

# Ipomadon

*anon*

*a late fourteenth or early-to-mid-fifteenth century Middle English verse romance, retelling the twelfth century Anglo-Norman romance Ipomedon by Hue de Rotelande.*

**Translated and retold in Modern English prose**

**by**

**Richard Scott-Robinson**

This story has been translated and retold from: Rhiannon Purdie, 2001. *Ipomadon*. Published for the Early English Text Society by Oxford University Press. This Middle English tail-rhyme romance exists in a unique manuscript copy in Chetham's Library Manchester MS Chetham 8009.

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**I**n Cessyle sumtyme wonyd a king · That holden was wyth old and ynge · Off poynttys wythe owten pere · He was worthy, were and wyse · Ouer all he wan losse and pryce – There once lived a king in Sicily who was held in such high regard by young and old alike that there was considered to be none his equal. He was wise and strong and had achieved great renown for himself. His name was Meleager and he had won the allegiance of many fine and noble dukes in France and elsewhere. He had no children, but raised his brother's son, his nephew, with a view to making him his heir. This boy was highly regarded, tall and strong, and his name was Cabanus. How he was conceived I cannot say, you will have to ask me later. Meleager's brother sent him to court, and asked the king to look after him, and the king replied that as soon as Cabanus was old enough, he would give him lands to rule over.

The boy became so fit and strong, so handsome and virtuous that everybody spoke well of him. He was much loved by the king for his brother's sake, loved above all else, and when he reached the age when he could ride a horse and wield arms, the king made him a knight.

Earlier in his reign, King Meleager had had a sister, a pretty and well-mannered young lady whom many a royal prince and king had come to woo. The King of Calabria had come to ask King Meleager if he would be prepared to give him his sister in matrimony, and in return he would cede to him all his lands. An agreement was made. They were married with great honour and the lady was taken back to Calabria with much joy. For ten years they lived happily together, and a daughter was born to them. But in the eleventh year the couple sadly died. The daughter, their heir, was still an infant, so all the noblemen took counsel together and they decided to appoint the most worthy amongst them to take charge of the young queen and to look after her education. She grew to be a very pretty young girl, and very generous, and when she had reached the age of fifteen she

*The romance Ipomadon in Middle English tail-rhyme verse is found uniquely amongst the works contained in a substantial, late fifteenth century manuscript known as MS Chetham 8009, lying in Chetham's Library, Manchester. Composed sometime in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, this verse narrative is one of three translations to survive in Middle English of a late twelfth century work by Hue de Rotelande, an Anglo-Norman poet who composed his tale at the same time, possibly, as Chretien de Troyes was working on his Conte du Graal, the original story of the Arthurian knight Perceval and the Grail.*

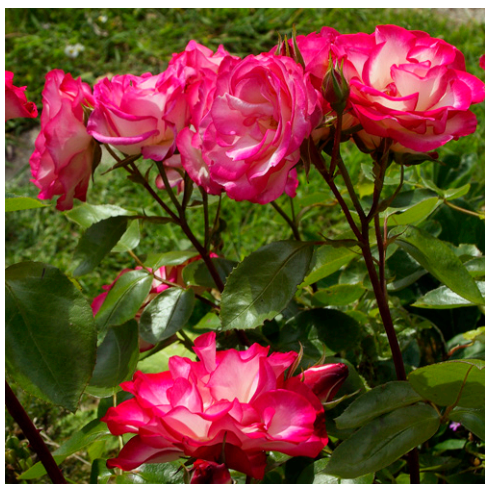
*Hue de Rotelande names his hero Ipomedon. The name Ipomedon, or Hippomedon, is taken from the Old French Roman de Thebes, a retelling of a Latin story derived ultimately from the play Seven Against Thebes by the Ancient Athenian playwright Aeschylus. Many of the names in the romance are similar to those in this Ancient Athenian play, although the story itself bears no relation to it. The plot bears far more similarity to the early thirteenth century pre-cyclic Lancelot do Lac. It sees Ipomedon assume a number of disguises before deeming himself worthy of the woman he loves.*

*Ipomadon is a reasonably faithful translation of this Anglo-Norman original, telling the story accurately, although with many of Hue's rather bawdy and masculine descriptions and opinions expunged.*

assumed for herself full power over her kingdom. She was healthy and intelligent, and everyone who knew her thereafter called her the 'Proud' of Calabria.

On the first day of her reign this pretty young lady said: 'Here before God I make a vow – that I shall never marry a man for wealth alone, and I will never take a man who is my inferior by birth. Only if he has proved himself to be the best knight in all the world shall I marry him.'

All her lords laughed at this. 'Nobody will welcome this statement!' they exclaimed. But she conducted her royal duties with such skill and honour, and was seen to be the cause of such prosperity, that everybody wished her happiness and success. Pretty and virtuous, sensible and good-humoured, well-mannered and of exceptional ability, she became so proud that she considered no prince to be her equal.



Word of this queen sprang far and wide, into Britain, France, Lombardy, and even into the Arab lands. Cyprus came to hear of her. And in the land of Apulia, in the heel of Italy, there lived a king called Hermodenes, a strong king who had put down all his enemies. He had a lovely wife and she had born him a son, so I am told. When this boy was old enough to learn he was put into the care of a man named Tholomewe, a very worthy man. There was no ruler in the entire world, emperor or king, whose court he would not have been an asset to. He taught the child courtesy, horsemanship, how to wield arms in battle and how to hunt. The child's name was Ipomadon, and God had given him very noble features. He grew into a fine young man, shrewd and perceptive, and he particularly liked hunting.

Everybody loved this handsome young man. His father was well-respected and ruled his lands well, and one day he arranged a banquet for all his noblemen and retainers. When they were seated and the food had been served, the conversation turned to the 'Proud' of Calabria. One knight said that she was the most beautiful young lady in the world. 'There is no worthier court from here to Spain or India, I can guarantee!' this knight insisted. Ipomadon was serving in the hall and heard these words spoken of this damsel.

When it was time for him to eat, he found pleasure only in thinking of the 'Proud' of Calabria and did not touch his food.

'Dear master Tholomewe,' said Ipomadon, afterwards. 'You are a trusted and faithful friend. I feel like a bear cooped up in his den and have no idea what the outside world is really like. The man who loves to stay at home will achieve little in this world, and see nothing of its beauty. I have heard strange lands spoken of that ignite only pain and discontentment within me. Will you be my companion? Your friendship means everything to me and I am determined not to stay at home another day. And if my mother and father will not let me leave, I shall nonetheless creep out of the castle barefoot at midnight,

for I intend nothing to stop me from going.’

When he had finished, Tholomewe looked quizzically at him. ‘My dear Ipomadon,’ he said, ‘since this is what you have set your heart on, where do you propose to go?’

‘Master, you heard as well as I about that beautiful damsel the knight was telling us of, the ‘Proud’ of Calabria. That is where I intend to go.’

His master burst out laughing. ‘My young friend,’ he said, ‘I must tell you – this pleases me well enough! I would hate to be left behind! I will ask leave for us both.’

Tholomewe sought out the king. ‘Sir,’ he said when he found him, ‘whoever remains at a single court without gaining experience of any other has no chance of broadening his outlook upon life, and so I advise that you give your son Ipomadon leave to travel, for with God’s blessing he may live to be a very noble man indeed! And I would further beg you to allow me to travel with him.’

**T**he King gave Tholomewe gold and silver in safekeeping for his son, two ponies upon which to carry the child’s clothes, and each was given a horse to ride. They travelled for many days, in no little comfort, and came at last into Calabria. Tholomewe found lodgings at the best inn in the city of Cantanzaro and they made that their base.

There was neither king nor emperor in the whole world who would not have been honoured to stay in this place. There were embroidered cushions and seats everywhere and hangings decorated with birds and fish.

‘Please could you obtain corn and hay for us,’ said Tholomewe to the inn-keeper, ‘and see that we are well-provisioned with food and wine – the best wine that you can lay your hands on. We have enough money. Spare nothing!’

The child was impatient to go at once to the court, and robed himself accordingly.

Into the hall comes Ipomadon, through throngs of noblemen, walking evenly and measuredly, neither too fast nor too cautiously, but very naturally. Everybody turned to look and everyone marvelled; he was tall and strong and no feature failed him. He blushed a little, but this seemed only to add to his dignity. His doublet was of red velvet with bright gold buttons, skilfully made. His coat was of scarlet with an ermine lining, the finest money could buy, and bordered with silk. His clothes and his demeanour made him look magnificent! Everybody stared in admiration, both lord and lady.

The ‘Proud’ gazed upon him but said nothing, despite the murmur rising from the hall. The child knelt before her and explained why he was there.

‘Gracious lady,’ he said, ‘may God send you health, and to all your courtiers. I have heard it said many times that there is no nobler court than yours. Therefore I have come from a far country to serve you. Whatever you desire of me, whatever task that befits a gentleman, I shall do. Please let me stay. Show me that men speak the truth of you!’

The lady sat and looked at him, and liked what she saw. She noted his fine features and thought to herself that he could find service at the court of any king or emperor. Into her heart rose the thought that she would, indeed, like him in her service.

‘You are welcome, my friend,’ she said. ‘Whoever brought you to me, I thank them. And since you wish to serve me, tell me your name, you strange young man?’

‘That is my name,’ replied Ipomadon, playfully. ‘Strange young man!’

The lady laughed. ‘It is good enough!’ she said. ‘I welcome you, ‘Strange’, to my court.’

The lady called her butler. ‘Take this golden goblet and give it to the young man. Show him where the buttery is so that he can serve me with wine.’

**F**or three years Ipomadon lived in the city and served at court, and the lady thought she had never before seen such a praiseworthy young man. But there is one thing which he lacks, and it pains me to have to mention it, but it concerns manliness and a willingness to receive wounds. He has disguised himself too well and shows no interest in martial pursuits. When knights go to tournaments he takes no notice at all. When deeds of arms are spoken of, Ipomadon turns his back and leaves the hall. He does not like to hear of chivalry.

Near to the city was a lovely forest, and Ipomadon’s favourite pursuit was hunting, and to see his greyhounds run. Hunting occupied all his thoughts and everybody perceived this. He would not listen to stories of chivalry and this troubled the ‘Proud’ very much. And so she complains of her ‘Strange young man’ and finds her love for him diminishing as a result. Knights begin to make a joke about his passion for hunting.

One summer, when flowers covered every meadow and the birds were chirping away merrily, it happened that the ‘Proud’ took it into her mind to go hunting in the forest. She gave her men eight days to prepare for the expedition.

Her men quickly made the necessary arrangements and on the eighth day they all took their way into the forest. Soon they came to a large clearing beside a river, and pitched the lady’s pavilion. Here the stags would be driven. They pitched tents and pavilions for earl, baron and knight, and Ipomadon put his horn around his neck and went deep into the forest. Whatever his failings elsewhere, he loved hunting. Although he gave no thought to chivalry, he loved the arts of tracking and pursuit.

For her comfort and entertainment they set the lady in the forest clearing, in her pavilion. Horns blew, hounds were unleashed, and all the huntsmen spread out through the forest to try to flush out their quarry. With bugles sounding, hounds barking and men crying, there was no safety for any deer!

Ipomadon chased a stag – his greyhound ran eagerly after it and at last, wearied by the chase, it made for the water and the chance of protection this offered. The little hound was so close behind that, in the middle of the clearing, right in front of the ‘Proud’, the

deer collapsed for heat, unable to run any more. Both deer and hound were so tired that neither could run a step further. But the dog lay yelping at the deer and the lady laughed to see it. 'Certainly,' she remarked, 'whoever taught this hound to run is no stay-at-home! And his master is not far behind, I have no doubt.'

Ipomadon made his way towards the sound of the dog, found it in the clearing very near to the royal pavilion, went over to the deer and dispatched the animal skilfully and fittingly. When he had killed the stag Ipomadon quickly blew a call on his hunting horn to urge Tholomewe to hurry up. The hound lay guarding the deer and would let nobody else near it. When Ipomadon caught sight of Tholomewe approaching, he cut off the head, and then dismembered the carcass very methodically and correctly, in front of the 'Proud'. He skinned the beast and gave due portion to the hound. Although she had seen deer butchered many times before, she had never seen it done so expertly.

She thinks to herself that she will take this man. Then she thinks: 'No! If I took him as my lover, I would be breaking my vow. I cannot accept that.'

Thus her heart grieved. She told herself she was wrong and many times told herself: 'I shall love no knight unless he is a man of valour and can demonstrate it in battle. If I loved him, truly, everybody would speak ill of it. They would say: "Our lady has discharged her ambitious vow on a very feeble specimen!" I know that in time I shall find a worthy enough knight to love. One who knows how to break a lance!'

**T**he lady had a cousin, a child called Jason, a strong young lad, and from the very beginning he and Ipomadon had loved each other as brothers and they were both greatly loved by the 'Proud'. No more handsome young men were in the court, nor more good-natured. The two washed and went to eat, and Ipomadon did not forget the lady's cup. He went to the buttery, filled the goblet with wine and brought it to the table. She was not yet tired of looking at him! 'Strange young man, have you eaten?' she asked. 'Today you excelled yourself.'

'Damsel,' he replied, 'not yet. I have eaten nothing since coming in from the forest.'

'That is too long to go without food,' she said. 'Call Jason and sit down to supper. Sit down on the floor in front of me.'

They both did as she wished and sat like brothers, enjoying a meal that some would later have cause to regret. Love consumes all who possess it, to the exclusion of all else. Other things may be overcome, but love cannot.

The lady fixed a longing gaze upon her 'Strange young man', and Ipomadon was fully aware of what was going on. He gave her many friendly and meaningful stares in return and the lady truly believed that he was in love with her. And it suddenly frightened her that someone might notice this exchange of glances and start malicious rumours. The 'Proud' smiled to herself and thought of a trick to play on him. She thought to rebuke her cousin in a way that the 'Strange young man' would recognise as being directed at

himself, although nobody else would guess that this was the case.

‘Jason,’ she said, ‘for God’s sake! Why do you stare so constantly at my maid-in-waiting. What is wrong? Tell me damsel, is it for you that Jason harbours a burning love?’

The damsel blushed scarlet with embarrassment. ‘Madam, no! Not that I know of!’

‘Do you imagine that this maiden loves you for your etiquette?’ she asked Jason. ‘This would do her little good as regards advancement! Or do you imagine this lady will love you for your looks? Unless you prove yourself to be a man of action, I tell you, no! If you desire to win the love of a lady you must turn your attention to other things as well. Sir, I tell you this for your own good. Take part in jousts and tournaments. Do this, or stop looking dreamily at young ladies, for it will do you no good otherwise.’

Jason sat motionless, eating nothing, so embarrassed was he at this undeserved rebuke. But Ipomadon knew full well that the tirade had been for his benefit. He knew quite well that the words had been directed at him and was ashamed. He dared not look at the ‘Proud’ at all. She noticed this and was pleased.

When the meal was over, Ipomadon knelt before her.

‘Have a good night, damsel, for I must go.’

‘What does he mean by this,’ she thought, and it worried her. But nevertheless, for appearance’ sake she was determined to betray no sign of her love and granted him leave to go. Then her heart sank so suddenly that she could hardly stand.

She called to her damsel Imayne and asked her to make up her bed and stay with her that night. ‘Dear God, why have you made me fall in love with him?’ she cried to herself. ‘There are so many worthy lords and dukes and kings. Am I a fool? Do you think that anyone else could love him as I do? No! And I can vouch for this – that he has no faults. I must love him, come what may. But I cannot do it. Yes I can! By great God who made me, I cannot!’

Thus she spoke to herself: ‘I could have taken him whenever I wanted. I could already have told him how I felt. Ah! Fool, what have I said? I thought no king nor prince my equal, and now I lie in this bed in pain and anguish, consumed with love for a man who is a stranger and whose very name I do not know. I do not even know his name, nor in which land I should look were he to go from me. But there is none fairer than he, none so noble nor courteous in all the world. So perfect is he, he cannot be anything other than a king’s son! But am I the only one who thinks so? No! But does any other maiden look at him as I do? No, I hope not. Yes, I hope so! I cannot be the only one to see his nobility!’

‘Why should he stare at me so intently if it was not through love? He took his leave of me when he said good night, and he never has before. Would he go? By God of heaven, no. Yes, in faith, yes! You could not hold your tongue. Do not be surprised if he leaves, then – you who brought such shame upon him this evening.’

Thus she wrestled with her heart and could not sleep.

When Ipomadon had taken his leave he went back to his lodgings with a very heavy heart, overcome by disillusion and disappointment. He asked Tholomewe to prepare his bed, but he did not sleep at all that night and lay sighing and in inner turmoil.

‘Alas, fool! What malady has brought you so far from your own country? You chose to come of your own accord and no one will mourn for you now. By God of heaven, now she knows the truth, I am certain. She knows that I love her.

‘But she gazed at me for such a long time, I could not help but notice it. Ah! Dear God, what might that mean? I shall tell you: the lady thinks I am a fool. Heart, I beg you, leave her alone. No, I cannot! To do so would be to die! Yes, I must. No, in faith, I would rather die than suffer this pain. Oh, to be near her would be joy indeed.



‘Why did you come into this land?

‘She wants me to joust, but a life devoted to warfare will not be a long one, that I might safely say! And in her court there are many who are good at jousting, who possess all the skills of the tournament, and whose pride makes them the enemy of everyone. In all the world, there is no knight so revered that his deeds of arms do not bring harm upon him. But through a disdain for jousting I am taken to be a coward. But if I should now take up arms, men will say: “He does this now just to win himself a few horses!” Therefore I advise you to go, in faith. If you stay here any longer it will only end in sorrow. A man is weakened by sorrow, this much I know. But another thing is true – he is sorely beaten who dares not to be hurt, by God!’

And so Ipomadon lies, arguing with himself and swinging from one decision to another, sighing, his heart in turmoil. He intends to go, for a while, then decides to stay. He didn't know where he was, he was thinking about her so much. But at last he decided to leave the city. As the sky brightened he got out of bed. Tholomewe came into the room and saw that he was as pale as death.

‘If I look upset,’ said Ipomadon, ‘you would understand if I told you why.’ But he did not intend to tell him the real reason – he could not, so he made up an excuse.

‘Tholomewe, I dreamed a curious dream last night. I will not hide the truth from you. I dreamed that my father and my mother have both died. I must ride back to my own country. I cannot stay here any longer.

Tholomewe was convinced that the reason Ipomadon gave was true, so the horses were



readied and with heavy hearts, the two of them set off for the forest.

As the sun rose they came upon the sound of hounds and bugles, and into sight came Jason. He greeted Ipomadon, and asked why he was travelling with all his equipment, and all his belongings, as though he was undertaking a long journey.

‘Where are you going?’ he asked. ‘Are you coming back to town with us?’

‘No, Jason. I must return to my own country.’

‘Then I shall come with you.’

‘No, you cannot. But I shall return one day, if I can.’

‘Has any man wronged you?’

‘No, by he who made the moon!’

‘Why are you leaving then?’

‘Jason, I have no choice.’

‘Then I shall accompany you!’

‘No, turn back my dear brother. Greet the ‘Proud’ on my behalf and serve her well.’

‘Then tell me your name and where I can find you.’

‘No, Jason, by God I cannot!’

The lady rose from her bed and stepped out of her pavilion, hoping to see her ‘Strange young man’; and although she had set her heart upon obtaining his love, she was full of apprehension.

Her cousin rode up and dismounted.

‘What news, Jason?’ she asked.

‘The ‘Strange young man’, whom you so often complement, my lady, is gone.’

Never before had she heard such unwelcome news, but she hid this from Jason. And although her heart ached, she answered: ‘Cousin, let him go. Good luck to him! But has he taken all his equipment?’

‘Yes, and Tholomewe has departed with all his.’

Then she was devastated. Jason began to cry and turned away, and she went back into her tent, blaming herself.

‘Fool!’ she wept. ‘Why did I say what I did last night? Now you have lost him forever! You know this to be true!’ She threw herself upon the bed and sobbed uncontrollably until her maiden, Imayne, arrived.

‘Damsel!’ exclaimed Imayne. ‘For God’s love! What is wrong? Tell me, my lady. Why do you weep so? Can I do anything to help? Often it does good to unload your troubles onto a friend, and it is good advice to do so.’

‘Alas, Imayne, that I was born! It is love – love that does not raise me to the heights but threatens to lower me into the earth!’

‘My dear lady, whom do you love?’

‘In faith, I cannot tell you! Even if my life depended upon it I could not tell you! Neither his name nor where he comes from!’

## 2

**I**pomadon goes on his way with many a sigh. His heart feels like lead inside him and often he turns to gaze in the direction from which he has come. One moment he is ready to abandon his journey and return, the next he rides onwards with a fresh resolve; his mind is in turmoil.

Tholomewe saw his heavy glances and cried: ‘Tell me the whole story. I can see that you are trying to hide something.’

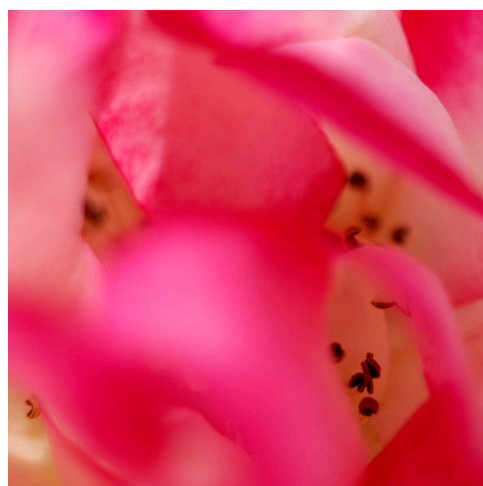
‘I will tell you who is causing me all this pain.’ And Ipomadon told Tholomewe everything.

‘This is wonderful!’ exclaimed Tholomewe. ‘Love makes a man seek advancement, makes him seek to achieve honour if he can. Often it is love that spurs a man to win glory in battle; makes him take the trouble to win knighthood, to travel from land to land and win the prize at jousting through his own strength and ability, where knights meet to test one another.’

‘You know that she has made a vow to take no man unless he has proved himself to be the best.’

‘So? Win the prize! Then you will accord with her vow. For when it comes to her notice how boldly you conduct yourself on the field of battle and what great esteem you are held in, I dare say she will consider no other lord but you.’

‘Master, what you say is true. And if God will give me the grace to achieve this, I will not fail!’



So Tholomewe brought comfort to Ipomadon's troubled soul and they rode onwards until, well into the afternoon, they came upon a child, running. He seemed to be a messenger, for he had a box hanging by his side and he carried a short spear. The child greeted them.

'My friend,' called Ipomadon. 'Where do you come from and to which country are you bound?'

'I am from Apulia, Sir,' replied the boy, 'and I have travelled far and wide with some rather bad news. I am looking for a young man, but I cannot find him.'

'What is his name?'

'Ipomadon.'

'Master,' Ipomadon called back to his friend, 'sorrows never come singly. Always there are more following close behind the first.'

When Ipomadon had collected himself, they rode into Apulia and came to the city of Barletta where his mother lay sick and in great pain. Ipomadon knelt before her and tried to bring comfort to her.

'Dear son, welcome,' she said. 'There is something that I must tell you. I can no longer keep it hidden. Take this ring from my finger and keep it safe. Protect it. Ipomadon, you have a brother, but tell nobody, I beg you; your father does not know – nobody does. If anybody recognises this ring, it will be your brother. Do not part with it. Your brother will know you by this ring, should you ever meet one another. Ask no more.'

Ipomadon's joy that he had a brother was matched only by his grief at his mother's illness. She gave him her blessing and shortly afterwards, she died.

Ipomadon was grief-stricken. So was all the royal court. Women wept and said that she was the finest woman ever to have trodden the Earth. What more is there to say? They took her to her grave with heavy hearts.

Ipomadon would not stay following the funeral but asked his father to confer knighthood upon him. His father was delighted that this was what his son wanted and hung a bright sword about him. He accepted his father's order of knighthood and vowed to serve it with honour. Thirty other sons of noblemen were knighted in honour of the day, all of them strong and valiant young men. Ipomadon would have been happy to have seen Tholomewe knighted, but he refused, explaining that no one could serve Ipomadon better than he could and he would rather serve than lead.

So Ipomadon is made a knight. Everything he needs is to hand, horse, armour, weapons, but he will not stay. He took his leave of his father the king and all the ladies, and rode off. And he travelled from land to land, winning tournaments at which the strong and the mighty were numbered amongst the competitors; in Britain, France and Lombardy,

in Germany and Arabia. In all these places he was considered to be the finest knight.

Wherever he came, to any battle, he rode away with the prize. And he grew into such a valiant warrior that no one could withstand a stroke of his sword. But always he was careful to conceal his identity and commanded his men to let no one at all learn who he was nor where they were from. Men could not refer to him in any other way than “that worthy knight who has no name”, both in lands far from Apulia and in lands close to it. But let us now leave Ipomadon and speak of the ‘Proud’.

Two years have passed since Ipomadon left her service and war has erupted in her land. Every man is at another’s throat and much blood has already been spilt. The noblemen had all assembled to discuss the situation and the most commonly voiced opinion was: ‘Our lady is wrong not to marry and to provide us with a strong lord who can wield his might and reimpose the rule of law.’ They went and told this to the noble lady. They threatened that unless she chose a husband quickly they would rise up against her and remove her from the throne. This upset her terribly.

‘Lords,’ she said. ‘While I acknowledge the truth of what you say, let me have eighteen days to consider my reply.’

Nobody was happy with this.

She went to her room, weeping and wringing her hands, and lay down on her bed. Her maiden, Imayne, entered. ‘Madam,’ she said, ‘you will have to do as they say.’

‘Imayne, this is terrible! My lords will force me to marry someone I don’t want to. Please advise me, how can I stop this?’

‘Then do as I tell you,’ replied Imayne. Answer them with courtesy and gentle words and try to pull the wool over their eyes. Use delaying tactics. Tell them that you will agree to send for your uncle, the King of Sicily, for you hold your lands from him; tell them that you will do as he says regarding a husband. And in the time it takes your uncle to arrive you may well have received news of your ‘Strange young man’.

‘Imayne, this is wonderful advice. Thank you!’

Her barons assembled again on the eighteenth day. ‘Lady,’ they said, ‘we would like to know who you intend to marry.’

‘Lords, so save me God,’ she replied, ‘I must remind you that I hold all my lands from my uncle, King Meleager, and if I were to go against his wishes, he might take it very badly and perhaps even imprison me. And if *you* were to go against his wishes, it would provoke even worse conflict in this land than we have already. Therefore, if you will send for the King of Sicily, I will put myself in his hands, as obediently as a leaf dancing in the wind.’

In the end, the earls and barons agreed that her request was reasonable.

When the 'Proud' was told that her uncle had arrived, she met him with handsomely dressed lords and attendants and was genuinely happy to see him. Their meeting was cheerful and informal. They retired to a tower and she chatted to her cousin, Sir Cabanus; and in the morning the king went to a private garden with his knights and advisors. Here he dismounted, and shortly afterwards the 'Proud' arrived with thirty maidens in attendance. The least of them was as beautiful as a queen, but the most beautiful amongst them, of course, was she. All the knights stared as she entered the garden.

She greeted her uncle and he rose as she came to sit by his side. Barons, bachelors, ladies and squires all crowded into the garden to learn whom it was she wished to marry.

She sat staring into space, deep in thought, for a long while, then she said: 'Sir, as for possible husbands, I have chosen three. One is the King of Russia, another the son of the Duke of Normandy, and the third, a son of the King of Ireland. I cannot decide which of them I love the most. Therefore, I must ask for a little more time in which to make up my mind.'

They agreed to a small delay.

The day drew to an end, and the 'Proud' retired to her chamber. She called Imayne to her.

'Dear Imayne, this is all too dreadful! What more excuses can I find?'

'Upon my life,' said Imayne, 'I don't know what to say. Since you would rather die than marry anyone but the 'Strange young man', why not tell everybody the truth?'

'Don't be ridiculous!' exclaimed the 'Proud'. 'Having vowed to marry only the finest warrior on Earth, men would laugh at me. But how about this for an idea? I shall ask that a tournament be announced, one that will last for three days. Whichever valiant knight, from whichever part of the world, takes away the prize shall have me to lie beside in bed. And if my love is still living and hears of this tournament, if he has any feelings for me at all, and any prowess within him, he will come. If he loves me he will not give me up without a fight. And if he fails to show up, he is not worth loving anyway!'

Imayne laughed. 'This will do!' she said. 'No one could have advised you better than this, and let nobody talk you out of it.'

Ipomadon had a cousin, Egyon, who heard all that subsequently took place in the garden in Cantanzaro. He rode back to Apulia without resting once and told Ipomadon everything he had learned. Ipomadon was delighted.

'Sir, it is their plan to find her a husband, and she has agreed that a tournament should take place, one lasting for three days, and that knights from every land in the world will be encouraged to attend.'

Ipomadon was so happy that he burst out laughing. He called Tholomewe to him.

Tholomewe was no less happy than Ipomadon. 'I dare stake my life,' he said, 'that God will so arrange matters that you will defeat every knight who comes against you and that you will win your love. So be sensible. Go to this tournament!'

Tholomewe got everything ready.

'I will travel out of Apulia,' said Ipomadon, 'and serve the King of Sicily, who is that fair lady's uncle. It is certain that he will go to this tournament and I shall as well, but in such a way that no one will know who I am. Let God do what he likes with me, but I would prefer it if I was there as a stranger.'



Ipomadon took his leave of his father and all his friends but took a young damsel with him, his cousin – a very beautiful and chaste young lady, so we are told. He took horses and equipment, greyhounds, smaller hunting dogs, some fine hawks and some men of good character and background. And he brought along with him three fine warhorses. One was as white as milk, its saddle was covered in white silk and on it sat a young squire dressed all in white, and the sight of him gave pleasure to everybody. A white shield hung about his neck and he carried a white lance with a white pencil hanging from it. This was the least horse of the three, and it led the others.

Following behind came another steed, and none finer had ever been ridden across the ground. It was red, with a red saddle and it shone like gold. A young man in red sat upon it with a red shield and a red lance in his hand with a red pencil hanging from it. The horse shone as brightly as a sunbeam, as radiantly as the stars.

A black horse came next, a beast of perfect musculature. It was the finest of the three and upon its back sat a young man with a black shield hanging about his neck. His armour was entirely black and on his lance the young man bore a black pencil.

There were no three other horses like them, nor young riders I dare say, and in their time they were unequalled. Each followed the other, and behind them came men with hawks and hounds. And behind these, Tholomewe was mounted upon a fine animal, dressed as a hunter and delighted to be so. A great horn hung about his neck, and he carried bows and arrows on his back, in case of ambush. Behind him came Ipomadon, and the maiden.

They rode like this for mile upon mile. Ipomadon and the maiden kept a large distance between themselves and the others ahead in order to allow the dust from the hooves of

the warhorses to settle before they passed, to save their fine clothes from dirt. They rode for so long, in this manner, that at last they came to the land of Sicily.

The birds were singing and the ground beneath the forest trees was strewn with a carpet of flowers – it was an ideal place to woo a beautiful young lady and Ipomadon had the ‘Proud’ in his mind as he rode, and this made him sigh. The sun was so hot that he took off his jacket and laid it in front of him across his saddle. And so they rode, richly attired, through bracken and through woodland, towards the city of Palermo.

The King of Sicily was hunting in the forests outside Palermo and, along with his trusted knight Cabanus, had become detached from the main hunt when he saw this group of riders approaching. The king was surprised and apprehensive, for he knew that men did not usually travel fully armed unless they meant to make war. The custom in those far off days was for the boldest knights to ride alone. Men would not ride fully armed in company. A knight errant looking for adventure would carry his own equipment. Ipomadon was breaking with all custom.

Cabanus rode off and stood his horse in their path. Ipomadon rode up to meet him, leading his cousin by his side. Cabanus hailed them courteously enough.

‘Sir,’ he called, ‘the King of Sicily is hunting nearby with a company of knights and he has sent me to ask you your business.’

‘I come in peace,’ replied Ipomadon. ‘Sir, go back to your king and tell him that here is a knight who would like to speak with him very much.’

Cabanus rode back to the king.

‘I have never seen such a fine entourage!’ he exclaimed. ‘Such marvellous horses, young men, arms, hounds, hawks, and such a beautiful damsel! Above all, Sir, he wishes to speak with you, but because of the damsel, he is reluctant to ride over to you alone. He is over there, beyond that wood.’

Soon Ipomadon saw the king approaching and held up his hand in greeting. ‘May God keep you, King Meleager!’ he cried. ‘Nowhere in all this world is any man held in higher esteem than you, and there is nobody in the entire world I would rather serve. I come from a distant country and I have brought my cousin along with me, as you can see. But Sir, if you accept my service, and that of my cousin, I must insist first upon a certain agreement between us, or else I cannot stay. Are you willing to accommodate my desire, as your reputation suggests you might?’

The king looked at Ipomadon. ‘Cabanus,’ he said, ‘take this knight into the city and find him the best lodgings you can.’

Cabanus and Ipomadon rode into the city of Palermo, and Cabanus dismounted outside the best inn to be found anywhere. Tholomew knew his master well and quickly ordered dinner.

‘You will, of course, stay and dine with us,’ said Ipomadon to Cabanus. He guessed the king expected this for he had not given his knight instructions to return, so they sat at a bench together and Tholomewe brought in a goblet decorated on the outside with costly gemstones.

‘Sir, listen,’ said Ipomadon. ‘Drink half of this and I shall drink the other half. Here, take it. It is yours. The goblet is yours. Here, at the beginning of our friendship, I give it to you as a gift.’

Cabanus laughed and thanked him. ‘Since you have given me this cup,’ he said happily, ‘I return to you my undying loyalty and vow that there will never be any strife between us, for as long as I live!’

And so they laughed and joked their way to the end of the meal. By this time the day had drawn to a close, so Cabanus led Ipomadon to the king’s court; and there were no two finer knights to be seen there. Ipomadon walked into the hall in a fine robe of silk and ermine, embroidered with gold. He carried himself magnificently and noblemen stepped out of the way as Cabanus led him by the hand through a crowd of knights towards the king.

‘Sir king,’ said Ipomadon, as they stood before him. ‘I would happily know what you have decided, for if I am to be your servant, I must insist upon the agreement I hinted at earlier. Unless you comply with my request, I cannot stay a moment longer. Is it true what is said of you, far and wide?’

‘Sir,’ he said. ‘Any reasonable request will be granted.’

‘If it is true what men say,’ replied Ipomadon, ‘you will not be averse to what I am about to ask. It is that you allow me to reside with the queen. And also, I ask that I might be known as the queen’s darling! My third request is that no man but myself should be allowed into her bedroom. I will serve her her meals – and afterwards, I may lead her to her chamber and kiss her. If you will grant me all this, I will serve her well and provide for her table by hunting and by hawking, and you may fear no impropriety, so God give me joy!’

‘You are very generous!’ said the king. ‘And you are coming close to humiliating me in front of everybody!’

‘Alas, Sir!’ cried Cabanus. ‘It will be a source of disgrace if he leaves!’



Ipomadon conducted himself so well at court that soon everybody loved him. And everyone called him Dru-la-reine – that is to say, the queen’s darling or the queen’s favourite. Some were bold enough to call him the queen’s lover, for they could see the look in her eyes when she gazed at him. But unbeknown to them, Ipomadon’s love lay elsewhere. For two months he led this life, catching deer and birds with hawk and hound. But whenever knights spoke of war, Ipomadon spoke of hunting and all the things he had seen in the forest. When knights got ready to joust, to keep their armour from rusting, Ipomadon gathered his hounds together. When knights spoke of fine warhorses, Ipomadon’s conversation turned to greyhounds. And for this reason the noblemen at court began to laugh at him behind his back.

This went on until the time came to set off for the tournament. King Meleager had not forgotten it! He crossed the sea with two thousand knights, the finest in his land, and the queen accompanied him. They arrived in Calabria and the queen was given a castle to stay at, about a mile outside Cantanzaro, within the forest that Ipomadon knew and loved so well.

Knights busied themselves with their equipment and Cabanus wondered greatly when he saw his friend leaving early in the morning to hunt. ‘Sir,’ he said, ‘Why do you not ready your armour? You have some fine equipment and some magnificent warhorses!’

‘It is neither my desire nor my intention to go to this tournament,’ replied Ipomadon.

Cabanus rode off to convey this startling news to the king. They were both astounded, and the queen expressed her disappointment, but everybody else thought it a good joke and quite in keeping with their expectations.

The king made ready his pavilion outside the city. It was a magnificent structure; the material was of silk and on the highest pole was placed a golden bell. If the city watchmen sounded their alarm during the night, the bell would be rung and the sound would carry for a mile, to the comfort of both king and knight. Over this bell was set a precious stone that shone like the moon.

Everywhere were kings and knights from distant lands. The Duke of Brittany was there, the Duke of Normandy also, with more than a thousand knights, the kings of Denmark, Scotland and Norway, of Ireland and Orkney. All who had travelled from the west had pitched their tents near the forest. The King of Spain had arrived with two hundred knights. The Duke of Lorraine, Sir Darius, was there, hoping to win Calabria. The Earl of Flanders intended to enter the field with two hundred men, and he had brought knights from Russia to help him win the lady. Even the Emperor of Germany was there. Some found lodgings within the city, others camped outside. The tournament was due to begin the next morning, at the ringing of the bell.

But let us speak of the 'Queen's darling'. The maidens all threw insults at him and laughed, and he derived great pleasure from this! He fetched the queen's meal and served her when she was ready to eat; and when she had finished he led her up to her bedroom and kissed her.

'Madam,' he said, 'go to see the tournament tomorrow and I will go hunting and bring us back something to roast. I prefer to be amongst the oaks than to suffer blows at a tournament. I have little blood to spare I fear!'

The maidens laughed insultingly and said: 'Madam, your knight speaks of his courage!'

The queen was embarrassed for him. But as the old saying goes: Where love is concerned, shortcomings are rarely an impediment. Ipomadon took his leave and made his way to the castle gate. He stopped to give the porter a gold ring.

'Sir,' he said. 'You know as well as I do that the huntsman who is not out in the forest early will leave it with very little. Therefore I would ask you – let me out before the sun comes up.'

Having received the porter's assurances, Ipomadon retired to his lodgings within the outer environs of the castle, but as soon as first light heralded the dawn chorus, he rose from his bed and saddled his white horse, had his white armour brought to him and all his hounds made ready. Then with a dreadful racket and the blowing of horns, he woke up all the young ladies.

'Madam!' they cried. 'There goes your darling, with his hounds, off to the tournament!'

The queen pretended not to hear this and lay as though she was still asleep. But despite all this, she loved him.

Ipomadon rode to a hermitage in the densest part of the forest. There, he dressed himself quickly in the white armour.

'Tholomewe,' said Ipomadon, 'today you must go hunting. If God sends you any deer, wait here for me this evening.'

Between the hermitage and the jousting field outside the city was a deep valley along which wound a little-known path. It was secluded and concealed by undergrowth and if a man protected his head he could ride along it unobserved. Ipomadon followed this path through the thick woodland. He took nobody with him but the child Egyon, his cousin, who had served him often and whom he trusted implicitly.

It was still early in the morning when he followed this secret path, and as the sun rose above the horizon he came up to the city. The watchmen were blowing the morning call. They looked over the wall and saw this white knight with a white pennon waving in the wind – as white as snow – and one of them called: 'Wake up, lady! Over here is the fairest knight that I have ever seen. His horse and he are both white, entirely white. It is

a delight to see!’

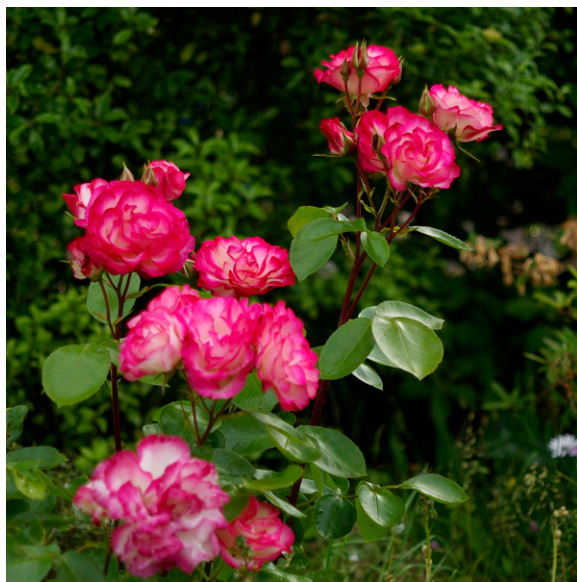
The lady went to the window and saw this knight; and it put her heart into a turmoil, for she did not know on whom to lay her love, for she had no mind to change her ‘Strange young man’ for anybody else, if she could possibly help it. So she looked at this white knight and the sight of him brought her little happiness.

But by now, the field was full of knights. The King of Spain saw the white knight standing there in his splendid arms, commanded his men to remain where they were and took up a great lance. Ipomadon became aware of his rapid advance, manoeuvred his horse to meet him and as their lances broke, the King of Spain flew twenty feet through the air and landed heavily onto the ground. Egyon seized his horse and leapt upon it. For all his strength and nobility, the King of Spain had to yield to Ipomadon.

The ‘Proud’ was happy to see this and told her cousin Jason to go out onto the field and help with his lances the knight who seemed to him to be performing the best, and to do this for the full three days. And as a reward, she promised to knight him on the third day. So Jason carried a lance to Ipomadon, and as though he had never seen him before in his life, Ipomadon asked: ‘Sir, who are you?’

‘I am my lady’s cousin, Sir.’

Jason did not recognise Ipomadon at all, although he had been great friends with him less than three years before. ‘Sir,’ said the white knight, ‘take this prisoner to your lady. I would like her to hold him. And take also this horse, and tell her that I sent it, along with the prisoner.’



The lady was very happy to receive her prisoner, but later she said to Imayne: ‘By all that I can see, this whole thing is going terribly badly. I cannot see my love anywhere and if he was here somewhere Jason would have recognised him by now.’

Revenge for the capture of the King of Spain filled one knight’s thoughts, but Ipomadon saw him coming. He levelled his lance against him and the blow that Ipomadon gave was so hard that the man would never need a priest again!

The day drew on and many a valiant warrior was brought down by Ipomadon, and no one who was hit by him had any other choice but to fall off his horse onto the ground. Ipomadon shattered mail, rent shields and felled many strong and worthy knights.

The Emperor of Germany gave Cabanus a nasty blow on the helmet that tore away part of the protection and knocked him to the ground. ‘What!’ cried the emperor, seeing him sitting there. ‘Do you think you are in Palermo now, drinking wine? Can you not

see that you are at a tournament?’ Cabanus heard this, quickly raised himself, swung his sword with great force and cut off the emperor’s left arm at the elbow. ‘So I am!’ he cried, derisively.

Sir Darius, the Duke of Lorraine, was inflamed at the sight of his cousin, the Emperor of Germany, receiving such harsh treatment and gave Cabanus a blow on the head that nearly sent him toppling once more from his saddle. Cabanus’s sword fell from his hand. Ipomadon saw this and rode to the rescue. He gave the Duke of Lorraine such a heavy stroke with his sword that he fell like a stone. Knights wondered at this blow, it had cut through so much chain mail! And as the light began to fail, the white knight was acclaimed the most praiseworthy and without doubt the finest knight on the field that day. All agreed that he was the best knight and they awarded him the prize.

The knights all began to retire to the city, or to their tents. Ipomadon caught up with Jason and cried: ‘Ah! Jason! Wait a moment if you will!’

‘By God’s power!’ replied Jason. ‘Sir, how do you know my name?’

‘Do you remember the ‘Strange young man?’’

‘Sir! My lady has chosen you above all other men to love!’

‘Jason, that cannot be. I must return to my own country. I can stay no longer. But greet her a thousand times for me.’

**I**pomadon met his cousin Egyon at the hermitage. Tholomewe had hunted all day in the forest and killed three great harts. Ipomadon was delighted; he cast off his armour, dressed himself as a hunter, all in green, and then with his horn about his neck he led Egyon back to the castle.

He blew a loud call before the castle gates. ‘Madam,’ said all the maidens inside, ‘here comes your darling, straight from the tournament. Soon you will receive all the horses he has won!’

The queen endured this ridicule and let them say what they liked. Ipomadon came into the hall and presented the three heads to her, since it was the correct thing to do. The queen sat down to supper and he served her with every effort and attention. Soon the king’s chamberlain arrived from the tournament. He knelt before the table.

‘Madam,’ he said, ‘the king greets you.’

‘You are welcome,’ replied the queen. ‘Tell me, how has the tournament gone? Who has taken the prize?’

‘In faith, Madam, I could not tell you.’

‘For shame! What is the point of you coming all this way if you have no news of the tournament?’

‘Madam, never, since the beginning of the world, has there ever been a tournament to match this one. My lord has won a great deal of honour today. He cast down knights in the field such that it was a joy to watch! Cabanus conducted himself bravely as well. But there was a knight in white who was better able to wield his equipment than any others. Everyone has said that he is the finest knight they have ever seen. He killed the Duke of Lorraine!’



‘Who is this white knight?’

‘Nobody knows! The king is looking far and wide for him...’

‘Greet the king well on my behalf,’ interrupted Ipomadon, ‘and tell him that all my hounds performed marvellously. Blokan and Nobillet ran magnificently, and also Redal. But of all the hounds I set after deer today, the white one was by far the best.’

Everybody laughed, maidens, knights and servants, and the queen blushed scarlet for shame and tried to change the subject.

‘I beg you, Madam,’ interrupted Ipomadon again, ‘of the venison that I brought home, let us send some to the king. Then he will see that I am looking after you properly, with all my strength and energy – in all sorts of ways!’

The chamberlain laughed loudly at this, then took his leave.

When the queen had eaten, Ipomadon led her to her chamber and kissed her. Then he went to his own lodgings in the outer environs of the castle. He had a great need to rest, for he was bruised all over.

**I**pomadon rose before dawn, selected his red horse and made his red armour ready; then he quickly set off with his hounds. Everyone who heard him laughed loudly. ‘There goes the queen’s favourite,’ they called, ‘off to the jousting!’

When he came below the queen’s window he blew a loud blast on his hunting horn, waking all the maidens. ‘Madam!’ they cried. ‘Because of all the noise your lover makes, we can get no sleep!’

The queen lay as still as a stone, pretending not to be awake.

Ipomadon rode straight for the hermitage, then armed himself and took the secret path through the valley so that nobody would see him. On the first day he had fought on the inner side so today he chose the outer, for his efforts of the previous day had given the knights of the outer side many painful wounds and had shattered their confidence. He

stood and raised his lance, and his red pennon waved in the wind. The watchmen on the walls of Cantanzaro saw this knight and one cried: 'Lady, awake! Awake! The tournament is about to continue, and the first knight to enter the field is wearing a marvellous suit of red armour.'

'Can you see the white knight who jousting here yesterday?' she asked in reply, for Jason had told her all that had taken place the evening before.

'No,' he replied, 'but this knight in red seems powerful enough!'

The lady went to watch from the walls, hoping to see her white knight, but when she couldn't see him, she returned to her chamber.

Jason went up to the wall and saw the field covered in standards. Then he went to his lady's room and urged her to come and watch the jousting.

'Go away, Jason!' she cried. 'I have no interest in the fighting. My love is not there.'

But nonetheless, he persuaded her.

The son of the King of Ireland leapt upon his bay steed and rode out of a pavilion. Ipomadon stood still, showing no inclination to joust. Over on the city wall he spotted the lady he loved – then he was fired with a passion to joust! He struck the Irish knight so hard that both horse and man tumbled to the ground. By this time Jason had come onto the field with nine or ten lances. Ipomadon recognised him, but said: 'Good Sir, where are you from?'

'I am a close cousin of the 'Proud',' replied Jason.

'You have some fine spears there. For God's love, lend me one.'

'Sir,' replied Jason, 'take the best! You have beaten the son of the King of Ireland who has made advances to my lady, although she does not love him. She is too sensible for that!'

'Sir, if this is the case, lead him to your lady at once.'

Ipomadon defeated the Duke of Normandy, then saw the Earl of Flanders lying on the ground and galloped angrily over to where Cabanus was trotting away with the earl's charger.

'Let go of that steed, Sir!' he cried. As Ipomadon drew alongside, Cabanus turned and drew his sword. Ipomadon drew his own and gave Cabanus such a blow with it that he fell off his horse to the ground and lay there unconscious.

When Cabanus had recovered, he got to his feet and swore: 'By God and Saint Michael! I shall avenge this act, if God will lend me the strength to!' But he did not know where the red knight had gone.

Ipomadon had ridden off to deliver mighty and skilful blows to left and to right, and

soon all were agreed that there was no better knight on the field.

The 'Proud' saw this and called Imayne to her.

'Do you see what the knight over there in red arms is doing?' she asked. 'Yesterday I can remember nothing at all to match it.'

She sent Jason out with a lance carrying a pensil that she herself had made. Ipomadon was very happy to receive it and used it to the full, knowing that she would be watching. He brought many knights to the ground with it.

King Meleager of Sicily saw this, gathered his arms and leapt upon his finest horse, Lyard. The king was mad with anger to see all his knights being beaten down and rode fiercely towards the red knight. He hit him in the middle of the shield – the lance drove through and caught Ipomadon in the side. Ipomadon blushed for shame, galloped at the king again and knocked him clean off his horse.

Ipomadon's shield was broken and his armour damaged. The lance had pierced his naked flesh, but not seriously. Ipomadon led the horse Lyard away into the forest where Egyon was waiting to receive all the booty. But by now the jousting had lasted for so long that the afternoon was drawing to a close. The inner side had won the day and by unanimous agreement, the red knight was given the prize.

As Ipomadon returned to the forest, he met with Jason.

'Jason! Here is the lance you gave to me. See, the pensil is still intact. Greet your lady for me and tell her that I shall take it with me into my own country. For her sake I shall carry this lance into some fierce fighting! Tell her this from me.'

'Sir, how do you know my name?'

'We were once friends,' replied Ipomadon. 'Yesterday I jousting here in white and today I am in red.'

'Ah! Sir! For Christ's pity! My lady dies for love of you! And you will leave her?'

'Jason, I cannot stay. All my people at the bottom of the hill over there are waiting for my return. Word has come to me just now that I must go back home. Goodbye! Greet your lady well for me. Greet her a thousand times and tell her that I shall speak with her when I can.'

Ipomadon rode off and Jason lost him in the crowd, so he made his way wearily back to his lady. 'Madam,' he said, 'I cannot help but weep, for today we have lost the best knight that has ever been born!'

'Which, cousin? The red knight?'

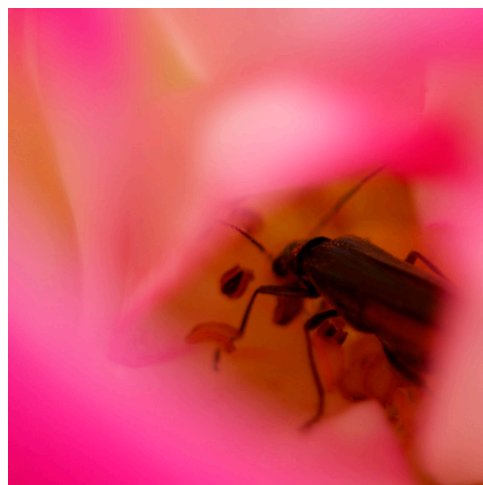
'Yes.'

'Did you learn who he was?'

‘He is the same knight who fought in white yesterday, and he is your ‘Strange young man’.

‘In faith, the same? Alas! He can be no Earthly man, by God!’

**T**holomewe had hunted well that day and bagged some fine deer. Ipomadon cast off his red armour, dressed himself in green and made his way back to the queen’s castle amidst loud calls on his hunting horn. All who heard it laughed and said: ‘Here comes the ‘Queen’s darling’ with many fine horses and noble knights that he has captured at the tournament! He has given so many hard blows amongst the oaks that he must be exhausted.’



When Ipomadon arrived at the main castle gates he blew his horn loudly, then made his way into the hall and presented the queen with another three deers’ heads. The lady gazed disapprovingly at the long antlers, and her maidens made some pointed remarks. The queen saw how pale Ipomadon was.

‘Sir,’ she remarked, ‘it is clear that you are doing too much. You were out very early this morning. Leave off hunting for a bit. You derive too much pleasure from it, if only you could see this.’

‘I cannot,’ replied Ipomadon. ‘I dare not! It would be cowardly to do so.’

The maidens all burst into laughter.

The king’s chamberlain arrived with news of the day’s fighting. He knelt before the queen.

‘Welcome,’ she said. ‘Sir, tell me, who performed the best today?’

‘Madam, so God help me, if yesterday we saw a knight accomplish the work of six, today there was a knight in red who put the fear of God into everybody! He achieved a much as ten knights! He sent the son of the King of Ireland to the ‘Proud’, he knocked Cabanus from his horse and rescued the Earl of Flanders, defeated the Duke of Normandy, and madam, this knight defeated my lord the king and led Lyard away.’ The queen asked if the king was hurt.

‘No, not badly,’ reassured the chamberlain.

‘Sir, who is this knight who dares to knock down my lord the king?’

‘We do not know! The king has searched everywhere for him, and so has the ‘Proud’, but nobody can find him.’



The queen looked at her knight sitting beside her and all thoughts of the red knight evaporated from her mind.

Ipomadon said loudly: 'Madam, let us send some of the venison to the king and chamberlain, and you may tell him, Sir, that today my red hound, Redal, won the prize.'

The chamberlain laughed, took his leave and went away carrying a large deer.

When supper was over, Ipomadon led the queen up to her bedroom, kissed her on the mouth – for well he knew the queen's desire – and then she went to rest, I believe.

**B**efore dawn, Ipomadon rose, went out of his lodgings and made ready his black horse and his black armour. Soon he had all his hounds on the leash. And as he left the castle he made such a hideous noise that there was nobody so soundly asleep that they did not wake up at once and cry out: 'There goes the queen's darling, curse him!'

Now it happened that there was a duke in Greece, a powerful lord who had an astrologer who knew how to read the stars. And when news of the tournament had reached this part of the world, this astrologer had gone to look at the sky that night and saw that a man would win great honour; but as to which knight it was, he must have got all his planets wrong. He told his lord all that he had observed and the duke had quickly made arrangements to set sail for Calabria.

Ipomadon stood in front of the city. 'Awake, bright lady!' called a watchman. 'There is a black knight in magnificent armour outside.'

'Can you see the red knight?' called back the 'Proud'.

'No, madam, but that is no matter. Just look at this!'

The Greek duke was making great boasts elsewhere about his destiny and instructed his men not to come to his aid unless he had at least two or three assailants at once. Then he rode hard towards the black knight. His horse was red, his saddle was red, his shield and lance were both red, and all his other equipment was red as well. He was a red knight and he shone like the sun!

Imayne shouted to her lady: 'Madam! Come and look! There's the red knight attacking that black knight over there.'

The 'Proud' was delighted.

The red knight and the black knight galloped together, and the duke struck Ipomadon so fiercely that the shield flew from his neck. Ipomadon, however, did not fail with his blow; he had just seen the lady on the wall and with inflamed intensity he cast the duke clean off his horse onto the ground. Egyon collected the loose horse and leapt upon its back. The lady nearly fainted. She thought her love had fallen in the field!

The Greek duke yielded his sword to Ipomadon and offered ransom – castles, towns,

gold, anything!

‘Sir,’ replied Ipomadon, ‘I have no desire for anything of your wealth, but you shall swear to me upon your honour that you will not wear arms again on this field today.’

‘Gentle mercy, Sir. I have come from a distant country. It has cost me a fortune to be here! If I was to waste all this expenditure it would be a source of great shame to me.’

Nonetheless, the knight agreed to take off his red armour, and went back to his tent to do so. Just then, Ipomadon saw Jason approaching him with a new lance. Jason didn’t recognise him.

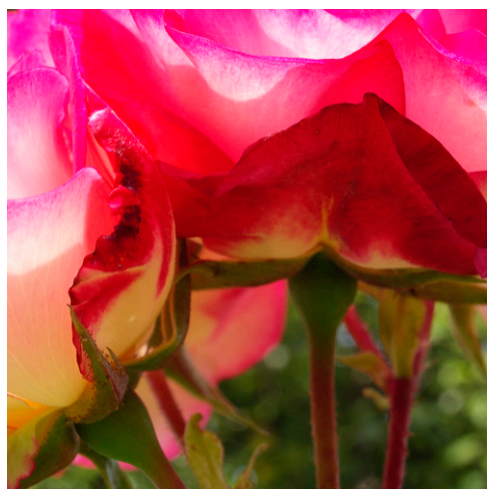
‘Sir, take this red horse to your lady, as quickly as you can,’ called Ipomadon. ‘Tell her that neither the white knight nor the red knight would have gone anywhere had I arrived sooner. Her love is stricken down. He is not able to make it to her prison and certainly, she will not be seeing him again today. He shall very soon be journeying far into the west. Tell her that if he had won the prize before, he has found his equal now, and show her the patch of ground where he lay. I believe her darling has had a fall! Go quickly and tell her all this.’

The young man did as he had been told, and when the lady heard it, she fell in a swoon.

‘Oh God!’ she groaned. ‘My love is dead!’

Outside on the battlefield the fighting had intensified. Ipomadon threw himself into the thickest fighting and performed magnificently. Many horses were captured and many knights were thrown to the ground.

The King of Scotland struck Ipomadon hard, nearly knocking him off his horse. Ipomadon thought to return a blow with interest – he swung his sword and cut the man in half! The blade ended up in the man’s saddle!



The battle continued all day and many a worthy knight was cast to the ground. Warriors of great renown were thrown from their horses and many a shield was shattered. Everybody witnessed the martial feats of the black knight and saw how every other knight on the field fell before his blows, they were so strong and the injuries they inflicted so grievous. At last the daylight began to fade, and the inner side appeared to be on the point of defeat. Ipomadon was at the forefront of the pursuit, but Cabanus turned and Ipomadon well knew that it was not in

his nature to flee.

Cabanus’s blow drove through Ipomadon’s shield casting him from his horse and wounding him in the side. Ipomadon’s heart nearly burst with anger. But Egyon caught the black horse and helped Ipomadon back onto it, then he captured Cabanus’s loose horse

and happily led it into the forest.

King Meleager saw all this and galloped towards the fray, giving Ipomadon a nasty blow on the right arm. Blood flowed down onto the knight's hand.

The black knight drew his sword and lifted it as if to deliver a mighty blow. The king did not waste any time – the inner side were dismayed to see him retreating so fast! Quickly it became a general rout.

And so ended the tournament.

The black knight had been far and away the best knight there, but as evening closed in he rode towards the forest as fast as he could. He looked around and saw Jason.

'Jason! Come and speak with me!' he cried.

'How do you know my name?' asked the other.

'We were once friends! I have jousting here for three days and each day in a different colour. And I thank God that I have achieved so much and performed so well. Greet your lady for me and tell her that you have spoken to me when I was a white knight, then a red knight, and now a black knight. For I must go. Greet that beautiful lady a thousand times for me. Do this for me, my friend, and tell her that I shall speak with her at leisure sometime, if God wills it. Tell her this from me.'

'Sir!' exclaimed Jason. 'If you leave her like this she will be destroyed!'

Ipomadon rode into the crowd and Jason lost him.

Soon Ipomadon came to the hermitage where he found Tholomew waiting for him. He cast off his armour and Tholomew dressed his wounds and stopped them from bleeding. They were very painful. Then Ipomadon dressed in green and rode home with a dreadful noise of hounds and hunting horns. When he came to the castle gate he blew a loud call and gave his hounds their portion of the kill. The maidens all cried out with laughter and the queen was very upset, for in her heart she loved him no less for it. She met him at the door, took him by the hand and led him to the table for supper.

As they sat eating, the king's chamberlain entered the hall. He knelt.

'Welcome,' said the queen. 'Tell me, who won the prize today?'

'Madam, by my faith, a knight in black has surpassed anything I have ever seen! Of all the knights on the field today, a black knight proved himself to be by far and away the best. My lady, the king has asked me to inform you that there will be a great assembly tomorrow morning in Cantanzaro and that you may wish to make your way there as early as you can, to hear the lady announce whom she has decided to marry.'

Ipomadon was sitting beside the queen and called to the chamberlain: 'Sir, remind the king, please, that he has not been deprived of venison for the last three days! He may have jousting all day, but I have not been idle either. Take some venison with you and tell

him that today my hounds performed magnificently, but none better than Belmond, my black hound.'

**I**pomadon sent Egyon to his niece to tell her to be ready to leave before dawn. He warned her to say goodbye to nobody. And in the middle of the night he rose from his bed, gathered all his horses, the red, the white and the black, and everything that he had won at the tournament, and then called the gatekeeper to come and speak with him in private.

'I wish to tell you something,' he said, 'but you must first agree, upon your honour, that it is told to you in confidence. I have been here for a number of days, serving the queen, as you know, but nobody knows who I am, and no one shall until I have gone out of this country.'

'Are you going, Sir?'

'Yes, my friend, I have to. I have jousting upon these horses for the past three days – the white, the red and the black. I make no boast about it. I jousting all day, and in the evening I returned as a hunter, to serve the queen.'

The gatekeeper laughed. 'Sir, no man could have done better than you have done!'

'This tournament is now finished,' said Ipomadon, 'and so I will leave. I have no plans to take a wife. In the morning you must go to the city of Cantanzaro. There you will find my lord the king, the queen and also the young lady for whose sake all this fighting has taken place. Give to the king this white steed, and to my lady the queen present this red horse, for she has been a good friend to me and it is good to keep one's friends. Say that her favourite sends her this horse, and tell her that were it made of red gold he would still send it to her. This black horse give to Cabanus and tell him that the animal has never lacked for any courage. And say that I know of no knight who will sit more fittingly upon him.

'And Sir, here is Lyard, who was the king's own horse. Give him to the 'Proud'. Ask the king to take it in good part, for he knows well that the horse was won fairly from him – a thousand people witnessed this, in broad daylight. Ask her to accept him for my sake, and say that the 'Strange young man' greets her a thousand times and asks that she remains true to the vow that she once made, that she takes as her husband only the man who is held to be the worthiest of all. Say this to that fair lady, whose beauty surpasses that of sunlight through stained glass.'

'Alas! Sir! What are you thinking of? For God's love, stay here and marry this fair lady! Then you will be the lord of all Calabria.'

'No, Sir, I have no plans to marry just yet. I may one day take a wife, but not now. For my friendship, take these horses into Cantanzaro, for I know that you are known there and will be given an audience.'

The royal court the next morning was full of lords and ladies; the king was there and the queen, and the 'Proud'. Some brightly dressed children led the horses that Ipomadon had given to the gatekeeper, and many wondered what was happening when they saw the castle gatekeeper himself, whom they all knew. The lady looked at the horses and her heart jumped in fear, and trembled. She blushed, then as quickly went pale. The king was intrigued. He recognised his own horse Lyard and Cabanus's steed, but not the others. He called the gatekeeper to him.

'Sir, where did you get these horses?'

The gatekeeper knelt. 'In faith, Sir, he who was known as the 'Queen's darling' has instructed me to give them to you.'

When they heard this, the maidens hid their heads under their hoods.

'In faith, Sir,' continued the gatekeeper, 'it was he who performed so magnificently at the tournament. But he has left this land now. Sir king, he sends you this white horse. He rode him on the first day, though how well he did I could not say.'

The king laughed and stared into space for a moment.

'In faith, Sir, he rode well enough!'

The castle gatekeeper completed his errand, said all that he had been instructed to, then knelt at the feet of the 'Proud'.

'Madam,' he said. 'The 'Queen's favourite' greets you a thousand times and wishes you to know that he was the 'Strange young man' who was at your court three years ago. He knows of the vow you once made and asks that you keep it.'

The lady went pale and moaned.

'Sir,' she replied, 'as I may have happiness, he sends me good advice.'

'Lords,' she said, 'you know well enough why this tournament was called! I made a binding promise to you that whoever bore himself best in the jousting could take control of my lands and of me. Now you have heard who it was who won the prize on each successive day of the tournament, but where is he? You don't know? Find him, then! And I assure you that there will be no further delay. I will willingly marry him!'

No one felt inclined to counsel her otherwise; on the contrary, they advised that she should wait until he was found. So everybody made ready to depart for their own lands once more. The king went to his castle, accompanied by a very sorrowful queen. She went to her chamber, found that the maiden who had accompanied her 'darling' was missing as well and tried to think of a way of bringing them both back. Aloud, she said: 'The knight who performed all these deeds has done me a great discourtesy to take my maiden from me while I was at the assembly. If I accept this without seeking revenge, it will be sung in years to come that I was willing to take any worthy bachelor from my husband's retinue into my bed without commitment. It is wrong of him to do me this

villainy.’

Cananeus heard this and said: ‘Madam, rest assured, if you have loved me in the past, then I shall repay that courtesy now.’

‘Don’t forget that he is leading your horse away with him as well,’ she said. ‘Go and fetch back my maiden and your horse!’ She said this knowing that Ipomadon would be brought back as well, she didn’t care how, her desire for him was so strong.

The steward Cananeus went to his lodgings, armed himself, leapt upon his horse and soon picked up Ipomadon’s trail.

Ipomadon was bruised and sore as he rode through the forest. He dismounted beneath a tree and fell asleep amongst the sweet smell of the flowers, with his head on his cousin’s knee. But after a while she heard a horse approaching. She woke Ipomadon at once.

Soon, the steward was lying on the ground with a broken shoulder. ‘I won a steed fairly from you and now, in faith, I will have another off you!’ cried Ipomadon. ‘Sir, you shall have a little hackney to ride back on; it will carry you twice as easily as this one, I think, for you are badly wounded. Tholomewe, bring that hackney over here. A war horse is much too high for a man with such an injury to ride.’

The queen was looking out, half anticipating that her love would not return, when the steward came into sight across the plain, his arm hanging limply by his side, blood dripping from his wounds like drops of rain.

## 4

**I**pomadon thinks that he has not yet done enough to earn the accolade he seeks, by all that he can see. So he has resolved to test himself further, to seek more adventures, in various countries.

‘Tholomewe,’ said Ipomadon, ‘I have agreed to marry King Darius’s beautiful daughter and heir! Make all the horses ready and gather up all our equipment, for God’s love. We will leave at midnight. We must flee!’

Ipomadon issued out of France, where he had been fighting for many months, and by a stroke of luck he happened to meet with Egyon, who was looking for him. Egyon greeted Ipomadon, who was now the King of Apulia, following his father’s death shortly after the tournament the year before.

‘Welcome cousin!’ Ipomadon called back. ‘Egyon, what news have you of Calabria since I left there a year ago? When did you leave Cantanzaro? How are things there?’

‘They could be better.’ replied Egyon.

‘Why? How is the ‘Proud’? How are things with her? Has she a husband yet?’

‘No, Sir!’

‘I believe that she has!’

‘I tell you no!’

‘How are things then?’

‘Sir, her heart is in great distress. Someone is causing her immense grief. Her barons are under siege, their lands are destroyed by war, and the knight behind it all has sworn that he will marry her, through love or by force, he does not care which. He is so arrogant that he has offered single combat for the lady’s hand in marriage. It has been widely announced throughout all of Calabria.’

‘Where is he from?’

‘A foreign land far to the east.’

‘Is he handsome?’

‘Him! Certainly not! A more ugly man could not be imagined. His hair is like felt, coarse like a boar’s bristles, his teeth are long and yellow and his lips hang down like a blood-pudding. His nose, I swear, hooks down onto his teeth and his mouth twists in every way. There is no uglier man in the whole of the world!’

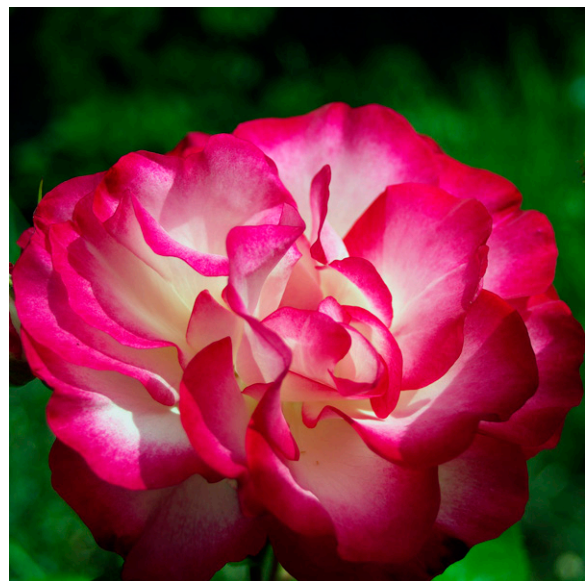
‘What is his name?’

‘Sir Lyoline, and there is no knight in the whole of Calabria who dares to fight against him. The ‘Proud’ is at her wits’ end. He has sworn to take her back to his own country.’

‘Egyon, can I get there in time?’

‘Yes, Sir, if you set out at once.’

Ipomadon called Tholomewe and told him everything he had heard. ‘It is worse even than I feared,’ he said. ‘Unless I can be there to defend the ‘Proud’, I will never be happy for the rest of my life. But I would much prefer it if, when I am there, nobody knows who I am. It is not long since I jousted there and someone might recognise us. In Sicily there are knights who are known to be valiant. The ‘Proud’ will surely send for King Meleager to provide a knight to take on this combat. I shall go again into Sicily then. But we must think of some ploy that will allow us not to be recognised.’



They rode quickly into Sicily, taking the fastest and most direct routes, and outside Palermo they rested in a secluded valley.

‘I shall be a fool!’ said Ipomadon. ‘I shall disguise myself as a fool.’

He made Tholomewe cut his hair short at the back and long at the front, wore a sooty shield that had been hanging up beside a fireplace for seven years and a rusty old sword. On one leg he sported an old split boot, on the other nothing but torn hose. His horse was so thin it could barely walk – it was an old, crooked mare. His bridle was a willow halter.

‘Tholomewe, you must go into the city and quickly find lodgings there.’ Tholomewe did as Ipomadon asked, while Ipomadon went to the king’s court.

The king had just sat down to eat, with the queen and many knights. Ipomadon came riding into the hall with his stirrup leathers so short that his knees were a foot above the animal’s mane. His horse would do little she was told to and the more he dug his spurs into her bony side, or hit her with a whip, the slower she went. She was very reluctant to walk across the flagstones and the knights all dropped their knives and roared with laughter at the sight of it. The look of annoyance that came across Ipomadon’s face caused them even more mirth!

Ipomadon looked around and peered suspiciously into every corner of the hall, as though he was deranged. The laughter subsided. Ladies fell into a worried silence.

After a long pause: ‘God keep you, Meleager!’ Ipomadon cried. ‘I am the best knight in all the world and there was a time once when I brought you to grief on the tournament field!’

Ipomadon turned to the queen. ‘May God keep you, fair lady!’ he said. ‘There was once a time when you were very eager to receive a loving kiss from me!’ The queen blushed bright scarlet with embarrassment.

‘Madam, is this true?’ asked the king.

‘Sir, I have never seen him before in my life!’

‘Fool!’ then exclaimed Cananeus, the king’s steward, ‘explain yourself. Where did all this take place, and when?’

‘Are you here as well?’ said Ipomadon in reply. ‘I cannot tell you exactly when, but I left the king lying on the tournament field and took his horse from him, every hair of it.’

‘When was this? I don’t remember it.’

‘No, in faith, neither do I!’ declared Ipomadon. The hall erupted into laughter.

‘Sir king, if it is your desire,’ said Ipomadon, ‘I would ask you to command these people to be silent. It is like being in a madhouse! No man is as accomplished as I at the art of warfare, as you can see from my clothes, and if you will consider retaining my services –



listen to what I have to say – if I am to stay, you must promise to give me the first combat for which you are asked to provide a knight.

The king could not stop laughing. ‘I shall grant you this if you will agree to stay with us,’ he said.

‘It is only good manners that you do.’



Everyone laughed once more and said: ‘He is a noble fool!’

‘May God bring you all misfortune if you mock me or call me a fool!’ cried Ipomadon. ‘Excepting the king, of course. I shall excuse nobody else – unless it is my lady the queen, for the great love that we once bore for one another.’ The hall erupted into a frenzy of laughter and good humour.

‘Sir,’ said Cananeus to the king. ‘I ask that you retain this man. For a noble fool does great good when weighty matters are pressing

down upon a court. Men laugh at what he says and anger drains down through the flagstones. Retain him, I say!’

‘Sir king,’ asked Ipomadon, ‘where is Cabanus? Certainly I would not have dallied here with you for so long had he been here. Were he to know who I am, he would be happier to see me than he would a cow or an ox! Once I knocked him from his horse on a tournament field, with my sword, although I cannot remember exactly when.’

Laughter once more: ‘In faith, neither can we!’ Cabanus was out hunting and knew nothing of Ipomadon’s arrival. So Ipomadon said: ‘Make up your mind, Sir king. If you wish to retain me, do so, otherwise I will leave at once. What do you say? Lords! Knights! Speak up for me!’

Then everybody clamoured for him to stay, and the king granted it. Ipomadon dismounted.

‘I will look after my horse myself. Come here, Manannan!’ Everybody laughed. He pulled at the bridle but the horse stayed where it was. Everybody said: ‘We would not have missed this for the world!’

So Ipomadon was asked to stay for his humour more than for his prowess at arms, although he was as powerful as a boar. Notwithstanding his strength, he was taken for a fool, which pleased him greatly.

As he sat eating on the floor, there came a worthy creature upon a milk-white horse

riding through the doorway. Her saddle was one of the finest that Ipomadon had ever seen and her horse's trappings were all of gold. Her gown was of velvet and it reached to her feet, and over it she wore a lightweight jacket studded with diamonds. Over this she wore a red garment. She shone like the sun.

Everybody in the hall stared at her – and the king and his knights, in all honesty, thought in their hearts how marvellous it would be to spend a long winter's night in bed with her, conjoined as though they were one.

'Worthy king, in whom lies great wisdom and understanding,' she said. 'Your niece in Calabria is at her wit's end. She begs you to send her some help. Sir, there is not a foot of land in her kingdom that has not been destroyed by a monster in human shape, and there is not a knight in Calabria who dares to fight alone with him. He has sworn, so God save me, that he will marry her – this is what he has sworn! Unless she can find a knight to defend her from him, she will be utterly ruined!'

All the knights sitting at the tables remained as quiet as mice. The king was ashamed.

'Alas!' cried the maiden. 'Why do you all sit there so silently? Many of you are worthy knights. Are any of you going to offer to help my lady? Unless somebody does, we will be destroyed!'

Still there was a heavy silence. No one dared say a word. The damsel began to weep.

'I see that my journey has been in vain.'

Ipomadon got up from the floor.

'In faith, now I am happy!' he declared. 'Sir king, I am delighted that I have come here, for this is my fight. You promised me the first combat for which you would be asked to provide a knight and, Sir, if you say I lie, here is my glove to challenge you to defend your denial.'

'Leave off, fool,' said the king. 'This is no time to joke.'

'Alas!' cried Imayne to the king. 'If I can find no help here, I have no idea where else to turn.' Still not a word. So Imayne turned her horse's head and, weeping, she rode out of the hall.

'Fool,' said the king, 'go if you wish. There is nobody stopping you.'

**I**pomadon quickly mounted his nag and rode to where he had left all his gear, then gathered up his fine equipment and leapt onto his steed. He had a tattered coat, so threadbare that it was little more than a rag, an old torn hood, and armour that would single him out as a fool.

He sent his finest horses and armour into Calabria by another way. Tholomewe and his page, his knights and everything else he sent on ahead. 'Wait for me at the hermitage,'

he instructed Tholomewe, 'and go secretly, so that no one knows that you are there.'

Ipomadon rode fast and caught up with the maiden Imayne. A dwarf was waiting for her just outside the city. He saw Imayne weeping.

'In faith, Sir,' she told the dwarf, 'we shall find no help here. The only man to speak was a court fool who said that the battle should be his! I have never before set eyes upon such a ridiculous-looking individual. Look! Here he comes now!

'Tell him to go away!'

'That would be discourteous,' replied the dwarf. 'Although he may not be the finest knight I have ever seen, the road is his as well as ours. What harm can it do to let him ride with us?'

The damsel was not pleased and rode on. Then she turned her horse and with a loud voice called: 'Turn around you idiot. I do not desire your company!'

'Damsel,' replied Ipomadon. 'You know well that the 'Proud' has loved me for a very long time, although this should not be revealed to anybody.'

'Now are you satisfied?' said Imayne, turning to the dwarf. 'I would rather be drowned in a pool than lead a fool!'

'You are well aware, damsel, that the 'Proud' has loved me for a very long time,' repeated Ipomadon.

'May God send me sorrow if I know whether she loves you or not,' she cried back at him. 'But I can tell you this – if she sees you now she will show you little love!'

They rode on together, through farmland and through forest, and the heat of the sun did nothing to cool Imayne's temper. Then she thought of a ruse to try to get rid of him; she dismounted and her dwarf pitched a pavilion. Ipomadon hung around, smiling idiotically to himself, then he dismounted a little way away.

The dwarf was a courteous fellow and went over to him. Imayne was livid!

Now it happened that Sir Lyoline had a cousin, a knight whose valour was well-known. Repeatedly he had asked his lord if he might be given Imayne, and he had asked so fervently and so insistently that Lyoline had granted him his request. This knight, whose name was Maugys, was aware that she had gone to the court of King Meleager, for he had good informants, and he had planned to intercept her on her way back. And it happened that he came riding along now, in all truth, to the very spot where Imayne was sheltering from the afternoon heat.

'Well found, maid Imayne,' he cried. 'Get back upon your horse at once, for you are coming with me. Sir Lyoline has agreed that you are mine.'

Imayne was panic-stricken.

‘Sir, what are your intentions towards this fair damsel?’ asked Ipomadon.

Maugys looked at his broken armour and said: ‘Sit still you simple fool. If you force me to defend her, your injuries will cripple you for the rest of your life!’

‘So, now you call me a fool?’ replied Ipomadon. ‘Whichever of us is the greater fool will soon be apparent by the nasty fall that he receives.’ He put on his helmet, quickly mounted his horse and took up a lance. Without any more ado, the two knights rode at each other. Ipomadon’s blow was so strong that it knocked Maugys off his horse and broke his collarbone.

They set him on the dwarf’s pony, his hand clutching painfully against his chest, and with ill grace and much regret, Maugys took his leave of them.

‘I have been very presumptuous in giving away your pony,’ Ipomadon apologised to the dwarf. ‘But nevertheless, no matter! Please accept this knight’s warhorse in good faith. The bargain is more than fair, I think.’

The dwarf had never been so happy in all his life.

‘Damsel,’ he said to Imayne, ‘Did you see what he did? There is no man under the moon who could have done better.’

‘Yes, well worth a reward!’

‘Had you chased him off, we would have had to have faced Maugys alone.’

‘I see that gifts can do much,’ replied Imayne.

The heat of the day had passed by now, so they remounted, all three of them, and continued their journey. As evening descended, they came to an inn. Here Ipomadon took his lodgings and let the damsel do as she wished. The dwarf waited upon him hand and foot and Imayne was furious at this. In the morning, they set off again.

The path led through a forest and Imayne rode deep in thought. By midmorning they found a spring and the damsel was overjoyed. She got off her horse and the dwarf put up her pavilion, then he brought some wine and cold roast venison to eat.

Ipomadon dismounted a little way off. The dwarf asked the damsel to call the knight to her.

‘May I never see another Christmas if I ever call a fool to me!’ she replied.

As they sat talking, a knight came riding through the forest towards them. This knight was Lyoline’s nephew, his sister’s son, and had won great honour on the field of battle in India and Palestine.

‘My darling,’ he cried when he saw Imayne, ‘get up upon your horse, for Sir Lyoline has given you to me as a gift.’

‘Sir,’ said Ipomadon, ‘be on your way!’

The knight looked disdainfully at Ipomadon's shield. 'Sit still you fool.'

'If I am a fool, you can soon expect a great flurry of strokes, for a fool relies on quantity over quality.' Ipomadon grasped a lance and leapt onto his horse. Setting his shield correctly, immediately they rode at one another. Imayne looked on.

Ipomadon's lance wounded the knight in the thigh. The knight drew his sword and took a swing at Ipomadon's head, but the sword turned in his hand and only the flat of it hit its target, otherwise Ipomadon would have been killed. Imayne nearly fainted when she saw this blow delivered. Ipomadon drew his own sword and laid into his opponent so hard that he managed to cut off the knight's ear as he rained blows down upon his head. The knight fell from his horse.

'You call me a fool,' cried Ipomadon, 'but do you like the way I have learnt to wield my sword? You could join a monastery now. You have your tonsure already.'

The knight's squire emerged from the woods with a fresh horse and helped his badly wounded master onto it. They rode off.

The dwarf took some food to Ipomadon and he ate it eagerly, while Imayne looked on. When they had eaten, they rode off. Ipomadon continued to shake his head like a madman. Night was fast approaching and at last they came to a town, beside a small river. It was little more than a village, and there was only one inn, and the inn was so small that there was only one room for all of them. But Imayne was not annoyed. She was beginning to regret having been so harsh to this knight, and thought that she might try to make it up to him.

Ipomadon took off his armour and the dwarf brought to him a clean garment to wear; it was red with a black lining. His shirt was of silk and beautifully embroidered, and as Imayne looked at him, and at his face, she thought that she had never seen a more handsome knight. Curiously, she did not recognise this strange young man.

'I deeply regret having been so harsh,' she said. 'Sir, please forgive me.'

The dwarf was delighted to hear this. 'Sir,' he said, 'since you are a noble and courteous knight, please accept this lady's offer of friendship, for I shall guarantee that you will find no more ill-feeling in her heart.'

Ipomadon accepted this assurance, and shook his head like a lunatic.

When they had eaten, they went to bed. But Imayne could not sleep. To and fro she turned, sighing, with her head in a spin. 'Alas, fool! Why do I think like this? It is my lady's fault for sending me on this journey. But if I don't return, she will be in great danger. And how can it be her fault? Did she ask me to sleep with the very man I am trying to rush to her aid? You must keep control of your heart. You are to blame, Ymayne, for all this pain, it is none of your lady's doing. But it is torment!'

Up she rises and down she falls. 'Love, why do you do this!' she cries. 'How is it fair,

that my lady's love is such a magnificent knight and my heart is captured by a fool? No, by my faith! He is not a fool. He is a noble knight and all who have seen him fight will agree.'

She put on some clothes and went over to his bedside. And there she stood, silently, for a little while.

She slowly drew back the bedclothes.

'Sir,' she said. 'Have you slept enough?'

He replied harshly, put her hand in his mouth and made as though to bite it. 'Mercy, Sir!' Imayne cried. 'It is I, Imayne. I have come to try to make up for all the horrible things I have said to you. Sir, I am the daughter of a duke, as noble a lady as the 'Proud'. Sir, when my father dies, I shall inherit Burgundy. Let us abandon this journey and go there at once, and you shall be lord of that country.'

Ipomadon lay still. Ah, you have little comfort Imayne.

She went back to her bed, but could not sleep.

In the morning they rose and continued their journey. Their path led them through a forest. 'Here is a lovely spring,' said the dwarf, after a while. 'I suggest that we rest here and have a bite to eat.'

Imayne was happy to do so and dismounted. Ipomadon got off his horse and she went straight over and sat down beside him. As they sat eating, Sir Lyoline's brother Sir Leander came riding by. When he saw the maiden sitting there, he had never been so happy in all his life!

'Noble damsel!' he called. 'It is good that I have found you. Leap up upon my horse and come with me. I shall make you the Duchess of Thessaly! I have admired you for a long time and Sir Lyoline has said that you shall be mine.'

Ipomadon quickly jumped up onto his horse. 'Sir!' he cried. 'Your lord is overgenerous with his lies. There is no gift for you here.'

The knight looked at him and said: 'So may I have joy, if you are that fool who has brought down my two cousins, then we have unfinished business.'

They rode at each other in anger, and very soon Ipomadon's lance went through Sir Leander's body so deeply that the point stuck out through his back by a foot or more! They finished their meal and rode off, and the knight stayed behind, beneath a lime tree.

Ipomadon, Imayne and the dwarf followed a secluded path, and as night was falling, Ipomadon cut a shelter of branches with his sword. The dwarf made a bed for each of them from the cloths he had with him. Ipomadon took off his armour and they all sat down to eat. Imayne sat as close to the knight as she could.

When they had finished their supper they retired to their beds.

Imayne's mind was so full of thoughts that she could not sleep. She reflected upon what had happened the previous night, put on a gown and made ready to go to Ipomadon's bed once more. Then: 'Alas that I ever set eyes on him!' she said to herself. 'In faith, Imayne, with full knowledge of what you are doing you rob yourself of your wits, and you will live to curse this day. We are both fools, he and I. No! It is love which does this to me, and to ignore it will be folly. I vow that unless I can taste love tonight, these feelings will bring me to my grave; and think, then, how sad it will be to have died without having tasted its sweetness.'

She went and sat on the side of his bed and touched his face.

The moon shone brightly as Imayne went back to her own bed and lay there as though she had never left it. But she is so in love that she has to return to his bed. She knelt down before it and said: 'Unless you wake and speak with me, I shall die of love for you. My heart is on the point of breaking. Unless you speak softly to me, I cannot live any longer.'

Ipomadon lay still.

In the morning Ipomadon went to Imayne. He called her dwarf over to them.

'You two shall ride home to the 'Proud' while I stay here,' he said.

Imayne was not pleased with this idea.

'Say no more when you arrive,' continued Ipomadon, 'but that a fool has followed you.'

Then Ipomadon dug his spurs into his horse and rode off into the forest until he came to the hermitage. Tholomewe and Egyon were waiting there for him.

Imayne rode home to the 'Proud' and was met with a sombre mood. No one smiled.

'What news?'

'I wish I hadn't gone.'

'Why Imayne?'

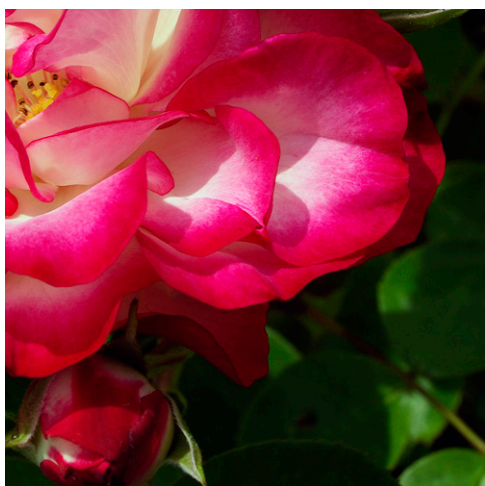
'I don't know. For many reasons. Madam, I saw two hundred knights sitting in King Meleager's hall, and when I told them how desperately things stood with you, not one of them offered a single word of support. None except for a fool, who jumped up and said that the battle should be his, in front of them all. Still nobody else said a word! He followed me and no one rode to stop him. He has defeated Sir Lyoline's cousin and his nephew through sheer folly, and by folly he has killed Sir Lyoline's brother.' Then Imayne broke down in tears.

'Where is he Imayne?'

‘How should I know? Madam, I tell you, he is not to be relied upon. He has wandered off into the forest somewhere.’

The ‘Proud’ told her men to make ready some boats on the coast and to make certain that Lyoline did not know what they were doing. ‘A thousand times more would I prefer to drown myself in the sea than to go away with Lyoline,’ she said. ‘Now I know for certain that my love is dead. There is no corner of the world that does not ring with the news of this challenge to single combat, and if my love was alive, he would be here by now to save me. Oh heart, will you not burst!’

## 5



The day came that Lyoline had designated for the combat. He would wait no longer. He armed himself all in black, mounted a black horse and took up a black shield, lance and pencil. Then he rode arrogantly in front of the city to give his horse confidence.

Ipomadon summoned Egyon. ‘Go quietly,’ he said, ‘conceal yourself at the edge of the forest and tell me what armour Lyoline is wearing; is it white or black? Come quickly back and tell me.’

Egyon happily set off to carry out his master’s instructions. He camouflaged himself with holly and at last spotted Lyoline riding back and forth in front of the city, as though he owned it. It was awful to hear the sobs and wails of the townspeople and the noblemen and their ladies.’

‘What news?’ asked Ipomadon eagerly, as Egyon returned.

‘Sir, he is in black armour.’

Ipomadon armed himself in black. He took a black lance and leapt upon a black horse. He feared he had already delayed too long and instructed his men to hide themselves at the edge of the forest. Then he rode away from them and out into the open. When those in the city caught sight of him, they all cried for joy!

No one knew who he was but Imayne, for she recognised the horse – it was the one he had won from Leander.

‘Imayne,’ said the ‘Proud’, ‘there is a very handsome knight over there and he seems to be very strong. I am sure he must be the same knight who followed you from Sicily, but



he doesn't look like a fool to me.'

'No, madam, it can't be him,' said Imayne, suddenly unsure. 'He didn't have any armour like that.'

**I**pomadon was armed identically to Sir Lyoline, from head to toe.

'You, Sir knight!' exclaimed Sir Lyoline. 'Have you come to fight with me?'

'Yes, I have!'

'It will bring you nothing but sorrow; and for this I hold you still more of a fool.'

'What the devil should I care?' replied Ipomadon.

'You are not of my family?'

'No, by God!'

'Who are you then?'

'My father was a king.'

'Are you a bastard?'

'No! But what is it to you?'

'I would like to know.'

'My mother was a queen and I was born in wedlock.'

'Sir, where did you get that horse?'

'Why the hell should I tell you?'

'Did you overcome my brother to win it?'

'Certainly, and with one blow, so I should take care if I was you!'

'Then you are indeed a fool,' said Lyoline. 'You reach above yourself! But I will tell you one thing, my friend, I advise you to go home again to those you love for, by Christ, I would hate to have to kill you, you are so handsome. Although you have killed my brother, I will let you go on your way. You must know that the 'Proud' has loved me for many years and suffers the pain of unrequited passion. Many times has she begged me to have my will of her.'

'I don't believe you. She would rather see you hang!'

'No my friend, I could have had her long before now, but I want her to hold to her vow, and therefore I have sought to see if there is any man on this Earth valiant enough to defeat me.'

'I always think that too much talking is a waste of energy,' replied Ipomadon. 'I have had

enough of it. But you have two or three hundred knights waiting over there I see. It is said that there is no chivalry in 'two against one.'

At once, Lyoline went over to his knights and they moved back into the forest. 'Upon your lives, stay there, whatever happens!' he commanded. His knights swore to this and he rode quickly back to Ipomadon.

Each of them rode into some space to turn, levelled his lance and galloped into the attack as fast as he could. Their lances struck and each tore the shield from the other. Chain mail that had never before yielded to the point of a lance burst and broke, links snapped, the most securely fastened armour gave way as the tips ripped into their sides. They both fell to the ground. Each had sustained only slight injury and they managed to recapture their horses and remount. Then they rode hard at one another again. The impact made their horses reel and stagger, their lances shattered and the sword strokes which followed were beyond description. Sparks flew from their helmets like the fire from spitting coals! Never before had such a battle been seen. No one could tell who was getting the better of the other, they seemed so evenly matched.

Lyoline struck Ipomadon on the head and nearly knocked him out of his saddle. His horse staggered from the impact and fell to its knees. Imayne gave out a cry: 'God save this knight!'

'Do you know who he is?' asked the 'Proud'.

'No, madam, I have no idea, but those blows have made my legs go to jelly!'

Ipomadon heard cries of lamentation and they gave him heart. By now, his horse had regained its footing and regathered its strength, and he surged forwards again with some brutal strokes of his own. Ipomadon struck a quarter of his adversary's helmet clean away and the sword carried on downwards, cut Lyoline's saddle in half and his horse also!

Lyoline got up from the ground and, seeing his own blood, ran at Ipomadon's horse with his sword in his hand like a madman. Ipomadon knocked him down again with his horse's chest but Lyoline got up again, thrust the blade of his sword between the animal's ribs and into its heart. Ipomadon saw his horse's blood and leapt out of the saddle. 'By God and Saint Michael!' he cried. 'My horse shall be avenged!'

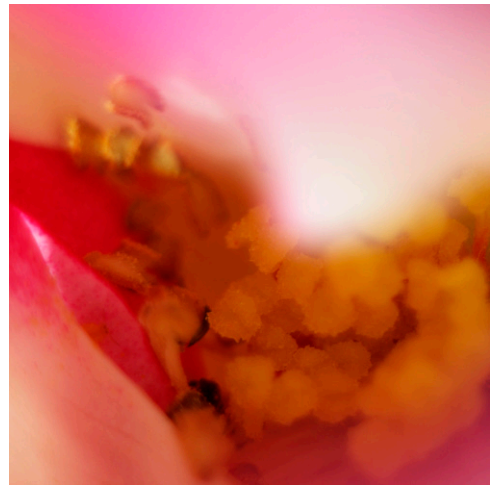
Their blows were so strong and the fight lasted for such a long time that they had to rest for a while, leaning against their swords.

'Ho, you shit!' cried Lyoline. 'This folly marks you out as a fool! You came a fool and you shall leave a fool. How dare you deal with me? I tell you, there is no greater warrior than I in the whole world. Do you not agree? I have killed a thousand men in countries far and wide and soon you will taste the same justice that I dealt to them. You do not understand the power of love! You are strong enough, and skilful in battle – be happy with this and yield to me while you still live! I will forgive you all your guilt and we shall be friends. Come with me to the east! I shall give you three fine castles and Imayne as

your wife.'

'So may I live,' replied Ipomadon, 'I shall accept no gift of marriage from you! I do not need you to woo any lady for me! I would have a fine enough wife if you were hanging by the neck!'

Lyoline shook with anger. He took up his sword and his shield, and Ipomadon responded in kind. Neither was prepared to give up a foot of ground. Hard was the assault and stern the defence. People stared in amazement as chain mail was shattered, blood flowed and armour was strewn about the field. Everybody said it was the hardest fight they had ever seen.



Lyoline tried to deliver a killer blow and took away a quarter of Ipomadon's helmet. He did his work so well that the blade bit through the mail of Ipomadon's arm into his shirt and down to the bone. Thank God no arteries have been severed! The sword had turned in Lyoline's hand, otherwise Ipomadon would have been killed without question. But Ipomadon was mad with anger to see his own blood; he looked at his hand and at the ring that his mother had given him just before she died, then he touched the wound with the stone and at once it stopped bleeding.

'You have no strength to fight with me any longer, you know this to be true!' cried Lyoline.

'In faith, Sir,' replied Ipomadon, 'I see no one here I wish to yield to. By the strength of the Saviour, any hurt that I have sustained shall be given back with interest! I offer only this to you – that I shall lie dead upon this field before I give up my sword. I will not sleep before you have yielded to me!' and he gripped his sword, his mind filled with thoughts of revenge, for he was badly wounded, but he attacked with such ferocity that Lyoline was not able to deliver any strokes of his own, Ipomadon's rained down so thickly. Lyoline began to retreat and to try to avoid the blows rather than to parry them. Ever since their horses had been killed, no one in the city had had any idea which knight was which.

Lyoline was a man of great strength and he began to fight back. Both gave such strokes that the ground quaked beneath them. But at last, Ipomadon struck Sir Lyoline such a blow that his helmet split in two and the blade of Ipomadon's sword drove down into his brain.

'You have taunted me for a long time,' cried Ipomadon, 'but I fear that your own wound might now be the worst. Perhaps you might become a monk, for you have no hair now on the top of your head! You can go and sing the stations of the day with your abbot. But by God, I fear there may be no doctor who can help you now.'

‘No, in faith,’ said Lyoline. ‘I acknowledge that my wound is deadly. Here is my sword. I yield to you. The ‘Proud’ and all this country are yours. Woo her, and she may take great delight in loving you, for there is no knight on Earth who can match you.’ And with this, Lyoline fell.

**T**holomewe watched all this from a distance and saw the outcome of the battle. Despite the similarity in their arms, he knew who had won. He brought a horse to Ipomadon, the knight leapt up onto it and rode into Lyoline’s tent. There was no one to challenge him. The people on the city walls groaned in anguish and no one dared to emerge from the gates. Ipomadon took a black banner from the tent and then everybody believed that he was Lyoline!

He rode to the walls of the city and cried: ‘Cease all this delay and get yourself ready, damsel. Now you can see for yourself that Lyoline is invincible! Know that I am he! Tomorrow you shall set off with me for India, for I have killed your knight.’

All within the city wrung their hands and sighed in despair. Knights and noblemen were weak with worry, the ‘Proud’ could scarcely stay on her feet for faintness and all looked in awe at the black knight addressing them. Piteously, the ‘Proud’ made her complaint to God.

‘If I go with Lyoline,’ she cried, ‘I shall lose the man I have loved for so long. Everybody, prepare to take to the sea, and may God do with us as he wishes.’

Knights and townspeople were distraught. The ‘Proud’ tore her hair. Imayne was extremely upset, but everyone made themselves ready, left the city through a secluded gate in the wall and made their way to the ships.

‘Goodbye Calabria,’ said the ‘Proud’ tearfully. ‘Goodbye forever!’

**W**hile Imayne was travelling back from King Meleager’s court in Sicily with the fool, Cabanus had returned from hunting to learn from the other knights about Imayne’s visit, and about her attempt to find a knight to champion the ‘Proud’ against Lyoline. He guessed that the fool might have been the ‘Queen’s favourite’ in disguise and with the king’s permission had gathered five hundred knights to set off for Calabria with him.

He arrived now, his knights in full armour, lances and shields glistening in the sun, only to see a myriad of ships waiting to sail. The ‘Proud’ fell to the deck of her vessel in a faint. She thought this newly arrived knight might be Lyoline, ready to wade in and seize her.

Cabanus stood on the shore and heard all the weeping. ‘Who are you?’ he cried.

‘I am a simple woman, Sir, who yesterday reigned over all of Calabria.’

‘Dear lady,’ he said, ‘come onto the land and speak with me. Have no fear, I am your cousin Cabanus and I have come from Sicily to rescue you if I can.’

Then the ‘Proud’ was happy! The boats were drawn to the shore and they greeted one another tearfully. ‘Sir Lyoline now controls all of Calabria,’ lamented the ‘Proud’. ‘He will stop for no man. He does as he pleases. And now I am exiled and shall never set foot in my land again. I mayne brought a knight along with her to fight on my behalf and never has such a tough warrior been born of a woman; he did marvellously well for a long while, but in the end, Lyoline killed him.’

‘I heard that a fool followed I mayne out of Sicily,’ said Cabanus.

‘Sir, may Christ save me, that was he!’

‘By God’s strength, I know of no knight able to last for so long against Sir Lyoline unless it was the ‘Queen’s favourite’, who was also the red knight and the black knight and the white knight at the tournament.’

‘In faith, Sir, perhaps it was. But no! Oh God!’

‘Lady dear, wait here and don’t do anything until I get back. For good or ill, I shall ride into the field and see if I can get any further news. My knights will stay here with you. I will ride to Lyoline to discover what right he thinks he has to do this to your country and to you.’

Cabanus took only ten knights with him and rode from the forest onto the field where the combat had taken place. Ipomadon leapt onto his horse and galloped away. He rode along the path through the deep valley so that no one would see him. But Cabanus saw him.

‘Sirs,’ he told his knights, ‘over there in that forest is Lyoline. He is fleeing from us, and if we are to overtake him we will have to ride like the wind!’

They spurred their horses and Cabanus cried: ‘How! Sir knight! Wait and speak with us!’

‘Know that I am Lyoline!’ replied the black knight. ‘I may ride here, for this land is mine now, as is the ‘Proud’. I won her through strength of arms just now. But tell me, who are you who dares to take it upon himself to impede my progress?’

‘In faith, my name is Cabanus, Sir, and we shall determine whether you have any right to the ‘Proud’ and to her lands right here and now!’

‘Are you Cabanus?’

‘I tell you, yes!’

Ipomadon made himself ready to joust, with all the remaining strength that he could muster. Both Ipomadon and Cabanus levelled a lance that was sharpened to a needle’s point and the lances splintered into fragments as they met. But they remained firmly

seated in their saddles, so strong were they both.

Although Ipomadon was wounded and weary from his recent combat, there was no better knight on Earth, although he had only three knights with him, while Cabanus had ten. Each of Ipomadon's knights chose a man and knocked him off his horse to the ground. Others of Cabanus's retinue joined in the fray and two of Ipomadon's knights were quickly slain. Ipomadon killed four of Cabanus's knights with his sword, but a fifth managed to get up again and attack Ipomadon's horse. Ipomadon was forced to the ground, but continued the battle bravely on foot. Although he had never been so weary, his blows were so powerful that he quickly caused blood to seep through chain mail. The knight who had just fought such a hard battle with Lyoline jumped across a stream and thought to defend the further bank as a way of gaining a little rest. He leaned his back against an oak and gave many a hard blow with his sword. But by now all his knights were dead, so he had to take the full brunt of the attack on his own. At last, part of his glove was knocked away by the stroke of a sword, leaving his hand bare. Cabanus saw the ring on his finger, and recognised it. He let his sword drop at once, and ordered his knights to stop fighting.

'Sir,' he said, 'Wait! How did you come by that ring?'

Ipomadon stood still, remembering back to the time when his mother had given it to him as she lay dying, and recalled that she said the man who would recognise it would be his brother.

Cabanus was eager to learn more. 'Sir,' he said, 'for the love of God, I ask not in any way accusingly but for the sake of she whom you love the most, tell me – where did you get that ring?'

Ipomadon suddenly felt reluctant to lie. 'I will tell you the truth,' he said. 'My mother gave it to me.'

'Who was your mother?'

'The Queen of Apulia, in faith! It is no secret.'

'Did she say anything regarding it?'

'Yes, that I had a brother, and I believed her.'

'Sir, are you Lyoline?'

'No. I shall lie to you no longer. I overcame Lyoline just now, in some fierce fighting. I have loved the 'Proud' for a long time and so, I believe, has she loved me. For three years I was her 'Strange young man', I shall hide it no longer. Then I was the 'Queen's darling', and now I have been a fool.'

'Tell me, Sir, what is your name?'

'Ipomadon.'

‘Alas, brother,’ said Cabanus, ‘why have you done all this? Why have you disguised yourself for so long? You are the finest warrior that I have ever seen, by the great God whose day this is. Had you gone away once more, I would have been very angry! Why, dear brother, Ipomadon, why would you wish to leave so secretly? It is a marvel to me. There is no man born of a woman more suitable to marry the ‘Proud’” And Cabanus laughed. ‘Welcome brother!’

They hugged one another, and it was a great joy to see. They both dropped their swords and hugged one another.

One of Cabanus’s knights who was watching this ran to a horse. He galloped through the thick woodland to the seashore and knelt before the ‘Proud’.

‘What news?’ she asked, fearing the worst.

‘Madam, the best that could possibly be! No better news will ever be brought to your ears, I can vouch for this.’

‘Is Sir Lyoline dead?’

‘Yes, lady, in all honesty, he shall annoy us no more.’

‘And is Cabanus alive?’

‘Yes, madam. Madam, Lyoline was dead before we arrived! He has been killed by one of the most secretive knights ever to have been born!’

‘Everyone would be delighted if you married him!’

**W**hen Ipomadon and Cabanus had spoken together for so long that they had run out of things to say, they leapt upon their horses and rode off together, laughing, towards the city of Cantanzaro. When they came into the city they sent for the ‘Proud’, and she came from the shore in all her finery. And so it can be seen that he who achieves his love at last is well-rewarded for his long labour!

The ‘Proud’ came into the city and Ipomadon met her courteously. He greeted her and they kissed. Both were trembling. You may well believe that they are both happy to see one another. Their hearts are quaking!

For a long while, Ipomadon said nothing. Then:

‘God save you, damsel.’

‘Sir, welcome,’ and her heart trembled with joy.