

Quemar Press

# The Ash Tree

Le Fresne



## Marie de France

translated by  
Katharine Margot Toohey



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## *Preface*

In this lai, spontaneous affection overcomes conceptual rejection. Here, the female hero does not wish suffering or punishment for a woman who abandoned her. Instead, the situation comes to a solution when both women realise the existence of the other - the ultimate remedy for them is the reality of each other. In this text, in a darkened room by night, the hero's mother can exclaim in new levels of clarity, away from all secrets: 'Beautiful friend, you are my daughter!'

Marie de France's text, in 12-century Anglo-Norman French, was based on traditional Breton Lais. Quemar's Modern English translation is juxtaposed with the original. The translation strives to maintain the original's vitality, cadence, four stresses and the effect of the rhymed final syllables. The work's illustrations are inspired by medieval artwork.

This Romance is named after the female hero, Fresne - the lady given the name of the Ash Tree, as she was resting in its branches when she was found, wrapped in a fine cloth - a cloth which would let her mother recognise her again by chance or serendipity. Her mother had given birth to her and her twin sister but feared for her own public reputation. She had slandered her neighbour's twins and fidelity by suggesting that it was not possible to give birth to twins without being promiscuous. Her mother had Fresne left at a minster, where her gentlewoman prayed and chose the Ash Tree to leave her.

'she turned and looked behind  
to see an ash wide and branching  
and very thick with its branches spreading,  
the branches growing as four quarters.  
It was planted here for shelter.  
In her arms, she took the baby  
and she ran to the ash tree,  
set her there and left her there,  
in truth to God entrusted her.'



The branching Ash protects the child from danger. She is nurtured by the Abbess who has great affection for her. All know her to be named after the tree. The Ash tree seems to act not as a talisman for her but as an element with which she is at one: an element that could signify a natural protective force steadfast through night, secrecy, danger or abandonment - something that ensured Fresne's existence.

The Ash tree is also something tangible for Fresne in the mystery surrounding her birth, as are the fine cloth and a ring left with her. She carries these possessions by her - objects that lead her mother to realise that she knows unwaveringly Fresne is her daughter.

'So she brought the ring to her  
and the lady studied it there  
and she recognised it clearly,  
and the fine fabric close by,  
and believed, knew without question  
her other daughter was this young woman.'

This is a story where the woman's individuality, reality and being are powerful catalysts driving the plot, and remorse is far out-weighed by joy at having found at last the woman lost. There is a line 'What you please is forgiven'.

Katharine Margot Toohey

Quemar Press



# The Ash Tree

The lai of the Ash I'll tell  
from a story I know well.

A long time ago, in Brittany  
two knights lived closely.  
They dwelt and had such riches,  
knights with valor, knights courageous,  
each next to each, in the country.  
They had each married a lady.  
One of them was to have a child.  
When it was at last delivered  
at that time she had two children.  
Her lord was glad and rejoiced then.  
He felt such pleasure  
he sent word to his neighbour  
that his wife had two sons.  
Now he was entrusted with twins  
so he would ask soon  
that one be given his name.  
The rich man was seated to dine  
when the messenger came this time.



At the dais, he came to kneel  
 and he told all he had to tell.  
 For this the lord thanked God  
 and gave him a beautiful steed.  
 The knight's wife began to grin  
 as she dined next to him.  
 At that time, she was proud and false,  
 slanderous then and still envious.



Le lai del Freisne vus dirai /Sulunc le cunte que jeo sai.

En Bretagne jadis aveient/Dui Chevaliers, voisin esteient;/Riches hummes furent è  
 manant,/E chevaliers prux è vaillant./Prochein furent, d'une cuntrée,/Chescun femme  
 aveit espusée;/L'une des Dames enceinta/Al fin qu'ele délivera/A cele feiz ot deus  
 enfanz/Sis Sires est liez è joianz;/Pur la joie que il en a./A sun bon voisin le  
 manda,/Que sa femme ad deus fiz éuz,/De tanz enfanz esteit créuz./L'un li transmettra  
 à lever,/De sun nun le face nomer./Li riches hum sist al manger/A-tant es-vos le  
 messenger;/Devant le deis s'agenoilla,/Tut sun message li cunta./Li Sire en ad Deu  
 mercié,/Un bel cheval li ad doné./La femme al chevalier surist,/De juste li al manger  
 sist;kar èle ert feinte è orguilluse/E médisante è enviuse.







She spoke as one mad  
and before all her people said:  
'Help, God: I'm amazed  
where this good man was advised  
to disclose all to my lord here,  
all the disgrace and all the dishonour  
that his wife gave birth to twins,  
so much shame for his wife and him.  
What happened is clear to us.  
It never came to pass, nor was:  
never may it happen in this instance  
that when giving birth at once  
a woman produce two children



but two men had fathered them.'

Her lord, studying her say this,

blamed her, said she was amiss:

'Lady, let it go.

It isn't yours to speak so.

In all honesty, that other lady

has been regarded very highly.'

Through the house, those within

came to remember her words then.

So they were said, known widely

throughout all the lands of Brittany.

She was hated for them everywhere,

with such scorn, all the more.

Every woman hearing the speech

despised her for it, poor and rich.

That messenger who had come to call

returned to his lord to tell of all.

Having listened and turned to go,

suffering, not knowing what to do,

he hated his noble wife,





deeply distrusting her past life.

He held her under duress,

not knowing she was guiltless.

The Lady who spoke ill of her

became pregnant the same year

- she was pregnant with two.

Her neighbour was avenged now.

She carried them to term:

two girls. It weighed so firm

then, her strong sorrowing grief.

She began lamenting to herself:

'Alas, what to do in future!

I will have no reputation, no honour!



Ele parlat mut folement,/E dist devant tute sa gent,/Si m'eït Deus jo m'esmerveil/U  
 cest Preudum prist cest conseil/Qu'il ad mandé à mun Seignur,/Sa hunte è sa  
 deshonor,/Que sa femme ad eu deus fiz,/E il, è èle en sunt huniz./Nus savuns bien  
 qu'il i afiert,/Unques ne fut ne jà n'en iert,/K'en avendrat cel aventure/Qu'à une sule  
 portéure/Que une femme deus fiz eit,/Si deus hummes ne li unt fait./Sis Sires l'a mut  
 esgardée;/Mut durement l'en ad blamée;/Dame, fet-il, lessez ester,/Ne devez mie issi  
 parler:/Vérité est que ceste Dame/Ad mut esté de bone fame./La gent qui en la meisun  
 èrent,/Cele parole recordèrent,/Asez fu dite è conue/Par tute Bretaine fut seue./Mut en  
 fu la Dame haïe,/Pos en dut estre maubalie,/Tutes li femmes ki l'oïrent/Povres è riches  
 l'en haïrent./Cil qui le message ot porté/A sun Seignur ad tut cunté,/Quant il l'oï dire è  
 retraire,/Dolent en fu, ne sot qu'i faire;/La preude femme en haï/E durement l'a  
 mescréi,/E mut la teneit en destreit,/Sanz ceo qu'ele nel' déservait./La Dame qu'isi  
 mesparla,/En l'an méismes enceinta;/De deuz enfanz est enceintié/Ore est sa voisine  
 vengié./Dèsqu'à sun terme les porta,/Deus filles ot, mut li pesa;/Mut durement en est  
 dolente,/A sei méismes se desmente; /Lasse, fet-èle, que ferai!/Jamès pris ne honor  
 n'aurai!



In truth, I'm shamed clearly;  
now my lord and all his family  
of course will never believe me  
as soon as they learn of this story  
because the one I judged was me  
I defamed every lady,  
said: it never was  
ever, never have we been witness  
to a woman having two children  
without knowing two men.  
No, but two children are mine.  
To me, the worst returned in time.  
The one who lies, maligns another,  
knows not how they, in turn, can suffer.  
If you can speak of someone,  
better just to praise them.  
To defend myself from those who condemn,  
I must murder one of the children,  
prefer with God later to amend  
rather than I be scorned or shamed.'



All those by her in the chamber  
consoled her and said to her  
that the girls should not suffer  
and killing a person is no light matter.  
The Lady had a young gentlewoman,  
who was noble and from heritage born.  
Long protected by the Lady and nourished,  
she was loved so much and cherished.  
This woman heard her Lady cry,  
her Lady weeping and sorrowing profoundly.  
It weighed on her anxiously  
and she went to comfort the Lady,  
saying, 'Lady, this is nothing.  
Do well and leave this grieving.  
Hand me one of the children,  
to free you of it then.  
You will not be shamed here.  
You will never see her.  
I will drop her at a minster,  
carry her safe and healthy over,

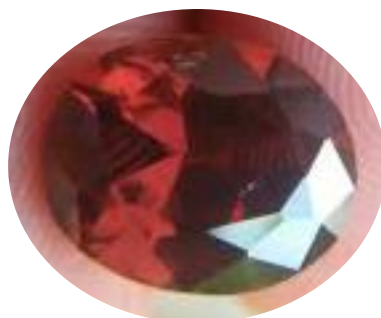




for some goodman to find there,  
and if God pleases nourish her.'



Hunie suiz, c'est véritez;/Mis Sire è tut sa parentez/Certes jamès ne me crerrunt/Dès  
que ceste aventure sauerunt;/Kar jeo méismes me jugai/De tutes femmes  
mesparlai./Dunc dis-jeo que unc ne fu,/Ne nus nel' avium véu/Que femme deus  
enfanz éust,/Si deus humes ne conéust./N'en ai deus, ceo me est avis;/Sur méi est  
turné le pis./Ki sur autre mesdit è ment/Ne seit mie qu'à l'oïl li pent./De tel humme  
peot l'um parler/Que meuz de li fet aloser./Por mei defendre de hunir,/Un des enfanz  
m'estuet murdrir./Meuz le voil vers Deu amender/Que mei hunir è vergunder./Ceo qui  
en la chambre esteient/La cunfortèrent è diseient/Que èles nel' suffreïent pas;/De  
humme ocire n'est pas gas./La Dame aveit une Meschine/Qui mut esteit de franche  
orine/Lung-tens l'ot gardée è nurie,/E mut amée è mut chérie./Cèle oï sa Dame  
plurer,/Durement pleindre è doluser;/Anguissusement li pesa,/Ele vient, si la  
cunforta./Dame, fet-èle, ne vaut rien:/Lessez cest dol, si ferez bien./L'un des enfanz  
me baillez ça,/Jeo vus en délivèrai jà,/Si que honie ne serez,/Ne ke jamès ne la  
verez./A un mustier la geterai,/Tut sein è sauf la porterai;/Aucun Preudhum la  
trovera,/Si Deu plaist nurir la fera.



Hearing this woman speak to her,  
the Lady promised, so much happier,  
that if the woman fulfilled this arrangement  
she would receive great payment.

They within a sheet of linen  
wrapped one of the noble children,  
under cloth silken and embroidered,  
that was brought to her by her lord.

It came from Constantinople.

None had seen cloth so beautiful.

She tied a piece of string  
on the newborn's arm with a ring,  
one ounce of gold fine,  
with red jewels at every turn.

Letters encircled all the band.

The ones who would this maiden find,  
by this truly they would know  
she was born to good blood now.

The gentlewoman took the baby.

She left the chamber instantly.





Then in hush of falling night,  
she left the city street,  
to enter into a road so vast  
it led her forward to the forest.



La Dame oï que Cele dist,/Grant joie en out, si li promist/Si cel service li feseit,/Bon  
guerdun de li avereit./En une chince de chesil,/Enlupèrent l'enfant gentil;/E desus un  
paille roé;/Ses Sires li ot aporté/De Costentinoble ù il fu,/Unc si bon ne èrent véu./A  
une pice de sun laz,/Un gros anel li lie al braz,/De fin or i aveit un unce;/En chescun  
turn out un jagunce./La verge entra; esteit lettrée/Là ù la Meschine est trouvée,/Bien  
sachent tuit vereïement/Qu'ele est née de bone gent./La Dameisele prit l'Enfant,/De la  
chambre s'en ist à-tant;/La nuit quant tut fut aseri,/Fors de la vile s'en eissi,/En un  
grand chemin est entré/Ki en la forest l'ad mené.



Amongst the forest and her path set  
with the child she continued yet,  
leaving the great road never.  
on her right, she heard afar  
dogs bark and roosters sing  
where might be found a town.  
Eagerly, she travelled there  
and heard dogs bark more.  
In a town with such wealth and beauty,  
so entered there this lady.  
Here in this city stood an abbey.  
It was rich and embellished powerfully.  
To my knowledge, here there were nuns  
and an Abbess to be its guardian.  
The young woman saw the minster,  
the towers, the walls, the bell tower.  
Quickly, she came closer  
and stopped with the house before her.  
The child with her setting down,  
she knelt humbly on the ground



and then her holy prayer began:

'God', saying, 'by your divine name,

if this is true to your own wish,

now guard this child not to perish.'

The prayer coming to its end,

she turned and looked behind

to see an ash wide and branching

and very thick with its branches spreading,

the branches growing as four quarters.

It was planted here for shelter.

In her arms, she took the baby

and she ran to the ash tree,

set her there and left her there,

in truth to God entrusted her.



Parmi la forest sa veie tint,/Od tut l'Enfant utre en vint,/Unques del' grand chemin n'eissi./Bien loinz sur destre aveit oï/Chiens abaier, è coks chanter,/Iloc purrat vile trover./Cele part vet à grant espleit/E la noise des chiens oïeit;/En une vile riche è bele,/Est entrée la Dameisele;/En la vile out une abéie,/Durement riche è garnie./Mun escient Noneins i ot,/E Abéesse kis guardot./La Meschine vist le mustier,/Les turs, les murs, è le clochier,/Hastivement est là venue,/Devant li hus est arestue./L'Enfant mist jus qu'ele aporta,/Mut humblement s'agenuila,/Ele comence s'oreisun./Deus, fait-ele, par tun seint nun,/Si céo te vient à pleisir,/Cest Enfant garde de périr./Quant la prière out finée,/Arière s'est regardée,/Un Freisne vit lé è branchu,/Et mut espès è bien ramu;/E quatre fois esteit ramé,/Por ombre faire i fut planté./Entre ses braz ad pris l'Enfant,/Desi qu'al Freisne vient corant;/Desuz le mist, puis le lessa,/A Deu de veir le comanda.



The gentlewoman returned again  
to tell her lady this she had done.  
Inside the abbey, there was a porter  
who would open the minster's door  
to the outside, when people came  
to hear God's service spoken.  
He rose on time tonight,  
kindled the candles and lamps alight,



rang the bells, unlocked the entry  
to glimpse the cloth on the ash tree,  
in belief a person had taken the sheet  
- some thief - and hidden it.

He saw nothing else,  
but when he could come close,  
touching the tree and finding the baby,  
he thanked God truly.

Taking her and not faltering  
he went back to his lodging.

He had a daughter who was widowed,  
her lord was dead and she had a child  
small in the cradle and breastfed.

The goodman called ahead:

'Arise, arise, now, daughter -  
kindle candle and kindle fire.

Here I carry in a baby.

I found her at the ash tree.

With your milk breastfeed her, too,  
make her warm then wash her now.'







La Dameisele arière vait,/Sa Dame cunte qu'ele a fait./En l'abbéie ot un Porter/Ovrir  
suleit l'us del mustier,/Defors par unt la gent veneient,/Quil' service Deu oïr  
voleient./Icele nuit par tens leva,/Chandeille è lampes alluma,/Le seins sona, è l'us  
ovri;/Sur le Freisne les dras choisist,/Quidat ke aukun les ust prist/En larecin, è illoec  
mis:/D'autre chose n'ot-il regard,/Plus tost qu'il pot vint cele part,/Taste, si ad l'Enfant  
trové,/E il ad Deu mut mercié;/E puis l'ad pris, si ne le laist,/A sun ostel arière  
vait./Une Fille ot qui vedve esteit./Sis Sires fut mort, Enfant aveit,/Petit en berz è  
aleitant./Li Preudum l'apelat avant:/Fille, fet-il, levez, levez,/Fu è chaunde  
le alumez;/Un enfaunt ai ci aporté,/Là fors el Freisne l'ai trové./De vostre lait le  
alaitez,/Eschaufez-le è sil' baignez.





She did as he'd directed her,  
took the baby, kindled the fire,  
well warmed her and well washed,  
and by her milk breastfed.  
On her arm, she found the ring.  
Seeing the fabric fair and fine,  
they knew with every knowledge  
she was born to high heritage.  
The next day, after the service,  
the time when the Abbess was at church,  
the porter went to confer with her.  
He told her about the adventure  
of the child, about finding her there.  
Then the Abbess instructed the porter  
to bring the baby for her to see  
just as he'd found her exactly.  
The porter went back to his home  
obligingly carried the baby on,  
to the abbey to show her to its Lady.  
She studied the child closely



and said she would nurture this girl,  
 maintain her to be her niece as well.  
 She said the porter was forbidden  
 from ever saying what had been.  
 She herself lifted up the baby.  
 As she was found by the ash tree,  
 they named her for it, 'Fresne',  
 and all knew this to be her name.



Cele ad fet sun comandement,/Le feu alum è l'Enfant prent;/Eschaufé l'ad è bien  
 baigné/Puis l'ad de sun leit aleité./Entur sun braz treve l'anel,/Le pali virent riche è  
 bel,/Bien surent cil tut ascient,/Qu'ele est née de haute gent./El demain après le  
 servise,/Quant l'Abbesse eist del' Eglise,/Li Portiers vet à li parler,/L'aventure li vait  
 cunter,/Del' Enfant cum il le trovat./L'Abbéesse le comaundat/Que devaunt li seit  
 aporté/Fut issi cum il fut trové./A sa meisun vet li Portiers/L'Enfant aporte  
 volentiers;/Si l'ad à la Dame mustré;/Cele l'ad forment esgardé,/E dit que nurir le  
 fera/E por sa nièce le tendra./Al Portier ad bien défendu/Qu'il ne die cument il fu./Ele  
 méismes l'ad levée./Pur ceo qu'al Freisne fut trovée,/La Freisne li mistrent al nun,/E le  
 Freisne l'apelet hum.





The Lady maintained her as her niece,  
guarded her a long time quietly.  
Staying within the grounds of the abbey,  
the Abbess nurtured the young lady.  
When she came to such age and time  
that nature shapes beauty's form,  
there was none so beautiful in Brittany  
as the young lady, with so much courtesy  
she was well-educated, debonaire  
in her every word and every air  
and no one who saw her did not love her  
and esteem her well, in great wonder.  
In Dol, a good lord was there,





never was one better before.

I will say to you his name:

he was called Burun in that realm.

Hearing talk of the young woman

there his love for her began.

He left for a tournament then

and he travelled to the abbey on his return.



La Dame la tient pur sa nièce,/Issi fut celée grant pièce;/Dedenz le clos de l'abbéie/Fu la Dameisele nurie./Quant ele vient en tel éé/Que Nature furme beauté,/En Bretaine ne fu si bele,/Ne tant curteise Dameisele./Franche esteit è de bone escole,/E en semblant è en parole;/Nul ne la vist que ne l'amast,/E à merveille la preisast./A Dol aveit un bon Seignur,/Unc puis ne einz n'i ot meillur./Ici vus numerai sun nun;/El païs l'apelet Burun./De la Pucele oït parler,/Si l'a cumença à amer./A un turneiment ala,/Par l'abbie se returna:



Seeing the young woman was his request.

Allowed to see her by the Abbess,

he saw her education, her beauty,

saw her wisdom, accomplishment and courtesy.

If her love be never his,

he would suffer it as injustice.

He was lost and knew not how,

for if he returned often now

the Abbess would perceive the situation

and his eyes see the lady not again.





He thought of one strategy:  
wishing to help enhance the abbey,  
he'd give of his land to them,  
each day improving then,  
for what he wanted in return  
was that he return and he sojourn:  
he wanted to have their fraternity,  
and gave them greatly from his property,  
but he also had another occasion:  
apart from returning to receive pardon  
often, he would return there  
to the young lady, to speak with her;





La Dameisele ad demandée/L'Abbéeſse li ad muſtrée;/Mut la vit bele è enſeignée./Sage,  
curteise è afeitée./Si il ne ad l'amur de li,/Mut se tendrat à mau-bailli./Esgaurez est, ne ſait  
coment;/Kar ſi il repairout ſovent,/L'Abéeſſe ſ'aparcevereit,/Jamès des oilz ne la vereit;/D'une  
choſe ſe purpenſa;/L'abeie creſtre voderà,/De ſa tere tant i durra,/Dunt à tuz-jurs  
l'amendera;/Kar il vout aveir en retur/E le repaire è le ſujur,/Pur aveir lur fraternité,/Lor ad  
grantment le ſoen doné./Mès il ad autre achéiſun/Que de recevoir le pardun;/Souvente feiz i  
repeira,/A la Dameisele parla;



Such was his prayer, such was his persuasion,  
so sought, she conceded her affection.

On a day, her love for him sure,  
sensibly, he spoke to her:

'It is clear, beauty, now  
you take me as your companion, so  
from all, come with me, and go.

My beliefs and thoughts are yours to know.

If your aunt perceived our situation clearly  
it would weigh upon her strongly.

Were you pregnant, furthermore,



she would feel strong anger.

My counsel is yours if you believe:

come away, together leave.

I will not fail you, of course.

All my best advice is yours.'

She who strongly loved him

granted as he wished to happen.

She went away with him, together,

and on to his castle he brought her,

she with her ring and the fabric rare:

they may have value to her here.



Tant li pria, tant li premist,/Q'Ele otria ceo ke il quist./Quant aséur fut de s'amur,/Si la mist à reisun un jur./Bele, fet-il, ore est issi/Ke de mei avez fet ami:Venez vus ent del' tut od mei,/Saver poez jeol' quit è crei,/Si vostre Aunte s'aperceveit,/Mut durement li pesereit,/Encur si feussez enceintez/Durement sereit encruciez;/Si mun conseil crere volez,/Ensemble od mei vus en vendrez,/Certes jamès ne vus faudrai,/Richement vus cunseilleraï./Cele qui durement l'amot,/Bien otriât ceo qui li plot,/Ensemble od li en est alée,/A sun chastel l'ad amenée./Sun pali porte è sun anel,/De ceo li pout estre mut bel;



The Abbess returned them to her  
telling her the past before:  
at first sent-away, the baby  
left to sleep at the ash tree  
and given the rich cloth and ring.  
The one who had sent her then  
left her with no possession else.  
As the Abbess nurtured her as her niece,



the young woman protected these well  
secured inside a chest's seal,  
a chest she carried with her  
to never misplace, forget never.

The knight who had the lady led  
cherished her very much and loved,  
and all his men, his every servant,  
there was not one great or insignificant  
who did not love her for her courtesy  
nor cherish nor honour this lady.

She was with him for a long time  
but a knight who is under fiefdom  
becomes one equipped ill.

Often they would come to tell:

'You should marry a gentlewoman  
and free yourself from that one.'

They would be glad if he had an heir  
after him, who would hold secure  
his land and all his inheritance unbroken -  
there would be too much ruin





L'Abéesse li ot rendu,/E dist come il est avenu,/Quant primes li fut envéiée,/E suz le freisne fut cuchée,/Le pali è l'anel li bailla,/Cil qui primes le envéia,/Plus d'aver ne reçut od li;/Come sa nièce la nuri,/La Meschine ben les gardast,/En un cofre les afermat,/Le cofre fist od sei porter,/Nel' volt lesser ne ublier./Li Chevaliers ki l'amena,/Mut la chéri è mut l'ama,/E tut si humme è si servant/N'i out un sul petit ne grant,/Pur sa franchise nel' amast,/E ne chéríst, è honerast./Lungement ot od li esté,/tant que li chevalier fiefé/E mut grant mal li atournèrent./Sovente feiz à li parlèrent,/Qu'une gentil-femme espusast,/E de cele se délivrast./Lié sereient s'il eust héir,/Qui après lui puist avéir/Sa tere è sun hiretage,/Trop i avereit grant damage





for his future, if this he allowed:  
a wife who did not have a child.  
He could be lord to them never.  
At will, they would serve no longer  
if he did not obey their wish.  
So the knight acquiesced to this:  
he was to take a wife, at their advice.  
They thought on who to choose:  
'Sir, nearby, very close,  
a Goodman spoke with us.  
He has one daughter, an heir -  
so much land to be had with her.  
Her name is Codre, the hazel tree,  
none with her beauty in all this country.  
For this ash tree you leave,  
in exchange the hazel is yours to have,  
a tree with hazel nuts and pleasure.  
The ash carries no fruit with her.  
The Lady, Codre, we shall bring  
and give her to you, God willing.'



Then, this marriage was arranged by them

and accepted in all by everyone.

Alas! How did it happen

that this could be known by none:

the story of the two young women,

who were sisters - who were twin.



Si il laissast pur sa suivant/Que de espuse n'eust enfant,/Jamès pur Seinur nel'  
tendrunt,/Ne volentiers nel' servirunt/Se il ne fait lur volenté:/Le Chevaliers ad  
graunté/Qu'en lur conseil femme prendra;/Ore esgardent è ceo sera,/Sire, funt-il, ci  
près de nus,/Ad un Preudum parlé od nus;/Une fille ad qui est suen heir,/Mut poez  
tere od li avoir,/La Codre ad nun la Dameisele,/En cet païs ne ad si bele./Pur le  
Freisne que vus lairez/En eschange le Codre arrez./En la Codre ad noiz è  
déduiz,/Freisne ne porte unke fruiz:/La Pucele purchaserunt/Si Deu plect si la vus  
durrunt./Cel mariage unt purchacié,/E de tutes parz otrié./Allas! cum est avenéu/Ke li  
aunkun ne unt séu/L'aventure des Dameiseles/Qui esteient sérur gemeles.





Fresne, the one kept hidden,  
the other one to wed her companion.  
With the other in marriage to be taken,  
Fresne appeared never stricken.  
On his behalf she worked well,  
still honouring all his people.  
In the household, the knights all,  
every servant, every vassal,  
all were first in immense sorrow  
for the lady they would lose now.  
With the day set for the wedding here,  
her lord summoned his friends there.



The Archbishop attended then,  
one of Dol, attached with affection.  
They brought his bride to him,  
and with her, her mother came,  
who of the young woman was in fear  
because her lord so loved her,  
that she influence him ill  
against her daughter if she will.  
She would throw her from the house,  
and give her son-in-law advice  
to marry her to a Goodman,  
thinks that will free him of this woman.  
They held the wedding lavishly  
there and very pleasantly.  
The young woman went to the chamber  
and all she had seen never  
seemed to weigh upon her  
or make her ever appear in anger.  
Tending well about the bride,  
she served, graceful in her aid,



and they held her in great wonder,

all who saw her there.

Her mother studied her much closer,

in her heart prized and loved her.

She thought, said: if she had known this,

the manner this young woman possesses,

she would not lose her to her daughter,

nor here, would she from her lord sever.

In night - to make ready the bed

where she should sleep, the bride -

there, the lady Fresne arrived,

entered, then her cloak untied

and she called to her the chamberlains

so that she could teach them

as her lord would wish the bed to be

because she had seen it frequently.

When the bed was ready there,

they'd cast a cover over,

its silken sheet so worn

under the gaze of the young woman.





This was hardly beautiful to her sight.

It weighed upon her spirit,

but from a chest, her fine fabric instead

was unfolded by her on her lord's bed.



El Freisne cele fu celée,/Sis amis ad l'autre espusée./Quant ele sot ke il la prist,/Unques pèjur semblant ne fist./Sun seignur sert mut bonement/E honore tute sa gent./Li Chevalier de la meisun,/E li vadlet, è li garçun,/Mervéillus dol en meneient/De ceo ke perdre la deveient./Al jur des noces qu'il unt pris,/Sis Sires i mande ses amis,/E l'Erceveske i esteit,/Cil de Dol qui de lui teneit,/S'Espuse li unt amenée,/E sa mère est od li alée./De la Meschine aveit pour/Vers ki sis Sires ot tel amour/Que à sa fille mal tenist,/Vers sun Seignur si ele poïst,/De sa meisun la getera;/A sun Gendre conseilera/Que à un Preudum la marit/Si s'en déliverat, ceo quit./Les noces tiendrent richement,/Mut i out esbaniement,/La Dameisele ès chambres fu;/Unques de quanke ele ad véu,/Ne fist semblant que li pesast,/Ne tant qu'ele se curuçast./Entur la Dame bonement/Serveit mut aféitement./A grant merveille la teneient/Cil è celes ki la véient./Sa mère l'ad mut esgardée,/En sun quor preisié é amée;/Pensat è dist, si ele le sust,/La manière k' ele le fust,/Jà pur sa fille ne perdist,/Ne sun Seignur ne li tolist./La noit, al lit apariller,/U l'espuse deveit cucher,/La Damisele i est alée;/De sun mauntel s'est desfublée;/Les chamberlencs i apela,/La manière lur enseigna/Cument si Sires le voleit/Kar mainte feiz véu l'aveit./E quant le list fu apresté/Un couverture unt sus jeté;/Li dras esteit d'un viel bofu,/La Dameisele l'ad véu./N'est mie bons, ceo li sembla,/En sun curage li pesa;/Un cofre ovri, sun pali prist/Sur le lit sun Seignur le mist



Fresne's gesture was to honour him  
because the Archbishop had come  
to authorise and bless them,  
as these were duties, rites of his profession.

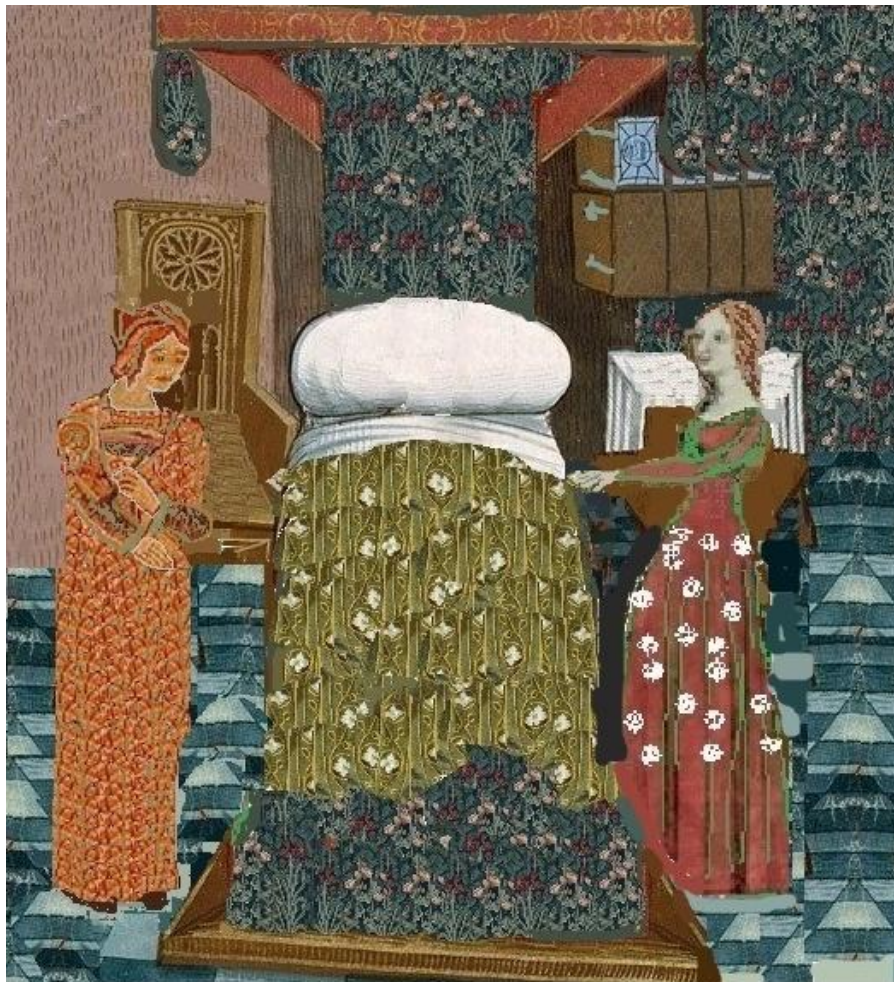


When they had prepared the chamber  
the lady brought in Codre, her daughter  
since she wanted to ready her to retire  
and ask her remove the day's attire.  
The mother studied the bed's cover,  
had seen finer fabric never,  
apart from the cloth she had given  
for her daughter whom she had hidden,  
so then she remembered her.  
All her spirit began to shiver.  
She called the chamberlain to her there.  
She said, 'By your Faith, answer  
where was this rich fine fabric found?'  
'Lady,' he said, 'you will understand  
the young lady brought it  
and threw it over the coverlet  
which seemed hardly beautiful to her then.  
I believe the fine fabric is her own.'  
At that, the lady called her near,  
and she came before her.





Fresne took off her cloak  
and then to her the mother spoke:  
'Beautiful friend, hide not from me  
where was found this cloth so lovely!  
If a gift, from where has it come,  
say if it is from someone!'  
The young woman answered her:  
'My Aunt, Lady, who gave me nurture:  
the Abbess gave it to me,  
and said to guard it safely.  
They had given this and a ring,  
when they sent me to her nurturing.'



Pur li honurer le feseit/Kar L'Erceveske i esteit/Pur eus beneistre è seignier,/Ceo afereit à sun mestier:/Quant la chaumbre fu délivrée,/La Dame ad sa fille amenée;/Ele la volt fère cuchier,/Si la cumande à despolier./Le pali esgarde sur le lit/Que unke mès si bon ne vit/Fors sul celui ke le dona/Od sa fille ke le céla./Adunc li remembra de li,/Tut li curages li frémi./Le chamberlenc apele à sei:/Di mei, fet-ele, par ta fei/U fu cest bon pali trovez?/Dame, fet-il, vus le sauerez,/La Dameisele l'aporta,/Sur le covertur le geta;/Kar ne li sembla mie boens,/Jeo quit que le pali est soens./La Dame l'aveit apelée,/E ele est devant li alée:/De sun mauntel se deffubla,/E la mère l'areisuna:/Bele amie, nel' me celez,/U fu cist bons palis trovez!/Dunt vus vient-il, kil' vus dona,/Kar me dites kil' vus bailla!/La meschine li respundi;/Dame, m'Aunte ki me nuri,/L'Abbéesse kil' me bailla/A garder le me comanda./Cest è un anel me baillèrent/Cil ki à nurir m'enveièrent.



'The ring, beauty, can I see?'

'Lady, that is well by me'.

So she brought the ring to her

and the lady studied it there

and she recognised it clearly,

and the fine fabric close by,

and believed, knew without question

her other daughter was this young woman.

All was spoken, not left to uncover.

'Beautiful friend, you are my daughter!'

Her mother, at all her distress from this event,





fell back, began to faint,  
but when fully conscious again,  
she sent for her lord to come.  
He arrived all in fear.  
When he entered the chamber,  
by his feet she fell down  
and without hesitating kissed him,  
seeking pardon from him for her error.  
He knew nothing of her prayer.  
'Lady, why say this?  
All is well between us.  
What you please is forgiven.  
Tell to me your wish then.'  
'Sir, when I have your forgiveness,  
listen, as I will tell this:  
there was a time that in my badness  
I spoke of my neighbour with madness,  
in malice about her two children,  
but I came to the same situation.  
Truthfully, I was with child then



and had two daughters, but hid one,  
had her cast away to a minster,  
and sent our fine cloth with her  
and the ring you gave to me before  
when we first spoke together.  
For us, this can't be a hidden thing.  
I discovered the cloth, the ring,  
and here our daughter I have known,  
whom I lost by that folly of my own,  
and now she is the young woman  
with such beauty, valiance and wisdom,  
she whom the knight loved,  
he who is to her sister married.'  
The lord said, 'I am overjoyed  
never have I felt so healed.  
Since we have found our daughter  
God has given us great pleasure.  
Before the sin doubles here,'  
he said, 'come forward, daughter'.  
The young woman was delighted there



when she had heard the adventure.

Her father wished to tarry no more

and sought for his son-in-law,

brought the Archbishop soon

and here the adventure told to him.

When the knight knew of it,

he had not felt joy so great.

The Archbishop gave his advice:

let the night be left at this.

Tomorrow, he would part them,

the knight and the one married then.

That was done, as he guaranteed,

and the next day, they were freed.

The knight wed his beloved friend

and her father gave him her hand.

In great warmth towards her now,

her father divided the inheritance in two.

He and the mother had stayed for the wedding

with their daughter, as was fitting.

Back to their country, they had to travel,



taking their daughter, Codre, the hazel.

To great riches within their land

they then gave that lady's hand.

When it was known, this story

and how it came to be

became the Lai of the Ash Tree;

for so was named the lady.

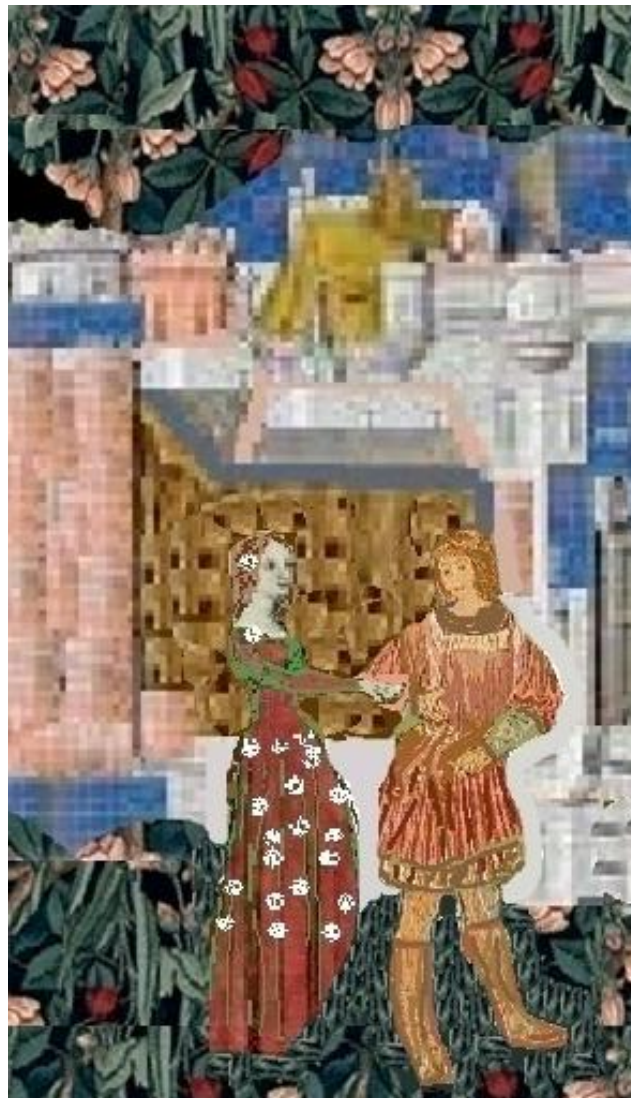


Bele, pois-jeo véer l'anel?/Oïl Dame, céo m'est bel./L'anel li ad dunc aporté,/E ele l'ad mut esgardé,/E l'ad très bien reconéu/E le pali k' ele ad véu./Ne dute, mès bien seit è creit,/Quele mesme sa fille esteit./Oiant tuz dist; ne céil mie,/Tu es ma fille, bele amie!/De la pité ke ele en a,/Arière cheit, si se pauma:/E quant del' paumeisun leva/Pur sun Seigneur tost envéia./E il vient tut effréez./Quant il est en chambre entrez,/La Dame li chéi as piez,/Estréitement l'ad baisiez;/Pardun li quert de sun meffait./Il ne saveit nient del' plait;/Dame, fet-il, que dites vus?/Il n'ad si bien nun entre nus./Quanke vus plect seit parduné,/Dites mei vostre voluté./Sire, quant parduné l'avez,/Jel' vus dirai, si m'escutez:/Jadis par ma grant vileinie/De ma voisine dis folie;/De ses deus enfanz mesparlai,/E vers mei méismes errai./Verité est que j'enceintai,/Deus filles eus, l'une celai./Ad un muster la fis geter,/E nostre pali od li





porter,/E l'anel que vus me donastes/Quant vus primes od mei parlastes./Ne nus peot mie estre celé;/Le drapeau è l'anel ai trové;/Nostre fille ai ici conue,/Que par ma folie ai perdue./E jà est ceo la Dameisele/Qui tant est pruz è sage è bele,/Ke li Chevaliers ad amée/Ki sa seur ad espusée./Li Sires dit: de ceo sui liez/Unckes mès ne fu si haitiez,/Quant nostre fille avum trovée,/Grant joie nus ad Deu donée/Ainz que li péchez fust dublez:/Fille, fet-il, avant venez./La Meschine mut s'esjoï,/Del aventure ke ele oï./Sun père ne volt plus atendre/Il méismes vet pur sun gendre,/E l'Erceveske i amena,/Cele aventure li cunta./Li Chevaliers quant il le sot/Unkes si grant joie n'en ot./L'Erceveske ad conseilié/Que issi seit la nuit laissié,/El demain les départira/Lui è cele qu'il espusa./Issi l'unt fet è graunté,/El demain furent désevré;/Après ad s'amie espusée,/E li pères li ad donée,/Qui mut ot vers li bon curage;/Par mie li part sun héritage./Il è la mère as noces furent,/Od lur fille, si cum il durent,/Quant en lur païs s'en allèrent,/La Coudre lur fille menèrent./Mut richement en lur cuntrée,/Fu puis la Meschine donée./Quant l'aventure fu séue/Coment ele esteit avenue,/Le Lai del Freisne en unt trové;/Pur la Dame l'unt si numé.



**The End**



**Fin**

