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# Tristram and Isoult

*By*

MARTHA W. AUSTIN

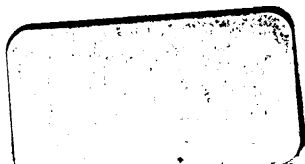
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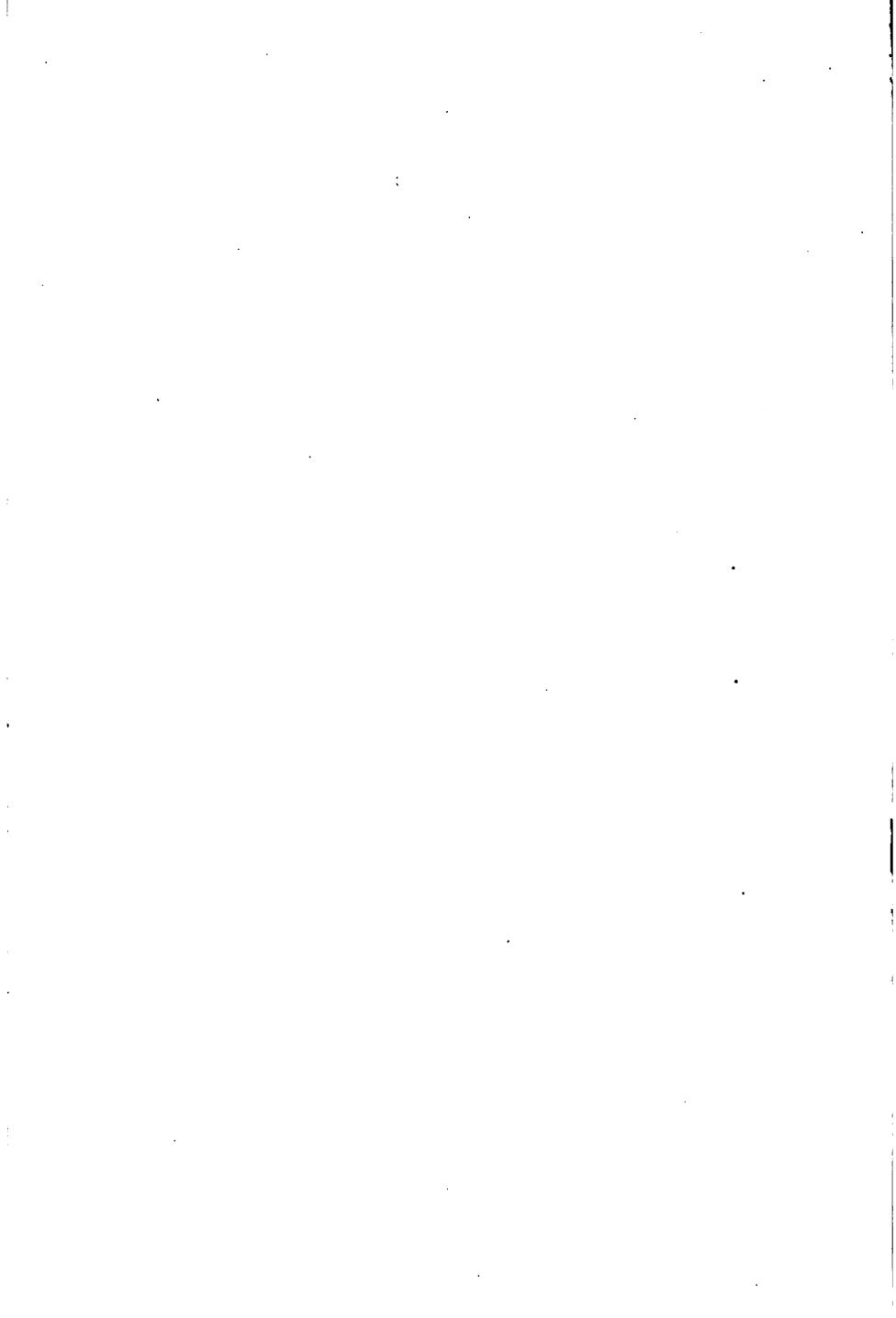
Mr Badger  
for whose sake as well as  
mine I am hoping some  
fortune for this little book.

Sincerely yours

Martine W. Austin

August 18<sup>th</sup>  
1905-

Flushing  
L. J.



# TRISTRAM & ISOULT

BY

MARTHA W. AUSTIN



BOSTON  
THE POET LORE COMPANY  
Publishers  
1905

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Printed at  
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TO  
THE MEMORY  
OF  
MY FATHER



DRAMATIS PERSONAE

KING ARTHUR OF BRITAIN  
KING MARK OF CORNWALL  
SIR LAUNCELOT DU LAC  
SIR TRISTRAM OF LYONESSE  
SIR ANDRED  
QUEEN GUINEVERE  
QUEEN ISOULT  
ISOULT BLANCHE MAINS OF BRITTANY  
BRANGWANE, BLANCHELYS, LINETTE,  
COLOMBE—

*Queen Isoult's damsels, and other  
women in waiting to the two Queens.*

Knights, pages, etc.

## FOREWORD

**A** YEAR ago when this dramatic poem was already completed, though wanting some retouching in metrical detail, I came upon the notice of a "Tristan and Isolde" by Louis Anspacher, a blank verse drama intended for stage production, about to be published by Brentano. For six months I had not the courage to order the book in question and learn if my work were superseded and superfluous. When at length I did read Mr. Anspacher's drama I found there was still a place for my own version, as the two differed almost as much as it was possible for any two treatments of the same theme to differ.

Mr. Anspacher's story is based, as the form of the names would indicate, upon the German legend, and follows somewhat the lines of Wagner's libretto. The great divergence between the German and the English variants lies with the character of *Mark*. In the one he is a mild, noble and benign old man; in the other he is a base, crafty, false-hearted and scheming coward. The conception of King Mark's character is the moral necessity that determines whether the passion of the lovers shall be guilty and secret or fearless and avowed. I have builded on Mallory, who tells how, wearied in the struggle against Mark's unremitting treachery, Sir Tristram after the vile betrayal and battle behind the chapel on the rocks, in which he came so near to losing his life, bore Queen Isoult into Launcelot's country and there lived with her in the castle of Joyous Garde.

Thus I have found in the Mallorean text my instance of Queen Isoult sending Tristram to the tourney at the great feast of Pentecost. "Sir, said Isoult, and it please you I will not be there, for through me ye be marked of many good knights, and that causeth you to have much more labour for my sake than needeth you. Then will I not be there, said Sir Tristram, but if ye be there. Not so, said Belle Isoult, for then shall I be spoken of shame among all queens and ladies of estate, for ye that are called one of the noblest knights of the world, and ye a knight of the Round Table, how may ye be missed at that feast? What shall be said among all knights? See how Sir Tristram hunteth, and hawketh and cowereth within a castle with his lady, and forsaketh your worship. Alas, shall some say, it is pity that ever he was made knight or that ever he should have the love of a lady. Also what shall queens and ladies say of me? It is pity that I have my life that I will hold so noble a knight as ye are from his worship."

There also it is written that he returned again to his own country to become its defender in its need; when Fate, who had let these two lives a brief space out of her hand, gathered their threads once more to the waiting shears.

For the rest I have used what freedom I chose, in that privilege of each to draw the thing as he sees it; for the story is legend and has not the constraining fixity of historical fact. MARTHA W. AUSTIN.

New Orleans, March 15th.

# TRISTRAM AND ISOULT

## PART I

*Scene I. (A room in Arthur's palace at Camelot. On a latticed balcony at back, some ladies of the court gaily dressed. Enter from balcony Queen Guinevere and the Queen La Belle Isoult.)*

### *Guinevere*

Ma Belle Isoult, here have you watched, unseen,  
The prowess of your knight—the brittle spears  
Went down before him as when Winter breathes  
Upon the mailèd boughs.

### *Isoult*

To see his joy  
When I have told him that I saw him joust!  
He never jousts so well, he says, as when  
Beneath my eyes, and loath was he to come  
Without me, till I urged—"The world will say  
Thou art to deeds grown dull, and dead to fame,  
Thy days all passed in harping, or the hunt,  
Or worse yet, by thy lady's side. Go—but  
I will not go with thee, for fear that thou  
Be known, and all the knights bear down at once,  
Keen for that glory, Tristram overborne."  
No sooner was he gone than we took horse,  
Brangwane, Sir Dinadin, and I; and all  
The way from Joyous Garde to Camelot  
We followed scarce a mile behind his heels!

*(Cries without on balcony, enter Brangwane.)*

*Brangwane*

The green knight rides away and none knows whither!  
The people shout for him.

*Isolt*

Ah, well I know  
He rides to Joyous Garde to seek Isolt.  
What ill may happen, if he miss me thence!  
Go, Brangwane, take this ring to Launcelot,  
Tell him that stranger knight who hath this day  
Been victor here, is Tristram, who returns  
To Joyous Garde. Bid him acquaint my lord  
I am with Guinevere.

(*Exit Brangwane.*)

*Guinevere*

Ah, my Isolt,  
How have I envied thee thy Joyous Garde,  
Where thou hast fled from Mark and all his court,  
And lived with Tristram these two happy years.  
For there thou hadst no need to hold a hand  
Curved round the flame to hide it from men's eyes.  
But ours close-covered in the dark must burn.  
And still, although the light men cannot see,  
It seems they feel the warmth. There have been  
hints—  
Always some mockery on Gawaine's lips.  
Mordred suspects. When Launcelot is here,  
I feel them watching us. I fear, Isolt.  
Suspicion grows; at times I turn, arrest  
The glance swift-travelling behind my back,

To see it on a sudden sink to still  
Submission on the floor. My ears are strained  
To whispers—all eyes are watchmen, all tongues  
Are witnesses. We princes lift tall heads,  
The winds of rumor blowing over us  
Scatter the seeds of action through the land.  
And I, rank weed, oh, what an evil crop  
Through all my lord's wide acres shall I sow!  
The woman in me was not born a queen,  
Subject to duty from her very birth!  
They should have led me straight from tutory  
Unto the throne, letting mine eyes not once  
Stray to the simple happy world without.  
I am raised up too high, and in my search  
For Nature's common level, fall too low.  
Arthur I scarce do think on as a man,  
But moulded of the essence of a King.  
I look at him and know his diadem  
Circles no thought outside its kingly round.  
My brow should match his; in its golden orb  
Strait as the forehead of some saint that shines  
Out of the altar galaxy full-sunned,  
Yet with a look of mundane matters, made  
Majestical. Alas, this crown of mine  
Sheddeth its splendor to light up my shame—  
A baleful beacon guiding every eye  
To settle on me and to eat me through—  
Through all the shams and secrets, to the soul!  
Oh, take away the ermine, tissues, pearls,  
And purples—give me back my one bare shift,  
My maid's shift of white chastity!

*Isoult*

Not so

Feel I. I put my love on like a crown,  
To wear it in men's sight. 'Tis Tristram makes

Me queen—not Mark.

*Guinevere*

Yet hadst thou wedded been  
To one like Arthur—

*Isolt*

Aye, the cause lies there.  
And hadst thou wedded been to one like Mark!  
Yet not alone in this our fates diverge—  
It was not sin, when I loved Tristram first.  
Under a false name's shield he came to us,  
Wounded and weak, to ask my mother's skill.  
I did not know him for my uncle's slayer,—  
I must have held him guiltless, had I known—  
Since he for Cornwall fought, serving his king,  
His country, even as Marhaus fought for Ireland.  
I dreamed not then what stream of kinsman's blood  
Between us flowed. While strength came slow to  
him,  
We were together. In long eventides,  
As restless little stars will drop away,  
To leave the heavens lonely to the moon,  
The thousand little cares of day slipped out  
Of sight, and left large space for love. Then he  
Would take his harp and sing me Cornish lays,  
Or tell me stories of King Arthur's court,  
And we were happy, till one dreadful day  
My mother, seeking, found his broken sword,  
And struck by the strange work and diapered  
Design, fitted into the jagged blade  
The piece that had from Marhaus' wound been tak-  
en,  
And which in hope of vengeance still she kept.  
Sudden as if the sword itself had turned,

Conscious its point upon her, passed the truth  
 Into her breast. She sped unto my father  
 Urgent of her revenge. "And knowest thou,  
 King Anguish, whom thou harbourest? This Tris-  
 tram  
 Is Cornish robber of Sir Marhaus' life.  
 He cometh here for leech-craft as the bitten  
 Desireth the dog's hair upon the bite.  
 Or as we bind the adder on the part  
 Its fang envenomed." This Brangwane o'erheard  
 And I so warned, sent Tristram safely thence.  
 Thus fell the end. Never until that hour  
 Were we aware of love. And fearfully  
 In agony our passion came to birth,  
 In throes of parting. But though Joy, its mother,  
 Died in the moment, looking on its face,  
 Love lived.

*Guinevere*

Whither fled Tristram then?

*Isolt*

To Cornwall.

*Guinevere*

Was love begun so long ago?

*Isolt*

Aye, even

So long ago. Yet ere he came again  
 Three years had passed, and then he came to take  
 His uncle Mark a bride. I—I must go,  
 Must close the breach between estrangèd kings,



And range me with the marble women who  
 Forever prop the roofs of palaces  
 With their numbed arms. I went—and all the rest  
 Is known to thee. See, Guinevere, this ring—  
 On that wild night of parting Tristram placed  
 It there. Dost wonder that my marriage band  
 Looked but a pale usurper by its side?

*Guinevere*

I wonder not. Thou hast not wronged the highest,  
 Nor daily undermined his builded hope,  
 Nor known thyself the worm that eats the heart  
 Of a whole realm, and makes it at the core  
 One rottenness! Would I were dead! I weary  
 Of love's unrest: I think of convent halls,  
 Those long, cool corridors that lead the way  
 To the low door of Death. Love has no peace.  
 I dread that Launcelot of straining up  
 May tire, to reach the joys forever out  
 Of reach, and take some nestling happiness,  
 That is not noble but is near.

*Isolt*

I, too,  
 Have had that fear, but I have lost it, now.

*Guinevere*

When hadst thou it? When Tristram to Isolt  
 Blanche Mains of Brittany, was wed?

*Isolt*

Aye, then,  
 The bitterness of then! I hated him.

And Oh, to hate what thou hast loved! To touch  
Some flower-thought thou hast been wont to wear  
Upon thy breast, and feel instead the bee!  
To wander from the garden of old hours  
Shut out, and see a face, a woman's face,  
Look on thee from the places that were thine!  
To waken in the night and know his kiss,  
Now dry upon thy lips is fresh on hers!  
But let me not renew that ancient pang.  
All that is past—long past. And he is now  
The surelier—surelier—mine—mine—mine!

*Guinevere*

King Howell made that marriage. But, Isolt,  
There is another thief, worse than sweet eyes  
For in the end he steals the sweet eyes too,  
And that is Time—dull Time—I dread that love  
Shall age,—that its gray ghost with gibbering lips,  
Too pale for kisses, shall walk in the room  
Of this bright vision with the sun-gold hair.  
Then will regret be deeper than remorse  
Is with me now. For if I fear to keep  
This love of Launcelot's, I fear to lose  
It more. The faultless goodness of the King  
Sometimes the chief of my reproach, again  
Is my guilt's plea. Though great in our regard,  
Goodness fills not the place of love. Had I  
But met my Arthur ere he was the king,  
All had been changed, perchance. Could he have  
been

My lover for a little while, not first  
And last the full-blown husband! Would we wish  
The wide, unfolded green and drowsy peace  
Of a midsummer's day, unless there came,  
Fore-running sharpness of keen April's joy.  
And what would be the dawn, were there no flush,

No faint, cold fears, and tremblings of the earth,  
 No wet of tears upon her virgin face?  
 (*Enter Tristram.*)

*Tristram*

Pardon, this is the rash, emboldened man  
 Who stumbles on the counsel of two Queens,—  
 But Launcelot rode after me in haste  
 With word I must come back— She waited here  
 Whose eyes would know me when I should be hid  
 From God on High.

*Guinevere*

And thou wouldst ride away  
 And not divulge thee even to Launcelot's self?  
 Oh Truant! Is it then Sir Tristram's use  
 To fight and flee? Hast thou yet seen the King?

*Tristram*

Madam, not yet, but I will go to him.  
 He hath had news that gravely doth concern  
 Myself, and Launcelot saith he had a mind  
 To send to Joyous Garde and summon me.

*Guinevere*

I will go say thou'lt shortly come to him.  
 Construe meanwhile my welcome not amiss,  
 If I should leave thee with this lady here  
 Awhile. Methinks you will not find yourselves  
 At loss for speech.

(*Exit Guinevere.*)

*Isoult*

Tristram!

*Tristram*

*(Catching her in his arms)*. Isoult! Isoult!  
To think that thou wast here and saw it all!  
This was thy plan!

*Isoult*

We followed on thy trail,  
Brangwane and I. Dinadan rode with us.  
I must be here to take thee in my arms,  
The glow still on thee, ere the glory fade,  
Or thou cool from the anvil of the strife  
Where thou wast hammered hot with many blows,  
While I, the woman, catch reflected fire  
As doth some little cloud that flieth far  
Upon the outer edges of the storm.  
Would it were so! I but a cloud to bear  
High in the heavens and in all men's sight  
Thy glory burning on my brow, my feet,  
My breast!

*Tristram*

The wish is needless, thou shalt bear  
It on thy bosom as thou art. Thus! Thus!  
*(He throws the ruby carcanet over her neck)*.

*Isoult*

The carcanet! The carcanet! The prize,  
The tourney's prize! And won by thee!

*Tristram*

For thee!

And won

*Isoult*

Her diamonds now.

I shall not envy Guinevere

*Tristram*

Her jewels?

Envy! Thou enviest

*Isoult*

Nay, but every diamond there  
 Stands for a joust and flashes forth the fame  
 Of Launcelot.

*Tristram*

Her diamonds suit well  
 That April Queen. Her variable mood  
 Doth come and go in their illumined depths.  
 Their purity troubled with changeful fire,  
 Symbols the shaken soul of Guinevere.  
 But these are thine, these flaming, vermeil drops—

*Isoult*

Heart-shaped, heart-colored,—'tis the rosary  
 Of loving hearts, whereon we'll tell the names  
 Of those who for love's sake have greatly lived  
 And died. This Hero's heart, and this the heart  
 Of that Egyptian Queen—

*Tristram*

This of Isoult—

*Isoult*

And this of Guinevere. You know her not  
How she loves Launcelot.

*Tristram*

Half heartedly—

Queen first and lover last. April is she,  
A pettish April—thou art Autumn ripe,  
The glooming Autumn of old forests dark—  
Autumn that loves on in the grasp of death,  
And gives herself unto the asking winds.  
Something of sadness and of fear is wrought  
In with thy spell. I knew thee fatal when  
I saw thee first. Thy deep eyes were the gates  
To mystery opening back; thy whiteness shone  
And glimmered as it belonged to dim sea-depths;  
And shadow undispeled dwelt on thy hair.  
Thy spirit stirred me like a wind that passed—  
Thy beauty tossed me with a wild unrest.  
Thou art a doom half dread,—yet, Oh, my Queen,  
A thousand lilies pale and opening buds  
Of maids, would I forego for one full breath  
Of thee, thou passion-flower of Love!

*Isoult*

Tell me,

Is it not worth all pain that we have known?

*Tristram*

And all that is to come.

*Isolt*

What meanest thou?  
 What pain? What is to come? Ah, thou wilt go  
 Upon this quest, this new quest of the Grail?

*Tristram*

That is for Galahad and the rest, but I  
 Have found my Grail; the cup from Brangwane's  
 breast  
 We took upon the ship, after the storm  
 That night—I drank of it, and in mine ears  
 A strain of music, and through all my blood  
 The splendor streamed.

*Isolt*

Oh, but not then, not then,  
 For the first time! You loved me long before.

*Tristram*

I loved thee 'neath the king thy father's roof,  
 That day, thou didst with healing fingers search  
 My wound. My life was dying in dull smoke  
 And fever-fume of dreams, when in the dimness  
 Thy face first bent on me, breathed on the spark,  
 And it sprang up and flowered in live flame.

*Isolt*

Oh, and that night of Mark's great hunt when thou

Hadst stolen back. The hoary-forest sprang  
 Above our heads; its arches hollowed out  
 Of darkness;—faint we heard the sobbing horns  
 As moonlight weave their cold thin silver through  
 The shades—the hunt of life passed by—far, like  
 A dream—the baying pack of tongues—the stroke  
 Of swift-struck death—what were they then to us?  
 Spectral the clamorous chase of all the world  
 Unreal life—unreal death—to us  
 Who had found love!

*Tristram*

To us who have found love!

*Isolt*

Put me not off, not even with words like these,  
 What fresh pain waits for us?

*Tristram*

If we must part?

*Isolt*

Must part? Why, what can part us now?

*Tristram*

Sends word. Sessions invades the realm, whom  
 Cornwall  
 Mark  
 Can ill afford to match, and Arthur fears—

*Isolt*

Arthur! 'Tis Arthur, then, sets thee this task!



*Tristram*

It is my native land; the charge devolves  
On me alone.

*Isolt*

Then I foresee the end—  
The end of all—all happiness, all peace.  
No thought for me! Arthur has but to speak  
Some bloodless sermon; for the cold king lets  
A many-rooted duty overrun  
His soul, as ivy o'erruns marble—  
(*Re-enter Guinevere followed by Arthur and Launcelot.*)

*Guinevere*

Tristram,  
The king, eager to praise thy lady's act,  
No longer would delay.

*King Arthur.*

Madam, I hear  
How love hath shielded him. Indeed 'twere best  
He were not known,—our knights grow envious;  
It is too much—so great a fortune both  
In love and war. The chiefest fortune this,  
That when of courage confident that needs  
No proof, he would have stayed from these last  
jousts,  
Isolt, for honor jealous, sent him hither.  
Was not this well done, Launcelot?

*Launcelot*

My liege,

Most nobly done.

*King Arthur*

The love that unto duty—

*Isolt*

To what new duty must love yield? I see  
Behind thy words' cautious, contrived screen,  
Some lurking motive stand.

*King Arthur*

Hath Tristram told

Thee then?

*Isolt*

Of what?

*Arthur*

Of peril imminent

To Cornwall and King Mark.

*Isolt*

'Tis like that I  
Should care for peril to King Mark, himself  
The very worst of perils unto me.

*Arthur*

To Cornwall then.

*Isoult*

And Cornwall a huge trap  
 Ready to spring on me; it's only good,  
 That the green Irish sea washes its shores.

*Arthur*

'Tis Tristram's land; to him all Cornwall looks.  
 His to redeem this canker of his race,  
 From the same blood—poison and antidote.

*Launcelot*

His Uncle Mark already asks his aid,  
 The fox begins to need the lion's paw.

*Isoult*

And art thou too against me, Launcelot?

*Launcelot*

Never, my Queen—

*Arthur*

Who is against La Belle  
 Isoult, unless it be herself? The self,  
 For honor eager to a tourney's gain,  
 Would have him now a recreant to his king?  
 And to his country false? I know that Mark  
 Hath plotted, prisoned, and betrayed—I know  
 His guile—yet in these tangled lives we lead  
 It sometimes happens public faith goes hand  
 In hand with private feud. So at this hour.

*Tristram*

Listen, Isoult—

*Isoult*

I will not hear thee plead  
With them, opposing me!

*Arthur*

Whilst he is gone,  
At Camelot remain with Guinevere.

*Guinevere*

Yes, stay with me.

*Isoult*

And he with Mark? No, no—  
I must be there to watch. Always the going,—  
Forever do I flutter on as doth  
A bird in fear of him that followeth.  
Oh, to drop down upon some spot of shelter  
And fold the wings. Sir Launcelot—

*Launcelot*

Madam?

*Isoult*

For Joyous Garde I give thee many thanks;  
I have been happy there.

*Launcelot*

And will return

To happiness again.

*Isoult*

To Joyous Garde

No more. Not joy shall guard me after this,  
 But doubt and dread shall keep unwearied ward  
 The joy no more was mine than was the castle,  
 I was the guest of Joy, and here I take  
 My leave. Anguish of Ireland is my father,  
 Tristram my love—I that am born of Anguish,  
 And wedded unto Sorrow, may not dwell  
 With Joy. Launcelot, if passing the great hall  
 Some night when the full moon doth mist her light  
 Down through the mullion to the floor, and makes  
 All dim as dreams; if thou, I say, shouldst see  
 Two figures, gray and carven as of stone,  
 He leaning on a harp, she on his breast,  
 And at their feet a hound that couches stark  
 And still—the moonlight weaves this vision; wipe  
 It from thine eyes: and if a strain should haunt  
 Thee like a harp—the wind alone thou hearest;  
 For when I die my spirit shall set up  
 Its ghostly monument forever, there,  
 At Joyous Garde—at Joyous Garde! Farewell.  
 (*Exit Isoult.*)

## PART II

*Scene I. (A tower of King Mark's castle of Tintagil. A wide view of river, valley, and distant sea. Queen Isoult sitting at tambour frame, her women at work around her—all except Blanchelys, who leans over the low parapet.)*

*Blanchelys*

Ah, see the circling swallows, how they play—  
Swim round and round the tower in the air,  
Until my head swims, too, ~~merely~~ *to watch their games*

*Linette*

That is because thou art so feather-brained.

*Blanchelys*

What color! Ah, what color! purple backs  
Like to the sea, breasts tawny as sea-sands.  
~~How~~ Their forked tails like scissors shear the air!  
They chase the evening gnats—Oh Swallow, Swallow,  
I'd live forever in the sea and sky  
If I were thou, and never drop to earth.

*Isoult*

Sea-Swallow was the name of that good ship  
On which we sailed from Ireland hither.

*Linette*

When  
Sir Tristram brought you home? Tell us the story,

The story of the voyage and the storm.

*Isoult*

No, no, my heart is heavy, 'tis the hour  
That I was wont to wait, at Joyous Garde,  
His weary coming home from the long hunt.  
At sunset would I mount the castle wall,  
And set the bugle to my lips, and hear  
Its voice forlornly wander, silver-sad,  
Like a blown question seeking in the wood  
'Till far away, from out the golden west  
Came answer—Tristram's horn.

*Blanchelys*

Oh, those old days  
At Joyous Garde—Would now that we were there!

*Isoult*

Name them no more, Blanchelys, their memory  
Strikes me too deep.

*Brangwane*

'Tis time Sir Tristram came.  
We know the battle hath been fought and won,  
And Sessions sent to mark submission here,  
And to King Mark swear oath of fealty.

*Colombe*

He little thought when Cornwall he invaded,  
Tristram of Lyonesse would take the field.  
(*Blanchelys who has meanwhile gone out, returns.*)

*Blanchelys*

Madam, the King comes hither; he would speak  
With you.

*Isoult*

Tell him that he may come, Blanchelys.  
(*She signs to her women to withdraw. Enter King Mark*).

*Mark*

My feet a little stumbled at this stair  
So seldom worn with them. You find the air  
Here pure—the prospect broad? Does any come  
Speeding across the plain, he is from these  
High towers visible, and thou canst watch  
The winking speck grow to the mailèd man.  
(*Isoult makes no answer; the king with a bitter smile*).

For such rewarding sight, even now no doubt  
We wait. Be comforted, thou hast not long,  
Tristram returns to-day.

*Isoult*

Aye, so I know.

*Mark (bitterly)*

I know thou knowest. Did I lack the news,  
For its procurance I should send to thee.  
'Twas usher to thy presence, that was all,  
To smile me into favor with its use.  
No phrase so fair that it may stand my friend,  
For still my tongue must make its music rough.



Who hath more cause for gladness than ourself,  
Is not our nephew come victorious home,  
And from our quarrel?

*Isolt*

True, he hath once more  
Redeemed thy realm. Three times for Cornwall  
hath  
He fought—with Marhaus first, and out of that  
Grew all our story—next—

*Mark (interrupting)*

He is the sword  
I draw against my foes. I need his edge,  
Yet grudge its dazzle in men's eyes. 'Tis well  
To have him where my hand can reach him down,  
But not hooked to my side and clanging round  
My step.

*Isolt*

You love not ringing souls that make  
Clear, warlike music; but some dagger's stealth  
That slips in silence from his sheath, and back,  
To muffle murder in a velvet cloak.  
If Tristram's presence irk thee, then unloose  
The silver cord that holds him to thy side.

*Mark*

The silver chord unloose—that were thyself—  
Not so the Psalmist meant to use the words.  
How if I take his meaning, and unloose  
The twisted strands of being—wouldst thou part  
With life?

*Isoult*

It were a way to part with thee.

*Mark*

Nay, I must follow soon, or else thy hell  
Were not complete.

*Isoult*

We shall not meet in Hell.  
Where the lean flame drips red along its blade  
As if with blood, thou scarcely shalt be found.  
The coward hath a hell unto himself,  
Where very fire looks white and licks blue lips,  
Crouches and creeps and cowers on the ground;  
Threatens the death it dare not deal, and burns  
Not, though it blackeneth.

*Mark*

If that be so,  
Isoult, and we meet not in Hell, I'll keep  
Thee longer on this earth; here shalt thou sit  
In this same tower thou lovest, day by day,  
And hold thy vigil o'er the vacant plain  
For one banished in far off Brittany.

*Isoult*

Banished! It is so old a tale. Hast thou  
Forgot the time of his first banishment,  
When thy knights rose and forced thee bring him  
back?

*Mark*

Now hath he fewer friends; Lamorak is dead,  
Palomides follows the Questing Beast,  
Gareth is gone on distant vow.

*Isoult*

Yet Arthur,  
The first of friends and fearless king, remains.

*Mark*

Not strange that he should stir in each a cause,  
The king who keepeth Launcelot in hall.  
Nor it is strange that she, the crownèd Lie,  
Should plead for thee.

*Isoult*

~~What~~ *What*

~~What~~ mean you, Guinevere?

*Mark*

'Tis known the Queen and Launcelot live in sin,  
Yet has she shame to hide it; thou dost flaunt  
Thy guilt. Did'st thou not send to her this word—  
"There be four lovers in the world—Launcelot  
And Guinevere and Tristram and Isoult?"

*Isoult*

"There be four lovers in the world—Launcelot  
And Guinevere and Tristram and Isoult!"  
Aye, true, by Lamorak I sent. How heard'st  
Thou that? Thy spies are everywhere—what room  
Is left in thee for thine own thoughts, that art  
So keen for those of other men? All eye

And ear! Well, let it be thy part to lie,  
 Watch dog, and look and listen with ears pricked  
 Outside Love's chamber door.

*Mark*

Beware, the dog  
 Feigns sleep, and thou wilt feel his teeth, one day.

*Isolt*

I care not. I have lost the dread of death;  
 I walk upon its brink and am not dizzied.  
 I am so high I stand on mountain tops  
 And see Death's river in the Vale of Life  
 Far at my feet in silver quiet shine.  
 Here on love's height it seems that if I die  
 I shall not taste the coldness of the stream,  
 I shall but step into a nearer glory.  
 Oh, Mark, how shouldst thou know what love like  
 ours  
 Can be. Man thinks to mate, and in the first  
 Fair face his wish is met. The maid that lifts  
 Meek eyes to some strong knight fresh from the lists  
 And shining in his steel, will see fulfilled  
 Her convent dream. But not like these we love.  
 Oh, not like these! On summer evenings thou  
 Hast seen a meteor fall. We have a belief  
 'Tis then a soul is born—such souls as mine  
 And his, brands from the burning caught, and flung  
 All burning from the hand of God. For us  
 There was not choice from many loves, but one—  
 Each unto each, although the world be set  
 Blazing upon our track!

*Mark*

Oh rare, rare souls!

*Isoult*

Aye, rare is he despite thy sneer. And this  
 Doth most beget thy hate. But wherefore, Mark?  
 Were there no Tristram wouldst thou be the first?  
 When lions perish doth the snake come next?

*Mark*

Snake? Darest thou?

*Isoult*

'Tis so men speak of thee,  
 And in the face of his great openness  
 Thy cunning shows, as snake-slime in the sun.

*Mark*

Too far, at last thou'rt gone too far, I think!  
 So safe in thy great beauty dost thou feel—  
 No man would dare to touch the perfect flesh—  
 And yet I hate thy beauty—hate, hate, hate  
*(He seizes her by the wrists, shaking her as he utters these words full of compressed fury).*  
 Thy beauty and his strength. I'll tear this curtain  
 Of flesh God hangs before thy soul to cheat  
 Men's eyes. I'll strip thee of this insolence.  
 I hate thy moonlight face, thy midnight hair,  
 Thy red, red lips that look as if they had  
 Not yet had time to pale since his last kiss.  
*(He forces her slowly back towards the parapet).*

*Isoult*

I do not fear thee— No, I do not fear.

Thou canst not make me fear. Take thy hands off!

*Mark*

This flesh thou never givest me to touch  
 By night nor day, I have it now; I hold  
 It in my clutch—the wan-white skin. The blood  
 Sits throned in purple at thy heart and will  
 Not come and go at bidding as it doth  
 In meaner veins. White, white, like purity  
 Proclaimed. Look down—think what a bleeding  
 pulp

Would lie upon those stones! Art thou upon  
 The verge of death undizzied still?

*(A noise unheeded by Mark is heard in the court-  
 yard below).*

Where is  
 Thy Tristram now? Cry out and he will hear—  
 Wilt thou not cry? Not even on God's help?

*(Isoult hangs upon the edge without sound or sign.  
 She smiles into his face).*

Thou wouldst look up out of the flames of Hell  
 And smile defiance in the face of God.  
 Methinks I see thee there like a tall lily  
 Midst of a bed of red—or like a white,  
 Indomitable star, that in the fierce  
 And burning glory of the West shows through  
 Unquenched.

*(Releases her)*

There! I release thee. I will wait—  
 For God will not endure a pride that shakes  
 His own Omnipotence. I cannot teach  
 Thee fear.

*Isoult*

Not though thou lessonest in what

Thou hast been mastered well. Was it thy thought  
 Thou couldst beget in me a whimpering fear,  
 A puling, crying fear—the child of thee —  
 White-livered, watery-veined? Thy hands have  
     touched  
 My throat and left disgust, or I could laugh.

*Brangwane (rushing in).*

Madam Isoult, dear lady—he is come.

*Isoult*

Tristram? Hath Tristram come?

*Brangwane.*

This moment.

*Mark*

Ha!

Yet had he been too late.

*Isoult*

Go bring him here.  
*(Mark goes out).*

Still am I standing, though I swayed but now  
 Within the circle of enarming death  
 Like poppies in the crescent of the scythe.  
 Oh, but I know that soon, soon must he mow  
 Us down. It cannot last long. We have lived.  
 Let it come when it will. I feel the event  
 Now set in motion moving toward me slow.  
 I wait for it, and cannot be surprised.

## PART II

*Scene II. (The great hall in the palace of Tintagil. A banqueting table in the midst—at one side a raised dais with two throne chairs under canopy. On the right at foot of throne is another chair, garlanded with green. Garlands of flowers are twined in the railing of the gallery which overhangs the hall. The lintel posts, wreathed with roses, are crowned with lighted torches, and clustered torches are at intervals around the hall. Mullioned windows at back of hall and of gallery. A harper sings in the gallery).*

His falcon stoops above the wood,  
His grayhound courseth as it should,  
His hounds make music bold and clear,  
A-chasing fleet the flying deer  
His horn it hath a clarion call,  
His harp sings soft in bower and hall.

Who is he—canst thou guess?

Tristram of Lyonesse,

Tristram of Lyonesse.

His clean sword doth not gather rust,  
His lance it biteth to the dust,  
E'er ready is his restless blade,  
To draw for king and country's aid,  
And ne'er shall king or country fall,  
While still he fighteth for Cornwall.

Who doth our wrong redress?

Tristram of Lyonesse,

Tristram of Lyonesse.

*(Blanchelys, Linette, Colombe, Ettarde, and others  
busied in binding the lintel posts).*



*Blanchelys*

Do you recall, Linette, the banquets once  
 We had at Joyous Garde—where was less state,  
 But we were far more blithe of heart. Here near  
 The roof a grayness gathers o'er our heads;  
 The banner of the empire of the dark.  
 And see these tapers dim and sputtering,  
 Almost you'd think the little ghosts of moths  
 They had consumed came back and that way took  
 A faint revenge.

*Sir Andred*

Of what doth Blanchelys talk,  
 Linette?

*Linette*

Of moths we cannot see, that dull  
 The tapers.

*Sir Andred*

Ghosts of butterflies? Light talk  
 Indeed!

*Blanchelys*

I say there always seems a gloom  
 Upon this place.

*Sir Andred*

The shade of the gray Mark,  
 He hangs like fog to thicken every breath,  
 A dank rot to our lungs. Faugh, what a court!

*Colombe*

I've watched and have made sure he hates the  
 Queen;  
 But if he hate her, why must she stay here?  
 You'd think he'd wish her from his sight, and give  
 Us leave to go.

*Sir Andred*

She is the wound that itches—  
 Itches! He cannot keep his fingers off.  
 I wonder not, when I look on the Queen,—  
 To have that woman ever near, yet scorned  
 From touching her. 'Twould madden me—I could  
 Not let her live.

*Colombe*

Thou wouldst not let her live!  
 The let of that proud life could no more lie  
 With thee than now it doth with Mark. For shame!  
 To speak thus of the Queen!

*Blanchelys*

Her scorn is noble.  
 Her nature lieth open to the sun,  
 Extreme in hate and love, in hot and cold,  
 Like the unscreenèd desert of white noon  
 And icy night.

*Sir Andred*

Aye, thou art right enough.  
 Hot noon with Tristram maketh a cold night  
 For Mark.

*Linette*

I hear voices and laughter—Haste  
Make haste, Ettarde, I think they're coming now,  
Are your wreathes ready? Catch this garland's end.

*Blanchelys (tossing garland)*

And this.

*Colombe*

And this—

*Ettarde*

She will be beautiful  
Tonight, and proud.

*Linette*

And wear the carcanet  
Of rubies that Sir Tristram gave—

*Colombe*

They're here!  
(*Enter King Mark and Isoult, Tristram walking  
alone behind them followed by a train of  
knights and ladies. Mark sits on dais, Isoult  
behind him, Tristram in chair at right.*)

*Mark*

Tristram, wilt thou not let them fetch the harp  
For thee to sing. The ladies would elect  
A love-song, and the knights a battle-lay,

Perchance, or the bold music of the hunt,  
But choose thou what thou wilt.

*Tristram*

Nay, if I sing

It shall be none of these. There is a song  
Yet warming in my breast and newly made—  
A song of the rough sea. Will you hear that?  
A theme not strange to any here in old  
Tintagil, where beneath these castle walls  
The sea doth build himself a dwelling-place  
To mock our majesty. We hear the wild  
White workmen of the waves, the wind doth lash,  
Hammer the roofs and sculpture columns vast  
For him whose state is many-halled—who hath  
A thousand palaces where he may spread  
His purple on the floor and dream away  
His summer rest. Not he—he is a king  
That never taketh ease. My childhood nights  
With the great voice like an unresting God's  
Were filled—that slumbered not nor slept. If still  
I move from task to task, it is the voice  
I think, urging me on. Some sleepless salt  
That stings the sluggish tides within my veins.  
This is the song.

(*He sings*).

As some sea-mew that 's blown  
By the wild gust alone  
From the salt strand  
Far inward o'er the land  
Goes crying in its pain  
Lamenting the waste main;  
So calls my heart in me  
Still yearning for the sea.

Give me the sea again,  
Give me the sea!

Or some white fleck of foam  
Torn from its ocean home,  
As the wave flies,  
Falls shoreward then and dies,  
Waif of the storm's free reign  
Fretting the lawless plain;  
So dies my life in me  
Set burning for the sea.  
Give me the sea again,  
Give me the sea!

*Isoult*

Give me the sea! Thou canst not ask it more  
Than I. For it was round my childhood close  
As round thine own. My land is the sea's lover  
Not fronting him with a bleak rock-bound coast  
But low and green and woman-like she lieth  
Encompassed and encircled by the main.  
In her its changeful emerald has been fixed,  
And made green constancy.

*Mark*

Dost thou not keep  
The sea in sight, likewise, in Brittany,  
Tristram?

*Tristram*

We do, my Liege.

*Mark*

'Tis fortunate.

And the word Brittany doth bring to mind  
One thing tonight is wanting to our joy;  
The hero of the feast must sit alone,  
His triumph all unshared by her who waits  
In Brittany—Isoult of the White Hands.

*Tristram*

Uncle, I wedded at her father's wish  
Isoult of Brittany. 'Twas known to him  
That on the morrow I must ride away.  
I scarce do know my wife—that love of ours  
Was as a gleam of winter sun—hath made  
No change in the white silence of her life;  
The frosty seal that locks the crystal source  
Of her young soul, is still unthawed; no wreath  
Nor garland of her virgin snow, hath yet  
As by a breath been stirred.

*Mark*

Doth she not fret?

*Tristram*

She lives in quiet. Mine were a rude life  
To share.

*Mark*

'Tis true, 'tis true—the fault is ours,  
To lay our burdens on thy back and leave  
No time of ease. Henceforward shalt thou rest.  
And since we know thou tak'st no thought for self

Nor sparest toil, but would be ever gone  
 On some hard quest, we must, under the guise  
 Of an ingratitude, hide our right wish ;  
 Command thy absence, banish to Bretagne  
 And exile thee to love ; punish with peace.  
 Those two white hands will cool with their soft  
 snow

The newer wounds—and children come to bless.  
 So now,—be witness, Friends,—Tristram from  
 Cornwall

Is banished for the term of ten round years.  
 And none shall harbour him, and none entreat  
 His stay beneath their roof, save they themselves  
 Incur like penalty. But as we part  
 In love, help me to show it this last night,  
 This night of parting fill with revel, wine,  
 (rises)

And song. Come, let us start the cup. I give  
 Ye for a pledge, Tristram of Lyonesse  
 And his Isoult—Isoult of the White Hands!

*Sir Andred*

Tristram of Lyonesse and his Isoult!

*(He lifts his goblet to the Queen. The knights and ladies who have been looking on each other with glances of surprise and consternation, all follow his example and cry "Tristram of Lyonesse and his Isoult," leaving off the words "of the White Hands," and many cups are lifted toward the Queen).*

*Tristram (rises)*

And is there none to help me thank the king?  
 His guerdon for his battles I have won,

To banish me the soil for which I fought!  
Now I have served his need he shakes me off.  
I go to Brittany—but not for peace.  
Look on this sword—this hacked, hewn warrior  
That bought the freedom from the Irish tax;  
That hath saved Cornwall from her enemies;  
Hath slain them singly one by one; or piled  
The field with mounded heaps. Now, in its prime  
Are age and rust to come on it? Is it  
In dark oblivion, in its narrow bed  
To turn and sleep? No, it hath dreamed too long  
Of glory—to the world made real that dream.  
Tristram, thou, crafty Mark, canst banish—never  
Tristram's good sword. For that can carve its  
way,  
Can split the fine hair of the law's decrees;  
Can rip thy realm in long red, running furrows  
And sow them with the white seed of the slain.  
I bear the load of Cornwall on my back  
I shake my shoulders, and thy sceptre sways.  
Thus, did I choose to pluck down what I built!  
But no, with my obedience I cement  
The structure I have raised. Sustain my work  
And set the seal of patience on the end  
Which has had force and violence for means.  
I then, obey,—I go to Brittany.  
It is not far, and soon I may return.  
But be you wise and give no cause for that!



## PART II

*Scene III. (The same hall later. The garlands are withered, the wine cups on table overturned. The only light the moonlight which streams through large windows at back. Tristram and Isult stand together at the casement and Tristram opens a lattice on the rose garden without. Beyond moonlight shining on the sea).*

*Tristram*

Look out, my Love, all night the sleepless sea  
Aching with anguish for the moon, hath tossed.  
All night desire hath burned in a white flame  
Her image in his breast. All night the wake  
Of her illusive promise on the wave  
Lay unredeemed. But yonder, now, at last  
The slow Queen cometh, stooping to his arms  
As thou to mine.

*Isult*

The torches all are quenched;  
Faded to smoke and gone. The garlands, too,  
Are drooped. Scents of dead roses haunt the air  
With perfume grown more poignant than a pain.  
Joy as it withers pierces all the sense  
With unrecoverable sweet. To-night  
I am but the stripped stalk that stands above  
The ruin of the rose.

*Tristram*

Silence—not now!  
To-morrow must we speak of banishment

And parting; not to-night—to-night we'll keep  
Perfect.

*Isoult*

Canst thou hold sorrow at arm's length?  
I cannot, Tristram. Oh, I fear, I fear!

*Tristram*

What dost thou fear?

*Isoult*

That being far away,  
Thou wilt forget.

*Tristram*

Forget! I go from thee  
Into the void of absence, like a star  
Thrust from his sphere, that spills his heart in fire  
Along the way.

*Isoult*

I stay, a rooted star,  
That burns fixed in one place. It is not all  
My fear.

*Tristram*

What other, then?

*Isolt*

That meek Isolt  
To whom thou goest—

*Tristram*

Is that doubt not laid?  
Knowledge of thee, my Queen, does put her off  
As the long, flaming sunset of the North  
Doth hold against the moon the evening sky.

*Isolt*

My very name she seemeth to usurp.

*Tristram*

Nay, is thy echo.

*Isolt*

Echo mocks me then.

*Tristram*

Thou knowest the story well. She tending me  
While I lay ailing of my wound, I called  
"Isolt," and yet again, "Isolt," as men  
Delight to get the well-belovèd name  
Even from the empty air. Until at last  
By much most vain imagining, she came  
To seem some part of thee. When thou hadst sunk  
Below the blank horizon of my life,  
Lost to mine eyes; she cheated them, as some  
Mirage—a thing of light and painted mist,  
That imaged thee.

*Isolt*

But she—doth she love thee?

*Tristram*

'Tis possible. So few men hath she seen—  
 It were not strange. At times I think—and yet  
 I cannot tell. Her soul hath built its nest  
 Like some wild sea-bird in the unclimbed cleft;  
 And there the white thing broods. But for the  
 world—

The naked rock and lone depth of green wave,  
 Depth as the depth of those sea-water eyes.

*Isolt*

I had not heard before of these strange eyes.  
 Her hands—now—Tell me, are her hands indeed  
 So beautiful?

*Tristram*

Her snowdrop hands! Isolt  
 Of the White Hands, that always idly droop,  
 Or that hang folded just below her breast.  
 Or often have I seen them lie palm laid  
 To palm, halves of a shell that hold a pearl,  
 The pale, pure pearl of Peace. And when her hands  
 Unclasp, open and flutter—then the doves  
 Of Peace are in the air. One fettered, bound  
 To me, while mine are free to swing the sword,  
 To thrust the lance, to close and crush thine own:—  
 Thy hands that are so strong, so lithe and live.  
 Thy hands—those half-blown buds upon the stalk  
 Which thy face crowneth as the perfect flower—

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Hers are but marble feebly come to life.  
 I have gone to her, when at touch of those  
 Cold finger-tips my blood was chilled, and sullen  
 Returned unto its seat. Her hands are fair,  
 Yet were they made for telling beads; to hold  
 Tapers as waxen as themselves. Thine count  
 Love's rosary and in these taper ends  
 Love's red flame burns. What tell they of the Grail?  
 An angel tall the veiled chalice bears,  
 A crimson splendor, mystic rose of light,  
 Intolerable, which men may not behold:  
 Be thou my angel of the Grail—lift thou  
 My cup of life on high—let it shine thro'  
 Thy hands, thy blessed hands, with love's intense  
 Own consecrated light—none holier—  
 While I kneel on before thee—Thus!  
 (*In the exaltation of passion he catches her hands up  
 into the attitude of the Angel of the Grail.*)

*Isolt*

Tristram!

Oh, say no more, 'tis too near blasphemy!

*Tristram*

Give me thy hands, both, both to hold! Ah, hands  
 Thrilling and pregnant with the pulse of blood  
 My kiss makes quick:—the talking blood that  
 speaks  
 From the mere finger-tips when lips are mute.

*Isolt*

Read you their message now? Not hers, Isolt  
 Of Brittany's, nor marble's self, more cold.  
 That word that lies like death upon my heart—

Is in them—that farewell. If they speak now  
It is of one last pressure—then apart,  
Apart and empty, evermore! Oh, God,  
Why hast thou made so vain the love Thou didst  
Foredoom? This was no chance—it was to be.  
Some wind of Destiny, ere we were born,  
Filled up the spirit's sail. Across the waste,  
Untraversed sea of life, on which no paths  
Are charted down, we near and nearer drew  
Unto each other. Why heed you this decree?  
He cannot fasten his weak will on us.  
We are above his bidding—Let us go!

*Tristram*

Where shall we go?

*Isoult*

Bear me to Joyous Garde  
Or some strong castle of thy holding, South.  
Once there—

*Tristram*

And undo all I came to do?  
My banishment was public,—did I fail  
In this obedience, what subject would  
Remain to Cornwall's law?

*Isoult*

Care you for that?

*Tristram*

Thou art the queenly head, Isoult, that crowns

The prow—and I the steerer of the ship;  
 Thou must *look* majesty, I keep afloat  
 The rotten realm;—else would it sink.

*Isoult*

It sink.

Then let

*Tristram*

So heedless, love?

*Isoult*

Of all but thee!  
 Thou art my law—my realm is in thy heart.

*Tristram*

Oh, silence, for thou temptest me to dream  
 Once more that younger dream which cannot be.  
 Not twice a man surprises unarmed Fate.  
 Not twice youth overrideth all the sage,  
 Calm wisdom of the world, and, sets its pulse  
 Abeating to his own hot blood's wild tune.  
 And if we came again to Joyous Garde  
 Can we be sure to find it still the spring?  
 Would not the ghosts of those dead, happy hours,  
 Make rustling Autumn round re-entering feet,  
 Though they were golden yet?

*Isoult*

The doubt reminds  
 Me of thy song. How go the words—Is't thus?  
 (*She hums*).

Life runneth forward, though too oft its face  
 It turneth back,  
 For it hath set its feet unto the race  
 Along Time's track.

No joy returneth that hath once been born,  
 Into Hope's womb;  
 No day shall live to see a second dawn,  
 Springing from gloom .

No May reneweth twice the self-same year  
 Its leafy screen,  
 Though Autumn dreameth, 'midst her gold and sere,  
 Of its young green.

The ancient paths are closed to thee and me,  
 Through joy and pain,  
 And nevermore what hath been shall it be,  
 For us again.

Then let us kiss this moment, lip and brow  
 (So brief is bliss),  
 Too soon the Never cometh, this is *Now*,  
 Then let us kiss.

*Tristram*

Then let us kiss!  
 The night grows late. Come to thy chamber, love  
 Of old hath consecrated to itself.

*Isoult*

Ah, not to-night!



*Tristram*

To-morrow must I go.

*Isoult*

I would thou wert already gone.

*Tristram*

Wherefore?

*Isoult*

Oh, I who never fear, am now afraid!  
 Lay thy hand here. All beatings of this heart  
 Are known to thee—wild captive in the keep  
 That knocks its message through the prison wall—  
 All, from its leap to meet thee, to the swift  
 Sustained pulse of passion and high hope.  
 In anger hast thou heard it beat as strong  
 As if it rained its blows upon the foe;  
 But never with this dull and failing stroke.  
 What is there in the world to work this change?  
 To work Queen Isoult's fear? All dangers that  
 Can come have I looked on. But this—it seems  
 To have no feature and no form—and yet  
 It hath presence that I feel—I feel!

*Tristram*

What dost thou dread? It were a strange new fear  
 The fear of Mark (he laughs). Leave that to him  
     whose life  
 Is one long cowardice, and we will laugh  
 At him—at fear—at fate—at Death.

*Mark*

*(As from the shadows behind he passes his sword through Tristram's back).*

Laugh now!  
No laughter? Then I laugh for thee. Ha, ha!  
*(Echoes in the roof repeat ha, ha, ha ha!)*  
*(Brangwane rushes wildly down from gallery above, in which she has kept watch for the lovers).*

*Brangwane*

I heard a laugh—than devils laughed all round  
Me in the air. Oh Mark! This is thy work!

### PART III

*Scene I. (A chamber in King Howell's castle in Brittany. On a couch covered with a bearskin, the wounded Tristram, weak and spent, is lying. A fire burning in the huge chimney, Isoult La Blanche Mains in a corner where the gathering twilight is deepest, seated at the harp. She sings).*

*Tristram*

Isoult! Isoult!

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

Is it for me he calls?

*Tristram*

Isoult! Isoult! Not Mark's Isoult, but mine!

*Isoult Blanche Mains**(Starting up in joy).*

"Not Mark's Isoult—but mine!" Oh, is it true,  
 At last? He said—"Not Mark's Isoult, but mine."  
 So often have I heard him call on her  
 I had almost resigned my name—but now,  
 'Tis I am wanted, I!

*Tristram**(Aloud—his mind, in his weakness, wandering dreamily).*

Not ever Mark's,  
 But mine, mine always, from the first!

*Isoult Blanche Mains**(Covers her face with her hands)*

Alas,  
 I might have known!

*Tristram**(With difficulty raising himself on his elbow to look out upon the sea. The sunset light falls on his face).*

How endless is this day!  
 Not yet hath it all vanished—that long strand  
 Of yonder gold along the lone sea marge  
 As if Night, grieving, held within his hand  
 One golden tress of the lost Day. But look,  
 A single sail! See, see, how fast it comes!  
*(Isoult Blanche Mains rises in sudden agitation).*

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

A sail! It is too soon—it cannot be.  
*(She stands behind the couch watching the sea).*

*Tristram*

The cupped sail holds the last red light, as wine  
 Is held in the the hand's hollow. All the rest  
 The many, many sails, which lying here  
 I have seen pass, fixed, silent, sad and slow  
 As destiny, held to their course. But this  
 So live, determined, swift— What quick import  
 Strengthens the pinions of its wingèd rush!

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

It heads for here and comes straight toward us—  
 Straight!

*Tristram*

What were her words? Some wind ere we were  
 born  
 Filled up the spirit's sail? Ah, I forget  
 When, where she said it—Strange, I once could  
 count

Each crimson hour that hath for us unfolded,  
 But now the rose of memory shattereth  
 And sheds its scattered petals on my heart.

*(The last light dies out).*

Doth the room darken all at once? Who's there?  
*(Isoult Blanche Mains comes toward him out of the  
 shadows—he starts wildly, then recovering  
 himself).*

Ah, it is thou, my patient, poor Isoult,

Some stirring shadow, fold of drapery,  
Mocked me.

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

The casement—wilt thou have it closed?

*Tristram*

Nay, let it stay, I fain would see the stars  
And feel the fitful, faint, salt-breathing airs.  
My spirit is so still I know that Death  
Hath come. I am too weak for pain or love.  
The wind of Destiny drops to a calm.  
What are we but a column of towering dust  
Raised by a breath of passion in the waste,  
And when the wind hath passed we fall to dust  
Again . . . Think you, Isoult, I might be  
helped  
Into the air, forth on the battlements?

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

I'll call thy men and they shall carry thee.

*(She calls without)*

Brian—Boris—Uwaine—Meliot!

*(Enter four retainers. They support Tristram from the room. He leans heavily on them. Isoult Blanche Mains goes to the window and looks out).*

It hath grown dark, I can no longer see.  
The moon will be to-night—she steps from out  
The middle sea and stands a moment-long  
Still on the threshold of the world: the world  
That empty seems of any save of her.  
The air is full of her, as one we love  
When he is near will fill the room, until

We scarce draw breath for his mere presence. So  
 The moon fills all; and then she walks the path  
 Straight o'er the sea, and all the little waves  
 Jump us to kiss her silver feet.  
 (*She takes up the harp that leans against the case-  
 ment sweeping it with her fingers*).

Last night

I heard the sea-wind sighing in the strings  
 As if a sorrow audible did haunt,  
 For hands that ne'er shall touch its soul again.  
 My harp, those songs of his live in thee still.  
 (*She sings*)

Sea-Swallow that didst bear her on thy wings  
 To old Tintagil, hold of Cornish kings,  
 Sea-Swallow bring her thence again to me,  
 We will take refuge now, we driven three,  
 We will take refuge with the friendly sea,  
 Sea-Swallow.

Sea-Swallow, bear us from the king-owned earth  
 To those wild realms unrul'd that gave us birth,  
 To the waste regions of the restless brine,  
 Whose life and freedom will I claim for mine,  
 Whose life and freedom shalt thou claim for thine,  
 Sea-Swallow.

Sea-Swallow her sole throne shall be thy prow,  
 The blowing spray shall crown Queen Isoult's brow,  
 The warming East shall find her morning's guest,  
 The sunset leave us loitering to the West,  
 The sunset leave thee to thy starry quest,  
 Sea-Swallow.

Sea-Swallow, hasten ere it be too late,  
 The Queen is wearied of her empty state,

Come let us lay our lives in the winds' hand  
 For mine is wasting in the woeful land,  
 And thine is wasting on the idle strand,  
 Sea-Swallow.

*(As the last chords die out Isoult Blanche Mains  
 looks up and sees La Belle Isoult standing on  
 the threshold. For a moment, in silence the  
 two steadfastly regard each other).*

*Queen Isoult*

I heard the harp—I thought that it was he—  
 Where is he?

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

On the battlements, without—  
 Yet stay an instant. It was I who sent  
 For thee.

*Queen Isoult*

How good—how generous—thou art!  
 Complete thy goodness—lead me to him—quick!

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

I ask one grace—that thou wilt stand there still,  
 And let me look at thee. For I must see  
 What power is in thee to eat men's hearts  
 And leave the husks. Thou'rt very beautiful,  
 Yet other women have some beauty, too—  
 But none those eyes that say—"Within me is  
 Some dread, sweet mystery. Wilt thou not seek  
 And find it out?" And at the summons, men  
 Plunge in and tread thy spirit's labyrinth  
 With tenuous clue—nor ever reach the heart

Of it—of thee—save one—Tristram. What found  
 He there? For he has never since come back.  
 Something there is unseized, unseizable  
 Men die to win. My husband didst thou take,  
 And my young brother died for love of thee,  
 When with my lord he went unto thy court  
 And came too near the passion of you twain;—  
 Died of that nearness, scorched by the great fire  
 That could not give him warmth. That tender slip  
 Of youth transplanted, withered at thy sun,  
 And yet, and yet, in spite of all my wrong,  
 Facing thee thus, as I stand here, I do  
 Not hate.

*Queen Isoult*

Thou canst not hate the wretched, dear  
 Isoult. Oh, pity me. instead!

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

Do pity thee. For thou hast suffered much. And I  
(Sounds of steps without).

*Isoult*

Ah God, beyond thy power to know how much!  
 And may it ever be beyond thy power.  
 No knowledge of such suffering for thee!

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

Oh but I know, I know!

*Isoult*

But not the pain,  
 Which naught can ease unless to take thy heart



Out of thy breast, and hold it in thy hand,  
And dig thy nails down into it for hate!

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

Aye, that. Or not to dig my nails, but leave  
My bosom empty to a little rest.

*Isoult*

Poor child! Have I done this? But no—ah no!  
Mine was he long before. You came between,  
And crossed our Fate and drew it after you.  
What noise is that?

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

'Tis he. They bring him here  
Let him not see thee suddenly.

*(La Belle Isoult withdraws into the shadow. Enter Tristram supported as before. He seems more exhausted, and his eyes are partly closed. He is placed on a couch. Isoult Blanche Mains bends over him).*

Art faint?  
Doth the wound pain? What wilt thou have?

*(Tristram opens his eyes, they rest upon the Queen. He raises himself on one arm, gazing fixedly at her).*

*Tristram*

So Death himself is pitiful—and shapes  
Out of his very shadows, thee—unto  
My failing eyes.

Thou art her spirit come,  
Drawn by my longing. Thou wilt go with me

A little of the road; until we reach  
 The shadow-country's border vast and dim,  
 Where ghosts of lovers thicken all the air  
 As ashes of dead fires fanned by the wind.  
 Thou must turn back too soon—ere thou art missed  
 In old Tintagil's hall. What boots the torch  
 And swinging cresset if thy gaze be dark,  
 Dark and deserted of the wandering soul?  
 I know they hold a revel there to-night,  
 I seem to hear the music—see the lights—

*Queen Isoult*

*(Rushing to him).*

Tristram! Tristram!

*(Isoult Blanche Mains goes out).*

*Tristram*

Art thou the waking Truth?  
 I have had dreams that had these hands, this hair.

*Queen Isoult*

I came as fast as sails could draw. Isoult  
 It was who sent for me. Oh, evermore,  
 Will those white hands two serving angels seem,  
 That wait on her pure thoughts!

*Tristram*

Not stayed for thanks. *Isoult!* She hath

*Queen Isoult*

Ah, she hath slipped away.

*Tristram*

Isoult the meek! How doth she think of thee?  
As the still-hearted pool, that the wild sea  
Invades at last.

*Queen Isoult*

Am I the sea?

*Tristram*

The sea!

The flood that lifts my soul against the stars—  
Yet now—yet now—I sink—I am dashed down—  
Dazed, dizzy, drowned and dark! I cannot see—  
All swims—Ah, what is this—

*Queen Isoult*

Tristram! Not now—

Thou wilt not leave me—I am come—we are  
Together—Oh, not now!

*Tristram*

Lo, it is death!

(*He sinks back. Isoult throws herself with a cry  
upon his breast. After a long while she rises  
and stands before the body.*)

*Queen Isoult*

Tristram, dost thou recall the cup—that cup,  
Of a strange magic by my mother mixed  
That should have bound my love to Mark,—I  
chanced

To find? Ah, I remember that we stood  
Seeing the flacket curiously wrought,  
And turned it round and all unconsciously  
We gazed into its black-red depths; nor dreamed  
Love's was the flame there, Death's the drowsy  
dark.

It was the sunset hour, the sea was wine  
And brimmed bright purple to its fine, far edge  
Of gold. And at the chalice rim had Night  
The dusk-browed set her lips, and Day's bright  
head

Drooped langorous for one last parting draught.  
Thus touched and pledged at brim the lips of Day  
And Night—sea-chalice for their loving cup.  
And we drank also.

*(She takes a small covered flacket from her breast).*

Oh, as a cordial, Death  
I drink thee that art but the wine of love  
Distilled too deep—the ruby grown too red,  
The rapture made too strong. How should it end  
But thus with the wild hearts that strain them-  
selves

To silence— Thus! We who have known all life  
What is there after love left us to prove  
But death? We who have felt a thirst that life  
Left quenchless—fill us, Death, with thy sage  
draught,

Mingling immortal coolness in our veins.  
Look Tristram, look! In my two hands I hold  
The Grail—as once thou saidst. The purple blood  
Our passion in its agony hath bled,  
The vision that moved through our lives in light  
In music and in splendor— Lo, again  
I fling my soul with thine into the bowl  
I drink the marriage of dissolveless Fates  
In death—as life—(She drinks)

The cup is empty, God.

*(Falls on Tristram's body)*

*(Sounds of tumult are suddenly heard without. Enter in desperate haste Isoult de La Blanche Mains—she strains frantically at the great doors, striving to close them).*

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

Help, help, Isoult! Help me to shut the doors!  
Quick, ere they come! They are close, close behind—

Mark and his men. Help me for Tristram's sake!  
*(She struggles with the doors).*

Isoult, Isoult, dost thou not hear? Come quick!  
*(She turns, sees the bodies of Tristram and Isoult, comes slowly down, and stands looking on them in silence. Mark appears in the doorway, his men crowding behind him).*

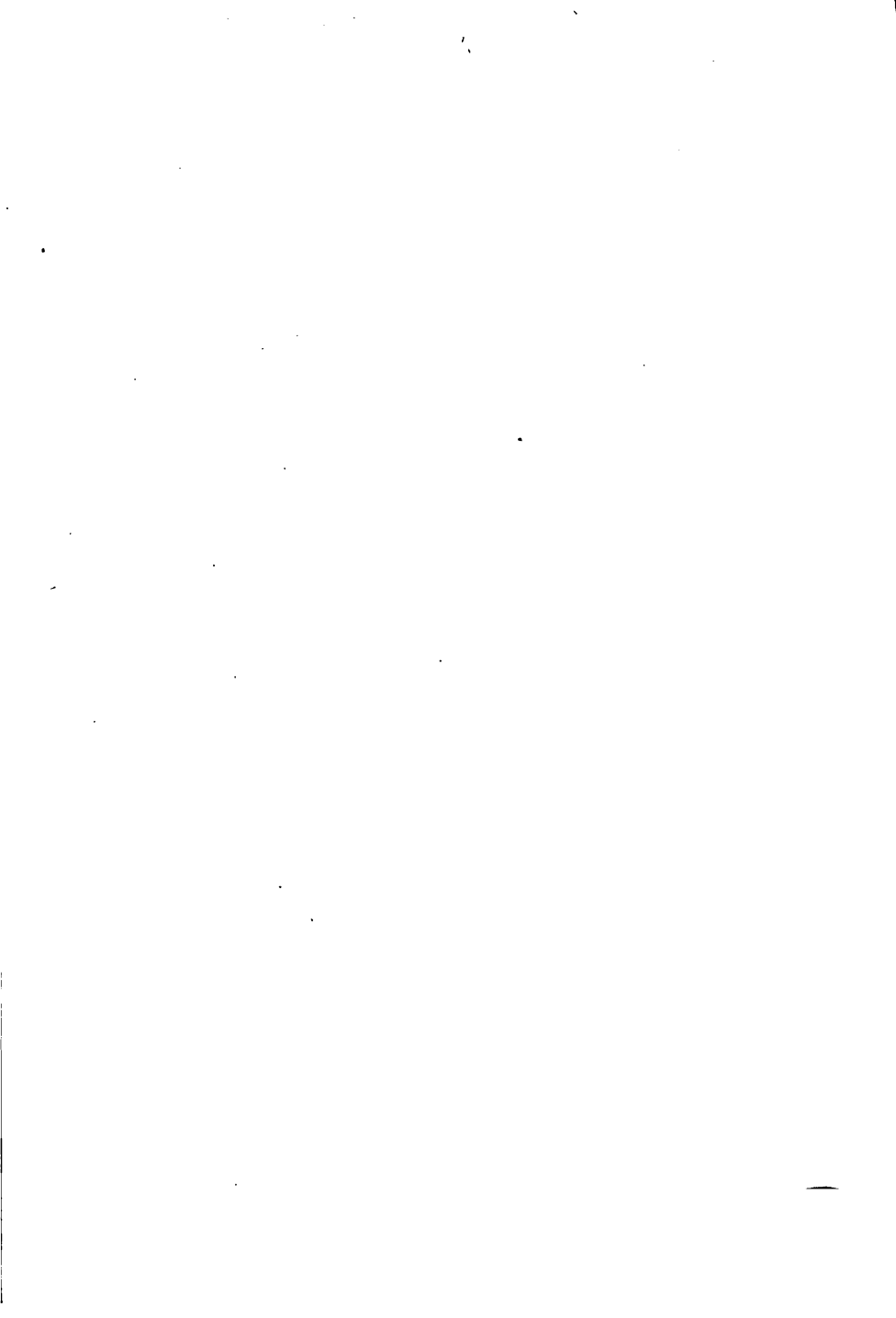
*Mark*

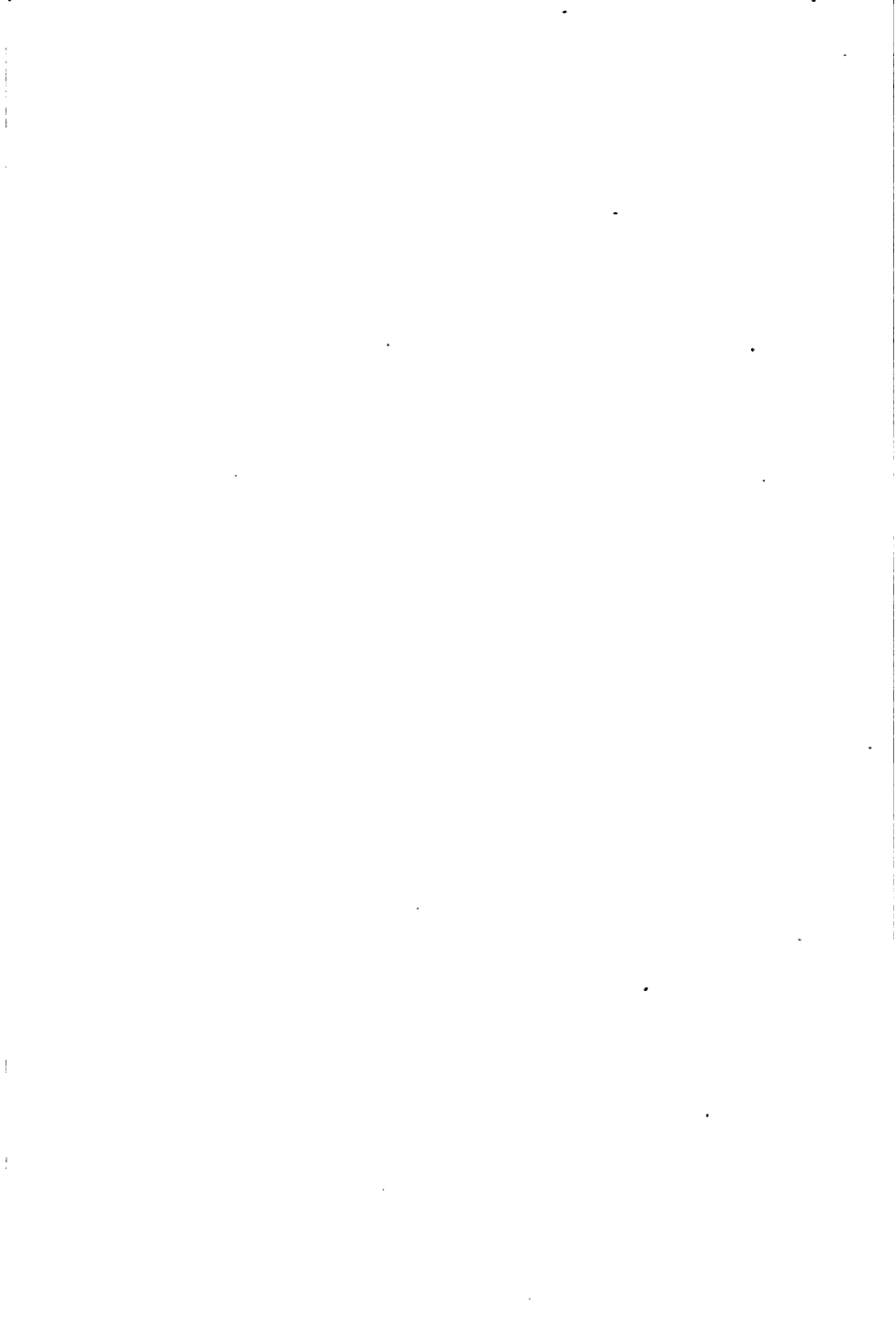
Is the sick lion cowered in his den?  
And our fair Queen, the true, the chaste? Ha, ha!

*Isoult Blanche Mains*

*(Pointing to the dead).*

Here are they. See, we had no power on them  
Nor thou nor I. Love such as theirs, I think  
That God himself will scarcely dare to touch.





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