



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

In The Castle Of The Sorcerers

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When they had tarried at this castle a certain time, they rode forth again. It was the month of June, when the days are long and birds' songs are merry. Sir Le Beau Disconus and maid Elene and the dwarf Teondelayn came riding by a river-side, and saw a great and proud city, with high strong castles and many gates. Le Beau Disconus asked the name of this city.

"They call it Golden Isle," answered maid Elene. "Here hath been more fighting than in any country, for a lady of price, fair as a rose, has put this land in peril. A giant named Maugis, whose like is nowhere on earth, has laid siege to her. He is as black as pitch, stern and stout indeed. He that would pass the bridge into her castle must lay down his arms and do a reverence to the giant."

Then said Le Beau Disconus, "I shall not turn aside for him. If God give me grace, ere this day's end I will overthrow him."

They rode all three towards the fair city. On a wooden bridge they saw Maugis, as bold as a wild boar. His shield was black, and all his armour black also. When he saw Le Beau Disconus, he cried, "Tell me, fellow in white, what are you? Turn home again for your own profit."

"Arthur made me a knight," said Le Beau Disconus, "and to him I made a vow that I would never turn back. Therefore, friend in black, make ready."

They rode forthright at one another. Their lances brake at the first blows. But they drew swords in a fury and rushed at one another. Le Beau Disconus smote the giant's shield so that it fell from him; but Maugis in turn slew Le Beau Disconus's steed with a great blow on its head. Le Beau Disconus said nought, but started up from his dead charger and took his axe: a great blow he struck, that shore the head of Maugis's horse clean from its body.

Then they fell to on foot, and no man can tell of the blows that passed from one to the other; and they fought till evening drew nigh.



Sir Le Beau Disconus thirsted sore, and said, "Maugis, let me go to drink. I will grant you what boon you ask of me in like case. Great shame would it be to slay a knight by thirst."

Maugis granted it, but when Le Beau Disconus went to the river and drank, Maugis struck him unawares such a blow that he fell into the river. "Now am I truly refreshed," cried Le Beau Disconus, as he climbed out. "I will repay you for this."

Then a new fight was begun, and they continued till darkness grew apace. At length Le Beau Disconus struck such a blow that the giant's right arm was shorn off. Thereupon Maugis fled, but Le Beau Disconus ran swiftly after him and with three stern strokes clove his backbone. Then Le Beau Disconus smote off the giant's head, and went into the town; and all the folk welcomed him.

A fair lady came down to meet him, called Le Dame d'Amour; and she thanked him for his aid against the giant, and led him to her palace. There he was clad in clean raiment, and feasted, and the lady would have had him be lord of her city and castle.

Le Beau Disconus granted her prayer, and gave her his love, for she was indeed fair and bright. Alas that he did not refrain! Twelve months and more he dwelt there; and fair Elene was afraid lest he might never go thence, for the lady of the castle knew much of sorcery, and put a charm upon Le Beau Disconus so that he wished never to leave her.

But it fell on a day that Le Beau Disconus met maid Elene by chance within the castle. "Sir knight," she said, "you are false of faith to King Arthur. For love of a sorceress you do great dishonour. The lady of Synadown lies in prison yet!"

At her words Le Beau Disconus thought his heart would break for sorrow and shame. By a postern-gate he crept away from the lady of the castle, and took with him his horse and his armour and rode forth with maid Elene and the dwarf and a squire named Gyfflet. Fast they rode without ceasing till on the third day they came in sight of the strong city of Synadown.

But Le Beau Disconus wondered at a custom he saw as he descried the town. For all the waste and refuse that was cast outside the town was gathered again by the folk and kept.

"What means this?" asked Sir Le Beau Disconus.

"This it is," said maid Elene. "No knight may abide here without leave of a steward called Sir Lambard. Ride to that eastern gate yonder, and ask his leave to enter fairly and well; ere he grants it, he will joust with you. And if he bears you down, he will blow his trumpets, and all through Synadown, at the sound thereof, the maidens and boys will throw on you this filth and mud that they

have gathered; and so to your life's end will you be known as a coward, and King Arthur shall lose his honour through you."

"That were great shame for any man living," said Sir Le Beau Disconus. "I will meet this man. Gyfflet, make me ready." Then they made ready and rode to the castle gate, and asked where knights might find lodging. The porter let them in and asked, "Who is your overlord?"

"King Arthur, the well of courtesy and flower of chivalry, is my lord," answered Le Beau Disconus.

The porter went and told Sir Lambard of the knight, and Sir Lambard was glad, and vowed to joust with him. Thereupon the porter came again to Le Beau Disconus, and said, "Adventurous knight, ride to the field without the castle gate, and arm you speedily, for my lord would joust with you."

Sir Le Beau Disconus rode to the field and made ready. Presently there came the steward all armed for the fight, and they fell to. Long and fierce was the fray, but at the last Le Beau Disconus struck Sir Lambard so fiercely that he was borne clean out of his saddle backwards.

"Will you have more?" asked Sir Le Beau Disconus.

"Nay," answered Sir Lambard. "Never since I was born came I against such a knight. If you will fight for my lady, you are welcome, sir knight."

"Nay," said Sir Le Beau Disconus, "but I fight for a lady even now." Then they went into Sir Lambard's castle and feasted and were right merry. Sir Lambard and Sir Le Beau Disconus spoke much of adventures, and at last Sir Le Beau Disconus asked him concerning his quest. "What is the knight's name who holds in prison the gentle lady of Synadown?"

"Nay, sir, knight is he none. Two magicians are her foes, false in flesh and bone: Mabon and Irayn are their names, and they have made this town a place of strange magic arts. They hold this noble lady in prison, and often we hear her cry, but have no power to come to her. They have sworn to slay her if she will not do their will, and give up to them all her rights in this fair dukedom which is hers."

They took their rest. On the morrow Le Beau Disconus clad himself in his best armour, and rode forth to the gate of the great palace of Synadown; and with him for escort came Lambard and his knights.

They found the gate open, but no further durst any man go save Le Beau Disconus and his squire Gyfflet; and Le Beau Disconus made Gyfflet also turn back with the rest.

Then he rode alone into the palace, and alighted at the great hall. He saw

minstrels before the dais, and a fire burning brightly, but no lord of the palace was there. Le Beau Disconus paced through all the chambers, and saw no one but minstrels who made merry. Le Beau Disconus went further, seeking those whom he should fight. He peered into all the corners, and looked on wondrous pillars of jasper and fine crystal; but never a foe did he see.

At last he sat him down at the dais in the great hall. As he sat, the minstrels ceased their music and vanished, and the torches were extinguished; doors and windows shook like thunder, and the very stones of the walls fell round him. The dais began to quake, and the roof above opened.

As he sat thus dismayed, believing that he was betrayed by magic, he heard horses neigh. "Yet may I hope to joust," he said, better pleased. He looked out into a field, and there he saw two knights come riding with spear and shield; their armour was of rich purple, with golden garlands. One of the knights rode into the hall. "Sir knight," he cried, "proud though you be, you must fight with us."

"I am ready to fight," answered Le Beau Disconus, and he leapt into his saddle, and rode against the knight. His might bore Mabon (for it was he) over his horse's tail: the hinder saddle-bow broke, and he fell. With that rode in Irayn fully armed, fresh for the fight, and meaning with main and might to assail Sir Le Beau Disconus. But Le Beau Disconus was aware of him, and bore down on him with his spear, leaving Mabon where he had fallen. They broke their lances at the first stroke, and fell to with swords. As they fought, Mabon rose up from the ground, and ran to aid Irayn. But Le Beau Disconus fought both, and kept himself back warily.

When Irayn saw Mabon, he smote fiercely at Le Beau Disconus and struck his steed. But Sir Le Beau Disconus returned his blow, and shore off his thigh, skin and bone and all: of no avail were his arms or his enchantments then!

Then Le Beau Disconus turned swiftly again to Mabon; and Mabon with a great blow broke the knight's sword. But Le Beau Disconus ran to Irayn, where he lay dying, and drew from him his sword, and rushed fiercely upon Mabon once more, and smote off his left arm with the shield.

"Hold, gentle knight," said Mabon, "and I will yield that to your will, and will take you to the fair lady. Through the wound from that sword I am undone, for I poisoned both it and mine, to make certain of slaying you."

"I will have none of your gifts, were I to win all this world by them," said Le Beau Disconus. "Lay on. One of us shall die."

Then they fell to again, and so fiercely did Le Beau Disconus fight that in a little while he cleft Mabon's head and helmet in twain.

When Mabon was slain, he ran to where he had left Irayn, meaning to cleave his head also. But Irayn was not there; he had been borne away, whither Le Beau Disconus did not know. He sought him everywhere, and when he found him not, he believed that he was caught in a snare, and fell on his knees and prayed. As he prayed a marvel came to pass. In the stone wall a window opened, and a great dragon issued therefrom. It had the face of a woman, fair and young, her body and wings shone like gold; her tail was loathly, and her paws grim and great.

Le Beau Disconus's heart sank within him, and he trembled. Ere he could think, the dragon clasped him by the neck and kissed him; and lo! as it kissed him, the tail and wings fell from it, and he saw before him the fairest lady that ever he looked upon.

"Gentle knight," she said, "you have slain the two magicians, my foes. They changed me into a dragon, and bade me keep that shape till I had kissed Sir Gawain or some other knight of kin to Sir Gawain. You have saved my life: I will give you fifteen castles and myself for wife, if it be King Arthur's will."

Then was Le Beau Disconus glad and blithe, and leapt on his horse and rode back to Sir Lambard to bring him these good tidings; and presently there came to him from the palace the lady herself, richly clad, and all the people of the town made a fair procession in her train. Every knight in Synadown did her homage and fealty as was due to her. Seven nights did they abide in the castle with Lambard, and then Sir Le Beau Disconus returned with the fair lady to King Arthur, and at his court gave thanks to God for their adventures. King Arthur gave the lady to Le Beau Disconus for wife; and the joy of that bridal can be told in no tale or song.

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