



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Fair Unknown

F. J. H. Darton

Sir Gawain had a son, and he was fair to look on, bright of face and well-favoured in body. He was named Geynleyn. But for love of his fair face his mother called him Beau-fys, and no other name; and he never asked her what he was truly called, for Sir Gawain had wedded this lady secretly, and none knew that he was Geynleyn's father. On a certain day Geynleyn went to the woods to hunt the deer, and there he found a knight in gay armour, lying slain. Geynleyn wondered thereat; but in a little time he took off the knight's garments, and clad himself in the rich armour; and when he had done this, he went to Glastonbury, where King Arthur lay at that time. He came into the hall before the knights and greeted them.

"King Arthur, my lord," he said, "grant that I may speak a word, I pray you. I would fain be made a knight."

"Tell me your name," answered King Arthur, "for since I was born I never saw before me one so fair to look on."

"I know not what is my true name," answered the lad. "While I was at home, my mother, jesting, called me Beau-fys, and nought else."

Then said Arthur the king, "This is a wondrous thing, that the boy should know not his name when he would become a knight; and yet he is full fair of face. Now will I give him a name before you all. Let him be called Le Beau Disconus, which is to say, 'The fair unknown': so is he to be named." Thereupon King Arthur made him a knight, and gave him bright arms, and girt him with a sword, and hung round him a shield wrought with the design of a griffin. Sir Gawain took charge of him to teach him knightly ways.

When Le Beau Disconus had been made a knight, he asked yet another boon of the king. "My lord," he said, "I should be right glad in heart if I might have the first fight that is asked of you."

"I grant your asking," answered Arthur the king, "whatsoever the combat be. But you seem too young to do well in a great fight."

Then they sat down to feast. Not long had they feasted ere there came a maiden riding, and a dwarf beside her, in a great heat as though with haste. This maid was called Elene the bright and gentle; no countess or queen could be her equal

in loveliness. She was richly clad, and the saddle and bridle of her milk-white steed were full of diamonds. Her dwarf wore silk of India; a stout and bold man was he, and his beard, yellow as wax, hanged down to his girdle. His shoes were decked with gold, and truly seemed a knight that felt no poverty. His name was Teondelayn; he was skilled in playing all musical instruments.

The dwarf spoke to the maiden, and bade her tell her errand, and lose no time. She knelt in the hall before all the knights, and greeted them with honour, and said, "Never was sadder tidings than I bring. My lady of Synadown is brought into a strong prison; she prays King Arthur to send her a knight of stout courage, to win her out of prison."

Up started the young knight Le Beau Disconus; his courage was stout and high. "Arthur, my lord," he said, "I shall take up this combat, and win the lady bright, if you are true to your word."

"Certain it is that I have promised even so," said King Arthur. "God grant you grace and might."

Then Elene began to complain, and said, "Alas that I was ever sent hither! Now will the word go forth that Arthur's manhood is lost, if you send a witless and wild child to deal doughty blows, when there are here knights of proved valour, Launcelot, Percevale, and Gawain." Le Beau Disconus answered, "Never yet was I afraid of any man; I have learned to fight with spear and sword. I will take the battle, and never forsake it, as is Arthur's law."

Then said Arthur, "Maiden, you get no other knight of me. If you think him not man enough, go get another of greater might where you can." The maid said no more; but for wrath she would neither drink nor eat at their feast, but sat down with her dwarf till the tables were taken away.

King Arthur bade four of the best knights of the Round Table arm Le Beau Disconus straightway in arms true and perfect. "Through the help of Christ, he shall hold to his word, and be a good champion to the lady of Synadown, and uphold all her rights," he said.

When he was armed Sir Le Beau Disconus sprang on his horse and received the king's blessing, and set forth a-riding with the maiden and the dwarf. Till the third day she railed at the young knight continually; and on the third day, when they came to a certain place, she said, "Caitiff, now is your pride undone. This vale before us is kept by a knight who will fight every man that comes; and his fame is gone far abroad. William Selebranche is he named, and he is a mighty warrior. Through heart or thigh of all those who come against him he thrusts his spear."

"Does he fight so mightily then?" asked Le Beau Disconus. "Has he never been

hit? Whatsoever betides me, against him will I ride and prove how he fights."

On they rode all three till they came to a castle in a vale. There they saw a knight in bright armour. He bore a shield of green, with a device of three lions: and he was that William Selebranche of whom maid Elene had spoken. When the knight had sight of them he rode towards them, and said, "Welcome, fair brother. He that rides here, day or night, must fight with me, or leave his arms here shamefully."

"Now let us pass," said Sir Le Beau Disconus, "We have far to go to our friends, I and this maid; we must needs speed on our way."

"You shall not escape so," answered William. "Ere you go we will fight."

Then said Le Beau Disconus, "Now I see that it must be so. Make ready quickly and do your best. Take a course with the spear, if you are a knight of skill, for I am in haste."



No longer did they wait, but rode together in arms. Le Beau Disconus smote William in the side with his spear; but William sat firm in his saddle. Nevertheless so mightily was he struck that his stirrup leathers were broken, and he swayed over the horse's crupper and fell to the ground. His steed galloped away, but William started up speedily. "By my faith, never met I so stout a man," he said. "Now that my steed is gone, let us fight on foot." They fell to on foot with falchions. [Footnote: Broad, short swords.] So hard they struck that sparks flew from their helmets. But William drove his sword through Le Beau Disconus's shield, and a piece of it fell to the ground; and thereat Le Beau Disconus was wroth. He smote with his sword downwards from the crest of William's helmet even to his hawberk, and shaved off with the point of his blade the knight's beard, and well-nigh cut the flesh also. Then William smote back so great a blow that his sword brake in two.

"Let me go alive," cried William at that, seeing himself reft of his arms. "It were great villainy to do to death an unarmed knight."

"I will spare you," said Le Beau Disconus, "if you swear a vow ere we go from one another. Kneel down, and swear on my sword to go to King Arthur, and say to him, 'Lord of renown, a knight sent me hither, defeated and a prisoner: his name is Le Beau Disconus, of unknown kith and kin.'"

William went upon his knees and took a vow as Le Beau Disconus bade him, and thus they departed each on his way. William took the road to Arthur's court; and it chanced that as he went, he met, on that self-same day, three proud knights,

his own sister's sons. "William our uncle," said they when they saw his wounds and his sorry array, "who has done you this shame?"

"The man is not to blame," answered William. "He was a knight stout and stern. One thing only grieves me sorely, that I must at his bidding go to King Arthur's court." And he told them of his vow.

"You shall be full well avenged," said they. "He alone against us three is not worth a straw. Go your way, uncle, and fulfil your vow; and we will assail the traitor ere he be out of this forest." Then William went on his way to the court of King Arthur.

But the three knights his nephews armed themselves, and leapt on their steeds, and without more tarrying went after Le Beau Disconus.

Le Beau Disconus knew nought of this, but rode on with the fair maid, and made great mirth with her, for she had seen that he was a true and doughty knight. She asked pardon for the ill things she had said against him at the king's court, and he forgave her this trespass; and the dwarf was their squire, and served them in all their needs.

At morning when it was day, as they rode on towards Synadown, they saw three knights in bright mail. They cried to him straightway, "Thief, turn again and fight."

"I am ready to ride against you all," quoth Le Beau Disconus. He pricked his horse towards them. The eldest brother (Sir Gower was his name) ran against him with a spear; but Le Beau Disconus smote him such a blow that he broke his thigh, and ever thereafter was lame. The knight groaned for pain, but Le Beau Disconus with might and main felled him altogether.

The next brother came riding fierce as a lion, as if to cast Le Beau Disconus down. Like a warrior out of his wits he smote Le Beau Disconus on his helmet with his sword; he struck so hard that the blade drove through the helmet and touched the young knight's head.

Then Le Beau Disconus, when he felt the sword touch him, swung his sword as a madman, and all that he struck he clove through. Though two were against him—for the third brother also came riding to the fray—they saw that they had no might to withstand him in his fury. They yielded up their spears and shields to Le Beau Disconus, and cried mercy.

"Nay," answered Le Beau Disconus, "you escape not, unless you plight me your faith to go to King Arthur, and tell him that I overcame you and sent you to him. If you do not so, I will slay you all three." The knights swore to go to King Arthur, and plighted their troth upon it. Then they departed, and Le Beau Disconus and the fair maid rode on towards Synadown. All that day they rode, and at night

they made their lodges in the wood out of green leaves and boughs, for they came nigh no town or castle; and thus for three days they pricked ever westwards.

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