand on her left shoulder, and this first time that he had touched her, it was as if a fire ran through all his body and changed it into the essence of her: neither was there any naysay in her eyes, nor any defence against him in the yielding body of her. But even in that nick of time he drew back a little, and turned his head, as a man listening, toward the door, and said: Hist! hist! Dost thou hear, maiden? She turned deadly pale: O what is it? What is it? Yea, I hear; it is horses drawing nigh, and the sound of hounds baying. But may it not be thy fellows coming back? Nay, nay, he said; they rode not in armour. Hark to it! and these hounds are deep-voiced sleuth-dogs! But come now, there may yet be time.

He turned, and caught up axe and shield from off the wall, and drew her toward a window that looked to the north, and peered out of it warily; but turned back straightway, and said: Nay, it is too late that way, they are all round about the house. Maiden, get thou up into the solar by this stair, and thou wilt find hiding-place behind the traverse of the bed; and if they go away, and my fellows come in due time, then art thou safe. But if not, surely they shall do thee no hurt; for I think, indeed, that thou art some great one.

And he fell to striding down the hall toward the door; but she ran after him, and caught his arm, and said: Nay, nay, I will not hide, to be dragged out of my refuge like a thief: thou sayest well that I am of the great; I will stand by thee and command and forbid as a Queen. O go not to the door! Stay by me, stay!
AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR

hewed at them again and drave them aback to the threshold of the door; but could get them no further, and they began to handle long spears to thrust at him.

But then came forward a knight, no mickle man, but clad in very goodly armour, with a lion beaten in gold on his green surcoat; this man smote up the spears, and made the men go back a little, while he stood on the threshold: so Christopher saw that he would parley with him, and forebore him, and the knight spake:
Thou youngling, art thou mad? What doest thou falling on my folk? And what do ye, said Christopher fiercely, besetting the houses of folk with weapons? Now wilt thou take my life. But I shall yet slay one or two before I die. Get thee back, lord, or thou shalt be the first.

But the knight, who had no weapon in his hand, said: We come but to seek our own, and that is our Lady of Meadham, who dwell-eth at Greenharbour by her own will. And if thou wilt stand aside thou mayst go free to the devil for us.

Now would Christopher have shouted and fallen on, and gone to his death there and then; but even therewith a voice, clear and sweet, spake at the back of him, and said: Thou kind host, do thou stand aside and let us speak that which is needful. And therewith stepped forth

A knight would hold parley

He claims Goldilind

Goldilind speaketh
Goldilind and stood beside Christopher, and said: Sir Burgreve, we rode forth to drink the air yesterday, and went astray amidst the wildwood, and were belated, so that we must needs lie down under the bare heaven; but this morning we happened on this kind forester, who gave us to eat, and took us to his house and gave us meat and drink; for which it were seemlier to reward him than threaten him. Now it is our pleasure that ye lead us back to Greenharbour; but as for this youth, that ye do him no hurt; but let him go free, according to thy word spoken e’en now, Sir Burgreve.

She spake slowly and heavily, as one who hath a lesson to say, and it was to be seen of her that all grief was in her heart, though her words were queenly. Some of them that heard laughed; but the Burgreve spake, and said: Lady, we will do thy will in part, for we will lead thee to Greenharbour in all honour; but as to this young man, if he will not be slain here and now, needs must he with us. For he hath slain two of our men outright, and hath hurt many, and, methinks, the devil of the woods is in his body. So do thou bid him be quiet, if thou wouldst not see his blood flow.

She turned a pale unhappy face on Christopher, and said: My friend, we bid thee withstand them no more, but let them do with thee as they will.

Christopher stood aside therewith, and sat down on a bench and laughed, and said in a high voice: Stout men-at-arms, forsooth, to take a maid’s kirtle to their shield. But there-with the armed men poured into the hall, and a half dozen of the stoutest came up unto Christopher where he sat, and bound his hands with their girdles, and he withstood them no whit, but sat laughing in their faces, and made as if it were all a Yule-tide game. But inwardly his heart burned with anger, and with love of that sweet Lady.

Then they made him stand up, and led him without the house, and set him on a horse, and linked his feet together under the belly thereof. And when that was done he saw them lead out the Lady, and they set her in a horse litter, and then the whole troop rode off together, with two men riding on either side of the said litter. In this wise they left Littledale.
CHAPTER XVII. GOLDILIND COMES BACK TO GREENHARBOUR.

They rode speedily, and had with them men who knew the wood-land ways, so that the journey was nought so long thence as Goldilind had made it thither; and they stayed not for nightfall, since the moon was bright, so that they came before the Castle-gate before midnight. Now Goldilind looked to be cast into prison, whatever might befall her upon the morrow; but so it went not, for she was led straight to her own chamber, and one of her women, but not Aloyse, waited on her, and when she tried to have some tidings of her, the woman spake to her no more than if she were dumb. So all unhappily she laid her down in her bed, foreboding the worst, which she deemed might well be death at the hand of her jailers. As for Christopher, she saw the last of him as they entered the Castle-gate, and knew not what they had done with him. So she lay in dismal thoughts, but at last fell asleep for mere weariness.

When she awoke it was broad day, and there was someone going about in the chamber; she turned, and saw that it was Aloyse. She felt

AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR

sick at heart, and durst not move or ask of tidings; but presently Aloyse turned, and came to the bed, and made an obeisance, but spake not. Goldilind raised her head, and said wearily: What is to be done, Aloyse, wilt thou tell me? For my heart fails me, and, meseems, unless they have some mercy, I shall die to-day. Nay, said the chambermaid, keep thine heart up; for here is one at hand who would see thee, when it is thy pleasure to be seen. Yea, said Goldilind, Dame Elinor to wit. And she moaned, and fear and heart-sickness lay so heavy on her that she went nigh to swooning.

But Aloyse lifted up her head, and brought her wine and made her drink, and when Goldilind was come to herself again the maid said: I say, keep up thine heart, for it is not Dame Elinor and the rods that would see thee, but a mighty man; nay, the most mighty, to wit, Earl Geoffrey, who is King of Meadham in all but the name. Goldilind did in sooth take heart at this tidings, and she said: I wonder what he may have to do here; all this while he hath not been to Greenharbour, or, mayhap, it might have been better for me. I wot not, said Aloyse, but even so it is. I shall tell thee, the messenger, whose horse thou didst steal, brought no other word in his mouth save this, that my Lord Earl was coming; and come he did; but that was toward sunset, long after

Now comes to her Aloyse

Aloyse tells tidings

Of Earl Geoffrey
they had laid the blood-hounds on thy slot, and I had been whipped for letting thee find the way out a-gates. Now, our Lady, when thou hast seen the Earl, and hast become our Lady and Mistress indeed, wilt thou bethink thee of the morn before yesterday on my behalf? Yea, said Goldilind, if ever it shall befall. Befall it shall, said Aloyse; I dreamed of thee three nights ago, and thou sitting on thy throne commanding and forbidding the great men. But at worst no harm hath happened, save to my shoulders and sides, by thy stealing thyself, since thou hast come back in the nick of time, and of thine own will, as men say. But tell me now of thine holiday, and if it were pleasant to thee.

Goldilind fell a-weeping at the word, bethinking her of yesterday morning, and Aloyse stood looking on her, but saying nought. At last spake Goldilind softly: Tell me, Aloyse, didst thou hear any speaking of that young man who was brought in hither last night? Have they slain him? Said Aloyse: Soothly, my Lady, I deem they have done him no hurt, though I wot not for sure. There hath been none headed or hanged in the base-court to-day. I heard talk amongst the men-at-arms of one whom they took; they said he was a wonder of sheer strength, and how that he cast their men about as though he were playing at ball.

Sooth to say, they seemed to bear him no grudge therefor. But now I would counsel thee to arise; and I am bidden to tire and array thee at the best. And now I would say a word in thine ear, to wit, that Dame Elinor feareth thee somewhat this morn.

So Goldilind arose, and was arrayed like a very queen, and was served of what she would by Aloyse and the other women, and sat in her chamber a-waiting the coming of the mighty Lord of Meadham.
CHAPTER XVIII. EARL GEOFFREY SPEAKS WITH GOLDILIND

BUT a little while had she sat there, before footsteps a many came to the door, which was thrown open, and straight it was as if the sun had shone on a flower-bed, for there was come Earl Geoffrey and his lords all arrayed most gloriously. Then came the Earl up the chamber to Goldilind, and bent the knee before her, and said: Lady and Queen, is it thy pleasure that thy servant should kiss thine hand? She made him little cheer, but reached out to him her lily hand in its gold sleeve, and said: Thou must do thy will. So he kissed the hand reverently, and said: And these my lords, may they enter and do obeisance and kiss hands, my Lady? Said Goldilind: I will not strive to gainsay their will, or thine, my Lord.

So they entered and knelt before her, and kissed her hand; and, to say sooth, most of them had been fain to kiss both hands of her, yea, and her cheeks and her lips; though but little cheer she made them, but looked sternly on them. Then the Earl spake to her, and told her of her realm, and how folk thrived, and of the deep peace that was upon the land, and of the merry days of Meadham, and the

praise of the people. And she answered him nothing, but as he spake her bosom began to heave, and the tears came into her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. Then man looked on man, and the Earl said: My masters, I deem that my Lady hath will to speak to me privily, as to one who is her chiefest friend and well-willer. Is it so, my Lady? She might not speak for the tears that welled out from her heart; but she bowed her head and strove to smile on him.

But the Earl waved his hand, and those lords, and the women also, voided the chamber, and left those two alone, the Earl standing before her. But ere he could speak, she arose from her throne and fell on her knees before him, and joined hands palm to palm, and cried in a broken voice: Mercy! Mercy! Have pity on my young life, great Lord! But he lifted her up, and set her on her throne again, and said: Nay, my Lady, this is unmeet; but if thou wouldst talk and tell me I am ready to hearken. She strove with her passion a while, and then she said: Great Lord, I pray thee to hearken, and to have patience with a woman's weak heart. Prithee, sit down here beside me. It were unfitting, he said; I shall take a lower seat. Then he drew a stool to him, and sat down before her, and said: What aileth thee? What wouldest thou?
Then she said: Lord Earl, I am in prison; I would be free. Quoth he: Yea, and is this a prison then? Yea, she said, since I may not so much as go out from it and come back again unthreatened; yet have I been, and that unseldom, in a worser prison than this: do thou go look on the Least Guard-chamber, and see if it be a meet dwelling for thy master's daughter.

He spake nought awhile; then he said: And yet, if it grieveth thee, it marreth thee nought; for when I look on thee mine eyes behold the beauty of the world, and the body wherein is no lack. She reddened and said: If it be so, it is God's work, and I praise him therefore. But how long will it last? For grief slayeth beauty.

He looked on her long, and said: To thy friends I betook thee, and I looked that they should cherish thee; where then is the wrong that I have done thee? She said: Maybe no wrong wittingly; since now, belike, thou art come to tell me that all this weary sojourn is at an end, and that thou wilt take me to Meadhamstead, and set me on the throne there, and show my father's daughter to all the people.

He held his peace, and his face grew dark before her while she watched it. At last he spake in a harsh voice: Lady, he said, it may not be; here in Greenharbour must thou abide, or in some other castle apart from the

AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR

folk. Yea, she said, now I see it is true, that which I foreboded when first I came hither: thou wouldst slay me, that thou mayest sit safely in the seat of thy master's daughter; thou durst not send me a man with a sword to thrust me through, therefore thou hast cast me into prison amongst cruel jailers, who have been hidden by thee to take my life slowly and with torments. Hitherto I have withstood their malice and thine; but now am I overcome, and since I know that I must die, I have now no fear, and this is why I am bold to tell thee this that I have spoken, though I wot now I shall be presently slain. And now I tell thee I repent it, that I have asked grace of a graceless face.

Although she spake strong words, it was with a mild and steady voice. But the Earl was sore troubled, and he rose up and walked to and fro of the chamber, half drawing his sword and thrusting it back into the scabbard from time to time. At last he came back to her, and sat down before her, and spake:

Maiden, thou art somewhat in error. True it is that I would sit firm in my seat and rule the land of Meadham, as belike none other could. True it is also that I would have thee, the rightful heir, dwell apart from the turmoil for a while at least; for I would not have thy white hands thrust me untimely from my place,
or thy fair face held up as a banner by my foemen. Yet nowise have I willed thy death or thine anguish; and if all be true as thou sayest it, and thou art so lovely that I know not how to doubt it, tell me then what these have done with thee.

She said: Sir, those friends to whom thou hast delivered me are my foes, whether they were thy friends or not. Wilt thou compel me to tell thee all my shame? They have treated me as a thrall who had whiles to play a queen’s part in a show. To wit, thy chaplain whom thou hast given me has looked on me with lustful eyes, and has bidden me buy of him ease and surespace of pain with my very body, and hath threatened me more evil else, and kept his behest.

Then leapt up the Earl and cried out: Hah! did he so? Then I tell thee his monk’s hood shall not be stout enough to save his neck. Now, my child, thou speakest; tell me more, since my hair is whitening.

She said: The sleek, smooth-spoken woman to whom thou gavest me, didst thou bid her to torment me with stripes, and the dungeon, and the dark, and solitude, and hunger? Nay, by Allhallows! he said, nor thought of it; trust me she shall pay therefor if so she hath done. She said: I crave no vengeance, but mercy I crave, and thou mayst give it me.

Then were they both silent, till he said: Now I, for my part, will pray thee bear what thou must bear, which shall be nought save this, that thy queenship lie quiet for a while; nought else of evil shall betide thee henceforth; but as much of pleasure and joy as may go with it. But tell me, there is a story of thy snatching a holiday these two days, and of a young man whom thou didst happen on. Tell me now, not as a maiden to her father or warder, but as a great lady might tell a great lord, what betid betwixt you two: for thou art not one on whom a young and doughty man may look unmoved. By Allhallows! but thou art a firebrand, my Lady! And he laughed therewith.

Goldilind flushed red exceeding; but she answered steadily: Lord Earl, this is the very sooth, that I might not fail to see it, how he thought me worth looking on, but he treated me with all honour, as a brother might a sister. Tell me, said the Earl, what like was this man? Said she: He was young, but strong beyond measure; and full doughty: true it is that I saw him with mine eyes take and heave up one of our men in his hands, and cast him away as a man would a clod of earth.

The Earl knit his brow: Yea, said he, and that story I have heard from the men-at-arms also. But what was the man like of aspect?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE 102</th>
<th>CHILD CHRISTOPHER</th>
</tr>
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| **Of Christopher's aspects** | She reddened: He was of a most goodly body, she said, fair-eyed, and of a face well carven; his speech kind and gentle. And yet more she reddened. Said the Earl: Didst thou hear what he was, this man? She said: I deem from his own words that he was but a simple forester.

Yea, quoth the Earl, a simple forester? Nay, but a woodman, an outlaw, a waylayer; so say our men, that he fell on them with the cry: A-Tofts! A-Tofts! Hast thou never heard of Jack of the Tofts? Nay, never, said she. Said the Earl: He is the king of these good fellows; and a perilous host they be. Now I fear me, if he be proven to be one of these, there will be a gallows reared for him to-morrow, for as fair and as doughty as he may be.

She turned all pale, and her lips quivered: then she rose up, and fell on her knees before the Earl, and cried out: O sir, a grace, a grace, I pray thee! Pardon this poor man who was so kind to me!

The Earl raised her up and smiled, and said: Nay, my Lady Queen, wouldst thou kneel to me? It is unmeet. And as for this woodman, it is for thee to pardon him, and not for me; and since, by good luck, he is not hanged yet, thy word hath saved his neck. She sat down in her chair again, but still looked white and scared. But the Earl spake again, and kindly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PAGE 103</th>
<th>AND GOLDILIND THE FAIR</th>
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| The Earl leaveth her | Now to all these matters I shall give heed, my Lady; wherefore I will ask leave of thee, and be gone; and to-morrow I will see thee again, and lay some rede before thee. Meantime, be of good cheer, for thou shalt be made as much of as may be, and live in mickle joy if thou wilt. And if any so much as give thee a hard word, it shall be the worse for them.

Therewith he arose, and made obeisance to her, and departed. And she abode quiet, and looking straight before her, till the door shut, and then she put her hands to her face and fell a-weeping, and scarce knew what ailed her betwixt hope, and rest of body, and love, though that she called not by its right name.