

[The scene is Sir Gawain's bedchamber in the Castle of Beaudessert. It is early morning, Sir Gawain and the Lady Alison, (his host's wife) are alone. In a parallel setting, The Hunt, led by Lord Bertilak, are pursuing a fox through the forest.]

GAWAIN:

A kiss then, come.

They kiss a second time; a cool one from Sir Gawain.

ALISON:

I know you may not in naked words speak;
But I've heard enough half-truth to hazard a guess
That your mission tomorrow has more than a little
To bear on your being in such a bad mood
With me:

You love me – that I know;
Its truth is plain to see;
And I love you, what though
Our fates are far from free.

And Alison gets up to go, but go quite, she can't.

My love, before I leave, let me have something;
Any gift thou canst give; a glove, or anything,
That I might remember and mourn thee less.

GAWAIN:

I wish I had with me, well – what might I wish for? ...
The loveliest thing in the land, my lady;
For you deserve, for sooth, simply and fairly,
More reward by rights than my reach can grasp.
I am here on an errand in unknown lands
And I brought no baggage to burden myself.
And miserable as it makes me, to be so mean as this
Yet a man must make the most of a lot
like mine –

ALISON:

Don't worry, you have no cause,
It shall not make me pine;
Though I have nothing of yours,
Yet you shall have nothing of mine.

Receive thou this rich ring, or red-gold works,
With a star-like stone standing aloft,
That bears blushing beams, bright as the sun.

GAWAIN:

O I wot¹ well it is worth a wealth full huge,
Yet I am loath², my love, and reluctant, you see,
For I'll gather no gifts of gold at this time,
Having nothing of merit to name in return.

¹ wot: to know, 1st person singular, present tense. From the original poem and generally in Middle English. From Old English 'witan' to know.

² loath: unwilling. To rhyme with "both".

ALISON:

Well, if you refuse my richest ring,
As you'd not be so highly beholden to me,
I shall give thee my girdle of greenest silk;
Though it were unworthy, I wish thee to have it.

GAWAIN:

No, no, I cannot - I know you'll understand -
Neither gold nor silk of green, as God gives me grace,
Before I have faced the fate He has framed,
And achieved my goal at that Chapel of Green.
For secrecy's sake, explain it, I can't.
Therefore, now, I pray you, displease you nought;
And, Alison, please...promise to probe no deeper.
Nor foist on me further; for refuse you I must,
Again.

I am down as already your debtor,
For all of the favours you've given
And shall be your servant forever;
On Earth, in Hell, or in Heaven.

ALISON:

Now forsake you this silk - forsooth? I suppose,
In itself it is simple; at least, it seems so.
Lo! It's so little; the least thing of worth.
But if a man were made 'ware of the magic herein,
Then pr'aps he would prize it expensive and rare.

GAWAIN:

Magic? What magic do you mean, my lady?

ALISON:

If a guy is girded with this green lace,
As long as he clasps it closely about him,
No arm on earth may hack him to death
With steel, nor slay him, by sleight, at all.

GAWAIN:

Well, isn't that interesting?... Incredible almost.
I mean, wouldst thou have thought such a thing had power?

ALISON:

And I wanted you to wear it, Wawen, for mi³ sake,
But I understand, if your honour's upset...

GAWAIN:

No, wait.
If you make me, I'll have it - it might come in handy -
Who knows?

Sir Gawain takes hold of one end of the silk.
The hunt is now here, as if on cue.

³ Mi: my. With short vowel, as in "hit". Northern English dialect & in the original poem.

HUNT (Chorus):

To hear then the hounds, the heart was made glad.
The main pack now meet him, merging together;
Such insults were slung him, like stones at his head,
As all the clambering cliffs had clattered in heaps –
“Halloo! Halloo!” the hunters all holler,
Threat upon threat and “Thief! Thief!”

ALISON:

But be careful good Gawain
And see that no one knows;
Fasten it in such fashion
That not a shred of it shows.

She lets go her end of the magic green girdle.

GAWAIN:

But, Alison, by mine honour, I have an agreement –

ALISON:

No – No one must know! Especially – Not my husband.
Tha'⁴ must hide it from him, or he'll suspect.

GAWAIN:

Suspect what, my lady? Woman! – What are you saying?

ALISON:

If he found that we'd flirted – well, as far as this,
His jealousy would drive him to a dreadful rage;
Thy life, thy limb, my love could not save.
I know him. He is noble, yet he's not all he seems.

GAWAIN:

Oh, Alison. Oh Angel. By all that is holy!

And Gawain holds Alison to himself, as the huntsmen are running:

HUNT:

With the trailers at his tail, he's no time to tarry;
Oft he is run at, yet Reynard⁵ runs onward!
The lord and his men are left limping behind
And on in this manner; from morning while⁶ noon,
They run and they run.....and run again! *[They are gone]*

⁴ *Tha'*: thou. Used to friends, loved ones, children and anyone of lower status.

⁵ *Reynard*: traditional name for the fox, also from the original poem.

⁶ *while*: until. Northern dialect; as in, “The shop is open nine while five”.