

Kevin Crossley-Holland Crossing to Paradise

FOR LINDA—WITH LOVE

The CHARACTERS

THE PILGRIMS

LADY GWYNETH DE EWLOEAUSTIN, her priest

NEST, aged 17, her first chamber-servant

GATTY, aged 15, her second chamber-servant

SNOUT, the cook

EMRYS, the stableman

TILDA, his wife, a wise woman

NAKIN, a Chester merchant

EVERARD, Chester cathedral choirmaster

AT EWLOE

ARMIN, a day-worker

SIR ROBERT DE MONTALT, Lady Gwyneth’s husband

LLEWELYN AP IORWERTH, a Welsh warlord

GRIFFITH AP ROBERT, Lady Gwyneth’s baby son

GRUFFYDD, the shoemaker

MANSEL, his son

HEW, aged 5, Snout’s son

ON THE ROADSAYER, a lively stablemaster in London

SOLOMON, his partner

SYNDOD, Gatty’s Welsh cob

SAVIOUR, Austin’s horse

JOHN AND GEOFF

, two hired pilgrims

A German envoy

A Norwegian merchant

A French nun

A monk at Vézelay

SISTER HILDA, a nun at Vézelay

A novice at Vézelay

The doctor’s accomplices

An Alpine guide

BROTHER BENEDICT

The stablemaster at Treviso and his two daughters

SIMONA, a translator in Venice

CINQUE AND SEI, her brothers

GIANNI NURICO, a dentist

GOBBO, captain of a pilgrim ship

TINY, an elephant

A hospice nun in Venice

ALESSANDRA LUPO, a surgeon

Three Saracen traders in Venice

OSMÁN, a Turkish astronomer

MICHAEL SCOT, a scholar

SIRM UMBERTO DEL MALAXA, a Venetian landowner in Crete

MANSUR, his Egyptian slave

A justice in Cyprus

BABOLO, a Cypriot baby

BROTHER ANTONY, a monk at Saint Mary of the Mountain

A Saracen fisherman and his two sons

A snake-charmer in Acre

A conjuror in Acre

A wise man in Acre

BROTHER GABRIEL, a Knight Hospitaller

SIR FARAMOND, a Norman crusader

LADY SAFFIYA, his Saracen wife

The Bedouin horsemen

GREGORY, a helper at the Hospital of Saint John

JANET, his wife

A blind Jewish singer

Pilgrims,

SIR WALTER AND LADY ANNE DE VERDON

WINNIE DE VERDON, aged 15

LORD STEPHEN AND LADY JUDITH DE HOLT

LADY ALICE DE GORTANORETOM DE GORTANORE, aged 17

MERLIN

Arthur de Caldicot’s mother

ARThUR DE CALDICOT (now SIR ARTHUR DE CATMOLE)

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1 Æœ Light of light! Oh, flight! Oh, flight!” trilled the early birds. In one corner of the cow-stall, the heap of dirty sacking shifted. Something buried beneath it made a sound that began as a gentle murmur and ended as a grouse. Then Peter the cock crowed and that loosed the tongues of his disciples. Half the neighers and brayers and bleaters and grunters in the manor of Caldicot welcomed the day’s dawning, chill and misty as it was. As soon as Hopeless joined in and moosed, the heap of sacking shrugged and then tossed. In one fluid movement, Gatty stood up, crossed herself, reached for her russet woolen tunic lying in the manger, and pulled it on over her undershirt and baggy drawers. Loudly she yawned. She opened her mouth so wide she could hear all her little head-bones cracking and cracking. Then she stepped round to the next stall. “Greetings in God!” she said politely to her cow. Then she gave Hopeless a handful of grain, pulled up her three-legged stool, and began to milk her. The air in the cowshed...
somehow smelt thick and fresh at the same time. Rank with gluey dung and stale urine and musty straw, but also rinsed with the cool, clean breath of late September, that time of year when the weather begins to sharpen its teeth. Gatty had chosen to sleep there since her grandmother died. After all, Hopeless was company of a sort, and Gatty preferred it to sleeping in her little two-roomed cottage on her own. Her mother had died in childbirth, and her little brother Dusty died when he couldn't stop laughing and choked. Then, early that summer, an army of night-elves had invaded her father's stomach and jabbed their spears into him, and just four weeks after that, her grandmother had died as well, seeing little point in hanging on once her only son had gone to the grave. So Gatty was alone in this middle-world. There was no one to look after her, and no one for her to look after. And since Arthur de Caldicot had left the Marches to join the great crusade, for two years at least, he said, for two years and maybe three, there was no one with whom Gatty could really talk and laugh, no one to whom she could open her heart. But soon after her father died, Gatty had begun to sing. While losing her family, and Arthur as well, Gatty found her own voice. As she filled her pail with bubbling milk, she crooned milking songs. She sang to herself the songs she heard villagers singing as they worked in the fields, love songs sung by traveling musicians, carols for dancing, charms. Not only those! She listened to the choirs of birds and the harping wind and made up her own green songs. Early one morning, Oliver the priest stopped to listen to Gatty singing to herself in the cow-stall, and then bustled over to tell Sir John and Lady de Caldicot about it. “That girl!” he said, blinking and shaking his bald head. “You've heard her sing?” “Half the time,” said Sir John. “Like a Welsh girl,” Lady Helen said. “Better!” said the priest. He drew himself up to his full height, such as it was, and laced his pudgy fingers over his stomach. “She's untrained, of course, but she has the voice of an angel. An apprentice angel.” Sir John rubbed his nose thoughtfully. “I wouldn't know,” he said. “In fact,” said Oliver, “I'm beginning to think she should enter a nunnery.” “Dear Lord!” said Sir John. “Sister Gatty!” exclaimed Lady Helen. “She should enter a nunnery,” said Oliver, who never said a thing once when he could say it twice, “where she can be taught and give her voice back to God.” The priest took a deep breath and permitted himself a small smile. “Yes!” he said. “Yes! A little March miracle!” Sir John de Caldicot called for Gatty to be brought to him and inspected his field-girl. “So, now!” he said. “Arthur’s friend!” “Sir?” “Braving furious bulls and...absconding to Ludlow Fair, and sleeping up a tree.” “No, sir.” “No what?” “Arthur wasn't there, sir.” “Where?” “Up the tree.” “I know that,” said Sir John, sitting down on a bench beside the fire. “You're lucky the bears didn't get you. So, Gatty, are you always hard-working?” “I'd starve if I weren't,” said Gatty. “Except when you're off on some wild goose chase.” Gatty stared at her chapped knuckles, her earth-stained hands. She scrubbed her gold-and-silver curls with her rough fingertips. Why was Sir John asking her such questions? Inside her sackcloth, Gatty began to feel smaller than she really was, and she gave Sir John a doleful look. “What have I done wrong, sir?” she asked. Sir John waved at Gatty to sit down on the bench opposite him. “You're fifteen, aren't you? When's your birthday?” “Just after the harvest, sir. That's what my father said.” “Yes, and you're alone now. No one to care for. No one to feed.” “Hopeless,” said Gatty. “What?” “Hopeless,” she said. “And my seven chickens.” “What about Jankin, then?” “I can't!” cried Gatty, and she stood up. “Sit down!” said Sir John. “I can't marry Jankin!” Gatty said fiercely. “You can't force me.” “Gatty,” said Sir John, “I'm your guardian now, and I will decide whom you marry.” “I won't, anyhow.” “So I gather,” said Sir John in a voice dry as a kindling stick. “As it happens, I know that Jankin's father dishonored yours, and that's the end of the matter.” Gatty glared into the fire. “We each have our place in this middle-world,” said Sir John. “Children have duties to their parents, field-men and field-women have duties to their lord. Isn't that so?” “Yes, sir.” “And I have duties to the king,” Sir John said, “and the king must honor God. Now this is most unusual, I know. But what with you being alone, and only fifteen, and Arthur's friend...well, for one reason and another I've decided to help you.” Gatty knitted her brows. “Oliver says you can sing. Will you sing for me?” “Close your eyes!” Gatty instructed him. “What?” “Close your eyes.” At first Sir John de Caldicot thought that he could hear the wind gently hissing, and then kissing the hall's horn windows. He listened to the soft cu-ic, cu-ic of the night jar. Then the bird clapped its wings. P'weet, sang the lapwing. P'weet. P'weet. And then Gatty began to sing the words she had heard in the hall at Caldicot three years before:
Love without heartache, love without fear
Is fire without flame and flame without heat.

Love without heartache, love without fear
Is summer without flower, winter without frost.

Gatty’s beautiful voice pierced Sir John’s heart, and no sooner had he heard her sing than he resolved she should become a nun. But after riding all the way to White Ladies beyond Wenlock, and talking to the nuns, he came back thunder-browed. “They’re grasping, those harriedans,” Sir John reported. “Avaricious, that’s what they are. They wanted me to pay outright for board, lodging, clothing, reading lessons, singing lessons, I don’t know what. They’d charge you for the sunlight if they could figure out how.” “Like all you English,” said Lady Helen. “Hard-nosed.” “Anyhow,” said Sir John, “they weren’t in the least keen to have Gatty, seeing as she’s a field-girl.” “What about her voice, though?” asked Lady Helen. Sir John sniffed. “Brides of Christ! They’re old crows. Rapacious crows.” In early November, it was Lady Helen’s turn to travel. She rode north to visit her widowed cousin, Lady Gwyneth of Ewloe, and when she came home after three weeks she reported that Lady Gwyneth was in search of a second chamber-servant. “Well?” said Sir John. “What am I meant to do about it? Find one under a hedgerow?” “What about Gatty?” said Lady Helen. She gave her husband a bright smile. “I promised Gwyneth I’d ask you. She’s leaving on a pilgrimage, and she needs a second girl.” “Poor Gatty!” said Sir John. “Not the shrine of another dismal Welsh saint. Not another mossy, dripping well.” Lady Helen shook her head. “And she says Gatty’s voice should help to keep everyone safe,” Lady Helen added. “Keep them safe!” exclaimed Sir John. “Armed men keep people safe—not singing.” “Gwyneth said she could do with her at once.” “She’ll have to wait,” said Sir John. “We need Gatty here over Yuletide. Macsen can ride north with her the morning after Epiphany.” When Lady Helen told Gatty about going north to Ewloe, Gatty grinned. “I don’t know nothing about chamber-servants and all that,” she said. “You can learn, then.” Gatty looked doubtfully at Lady Helen under her long lashes. What daunted Gatty, though, and each day a little more, was the thought of leaving Caldicot. Leaving her lifelong friends. Leaving Hopeless, who always mooed to tell Gatty to feed her. Leaving her strip of land in Nine Elms, the one she and her father had worked side by side for as long as she could remember. Leaving the glinting clods and the high rookery, the way the cool dawn air fingered her hairline, the way the setting sun bled over Wales. Gatty had never traveled further than Ludlow in her whole life, where she went to the fair with Arthur. “Lady Gwyneth is going on a pilgrimage,” Lady Helen told Gatty, “and she means to take you.” “Where?” asked Gatty. “Jerusalem!” Gatty exclaimed. “Where Jesus was?” “The Holy Land,” said Lady Helen. “Will I see Arthur, then?” she asked eagerly. “That girl!” Sir John said later to Lady Helen. “So raw! She has no idea whatsoever of all the dangers and terrors awaiting her.” Lady Helen shook her head. “Just as well, maybe!” she said in her sing-song voice. “Jerusalem!” Sir John exclaimed. “She’ll be lucky to get there alive, let alone back home again.”

Yuletide. It was different for Gatty this year. For the first time in her life, her father was not blowing the pipe and banging the tabor, leading Slim into the hall, Slim raising the boar’s head on a silver dish while everyone sang:

“Bring on the first dish of meat!

A boar’s head. That’s what you’ll eat.”

No, Gatty’s father was dead, and Arthur was far away, and in twelve days’ time she herself would
be leaving Caldicot. As usual, the priest Oliver treated everyone to a particularly lengthy sermon. He reminded his flock that their hearts were like cradles, waiting for Jesus to be born. “And if it's God's will,” he went on, “one of our flock, one of our own Caldicot flock, will reach the Golden Gate. She will stand inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the most holy place in holy Jerusalem.” Gatty listened, and she felt that Oliver wasn't really talking about her at all but about some stranger. “Let us pray for Gatty and her great pilgrimage,” Oliver said. “And if she reaches Jerusalem, may she pray for each one of us at each of the holy places.” On Saint Stephen's Day, Caldicot had visitors, Winnie de Verdon and her father, Sir Walter. They arrived early, in time to join the games, and when they stepped into the hall, the first thing Gatty noticed was Winnie's half of her and Arthur's betrothal penny, strung on a cord around her neck. The first thing Sian de Caldicot noticed, though, was Winnie's exquisite white fur mittens. “Where did you get them?” she exclaimed, and she grabbed Winnie's wrists and buried her face in the misty fur. Winnie tried to pull her hands away. “They look like Spitfire did. My cat!” “Let go!” said Winnie, and she turned pink. “I don't like them, anyhow,” she said. “They're too tight. Like my betrothal ring.” “I love Arthur,” Sian declared. “I wish I could marry him.” “Well, you can’t!” said Winnie. “I'm not going to wait forever, though.” “You can marry my cousin Tom,” Sian went on. “He said he'd be glad to marry you if Arthur doesn't come back.” Winnie smiled and said, “Anyhow, you're only eleven!” “Twelve,” said Sian. “Winnie!” said Sir Walter. “Have you even greeted Sir John and Lady Helen?” Winnie curtsied, she clasped hands, she smiled, she said the right words, but she didn't so much as incline her head to Gatty. She didn't even notice her. Gatty felt breathless. Her mouth was dry and there was such a knot in her throat. She had heard all about the betrothal but this was the first time she had ever seen Winnie, face-to-face. All day Gatty kept her distance from Winnie, her sharp words and flashing betrothal ring, her flame of hair, her wide-sleeved gown and grassgreen shoes. In her stained sackcloth and untanned boots, Gatty felt as if her own friendship with Arthur didn't really exist. She felt so worthless. Yuletide! How soon the twelve days were over. On the last morning, Gatty carried her squawking chickens one by one up to Sir John's run, and drove Hopeless up to Sir John's byre. She put her arms right round her cow's neck, and felt her calm warmth; then Gatty gave a long moo, soft as the bottom-most notes of a flute and, with an aching heart, walked away. In the afternoon, Gatty found Oliver in the church vestry. He was sitting at his sloping desk, his feet on a footstool, writing on a piece of parchment. “There you are!” said Gatty. “In the service of the Lord,” Oliver replied. “Oliver, can you write a message for me? Please.” “Can I or will I?” “Will you?” Oliver looked dimly at Gatty. “To whom?” “Arthur!” Oliver smiled. “There's a surprise,” he said. “Well, you're in luck. I've one small piece of parchment left over from my labors. My morning labors.” “Who are you writing to?” asked Gatty. “Lady Gwyneth's priest.” “Why? What about?” Oliver completed the character and then the word he was writing. Then he rolled up the little scroll and gave it to Gatty. “Keep it safe and dry,” he said. “This letter could make all the difference.” “To what?” “You'll find out,” said Oliver. “Now! What's your message?” “Ready?” asked Gatty. “Where are you today I keep wondering. I often talk to you and see you easy.” “Easily,” said Oliver. “No,” said Gatty. “Easy.” “Easy is wrong,” said Oliver. “Not for me,” Gatty replied. “Please, Oliver! Write what I say. Then Arthur will hear me.” Oliver pressed his lips together. “Go on, then,” he said. “You got the sky on your shoulders,” Gatty dictated. “You remember when I said let's go to Jerusalem? I can't explain but somehow I thought it, I believed it, and now I'm going. You and your singing will keep us all safe, Lady Gwyneth says. Arthur, when are you coming back? I haven't forgot…” “Forgotten,” said Oliver. Gatty gently shook her head and then, very boldly, she laid the flat of her right hand on Oliver's back. Oliver sniffed. “…I haven't forgot going upstream. You promised. Or can you ride to Ewloe. Them bulls, and me wearing Sir John's armor, and rescuing Sian from the fishpond and going to Ludlow Fair, and everything...It's true! It is. Best things don't never get lost.” Oliver looked up at Gatty: so eager, her eyes shining. He knitted his brows. “Just what are you to Arthur?” he inquired. “Me? To Arthur? What do you mean?” And then, with a smile and a little shrug, Gatty said, “True.” “Yes,” said Oliver. “True.” He wrote four more words, and voiced them as he wrote. “By your true Gatty...” “There you are!” said Oliver. “That's your letter.” “Will you keep it and give it to him?” Gatty asked. “When he gets home.” “If he gets home,” the priest replied. “He will,” said Gatty. “Some do,” the priest said. “Most don't.” “I know what,” said Gatty. Then she untied the violet ribbon she wore day and night
round her waist, the one Arthur had bought for her with his last farthing at Ludlow Fair. She doubled it, tore at it with her teeth and bit it in half. “Really!” said Oliver, wrinkling his nose. “Half for him, half for me,” said Gatty. So Oliver rolled up the little piece of parchment and Gatty secured it with the violet ribbon. Gatty took a deep breath, and noisily blew out her pink, freckled cheeks. “There!” she exclaimed. “Writing and all!” She smiled brightly at Oliver and then she wound her half of the violet ribbon round and round her left wrist. Oliver was ringing the church bell as Gatty rode out of Caldicot and she wondered why. Steady and unhurried, neither eager nor forlorn, the bell rang and rang, and it never once occurred to her that Oliver was ringing it especially for her. For a long while, Gatty and Macsen rode side by side in silence and then Gatty gave a heartfelt sigh. “You all right, girl?” Macsen asked. Gatty was not all right. Her strength was bleeding out of her as she left the only landscape she knew. She couldn't get the strange idea out of her head that the Marches and her body were one: This earth was her mother, and she was mother-earth. When at noon they reached the Great Dyke, Gatty and Macsen entered a no-man’s-land. A hovering grey mist blotted out the sun, turned trees into roaming spirits and one-legged giants brandishing clubs, and lay on the land on either side of the Great Dyke like a vast wraith-ocean. For three days Gatty and Macsen rode north, and when at last they turned east the hazy sun blessed them. Down they rode from the high fields and farms, with their huge flocks of sheep and yapping sheepdogs, down into a sopping forest, and somehow their two horses sensed the journey was almost over. They raised their tucked heads; they whished their tails. Gatty stared ahead. Nothing but trunks, some silver, some grey-green, some ivied, some carbuncled, nothing but a prison of tree trunks stretching to the end of the world. But then there was something. A handsome high wall, brown as an eggshell and speckled, with teeth along the top. Five peephole windows, four of them slits but one round as the full moon. Side by side, Gatty and Macsen rode across the drawbridge. They dismounted and walked up to the huge ribbed oak door. Gatty stepped into the hall, and she caught her breath. She saw Lady Gwyneth at once, standing at the far end of the hall, very tall and slender and fair, with a girl on her right and a big man on her left, but in that same first long moment she saw the kind tapestries hanging on the walls and the soft honey-light of dozens and dozens of candles, she smelt scents sweeter and thicker than Fallow Field in June, she heard a cascade of notes, more notes than a climbing lark sings in May, and saw a man plucking an instrument with a forest of strings. Then Gatty let go of her breath again, and Lady Gwyneth turned to her, took two steps towards her, and inclined her head. Had Gatty been able to look at herself through Lady Gwyneth’s eyes, what would she have seen? A grubby parcel of sackcloth and, sticking out of the top, a freckled and dirt-streaked face; large river eyes, set quite wide apart; and a storm of curls, now in the candlelight more silver than gold. Gatty shuffled towards Lady Gwyneth, and grinned. “God’s bones!” she exclaimed. “I never knew there was no place like this.” Lady Gwyneth looked, unblinking, at this creature standing before her. “Gatty!” she said. “It is Gatty, isn’t it?” “Me,” Gatty agreed, and as she nodded each of her curls seemed to have a life of its own. Lady Gwyneth of Ewloe tilted her head slightly to the right. A smile hovered around the corners of her mouth. “Yes,” she said. “I rather thought so. You and...” she hesitated, and her pale brow creased. “You and...” “Macsen,” Gatty said in a loud voice. “Saxon, I call him!” “Welcome back,” Lady Gwyneth told Macsen. “You do both look rather the worse for wear.”

Gatty is a field girl on a manor. She has never seen busy London or the bright Channel, the snowy Alps of France or the boats in the Venetian sea. She has not sung in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem or prayed at the manger in Bethlehem -- or been kidnapped, or abandoned, or kissed, or heartbroken. But all these things will change. As Gatty journeys with Lady Gwyneth and a prickly new family of pilgrims across Europe to the Holy Land, Kevin Crossley-Holland reveals a medieval world as rich and compelling as the world of today it foresees -- and, in Gatty, a character readers will never forget.
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