

RIDING TO BRITTANY

ARTHUR S. BOURINOT*

ELOISE, niece of Fulbert, Canon of Notre Dame, and Abelard, the philosopher, left Paris secretly to escape the anger of Fulbert, for Eloise was with child by Abelard. They rode to Pallet in Brittany, Abelard's home, where their son, Astrolabe, was born. Later they returned to Paris and were secretly married, but disaster met them and Fulbert had his revenge in the mutilation of Abelard. Eloise took the veil at Abelard's request, and the later entered a monastery.

I shall never forget that journey.
The moon was yet in the sky
when we left Paris,
a new moon, a May moon,
slender, white and beautiful,
and Paris was quiet behind us;
so we reined our horses,
paused for a moment
and looked back.
The towers of Notre Dame,
taking the first light,
loomed black,
menacing
and magnificent,
and a cock crowed in the distance,
the watchman called the hour,
and I shuddered a little,
drawing my nun's cloak
closer about me,
for our minds were full of Fulbert
and the fear of him.
And then our horses pawed the ground,
impatient to be off;
so we turned from Paris,
taking the road to Brittany.

I shall never forget that journey.
How happy we were
at times,
for it was spring
and we were lovers
and all France
seemed to sing,
and our hearts also;
and yet it was a happiness
tinged with grief,
for our minds

*Of Ottawa.

could not erase the past
and our betrayal of Fulbert.
The old man, his simple belief,
lived in our thoughts
more than we cared
or dared to admit
and burdened our joy
with regret.

We journeyed on from day to day,
resting at inns
or lying asleep
in the deep
of a great forest,
rolled in our cloaks,
with a retinue of stars
overhead
and the song of the nightingale
flooding the glade
and our ears
with rapture, delight,
in the dead of the night.

I shall never forget that journey.
How happy we were,
for the farther we travelled from Paris
and Fulbert
the safer we felt,
and finally in our joy,
our ecstasy,
deemed all secure
and almost forgot him.
France seemed to smile,
and mile on mile
the silver Loire
sang on its way,
sang all the day,
and we washed in its waters
where the great Heron
stood on one foot
in the sand,
patiently fishing;
or deep in the shade
of a wood
we bathed in a pool,
sunning ourselves in the glade,
and Pierre sang me his songs
that all Paris now sings,
yea, all France,
and gleemen, troubadours
in every land.

*Let loose thy raven locks, O Love,
To hide the coming morn,
For with the light, I'll leave thee, Love,
And from thy breast be gone.*

*Let loose thy raven locks, O Love,
I'll say it's still and dark;
Hold back, O swift approaching dawn,
Sleep on, O silent lark.*

We passed through many a hamlet
and town,
Orleans, Blois,
and lovely Tours
with its twin cathedral towers,
a jewel set,
in the silver bracelet
of the Loire.
White walled Tours,
lovely Tours,
where the chestnuts were in bloom.
Hawthorn and lilac
scented the air,
the world was fair,
there was no time for sorrow
or gloom,
and all the beauty of spring,
with the birds on the wing,
enraptured our eyes
and haunted our hearts,,
haunted our hearts.
Earth was a place enchanted,
a bit of Paradise recaptured.
France was a garden
moon argent, drenched with gold.
France was a garden
God given to behold.
France was a garden—
the garden lost of old.

But there was no room
in the inn;
so we sojourned
under the stars,
the river murmuring
at our feet,
in happiness complete.
And the bell to matins
woke us at dawn;
with the dew on the lawn
we went on.
Together we watched great sunsets

smoulder, burst to flame,
together saw the artist dawn
paint pictures on the sky,
together saw the moon come up
to silver all the world
until it seemed a holy light
transfigured copse and hill:
all earth was Eden then to us,
and God was with us still.
We broke bread together
in every kind of weather
and sometimes wondered
what the years ahead
would bring to us.
We talked of our babe
to be born at Pallet,
in Pierre's old home;
and life seemed very sweet
with our feet
set in pleasant places,
and our faces
turned to Nantes
and home.
And as we came nearer
and nearer
Pierre sniffed the air
expectantly,
and clearer and clearer
it came,
the scent of the sea,
the salt of the sea
with all its mystery,
the smell of the tidelands,
unknown and new to me,
to Pierre but the tang
that breathed home.
And he sang
as we rode:

*O river, lovely river,
Sing to my love and me,
For we are also pilgrims,
Bound for Brittany.*

*O river, lovely river,
O murmuring troubadour,
Sing for my love is weary,
And would not wander more.*

*O river, lovely river,
The burden of young song:
"So brief man's earthly sojourn,
Eternity so long."*

*O river, lovely river,
Sing till we fall asleep,
The stars above watch o'er us
And constant vigil keep.*

*O river, lovely river,
Sing to my love and me,
For we are also pilgrims
Bound for Brittany.*

And a load
lifted from my heart
and that night we saw Nantes
and rode into Pallet;
we were home.
And there at Pallet
our little son was born,
and we were happy.
I remember it so well
from what happened after
when there was no more laughter
but years of sorrow and pain;
true happiness never came to us again.

No, I shall never forget that journey.
How happy we were
and I praise God for it
continually
for those short weeks of Paradise
with him I loved.
What happened after
I try to forget
but memory will not let
me be,
and the long, long nights,
and days that drag interminably
are bitter in my mouth.

The return to Paris
was a mistake.
We should have waited,
for sorrow and fear
and tragedy
have ever haunted our feet,
fated to have no peace,
fated to be parted,
Pierre at Cluny
and I at the Paraclete,
for years ago I took the veil
at his behest.
As for the rest,

God alone knows,
in his wisdom
God knows best.
Yes, the return to Paris
was a mistake;
we should have waited
till the moment was propitious,
for the memory of man is short
and time is a great healer
and other matters than ours
would have occupied the gossips
and peace might have reigned
in the Rue des Chantres;
but we were fated
for revenge and sorrow—
perhaps to-morrow
will bring me word of him.

O Christ, Saviour,
Have Mercy,
Grant him Thy rest
and peace
in the haven
of Thy breast,
for he is ill
and sore beset,
his books burned,
his mind spurned,
and the great heart I love,
spent and bent and broken,
broken on the wheel of the world.

O Christ, Saviour,
Grant him Thy peace
and Thy rest.