

# Preview of *Bisclavret* by Marie de France

Translated by Katharine Margot Toohey

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## *Bisclavret* (werewolf) Marie de France



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## **Bisclavret (werewolf)**

Many lais engage me.

I'm unwilling to forget Bisclavret.

Bisclavret - its name in Breton.

They called it 'Garwall' in Norman.

Long ago, this was heard then,

as once it would happen often:

many became Garwall, would become

werewolves, with forests for home.

The Garwall was a wild beast, savage.

It felt such rage,

devoured men, created menace.

It traversed great forests.

But now, let that issue be.

I wish to tell of the Bisclavret.

Once a lord lived in Brittany.

I heard lauded marvellously,

the knight who had goodness and beauty.

Always, he behaved nobly.

His lord felt so close to him.



All neighbours loved him in affection.

He married a worthy woman  
who made a noble impression.

He loved her, and she too,  
but something challenged her now.

Every week he'd be gone  
for three entire days unknown.



Quant de Lais faire m'entremet/Ne voil ublier Bisclaveret ;/Bisclaveret ad nun en  
Bretan,/Garwall l'apelent li Norman./Jadis le poët-hum oïr,/E souvent suleit  
avenir,/Humes plusurs Garwall devindrent/E es boscages meisun tindrent./Garwall si  
est beste salvage;/Tant cum il est en cele rage,/Humes dévure, grant mal fait,/Es granz  
forest converse è vait./Cest afère les ore ester/Del' Bisclaveret voil cunter./En  
Bretaine maneit un Ber/Merveille l'ai oï loer;/Beau chevaliers è bon esteit/E  
noblement se cunteneit./De sun Seinur esteit privez/E de tuz ses veisinz amez./Femme  
ot espusé mut vailant/E qui mut feseit beau semblant./Il amot li è ele lui ;/Mès d'une  
chose ert grant envi/Qu'en la semeine le deperdeit/Treis jurs entiers qu'ele ne saveit.





To go where, become what,  
his men knew neither of it.  
Once, he returned again,  
joyous, gladly back to his home.  
She asked him this question:  
'Lord, sweet and beautiful companion,  
I ask you this thing,  
by my will, by my daring,  
but I fear your anger  
nothing would upset me more.'  
Hearing her, he embraced,  
pulled her to him and kissed,  
saying, 'Ask me lady  
what you will say to me.  
If I can I'll answer.'  
'By faith, now I'm secure.  
Lord, I'm in such anxiety,  
the days you leave me.  
Waking, I'm placed in dolour  
and losing you becomes my terror.  
If I have no quick comfort,  
soon I'll die of it.  
So tell to me where  
you go to inhabit there.



By my knowledge, loved by you,  
have you gone astray now?’  
‘Lady,’ he said, ‘for God’s Mercy,  
Ill would come if I say.  
You’d abandon my affection  
and leave me lost soon.’  
Hearing these words, the lady  
didn’t take them seriously.  
She asked him often  
cajoling him and flattering him  
to tell her about his adventure.  
He concealed nothing from her:  
‘Lady, I become Bisclavret,  
in that immense forest stay.



U deveneit, ne ù alout ;/Ne nul des soenz nient ne sout./Une feiz esteit repeirez/A sam  
 eisun joius è liez ;/Demandé li ad è enquiz,/Sire, fait-el, beau duz amiz,/Une chose vus  
 demandasse/Mut volentiers si jeo osasse :/Mès jeo creim tant vostre curuz/Que nule r  
 ien tant ne redut./Quant il l’oï si l’acola,/Vers li la traist, si la beisa,/Dame, si fait-il, d  
 emandez ;/Jà cele chose ne me direz/Si jeo la sai, ne la vus die./Par fei, fet-ele, ore sui  
 garie :/Sire, jeo sui en tel effrei,/Les jurs quant vus partez de mei ;/El lever en ai grant  
 dolour/E de vus perdre tele pour,/Si jeo n’en ai hastit cunfort,/Bien-tost en puis avoir l  
 a mort./Kar me distes ù vus alez,/U vus estes, ù conversez./Mun escient, qui vus amez,  
 /E si si est vus meserrez./Dame, fet-il, pur Deu merci,/Mal m’en vendra si jol’ vus di :  
 /Kar de m’amur vus partirai/E me-mesmes en perderai./Quant la Dame l’od entendu,  
 /Nel’ ad nient en gas tenu/Suvente feiz li demanda,/Tant le blandi, è losenga,/Que s’av  
 enture li cunta,/Nule chose ne li céla./Dame jeo deviens Bisclaveret,/En cele grant for  
 est me met,



Within the woods, the part denser,

I live on roots and plunder.’

When he told her everything,

she questioned him, enquiring

‘Go you undressed or covered?’

‘Lady, I go naked.’

‘Your clothes where, by God?’



‘Lady, that can’t to you be told,  
because if I lost them  
and this was glimpsed by someone,  
I would be a bisclavret for all days  
with nothing to help me always,  
unless they return them.

So I wish this known by no one.’

The lady answered him, ‘Lord,  
my love for you is greater than the world.

You should hide from me nothing,

Mistrust nothing at all, doubting.

That would not seem like companionship.

What did I sin, forfeit,

that you doubt me at all?

Tell me and it will be well.’

She scared him, she surprised him.

He answered her, with no option,

saying: ‘Lady, by the woods,

by the path, by the crossroads,

there can be found a chapel,



that often serves me well.

There the stone is wide and hollow,  
under a bush, buried below.

I set my clothes beneath,  
until I return to this hearth.' ...



Al plus espès de la gaudine,/Si vif de preie è de racine./Quant il li aveit tut cunté,/Enquis li ad è demaundé/S'il se despuille u vet vestu./Dame, fet-il, jeo vois tut nu./Di mei, par Deu, ù sunt voz dras ?/Dame, ceo ne dirai vus pas/Kar si jeo les eusse perduz/E de ceo feusse aparcéuz, /Bisclaveret sereie à tuz-jurs ;/Jamès n'averie mes sucurs,/De ci k'il me fussent rendu :/Por ceo ne voil k'il seit séu./Sire, la Dame li respunt,/Jeo vus eim plus que tut le mund ;/Nel' me devez nient céler,/Ne de nule rien duter:/Ne semblereit pas amisté./Qu'ai-jeo forfait, por quel péché/Me dutez vus de nule rien ?/Dites mei et si ferez bien./Tant l'angoussa, tant le surprist,/Ne pout-il faire, si le dist :/Dame, fet-il, delez cel bois,/Lez le chemin, par un troivois,/Une vielz chapele i esteit,/Ke grant bien me fait ;/Là est la pierre cruose è lée,/Suz un bussun, dedanz cavée ;/Mes draz i met suz le buissun/Tant que jeo revine à meisun.



*To be continued*

