

The Ballad of Sarah de Bretagne

Many waters cannot quench love,
Neither can the floods drown it.

– Song of Solomon 8:7

Canto I

The rains fell down,
And the black floods came,
And there in the dark stood Sarah Cymru.
Lightning snarled on Snowdon's ragged breast,
The rain driving hard as flint arrows
Against the mountains and the sea.
A lone ship stood at anchor,
In the ashen bay of Aberffraw,
Starkly illumined by the town in flames.
There stood Meriadoc, Lord of Gwynedd;
She watched his grieved glances up the green rocky fells,
In search of the daughter who tarried too long.
But she stood with numbed soul and came not.
Pale face haggard with freshwater tears,
She saw his hand fall, though she heard not his cry;
The little ship struggled in sea of high swells,
Like broken blue pottery gnashing its teeth.
And then it was gone, to the south far away,
While Aberffraw died in the harsh driving rain.
Sarah shivered with dread, but did steel her strong arm;
The Saxons were coming; there was naught else to do.
With narrowed blue eyes did she set her bare feet,
On the twisting tortured downward path,
Turning her back on ancient Gwynedd.
There was none left but her and the hated invaders:
Time only would tell of the victor this night,
She swore with a grimness beyond her scant years.
Gripping the hilt of her Toledo-sharp dirk,
For hours she crept through the Cambrian dark,
Shivering and soaked in her plaid robes of state,
Which she knew all too well did mark her as prey.
She drew near the town, heard shrieking of dogs,
And ribald carousing through thick castle walls.
She smiled a wintry smile, baring even white teeth,
And slid through the garden over trampled wet beds,
To a secret back way only royals knew.
She slipped like cold breath into Roderick Caer;
By devious means did she reach the main gate,
Shut fast for the night against aught which might come,
Whether animal, spirit, or Celtic avenger.
With a flick barely heard, she jammed the old lock...
No one was leaving; least of all her.
None saw her, none stopped her, so careful she crawled,
While the men partied on unbeknowing in bliss.
A barrel of mead and a torch in the rushes –
Caer Roderick Mawr was aflame!
They rushed for the gate – The fools! She exulted;
And they screamed in stark terror at facing sweet Death.

She stepped on the dais and drew herself up;
“It was I who destroyed you killers and thieves!”
She cried like a fiend as she brandished her blade.
They shrank from before her, so occult she seemed,
A demon of Hades come claiming their souls.
With a cold heart she watched as they fell down and died,
And the flames licked up at the hem of her gown.
The brocade swift blackened, caught fire and cracked;
She smiled with fierce triumph and gripped her cold steel.
With a swift practiced motion it plunged toward her breast,
And she welcomed the pang ere it came.
But a pale white hand seized the blade in her grasp,
And was cut to the bone; she heard a wild curse;
Blood splattered to sizzle on the smoking stone floor,
While the dagger skittered down in the flames.
In a rage she lunged after it, straining to die,
But two arms held her back till she finally broke,
Then hauled her in haste out the royal way.
Through the ruin of tulips and roses and trees,
Where she’d played as a girl within sight of the sea,
Away from Caer Roderick down the muddy black beach.
Sea creatures slithered and writhed on the sands,
Dying in slime on the alien shore,
Where the night storm had cast them, alone and afar;
There was their tomb, and she envied such peace.
She knew not the way; she no longer cared;
Her brain was a mass of wet clay in her head;
She spoke not a word, but neither did he;
Whether Saxon or Brython she knew not, nor cared.
Yet his hand on her arm was gentle and light,
Never forcing nor hurting nor pulling away,
But utterly firm and unyielding as marble.
The flames of Caer Roderick faded away,
And the lightning abated with muttering scowls;
A sliver of moon pushed brave through the clouds,
Till her pale red hair was all gilded in silver,
And she looked every year of the hundred she felt.
They came to a cave on the black sea strand,
Just a jumble of rocks all crusted with white,
And there the man built up a bower of stone,
For to hold the Celt maiden he so long had loved;
She lay without protest and closed her blue eyes,
Hands folded regally cross on her breast,
A pale colored orchid by the dark gray sea,
Or so did she seem to the Prince at her feet.
And then he lay down by her side in the dark,
Debated, then tenderly kissed her wet hair;
No more did he venture, nor yet did he wish,
And together they slept in the stones by the sea.

Canto II

The golden sun in the morn uprist,
To flood the dark beach with a warm red wave,
Where the Prince of Anjou and the Celt maiden lay,
Alone with the sea and the dead of the storm.

The sky feathered blue like cormorants' wings,
And salty white foam raced the waves on the shore.
He looked up and smiled at the watercolor sky,
And thanked the dear Lord for his love and his life,
So near come to perishing yesterday night.
He turned to the maiden that lay at his side,
Tenderly open while yet she still slept,
And whispered "*Je t'adore, ma chère et ma vie.*" ¹
Perhaps through the cold of her broken-glass heart,
She heard the soft words, for she opened her eyes,
To behold Prince Guillaume looking down from so near,
And he longed to say more, but naught else could be said.
"Who art thou?" she asked him, "to pry in my plans?
Speak swiftly, young man, thou hast much to explain."
The prince's heart sighed at the ice in her tone,
But he gathered his thoughts to reply as he must.
"My name is Guillaume of Anjou in France,
But the days of my youth have I passed in Gwynedd,
In the house of thy father Meriadoc the King.
I saw thee each day at Caer Roderick Mawr,
In the garden of blossoms where Beauty doth dwell,
And I watched thee, and listened, heard tell of so much;
Saw thee dancing in springtime on daisies new-sprung,
Where the sweet blue-grey mist lit on rolling green hills,
And thou smiled in the sunshine that clothed thee in light;
Such a sweetness I saw that I wished in my heart,
And did call thee *ma chère* ² in my dearest of dreams,
Though I thought not to ever speak words such as these. . .
But then came the Saxons with terrible War;
Thy father Meriadoc quit these high coasts,
With all of the people his tongue could persuade;
Even I, but not thee, I could tell in my bones.
I knew all thy moods and did feel them the same,
So remained in Caer Roderick hid in the hall,
Whilst the last ship weighed anchor in Aberffraw bay,
For I knew thou wouldst come, and what thou wouldst do.
I waited and watched as the Saxons caroused,
And grew drunk on the fat of thy father's rich land;
When thou camest in secret I followed each step,
Till the moment should come when I knew I must act;
Here is my hand. . . thou knowest the rest."
And with difficult silence he heard her reply.
"Thou art bold and unwise to say such to me.
Did I ask for thy help, much less for thy love?
Thou knowest me not, but art kind nonetheless;
Dear Boy, leave me be; thou wist not what thou wishest."
And the stone in her voice left naught to discuss.
A spray of salt wind brought a tear to his eye,
"*S'il te plaît, ma plus chère,*" ³ he promised, but then,
She reached out a pitying hand to his breast.
Her thin white fingers lay warm on his heart;
Close-bitten nails catching rough on his shirt.
"Thou'rt good to me, truly; I know it, dear friend,
Though I meet thee at times and in ways I wish not. . .
Go back to Anjou of the emerald south,
And find there an other more suited to thee."

These kind words spake she with a dull timbred voice,
Wishing for something. . . anything else.
“And where wilt thou go, fair maiden beloved?
Caer Roderick Mawr and Gwynedd are now lost,
And naught may restore them or give life again,
To memories sweeter than present days know.
Thou art lovely and good; how it stabs me to think
Thou wouldst cast away life for the sake of revenge.
Oh, say thou wilt not!” he beseeched with a cry.
She drew her breath sadly and cast down her gaze.
“Ah, ‘twas not for revenge that I did what I did.
‘Twas merely for glory, and justice, and pride.
Thou hast made these impossible now the deed’s done;
Thou hast nothing to fear for my death anymore.
I go to Bretagne where Meriadoc rules,
No more to look back on these mountains I love.
There will I dance, as I did in the Caer,
Princess and bauble, for such I will be,
Till Meriadoc finds better uses for me.
Marriage, perchance, to some warty old Lord,
At the court of Gascon, or even Anjou. . .
Say where is the romance and honor in that?
But such is the life thou returns’t me,” she sighed,
Shaking her head so her rippled hair danced,
As she sat up to gaze at the whispering sea.
Sun licked the waves with goldenrod fleece,
And did taste of the deep with ephemeral lips.
Sarah rose up and soon smoothed her fair plaids,
Still lovely, though battered and burned at the hems.
Then barefoot she set out to find a sweet pool,
For to drink and refresh herself thence for the walk,
To Llanfaelog-town where the fisher-folk dwelt.
Mayhap one remained who could bear her away.
Guillaume followed after in silence profound.

Canto III

They wended their path to Llanfaelog-town,
Whence a grizzled old fishwife did ferry them south,
To Aberyst-wyth whence the trade ships would ply,
To Santander and Erin, the Baltic, and France.
From thence would they go on their disparate ways,
And meet nevermore in the world till the end.
But the country was fair while they waited to leave,
In the last blush of summer they’d feel in Gwynedd.
There were naught but each other they knew in the town,
And solitude came all too quickly, they felt,
So they walked the long valley the Aeron had cut,
In the bones of the mountains of Cambria’s coast,
And they spoke of the past and exchanged mighty tales,
Over cheese and wine lunches on August-green grass,
In the depths of the forest where no one could hear.
Guillaume did not speak of his love any more,
For fear of distressing her sore troubled brow,
But it shone through in other ways subtle and dear,
For true it still was, and he wished her all joy.

Then the hour came at last, on Michaelmas Day,
 That the two of them met for the very last time.
 The first taste of Autumn hung crisp in the air,
 While they told funny stories to cheer their farewells.
 But as they sat on a log by the Aeron's stone banks,
 Sarah finally stopped laughing, and turned to Guillaume
 With a serious mein, and unburdened her heart.
 "How art thou so happy, and kind and carefree,
 When we both see such evil that crusheth the soul?
 Understand thee I cannot, unless thou knowest nothing,
 But that too is impossible; thou art a riddle.
 Pray tell me thy secret. . . I fain would hear now."
 Her open face waiting, he hardly could think.
 "I know not exactly what words I should say,
 But I'll sing thee a ballad, a tale of Anjou,
 Which my father did tell me the day I left home.
 Perhaps it will help thee; if not, then I'll show thee,"
 He promised with gentleness, care in his tone.
 He drew in his breath, sat up straight and looked down,
 In her bright blue eyes and began then to sing.

*"Ah, je te souhaite de la grande joie, mon fils!
 Écoutez, donc, car je chante du sagesse:
 L'amour et la vie et tes songes et le vrai,
 Ceux seulement sont nobles d'aimer dans l'enfin:
 Quand la vie est facile, laissez les bons temps rouler!
 Souvenez d'amour vrai ne peut mourir jamais." 4*

He finished the last with a half-hidden grin.
 "Oh, indeed?" Sarah scoffed with a roll of her eyes,
 "Well, I'll tell *thee* the story that life has taught me,
 And I believe it more true than thy pithy refrain.
 People care only for power and wealth;
 Happiness comes as an afterthought. . . maybe.
 A good man I liken to fresh wine in June,
 All sweet and delicious; so lovely at first!
 But when kept overlong merely souring to vinegar.
 Love is a waste, and fools only dream,
 And what is the Truth? Do you still think you know?
 Life is not easy and never will be;
 Wisdom and happiness poison each other;
 Thou canst not have one and retain still the former.
 I know, for I've tried, and in time so wilt thou."
 She asserted these doctrines with angry sad eyes,
 Tossing pebbles to *crack!* on the stones down below.
 At a loss what to say, he embraced her thin shoulders;
 She stiffened, then yielded and patted his arm.
 "Ah, thy friendship doth cheer me, though foolish it be.
 A good man thou art; I prithee change not."
 She spake the words softly; he nodded and said,
 "Once did I believe these same words thou dost say,
 For I saw such vile cruelty, hatred, and greed. . .
 Lecherous fools and rich thieves in Le Havre,
 While children stood starving not ten yards away;
 Such dirt and blood and filth unspeakable!
 It angered me sore, and I called the world cursed,

And the hot breath of hell near broke my sad heart.
I could not do aught to relieve all the pain,
For the world changeth not, and loveth no man.
But dear one, I tell thee, there's more than I knew!
All thou hast said, it is true, I agree,
But such wisdom is half-truth, and kills all joy.
Yet, 'tis all thou canst see, alone with no hope.
My song helped not, but I promised I'd show thee
The answer thou seekest. . . other ways will I try.
So follow and listen, observe every thing;
Take note of the tiny, the subtle, the plain,
For this is the heart and the blood of all joy.
Come now, *ma chère*, let us dither no more;
For I've much I must show thee, and ah what short time!"
They got up and walked through the green Aeron vale,
Side by side in the aisles of leafy grey beeches;
The river splashed laughingly cool at their right,
Kissing the air with glittering spray,
Like diamond dust scattered through lead crystal glass,
And the warm west wind blew its breath at their backs.

Canto IV

They chanced upon a butterfly, caught in a pool of rain;
Guillaume shook his head and reached down with his fingers
To lift it up, free, to the zephyr's embrace.
It flew away shining in dappled gold light.
"Thy freedom I grant thee, for such is the gift,
Of all living creatures the Lord ever made!"
He called with a smile, then turned to the girl.
"When thou findest the needy, though tiny they be,
Neglect not to help them, though aught tell thee no.
Reach out and heal every hurt in thy sight,
From the death of an insect to tears of a stranger.
This is worth much; deceptively so."
He assured her obliquely, and quickened his stride.
They came to a cliff overlooking the vale,
And there Guillaume sat on the cool earthen floor.
Wild roses bloomed in the sheltered wet nooks,
Confused by the warmth of the south-facing stone,
Smiling and nodding at Sarah, serene.
The prince reached a hand for the reddest in sight,
With petals of velvet and scent of high spring.
Then he laughed for no reason and offered it her;
She smiled, just a little, and sat down as well.
The flower she wove in the hair by her ear,
A splash of wet crimson to rival the dawn.
"These flowers bloom only in May in Gwynedd,
And yet, here they are, without fear for the day!
We could not have known they were coming, but still,
They made thee to smile. . . take thought for this matter.
The greatest of joys are not planned, *chère amie*,
But surprise with delight unexpected and sweet."
And they stole on still farther and reached a great tree,
A handsome old oak, and there Guillaume stopped
And took Sarah's hand in his own without smiling.

She allowed this, uncertain, and waited for more.
“And there also is this, the very last thing,
By far the most crucial and hardest to take.
All that I do, which thou call’st kind and good,
‘Twill soon be forgotten; ‘tis thankless and hard,
And surprises be hateful as often as not.
This thou wilt find, if thou believest my words.
But this mattereth not, for ‘tis done for Another.
These are the gifts which I offer in love,
To Him who breathed life in this body of clay.
He hath blessed me with joy, and filled me with love,
And the more I pour out, the more do I have!
Remember thy faith, my fairest beloved;
Naught else avails long, if thou lack’st this one thing.”
And with that he fell silent and cast down his eyes.
Sarah hardly could find any words to reply,
Till the moment he kissed the soft hand in his grasp.
She sighed with old pain and drew it away.
“Guillaume. . . do not do this; I pray thee to stop.
I never can give thee the love that thou wishest,
I have seen far too much, and remember old wounds.
‘Twould pain me to hurt thee. . . pray cease and forgive.
If thou lovest me truly, ask not any more.”
And she fled down the path by the cold laughing stream,
Heedless of aught but the sound of her feet.
Willow-wands flogged her and left tiny welts,
To bleed tears of blood down her smooth and dry cheeks.
She ran till the pain in her powdered left side,
Made her halt by the Aeron to quiet her breath.
She listened behind for the sound of his steps,
But the valley was silent as soft falling snow.
Her breath at last calmed, and the hurt drained away;
The blood on her face she washed clean in the stream.
Then she gathered her will from its scattered abodes,
And walked more sedately toward Aberyst-wyth.
Within hours her ship would depart over sea,
And mayhap a few worries she’d leave far behind.
Mayhap it were so; she prayed it might be.
Her footfalls were light as the grass in the spring,
And left not a trace of her passage behind;
It was almost as if, to the Cambrian hills,
She had ceased to exist on that night in the Caer;
Her land had forgotten her ere she could leave.
The thought made her sad, but she crushed such a weakness;
She was a Princess; that still meant a bit.
Her father might scold, or he might praise her courage
For all she had done; one could never be sure,
But mattered it really so much, after all?
Whichever he chose, naught would change in the main.
Sarah came to the town on her silent cat’s feet,
Took her path to the quay and soon found her good ship,
Bound for Santander by way of grey Brest.
From thence would she follow the vale of Elorn,
To the high rocky fastness her father had built,
In the side of a peak in les Montagnes d’Arreé.
While the sailors cast off and the land dropped away,

She stood on the deck looking back at Gwynedd,
And all it contained, and all she had been.
The breeze blew her hair in a cloud of pale red,
And the bloom she'd forgotten fell down from her ear.
It lay on the deck for a moment in time,
An out-of-place prettiness already near fading.
She held back at first, then took it in hand,
And thoughtfully drew in the scent of past sweetness.
She lingered above till the coast slipped astern,
Then, holding her blossom, at last turned away.

Canto V

He listened a while till the sound of her running,
Faded away in the afternoon quiet,
And all the bright world was left breathless and waiting,
For what should come next, which naught could reveal.
A late singing robin called out from above,
Then hushed as if thinking of Autumn so near.
The sun went on shining, wild roses growing,
Aeron still chattered nonsensical tunes,
While Guillaume could do nothing but inwardly scream,
Or chase her, or weep, and he knew none would help.
He fell to his knees for a prayer forlorn,
The worn mountain stones digging harsh in his legs,
But he paid them no mind with his sorrow so fresh.
The old oak washed him with comforting shade,
Caressing his brow like a cooling wet cloth,
While the wind on the water sang prettily on,
Of things he knew not; cared no more to imagine.
He rose from the ground with a shuddering sigh,
Looked longingly westward, then turned slow away.
A rain cold and gray began to fall from the sky,
Though the day had seemed fair just a little before.
With his fists clenched in balls till his fingernails hurt,
He climbed the long vale toward the ancient grey hills,
Till it closed up about him like wrinkled rock hands,
And he reached a high cliff where the Aeron fell down,
In a thunder of spray from the rounded old crags.
The high-soaring walls formed a chancel of green,
A granite cathedral more lovely than marble,
Fluted with water-shapes, carved organ pipe-stones,
Half-melted faces of monsters and men.
He could go on no farther and halted a bit,
To think what to do, but naught came to mind.
Algae-strewn boulders lolled drunkenly round,
Near sunken in foam as it swirled from the falls,
And to one of these couches Guillaume at last moved.
Leaping nimble and fearless by broken-up rills,
Which raged underfoot like a rabid white bear,
He gained a great boulder and lay on his side,
Looking down at the water reflecting the sky,
And felt the wet stone seeping cold in his bones.
Wind whipped the spray in a fine misty quilt,
That fell on his face like the summertime dew.
He took a deep breath, scenting earth and wet wood,

From the rain and the spray that thin-coated his throat.
The thread of a song flowed clean through his head,
And a sweet tuneless melody spilled from his lips,
Half-remembered from childhood in distant Anjou,
Half sprung from the seed of his own dreamer's mind.
He tinkered a while till the work pleased his ear,
And then sang aloud by the roar of the falls.

*Les fleurs sont sauvage, et rouge dans la pluie,
Mais belle, quand le monde est sombre et gris,*

*Leur beauté je tenis serré à mon coeur,
Ici dans la pluie sans la dame qui j'adore.*

*Et je chante à moi-même dans ce pays-ci lointain,
Touchant toi, la belle fille avec mon coeur dans sa main,*

*C'est dur, et mes yeux bleus sont gris comme la pluie,
Qui tombe froid et triste dans ce pays désolé,*

*Ah oyez, ma chère, mon coeur est cassé!
Mais je t'aimerai vraiment pour jamais et jamais. . .⁵*

He faded to tremolo, faded away,
Fell silent and wept on the stone in the stream,
But quietly still, for he hated to cry.
There was no one to hear in the Cambrian wilds,
But that was no reason to lose self-control.
At length he arose to retrace his goat's path,
Through the rocky fall pool to the carven rock bank.
He reached it in safety and followed the trail,
Through the mossy beech wood of the green Aeron vale,
Till he reached the old oak tree, rustling with pity.
He passed without stopping the patch of wild roses;
The torn-away stem of the flower he'd picked,
Looked reproachfully up with a beaded sap eye.
He couldn't look back; it had been such a waste.
He drew near the log where scant hours past,
He'd spoken with Sarah of happiness' ways;
Now he wondered if really he'd been such a fool.
Was she right after all? If so, what despair!
He kicked the log viciously, hurt his big toe,
Cursed and then prayed for forgiveness at once.
Then he limped down the valley to Aberyst-wyth,
Where his own ship awaited, he knew all too well.
Must needs he go to Le Havre, he supposed,
Though he hated that place, with its thieving and filth.
From thence to Anjou it was not very far,
And what then? He wondered, but cared not to ponder.
His father would surely have something in mind;
Boring at best, and most likely distasteful.
Five years in Gwynedd had turned out so, at least.
*Ah, that isn't true, he thought with regret;
It was worth every moment I spent with the maiden.
"Whichever way thou goest, may Fortune thence follow!"*
He called to her silently, quoting old Virgil.

He thought she'd approve that, if ever she knew.
Fitting it seemed, this farewell *ex post facto*.⁶
He boarded his ship, shook the dirt from his boots,
And never looked back, except in his dreams,
Till the moment he'd meet his fair maiden again.

Canto VI

She landed in Brest on a cool autumn day,
While the ocean lay brooding and stormy beneath;
Reflecting the state of her mind, perchance.
So she liked to imagine, poet she was.
Bretagne seemed no different than home that day,
And she thanked God for that. . . a little, at least.
She knew she could send for a guard any moment,
Arrive in Caer Lache with comfort and pomp,
Be welcomed with love as the prodigal child,
But she wished not to do this; it rankled her freedom.
She was a Princess, and *ought* to be free.
Then she thought of the sight she must make at that moment,
Two months in one garment, all sea-worn and penniless;
Ragged and dirty she stood on the wharf,
Like a kitchen-work drudge in her Lady's old gown.
She laughed at the image with humorous rue;
How silly it was, to care for such things!
She'd had time to reflect on the long ocean trip,
Alone with her thoughts and the words of Guillaume,
And decided (perhaps) life might not be so grim.
Not always, in all; just more often than not.
She thought she could live on the rarities now.
She touched the wild rose that lay deep in her pocket,
Feeling the texture of velvety spring,
And thought, *Yes, perhaps; at least I have this*.
She wished she'd not run quite as soon as she had;
It was almost a reflex she almost regretted.
Not quite, for she still had no faith in such love
As he proffered to give, though he shook her disbelief.
Now he was gone it was safe to regret,
And cherish the moments the flower kept fresh.
She would never forget him, she promised herself,
And would warm the cold nights by the light of her memory.
She wished he could know this, but dared not to tell.
The gravelly road led her straight through the town,
And she left without caring for aught she had seen.
It was hasty and new, hardly better than hovels,
Thrown up by the refugees fleeing the storm,
And swelling each day with fresh boats from Gwynedd.
She could blend in and vanish, if not for her plaids,
But those were so ragged the pattern was blurred.
She hoped that were true; then they'd leave her alone.
The country was crawling with farmers and guards;
There was so much to do in this wilderness land!
And no one paid heed to a ragged young girl;
There were too many like her to worry for one.
She followed the road by the banks of Elorn,
As it climbed through the mountains so much like her own,

And at length did arrive at the gates of Caer Lache,
Where a soldier she recognized called her by name.
The castle entire poured out on the green,
To rejoice in the safety of one they'd thought dead,
And at last came Meriadoc, ancient and hale,
To bestow his bright smile on the daughter he loved.
"Ah, my dear child, and where hast thou been!"
He cried in a voice that did boom off the fells,
Then he swept her up high with a hug like a bear's.
He released her at last and the whole Caer fell silent,
While Sarah related the tale of her deeds.
Of Guillaume she spoke not, for that was her treasure;
A secret she guarded with jealousy deep.
When she finished with speaking Meriadoc cried,
"Ah, my fair daughter, thou'rt truly my child!"
And the crowd roared approval that meant not a thing.
You know not the half of it, Sarah did think,
And smiled with her secret that no one could guess.
Then Meriadoc led all the court to the hall,
And commanded a feast to be set on the board,
In honor of Sarah, the bravest of Celts.
She was clothed in fresh dresses and jewelry bright;
Her long hair she brushed till it shone in the torches,
And she danced in the ballroom the waltzes and reels,
She'd learned in Caer Roderick's ancient stone halls.
The floor was a swirling of color and light,
A bed of bright flowers in form of the dancers,
Who laughed in high spirits to kiss her soft hand.
She danced for them all with a flush on her cheeks,
Till it seemed the whole world had its eyes on her back,
And the music poured through her like rivers of song,
That flowed in her body and spirit with love,
And the party would last till Eternity came,
While she danced through the night with her dearly Beloved.

But he was not there.

She stopped with a jerk as the thought grabbed her breath.
The party went on in its colorful loveliness,
Fragrant with sachets of roses and tea,
But Sarah walked slowly to stand by the wall,
And sit on a chair where her watered silk dress,
Fell down in soft folds like a stream to the floor.
The dancers could see her, and worried, she knew;
She would ruin the party for all if she stayed,
So she slipped from the room with a whisper of silk,
And found the thin stair that did climb to the tower.
There did she sit in the deep autumn dark,
Where none could behold her save mountains and stars.
She looked to the north where the sea stretched away,
In a shimmer of blue toward the Cambrian coast,
Where Guillaume still remained, perhaps; she knew not.
She never had asked, and now 'twas too late.
She cast down her face and then wept in the dark.
And she climbed the high tower every morning and eve,
To look out and long till her hope crumbled down,

But no one did come, or behold her alone,
Till Winter swept down on the hills of Bretagne,
And the mountains were coated with sheets of blue ice.
The days stretched as long as a wool spindle-thread,
And there she remained (so she thought), for all time.

Canto VII

But Fate is a mistress who plays many cards,
And Love is the master of all he surveys.
Though Sarah knew not that Guillaume loved her still,
And he dared not to hope that her heart might have changed,
Yet they both lived in love unbroken and sure,
Till at last he could bear it no longer.
So Guillaume did set out on an icy cold day,
In the depths of December when all things lay still,
Asleep under frost till the new year should come.
And he rode from Anjou to the hills of Bretagne,
Forsaken and empty of all men and beasts.
Long did he search for the maiden he loved,
For he thought in his heart he might ask just once more,
For her love and her hand, if her father approved.
And therefore he rode through the cold and the dark,
For many a day, till he almost despaired.
But then on the eve of Midwinter's Day,
He crossed the chill stream of the River Elorn,
And climbed a tall hill enshrouded with snow.
From the summit he looked to the north far away,
And beheld there a tower that stood tall and proud,
And lights and warm fire in the keep down below.
Guillaume was sore tired and chilled to the marrow,
And welcomed the sight of the castle right gladly,
Thinking at first he would ask there for shelter,
And room for the night, till morning should come.
For a chill salt fog crept close on his heels
Up the dark narrow vale from the cold grey sea,
Bright where the moon glinted soft on its edge,
And soon all things would be wrapped in its folds.
But then he espied a small figure alone,
Atop the tall tower neath the bright silver moon.
He knew it was Sarah the instant he saw,
And his heart beat so fast it was like unto bursting.
Then he spurred his tired horse to a gallop downhill,
And he came to the keep of Meriadoc quickly.
The guards let him in, a lone man and his horse,
And he left his bay charger in care of the ostler.
Then he ran to the hall where he found an old woman
And begged of her quickly to know how he might
Find the stairs to the tower before night fell at last.
A quizzical look did she give him indeed,
But she asked him no questions, and told him the way.
Then Guillaume climbed the steps to the platform above,
And found the door open with snow drifting in.
He crept to the opening quiet and slow,
Lest he startle the one who stood gazing alone.
For he heard the soft words of a half-uttered prayer,
And his name he heard whispered in longing.

Then the Prince of Anjou forsook all his caution,
Still sodden and cold from the fog and the snow,
And entered the tour where the Celt maiden stood,
And called out her name in great joy.
Then Sarah looked back, and their gaze met at last,
And for long neither one said a word.
Then he took her pale hand, and she turned up her face,
And they kissed by the light of the moon on the snow.
Now all has been said of Guillaume of Anjou,
And of Sarah Cymru, his Celt maiden bride,
Who loved long ago when the world was yet young,
In the snow-shrouded hills of distant Bretagne.

*She stood on a tour in les Montagnes d'Arrée,
With snow in her hair and the ice at her feet,
Gazing through tears to the north over sea,
In the Celtic-plaid robes of a Princess Gwynedd.*

*She stood all alone in the evening to cry,
Where the moon on the drifts was as blue as her eyes,
Reflecting the winter that filled her inside,
And the midnight snow fell soft on her head.*

*She stood on her tour in les Montagnes d'Arrée,
As the bright salt fog rolled in from the sea,
And shrouded her longing so fully that she
Stood crushing her nails in her palms till they bled.*

*And she whispered a prayer with frost at her lips,
While the blood on her fingers trickled to drip,
And freeze on the stones like icicle chips,
But none could attend to the words that she said.*

*She stood in the wilderness aching alone,
With only the sighs of les Rapides d'Elorn,
To sing Brython songs for a maiden forlorn,
Whose heart still abode in the airs of Clwyd.*

*She stood on her tour in les Montagnes d'Arrée,
With snow in her hair her prayers to speak,
But none could have listened, for Winter was deep,
And even the wind on the summits lay dead.*

*But I know the words that she whispered that night,
In the fog and the darkness without any light,
And I prayed for the love that I saw in her eyes,
For all that it meant, and to all it has led,*

*Since that midwinter's night in les Montagnes d'Arrée,
When she whispered her prayers, unknowing, to me,
And turned from her gazing at long last to see,
The one who heard all, on that night in Bretagne.*

French Translation Notes:

1: “I adore thee, my love and my life”

2: “My dear”

3: “If you wish, dearest one”

4: “Ah, I wish you great joy, my son!
Listen, therefore, while I sing of wisdom;
Love and life and your dreams and the Truth,
Only these are worthy to love in the end:
When life is easy, let the good times roll!
Remember true love can never die.”

5: “The flowers are wild, and red in the rain,
But beautiful, when the world is dreary and gray.
I clasp their beauty tightly to my heart,
Here in the rain without the lady I love.
And I sing to myself in this far distant land,
Of you, the beautiful girl with my heart in her hand.
It’s hard, and my blue eyes are gray like the rain,
That falls cold and sorrowful in this desolate place.
Ah, hear me, my love; my heart is broken!
But I will love you truly forever and ever. . .”

6: *Ex post facto* – “After the fact”