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Evadeam, The Dwarf Knight from the *Lancelot-Grail* Cycle (ca. 1220–30) 

*Contributed by Kara Larson Maloney*

**Introduction**

Dwarfism is a medical or genetic condition that results in short physical stature, usually under the designated height of four foot ten inches. This condition does not have one singular cause, and the conditions that are most often associated with dwarfism—large head, disproportionate limb size to trunk size—are not universal affects. Though it is an acknowledged medical condition in modern times, those who manifested such traits in the Middle Ages occupied a different, liminal space in medieval European texts. Their short stature and other visible differences could be considered a physical ailment or impairment, or they could be considered part of a race of monsters and not entirely human. Celtic folk tradition, for instance, mentions dwarfs as a magical race. And while medical conditions such as achondroplasia (a genetic disorder that results in dwarfism—shortened arms and legs, reduced height, and usually a normal length torso) would have little debilitating impact on a person’s function within their community, people with such conditions were still Othered and seen as being outside the norm during the medieval period.

The Middle Ages produced hundreds of texts regaling the stories of King Arthur, and peppered throughout these stories are a handful of dwarves who serve as devices to move the plot forward. David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder compare disability to the “master trope of human disqualification.” This human disqualification can be seen in the “accessorizing” of dwarves within the Arthurian canon, such as in the dwarf who drives Lancelot’s cart in Chretien de Troyes’ *La Charette*, or Gareth’s dwarf in Malory’s *Morte Darthur*. Some have even argued that the dwarf himself serves to enhance Gareth’s masculinity and prowess as a knight, a veritable prosthesis. Mitchell and Snyder also look at disability’s role in narratives to see how disability becomes coded as inferiority. Historically, dwarves in the Celtic tradition, especially that of the Welsh, are defined as a separate race, “small and handsome” who are “noted for their noble character and complete community harmony,” per Vernon J. Harward.

Dwarves in the Arthurian tradition follow Mitchell and Snyder’s idea of inferior because these dwarves are not magical fairy-folk who impart gold and wisdom, but “disfigured” people who are ridiculed and demonized. When looking at the story of Evadeam, one must consider Mitchell and Snyder’s question: “can one possess a physical or cognitive anomaly that does not translate into a belief in one’s social inferiority?” I have chosen to focus on the story of Evadeam, the “nain chevalier,” or “dwarf knight,” because his disability serves as the “narrative prosthesis” that Mitchell and Snyder speak of: his condition is a “curse” that he must overcome in order to gain full membership into the Round Table. What makes his tale unique from a medieval standpoint is that Evadeam serves as the focus character of the story. The author’s use of realistic detail also helps set this text apart, not quite subverting the “narrative prosthesis” trope, but at least recognizing the reality of living life with
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dwarfism. One other notable dwarf knight wins his lady’s love in the midst of Malory’s recounting of Pelleas and Etard, but no one really remarks that the lady herself chooses the dwarf of her own free will, and that the other knight goes his way, visibly disturbed, and their story ends. Evadeam, however, embodies the liminality that little people (those who manifest the physical condition of dwarfism, as they wish to be called today) could have faced in the Middle Ages.

Part of the Old French Lestoire de Merlin from the Lancelot-Grail saga, Evadeam’s story tells of the knight’s encounters with Gawain and others in the early days of King Arthur’s court. The Lancelot-Grail, or Vulgate, Cycle is the longest Old French Arthurian romance cycle. Written sometime between 1215 and 1235, the Cycle tends to layer its adventures with heavy-handed moralizing. As such, when readers encounter Evadeam, we are quickly introduced to him as the “the most deformed and ugliest dwarf,” companion of a damsel who is “the greatest beauty” and whose parallel cannot be found for four realms. The court, including Guinevere, cannot believe that such a beautiful, innocent damsel could be in love with such an ugly creature. None of them consider Evadeam, who is simply known as the dwarf knight, and what his feelings can be. They cannot see beyond his “coarse black hair,” “his shoulders high and crooked,” and the hump on his back. (One should note that Evadeam’s shortened limbs in proportion to his torso, as well as his broad hands and soft fingers, are marks of anachondroplasia.) Even when they know his name, Evadeam, and that he is of royal birth, the main concern is whether it was the sin of his mother or father responsible for his condition. As Edward Wheatley shows in Stumbling Blocks before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability, the Church’s attempt to dominate the field of medicine and other fields of learning in pre-modern times meant that the causes of disability were thought to be rooted in the moral and amoral deeds of his parents.4 Impairment such as blindness, or disability such as Evadeam’s dwarfism, could be seen as a spiritual test of character, which makes for an interesting choice in a narrative like the Lancelot-Grail. Though the narrative states that Evadeam’s state “is not the fault of his father, or of his mother, or anything that [Evadeam] deserved,” the question of what Evadeam or his parents had done to invoke such a “punishment” would have occurred to a medieval Western European audience in ways that modern readers might not consider.

The bulk of the Lancelot-Grail Cycle questions the values of chivalry. The inclusion of the dwarf knight, who despite his physical “disfigurements” and slight impairment (he must cut holes in the leather fenders of his saddle so that his spurs can actually touch the horse’s flanks), makes an interesting counterpoint to the likes of Gawain, who suffers from questionable moral values, and yet is physically pleasing to the eye. Evadeam, though physically ugly by the other knights’ standards, is a true gentleman and manages to fight five physically able knights to near-death, all for the sake of his love. Later in the cycle, Gawain falls victim to the same curse, disfiguring dwarfism, and must also learn a lesson in courtesy. For Evadeam, it took Gawain wishing him that God grant him joy. For Gawain, it was his very remembering to greet a lady when he met her in the forest without passing her by first. Both, in the end, regain their physical beauty, which will match their spiritual purity and courtesy as a knight. It isn’t quite as satisfying as a modern ending might have been, wherein the court would have recognized Evadeam’s prowess as a knight did not depend on his physical stature, but one must note Evadeam’s treatment as a character. He is granted a name, a full genealogy, and a backstory, complete with conflict. He has a lady love who can see beyond his physical features to the beauty within. And that, in the end, humanizes Evadeam in ways that few other dwarfs are within the medieval Arthurian canon. He is
not a member of a fairy race, but a flesh and blood human being.

Bibliography
Lestoire de Merlin: The Dwarf Knight

After Merlin had told his master all the stories of the things as they happened, one after another, he took leave of Blaise and went right to the city of Logres, where King Arthur and his wife were, and they had great joy at the sight of him. And just as Merlin got there, a maiden came to the front of the room riding a dun-colored mule, and in front of her, on the saddlebow of the mule, she carried the most deformed and ugliest dwarf that anyone had ever seen. He was snub-nosed and skinny and had red curly eyebrows, and a red beard that was so long that it fell to his feet, and his coarse and black hair an ugly combination, his shoulders high and crooked, and a big hump on his back and one in front on his breast, his fat hands and short fingers, and short legs, and a long and sharp spine. The maiden was the greatest beauty. And they all looked at one, and the other.

When she climbed down from her mule, she took her dwarf in her arms and put him down very softly and led him into the room before the king, who sat eating. And when she saw the king she greeted him genteelly, for she was full of great courtesy, and the king returned her greeting most debonairly. The maiden said in front of them, “Sire, I have come to you from very far, because of your court’s great renown throughout the world, to ask you a gift, because no maiden—as the renown witness of you—does not receive that which she asks you. And because you are the greatest gentleman in the world, I have worked to come to your court for one single request. Guard you well that you do not grant me what you do not want to do or give.”

“Sire,” said the lady, “I have come to ask that you knight this young man that I hold by the hand and who is my friend. He deserves it well by right, because he is worthy and hardy and of noble lineage. He should have been a knight before, and he could have been knighted by the hand of King Pelles of Listnois, who is a most loyal gentleman. But my friend did not want to do that, and he made an oath to only be knighted by your hand. And for this I ask that you make him a knight.”

And then everyone began to laugh in the room, and Kay the Seneschal, who had a most slanderous tongue full of dangerous words, said to her while sneering, “Watch him well and keep him close to you so that the maids of the queen will not take him. He is a great beauty, so they may try to take him from you!”

“Sire,” said the damsel, “the king is such a worthy man that he would not allow anyone to do wrong against me, as it pleases God and himself.”

“Certainly not, lady,” said the king, “you can be completely sure and I swear it to you.”

“Sire,” said the lady, “I thank you. Pray do as I ask you.”

“Lady,” said the king, “I will do what you ask.”

At these words, two squires entered the court on two strong and quick horses. One carried on his neck a shield with three leopards with crowns of blue, the field of the shield was black as mulberries, and the strap was of the gold work of a goldsmith, with an inlay of little crosses, and a sword hanging from the bow of the saddle. And the other brought a little war horse in his right hand which was of a good size, and the bridle of gold and the halter of silk. Both squires had driven out a packhorse with two very beautiful saddlebags. Then they dismounted at a pine tree and tied up their horses. Then they opened the saddlebags and drew out from one a double-mail hauberk which was as white as new snow because it was of fine silver, leg armor of the same, and one helm of
silver gilding. Then they went into the room where the king and the barons were dining and they came before the lady.

When the lady saw them coming, she said to the king, “Sire, please grant my request, for it is I who have delayed too long. Here is all the apparatus that a knight needs, for I have brought the armor with which my friend will be dubbed.”

“Fair, sweet friend,” said the King, “I will do your bidding and your greatest wish of my free will after you come and eat.”

And she said that she would not eat before her friend was made a knight.

So the lady stood in the hall before the king, and she always held her friend by the right hand, and when the king had eaten and the tablecloths were cleared, the lady drew from her purse two spurs which were wrapped in a swath of silk. Then she said to the king, “Sire, do what I ask because I have delayed too long.”

Then Kay jumped in front and started to put on the right spur. And the lady seized him by the hand and she said, “What is it that you wish to do, sir knight?”

“I want to put the right spur on your friend to make him a knight at my hand.”

The lady said, “With your hand is not what the Lord wants. It will only be the hand of King Arthur because he gave me a promise that he would only do as I wish. Else he would have hurt me to the death. No one but a king will touch one as high status as my friend.”

“So God help me,” said the king, “Lady, you are right, and I will do that which you desire.” Then the king took the spur from the lady and he put it on the right foot. And the lady put on the other. And the king put the sword on him after he had dressed in the hauberk, because the lady did not want anyone but the king to touch him. And when he was dressed in a proper way with everything a knight would need, the king took him by the neck and said that God would make him a worthy knight.

And then the lady asked if he could do anything else.

“Lady,” the king said, “I have done that which you wanted.”

“Sire,” she said, “please ask that he will be my knight.”

And the King asked him, and he said that he would do what the king wanted.

Then they left the hall and went to the pine tree. And the young lady lifted her new knight on the warhorse, which was more beautiful than any other, all covered with weapons. And then she hung his shield about his neck herself, which was as the story had said it was. Then she mounted her mule and called to the squires and sent them away to her country. Then she went the other way with her knight and they entered a great and marvelous forest.

And King Arthur had remained at his castle with her and Merlin and their company, all of whom had laughed at the lady who was in love with the dwarf:

“Certainly,” said Queen Guinevere, “I wonder how such a thought had come to her for I have never in my life seen such an ugly or despiteful thing. And the damsel is full of such great beauty that no one can find her equal in four realms. I believe that devils or phantoms have blinded or enchanted her.”

“Lady,” said Merlin, “she is not blinded to anything except the great ugliness of the dwarf. In your life you have not seen as loathsome a piece of flesh as the dwarf is, and yet, he is the son of a king and queen.”

“Dear sir,” said the queen, “the damsel appears to come from a great line, for she is beautiful beyond all others, and her friend is so horribly ugly.”

“Lady,” said Merlin, “his great bounty and his bravery will get rid of a great part of the ugliness which is so very much in him, as you have seen, and you will learn about this soon.”

“Noble, sweet friends,” said King Arthur to Merlin, “How is the lady known to you?”
“Sire,” said Merlin, “I tell you truly. I have never seen her before, but I do rightly know who she is and what her name is, but she will tell you herself in a short time, and she will be better believed than I, and you will find out who he is sooner than you think in his own words, and you will have both sorrow and joy for it.”

“How will I have sorrow and joy?” said King Arthur.

[Word comes from Lucius, the emperor of Rome, and the story is not concerned with the dwarf knight.

Merlin becomes imprisoned. Arthur sends out knights to find him, and Gawain and others search, but return without success after one year. As they return to Arthur, they meet up with the damsel and the dwarf knight.]

Now continues the story, after King Arthur had knighted the dwarf at the damsel’s request, that she took him away cheerfully, and they returned to their country. And they traveled that first day until just before vespers. And they left the forest and entered into a most beautiful land, which was very grand and large. And the lady saw before her an armed knight coming, riding on a black-and-white spotted charger, and she pointed the knight out to her dwarf. And he said, “Lady, don’t you worry, but ride without fear, for you are safe from him.”

“By God,” said the lady, “he will want to take me away with him. That is the only reason for him to come this way.”

And the dwarf said to the damsel, “Ride on surely.”

The knight called out to them as soon as he saw her, in a voice that she could hear, “It is well that you have come, my dear lady, and now I have found that which I have loved forever.”

And the dwarf who had heard him quite well, said, “Sir, do not be so hasty, for you might be discouraged before you can start so that you can take joy in her.”

“I should take joy in her,” the knight answered, “because I love her as if I held her as my own. And I will hold her soon enough.”

And the knight kept coming closer as quickly as he was able to ride.

When the dwarf saw the knight approaching, he put his lance in its holder and hid behind his shield until only his eye could be seen. He kicked his horse with his spurs through two small openings cut through his saddle’s fenders, because his legs were so short that they could not reach the stirrups of the saddle. And the horse carried him so fast that one would think he was flying. He shouted to the knight to watch himself.

The knight, who was most proud and haughty, thought it was shameful to joust with such a despicable creature. He raised his lance til it was upright and said that it was God’s will that he would not joust with him. He still put his shield up against the blow. And the dwarf hit him so hard that he pierced through the shield and the knight’s hauberk, and the iron tip of the lance grazed his side. And he hit the knight so hard with his body and his shield, and the horse ran so fast, that the dwarf knocked the man and the horse to the ground. As he fell, he hit his shoulder, and swooned from the pain he felt.

When the dwarf saw this, he called to the damsel and asked her to help him dismount. She took him in her arms and put him down. Then he drew his sword from its sheath and, running to the knight, cut the knight’s helmet from his head. He threatened to cut the knight if he didn’t acknowledge defeat. And the knight, who was very wounded, saw the sword the dwarf held about his head and was afraid of dying. He cried for mercy and said that he would trust his life to the dwarf.

The dwarf said, “Then you will go to King Arthur to be held prisoner. And tell him that the little knight that he dubbed sent you to him, and that you put yourself at his mercy.”

And the knight swore it to him.

The dwarf told the knight to mount his horse, but the knight said that he didn’t have the strength, because his shoulder was
wounded. “So I will stay here until I can find someone to carry me. But if you mount your horse and go to the head of this valley, you will find a house of mine. It is time for you to find a place to stay. You will stay there and send some of my men to carry me back. You have nothing to fear.”

And the dwarf agreed. He went back to the damsel, who held his horse. She bowed low over the neck of her palfrey, took him by the arms, and lifted him up until, with great strain, she put him in his saddle. Then they went back to the king’s lodge.

Six squires who lived there ran out to greet them and help them dismount. They disarmed the dwarf and put a rich mantle on him, and the dwarf told them that their lord was wounded. They took a litter, fastened to two palfreys, and went to their lord. They put him in the litter and carried him back to the lodge. They disrobed him and then sent for the physicians, and they gave him what they could. Then the squires asked him who had done this, and he responded that it was a knight that he did not know, and he dared not say that it had been the dwarf. Then he welcomed his guests as joyfully as a wounded knight was able to do. He had them well served and made comfortable. After eating, they were given two rich beds to sleep in in a very beautiful chamber, and they slept until the next morning, when they got up and dressed. And the damsel armed the dwarf, for she loved him dearly, and only wanted to do it with her hand. And when she had armed him and readied him except for his helm, she took him by the hand and took him to where the wounded knight lay. They both said that God grant him a good day, and he returned their greeting quite meekly. They commended him to God and thanked him for the honor that he granted them.

Then they left the room, and the damsel laced his helm and helped him mount his horse, then armed him with shield and lance. Then the squires came up and brought the lady her palfrey and helped her mount. Then they left the knight’s lodge and took the road toward Estrangorre.

And the knight who had been wounded started to think of fulfilling his oath, so he had a horse-drawn litter most lavishly fit out; it had a most fair and comfortable bed, and the litter was covered with expensive silk cloth. The knight was laid on the bed and the litter hitched to two sweet-natured palfreys. And they left sorrowfully, and took the road into Carduel in Wales, where King Arthur and his queen were spending time. That day, they were with many people. When they got there, King Arthur was sitting to eat his meal, so the knight had himself carried into the hall before the king.

And the knight said, “Sire, in faith and to keep my oath, I come, full of shame, to throw myself at your mercy at the order of the most spiteful creature in the world who defeated me in combat.”

When he said this, he ordered his squires to carry him away, but King Arthur said to him, “What is this, sir knight? You say that you come to be my prisoner and to beg for my mercy?”

“You see, sire,” said the knight, “I know well that I must tell you about my shame and my disgrace, and I will, since I have come to that. I must do your will and fulfill my oath. In truth, I fell in love with a damsel who is so beautiful and kind that she has no equal in the world. She is a noble woman, the daughter of a king, and if you desire to know her name, it is the beautiful Byanne, daughter of King Clamadon, who is very wealthy and powerful. But never by bidding, loving, or knighthood service done on her behalf, could I bring her to give me her love. And I would gladly take her to be my wife, and her father would be most willing and happy about it, for I am of noble stock, son of a king and queen. But the damsel would not agree to it, because of the most despicable thing a mother ever gave birth to. The other evening, I was out riding alone through a land, all armed, when I met my damsel who had been coming back from your court and with that false dwarf
knight, whose friend she is. And when I saw her coming with so little an escort, I felt great joy, and I said that God should be blessed for bringing her to that place, because I thought I could take her without a fight. But the dwarf who was with her told me that I came too soon, and it would do me no good, for things would not go as I hoped, that it was crazy for me to be carried away thus. I thought I could get what I wanted without resistance, so I told him I would certainly get what I wanted. So I let my horse gallop toward the lady, because I wanted to pick her up and carry her away on my horse's neck to my lodge that was not very far from there. But when the dwarf saw that I had started, he spurred his horse toward me and put his lance into its holder. It still seemed a shame and a disgrace to me, so I didn't want to strike him. But he struck me so hard that he dropped me to the ground and when I fell I injured my left shoulder, and I fainted in agony. He unlaced my helm and would have cut off my head if I didn't swear to make myself your prisoner at his bequest, so I am doing all of this."

“Certainly, dear friend,” said the king, “the one who sent you here puts you in a good prison. Can you tell me whose son the dwarf is?”

“Sire,” he answered, “he is the son of King Brandegorre of the land of Estrangorre, who is most wealthy and powerful in land and loyal subjects. He is also faithful to God.”

“Certainly,” said the king, “he is a true nobleman; I wonder how Our Lord could bear it that he has such offspring.”

“Sire,” the knight said, “Our Lord bears many things. It is not the fault of his father, or of his mother, or anything that he deserved. At one time there was no one in all the world as beautiful as he was. It was on Trinity Sunday nine years ago that it happened to him, and he will only be twenty-two years old.”

And King Arthur said that he could not be only twenty-two years old, for by his looks he seems much more than sixty.

“Certainly,” said the knight, “he will be just twenty-two because my father, King Evadeam, whose name he bears, has told me many times that he is no older than that.”

“And how did it happen to him?” asked King Arthur.

“Sire,” he said, “it was a damsel who did this to him, for he was not willing to love her. And there is a time limit to it, as I have been told many times. Now I have told you that which I was bound to say, so I make myself your prisoner and throw myself at your mercy, for I have been defeated.”

“Dear friend,” the king said, “you put yourself in a good prison, for I relieve you of your oath. But first tell me your name.”

“Sire,” he said, “What I am called is Tradelmant, and I am the godson of the king of North Wales, who by great charity gave me his name. So I will go, by your leave and to my shame.”

“Go with God,” said the king, “who guides you.”

Then the squires took the knight and carried him out of the hall and they put him on the litter between the two palfreys, and they went back to their countries. And King Arthur and his barons spoke quite a bit about the dwarf and the maiden, and said between themselves that it would be very joyful to see the dwarf regain his beauty, and they held the damsel in great esteem that she never hated her friend for his ugliness.

[And now the story turns to Sagremor, the quest for Merlin, and how none of the knights found any word of Merlin.]

The story says that Yvain made his way, after leaving Gawain, until he and his companions rode out of a forest. And as they were riding out of the forest, they met a damsel on a mule, and she was consumed with grief. She pulled out her hair by great handfuls and cried out in a loud voice, “I am so wretched! What will become of me? I have lost the one I loved so much, and he loved me so much that he lost the great beauty that he had to win my love.”

And when Yvain heard this, he felt great pity, so he went to her and asked her why she was grieving so. And she answered, “Noble
knight, have mercy on me and my lover. Five knights are killing him in the valley behind that hill!

“And who is your friend, Lady?” asked Yvain.

“Sir, he is Evadeam the dwarf, son of King Brandegorre.”

“Lady, stop sorrowing now,” said Yvain, “for by the faith that I give you, he will not be harmed if I can help it, if I get to him in time.”

“Sir, God’s mercy on you,” said the damsel, “but you will have to hurry.”

So Yvain set off as fast as he could get his horse to run to the place that the lady had pointed out, and his companions followed him. And the lady followed behind as best she could, because her mule went very slowly. And Yvain rode until he saw the dwarf, who was fighting hard with two knights, and Yvain also saw three others lying in the middle of the field who did not have the strength to get up, because one had been wounded by a glaive in the upper thigh, another had been hit on the shoulder, which was severed from his body, and the other was split open by a sword down to his teeth. And the other two were exhausted, and both were near death, for the dwarf kept attacking with vigor.

And when Yvain saw him behaving like this, he said to his companions that “it’s a shame the dwarf is built as he is, for he is one is worthy and brave and has a great heart.”

“Truly, sir,” said one of the companions, “no one has ever fought with such skill with such a build. For God’s sake, let us separate them so that nothing bad will happen to him, for there would be great shame if he were hurt.”

“You speak the truth,” said Yvain.

Then he spurred his horse to where they were, but before he could get there, the dwarf sent one of the knights to the ground and rode over him three or four times with his horse until he had nearly killed him. And when the fifth knight saw that he was all alone, he became deathly afraid for himself, and started to turn away, as if to turn in flight, for he had deep wounds all over his body. But the dwarf, on a very expensive horse, kept on his heels, and went so fast that he would have certainly killed the knight if Yvain hadn’t ridden that way at once.

“So he said to the dwarf, “Dear sir, don’t do that anymore. Let him go, for courtesy’s sake, because we can easily see how he is, because you have fought long and hard with him.”

When the dwarf heard Yvain ask that so mildly, he answered like a man more noble and courteous than any other: “Sir, is it your desire that I give up?”

“Yes,” said Yvain, “with my thanks, for we can see how he is.”

“Then I will do as you ask,” said the dwarf, “for you seem to be a most noble gentleman.”

Thus the knight whom the dwarf was fighting came to Yvain and said, “Sir, your mercy has saved me from death by coming here, and blessed be God for bringing you here.” Then he surrendered his sword to the dwarf and the dwarf took it, and the others who still lived did the same. And he sent the four of them to be King Arthur’s prisoners. And they went there and gave themselves over on behalf of the dwarf knight. And Yvain and his companions left the dwarf and the damsel and crossed through various countries. They quested for Merlin here and there, but they could not find him anywhere, and they were filled with great sorrow and displeasure. And then they returned to the court of King Arthur after one year, and each one told the story of their quests, and King Arthur had them written down. Thus we leave the story of King Arthur here and return to speak of Gawain.

When Sir Gawain had left his companions at the fork in the road, he made his way with ten others until they left the forest. And then, Gawain said to his companions that they should depart, and each should go on his own, for he wanted to go on alone. So they departed in this manner, and each went his own way. And Gawain rode on all alone, and he made his way over a great part of the land of Logres until one day, riding
while pensive and sad, because he could not hear any news of Merlin, and while thinking on this Gawain came into a forest. And after he had ridden two Welsh leagues into it, there came a damsel riding toward him on the most beautiful palfrey in the world. Her saddle was of ivory and her stirrups of gold, and a blanket of scarlet that had bands that fell to the earth and reins of gold thread with gold studs. She wore clothing of white samite with linen fastenings, and her head was enveloped in silk. And all enveloped as she was, she passed in front of Gawain, who was deep in thought so that he did not greet her. And after she had passed him, the damsel pulled her reins and turned her palfrey and said, “Gawain, Gawain. It is not true, that which they speak of you and our renown in courts throughout the kingdom of Logres. They say, and they swear to it, that you are the best knight in the world. And they say also that you are the most courteous and the most noble in the world. But in this, your renown disagrees with the truth, for you are the rudest knight in the world that I have seen in my lifetime. You meet me in this forest all by myself, far from others, and the great crime that is in you would not allow you to show such kindness or humility so that it would stoop or dare or bear to greet me or even speak to me. So you can know well that much ill will come to you as you have done to me, and you would have to give the city of Logres and half of the realm of King Arthur to not have this.”

And when Gawain heard the damsel he felt great shame and he turned his horse’s head toward her and he said with heavy heart the words that you will hear:

“Lady,” said Gawain, “God help me, I was thinking on a thing that I am questing for, and I ask for your mercy so that you will pardon me.”

“God help me,” said the damsel, “you will first pay dearly for this, and you will be very ashamed and ugly for it, so that the next time you will remember to greet young ladies when you see them, but I tell you that this will not endure the rest of your days. But you will find that no one in the kingdom of Logres can tell you about what you are looking for. Instead in Little Brittany you will hear something about it. Now I will go about my affairs, and you will seek out that thing you wish to find. And may you look as you did the first time when you see me again.”

Then Gawain left the damsel, and he had not ridden more than a Welsh league when he met the dwarf knight and the damsel, who had left Yvain the night before and sent four knights to be prisoners of King Arthur. And this happened on the day of the Trinity at the hour of noon. And as soon as Gawain saw the damsel, he thought about the damsel he met before, and he stopped thinking about it and said to the damsel, God grant you joy to her and her companion, and the damsel and the dwarf responded that God grant him good adventure. Thus they passed by, Gawain on one side and they on the other, and as they had gone a little way passed, the dwarf knight recovered his beauty as he previously was, and his right age of 22 years, and he was once again grand and well-built in the shoulder, and he had to take off the armor he was wearing, because it was no longer of use to him.

When the damsel saw her friend restored to his beauty, she had joy greater than anyone could say. So she reached up and put her arms around his neck and kissed him more than one hundred times without stopping, and then they went away, rejoicing and happy, one by the other, in great joy. So they thanked Our Lord for the honor that He had given them and wished joy and good adventure to Gawain who had said that God grant them joy, and so He had. Then they went on their way. But by right the story falls silent about these two and speaks of Gawain.

When Gawain had left the dwarf knight and the damsel, he rode through three good arrow shots before he began to feel that the sleeves of his hauberk hung over his hands and that the bottom of his hauberk hung past his two feet, for his legs had grown so short that they did not stretch below the fenders of his saddle, and he looked up and saw that
his mail leggings had fallen over the top of his stirrups, and his shield hung close to the ground. He could well see that he was now a dwarf. So he said to himself that this was what the damsel had promised. So he was so angry that he almost killed himself. So he rode so full of grief and agony until he reached the edge of the forest. And there he found a cross and a block where he dismounted, and then he began to shorten his stirrups, his mail leggings, and the belt of his sword, and the straps of his shield, and the sleeves of his hauberk. And he attached straps to his shoulders and dressed the best that he could. Then filled with anger and with sorrow, he would have preferred to die rather than live.

Then he mounted his horse and went back on his way, and he cursed the day and hour that he started out on the quest, for he had been ashamed and dishonored by it. And he went on in this manner and did not pass by castle or lodge, woods or plains without seeking news of Merlin from everyone and all that he encountered. Thus he encountered those men and women who said such mocking and loathsome things to him, but he did many feats of prowess, because even though he was a dwarf, he had not lost his power to do such, nor his heart or his strength. Instead, he was hardy and enterprising and conquered many knights.

And after he had searched up and down through the realm of Logres, he knew that he would find nothing there, so it is known that he crossed the ocean and went into Little Brittany, and he searched near and far, but he was not able to find Merlin. And he rode until he approached the time when he had to return. And he said to himself, “Alas, what will I do? The time has come when I must return, when I swore an oath to my lord my uncle that I would return. And I must return because otherwise I would be a liar. No, I will not, because the oath assumes I can act on my own, but I cannot act on my own will, because I am ugly and disfigured and have no power over myself. And that is why I cannot be bound to go to court. By faith, now I have misspoken.

Under no circumstances, whatever shape I have, I would not perjure myself, and because I am not locked in a prison, thus not being able to go where I want, I would only perjure myself if I didn’t go to court. And for that I must go to court to not prove me faithless. And so I pray to God to grant me faith, because the body is treated shamelessly in this age.”

[Gawain rides through the forest of Brocéliande and hears Merlin’s voice. Merlin tells Gawain of his imprisonment and how no one from Arthur’s court will ever see or hear from Merlin again. Merlin does tell Gawain that:]

“You will find the lady who did this to you in the forest where you met her previously, but do not forget to greet her, for that would be a foolish thing to do.”

“Sir,” said Gawain, “I will not, if it pleases God.”

“Then farewell and go with God,” said Merlin, “who guards King Arthur and the realm of Logres and you and all the barons who are the best men in the world.”

[And Gawain rides with much to think about until he comes to the forest again.]

And when he went into the forest where he had found the damsel that he had passed without greeting her, he thought of Merlin and what he had said to not forget to greet her when he met her. And he was so full of great doubt and dread that he might pass her without greeting her that he took his helm off his head to see better. He began to look in front and behind and at all sides, everywhere, until he came to the same spot where he had encountered the lady and passed her without greeting her. Then he looked up between two areas of trees where the forest was thick and deep and he saw two knights who were still armed but for their shields and helms which they had taken off, and their horses tied to their lances. And they were holding a lady in between, and they seemed as if they were forcing her. They did not desire it, but the damsel was making them do it to try Gawain’s will and heart, and she thrashed about as if they were trying to rape her in truth.
And when Gawain saw the two knights holding the damsel, one by the hands and the other by the legs as if they were going to lie with her by force, he shook with anger. And with his lance in his hand, he spurred his horse to where they were. And he said to the knights that they were as if already dead because they were forcing a lady in the land of King Arthur. Because you know well that ladies are guaranteed their safety.

And the damsel saw him and cried, “Gawain, now I will see if you are honorable enough to save me from this shame.”

“Lady,” Gawain said, “God help me that you will not be dishonored if I am there to defend you. I will die if I do not save you.”

And when the knights heard him it came to them as a great disdain and they sprung to their feet and tied on their helms, because they were already afraid of him. And even though the damsel had reassured them that he would not harm them, and she had enchanted them by the arts so that no one would be harmed by anyone at that time, so they felt better. And when they had laced their helms and hung their shields about their necks, they said to Gawain, “God help me, you crazy dwarf, you appear already dead. And it is a shame to us to attack an ugly thing like yourself.”

And when Gawain heard that they were calling him dwarf and ugly thing, he had great grief in his heart. Then he said to them, “Ugly thing that I am, I have come here at a bad time for you, so mount your horses, for it seems to me like villainy to attack you on horseback while you are on foot.”

[Gawain and the knights fight, and both fall to the ground until the damsel cries at Gawain to stop hurting her two supposed attackers.]

“Lady,” he said, “is that what you wish?”

“Yes,” she said.

“Then I will agree to stop at once for your love, and God grant you good adventure, to you and all the ladies of the world. You may know that if not for your plea, I would have killed him, or he would have killed me, because they shamed and wronged you, and they dishonored me when they called me an ill-made dwarf. And they also spoke the truth, for I am the most loathsome thing in the world, and it is in this forest that it happened to me six months ago.”

And the damsel and the knights began to laugh. “So then,” said the damsel, “what would you give to the one who could cure you of this?”

“Certainly, lady,” he said, “if I could be saved from this, I would give myself first and then as much wealth as I could gather in the whole world.”

“You will not have to give me so much,” said the damsel, “but swear me an oath such as I tell you.”

“Lady,” he said, “I will do whatever you wish. Just tell me what to do and I am ready to do it.”

“You will swear to me on the oath you gave King Arthur, your uncle, that you will never fail to help any lady or damsel and that you will never meet a lady without greeting her, if you can, before she greets you.”

“Lady,” he said, “I swear this to you as faithful knight.”

“And I accept this oath,” she said, “but in the same manner if you break it you will become as you are now.”

“Lady,” he said, “I agree, but only if the lady’s quarrel that she asks me to help in is just, for I will have nothing to do with disloyalty, even for life or death.”

“I grant this to you,” said the lady. And all at once the straps that he had tied on his mail leggings broke because his legs were growing out again, and soon he was back to his likeness. And when he found himself returned to his previous state, he got to the ground and knelt before the lady and said that he would be her own knight for all her days. And the damsel thanked him and took him by the hand and it was the same lady who had sent him this mischance.

[Gawain returns to Arthur’s court and tells the story of what he found, and as he’s
retelling the story, a familiar face comes into the court.

As they celebrated, Evadeam came into the hall. He was twenty-two years old and so beautiful and fair that no man in two kingdoms was more beautiful. And he had the damsel by the hand and they came before the king and greeted him most courteously.

And the king greeted them, and the knight said, “Sire, you do not know who I am, and it is no marvel, because when you saw me only once before, and then I was wearing clothing that no one would have seen me in before, and no one would recognize me now who hadn’t seen me as a child.”

“Certainly, good friend,” said King Arthur, “I don’t remember having seen you before, but you are a most handsome knight.”

“Sire,” said Evadeam, “do you remember that a damsel brought you a dwarf for you to dub a knight?”

“Yes,” said the king, “I do remember, for he had sent me five knights as prisoners whom he had conquered with his prowess.”

“Sire,” said Evadeam, “I am the dwarf whom you dubbed, and this is the lady who requested that you do it.”

[Evadeam recounts his story to King Arthur, finishing with] “Because then I was a dwarf, ugly and hideous. For I well believe that his words and his prayers helped me so that God freed me from my shame, and for this, I thank the Lord.”

And then the king asked who he was and of what family, and he told the story as I have told it to you before. And when the king and Gawain and the others heard about what happened they had much gladness and joy. And the king named him a companion with the others of the round table and the damsel stayed with the queen willingly and with much joy.

Here ends the story of Evadeam, no longer the dwarf knight.
Endnotes


5 In Old French, nain or neim simply glosses as “dwarf.” The Anglo-Norman dictionary links neim to neimcel/neincel, a pejorative that means “little dwarf, insignificant wretch.” The FEW gives the etymology of neim as related to Latin nanus, meaning simply “one who is of a size smaller than normal” or “of a size very inferior to the average.”

6 The word in Old French is “cose” or “chose,” which the Anglo-Norman Dictionary defines as “thing (generalized term applied to all manner of objects, matters, items, business, property, goods etc.).” The second definition is “(living) thing, person,” but one should note that “thing” is the more common usage. Based on Guinevere’s revulsion of Evadeam and how the text treats him, I would say a gloss of “thing” is more apropos.