

The Lady and her Little Dog

La Chastelaine de Vergi



BnF fr. 95, f. 343v

Enthusiastically described as “one of the most accomplished works of narrative literature to emerge from the French Middle Ages,” La Chastelaine de Vergi is a short rhymed romance in the Courtly Love tradition from 13th-century Burgundy. It is anonymous. Critical interpretations of the poem range widely, and it may well be true that it raises more questions than it answers. It survives today in more than twenty manuscripts, and has frequently been translated before, most recently by Burgess & Brook (2016). The edition I have used here is the one by Frederick Whitehead, published in 1951 by the University of Manchester Press and based on MS Paris BnF fr. 837, ff. 6-11. An extensive bibliography will be found in ARLIMA. My translation deliberately avoids the literal in an attempt to better convey the sense, tone and the poetic qualities of the original. Its accuracy, of course, remains paramount.

Ian Short, September 2025

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There are some people who are so successful in misleading others into believing that they are trustworthy and discreet that it seems natural to confide in them. When, however, the time comes when you bare your soul to them about your love affairs, they make you into a laughing stock by spreading all your secrets far and wide. What happens also is that the person who divulges the information forfeits the happiness that his love brought him. The greater the love, the greater the pain true courtly lovers feel when one of the partners believes the other guilty of disclosing something that should have remained private. Often also the results are even more damaging in that the love affair has to come to an abrupt end amid much suffering and shame. (17)

This is precisely what happened in Burgundy between a valiant, exemplary knight and the lady from Vergy. So great was his love for her that she granted him hers in exchange. But she made one condition: he was to understand that, if their affair were ever to become public knowledge because of him, that very day, that very hour, he would lose her love and the physical enjoyment of it that she granted him. (28)

The lovers' arrangement was that the knight would come and visit her regularly, at a time he would determine, in a garden planted with fruit trees. He would stay out of sight in a corner until he saw a little dog appear and cross the garden. He would then immediately come up to her chamber where he could be confident of finding her alone and unattended. This timetable was followed for a long time during which their affair flourished and remained hidden. Not a living soul knew of it except the two of them. (42)

Such was the reputation of this handsome and elegant knight that he came to enjoy the friendship of the duke who ruled over Burgundy, at whose court he became a frequent visitor. His constant presence there eventually led to the duchess falling in love with him. She made her infatuation abundantly clear, so much so that, had his affections not already been directed elsewhere, he would have been in no doubt as to the designs she had on him. As it was, he never gave the slightest indication of even noticing the signs that she was really in love with him. (56)

This annoyed her considerably, so one day she confronted him. Here is what she said: 'My lord, you are a handsome and intelligent man of the world, as everyone says, and thanks be to God for it. The least you deserve is to have a lover whose high rank would bring you both respect and prestige. This kind of mistress would suit you admirably.' 'My lady,' the knight replied, 'I have not yet turned my mind to that sort of thing.' 'Frankly,' she said, 'my view is that any delay would not be to your advantage. I would advise you to set your amorous sights at the highest level, and see whether you find any favour there.' To this the knight replied: 'To tell you the truth, my lady, I have no idea why you are saying this to me, and what you could possibly mean. I am no duke, no count, and not entitled to have such high ambitions in love. I am a million miles from falling in love with any lady of such exalted rank, even if I were to try hard to.' (80)

In reply the duchess said: 'But you are, perhaps, closer than you think. Stranger things do happen, and will continue to happen in the future. Have you any idea whether a widely respected lady of the highest nobility such as myself has fallen in love with you?' To which the knight immediately responded: 'No, I am not aware of that, but I would naturally welcome your love as long as it were honourable and respectable. But God preserve me from the sort of love that would bring shame on the duke, be it by me as his vassal or by you as his wife. At no price and in no way would I ever act so outrageously, so illegally and so basely as to be unfaithful to my legitimate and rightful lord.' 'Fie on you, my fine philanderer!' said the duchess, greatly annoyed, 'and who, pray, is asking you to do such a thing?' 'Ah! my lady, I do beg your pardon. This I realise, but I just thought I ought to let you know.' (102)

The duchesse did not bring the matter up with the knight again, but continued to feel angry and deeply embarrassed. She felt extremely resentful towards him and resolved that, if she could, she would have her revenge on him. She was highly annoyed. That night as she lay in bed next to the duke, she started sighing and then sobbing. The duke immediately asked her what was wrong and insisted on knowing there and then what was upsetting her. 'To tell you the truth,' she said, 'what saddens me is that men in positions of power do not know who their most faithful vassals are and who are not. Without anyone realising it, they sometimes find themselves honouring and rewarding those who are actually looking to betray them.' 'Honestly I don't know why you say that,' the duke replied, 'but that's certainly not the case with me. At my court I would never at any price tolerate someone who I know to be a traitor.' (124)

‘Then you should hate,’ she said, ‘that knight who all day long today has not stopped begging me to become his mistress. His heart, he told me, has been set on this for a very long time, but only now has he dared tell me.’ And she named the man in question. ‘I thought I should tell you this straightaway, fair lord. What’s more, it may well be true that he has had this in mind for several years now, because there has never been any talk amongst us of his having a mistress somewhere else. What I ask of you as a reward for my telling you this is that you do what you know justice demands in defence of your honour.’ This was very painful news for the duke, and he said to his wife: ‘I’ll sort this out as a matter of urgency. You can count on that.’ (143)

The duke had an uncomfortable night, unable to sleep on account of the knight. He was someone to whom he was particularly attached, and what kept him awake all that night was the suspicion that he had done him wrong and as a result deserved to lose his friendship. The duke got up early next morning, and sent for the knight in question. Because of his wife’s accusation, he had become an object of the duke’s hatred even though he was innocent of any offence against him. There was no one else present, so he came straight to the point. (155)

‘What a great shame it is,’ he said, ‘that someone with such prowess and such attractive qualities as you have should turn out to be so disloyal. There you have well and truly deceived me, since for a long time now I have believed you to be sincere and entirely trustworthy, at the very least as far as your devotion to me personally is concerned and the affection I have had for you. I cannot imagine how you ever have thought of committing the crime you have by soliciting the duchess to become your mistress. You are guilty of such a base act of betrayal that it is difficult to think of anything more contemptible. Leave my lands immediately! I banish you utterly and completely. Never ever return on whatever pretext, and if you are caught doing so, you can be certain that I would have you hanged.’ (176)

On hearing this, the knight’s whole body began shaking, so angry and resentful did he feel. His first thought was for the woman he loved. He knew he could only enjoy her love by being in the same country and by coming and going unhindered as he always had done. But now the duke was intending to banish him. He was acutely distressed also that his lord, entirely unjustly, should consider him a disloyal traitor. Such was his sense of hopelessness that he felt not only betrayed but also as if he were now a dead man walking. (189)

‘Sire, have pity on me in God’s name!’ he cried. ‘Do not, for one moment, believe or even think that I would have the effrontery to do such a thing. You are mistaken, and what you accuse me of never once crossed my mind. Whoever it was who told you this is wrong.’ ‘There is no sense in your denying it,’ the duke replied. ‘Denial is just impossible. It was the lady in question herself who told me what you did and exactly how you attempted to gain her favours. You are nothing but a traitor, and a lustful one at that. And you may well have admitted something more to her that she prefers to keep to herself.’ (203)

‘My lady told you what she wanted to tell you’, the knight replied in profound sorrow. ‘So there’s no use your denying it, then.’ ‘There’s no use in my saying anything more, except that there is nothing I wouldn’t do to get you to believe me. None of this ever happened.’ ‘By my soul I swear it did,’ said the duke who felt absolutely sure that his wife was telling him the truth. He remembered her saying that there was never any talk of the knight already having a lover anywhere else, so he

said to the knight: 'If you were to promise me, and swear a solemn oath to this effect, that you will give a truthful answer to a question I will put to you, your reply will tell me for certain whether or not you did what I suspect you of doing.' (224)

What the knight wanted above all else, what he most desired, was to placate his lord and bring an end to the resentment the duke felt, entirely unjustly, towards him. The knight was all too aware, also, of how much he had to lose if he were to be banished from the country where the object of his desire lived. He therefore had no hesitation in agreeing to what the duke was proposing, even though he had no inkling of what his lord actually had in mind. His anguish was such that he gave no thought to precisely what it was that the duke was intending to ask, only that he was going to put a question to him. Accordingly he swore the oath as agreed, and the duke accepted his word. (239)

The duke immediately launched into his speech. 'One thing I can assure you of is that up until now my affection for you has been entirely sincere, and that nothing allows me to think that you are guilty of the sort of disloyalty and impropriety that the duchess alleges. And I would not have believed it had there not been something that, in my view, gives rise to grave doubt, namely the way you conduct yourself. I see, among other features, a certain elegance in how you behave and dress that indicate, beyond a shadow of doubt, that you are in love with someone or other. Given that no particular young girl or lady is to be seen as the object of your affection, it occurs to me that it may well be my wife that you love, and that you are currently propositioning her as she says. In fact I am absolutely convinced that this is the case, and nothing will change my mind unless you can prove to me that you are in fact truly in love with someone else. You need to tell me the truth and the whole truth, in order to put the matter beyond all reasonable doubt. If you are unwilling to do this, then without more ado I find you guilty of breaking your oath and banish you from the country.' (267)

The knight was completely taken aback. Either of the alternatives before him was as good as a death sentence. If he followed one course of action and revealed the whole truth, as he must if he was not to perjure himself, he would be guilty of breaking the agreement he had with his lady and mistress the chatelaine. He would certainly lose her the moment she discovered that he had betrayed her. On the other hand, by not telling the duke the truth he would break his oath, be a perjurer and an exile, in addition to losing the woman he loved. Being forced to leave the country did not, in itself, concern him unduly, but only on condition he could keep his lover. He feared losing more than anything else. At the thought of all the joy and happiness he had found in her arms, he asked himself how, if he should break his word to her and be unable to take her with him, he could ever survive without her. (290)

The situation he found himself in was the same as that described in that stanza of the song by the chatelain de Couci, another example of someone whose heart was completely dominated by love:

*God! How hard I find it, Love, to go without
the sweet pleasure and the company
and marks of affection I received
from my lady, my mistress, my lover.
When I recall her natural courtliness,*

*the tender words she whispered in my ear,
how can my heart survive within my breast?
What a base and vulgar heart mine is
if it fails to pass away!*

The knight was in such anguish that he did not know whether to tell the duke the truth or lie and go into exile. The mental turmoil he was in prevented him from deciding which of the two alternatives would be more to his advantage. So agitated and despondent did he become that tears came welling up from his heart into his eyes, spilling over and running down his cheeks. This quite disconcerted the duke who thought the knight must be hiding something from him that he did not dare confess. (314)

The duke responded at once: 'It is clear to see that you do not trust me as much as you should. Do you think that I would divulge your secret love affair to anyone if you were to confide it in me? No. I would certainly rather have my teeth drawn one by one than do such a thing.' 'Ah! Then have pity on me, sire! I don't know what I should say, or what might become of me. I would rather die than lose what I must lose if I am to tell you the truth. If ever she got to know that I had identified her at any point in my life ...' At which the duke said: 'I swear to you on my life, on my soul, even, and by the love and faith I owe you by virtue of your homage to me, that never as long as I live will a single word of this be said or in any way communicated to any living creature.' (339)

Still weeping, the knight replied: 'My lord, that being the case, I will tell you. I am in love with your niece from Vergy, and she is in love with me. We love each other as much as it is possible for anyone to love.' The duke replied: 'Tell me, if you want to keep this affair secret, does no one else know of it except the two of you?' 'Not a living soul,' said the knight. 'That's unheard of,' said the duke. 'How do you possibly manage? How do you go about arranging a time and place?' 'On my faith, sire, we have devised a clever plan that I will explain to you in detail now that you are aware of our affair.' The knight proceeded then to describe the understanding that the lovers had first come to, then his own comings and goings, and the arrangement with the little dog. (358)

The duke's immediate reaction was to say: 'Then what I require of you is that, when you are next due to meet, you allow me to accompany you and go along with you. I need to know, without any prevarication, if things really happen as you say they do. My niece, of course, will know nothing about this arrangement.' 'Sire,' replied the knight, 'I agree willingly if that is what you want and if it's no trouble for you. In fact I can tell you that I shall be going this very night.' The duke replied that in that case he would go along with him. No trouble at all. In fact it would be a pleasant diversion, fun even. The two agreed where they would meet; it would be within walking distance of where the duke's niece lived. (376)

As soon as it was dark, they met up and found their way to the garden. The duke did not have to wait long before he saw his niece's little dog come padding across the far end of the orchard. It came up to the knight, who duly made a great fuss of it. Leaving the duke behind, he immediately set off. The duke followed in his footsteps until he was only a short distance from the lady's chamber. There the duke stopped and began searching for the best hiding place he could find. He ended up by carefully concealing himself behind a large tree with thick foliage that shielded him from view. It was from here that he was able to see the knight about to enter the chamber and his niece emerging from it, running onto the lawn in front to welcome him. He also heard the cry of

delight she gave on first catching sight of her lover, how she greeted him with dainty, outstretched arms that she threw around him, smothering him with countless kisses before even saying anything to him. The knight in turn clasped her in his arms and returned the kisses she gave him. (404)

He said to her: 'My lady, my love, my sweetheart, my mistress, my hope and all that I adore in this world, believe me when I tell you that every single day since last I saw you I have hungered to be with you as I am now.' To which she replied: 'My sweet lord, my sweet love and my lover, not a day, not an hour has gone by that I have not suffered from being apart from you for so long. But now that I have what my heart most desires, now that you are back here with me safe and sound, all my sorrow and my suffering has disappeared. Welcome, welcome!' 'And welcome, welcome to you!', her lover replied. (419)

Every word the couple uttered as they entered the chamber was overheard by the duke from his hiding place very close nearby. He recognised his niece's voice and her features that he knew so well, and this was enough to dispel all the doubts he had. It made it clear that the duchess had been lying when she told him what she had. This was something that he was very pleased to know, as it was clear to him now that the knight was innocent of the crime he had suspected him of. The duke stayed hidden where he was for the rest of that night. (431)

Meanwhile inside, the lady and the knight lay together in bed. They got no sleep but enjoyed the sort of pleasures and delights that it is not right and proper for anyone to describe -- things that should be heard only by those who yearn for the joy that true courtly lovers are granted as a reward for suffering the pains of love. A man who hears about such pleasures but has no desire to experience them, cannot even begin to understand unless his heart has already been a prisoner of love. No one would ever know what the true value of such joy is unless it is love that reveals it to him. It is not given to everyone to experience this joy; it is joy unmitigated, it is delight, gratification. But it is something also that lasts only for a short time, at least it appears so to every lover who enjoys it. Such is the delight that comes to someone who is in love that it will never last long enough. If a single night turns into a week, a week into a month, a month into a year, one year into three, three into twenty, twenty into a hundred, when love comes to an end, the true lover would prefer to see night just falling rather than dawn breaking. (460)

Such were the thoughts filling the knight's mind as he was preparing to leave, as he had to, just before daybreak. The duke, who was still waiting outside, saw the knight's mistress come with him to the door. He saw the many kisses they exchanged, much sighing and sobbing, many a tear shed as the lovers parted. He also heard them arrange their next meeting. The knight left, and the lady closed her door, but for as long as she could still see him, she followed him with her loving eyes. That was the best she could do. (476)

The moment he saw the door close, the duke left his hiding place and had soon caught up with the knight. He was still bemoaning how short that night had been for his liking, so he said. The lady he had left, meanwhile, was thinking and giving voice to similar thoughts: she felt cheated, convinced that her night's pleasure had been cut short by the day breaking so soon. She took no pleasure in seeing the light. The duke caught up with the knight as he was still engrossed in thoughts such as these. He embraced him with an affection that was clear to see. 'I swear to you,' he said, 'that from now on I will always show my love for you and never again let it turn to hatred. You have

told me the whole truth about your affair and proved that you were not previously telling me any lies.' (496)

'My lord, I am grateful to you,' said the knight, 'but for the love of God I beg and entreat you to please keep this confidence secret. If I were to learn that anyone else but you knew of the affair, I would immediately lose the love, the joy and all the delight that come with it, and that would certainly be the death of me.' 'Not a word more,' replied the duke, 'I can assure you that your secret is safe with me, and I shall not breathe a word of it to anyone.' By which time they found themselves back at the place from where they had first set out. (508)

At dinner time later that day, the duke showed himself to be more friendly to the knight than he had ever been before. This made the duchess so angry and distressed that she pretended to be taken ill all of a sudden, actually got up and went to lie on her bed. This, however, brought her no relief at all. When the duke had finished eating, washing his hands and taking part in the usual merry-making, he immediately went to see the duchess. He gave orders for the room to be cleared, and this was done straightaway. He had her sit up in bed, then enquired about how she had come to feel sick and what precisely the matter was. (528)

'So help me God,' she replied, 'I never expected, just now when we sat down to eat, that I would find you as foolish and as lacking in judgement as I did when I saw you acting on even more friendly terms than before with that knight. That's the very person I told you was seeking to sully my reputation and humiliate me. I was so upset and angry to see you being even kinder to him than before that I couldn't bear to stay there a moment longer.' (540)

'Ah! my sweet love,' replied the duke, 'I find it impossible to believe, whatever you or anyone else might say, that the story you told me actually happened in any shape or form. On the contrary, from what I have learnt I now know for sure that he is entirely innocent. The thought never even entered his head. I forbid you now to ask anymore questions about this.' (549)

Whereupon the duke walked out of the chamber, leaving his wife deep in thought. She would never, for as long as she lived, rest, even for a moment, until she got more details about what the duke had forbidden her to mention again. But imposing silence like this will not hold her back, since she is already devising in her mind a plan that would enable her to find out exactly what it was. She would bide her time until she was holding the duke in her arms that night. She knew for certain that this moment of intimacy was her best opportunity of getting what she wanted. She waited, therefore, until the duke came to bed. She then retreated to the far edge of the bed as if she did not want him to touch her. She was well aware that she could get her own way with her husband by pretending to be angry with him. She therefore did what she had to do to inveigle her husband into believing she was rejecting him because she was highly annoyed with him. (575)

No sooner had he given her his first kiss than she said: 'You are nothing but a liar, a trickster and a traitor. You pretend to love me, but have never really loved me. For a long time I have been foolish enough to take you at your word and believed you when you claimed, as you so often did, to love me as a true courtly lover. I have now come to realise today that I have been misled.' (586)

'How do you mean? In what way?' asked the duke. 'Just now, actually,' came the lady's mischievous reply, 'when you told me not to dare ask for any more details about that business you

know all about. ' 'And what business would that be, sweetheart? For God's sake tell me.' 'Those lies and fabrications about me that knight made you believe were true. Not that I'm interested in knowing all the ins and outs, of course. I just don't think there is any more point in my loving you faithfully and in true courtly fashion. I have never, in the past, come across any information, good or bad, without immediately sharing it with you, but I now see that, when it suits you, you are happy to keep some things to yourself. I tell you loud and clear that, from now on, I will no longer trust you as I have in the past, or love you as I used to.' Whereupon the duchess began to sigh and weep again, straining every muscle as she did so. (611)

The duke felt extremely sorry for her and said: 'My sweetheart, I would do anything I could not to make you angry or unhappy. But I assure you that it is quite impossible for me to tell you what you want to know. It would make me guilty of the basest act of treachery imaginable.' Her reply was immediate: 'Then don't tell me, my lord. You have made it abundantly clear that you do not trust me to keep your secret. This is something I find unbelievable. Never before have you heard it said that I have disclosed any secret, great or small, that you have confided in me. I can assure you in all good faith that such a thing will never happen as long as I live.' Then she began crying again. The duke put his arms around her and kissed her. He felt so utterly despondent that he could no longer prevent himself from telling her everything wanted to know. (634)

'My dear lady,' he said to her, 'I am frankly at a loss to know what to do next. I have such trust and belief in you that there is nothing I know or hear of that I should keep hidden from you. But, I beg you, never breathe a word to anyone about this. I absolutely insist that you realise that, if you should ever betray me, you will pay for it with your life.' 'I accept without reservation,' she replied. 'It is impossible that I should ever do anything that could be to your detriment.' His love for the duchess was such that he believed this and was convinced that she was telling him the truth. So he proceeded to tell her the whole story of his niece, how he had heard it from the knight's own lips, how he himself had been in the garden hidden in a corner alone with the knight, waiting for the little dog to come up to them. He described the lovers' comings and goings and omitted not a single detail of what he had seen and heard. (658)

When the duchess learnt that the knight who had spurned her love was in love with someone of inferior rank to hers, she felt mortified to the point of death. She gave no inkling of this, however, and promised the duke that she would keep the secret. If ever she was to reveal it, she agreed, he could have her strung up and hanged. But already she was burning to speak with the knight's lover. The duchess hated her from the moment she discovered that the chatelaine was the mistress of the man who had shamed and insulted her by refusing, so she thought, to become her lover. She resolved that, as soon as she had the opportunity and the time was right, she would talk to the duke's niece. She would bring the matter up without any hesitation, and make a remark that would show exactly how treacherous she was. (680)

It was not until the following Whitsun that the duchess found the time and the place she was waiting for. The duke was to hold his first plenary court of the year, and all the ladies of the land had been summoned to attend. First and foremost among these was his niece, the chatelaine from Vergy. As soon as the duchess set eyes on her, her blood immediately began to boil. Here was the woman she hated more than all the others in the world. She contrived, however, to keep her feelings under control, and greeted her more affably than she ever had before. But in reality she was

dying to tell her why she had such a deep hatred against her, and she found it very painful to have to wait. (697)

So on Whit Sunday, after the tables had been cleared away, the duchess led the ladies into her chamber so that they might powder their noses in private and look their best before joining the dancing. The duchess sees that this is her opportunity and she can stay silent no longer. As if she is simply exchanging pleasantries with the chatelaine, she says to her: 'Make sure you're looking your best, chatelaine. You have an admirable and fine looking friend.' In all innocence the chatelaine replies: 'I'm sure I don't know which friend you can be referring to, my lady. I have no wish to have any friend or lover unless it be in every way to my personal honour and that of my lord.' 'I am quite willing to believe that,' the duchess replies, 'but like any good mistress you have mastered the art of training that little dog of yours.' The other ladies present overhear this exchange but without understanding what it means. Together with the duchess they go back to the dancing. (722)

But the chatelaine stays rooted to the spot, pale and livid with anger, sick to her stomach and shaken to her very core. She finds her way into a side room. There is a serving girl lying at the foot of a bed, but out of the chatelaine's line of vision. Consumed with grief the chatelaine throws herself on to the bed, moaning loudly and lamenting. 'Ah! Dear God, have pity on me!' she cries. 'What can be the meaning of what I've just heard? Did the duchess really take me to task for training my little dog? She cannot know about this, I'm sure, except from the man I used to love and has now betrayed me. And he would never reveal our secret unless he has another, and noble, mistress whom he clearly loves more than me. I have been betrayed, and can clearly see that he does not love me if he breaks his promise, as he has. (745)

Dear God, I loved him so much, as much as one human being could love another. Every hour of the day, and of the night, I could think of no one but him. He was my passion, my source of pleasure, my fulfilment, my delight, my comfort and my consolation. How could I stop myself thinking about him when I could not see him! Oh my dear love, how could this have come about? What could possibly have happened to you to make you be unfaithful to me? So help me God, I thought you were even truer to me than Tristan was to Iseult. God forgive me but I loved you twice as much as I loved myself. Never, right from the start and right to the end, did I ever do you any wrong, great or small, in thought, word or deed, that would justify your hating me or betraying me in such a shameless manner. How could you have revealed our secret, destroyed our love and abandoned me in order to love another woman? (771)

Ah! wretch that I am, I am amazed at what has happened, because, so help me God, my love for you, my dearest, has never been in question. If God had granted me the whole world, even heaven and paradise as well, I would not have accepted if it meant that I would lose you. You were my fortune, my salvation, my happiness. As long as I knew in my heart -- that poor heart of mine -- that you had some love left for me, nothing could possibly have hurt me. Ah, alas for true love! Who would have thought that I could be treated so badly by a man whose every wish I did my best to satisfy, a man who, when we were together, swore that he was mine and wholly mine, and that he considered me his lady, body and soul? He said these things with such tenderness that I thought he really meant it, and that he could never have found it in his heart, or so I thought, to turn against me and hate me on account of another woman, be her duchess or even queen. Loving him was such pleasure that I thought his love was as sincere as mine. I also believed he saw himself as being his

lover for the rest of his life. I knew in my heart that, were he to die before me, my love for him would be such that I would not survive him for long. I would prefer to die with him than to live without ever setting my eyes on him again. (807)

Oh! alas for true love! Is it right for him to have disclosed our secret and led to his losing me? When I first granted him my love, I told him I made it a firm condition that, if ever he revealed our love, he would lose me on the spot. Now I am the one who has lost him, and it causes me such suffering and mourning that I have no wish to go on living without him, and it is not possible for me to do so. Life for me is now so unbearable that I pray God to allow me to die. With the same pure love as I loved the man who has brought me to this sorry state, I beseech God to have mercy on my soul. May God also grant respect to the man who has so unjustly betrayed me and brought about my death. Him I hereby forgive. As it comes to me from him, my death, I feel, can only be a pleasant one. When I remember his love for me, my dying for him is no hardship for me.' With one last sigh the chatelaine falls silent: 'My dearest love,' she says, 'I commend you to God.' (834)

With that she clasped her arms together against her breast, and her heart stopped beating. The colour drained from her face, and in great anguish she lost consciousness. She lay stretched out on the bed, pale, ashen -- and dead. Unaware of all this, her lover was making merry, prancing around and dancing in the ballroom. He was not, however, enjoying himself, as he could see no sign of the love of his life, his mistress, and he found this very surprising. He whispered in the duke's ear: 'What could have happened to your niece, sire? We've been waiting ages for her to join in the dancing. Have you locked her away or something?' (850)

The duke, who had not noticed that the chatelaine was not present, cast an eye over the people dancing, then took the knight by the hand and went with him into the adjoining apartments. On failing to find her there, he urged the knight to go and look for her in the side room. This was his way of allowing the couple to be together on their own and to kiss and canoodle. The knight, happy to take advantage, enters the room only to see his mistress stretched out on her back on the bed, her face deadly pale. Finding himself alone, he immediately takes her in his arms and kisses her. Her mouth, however, he finds cold, her entire body motionless, and her limbs rigid. All the indications are, he understands, that she is dead, and dead indeed she is. (870)

Thunderstruck, the knight's first reaction is to shout out: 'What is this? Alas! Woe is me! Can my love be dead?' At which point the young serving girl lying at the foot of the bed gets to her feet and says: 'Yes indeed, sir, she is, I believe. Since she first came in here, she had nothing but that on her mind. She was so overwhelmed with grief about my lady the duchess's accusation against her lover, and her taunting her about a certain little dog. All this was such agony for her that she could not go on living any longer.' (881)

When the knight hears this, he understands that his revealing their secret to the duke has killed his love. He gives vent to all the anguish he feels: 'Alas!' he cries, 'my sweet love, the best there ever was, the most refined and the most faithful. I am nothing but a traitor, an oath breaker. I am the one responsible for your death. I, not you, should rightly have been punished for what has happened, and you should not have suffered the consequences. But your love for me was so perfect that you pre-empted me. I however will punish myself for the treachery I am guilty of.' (895)

Drawing a sword that was hanging from a hook nearby, the knight plunged it straight into his heart. The blood came gushing out and he died. His body fell onto that of his lover. The serving girl, horrified to see two lifeless bodies, came running out of the room. She found the duke there and told him everything she had seen and heard, sparing no detail. She told him about how it had all started, and even how the duchess had alluded to the training of the little dog. (909)

You should have seen how furious this made the duke! He ran into the room and pulled the sword the knight had used to kill himself out of his chest. From there he rushed into where the dancing was taking place. Without more ado, he went up to the duchess and made good his promise to her by bringing the naked sword crashing down onto her head. He uttered not a single word, so infuriated was he. Before the eyes of all the duke's vassals from all over the duchy, the duchess fell at his feet. This brought the celebrations to an abrupt and dramatic end, much to the chagrin of the knights who had been having such a good time enjoying the festivities. (926)

The duke proceeded, in open court, to give an account, to anyone who wished to listen, of what had happened. There was no one who did not shed a tear especially when they saw the two lovers lying there dead, and the duchess close by. The court broke up in high emotion and in great sorrow. It had all been a most disgraceful business. The next day the duke had the two lovers buried in the same coffin, with the duchess laid to rest separately. He himself never recovered from such a bitter experience, and was never seen to smile again in his life. He became a crusader, went overseas and joined the Templars. He was never to return home. (943)

Ah, God! All this trouble, this catastrophe, came about because the knight was unfortunate enough to reveal something he ought to have kept hidden. For as long as he wished to enjoy his mistress's love, she had forbidden him ever to speak of it. The moral of this story is that the greatest possible care needs to be taken to keep love hidden. It must always be borne in mind that revealing love gets you nowhere, and that keeping it secret is in every instance preferable. Whoever follows this principle need not fear being attacked by those deceitful and criminal busybodies who meddle in the love affairs of others. (958)

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|                                        |     |
|----------------------------------------|-----|
| Lors ne pot garder ses paroles         |     |
| la duchoise qui vit son leu,           | 705 |
| ainz dist ausi comme par geu :         |     |
| « Chastelaine, soiez bien cointe,      |     |
| quar bel et preu avez acointe. »       |     |
| Et cele respont simplement :           |     |
| « Je ne sai quel acointement           | 710 |
| vus penssez, ma dame, por voir,        |     |
| que talent n'ai d'ami avoir            |     |
| qui ne soit del tout a l'onor          |     |
| et de moi et de mon seignor. »         |     |
| « Je l'otroi bien, » dist la duchesse, | 715 |
| « mes vus estes bone mestresse,        |     |
| qui avez apris le mestier              |     |
| du petit chienet afeter. »             |     |

a inc noistres grant ne peat  
 o seil q' vous meismes dit  
 d' de descouuier fuisse p' moi  
 z si vous di en bone foi  
 f a en ma vie nauendra  
 z uant ce ot dit si reploia  
 z li dur si laole z bele  
 z est de son cuer a malese  
 s i q' plus ne se pot tenir  
 d e la volente descouuier  
 p uist se li a dit bele dame  
 f e ne sui q' face p' mame  
 q tant mafi en vous z en  
 q chose celer ne vous doi  
 q li mient cuers sache ne ot  
 a es ie vous pu nen ples mot  
 s achies z tant vous en di  
 q se ie sui p' vous trahi  
 e en reueuerz la mort  
 z ele dist bien mi acort  
 e stre ne pourit q' fesse  
 c hose dont vers q' mespisse  
**E** il q' laime por ce le croit  
 z cuide q' verite soit  
 d e ce q' li dist p'us li ote  
 d e la miece t'houit le ote  
 o me apus lor du ch  
 z omie il fu el vergier  
 e n langlet ou il noz q'us y  
 q uat li chenes sen vint a eul  
 z de lissue z de lentrece  
 l i a la verite contee  
 s i q' ne li haient deu  
 q uil i ait oi ne veu  
 z quant la duchoise l'entend  
 q cil aime plus bassement  
 q' de samor la escondite  
 a oite se tient z a despire  
 a es ainc de ce sablant ne fist  
 a incos otroia z promist  
 a u duc a si celer ceste oeuvre  
 q se cest q'le le desaveue  
 q il la pende a une furt  
 z se li est il ia mlt tarte  
 d aceli p'ler quele bet  
 d es icelle eue q'le set  
 q ele est amie a celui  
 q li fet z honte z anui  
 p or tant ce li est auis  
 q l ne vout estre ses amis

s i afferme tout son poens  
 q sele soit ne lieu ne tens  
 q la miece le duc parole  
 q le li d'ua ausi tost  
 n e ia ne celera tel chose  
 o u felonie aura enclose  
 a es ainc en poe nen lieu nen vir  
 z ant q' la pence couste vint  
 q ap'el fu a la premiere  
 q li d'us c'ant cor mlt pleniore  
 s i q' enuora p' tout que  
 t outes les dames de la dre  
 z la miece tout p'meraine  
 q de veigi ert chastelaine  
 z quant la duchoise la vit  
 t antost co' li sans li fremit  
 q cele del mont q' plus bet  
 a es son corage celer set  
 s e li a fet plus bel atrez  
 q q' deuant ne li ot fet  
 a es mlt ot grāt talent de dure  
 c e dot ele ot au cuer grāt ire  
 z la demeure mlt li couste  
 p or ce le ior de pence couste  
 q uat les tables furent ostas  
 e n a la duchoise menees  
 l es dames en la chabrie o soi  
 p or es parer en revoi  
 p or venir comtes aus carols  
 l ois ne pot garder ses paroles  
 l a duchoise q' ot son leu  
 a m' dist ausi q'ne p' gen  
 c chastelaine soiz bien coines  
 q bel z preu auer acointe  
 z cele respont simplement  
 q e ne sui q' acointement  
 s p'usse ma dame p'edoir  
 q talent nai d'ami auer  
 q ne soit del cour a sonor  
 z de moi z de mon seignoz  
 f e lozoi vie dist la duchesse  
 a es c'estes bone mestresse  
 q auer apus le mestier  
 d u petit chienet afferer  
**E** es dames ont oi le conte  
 qes ne seuent a qoi ce mouet  
 o la duchoise sen rauouet  
 a us carols q' fetes ont  
 z la chastelaine remamir  
 l i cuers li trouble dure z tant