

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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Publication webpage:

https://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/a1/ai-generated_graded_readers.html

Publication date: April 25, 2026

About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Content Note

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

Source Text

Original work: The Story of King Arthur and his Knights; The Story of the Champions of the Round Table; The Story of Sir Launcelot and His Companions; The Story of the Grail and the Passing of Arthur

Author: Howard Pyle

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Howard Pyle's King Arthur Stories (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified
by ChatGPT)

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Book I — The Story of King Arthur and His Knights

Part 1 — The Hidden Child and the Sword

Long ago, there was a great king named Uther-Pendragon. He ruled Britain with power, but he did not rule by power alone. Two men helped him very much. One was Merlin, a wise man who knew many secret things. The other was Sir Ulfius, a strong and famous knight. With their help, Uther overcame his enemies and became the highest king in the land.

After some years, Uther married a beautiful lady named Igraine. She had been married before, and she had two daughters from that first marriage. One daughter was Margaise, and the other was Morgana le Fay. Morgana was not an ordinary woman, for she had knowledge of magic. These daughters came with their mother to Uther's court, and there they were married to other kings.

In time, Uther and Igraine had a son. The child was strong and beautiful, and many people would have loved him if they had seen him. But Merlin came to Uther with a dark warning. "My lord," he said, "I believe that you will soon become very ill. If you die, this child will be in great danger. Many men will fight for the crown, and some of them may try to kill the child or keep him as a prisoner."

Uther listened to Merlin with a calm face. He was not afraid for himself, but he was afraid for the child and for Britain. "If this is true," he said, "then take the child away and hide him. Keep him safe until he is old enough to protect himself. He is the greatest gift that I shall leave to this land." So that night, Merlin and Sir Ulfius carried the child away in secret. No one knew where they took him.

Soon after this, Uther became sick, just as Merlin had said. He died, and the land fell into trouble. Many smaller kings wanted to rule Britain, and they fought one another for power. Bad knights and cruel lords made the roads unsafe. Some travelers were robbed, some were taken prisoner, and some were killed. The whole country was full of fear and pain.

Nearly eighteen years passed in this unhappy way. Then the Archbishop of Canterbury called Merlin to him. "Merlin," he said, "people say that you are the

wisest man in the world. Can you not help this poor country? We need one true king, a king who can bring peace again.” Merlin looked at the Archbishop and answered, “A king will come soon. He will be greater than Uther, and he will bring order where there is now war.”

The Archbishop was deeply interested. “How shall we know this king?” he asked. “Many men will say that they have the right to rule. How can we know the true one?” Merlin said, “If you allow me, I will set a test. The man who can pass that test will be the rightful king of Britain.” The Archbishop agreed, and Merlin began his work.

By magic, Merlin caused a great square stone of marble to appear before the door of the cathedral. On the stone stood an iron anvil. In the anvil there was a bright sword, fixed deep in the iron. The sword was beautiful, with a shining blade and a golden handle set with stones. Around it were words saying that the man who pulled the sword from the anvil was the true-born king of England.

News of this wonder spread through the land. Everyone began to talk about the sword. Some said King Lot would pull it out. Others said King Urien, King Leodegrance, or King Ryence would do it. As Christmas came near, great lords, knights, ladies, servants, and soldiers all traveled to London. The roads were full, the inns were crowded, and many people had to sleep in tents beside the way.

Among those who came to London was Sir Ector of Bonmailson. He was known as a good and honest knight, a man who kept his word. He had two sons in his household. The older one was Sir Kay, a brave young knight who already had some fame. The younger one was Arthur, a boy of eighteen, who served as Kay’s helper in arms. Arthur believed that Sir Ector was his father and that Sir Kay was his brother.

Sir Ector came to London with many servants and men-at-arms. He set up a green tent in a field where many other great lords had placed their tents. Banners of many colors flew in the wind above the field. There were kings and dukes there, and many famous knights had come with them. The city had never seemed so full of noble people. All of them waited for Christmas Day, when the test of the sword would be made.

Before that day came, the Archbishop ordered a great tournament. It was to be held three days before Christmas, near the cathedral. Sir Kay wanted very much to fight in it. He went to Sir Ector and said, "Father, I wish to enter this tournament. If I do well, it will bring honor to our house." Sir Ector gave him permission and blessed him, and Sir Kay chose Arthur to carry his spear and serve him in the field.

On the day of the tournament, a huge crowd gathered to watch. Lords and ladies sat around the field, and the Archbishop sat in a special seat of honor. The knights entered from two sides, shining in their armor. At the sound of the trumpet, they charged at one another. Their horses shook the ground, and their lances broke with a terrible noise. Many knights fell, and servants ran to carry them away.

Sir Kay fought very well that day. Two knights came against him at the same time, but he met them bravely. He struck one of them so hard that the knight fell backward from his horse and rolled in the dust. Those near Sir Kay shouted with joy, and Sir Kay felt proud in his heart. At that time, few knights in Britain seemed stronger than he. Arthur watched him with love and excitement, glad to serve such a brother.

After the first part of the fight, the knights returned to their places. Now they had to fight with swords instead of lances. Sir Kay was tired, and his face was wet with sweat and blood. Arthur ran to him and gave him a cup of spiced wine. Sir Kay drank quickly, then said, "Brother, get me another sword. Mine has broken, and I must return to the fight." Arthur asked where he should find one, and Sir Kay told him to run to their father's tent.

Arthur ran as fast as he could to Sir Ector's tent. But when he arrived, no one was there, because all the servants had gone to watch the tournament. Arthur searched for a sword, but he could not find one fit for Sir Kay. He was troubled, for he did not want to fail his brother. Then he remembered the sword in the anvil before the cathedral. "That sword will serve him well," Arthur thought, and he ran toward it at once.

When Arthur reached the cathedral, no guards were standing by the stone. They too had gone to watch the tournament. The great marble stone stood quiet in the open place, and the sword shone from the anvil. Arthur climbed onto the

stone and took the handle in both hands. He pulled, and the sword came out smoothly and easily, as if it had been waiting for him. Arthur did not understand the wonder of what he had done.

He wrapped the sword in his cloak so that no one would see its bright light. Then he ran back to the tournament field as quickly as he could. Sir Kay was waiting in great impatience, angry because Arthur had taken so long. Arthur gave him the sword and said that he had found no other. Sir Kay took it, and at once he knew it was not an ordinary sword. He looked at the shining blade, and fear and hope rose together in his heart.

Part 2 — Arthur's Birthright

Sir Kay looked at the sword in his hand, and his heart beat fast. He knew that this was the sword from the anvil. For a moment, he forgot the tournament, the crowd, and even his broken sword. He turned away from the field and went quickly to Sir Ector's tent. Arthur followed him, not knowing why Sir Kay had suddenly become so silent.

Sir Ector was in the tent when Sir Kay came in. Sir Kay held out the sword and said, "Father, look. I have the sword from the anvil. So I must be the king." Sir Ector looked at the sword, and his face changed at once. He did not speak for a little while, but looked first at the sword and then at Sir Kay. Then he said quietly, "My son, tell me the truth. Did you draw this sword from the anvil with your own hands?"

Sir Kay could not answer at once. He wanted honor, and he wanted his father to be proud of him. But Sir Ector's eyes were steady, and Sir Kay knew that he could not lie to such a man. At last he said, "No, Father. I did not draw it myself. Arthur brought it to me." Then Sir Ector turned to Arthur and said, "Arthur, where did you get this sword?" Arthur answered simply, "I could not find a sword in the tent, so I went to the cathedral. I saw this sword in the anvil, and I took it for my brother."

Sir Ector was very still when he heard this. Then he told Arthur and Kay to

come with him to the cathedral. The three of them left the tent and went through the busy streets. People were still watching the tournament, so the place before the cathedral was quiet. The marble stone stood there, and the anvil stood on the stone. But now the anvil was empty, because the sword was in Sir Kay's hand.

Sir Ector said to Kay, "Put the sword back into the anvil." Sir Kay climbed onto the stone and set the point of the sword against the iron. He pressed with all his strength, but the blade would not enter. He tried again and again, and his face became red with effort. At last he came down and said, "Father, no man can do this. No sword can be pushed into solid iron."

Sir Ector said, "Then how could you have drawn it out?" Sir Kay had no answer. Then Arthur spoke, for he felt troubled by all this. "Father, may I try?" he asked. "I drew it out, so perhaps I can put it back." Sir Ector looked at Arthur with a strange face. Arthur did not understand that look, and he said, "Father, are you angry with me?" Sir Ector answered, "No, my son. I am not angry. Try if you wish."

Arthur took the sword and climbed onto the marble stone. He placed the point of the blade on the anvil and pressed down. At once the sword entered the iron smoothly, as if the anvil were soft earth. The blade went halfway down and stood there fast. Then Arthur took the handle and drew the sword out again, easily and cleanly. He put it back a second time and drew it out a second time, while Sir Ector and Sir Kay watched in silence.

When Sir Ector saw this, he cried out in wonder. Then he knelt before Arthur and put his hands together. Arthur was shocked and hurt by this, for he loved Sir Ector as his father. "Father, why are you kneeling to me?" he cried. Sir Ector answered, "I am not your true father. You are of royal blood. No one else could have done what you have done."

Arthur began to weep. This news did not make him happy. It frightened him and filled him with pain. "If you are not my father," he said, "then I have lost my father today. I would rather have you for my father than be a king." Sir Ector stood again and spoke gently to him. He told Arthur that eighteen years before, Merlin had brought a baby to him and had asked him to raise the child in secret. Sir Ector

had done so faithfully, and that child was Arthur.

As they were speaking, two men came toward them. One was Merlin, and the other was Sir Ulfius. Sir Ector knew them at once, and so did Sir Kay. Merlin said that he had watched Arthur all these years. He had seen, by his secret art, everything that Arthur had done that day. He knew that Arthur had drawn the sword, put it back, drawn it again, and put it back again. Then Merlin said, “Arthur, you are the true son of Uther-Pendragon. You will be the greatest king Britain has ever known.”

Sir Ector then asked Arthur for one gift. Arthur was still in tears, but he answered at once. “Ask anything you want,” he said. “All I have is yours.” Sir Ector said, “When you are king, make your brother Kay the Seneschal of the kingdom.” Arthur promised this gladly. Then he took Sir Ector’s face in his hands and kissed him. “And you,” he said, “shall always be my father.”

Three days later, Christmas morning came. Thousands of people gathered before the cathedral to see who would draw the sword from the anvil. A rich cloth had been spread above the stone, and a platform had been built around it. The Archbishop sat nearby in a high seat, with churchmen and knights around him. Nineteen kings and sixteen dukes had come, and each hoped that he would become the ruler of Britain.

First, King Lot of Orkney came forward. He was dressed richly, and many knights and servants came with him. He climbed onto the platform, bowed to the Archbishop, and took the sword in both hands. He pulled with all his power, but the sword did not move at all. He tried again and again, but the blade stayed fixed in the anvil. At last he came down, angry and ashamed.

After him, many other kings and dukes tried. King Urien tried, and King Leodegrance tried, and King Ryence tried. Strong dukes and proud lords also came forward. Some pulled slowly with all their strength. Some pulled suddenly and fiercely. Some smiled before they tried, sure that they would win. But every one of them failed, and the sword stood still in the iron.

Then Merlin came forward with Arthur, Sir Ector, Sir Kay, and Sir Ulfius. The Archbishop rose when he saw Merlin and asked, “Who is this young man, and

why has he come?" Merlin put his hand on Arthur's shoulder and said, "This young man has come by the highest right. He is Arthur, the true son of King Uther-Pendragon and Queen Igraine." The Archbishop was greatly amazed, and many people near him began to whisper. Then Sir Ector and Sir Ulfius both said that Merlin had spoken the truth.

The Archbishop looked at Arthur, and his heart became kind toward him. Arthur was young, but there was something noble and gentle in his face. "You may try the sword," the Archbishop said. "May God help you." Arthur went to the marble stone and took the handle of the sword. He pulled, and the sword came out easily into his hands. Then he lifted it above his head, and the blade flashed in the light.

For a moment, no one spoke. Then a great sound rose from the crowd. Some people cried out with joy, for they believed that God had shown them their king. Others stood silent, because they were proud and did not want to bow to a young man they had never honored before. But the sign had been given before all the world. Arthur held the sword in his hands, and the old time of fear and disorder began to pass away.

Part 3 — The First Tests of the King

After Arthur became king, he held court at Carleon. Many knights came to him there, and many people looked to him for justice. One day, while the court was gathered, a wounded knight rode into the hall. His armor was broken, his body was weak, and blood had dried upon his clothes. He came before King Arthur and said that a terrible black knight had hurt him and had taken his lady away.

The wounded knight told the court that this black knight lived in a lonely castle in the forest. He said that the knight had a black shield and was known as the Sable Knight. Any knight who wished to challenge him had to strike that shield. Then the Sable Knight would ride out and fight. Many good knights had already been defeated by him, and the wounded knight begged Arthur's court for help.

A young knight named Sir Griflet heard this story and became very eager. He

was brave, but he was still young and had little experience. He came to Arthur and asked for permission to take this adventure. Arthur did not wish to send him, because the danger was too great. But Griflet begged so strongly that Arthur finally agreed, and the young knight rode away with high hope in his heart.

Sir Griflet found the castle of the Sable Knight and struck the black shield. At once the gate opened, and the dark knight rode out. The two knights charged at each other across the green field before the castle. Griflet fought with all his strength, but he was not strong enough for such an enemy. The Sable Knight struck him down and left him badly wounded on the ground.

When Griflet was brought back to court, Arthur was deeply troubled. He looked at the young knight and blamed himself for allowing him to go. "This was my fault," he said. "I should not have let so young a knight face so great a danger." Then Arthur made up his mind to take the adventure himself. He would not send another knight into danger while he stayed safe at court.

Arthur armed himself and rode into the forest. He did not take a great company with him, for he wished to go as a knight seeking justice. As he rode, he came upon three rough men who were attacking an old man. Arthur lowered his spear and rode at them with a loud cry. The men were afraid when they saw an armed knight coming at them, and they ran away into the trees.

Arthur rode up to the old man and saw that it was Merlin. He was amazed, because Merlin had been at court not long before. "Merlin," Arthur said, "it seems that I have saved your life." Merlin answered calmly, "You saw me in danger, but I could have saved myself. I appeared this way to warn you. A greater danger waits for you, and there may be no knight to save you from it."

Arthur listened, but he would not turn back. "Even if death waits for me," he said, "I will not leave this adventure undone." Merlin asked to go with him, and Arthur agreed. So the king and the wise man rode together through the forest. The trees grew thinner, and at last they came near the place where the Sable Knight lived. There they saw a dark castle, a smooth field, and an apple tree covered with shields taken from defeated knights.

Arthur rode to the bridge and struck the black shield. The sound rang out across

the quiet place. Soon the gate opened, and the Sable Knight came out in black armor, riding a black horse. He was strong and grim, and there was no fear in him. Arthur and the Sable Knight took their places, then rode against each other with great speed.

Their spears broke, and then they fought with swords. The battle was long and hard. Arthur struck many strong blows, but the Sable Knight gave back as much as he received. At last Arthur's sword broke in his hand. Then the Sable Knight struck him fiercely and wounded him so badly that Arthur could hardly stay upon his horse.

Merlin saw that Arthur would die if the fight continued. So he used his power and caused the Sable Knight to fall into a deep sleep. Arthur was angry when he understood this, for he did not wish any magic to help him in battle. But Merlin said, "My lord, if I had not done this, you would have been killed. This knight is King Pellinore, and he is one of the strongest knights alive." Arthur was too weak to answer for long, and Merlin took him away from the field.

Merlin brought Arthur to a holy hermit in the forest. There Arthur's wounds were washed and bound. He rested in the quiet place until his strength began to return. But he was sad because his sword had broken and because he had not won the battle by his own power. Merlin knew his thoughts and told him that a better sword was waiting for him.

The next day, Merlin led Arthur to a strange lake. The water was still and bright, and in the middle of it Arthur saw an arm rising from the water. The hand held a beautiful sword. Near the shore stood a wonderful lady, the Lady of the Lake. She told Arthur that the sword was for him, if he would give her a gift when she later asked for it. Arthur agreed, and a small boat carried him across the water.

Arthur took the sword, and his heart was filled with joy. The sword was called Excalibur. Its blade shone brightly, and Arthur knew at once that no ordinary weapon could be compared with it. Merlin also told him that the sword's sheath was very precious, because it would protect him from losing blood in battle. Arthur thanked the Lady of the Lake, then returned with Merlin to the forest.

When Arthur was strong again, he went back to the castle of the Sable Knight.

This time he carried Excalibur. He struck the black shield once more, and King Pellinore came out again to fight. Arthur told him that each of them had a just cause for anger. Pellinore had injured many knights, and Arthur had once driven him into the wild lands. So they agreed to fight man to man and let the battle decide the matter.

The second battle was fierce, but now Arthur had Excalibur in his hand. The sword cut cleanly and strongly, and Arthur fought with greater hope. At last he overcame Pellinore. Yet he did not kill him. Instead, Arthur spared him and treated him with honor. In time, Pellinore became one of Arthur's important friends, and this was a great gain for the kingdom.

Soon after this, bad news came to Arthur's court. Five kings had entered his land with a great army and were burning and destroying the country. Arthur was deeply distressed, but he acted at once. He called for help from King Uriens and King Pellinore, and then he led his own army out to meet the enemy. The five kings attacked suddenly, and for a time Arthur's army was in great danger.

But Arthur did not lose heart. He held his men together by his courage, and they fought with great strength. Then King Pellinore arrived with his army, and the battle changed. Arthur won a great victory, and the enemy kings were defeated. Yet the victory was not without sorrow, for several knights of the Round Table were killed. Arthur mourned them deeply, because they had died in his service and for the peace of the land.

Part 4 — Arthur Comes to Cameliard

Some time after these events, King Arthur held a great feast at Carleon upon Usk. Many kings, queens, lords, ladies, and knights came to his court. The hall was bright with rich clothes, shining armor, and happy faces. Arthur looked around him and felt deep joy, because men who had once been enemies were now sitting together in peace. He thought that his kingdom was beginning to become the kind of kingdom he had hoped for.

While the feast was still going on, a messenger came from the west. He stood

before Arthur and said that he had come from King Leodegrance of Cameliard. His master was in great trouble, because King Ryence of North Wales was threatening him. Ryence wanted part of Leodegrance's land, and he also wanted Leodegrance's daughter, the Lady Guinevere, to marry Duke Mordaut of North UMBER. The messenger said that Duke Mordaut was a strong warrior, but he was ugly in face and violent in heart.

When Arthur heard this, his anger rose quickly. He had seen Guinevere before, when he was wounded and weak in the forest, and she had seemed to him like a bright angel of kindness. The thought that such a cruel man should try to take her by force filled Arthur with fire. He stood up from the feast and went into a private room. For a long time, no one dared to come near him, because everyone could see how deeply angry he was.

After some time, Arthur called Merlin, Sir Ulfius, and Sir Kay to him. He told Sir Ulfius and Sir Kay to gather an army and bring it near Tintagalon, a strong castle close to Cameliard and North Wales. Then he told Merlin to come with him on a secret journey. The next day, Arthur left Carleon with Merlin and four young knights: Sir Gawaine, Sir Ewaine, Sir Pellias, and Sir Geraint. They traveled through the forest country until they came to Tintagalon.

The people of Tintagalon were very happy when Arthur arrived. They loved him, as many people in Britain now loved him, because he brought order and hope to the land. Arthur stayed there that night, but early the next morning he walked in the garden with Merlin. The air was cool, and birds were singing in the trees. In that quiet place, Arthur opened his heart to Merlin.

"Merlin," Arthur said, "I love the Lady Guinevere. I have loved her since the day she came to me when I was hurt in the forest. I think of her by day, and I dream of her by night. I do not want any other man to have her as his wife. Help me go into Cameliard in secret, so I may see her and also learn how great the danger is around King Leodegrance."

Merlin agreed to help him. That morning, he gave Arthur a small magic cap. When Arthur put it on, his noble face and body seemed to change at once, and he looked like a rough country boy. Arthur put a plain coat over his fine clothes and

covered the golden collar around his neck. Then, in this simple disguise, he left Tintagalon on foot and walked toward Cameliard.

Late in the day, Arthur saw Cameliard before him. The town stood on a high hill, with red walls, shining windows, and a strong castle above it. Gardens, trees, and fields lay around the castle, and the evening sky burned bright behind the towers. Arthur was tired from walking, but the sight of the place pleased him. He entered the castle town as a poor gardener's boy, and no one knew that he was the King of Britain.

Arthur asked for the head gardener and begged for work in the garden near the rooms of Lady Guinevere. The gardener saw that he was tall and strong, and he accepted him. So Arthur became a servant in the garden of Cameliard. He was glad of this, because Guinevere often walked there with her ladies. Many times he saw her among the flowers, and each time his love for her grew stronger.

One morning, a lady named Mellicene looked from a window near Guinevere's room. Below, beside a marble fountain, she saw a wonderful young knight washing his face and chest in the clear water. His hair and beard shone like red gold in the sunlight, and a beautiful golden collar hung around his neck. Mellicene stared in wonder, then ran down to the garden. But before she arrived, Arthur heard her coming and quickly put the magic cap back on his head.

When Mellicene reached the fountain, she found only the gardener's boy. She asked where the knight had gone, but Arthur said that no one else had been there. Mellicene did not know what to think. She told Guinevere what she had seen, but Guinevere laughed and said that she must have been dreaming. Yet Mellicene kept looking from the window, because she was sure her eyes had not lied to her.

Some days later, Mellicene saw the same knight again at the fountain. This time she ran to Guinevere and begged her to come quickly. Guinevere came to the window and saw the knight for herself. She saw his golden hair, his rich clothing under his rough coat, and the shining collar lying beside the fountain. She hurried down into the garden, but once again Arthur put on the cap before she reached him.

Guinevere found only the gardener's boy standing by the fountain. She asked

where the knight had gone, and Arthur again said that no knight had been there. But this time he had forgotten the golden collar. Guinevere saw it lying near the water and knew that the gardener's boy was hiding something. She told him to give the collar back to its true owner and said that a true knight should not hide in a lady's private garden.

Later that day, Guinevere thought of a way to test him. She told Mellicene to ask the gardener's boy to bring her a basket of fresh roses. Arthur came with the roses, but he kept his cap on his head. The ladies were shocked and told him to take it off. Arthur said he could not, because there was an ugly place on his head. Then Guinevere suddenly reached out and pulled the cap away.

At once the gardener's boy disappeared, and the noble young knight stood before them. The roses fell from his hands and scattered across the floor. Some of the ladies cried out, and others stood silent in surprise. Guinevere knew this was the knight she had once seen wounded in the forest, but she still did not know that he was Arthur. She laughed, gave him back the cap, and afterward often teased him as the gardener's boy with the ugly place on his head.

Soon after this, King Ryence and Duke Mordaunt came to Cameliard with a great company of knights and lords. King Leodegrance went out to welcome them, but they would not enter his castle as friends. Ryence demanded land, and Mordaunt demanded Guinevere as his wife. They said they would wait five days for Leodegrance's answer. Then they set up their tents outside the castle and filled the field with noise, pride, and feasting.

The next morning, Duke Mordaunt rode before the castle in full armor. He called out to the knights of Cameliard and dared any one of them to fight him for the right to Guinevere's hand. No knight came out, because Mordaunt was known as a very strong and dangerous fighter. The people on the walls felt shame and fear. Arthur heard everything while he worked in the garden, and at last he could bear it no longer.

Arthur left the garden secretly and went to a rich merchant named Ralph of Cardiff. He took off the magic cap and showed the merchant his true noble form. He also showed his golden collar, his fine clothes beneath the rough coat, and his

royal ring. Ralph understood that this was no common knight, though he did not fully know who stood before him. Arthur asked him for armor and a horse, because he wished to fight Duke Mordaut.

Ralph gladly helped him. He gave Arthur food, a bath, and a splendid suit of white armor. He also gave him a white horse with rich but simple trappings. When Arthur rode through the town, people stopped and stared at him, because he looked like a bright white champion. Before he went to the field, he asked to speak with Guinevere. She came above him in a gallery with her ladies, wondering who this knight might be.

Arthur asked Guinevere for a token to wear in her honor. She did not know his name, but she accepted him as her champion. He asked for the necklace of pearls around her neck. Guinevere took it off and dropped it down to him, and Arthur tied it around his arm. Then he rode out through the castle gate while the people gathered on the walls and watched with hope.

Duke Mordaut greeted the white knight and asked who he was, because he had no sign on his shield. Arthur answered calmly that he was of equal rank and equal courage. Mordaut spoke proudly and said that he would throw him down and leave him unable to rise. Arthur did not boast in return. He only said that the result would be in God's hands, not in Mordaut's.

The two knights rode apart and made ready. For a short time, the whole field was silent. Then they shouted to their horses and charged at full speed. They met in the middle of the field with a great crash. Mordaut's spear broke into pieces, but Arthur's spear held firm, and Mordaut was thrown from his horse with terrible force.

The people on the walls shouted with joy. The knights of King Ryence's court ran to Mordaut and took off his helmet, thinking at first that he might be dead. He lay without moving for a long time, but at last they saw that he was still alive. Arthur watched quietly, and when he knew that Mordaut was not dead, he turned his horse away. He did not return to the castle then, because he felt that his work against the enemies of Cameliard was not yet finished.

Part 5 — The White Champion and the Four Knights

After Arthur had thrown Duke Mordaunt from his horse, he did not return at once to Cameliard. He rode away into the bright summer country, still wearing the white armor that Ralph of Cardiff had given him. The day was warm and fair, and the wind moved over the long grass and the fields of wheat. Arthur felt young and glad, for he had served Guinevere well and had brought shame upon a proud enemy. Yet he knew that his work was not finished.

As he rode on, he came near a tower standing beside the road. On a balcony of the tower stood three young ladies dressed in green. Below them, a knight sat upon his horse and played a lute while he sang to them. The ladies listened with pleasure and clapped their hands when the song ended. Arthur looked more closely and saw from the knight's shield and crest that this was Sir Geraint, one of the four knights who had come with him from Camelot.

Arthur closed his helmet so that Geraint would not know him. Sir Geraint saw the white knight coming and stopped his song. He told the ladies that he would now do a deed of arms in their honor. Then he rode toward Arthur and said that the three ladies in green were fairer than Arthur's lady, whoever she might be. Arthur answered that his lady was a princess and was thought by many to be the most beautiful lady in the world.

Arthur then made one condition. "If one of us is thrown down," he said, "that knight must serve the other for seven days." Sir Geraint agreed, because he believed he would win. The two knights rode apart, lowered their spears, and came together with great force. Geraint's spear broke, but Arthur's spear held firm, and Geraint was thrown from his horse into the dust.

Sir Geraint was shocked and ashamed, because no knight had ever overthrown him in such a way before. He drew his sword and wanted to continue the fight on foot. But Arthur would not allow it. "You have promised to serve me," he said. "Now go to the Lady Guinevere at Cameliard. Tell her that the knight who wears her necklace has sent you to serve her for seven days." Geraint could not refuse, for he had given his word. So he mounted his horse and rode away.

Arthur rode on again, laughing quietly to himself. After some distance, he came to flat land with ditches, reeds, and windmills. Near one windmill, two knights were resting in the shade and eating bread and cheese. Arthur saw their shields and knew them at once. They were Sir Gawaine and Sir Ewaine, two more of the young knights who had come with him from Camelot.

Sir Gawaine rode forward and stopped him. He told Arthur that this road was dangerous ground and that no knight could pass without a joust. Arthur accepted, but he again set the same condition. The knight who fell must serve the other for seven days. Sir Gawaine agreed proudly, for he did not think an unknown knight could defeat him.

The two knights charged. Their horses ran hard along the road, and their spears struck together. Sir Gawaine's spear broke, but Arthur's spear held. Gawaine was lifted out of his saddle and thrown behind his horse. He lay still for a short time, stunned by the fall, while Arthur waited quietly nearby.

Then Sir Ewaine rode forward in anger. He said that Arthur must fight him too, because he wanted to free Gawaine from his promise. Arthur agreed at once. Again the knights took their places, and again they charged. Sir Ewaine also fell, and his saddle came down with him, so that he struck the ground with a great noise.

Arthur then commanded both knights to go to Guinevere. They were to tell her that her knight, the one who wore her necklace, had sent them to serve her. Sir Gawaine was angry and said that after seven days he would seek the unknown knight again and fight him to the end. Arthur answered that when the seven days were over, Gawaine might not wish to fight him so much. Then Arthur left them, while the two knights rode toward Cameliard in great shame.

Later in the day, Arthur came to the edge of a dark wood. There he saw a shield hanging from an old oak tree. Under it were words saying that whoever struck the shield did so at the risk of his body. Arthur struck the shield with his spear, and the sound rang loudly through the trees. At once a white knight came out of the wood, riding a white horse and wearing white armor. Arthur knew from his sign that this was Sir Pellias, the last of the four knights who had come with him.

Sir Pellias was angry that his shield had been struck. Arthur made the same agreement with him that he had made with the others. Then the two knights fought with spears. Pellias was strong, but Arthur struck him so hard that he was thrown far behind his horse. When Pellias rose at last, Arthur commanded him also to go to Guinevere and serve her for seven days. Pellias wondered greatly who this unknown white knight could be, but he obeyed.

That day, Sir Geraint, Sir Gawaine, Sir Ewaine, and Sir Pellias all came before Guinevere. Each told her the same strange story. Each had been defeated by the white knight who wore her necklace, and each had been sent to serve her. Guinevere felt great joy, because her champion had overthrown not only Duke Mordaunt, but also four famous knights in one day. Yet she also wondered more and more who he could be.

Arthur returned secretly to the forest and left his horse and armor with some woodcutters. Then he put on his rough clothes again and returned to Cameliard as the gardener's boy. The gardener was very angry because the boy had been gone from his work. He tried to beat him with a stick, but Arthur seized him by the wrists and took the stick away. The poor gardener became frightened and ran to complain to Guinevere.

Guinevere laughed when she heard his complaint. She had already begun to suspect that the white champion and the gardener's boy were the same person. Later, she walked in the garden with her ladies and the four knights who had been sent to serve her. Arthur was digging there with his cap still on his head. Guinevere teased him before them all and said that he was a very bold gardener's boy, because he wore his cap even in the presence of ladies and knights.

The next morning, Duke Mordaunt came again before the castle. This time he brought six knights with him. He called out to King Leodegrance and said that if seven knights of Cameliard could defeat him and his companions, he would give up his claim to Guinevere. But if no such knights came, then he would claim Guinevere and also take three of Leodegrance's castles. King Leodegrance heard this and went away in deep sorrow.

Guinevere then asked the four knights to take the challenge for her. But Sir

Gawaine refused. He said that they were Arthur's knights and could not fight in another king's quarrel without Arthur's command. Guinevere became angry and said that perhaps Gawaine was afraid. Gawaine answered in anger too, and Guinevere went away weeping.

Arthur knew what had happened. He found the gardener and gave him Guinevere's pearl necklace. Then he ordered him to take it to Guinevere and say that the gardener's boy wanted food from her own table. He also told the gardener to say that the four knights must bring the food and serve him. The gardener thought the boy had gone mad, but he obeyed because he was afraid.

When Guinevere saw the necklace, she knew the truth. She called the four knights and ordered them to serve the gardener's boy as a punishment. They were angry and ashamed, but they could not break their promise. They brought him meat, bread, sweets, and wine on silver dishes. Arthur ate calmly while they served him, and this made them even angrier, because he showed no fear.

After he had eaten, Arthur gave them another command. He told them to put on their armor and bring Guinevere's horse to the postern gate. They obeyed, though Gawaine warned him that the journey would end badly for him. Arthur made them hold the horse while he mounted, and then he ordered them to ride behind him. When they came near a dark wood, Gawaine said that the gardener's boy would soon die there.

Then Arthur turned in the saddle and took off the magic cap. At once the rough gardener's boy disappeared, and the four knights saw King Arthur himself before them. They were struck silent with shame and wonder. Then they leaped from their horses and knelt in the road. Arthur laughed kindly and told them to rise, because there was no more time to waste. Then they rode on together toward the forest, where Arthur's white armor and horse were waiting.

Part 6 — Guinevere and the Round Table

The next day, Duke Mordaunt came before the castle again with six knights beside him. They rode proudly across the field in front of Cameliard, with heralds

blowing trumpets before them and servants carrying their shields and spears behind them. The sound of the trumpets was so loud that people came running from every part of the town. Soon the walls were full of men, women, and children, all looking down in fear and shame. King Ryence and his court stood near their tents and cheered for Mordaunt and his companions.

King Leodegrance was so troubled that he would not come out of his room. He felt that he had no knight strong enough to meet the seven challengers. Guinevere went to his door with some of her ladies and spoke to him from outside. "Father," she said, "do not lose hope. A great champion has taken our cause into his hands, and I believe he will come before this day is over." Leodegrance answered sadly that only God could help him now, but Guinevere's words still gave him some comfort.

The morning passed, and part of the afternoon passed too. Still no defender appeared. Then, while the sun was still high, a cloud of dust rose far away on the road. Out of that dust came five knights riding fast toward the castle. The first was the White Champion, and behind him rode Sir Gawaine, Sir Ewaine, Sir Geraint, and Sir Pellias. When the people saw them, they shouted so loudly that King Leodegrance came out to see what had happened.

Guinevere also came to the wall. When she saw the White Champion and the four knights with him, joy filled her heart so strongly that she both laughed and wept. She waved her cloth to them, and the five knights bowed to her as they rode into the field. Duke Mordaunt came forward with his six companions, but when he saw the White Champion, his face changed. He remembered the hard fall he had received from that same knight, and he did not wish to fight him again without first knowing his name.

Mordaunt said, "I will not fight an unknown knight in so serious a matter. Tell me who you are and what rank you hold." Then Sir Gawaine opened his helmet and said, "I am Gawaine, son of King Lot. My rank is at least as high as yours, and I tell you that this White Knight is greater than you." Mordaunt then said that seven knights stood against only five, so the fight was unfair. Gawaine smiled coldly and answered that Mordaunt seemed more afraid for himself than for them.

After this, no more excuses could be made. The seven knights rode to one end of the field, and the five defenders rode to the other. Arthur took the middle place among his companions, and Mordaunt took the middle place among his men. Then both sides lowered their spears and charged. They met with a great crash in the center of the field, and dust rose around them. When the dust cleared, three of Mordaunt's seven knights had fallen, but none of Arthur's five had fallen.

Duke Mordaunt was one of those who fell. Arthur's spear had struck him with such power that it broke through his shield and armor. He was thrown far behind his horse and never rose again. Arthur turned his horse and saw that only four enemies remained. He lifted his spear and said to his companions, "I am tired of this quarrel. You four may finish the matter while I watch." Then Gawaine, Ewaine, Geraint, and Pellias rode forward against the four remaining knights.

The four enemies did not come with brave hearts now. They had seen Mordaunt fall, and fear had entered them. Sir Gawaine struck the first of them so hard that the knight nearly fell from his saddle. Terror seized him, and he turned his horse and fled. When the other three saw him flee, they also turned and ran. Gawaine and the others chased them through the tents of King Ryence, and the proud court of North Wales scattered in confusion.

The people of Cameliard cried out with joy. King Leodegrance knew that his danger had passed, but he still did not know who the White Champion was. Guinevere knew more than her father, yet she did not speak at once. Later, when they were together, Leodegrance asked her about the knight who had saved them. Guinevere smiled through her tears and said, "If I give my heart to anyone, I will give it to the poor gardener's boy who works in my garden."

Leodegrance thought she was mocking him and became angry. But Guinevere said, "I am not mocking you. Send for that gardener's boy, and you will understand." So the king ordered a page to bring the boy from the garden. Soon Arthur came in, still wearing the magic cap, and with him came Gawaine, Ewaine, Geraint, and Pellias. Leodegrance asked why the boy wore his cap before a king. Arthur said he could not take it off, but Guinevere asked him gently to do so for her father.

Arthur then removed the cap, and at once the gardener's boy was gone. King Arthur stood before them in his true form. Leodegrance cried out in wonder and knelt before him, placing his hands in Arthur's hands. Arthur raised him kindly and kissed him as a friend. Guinevere stood apart by the window, suddenly afraid when she understood that she had teased and commanded the king himself. Arthur went to her, took her hand, and said, "Do not fear me. I served in your garden because your good will was dearer to me than anything in the world."

Guinevere answered that he had her good will, and Arthur asked if he had it in great measure. She said yes. Then Arthur kissed her before those who stood there, and their promise to each other was made. After that, Sir Kay and Sir Ulfius came with Arthur's army, as they had been ordered to do. King Ryence brought war against Cameliard, but Arthur defeated him completely and drove him back into his mountains. Then there was great joy in Cameliard, with feasting, games, and many battles for sport.

One day, while Arthur sat happily at table with King Leodegrance, Leodegrance asked what gift he should give with Guinevere when she became queen. Arthur turned to Merlin and asked what he should request. Merlin said that Leodegrance owned one thing that would bring great glory to Arthur's reign. It was the Round Table, made in the days of Uther-Pendragon. It had seats for fifty knights, and each seat would show the name of the knight worthy to sit there.

Merlin also told Arthur of the Seat Perilous. That seat was different from all the others, because only one perfect knight could sit there safely. Any other man who tried would suffer death or a terrible misfortune. The Round Table had once been full of great knights, but now most of those seats were empty. Leodegrance heard Merlin's words and gladly gave the Round Table to Arthur as Guinevere's marriage gift. Arthur accepted it with deep joy, for he knew that this gift would become the heart of his kingdom.

In early autumn, Arthur and Guinevere were married at Camelot. The streets were covered with fresh green rushes and fine cloths, and the houses were hung with bright banners. Arthur rode out to meet Guinevere before she entered the town, and he welcomed her with great love and honor. At noon, they were married

in the cathedral by the Archbishop, while the bells rang and the people shouted outside. Afterward, a great feast was held in the castle, and many kings, knights, ladies, and nobles sat together in joy.

That afternoon, Merlin led Arthur, Guinevere, and the whole court to a wonderful pavilion where the Round Table stood. The walls were painted with saints and angels, the roof looked like a blue sky full of stars, and music sounded as they entered. In the middle stood the Round Table, with fifty seats, and at each place were bread and wine in vessels of gold. Merlin showed Arthur the Seat Royal, where golden letters appeared with the name Arthur, King. He also showed him the Seat Perilous and warned him again that only one knight, not yet born, could sit there.

Arthur wished to fill the Round Table at once, but Merlin told him not to hurry. “When your glory is complete,” Merlin said, “your decline will begin.” Arthur listened with a steady face and said that he was in God’s hands. Merlin then chose the first worthy knights, beginning with King Pellinore, and golden names appeared upon their seats. Gawaine, Ewaine, Kay, Pellias, Geraint, and many others were chosen. One seat beside Arthur remained empty, and Merlin said that a very great knight would come to sit there later.

Then the Archbishop blessed the seats, and the chosen knights stood with their swords before them. They promised to be gentle to the weak, brave against the strong, terrible to evil men, loyal to one another, merciful to all, true in friendship, and faithful in love. Each knight kissed the cross of his sword to seal the promise. Then they sat at the Round Table, broke the bread, and drank the wine. In this way, Arthur was married to Guinevere, and the Round Table was established.

Part 7 — Vivien and the Fall of Merlin

After the Round Table was established, a darker story began to move under the bright life of Arthur’s court. Queen Morgana le Fay had gone to the island of Avalon, but she had not forgotten her anger against Arthur. She thought again and again about what she believed he had done against her house. The more she

thought about it, the greater her anger became. At last, she could take no pleasure in anything unless she could find a way to hurt him.

Morgana was a powerful woman in magic. Merlin himself had taught her many secret arts when she was younger. Yet Merlin had not taught her everything, and he had one gift that she could never receive from him. He could see many things that would happen in the future. Because of this, Morgana knew that she could not safely attack Arthur while Merlin stood near him as his friend and guide.

So Morgana decided that Merlin must first be removed. At her court there lived a young lady named Vivien, the daughter of the King of Northumberland. Vivien was only fifteen years old, but she was very clever and very cold of heart. She was also wonderfully beautiful, and Morgana believed that Merlin would notice her beauty. For this reason, Morgana chose Vivien as the tool for her plan.

One day, Morgana and Vivien sat together in a garden on Avalon. The garden was high above the sea, and the blue water shone far below them in the clear light. Morgana asked Vivien what she wanted most in all the world. Vivien answered that she wanted wisdom and magic more than anything else. Morgana smiled when she heard this, because that was the very desire she wished to use.

Morgana told Vivien that Merlin was the greatest master of magic in the world. She said that Merlin had taught her many things, but had kept many other things for himself. She also said that Merlin loved beauty, and that Vivien was more beautiful than Morgana had been when she was young. "If you use your beauty well," Morgana said, "and if I give you the right charm, Merlin may teach you more than he ever taught me."

Vivien listened carefully, and her eyes became bright with desire. She did not fear the danger. Instead, she said that if Merlin taught her enough, she would use his own magic against him. Morgana laughed loudly when she heard this. She thought it was strange and terrible that so young a girl could already plan the fall of the wisest man in the world.

Then Morgana called for a small box. From it she took two golden rings. One ring had a white stone, and the other had a red stone. Morgana gave the white-stone ring to Vivien and told her to wear it. The red-stone ring was for Merlin. If

Merlin wore that ring, he would love Vivien so strongly that she could guide him as she wished.

Soon after this, Vivien went to Arthur's court at Pentecost. Arthur was holding a great feast, and the hall was full of kings, queens, knights, ladies, and music. Vivien entered with a small, ugly dwarf who carried a cushion of bright silk. On the cushion lay the red-stone ring. Vivien was dressed in red and gold, and everyone turned to look at her when she came into the hall.

Arthur welcomed her, for he thought she had brought some pleasant entertainment for the feast. Vivien said that the ring could be worn only by the wisest and worthiest person in the hall. Arthur tried it first, but the ring would not fit his finger. Then many others tried, but it would not fit any of them. Last of all, Vivien came to Merlin and knelt before him.

Merlin looked at her with suspicion at first. He asked what childish trick she was playing. But when he looked more closely, he saw how beautiful she was, and his face softened. Vivien praised him and said that surely he was the wisest man there. Merlin took the ring, placed it on his finger, and it fitted him perfectly. Vivien cried out that the ring had chosen the right man.

A little later, Merlin tried to take the ring off. He could not. The ring seemed to have grown into his finger, as if it were part of his body. Merlin became troubled and asked where it had come from. Vivien answered that it had come from Morgana le Fay. Merlin was afraid then, but the magic had already begun to work upon his heart.

From that day, Merlin followed Vivien wherever she went. If she walked in the garden, he was there. If she sat in the hall, he was there also. If she rode out, he rode near her. The people at court saw this and laughed quietly, for it was strange to see wise old Merlin so fully caught by a young girl. Vivien hated him more because of that laughter, but she hid her hate and spoke to him as if she were his friend.

One summer day, Vivien sat alone in the garden. When she saw Merlin coming toward her, she rose quickly and tried to leave. Merlin followed her and asked if she hated him. She said no, but he knew that her heart was not kind toward him.

Then she told him that if he would teach her his wisdom and magic, perhaps she could love him. She said she feared him because he was so wise and she was still like a child in knowledge.

Merlin looked at her steadily. He knew there was deep cunning behind her young face. "If I teach you what you ask," he said, "it may bring ruin to you or to me." But Vivien cried out that if he truly loved her, he must teach her. Merlin's heart was weak under the power of the ring, and at last he agreed. Vivien lowered her eyes so that he could not see the joy and triumph in them.

Merlin told her that he could not teach her at court. She must ask Arthur for leave to return to her father's kingdom. Then they would travel together to a quiet place, where no one would trouble them. Vivien did as he said, and three days later she left Arthur's court with Merlin and her attendants. They pretended to travel toward Northumberland, but after a short distance they turned east toward a hidden valley known to Merlin.

They traveled for three days and came at last to a dark forest. The trees were thick, and their branches covered the sky. Many in the party were afraid, but Merlin gave them courage and led them safely through. At evening, they came out into a beautiful valley. In its center lay a clear lake, shining under the moon like silver, and around it were meadows full of flowers.

Vivien was filled with wonder when she saw the place. But there was no house, no hall, and no shelter there. The attendants began to whisper among themselves, wondering where they would sleep. Merlin heard them and told them not to fear. Then he stood beside the lake and spoke powerful words of magic. The ground shook, red dust rose into the air, and shapes began to appear inside the cloud.

When the dust cleared, a marvelous castle stood beside the lake. Its walls shone with deep blue, bright red, and gold, and in the moonlight it looked almost like a dream. Vivien knelt before Merlin and praised him. She asked if he would teach her to make such a castle from nothing. Merlin promised that he would teach her that, and more besides. He would teach her to create, to change, and to destroy by magic.

For a year and a little more, Merlin lived with Vivien in that valley. During

that time, he taught her nearly all the magic that he could give to another person. At last, he told her that no one in the world knew more of such arts than she did, except perhaps himself. Vivien was filled with joy, but she did not show it openly. In her heart she thought that if she could trap Merlin now, no one would be left above her.

The next day, Vivien prepared a great feast for Merlin. Into a fine wine she mixed a strong sleeping drink that had no taste. She poured the wine into a golden cup and brought it to Merlin with many words of praise. She told him that the wine was precious, just as his wisdom was precious. Merlin suspected no evil and drank from the cup gladly.

Soon the drink clouded his mind. Merlin knew then that he had been betrayed. He cried out in pain and tried to rise, but he could not. Vivien watched him with a strange smile. When he sank into a deep sleep, she leaned over him and used the very magic he had taught her. She wove a spell around him like a silver net, so that he could not move even a finger.

When Merlin woke the next morning, Vivien sat watching him. She laughed and told him that he was now fully in her power. Merlin groaned, not only because he had been defeated, but because his own wisdom had been turned against him. Yet even then, he asked one last favor. He said that Arthur was in great danger and begged Vivien to go west to the castle of Sir Domas de Noir and save the king.

Vivien still had a little pity left, and she agreed. But first she called her attendants and showed them Merlin, unable to move. They touched his hands and face, and some even pulled at his beard, while he could only groan. Then Vivien caused a stone chest to appear. Her servants laid Merlin inside it, and she set a heavy stone cover over him. After that, she made the magic castle disappear and placed a wall of mist around the place.

Then Vivien left the valley with her court, full of pride because she had overcome Merlin. The world never saw him walking freely again. Yet before she left, she remembered her promise and went toward the castle of Sir Domas de Noir, where Arthur was soon to be in danger. In this way, Merlin passed from the world, and Arthur lost the wisest friend and guide he had ever known.

Part 8 — Morgana's Treason and Accalon

After Merlin was lost, Queen Morgana le Fay came back to Arthur's court. She did not come as an open enemy. She came softly, with kind words and a smiling face. Arthur was glad to see peace between them, because she was his sister. He did not know that her heart was still full of hate, and that she had come to strike him when he felt safe.

Morgana soon asked to see Excalibur. Arthur wished to show trust and kindness, so he brought out the sword and gave it into her hands. Morgana drew it from the sheath, and the blade flashed like fire in the room. She praised its beauty and asked if she might keep it for a little while. Arthur, still wishing for peace, agreed and let her take both the sword and the sheath away.

As soon as Morgana had Excalibur, she called skilled workers to her. She ordered them to make another sword exactly like it. Goldsmiths, armor workers, and jewel workers labored for many days. At last, they made a copy so perfect that almost no eye could tell the two swords apart. Morgana kept the true sword and the false sword near her, waiting for the right time to use them.

One day, Arthur announced a hunt. The day before the hunt, Morgana came to him with a beautiful black horse as a gift. Its harness shone with silver, and everyone who saw it admired it. Morgana said that the horse was a sign of peace between brother and sister. Arthur thanked her warmly and promised that he would ride it in the hunt the next day.

The next morning, Arthur rode out with his court. The forest was fresh and full of light, and the hounds soon found a great hart. Arthur's new horse was so fast that it left almost all the other horses behind. Only Sir Accalon of Gaul could keep near him. Accalon was a good knight and a man whom Arthur loved, so Arthur was pleased to have him close during the chase.

The hart ran deep into wild country, and the two riders followed until they were far from the court. At last, they came to a lonely lake, where a strange ship lay by the shore. It was rich and beautiful, but no sailor could be seen. Arthur and

Accalon went on board, wondering at it. There they were welcomed by ladies, given food and drink, and treated as honored guests.

After the meal, the two knights became very sleepy. They lay down and soon fell into a deep sleep. When Arthur woke, he was no longer on the ship. He found himself in a dark prison, with other sad knights around him. They told him that they were prisoners of Sir Domas de Noir, a cruel lord who held them without mercy.

Sir Domas soon sent word to Arthur. He said that Arthur must fight as his champion against his brother Sir Ontzlake. If Arthur refused, he and the other prisoners would remain in prison. Arthur hated such a forced quarrel, but he could not leave helpless knights in that place. He agreed to fight, but he sent a sealed message to Morgana, asking her to send him Excalibur.

When Morgana received the message, she laughed. She did not send him the true sword. Instead, she sent the false sword that looked like Excalibur. Arthur received it and believed it was his own weapon. He did not know that the true sword and its precious sheath had been sent another way.

Meanwhile, Sir Accalon woke beside a clear fountain near a bright pavilion. He was troubled, because he too remembered falling asleep on the strange ship. A dwarf came out of the pavilion and led him to a lady named Gomyne. She told him that Sir Ontzlake needed a champion, because he was badly wounded and could not fight for himself. Then she showed Accalon a sword wrapped in red cloth.

When Accalon saw the sword, he was filled with wonder. It looked exactly like Excalibur. The lady told him that he might keep it if he fought for Sir Ontzlake. Accalon was pleased beyond measure, because no knight could wish for a better sword. He did not know that this was truly Arthur's own Excalibur, given to him by Morgana's secret plan.

The day of battle came. Sir Ontzlake was brought to the field in a litter, because his wounds were so severe. Sir Domas also came with his men. Arthur wore armor given by Domas, and Accalon wore armor given by Ontzlake. Their helmets covered their faces, so neither knight knew the other. Each believed that he was

fighting a stranger in a hard but lawful quarrel.

The two knights first charged with spears, and both spears broke. Then they came down from their horses and fought on foot with swords. Very soon Arthur saw that something was terribly wrong. His own sword did not cut Accalon's armor, but Accalon's sword cut deeply into him again and again. Blood ran down inside Arthur's armor, while Accalon remained almost unharmed because he wore the sheath of Excalibur at his side.

Vivien came to the field while the battle was going on. She had remembered Merlin's last request and had come to help Arthur if she could. At first, she could not tell which knight was Arthur, because both were fully armed. She watched carefully as they fought. When she saw one knight bleeding badly while the other was protected from harm, she understood that Morgana's treason was at work.

Arthur grew weaker and weaker, but he would not yield. At last, by chance and by Vivien's secret help, Excalibur came into Arthur's hand. When Arthur felt the true sword in his grasp, new strength entered him. He struck Accalon hard and brought him down. Then he tore away Accalon's helmet and saw, with great sorrow, the face of a knight he loved.

Accalon also learned who had fought against him. He was filled with pain and shame, not because he had fought bravely, but because he had been used in treason against his own king. He told Arthur all that he knew. He said that Morgana had given him the sword through the lady and had led him into the battle without telling him the truth. Arthur understood then that his sister had meant to kill him.

Arthur asked Vivien to heal Accalon as she had healed him, but Vivien said that she had no more healing balm. This was not true, but she would not use it on Accalon. So Accalon died that same afternoon from the wounds he had received. Arthur mourned him deeply, for Accalon had been brave and had not known the full evil of Morgana's plan.

Arthur then judged Sir Domas and Sir Ontzlake. He showed mercy, because they had not known that the king himself had been drawn into their quarrel. But he punished Domas, for Domas had been cruel and false. He took most of Domas's lands and gave them to Ontzlake. He also ordered Domas to free the

imprisoned knights and repay them for the wrongs he had done.

Soon Morgana heard that Accalon was dead and that Arthur still lived. She did not know how much Arthur understood, so she went to see him. When she reached the place where Arthur lay, she was told that he was sleeping and must not be disturbed. She entered anyway, because she was the king's sister. Arthur lay weak from his wounds, but Excalibur was near him.

Morgana did not dare take the sword, because Arthur's hand rested close to it. But she saw the sheath lying near him and took that instead. She knew the sheath was even more precious than the sword in one way, because it kept the wearer from losing blood. Then she left quickly with her people. When Arthur woke and learned what had happened, he knew that Morgana's hate had not ended.

Arthur sent men after her, but Morgana escaped by magic. When she reached a lake, she threw the sheath of Excalibur into the water, and it sank beyond all finding. In this way, Arthur lost the protection that might have saved him in many later battles. Morgana went away from his court, and Arthur was left with Excalibur alone. From that time, the brightness of his kingdom remained, but a deep shadow had entered it.

Part 9 — Sir Pellias and the Lady Ettard

One spring day, Queen Guinevere went out into the fields with many knights and ladies of her court. The sun was warm, the wind was soft, and flowers covered the grass. Among the knights who went with her was Sir Pellias, who was gentle in speech and strong in battle. The whole company walked happily among the blossoms, and it seemed to them that no place in the world could be more pleasant.

While they were enjoying the day, a young woman came riding across the meadow on a white horse. She was dressed in blue, and three pages in blue followed her. One of the pages carried a covered picture in a fine frame. Guinevere sent Sir Pellias to meet her and ask her name and her purpose. The young woman said that her name was Parcenet and that she served a beautiful lady named Lady Ettard of Grantmesnle.

Parcenet said that Lady Ettard had heard much about Queen Guinevere's beauty. Because of this, she had sent Parcenet to see if the reports were true. Then Guinevere asked what was under the red cloth that the page carried. Parcenet answered that it was a true picture of Lady Ettard. When the cloth was taken away, everyone saw the face of a lady of wonderful beauty, painted on ivory and set in a frame of gold and jewels.

Guinevere praised the picture and said that Lady Ettard must indeed be very beautiful. But Sir Pellias spoke at once and said that Guinevere was still more beautiful. Parcenet answered that if he said such words near Grantmesnle, he would have to fight Sir Engamore, the champion of Lady Ettard. Sir Engamore defended Lady Ettard's beauty against all knights who came. Sir Pellias then knelt before Guinevere and asked leave to take this adventure in her honor.

Guinevere laughed with pleasure and accepted him as her champion. She told him to arm himself properly, but Pellias said he wished to begin the adventure in the clothes he was already wearing. He believed that he would find armor on the way, and that this would bring more honor to Guinevere. Guinevere liked his brave spirit, so she agreed. A fine black horse was brought for him, and Pellias rode away with Parcenet and her three pages.

As they traveled, Parcenet asked Pellias how he would find armor before meeting Sir Engamore. Pellias answered that he did not yet know, but he trusted that the chance would come. He said that a knight's courage was sometimes worth more than the armor on his body. Parcenet liked his words and his cheerful manner. They spoke together with much kindness as they rode, and before long they entered a strange forest called Arroy, the Forest of Adventure.

In that forest, they came to a loud and dangerous stream. Beside the water, under a thorn tree, sat an old woman who looked poor, weak, and very ugly. She called to Pellias and asked him to carry her across the water on his horse. Parcenet told the old woman to be quiet, for she thought it was rude to ask such a service from a noble knight. But Pellias gently corrected her and said that a true knight must help anyone who needs help.

Pellias lifted the old woman onto his horse and carried her safely across the

stream. When they reached the other side, she jumped lightly down without help. At once her shape changed. She was no longer an old woman, but a beautiful and strange lady dressed in green, with dark hair and bright eyes. Pellias knew that she must be a lady of magic, and she told him that she was Nymue, the Lady of the Lake.

Nymue said that she had taken the shape of the old woman to test his knightly heart. Because he had helped her kindly, she gave him a wonderful collar of gold, emeralds, and opal stones. She told him to keep it, for it had strong magic. Then she disappeared, leaving Pellias and the others full of wonder. Pellias did not know the collar's secret power, but anyone who wore it would be loved by those who looked upon that person.

After this, Pellias and his companions rode on until they stopped to rest near some charcoal-burners in the forest. While they were eating, they heard loud crying. A sorrowful lady came from among the trees, with a young esquire behind her. Her clothes were torn by branches, and her face was wet from weeping. Pellias went to her at once and asked what trouble had come upon her.

The lady said that she and her husband, Sir Brandemere, had been hunting with a hound. The hound had crossed a narrow bridge near a castle with seven towers. A red knight had come out and would not let Sir Brandemere pass. Though Sir Brandemere was not armed for battle, he had tried to cross the bridge. The red knight struck him down, carried him into the castle, and left the lady outside with no news of whether her husband was living or dead.

Pellias promised to help her, though he still had no armor. The lady, Parcenet, and the esquire all begged him not to face the red knight without protection. Pellias would not listen, because he could not leave a wrong unchallenged. They led him to the bridge and the seven-towered castle. When the red knight came out, Pellias accused him of cruel and shameful behavior.

The red knight threatened Pellias and told him to surrender. Pellias looked around and saw a heavy stone lying loose on the bridge. He lifted it with both hands and threw it with terrible force. The stone struck the red knight's shield and drove him backward from his saddle. Pellias then stood over him with the knight's

own dagger and demanded his name and the truth about Sir Brandemere.

The red knight said that he was Sir Adresack of the Seven Towers. He also said that Sir Brandemere was alive, and that twenty-one other captives were held in the castle. Pellias spared his life, but ordered him to go to Camelot and confess his wrongs to Queen Guinevere and King Arthur. Then Pellias took Adresack's red armor for himself. He entered the castle, freed Sir Brandemere and all the other prisoners, and divided Adresack's treasure among those who had suffered.

Among the freed knights were Sir Brandiles and Sir Mador de la Porte, both from Arthur's court. They were overjoyed to see Pellias and asked to go with him on his adventure. Pellias allowed them to join him, and they traveled with Parcenet toward Grantmesnle. At last they came out of the forest and saw Lady Ettard's land before them. The castle was red and beautiful, with a small town behind its walls.

The next day, Pellias rode into the field before Grantmesnle in the red armor of Sir Adresack. He called out that Queen Guinevere was the most beautiful lady in the world and that he would defend that claim against any knight. Soon Sir Engamore came out in green armor. He was Lady Ettard's champion and had defended her beauty for nearly a year. The two knights charged, and Pellias struck Engamore so hard that the green knight was thrown far from his horse.

Lady Ettard came down from the castle after the battle. When Pellias saw her, he was amazed by her beauty and knelt before her. Because he wore the magic collar, Ettard looked on him with sudden love and kindness. She invited him and his companions into the castle, and that evening she gave a fine feast. But during the meal she desired the collar, and Pellias, unable to refuse her, let her wear it for a while.

As soon as the collar was around Ettard's neck, its magic left Pellias and passed to her. Ettard's heart changed at once. She remembered that Pellias had come to shame her name and overthrow her champion. She hid her new anger and still spoke sweetly to him. Then she ordered Parcenet to bring a sleeping drink, though Parcenet knew it was a cruel thing to do to a guest.

Ettard gave the drink to Pellias in a cup of wine. Parcenet tried to warn him

with her eyes, but Pellias did not understand. He drank, and soon his head became heavy. He fell asleep at the table, and Ettard laughed. She ordered her servants to strip him of his fine clothes and carry him outside the castle walls, so that everyone might laugh at him in the morning.

When Pellias woke, the sun was shining on his face. He was lying in the field near the castle gate, dressed only in his underclothes. People stood on the walls, laughing and calling out cruel words. Lady Ettard looked down from a window and laughed too. Then Parcenet came secretly through the gate, weeping, and gave him a bright cloak to cover himself.

Pellias wrapped himself in the cloak and walked slowly back to his pavilion. His body shook with shame, and he could hardly speak. Sir Brandiles and Sir Mador were filled with anger and wanted to punish Lady Ettard. But Pellias would not allow them to harm her, for he loved her with a strange and painful love. Later he rode again toward the castle, was captured on purpose because he hoped to speak with her, and was sent back bound to his horse in deeper shame.

Part 10 — Gawaine's Failure and the Lady of the Lake

News of Sir Pellias's strange shame came at last to Arthur's court. Some knights had seen the red knight riding again and again before Lady Ettard's castle, and they had heard how he allowed himself to be taken and mocked. Queen Guinevere was deeply troubled when she heard this. She remembered that Pellias had gone out as her champion, and she could not understand why so noble a knight would suffer such dishonor for the sake of one proud lady.

Sir Gawaine was with the Queen when this matter was spoken of. He was quick in feeling and quick in speech, and he said that no knight of the Round Table should behave in such a way. Guinevere answered sharply that it was easy to blame a man from a safe place at court. She said that perhaps Gawaine himself would not do better if he stood face to face with the same strange trouble. Gawaine was hurt by her words, and anger rose between them.

At last Gawaine said that he would leave the court and see the matter with his

own eyes. If Pellias had truly brought shame upon Arthur's Round Table, then Gawaine would make him answer for it. But if some wrong or magic lay behind the matter, then Gawaine would set it right if he could. Guinevere did not try to stop him, for her own anger was still hot. So Sir Gawaine armed himself and rode away from Camelot with a proud and troubled heart.

After some days, Gawaine came near Grantmesnle, where Lady Ettard lived. There he met Sir Mador de la Porte and others who knew the sad truth. They did not tell him everything at once, but they brought him to a white pavilion. Inside, Sir Pellias sat with his head bowed low, like a man whose heart had been broken. When Gawaine saw him, he was amazed, because Pellias had once been one of the noblest and gentlest knights of Arthur's court.

Gawaine spoke to him sternly. "How can you let yourself be taken and bound by lesser knights?" he said. "How can you bring shame on Arthur's court in this way?" At first Pellias would not answer. He turned his face away and stood silent, as if speech itself hurt him. But Gawaine pressed him harder, and at last Pellias cried out that he would tell everything.

Then Pellias told the whole story from the beginning. He told how he had gone out for Guinevere's honor, how he had met the Lady of the Lake, how he had received the magic collar, how he had defeated Sir Adresack and Sir Engamore, and how he had come to love Lady Ettard. He told how Ettard had taken the collar, how she had turned against him, and how he had been mocked and cast outside the castle. As he spoke, shame and love fought together in his face, and Gawaine began to understand that this was not a simple fault.

Gawaine thought for a long time. Then he said that perhaps Lady Ettard had used magic, or perhaps the collar had drawn Pellias into a love he could not rule. He promised to help his friend. His plan was to exchange armor with Pellias and ride to the castle in the red armor. There he would say that he had defeated Pellias and had taken his armor, and in that way he would gain entrance and speak with Lady Ettard.

Pellias agreed, because he still trusted Gawaine. The two knights changed armor, and Gawaine rode out in the red suit that everyone knew. Lady Ettard saw

him from the wall and thought that Sir Pellias had returned again to trouble her. She was angry and ordered her knights to ride out and take him. But Gawaine defeated them easily and sent word into the castle that he had overcome Sir Pellias and had come to show his victory.

Lady Ettard was pleased when she heard this. She thought that the knight before her had freed her from Pellias forever. She invited him into the castle and treated him with great honor. Sir Engamore, who had once been her champion, saw how she welcomed this new knight and became filled with sorrow. He understood that his own place in her eyes was now lost, and he went away alone.

Lady Ettard walked with Gawaine in her garden, and they talked together until evening. She was very beautiful, and the magic collar still lay around her neck. The more Gawaine looked at her, the more his promise to Pellias faded from his mind. At supper, he sat beside her, drank from the same cup, listened to music, and thought how pleasant it would be to remain there. He even began to think that because he had been angry with Arthur's court, he might make a new court for himself at Grantmesnle.

Meanwhile, Pellias waited in his pavilion and grew more and more troubled. He knew that Lady Ettard's beauty had a strange power, and he feared that Gawaine might forget him. When night came, he dressed himself as a black friar and went secretly to the castle. In that dark clothing, no one knew him. He entered quietly and stood behind a curtain near the hall where Gawaine and Ettard were sitting together.

Pellias watched them for some time. The room was bright with candles, and music sounded softly as they feasted. He saw Gawaine and Ettard smiling at each other, drinking wine from the same golden cup, and speaking as if no duty or friendship stood between them. Then Pellias knew that Gawaine had betrayed him. His heart burned with anger and pain, and he could not stay hidden any longer.

He stepped into the room and threw back his hood. Lady Ettard cried out in fear, and Gawaine sat silent, unable to speak. Pellias went straight to Ettard and pulled the magic collar from her neck so roughly that the clasp broke. "This is mine," he said, "and you had no right to keep it." Then he turned to Gawaine and

said, "You were false to your knighthood and false to your friend."

Pellias struck Gawaine across the face with the back of his hand. The mark of his fingers showed red on Gawaine's cheek. Gawaine grew pale and said that he had indeed failed him, but that the blow had made their wrongs equal. Pellias answered that a mark on the cheek was not equal to a wound in the heart. He said that Gawaine would answer for his betrayal, and he himself would answer for the blow.

The next morning, Gawaine sent his glove to Pellias as a challenge. The knights around them were filled with grief, because everyone knew how close the two men had once been. Sir Ewaine, Sir Brandiles, Sir Mador, and Sir Marhaus all tried to stop the quarrel, but neither knight would listen. Pellias said that Gawaine was no longer his friend. Gawaine waited in the meadow, and Pellias came out to meet him in the red armor.

The battle was hard and bitter. They first fought on horseback, and then they fought with swords. Gawaine was strong and fierce, but Pellias fought like a man whose heart had already been broken. At last Gawaine wounded him so deeply that Pellias fell and could not rise. When the others came to him, they thought he was close to death. Parcenet and a dwarf carried him away through the forest, seeking help.

They came to a little holy house in the woods, where a hermit lived. The hermit examined Pellias and believed that he would die very soon. While he prepared the last holy service for a dying knight, the door opened, and a strange lady in green entered. It was Nymue, the Lady of the Lake. She went to Pellias, bent over him, and said that he would not die yet.

Nymue took the magic collar from Pellias's neck and put it around her own. Then she used her power to bring him back from the edge of death. Pellias opened his eyes, weak and changed, as if he had returned from very far away. Nymue said that he must leave the common world, because his heart had suffered too much there. She took him with her to the hidden lake, and after that Sir Pellias was no longer seen in Arthur's court as before.

Sir Gawaine was left with deep sorrow. He had failed his friend, and he knew

it. Later, he would see signs of Pellias again and would learn that the Lady of the Lake had saved him. But the friendship between Gawaine and Pellias had been broken by pride, beauty, magic, and weak human desire. Thus the story of Sir Pellias ended sadly, and Arthur's court lost one of its gentlest knights.

Part 11 — Sir Gawaine's Nobility

Some time after the story of Sir Pellias, King Arthur and Queen Guinevere traveled through part of the kingdom with many knights, ladies, pages, and servants. The day was very warm, so Arthur ordered his people to set up pavilions in a pleasant open place near the forest. Tables were placed under the trees, and the court sat down to eat in the cool shade. Everyone was cheerful, for the birds were singing, the wind was soft, and the green leaves moved gently above them.

While they were eating, a strange white hart suddenly ran into the open place. It was a beautiful animal, as white as snow, and it moved with great speed and fear. Behind it came a small white hound, barking sharply as it followed. Then, close behind the hound, there came a knight with a lady before him on his horse. The lady seemed to be his prisoner, and she cried out for help as he carried her away.

All the court was amazed at this strange sight. Arthur rose at once and said that such a wonder must not pass without answer. He ordered Sir Gawaine and his younger brother Gaheris to follow and learn what it meant. Gawaine was glad to take the adventure, for he wished to prove again that he could serve the king well. So he and Gaheris mounted their horses and rode quickly into the forest after the hart, the hound, and the unknown knight.

Before long, they came upon two knights fighting fiercely in a glade. Both were wounded, and both seemed too angry to listen to reason. Gawaine rode between them and asked why brothers should hurt each other so badly. They answered that one wished to follow the white hart, while the other wished to follow the white hound and the captured lady. Their quarrel had begun from that small disagreement and had grown into a bitter fight.

Gawaine was astonished by their foolish anger. He told them that Arthur himself had sent him and Gaheris to understand the whole matter. He also told them that if they continued to fight, he would have to fight them both, though he did not wish to do so while they were already tired and hurt. The two brothers were ashamed when they heard this. They agreed to stop fighting and to go to Arthur's court to tell what they had seen.

Gawaine and Gaheris then rode on until they came to a castle. There they learned that the white hart had run inside and had been killed. They also learned that the white hound had been killed in the trouble that followed. The lord of the castle was very angry because the hart had been dear to his lady. He put on his armor and came against Gawaine, crying that Gawaine had done wrong in bringing death to the hart.

The lord struck Gawaine suddenly and wounded him deeply in the shoulder. Pain and anger filled Gawaine, and he struck back with terrible force. The lord fell to his knees and asked for mercy, but Gawaine, still hot with anger, raised his sword to kill him. At that moment, the lady of the castle ran forward and threw herself over her husband to protect him. Gawaine tried to turn the blow aside, but the flat of the sword struck the lady and made blood run from her neck.

Gawaine was filled with horror when he saw what he had done. For a moment, he thought he had killed the lady. Gaheris cried out that the blow had brought shame on them both, because they were brothers. Then the lady's women came and found that she was not dead, but only faint from the shock. Gawaine was deeply relieved, and he asked forgiveness from the lord and lady of the castle.

That night, Gawaine and Gaheris stayed at the castle. The lord learned who Gawaine was and treated him with honor. Gawaine also asked that a lady who had been kept there as a prisoner should be set free, because the anger about the hart and hound was now ended. The lord agreed, and peace was made in that place. The next day, Gawaine and Gaheris returned to Arthur's court and told everything that had happened.

Queen Guinevere was not pleased when she heard the story. She said quietly that it was strange for a true knight to refuse mercy to a fallen enemy and to strike

a lady, even by accident. Gawaine heard her words and was deeply angry, though he did not answer her in public. Later, he told Gaheris that the Queen thought his sword dishonored. Then he broke that sword across his knee and threw it away, saying that one day he would show more courtesy than she believed he had.

Not long after this, King Arthur had his own strange adventure. He was riding near Tintagalon with only one esquire, named Boisenard, when he lost his way in the forest. At last, he came to a lonely castle, where a dangerous knight-enchanter lived. This knight trapped Arthur by a riddle and told him that if he could not answer it within a certain time, his life would be lost. The riddle was this: What does a woman most desire?

Arthur searched far and wide for the answer. He asked many people, but every answer was different. Some said women most desired beauty, some said wealth, some said love, and some said honor. None of these answers seemed sure enough to save his life. At last, tired and deeply troubled, Arthur came to a poor hut in the forest, where an old woman sat by the fire.

This old woman was extremely ugly, and at first Arthur was shocked by her appearance. But she spoke wisely and said that she knew the answer to his riddle. She would tell him, but only if he gave her a promise. She asked that, when he returned safely to court, she might choose one of his knights to become her husband. Arthur was troubled, because this promise would bring great pain to one of his own men, but he believed his knights would do anything to save his life and the kingdom.

So Arthur gave his promise. Then the old woman told him the answer. "What a woman most desires," she said, "is to have her own will." She also warned Arthur that the knight-enchanter could not be killed in the usual way, because his life was hidden in a crystal globe inside a locket around his neck. Arthur thanked her and returned to the castle with new courage. When the knight-enchanter heard the answer, he knew he had been defeated.

Then Arthur fought him and struck the locket. The crystal globe broke, and the evil knight's life ended with it. Arthur was free, and he rode back through the forest with the old woman behind him on his horse. When he came near the court,

Guinevere and many lords and ladies saw him coming in that strange way. They wondered what joke he was playing, but Arthur told them that this woman had saved his life.

Arthur then explained the promise he had made. Seventeen lords and knights were standing there, and all said that Arthur had done right. Then Arthur asked the old woman which knight she wished to marry. She pointed at Sir Gawaine, because he looked like the son of a king and carried himself proudly. Arthur asked Gawaine if he would fulfill the promise, and Gawaine answered at once, "My lord, whatever you require of me, I will do."

Gawaine took the old woman's hand and kissed it with full courtesy. No one laughed, because everyone understood the weight of his sacrifice. Eleven days later, they were married in the chapel of the king's court. The old woman was dressed in rich clothes, but the fine dress made her seem even uglier to those who looked at her. All the court felt sorrow for Gawaine, as if he were going to his death.

After the wedding, Gawaine went alone to his house with his wife. For much of the day, he walked in his room in deep shame and pain. He was proud, and this trial wounded his pride more than any sword had ever wounded his body. But when night came, he grew ashamed of his own behavior. "She is my wife," he thought, "and I must treat her with honor."

So Gawaine went to her room. The old woman said that he had treated her badly by leaving her alone on their wedding day. Gawaine bowed his head and asked her forgiveness. She then asked for light, and Gawaine himself went to bring two candles in golden holders. When he returned and the light fell upon her, he cried out in wonder, because the old woman was gone. Before him stood a young lady of wonderful beauty.

The lady told him that she was truly his wife. A spell had made her appear old and ugly, but because Gawaine had married her freely and had treated her with courtesy, part of the spell was broken. Yet she could be beautiful only half the time. She asked him whether he wished her to be beautiful by day, when the court could see her, or by night, when only he would see her. Gawaine thought for a

moment, and then he gave her the choice, saying that her own will should decide.

At that answer, the spell was completely broken. The lady said that because he had given her her own will, she would be beautiful both day and night. Gawaine's sorrow turned into deep joy, and he loved her with all his heart. The next day, he brought her before Arthur, Guinevere, and the whole court. Everyone was amazed, and Guinevere learned that Gawaine could indeed show great courtesy, patience, and nobility when duty called him to do so.

Book II — The Story of the Champions of the Round Table

Part 12 — Launcelot Comes from the Lake

In the days after Arthur had made his kingdom strong, there lived a noble king named Ban of Benwick. He was a friend of Arthur, but he fell into great danger when King Claudas came against him with a large army. Claudas set his men around the Castle of Tribble, where King Ban lived with Queen Helen and their young son Launcelot. Ban tried to defend the castle, but each day his strength grew smaller, while the army of Claudas grew stronger.

At last, Ban knew that he must ask Arthur for help. He did not want to trust such an important matter to a messenger. So he decided to go to Arthur himself and take Queen Helen and the child Launcelot with him. He left the castle in the care of Sir Malydor le Brun and escaped at night through a secret gate. With him went Queen Helen, little Launcelot, and one faithful esquire named Foliot.

They traveled through the dark forest until they came near a quiet lake before dawn. Queen Helen was tired, so they stopped there to rest. Then Foliot saw a strange light in the sky behind them. King Ban rode up a high hill to see what it was. From that place, he saw his own castle and town burning in a great fire. The sight was too much for him, and grief broke his heart. He fell from his horse and died alone on the hill.

Queen Helen waited by the lake until Ban's horse came back without him. She understood at once that some great sorrow had happened. Leaving the sleeping Launcelot wrapped in her cloak, she rode up the hill with Foliot. There she found her husband dead, with his face calm in the morning light. She wept bitterly, but then she remembered her child and hurried back down to the lake.

When she reached the meadow, she saw a wonderful lady holding Launcelot in her arms. The lady was dressed in green and seemed more than human. She was Nymue, the Lady of the Lake. Queen Helen begged her to give the child back, because Launcelot was all she had left in the world. But Nymue said that she must take him away for a time, so that he could become the greatest knight in the world.

Queen Helen reached out to take her child, but the Lady of the Lake stepped back. Then she vanished with Launcelot, as breath disappears from glass. Queen Helen fell to the ground in a faint. Later, three nuns came by and found the sorrowful queen and the dead king. They buried King Ban in holy ground, and Queen Helen lived with them afterward as a nun, known as the Sister of Sorrows.

Launcelot grew up in the hidden land of the Lake. To ordinary eyes, it seemed to lie under the water, but inside it was a bright and beautiful world. There were fields of flowers, clear fountains, green trees, and a shining castle. Sir Pellias lived there too, after the Lady of the Lake had saved him from death. He became Launcelot's teacher and trained him in courage, courtesy, and skill with arms.

Nearly seventeen years passed in that wonderful place. Launcelot became tall, strong, and beautiful, and he carried on his shoulder the golden star that had marked him from birth. He learned how a knight should fight, speak, serve, and show mercy. Yet because he had grown up in that strange land, he was never quite like other men. He smiled often, but he did not laugh loudly, and there was always something distant and gentle in his manner.

One summer morning, King Arthur looked out from his room and saw that the world was full of light and life. He called Sir Ewaine and Sir Ector de Maris and said that they should go hunting with him. They rode out early with huntsmen, dogs, and servants. The day was joyful, and they hunted until evening. Then, as they were returning, they met a strange damsel, a dwarf, and a small white dog at a crossing in the forest.

The damsel knew Arthur and greeted him by name. Arthur asked who she was, but she only said that she served a lady who was Arthur's friend. She asked him to follow her, and Arthur agreed. She led him and his companions through the moonlit forest to an open meadow. There they saw many strange and beautiful people, and among them sat the Lady of the Lake, Sir Pellias, and a young man of wonderful appearance.

Arthur knew the Lady of the Lake and honored her, because she had helped him before. He also rejoiced to see Sir Pellias again, for Pellias had once been one of his own knights. Then Arthur looked at the young man and wondered who he

was. The Lady of the Lake would not yet give his name. She only asked Arthur to make the youth a knight in the morning and to allow him to wear the armor that she had prepared for him.

Arthur agreed, and the Lady of the Lake gave a feast under the moon. Afterward, beautiful armor was brought for the young man. The armor was white, and on the shield there was the picture of a lady. That night, the young man watched beside his armor in a small chapel near the forest, as was the custom before knighthood. Sir Ewaine stayed with him through the night and noticed the golden star upon his shoulder.

In the morning, the young man was bathed and dressed for the ceremony. Arthur took his sword and made him a knight with great honor. The Lady of the Lake then spoke to him privately. She told him to remember that he was the son of a king and that his behavior must be as noble as his birth. She also told him not to stay long at Camelot, but to go out soon and prove himself by his deeds.

Arthur, Sir Ewaine, Sir Ector, and the new knight then rode to Camelot. On the way, Sir Ewaine quietly told Sir Ector about the golden star on the young knight's shoulder. Sir Ector became very silent, because his lost brother Launcelot had carried just such a mark. At Camelot, the court welcomed the young knight with great joy. When they went to the Round Table, they found that one seat now bore the words "The Knight of the Lake."

That day, the young knight saw the world of men as if he were walking in a dream. The court, the voices, the banners, the ladies, and the knights were all new to him. But in the evening, he asked Arthur for leave to ride out in search of adventure. Before he left, Sir Ector came to him and asked if he bore a golden star on his shoulder and if his name was Launcelot. When Launcelot said yes, Sir Ector embraced him with tears, for they were brothers, both sons of King Ban and Queen Helen.

Launcelot soon became famous through many adventures. He freed the castle of Dolorous Gard and made it his own, changing its name to Joyous Gard. He helped the Lady of Nohan against the King of Northumberland and won honor in many lands. After these deeds, he returned to Arthur's court and took his seat at

the Round Table. Arthur loved him greatly and said that no king could have a better knight in his service.

Yet Launcelot still loved the open road more than the safe life of court. So one day he asked Arthur again for leave to seek adventure. Sir Lionel, his cousin, asked to go with him, and Launcelot agreed. The two knights rode out together in the fresh spring morning. At noon, they stopped under a large apple tree, ate their meal in the grass, and rested in the shade.

Launcelot became sleepy and lay down with his helmet under his head. Lionel kept watch beside the hedge. From the hillside, he saw three knights riding fast along a road in the valley below. Behind them came a huge knight in black armor, on a black horse, with a black shield and spear. The black knight caught the three riders one by one, struck them down, tied them, and laid each across his own horse like a heavy sack.

Lionel was amazed and angry. He mounted quietly so that Launcelot would not wake, then rode down to challenge the black knight. The black knight said that the captured men were knights of Arthur's court, and that he treated all such knights in that way. Lionel answered that he too was of Arthur's court and would free the prisoners if he could. They charged at each other, but Lionel was struck from his horse with terrible force and fell senseless to the ground.

The black knight bound Lionel and laid him across his horse with the others. This knight was Sir Turquine, a cruel lord who hated Arthur's knights and kept them in a cold prison. Launcelot still slept under the apple tree, hearing only the soft sound of bees above him. Meanwhile, Sir Ector left Camelot to follow Launcelot and Lionel, because he was sad that his brother had not taken him too. He took the wrong road, found Turquine's castle, struck the brass basin that called for battle, and was also defeated and thrown into prison with many knights of the Round Table.

Part 13 — Launcelot and Sir Turquine

While Sir Lionel was being carried away by Sir Turquine, Sir Launcelot still

slept under the apple tree. The air was warm, and the leaves moved softly above his face. His horse stood near him, cropping the grass beside the hedge. Then a great company came riding along the road: four queens, with knights, ladies, and servants around them. The first of these queens was Morgana le Fay, Arthur's sister and a woman of strong magic.

Launcelot's horse heard the other horses and gave a loud cry. The queens looked that way and saw Sir Launcelot lying asleep, with his head upon his helmet. Morgana sent an esquire quietly to look at him and learn who he was. The esquire went near, bent over the sleeping knight, and knew him at once. He returned to Morgana and said, "Lady, this is Sir Launcelot of the Lake, the knight whom Arthur loves above all others."

When Morgana heard this, an evil thought came into her mind. She hated Arthur, and she wished to hurt anything that Arthur loved. She went softly to Launcelot and tried to place a strong spell upon him. But she saw a ring on his finger, a ring given to him by the Lady of the Lake. Because of that ring, her worst magic could not touch him.

Yet Morgana could still make his sleep deeper. She moved her hands above his face and spoke secret words. Then Launcelot slept so heavily that no sound could wake him. Morgana ordered her servants to lay him upon his own shield. They lifted him gently and carried him away through the forest to one of Morgana's castles, a strong place called Chateaubras.

When Launcelot woke, he was lying in a beautiful room. Rich cloths hung on the walls, and the light came softly through the windows. For a moment, he did not know where he was. Then he remembered falling asleep under the apple tree with Lionel near him. He sat up quickly and saw four queens standing before him, dressed in bright robes and jewels.

Morgana spoke first. She told him that she had found him sleeping and had brought him there as a gentle prisoner. She said that she wished him to stay with them for a few days, because his fame was great. Launcelot answered courteously, but he was not pleased. "Lady," he said, "I left my cousin Sir Lionel near me. I do not know what has happened to him. Please let me go, and when I have found him,

I will return if I can.”

Morgana smiled, but her heart was not kind. She said that he might go only if he gave her the ring from his finger as a promise that he would return. Launcelot refused at once. “This ring was given to me under a promise,” he said. “It may not leave my hand while I live.” Morgana’s face grew red with anger, and her eyes burned, but Launcelot still would not give her the ring.

Then the queens spoke to him together. They said that he must choose one of them as his lady. If he chose one, he would be free and would have great honor. If he refused them all, he would remain their prisoner. Launcelot answered that he would not make such a choice. He said he was already bound in service and loyalty, and that no fear of prison would make him false to his own heart.

The queens were angry when they heard this. They left him in the room and had the doors locked and guarded. Launcelot walked from wall to wall, deeply troubled. He thought of Lionel and wondered whether his cousin was searching for him or lying hurt somewhere in the forest. More than anything, he hated being shut in while danger might be near one whom he loved.

That evening, a young lady came secretly to his room. She was Elouise the Fair, daughter of King Bagdemagus. She had heard that Launcelot was a prisoner in the castle, and she pitied him. She told him that her father was soon to fight in a tournament against the King of North Wales, and that he needed a strong knight to help him. If Launcelot would promise to aid her father, she would help him escape.

Launcelot gave the promise gladly. Elouise led him by a hidden way out of the castle and brought him to his armor and horse. He thanked her with deep feeling, because she had saved him from Morgana’s malice. Then he rode away into the night, free again, but still full of worry for Sir Lionel. He did not forget his promise to Elouise, but first he had to learn what had happened under the apple tree.

The next morning, Launcelot returned to the place where he had slept. There he found no Lionel and no sign of him except marks on the ground. He searched the road and the nearby fields, but he found nothing certain. At last, as he rode on, he met a young damsel on a small horse. He asked her if she had seen a knight

called Sir Lionel, but she said that she had not.

Then Launcelot asked if she knew any adventure nearby. The damsel laughed a little and said that she knew one, but it was an adventure no knight had yet finished. She told him of Sir Turquine, a huge and terrible knight who kept many of Arthur's knights in prison. Their groans could sometimes be heard from the road below his castle. She said that Turquine was thought by many to be the strongest knight in the world, unless Launcelot himself was stronger.

Launcelot listened carefully, and hope rose in him. He thought that Lionel might be one of those prisoners. "Take me to this castle," he said. "If God helps me, I will try this adventure." So the damsel led him along the road through the forest. The sun rose higher, and the day grew hot, but Launcelot did not slow his horse. His mind was fixed on the castle and on the prisoners inside it.

Before long, they saw a strong castle standing near a ford. As they came closer, they saw a knight riding toward them. Across that knight's horse lay a wounded man, bound like a prisoner. When Launcelot looked more closely, he saw that the wounded man was Sir Gaheris, brother of Sir Gawaine. Anger rose in Launcelot, and he rode forward at once.

The great knight was Sir Turquine. Launcelot called to him and ordered him to set the wounded knight down. Turquine asked who he was. Launcelot answered, "I am Sir Launcelot of the Lake, a knight of King Arthur." At that name, Turquine showed fierce joy. He said that he had long wished to meet Launcelot, because Launcelot had killed his brother at Dolorous Gard. He also said that Lionel and Ector were among the many knights held in his prison.

Turquine set Sir Gaheris down on a stone slab, and then he made ready for battle. The two knights charged at one another with such power that both horses were ruined by the shock. Turquine's horse fell dead, and Launcelot's horse could not rise again. So the two knights drew their swords and fought on foot. Their blows were so heavy that pieces of shield and armor flew from them and lay scattered on the ground.

They fought for a long time in the heat of the day. Blood ran from both men, and neither seemed able to overcome the other. At last, Turquine asked for a short

rest. Launcelot allowed it, and the two stood apart, breathing hard. Turquine then said that if Launcelot would leave Arthur and become his friend, he would free all the prisoners in his castle. Launcelot refused him at once, for he would never betray Arthur or the Round Table.

Then the battle began again, even fiercer than before. Turquine struck like a giant, but Launcelot watched him carefully and waited for the right moment. At last, Turquine lifted his sword too high and left himself open. Launcelot struck with all his strength and brought him down. Turquine tried to rise again, but he could not. So ended the cruel knight who had made so many good men suffer.

Launcelot was badly wounded and very tired, but he did not think first of himself. He told Sir Gaheris to take Turquine's keys, go into the castle, and free the prisoners. He also told him to greet Lionel and Ector and say that Launcelot was alive. Then Launcelot mounted Gaheris's horse, because his own horse was dead, and rode away with the damsel. Behind him, the gates of Turquine's castle were opened, and more than a hundred prisoners came out into the light.

Part 14 — Launcelot's Early Glory

After Sir Launcelot had defeated Sir Turquine, he rode away with the young damsel who had brought him to that adventure. He was still in pain from his wounds, and for a while he spoke very little. The damsel saw that he was suffering, so she did not trouble him with many words. At last she said, "Sir, you should rest. My brother has a castle not far from here, and he will gladly care for you."

Launcelot thanked her and asked her name. She said, "I am Croisette of the Dale, and my brother is Sir Hilaire of the Dale." Then she led him through a quiet valley with a river, fields, trees, and a small village near a pleasant castle. Launcelot looked at the place with deep pleasure, because it seemed peaceful after so much fighting. Croisette was happy that he liked her home, for she loved that valley more than any place in the world.

Sir Hilaire welcomed Launcelot with great honor. When he learned that his guest was Sir Launcelot of the Lake, he was filled with wonder and joy. Servants

took Launcelot to a chamber, removed his armor, washed his wounds, and gave him soft clothing. That evening, Launcelot sat at supper with Sir Hilaire and Croisette. He told them some of his adventures, and everyone listened as if a man from another world were speaking.

Launcelot stayed there several days until his wounds were better. During that time, his broken armor was repaired, and his strength returned. Then he asked to continue the adventure that Croisette had first brought to him. Sir Hilaire gave them leave to go, and the two rode into an old forest together. As they rode, Croisette asked him why he had no lady of his own to serve in love, as many knights did.

Launcelot answered that he served Queen Guinevere, but only from far away. "She is like a bright star," he said. "A man on earth may look up at such a star, but he can never reach it." Croisette said that a nearer lady might make him happier, but Launcelot only smiled. He said that he loved the wide world, the trees, the grass, the open road, and the work of helping people. For him, knightly service itself was joy enough.

Later, they came to a rough and rocky country. Far away, high on the rocks, stood a sharp-looking castle. Croisette told Launcelot that it belonged to Sir Peris of the Forest Sauvage. She said that Peris was strong, but cowardly, because he often attacked women and travelers who could not defend themselves. Launcelot then made a plan. Croisette would ride openly on the road, while he would keep hidden among the trees.

The plan worked. As Croisette rode alone, Sir Peris and his squire rushed out from the forest. The squire seized her horse, and Peris tried to pull her from the saddle. Croisette screamed, and Launcelot came out from the trees like a storm. He shouted for Peris to let the lady go and defend himself. Peris looked for a way to escape, but there was none, so he had to fight.

Launcelot struck him with such force that Peris fell senseless from his horse. When Peris came back to himself, he begged for mercy. Launcelot spared him because he had asked in the name of knighthood, but he gave him deep shame. He freed fourteen ladies who had been held in the castle for ransom, and he

divided the treasure of the castle among them and Croisette. He kept nothing for himself.

Then Launcelot had Peris stripped of his armor and tied with a rope. He led him back in shame to Sir Hilaire's castle and ordered that he be sent to Arthur for judgment. After that, Launcelot rested one more day with Sir Hilaire. Then he rode to the abbey where he had promised to meet Elouise the Fair, the daughter of King Bagdemagus. He had not forgotten that she had once helped him escape from Morgana's castle.

Elouise received him with great happiness and sent for her father. King Bagdemagus came quickly and was amazed when he learned that the knight who had come to help him was Sir Launcelot. Bagdemagus told him that the King of North Wales would fight against him in a tournament, and that three knights of Arthur's court were on the other side. These were Sir Mordred, Sir Mador de la Porte, and Sir Galahantine. Launcelot said they were strong knights, so the matter must be handled wisely.

Launcelot told Bagdemagus to choose three good knights and give them plain white shields. He would also carry a white shield, so that no one would know him. The four of them would hide near the field until the battle became hard. Then they would rush against the side of the enemy and break their order. Bagdemagus liked this plan, and that night Launcelot and the three chosen knights slept in a small wood near the place of battle.

The next day, many people came to watch the tournament. The side of the King of North Wales had many more knights than the side of Bagdemagus, and at first Bagdemagus's men were pushed back. Then Launcelot saw that the right moment had come. He and the three white-shielded knights rode out of the wood and struck the enemy's side with great force. Horses fell, shields broke, and the whole line of the King of North Wales was thrown into confusion.

Launcelot overthrew many knights with his spear. He struck down the King of North Wales himself, so that the king had to be carried from the field. Then Mordred came against him, and Launcelot threw him so violently that he lay in a deep faint. Mador also came, but he was thrown down with his horse upon him.

Galahantine fought more strongly, but Launcelot struck him so hard that he could no longer guide his horse.

Soon the whole party of the King of North Wales broke and fled. Bagdemagus won the tournament with great honor, though his side had been much smaller. He begged Launcelot to stay and receive thanks and reward. But Launcelot would not stay. He asked only that Bagdemagus greet Elouise for him and tell her that if she ever needed his help again, he would come, even to the end of the world.

After this, Launcelot wandered for many days. One morning, he came to a fair valley and passed a large castle. Near the castle he saw a falcon caught high in a tree by the strings on its feet. A lady came riding out and begged him to get the bird for her, saying that her husband would be terribly angry if the falcon were lost. Launcelot did not like climbing trees, but he could not refuse a lady who asked for help.

He took off his armor and climbed the tree with great difficulty. He freed the falcon and threw it safely down to the lady. But while he was still in the tree, an armed knight rode up. This knight was Sir Phelot, brother of Sir Peris. He had planned the whole matter with his wife, and now he meant to kill Launcelot while he was unarmed and helpless.

Launcelot asked at least for his sword, but Phelot refused. Then Launcelot broke a heavy branch from the tree and used it as a club. He leaped down behind his horse, turned quickly, and struck Phelot several terrible blows. Phelot fell, and Launcelot took his sword from him. The lady begged for her husband's life, and Launcelot spared him, though he said that both husband and wife had acted with great treachery.

Later, Launcelot came to a marshy land, where a town and castle stood on an island. A hunter told him that two cruel giants had taken the castle and had kept the true lord in a dungeon for three years. Launcelot crossed the long bridge, killed the huge guard who tried to stop him, and entered the castle yard. The two giants came out with great clubs, terrible to see. Launcelot killed the first with one mighty blow, and when the second tried to run away, he chased him down and killed him too.

The people of the town and castle crowded around Launcelot and praised him, but he did not stay for their thanks. He only told them to free their true lord from the dungeon and care for him well. Then he rode away quietly. He had saved the whole place, but he wanted no gift and no feast. His reward was the deed itself.

One night after that, Launcelot lodged at a manor house kept by an old gentlewoman. In the middle of the night, he heard a knight beating at the gate and crying to be let in. Three other knights were chasing him and soon attacked him together. Launcelot saw this from his window, quickly put on his armor, and climbed down by a sheet from his bed. Then he fought the three knights and defeated them all.

The knight whom he had saved was Sir Kay. Kay had been searching for Launcelot and had been chased for three days by those three brothers. Launcelot made the defeated knights yield to Kay and go to Arthur for judgment. Then he and Kay entered the manor, ate, and slept. Before dawn, Launcelot woke, put on Kay's armor as a joke, left his own armor for Kay, and rode away.

Because Launcelot wore Kay's armor, many knights mistook him for Kay. First he met three brothers, Sir Gunther, Sir Gylmere, and Sir Raynold, and he overthrew them one after another. Then he met four knights of the Round Table: Sir Sagamore, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Ewaine, and Sir Gawaine. They also thought he was Kay, and each tried to test him. Launcelot defeated them all, though some began to understand that no ordinary Kay could fight in such a way.

At evening, Launcelot returned to Camelot. Arthur and the court were at supper, and there was great joy when he came in. He told them all that had happened since he had left court. When he told how he had worn Kay's armor and defeated seven famous knights, most of the court laughed loudly. The defeated knights did not enjoy the joke very much, but everyone understood more clearly than before that Launcelot was now the greatest knight in Arthur's world.

Part 15 — The Youth of Tristram

Before Sir Tristram became famous, sorrow already stood near his life. His

father was King Meliadus of Lyonesse, and his mother was the Lady Elizabeth. While she was heavy with child, King Meliadus was taken away by magic and held in a strange castle. Lady Elizabeth went into the forest to seek him, but the day was cold, and snow lay on the ground. There, in the lonely forest, her son was born, and because so many tears were shed at his birth, she named him Tristram.

Soon after the child was born, Lady Elizabeth died. Her people carried her body back to Lyonesse, and the baby was brought with them. Merlin later freed King Meliadus from the magic that held him, but when the king came home, he found his wife dead and his house full of sorrow. For many years he grieved for her so deeply that he took little joy in life. He also took little joy in the child, not because he hated him, but because the child always reminded him of what he had lost.

After seven years, one of the king's wise men came to him and spoke plainly. He said that a king should not live forever in grief, and that the kingdom needed a queen. He also said that it was dangerous for all the hope of Lyonesse to rest on one small boy. King Meliadus listened and knew there was truth in these words. So, though his heart still belonged to Elizabeth, he married Lady Moeya, the daughter of King Howell of Britain.

Lady Moeya had already been married before, and she had a son of her own. That boy was about the same age as Tristram, and at first the two boys played together like brothers. But Lady Moeya soon began to hate Tristram in secret. She saw that he was stronger, more beautiful, and more noble than her own son. She thought that if Tristram died, perhaps her son might one day rule Lyonesse.

When Tristram was about thirteen, he was tall and strong for his age. He was also gentle, and he loved his stepbrother truly. This made Lady Moeya's hate even darker, because Tristram had done nothing against her. One day, she called a man who knew how to make dangerous drinks. She asked him for a poison that would surely kill anyone who drank it, and he gave her a small bottle filled with a golden liquid.

Lady Moeya knew that Tristram and her son often played ball in a court of the castle. When they played, they became hot and thirsty. So she poured part of the

poison into a cup of clear water and set it on a bench near the place where they played. Then she hid herself and waited, thinking that Tristram would drink first when he became thirsty.

The boys played hard for a long time. At last Tristram said that he wished he had something to drink. His stepbrother saw the cup and told Tristram to drink from it. But Tristram loved him and said, "No, you drink first, because you are more thirsty than I am." So the other boy took the cup and drank. Very soon he fell to the ground in great pain, and before anyone could save him, he died.

A great cry went through the castle. King Meliadus came running, and Lady Moeya came too, wild with fear and grief. When the truth began to appear, the king's anger was terrible. He forced Lady Moeya to tell what she had done. She confessed everything, and Meliadus ordered that she be put in prison and judged by the law. In time she was condemned to die by fire.

On the day of her punishment, Tristram saw her tied to the stake. Though she had tried to kill him, he felt deep pity for her. He went to his father, knelt before him, and asked for one gift. The king loved him and promised to give whatever he asked. Then Tristram asked him to spare Lady Moeya's life, because she had suffered greatly and had surely repented.

King Meliadus was angry and deeply troubled. He had given his word, so he could not refuse, but he believed Tristram had done wrong to stop the law. He told Tristram that Lady Moeya's life was now his gift. But he also ordered Tristram to leave Lyonesse, because he feared that more sorrow would come if Tristram and the queen stayed near each other.

Tristram went to Lady Moeya and cut her bonds with his own dagger. He told her that she was free and that he forgave her. She wept and said that he was very good to her. Then, because she was cold and poorly dressed, he wrapped his cloak around her. After that, he left Lyonesse with a noble man named Gouvernail, who was sent to guide and care for him.

Tristram and Gouvernail went to France. There Tristram was welcomed at the French court and learned many things that a young nobleman should know. He learned music, hunting, arms, and courtly behavior. He became especially skilled

with the harp, and his playing could move people's hearts. Yet even in France, he often thought of Lyonesse and of the father from whom he had been sent away.

After some time, Tristram returned to Lyonesse in disguise. He came before King Meliadus as a young harper from France. The king did not know him, but his heart was drawn to him. He asked if the harper had ever seen a young man named Tristram in France. Tristram answered that he had seen him often and that Tristram did well, though he longed for his own country.

The king was moved by this answer and asked the harper to play. Tristram took his harp and sang so beautifully that all who heard him were silent with wonder. King Meliadus was overcome by the music and said that the harper might ask any gift from him. Then Tristram knelt before him and asked only to be forgiven and loved again. When the king learned that the harper was his own son, he came down from his seat and embraced him with great joy.

After that, Tristram lived peacefully in Lyonesse for a time. He also made peace between King Meliadus and Lady Moeya, and the queen came to love him because he had saved her life and shown her such mercy. The king wished to make Tristram a knight, but Tristram refused for the time. He said that he wanted to wait until a great adventure came. Then, if he was made a knight for that adventure, he might win honor at once.

The chance came through King Mark of Cornwall, who was Tristram's uncle. The King of Ireland demanded tribute from Cornwall and sent Sir Marhaus as his champion. Sir Marhaus was one of the strongest knights in the world, and Cornwall had no knight strong enough to face him. King Mark sent to Lyonesse, asking if any knight there would fight for him. When Tristram heard the message, he went to his father and asked leave to go.

King Meliadus loved him dearly and feared for him, but he saw that Tristram's heart was set. So he gave him leave to travel to Cornwall with Gouvernail. Tristram came before King Mark and said, "My lord, I am Tristram of Lyonesse, your sister's son. If you will make me a knight, I will fight Sir Marhaus for you." King Mark was amazed by the courage of one so young, but at last he agreed.

That night, Tristram watched beside his armor in the chapel. The next day,

King Mark made him a knight with full honor and gave him fine armor, weapons, and a strong horse. That same afternoon, Tristram and Gouvernail sailed to the island where Sir Marhaus was waiting. On the second day, they came to shore and saw three ships near the land. Under their shadow sat a great knight in full armor, and Gouvernail knew that this must be Sir Marhaus.

Tristram looked at the knight for a long time. He saw that Marhaus was older, stronger, and more used to battle than he was. Yet he did not turn back. He told Gouvernail to leave him alone, because this battle had to be his own. If he lost and yielded, Cornwall would pay tribute to Ireland. If he died without yielding, King Mark could still seek another champion.

Sir Marhaus rode forward and asked who he was. Tristram gave his name and said that he had been made a knight only three days before. Marhaus was sorry for him and advised him to return, because it seemed a pity for such a young knight to face certain death. But Tristram refused. He said that he had received knighthood for this very purpose, and that he would either win or die.

Then the two knights made ready. They charged first with spears, and the sound of their meeting rang across the field. After that, they fought with swords for a long time. Sir Marhaus wounded Tristram deeply in the side, and Tristram's strength began to fail. But at last Tristram struck Marhaus on the head with such force that a piece of his sword broke off in the wound.

Sir Marhaus could fight no more. He left the field and was carried back to Ireland, where he later died from that wound. Tristram also was badly hurt, and Gouvernail and the sailors feared that he would die. They carried him back to Cornwall and laid him before King Mark. There, weak and pale, Tristram told Mark that he was his sister's son. Mark wept bitterly, because the young knight who had saved Cornwall was also his own blood.

Part 16 — Tristram and Belle Isoult

The wound that Sir Marhaus had given Tristram did not heal. Day after day, it grew worse, and the pain went deeper into his body. Many doctors came to

Cornwall and tried to help him, but none of them could cure the wound. At last, a wise woman examined him and said that only one person might save him. That person was the King of Ireland's daughter, the Lady Belle Isoult, who was famous for her skill in healing.

King Mark asked Tristram if he would go to Ireland, though Ireland was the land of Sir Marhaus. Tristram knew the danger, because he had killed Marhaus in battle. But he also knew that he would die if he stayed in Cornwall. So he agreed to go, but he did not go under his true name. He called himself Sir Tramtris of Lyonesse, and Gouvernail went with him to care for him.

When Tristram came to Ireland, King Angus received him kindly. The king did not know that this wounded knight was the man who had killed Sir Marhaus. He only saw a young and noble knight in great pain, and he wished to help him. The next day, Belle Isoult came to Tristram's room with her women. She looked at the wound and felt deep pity, because he was so young and so near death.

Belle Isoult searched the wound with careful hands. At last, she found a broken piece of spear deep in the flesh. She drew it out, and Tristram groaned with terrible pain. Blood came from the wound, and he fainted as if he had died. But Belle Isoult and her women stopped the blood, and after a little while he opened his eyes again. From that day, the wound began to heal.

As Tristram grew stronger, he spent more and more time with Belle Isoult. He loved her because she had saved his life. She loved him because she had seen his suffering so closely and had brought him back from death. They walked together in the gardens, sat together in the hall, and spoke together in quiet places. No one knew that Sir Tramtris was truly Sir Tristram, the knight who had killed Sir Marhaus.

Then Sir Palamydes came to the Irish court. He was a famous knight, very strong and very proud. When he saw Belle Isoult, he loved her at once and tried always to be near her. Belle Isoult did not love him, but she feared his fierce heart, so she treated him with courtesy. Tristram saw this and was troubled, because he could not bear to see another knight seek her love.

Belle Isoult told Tristram that she did not love Palamydes. She said she was

only afraid to offend him, because he was so strong. Tristram answered that no knight should win her favor through fear while he was there to defend her. He asked her to help him take part secretly in a tournament. She agreed and told King Angus to proclaim a great contest in honor of Sir Palamydes.

On the first days of the tournament, Palamydes fought very well. Many knights praised him, and he believed that Belle Isoult must soon accept his love. But she only told him that there was still another day to come. On that last day, she armed Tristram secretly in white armor and gave him a white horse. Then she led him out through a small gate, so that no one would know who he was.

Tristram entered the tournament like a bright white flame. He rode into the field after the fighting had already begun, and he struck down knight after knight. Then he came against Palamydes. Their meeting was hard and loud, and many people turned to watch them. At last, Tristram overcame Palamydes and won the honor of the field. Belle Isoult was so filled with joy that she forgot caution and spoke too freely of him.

After the tournament, the Queen of Ireland became suspicious. She said that Tristram should bathe in healing water, because he had fought too soon after being wounded. While he was in the bath, the Queen saw his sword lying on the bed. She drew it from the sheath and saw that a piece was missing from the blade. Then she brought out the piece that had been taken from Sir Marhaus's wound, and it fitted the sword exactly.

The Queen was seized by anger and grief. She cried out that this knight was a traitor and had killed her brother. She took Tristram's sword and rushed toward him while he was still in the bath. Tristram moved aside just in time, and the blow missed him. Gouvernail and Sir Helles caught the Queen and took the sword from her hands, while she cried out for justice before King Angus.

King Angus heard the whole matter and was deeply troubled. Tristram did not deny the truth. He said that he had fought Sir Marhaus openly and fairly for Cornwall, and that there had been no murder or treason in the deed. King Angus was a just man, and he knew this was true. Yet peace could not remain in Ireland while Tristram stayed there, because the Queen's heart was full of grief for her

brother.

So Tristram had to leave Ireland. Belle Isoult was filled with sorrow when she learned that he must go. They spoke together before he left, but neither could change what had happened. Tristram returned to Cornwall with Gouvernail, and Belle Isoult remained with her father and mother in Ireland. From that time, both of them carried a hidden wound in the heart.

Later, King Mark heard much about Belle Isoult's beauty. He also heard how Tristram loved her, and jealousy began to grow in him. Mark did not truly wish Tristram to be happy. So he commanded Tristram to go back to Ireland and bring Belle Isoult to Cornwall, not for Tristram himself, but to become King Mark's wife. This order was cruel, but Tristram could not refuse his king.

Tristram went again to Ireland and asked King Angus for Belle Isoult on King Mark's behalf. After many words and arrangements, King Angus agreed. Belle Isoult was to go to Cornwall and marry King Mark. Her mother knew that her daughter still loved Tristram, so she gave Lady Bragwaine a golden flask. It held a love drink, and the Queen ordered Bragwaine to give it to Belle Isoult and King Mark after their wedding, so that they would love each other forever.

Soon the ship left Ireland. Belle Isoult, Tristram, Bragwaine, Gouvernail, and many attendants sailed together toward Cornwall. During the voyage, Belle Isoult wept because she was being taken away from the man she loved and sent to marry another. Bragwaine tried to comfort her and told her about the love drink. Belle Isoult listened, and a strange thought entered her heart.

When Bragwaine was away, Belle Isoult took the flask and came to Tristram. She asked him if he would drink with her. Tristram answered that he would drink anything she gave him, even if it were death. She poured the drink, and they both drank from it. It was not death, but from that moment their love became stronger than before, stronger than duty, fear, or reason. The ship moved on toward Cornwall, and their sorrowful future moved with it.

Part 17 — Tristram among Arthur's Knights

After Belle Isoult came to Cornwall, she was married to King Mark with great ceremony. The halls of Tintagel were filled with music, rich clothing, and many bright lights. People said that the wedding was joyful, and outwardly it seemed so. But in the hearts of Tristram and Belle Isoult there was no true joy, because each loved the other and yet each was bound by duty to King Mark.

Tristram tried to hide his sorrow by serving King Mark with all the honor he could. He went hunting, rode in arms, played the harp, and sat at court as if nothing had changed. But whenever he saw Belle Isoult beside King Mark, pain rose in him like a sharp knife. Belle Isoult also kept her face calm before others, though her heart was not calm. Thus the court of Cornwall had the appearance of happiness, while secret sorrow moved beneath it.

One day, a famous knight came to King Mark's court. His name was Sir Bleoberis de Ganys, and he was a knight of the Round Table. He was also cousin to Sir Launcelot of the Lake, and for that reason all men treated him with great honor. King Mark welcomed him and gave a feast for him. Tristram was not there at first, because he had gone hunting in the forest.

During the feast, much wine was drunk, and Sir Bleoberis became hot in mind. He began to boast about the knights of Arthur's court. He said that one knight of the Round Table was worth twenty knights of Cornwall. The hall became silent when he said this. King Mark smiled in a cold way and answered that because Bleoberis was his guest, he would not take the words too seriously.

But Sir Bleoberis's pride had already been touched. He stood up, took a golden cup from the table, drank from it, and said that he would carry it away. If any knight of Cornwall could take it from him, then he would admit that Cornwall had better knights than he had thought. Then he walked out of the hall with the cup in his hand. No knight there stopped him, and that made the shame greater.

A little later, Tristram came back from the forest and found the court silent and dark-faced. He asked what had happened. King Mark told him how Sir Bleoberis had insulted the Cornish knights and had taken away the golden cup. Tristram was angry, but his anger was not loud. He only said that he would bring the cup back if he could.

Tristram armed himself quickly, and Gouvernail rode with him. Before long, they met two knights on the road. These were Sir Sagramore and Sir Dodinas, both knights of the Round Table. They asked Tristram who he was and where he was going so fast. Tristram answered that he was following Sir Bleoberis and that he had no wish to fight them unless they stood in his way.

But the two knights would not let him pass easily. They thought he was only a Cornish knight, and they wished to test him. So Tristram fought them, one after the other, and overthrew them both. Then they understood that he was no common knight. They remembered that he had already won great honor in Ireland, and they spoke to him with respect instead of pride.

Tristram asked them for two things. First, they must go to King Mark and say that they had been defeated by a Cornish knight. Second, they must tell him whether they had seen Sir Bleoberis. The two knights agreed. They said that Bleoberis had passed that way not long before and could not be far ahead. Then they rode toward Tintagel, while Tristram and Gouvernail followed the road deeper into the forest.

Near sunset, Tristram saw Sir Bleoberis riding before him. The red light of evening shone on the tops of the trees, while the road below was gray and cool. Tristram called loudly for Bleoberis to stop. Bleoberis turned and waited. Tristram rode up to him and said, "You took a golden cup from King Mark's table in a shameful way. Give it to me, so I may take it back."

Sir Bleoberis answered proudly, but not without courage. He said that Tristram might have the cup if he could win it. The two knights rode apart, lowered their spears, and charged. Their meeting was so hard that both horses were thrown down, but both knights leaped clear and rose to their feet. Then they drew their swords and began a fierce fight on foot.

For a long time, neither knight could win. Their shields rang again and again, and their armor was marked by many blows. At last, Tristram's anger and strength rose together. He struck Bleoberis so heavily on the head that the knight fell to his knees. Then Tristram took off his helmet and told him to yield. Bleoberis yielded and praised Tristram as one of the best knights he had ever met.

When Bleoberis learned Tristram's name, his manner changed fully. He said that he had heard of Tristram's great deeds and believed that one day Tristram might stand beside Launcelot and Lamorack as one of the greatest knights in the world. He gave the golden cup to Tristram freely. Tristram thanked him, and the two parted in peace. That night, Tristram returned the cup to King Mark and spoke sharply of the older knights who had let such shame fall on Cornwall.

Some time after this, Tristram set out again, because he needed to speak with King Angus of Ireland. On the sea, a strong storm drove his ship from its course. Instead of reaching Ireland, he was carried near the land where King Arthur held court. Tristram came ashore and set up his pavilion, not yet knowing clearly what would happen next. Soon King Arthur and Sir Launcelot heard of him and came to visit him.

Tristram received them with honor, and the three great men sat together in friendly talk. Arthur soon understood that Tristram was not only strong in battle but also noble in speech and heart. Launcelot also felt drawn to him, because Tristram loved him greatly and honored him above all knights. Then Tristram took his harp and sang before them. His song was so beautiful that everyone listened in silence, as if the air itself had become still.

When the song ended, Arthur praised him warmly. He said that he had heard many good singers, but never one like Tristram. He wished that Tristram might remain always at his court. Tristram answered that he too would gladly stay among such noble knights, because he had never loved any court as much as he loved Arthur's. For a little while, he forgot the sorrow of Cornwall and the duty that had brought him out upon the sea.

Then Gouvernail came quietly to Tristram and told him that King Angus of Ireland was in Camelot. Tristram was surprised, because he had been traveling to Ireland to seek him. Arthur then explained that King Angus was in serious trouble. Sir Blamor de Ganys had accused him of treason, because Sir Bertrand, Blamor's companion, had been found murdered in Ireland. Many people believed the charge, and no knight had yet agreed to defend King Angus.

Tristram listened carefully and remembered how King Angus had once treated

him with justice. He also knew in his heart that Angus was not a traitor. So he went to the king and offered to fight as his champion. King Angus was deeply moved, for he had thought himself almost friendless. The next day, the battle was prepared in a fair meadow outside the town, with Arthur and Angus seated where all could see them.

Sir Blamor rode in the field in red armor, strong and proud. Then Tristram entered in bright armor, attended only by Gouvernail. He came before Arthur and said that he would defend King Angus because he believed him innocent. The battle began with spears, and then the knights fought with swords. Sir Blamor was very strong, but Tristram slowly gained the better of him and at last brought him down.

Tristram could have killed him, but he would not. Blamor was near in blood to Launcelot, and Tristram had sworn friendship with Launcelot. So Tristram threw away his own sword and gave Blamor back his sword. Then he stood unarmed before him and said, "Now you may either yield to me or kill me. I cannot strike you again." Blamor was amazed by such nobility and yielded in love, not in shame.

Then Tristram gave his word that King Angus was innocent, and Blamor accepted it. He withdrew his charge, and the two knights went together before Arthur. Arthur embraced them both and said that no king could have greater honor than to know such knights. King Angus was cleared of the accusation, and Tristram's fame became even greater. Yet his heart remained troubled, because his honor had again brought him nearer to sorrow than to peace.

Part 18 — Tristram and Lamorack

Now we must turn to Sir Lamorack of Gales. In those days, people said that three knights stood above almost all others in strength and honor. These three were Sir Launcelot of the Lake, Sir Tristram of Lyonesse, and Sir Lamorack of Gales. Lamorack was the son of King Pellinore and the brother of Sir Percival. Because of such men, the house of Pellinore was famous wherever stories of knighthood

were told.

After Belle Isoult became Queen of Cornwall, Sir Tristram stayed for a time at King Mark's court. He tried to keep his mind away from sorrow by hunting, riding, and doing brave deeds. The more famous he became, the more King Mark hated him. Mark could not bear to see Tristram honored by everyone. He also could not bear the quiet sadness that stood between Tristram and Belle Isoult.

One autumn season, when the woods were brown and gold, a strange knight came to Tintagel. This knight was Sir Lamorack. He had come in search of adventure and honor, and he soon entered the field before the castle. Many knights of Cornwall came against him, but he overthrew them one after another. The people watched in wonder, because they had never seen such strength except perhaps in Tristram himself.

Sir Tristram sat with King Mark and Belle Isoult, watching the battle from above the field. He knew Sir Lamorack and loved him, for they had sworn friendship together. He was pleased to see his friend win such honor, but King Mark was not pleased. The king saw that all Cornwall was being shamed by one stranger. He turned to Tristram and asked coldly why he did not go down and fight.

Tristram answered calmly that he feared no man alive. But he would not fight Lamorack that day. Lamorack had already fought many knights, and his horse was tired. Also, Lamorack was his sworn brother-in-arms and a knight of the Round Table. If Tristram fought him then, the fight would not be fair, and the honor of both men would be stained.

King Mark would not accept this answer. He said that Tristram was the champion of Cornwall and must defend Cornwall's name. Then he gave a direct command, not only as king, but as the man who had made Tristram a knight. Tristram looked at him with anger and pain. He said that Mark seemed always to find new ways to shame and hurt him, though he had served Cornwall faithfully. But at last he rose and said, "I will go."

When Lamorack saw Tristram riding into the field, he was deeply surprised. He called out, "Tristram, have you forgotten that we are brothers-in-arms?" Tristram answered that he had not forgotten and that he came only because his

king had commanded him. Lamorack was hurt and angry, but there was no way to stop the meeting now. The two knights took their places, and the marshal gave the signal.

They charged together with great speed. Lamorack's spear broke into pieces, but Tristram's spear held firm. Because Lamorack's horse was already tired from earlier battles, it could not bear the force of the blow. The horse fell in a cloud of dust. Lamorack sprang clear and landed on his feet, but the shame of the fall burned in him like fire.

Lamorack drew his sword and called for Tristram to come down and fight on foot. Tristram sat on his horse with a sorrowful face. He said that he had already done wrong by fighting him when he was tired. He would not add another wrong by continuing the battle. If Lamorack wished, they could fight another day, when both men and horses were fresh.

Lamorack would not hear this. He felt that Tristram had shamed him before many people and then refused to give him a fair chance to answer that shame. He turned to the knights and people in the field and spoke loudly. He told them to carry word to Sir Launcelot that Tristram had attacked him when he was weary and had then refused him a true test of battle. Tristram begged him to listen, but Lamorack would not. He left the field in bitterness, and Tristram sat silent like a man turned to stone.

That same day, Lamorack left Tintagel. He went down to the sea and took ship for Camelot, because he wished to bring his complaint before Arthur's court. But he never reached Camelot. A fierce storm rose upon the sea, and his small ship was driven onto sharp rocks and broken apart. Lamorack saw the danger before the end came, so he threw off his clothes and leaped into the water.

He swam for a long time through the dark and violent sea. At last, almost dead from cold and weariness, he reached a quiet bay. He crawled onto the land and lay down among the heather on the hillside. He slept there like a dead man. But that land belonged to a cruel giant-like knight named Sir Nabon le Noir, who ruled the island with fear.

Some of Sir Nabon's men found Lamorack and brought him before their lord.

Sir Nabon saw that Lamorack was big and strong, but he did not know who he was. Instead of killing him, he decided to use him as a servant. He ordered that Lamorack should herd his swine. So one of the greatest knights in the world was forced to live like a poor swineherd, rough, dirty, and almost unknown even to himself.

Meanwhile, Sir Launcelot heard the report against Tristram. He wrote to Tristram, asking him to set the matter right, because he could not believe such dishonor of him. When Tristram read the letter, his heart was filled with pain. He could not explain the matter properly by writing. So he decided to go to Camelot himself and speak with Launcelot face to face.

Tristram set out by sea with Gouvernail, but his ship also came by chance to the island of Sir Nabon. There he heard of Lady Loise, whose husband had been killed by Nabon and whose land had been taken from her. Tristram's heart rose against such wrong. He said that if God allowed it, he would punish the evil lord and return the island to its rightful lady.

Tristram rode toward Nabon's castle and met one of Nabon's servants on the road. The man was so frightened by the sight of a strange knight that he tried to run away. Tristram caught him and asked about the castle and its lord. The servant warned him that Sir Nabon was thought to be stronger than any knight alive. Tristram did not turn back. He sent the man to tell Nabon that a knight had come to challenge him.

Sir Nabon came out in black armor, huge and terrible to see. He was angry that any stranger had dared to enter his land. Tristram waited for him calmly in the meadow below the castle. The two knights charged with great force, and then fought fiercely with swords. Nabon was very strong, but his strength was joined with cruelty, while Tristram fought for justice and for the lady whose land had been stolen.

At last, Tristram overcame Sir Nabon and killed him. Then he entered the castle and took control of the island. He called the people together and told them that Nabon's evil rule was ended. He restored the land to Lady Loise and gave judgment as fairly as he could. The people were filled with wonder, because the

lord they had feared for so long had fallen in a single day.

After this, Tristram heard that a rough swineherd in Nabon's service might be a man of noble birth. He ordered that this man be brought to the castle and treated with honor. Servants washed him, cut his hair, shaved him, dressed him in fine clothes, and armed him in bright armor. When the man was brought into the hall, Tristram saw that it was Sir Lamorack. His heart was moved with love and pity.

Lamorack also knew Tristram and understood that all this kindness had come from him. The two knights spoke together privately, and the bitterness between them passed away. Tristram explained how King Mark had forced him into that shameful battle, and Lamorack saw at last that Tristram had not meant to wrong him. They embraced each other as brothers again. Then they left the island with renewed friendship, and the sorrow of Tintagel was healed for a time.

Part 19 — The Madness of Tristram

After Sir Tristram rescued Belle Isoult from Sir Palamydes, he lived quietly at the court of Cornwall through the winter and into the spring. Many people praised him openly, because he had done a brave and noble deed. But King Mark did not praise him in his heart. Mark's hate grew deeper each time he heard people call Tristram the true champion of Cornwall. The king smiled before others, but inside he wanted only to bring Tristram down.

The worst of those who helped King Mark was Sir Andred, Tristram's own cousin. Andred was strong and clever, but his heart was small and false. He hated Tristram because Tristram was better loved, better honored, and greater in arms. So Andred set spies to watch him. He hoped to find some fault that would make King Mark's anger burst into open violence.

For a long time, the spies found nothing. Tristram behaved with care, though his heart was full of sorrow. Then one day, Sir Andred came to him and said that Queen Belle Isoult wished to speak with him in her private room. Tristram believed the message, because he had no reason to think that his cousin would use such a wicked trick. So he went at once to Belle Isoult.

As soon as Tristram had gone, Andred ran to King Mark. He told the king that Tristram and Belle Isoult were alone together. Mark's jealousy became like fire in dry grass. He took a great sword from the wall and hurried through the castle with Andred leading him. When he reached the Queen's room, he threw open the door and saw Tristram and Belle Isoult sitting together by a window.

King Mark rushed at Tristram with the sword raised high. Tristram had no weapon in his hand, and Belle Isoult cried out in terror. But Tristram moved quickly. He seized Mark's wrist, twisted the sword from his hand, and threw him hard to the floor. Then anger and pain overcame him, and he struck the king again and again with the flat of the sword. He did not kill him, but the shame of the beating was very great.

When Tristram understood what he had done, horror came upon him. He had struck his king and his uncle, and he knew that he could no longer stay in Cornwall. Belle Isoult wept and begged him not to leave her, but he could not remain. He told her that if he stayed, Mark would kill him or he would kill Mark, and either end would be terrible. Then he left her and fled from Tintagel into the forest.

Tristram wandered for many days. He had no clear plan, no food, and no rest. His mind was broken by shame, love, grief, and anger. At last, his thoughts became confused, and he no longer knew who he was. He tore off his clothes, wandered like a wild man, and spoke to trees, stones, and empty air as if they could answer him.

One day, he fell down among the leaves, weak from hunger and cold. Some swineherds found him there, and they gave him food and drink. He was gentle with them, and they thought he was only a poor harmless madman. So they let him stay with them in the forest. He ate their rough food, slept near their fire, and followed them among the trees while they watched their swine.

Months passed, and Tristram did not return to Tintagel. Sir Andred then began to desire Tristram's lands and goods. He brought a false woman before King Mark and made her say that she had seen Tristram die in the forest. She even showed a new grave and said that Tristram lay there. Many people believed her, and Andred took Tristram's possessions. When Belle Isoult heard that Tristram was dead, she

fell senseless and afterward mourned as if her own life had ended.

Meanwhile, Tristram still lived among the swineherds. One day, Sir Kay came riding through that part of the forest. He saw the strange madman and spoke roughly to him. Perhaps he thought to frighten him or drive him away, but Tristram suddenly showed the strength hidden inside him. He took Kay's sword from him and threw Kay into a well, so that Kay was almost drowned before he escaped.

From that time, Tristram kept Sir Kay's sword always with him. He loved it like a child loves a bright toy, but there was more than childishness in that love. The sword woke something deep in him. His body remembered what his mind could not remember. When he held it, some part of the old knightly spirit came back to life.

Not far from that forest lived a huge and cruel knight named Sir Tauleas. He was feared by all the people of that region. Many knights had tried to defeat him, but none had succeeded. He was very tall, very strong, and wild in his anger. The swineherds spoke of him in low voices, as people speak of a storm or a dangerous beast.

One warm day, Sir Daynant rode into the forest with his young wife. They came to the place where the swineherds lived and asked for food and water. While they rested there, Tristram came near and smiled at them. Sir Daynant looked closely at him and saw that he was strong and beautiful, though poor and wild. He also saw the fine sword in Tristram's hand and wondered what kind of man this madman truly was.

While they were speaking, Sir Tauleas came suddenly out of the forest. Sir Daynant tried to arm himself, but he had no time. Tauleas struck him so hard that he fell to the ground as if dead. Then the cruel knight seized Sir Daynant's wife, lifted her onto his horse, and rode away with her while she cried for help. Tristram stood still for a moment, confused and frightened by what he had seen.

Then the chief swineherd turned to him and said, "You have a sword. If you are more than a madman, follow that knight and bring the lady back." These words seemed to reach some hidden place in Tristram's mind. He cried out that he would

go, and he ran into the forest after Sir Tauleas. He ran fast and long, holding the sword in his hand. At last he saw Tauleas ahead of him, with the lady lying faint across the saddle.

Tristram shouted for Tauleas to stop. The great knight turned and saw only a half-naked madman running after him. In rage, he put the lady down and rushed at Tristram with his sword. He struck a terrible blow, but Tristram leaped aside with the skill of a trained knight. Then he struck Tauleas on the head with such force that the huge knight fell from his horse.

Sir Tauleas begged for his life, but Tristram did not spare him. He knew, even in his broken mind, that this was a wicked man who had brought fear and pain to many people. He cut off Tauleas's head and then went to the lady. He rubbed her hands and face until she woke from her faint. She looked at him with fear at first, but then she understood that this strange wild man had saved her.

Tristram brought the lady back to Sir Daynant and the swineherds. Sir Daynant was not dead, though he was badly wounded. Everyone looked at Tristram differently after that day. They no longer saw only a poor madman. They felt that some great knight must be hidden inside that sorrowful body, though no one knew his name.

Soon after this, Sir Launcelot came riding through that forest. He heard of the strange madman who had taken Sir Kay's sword and slain Sir Tauleas. Launcelot's heart was moved, and he wished to see him. When he found Tristram, he did not know him at first, because grief and madness had changed his face. Yet something noble in the man drew Launcelot close to him.

Launcelot treated him gently and brought him away from the swineherds. He took him at last to Tintagel, thinking that King Mark would care for the poor madman while he himself continued his quest. King Mark received Launcelot with courtesy and promised that the madman would be fed, clothed, and treated kindly. Neither Mark nor the people of the court knew that the broken man before them was Sir Tristram, whom they believed to be dead.

So Tristram returned to Tintagel without knowing that he had returned home. The halls, gardens, and voices around him seemed familiar, but his mind could

not understand why. He wandered freely through the castle, because everyone thought him harmless. In this strange way, sorrow brought him back near Belle Isoult again, though neither she nor he yet knew what would follow.

Part 20 — The End of Tristram and Isoult

Sir Tristram stayed at Tintagel as the gentle madman of the forest. No one there knew who he was, so he was allowed to walk where he wished. He moved through the halls, the yards, and the garden without being stopped. Sometimes a place seemed almost known to him, and then his heart would stir with a strange feeling. But his memory did not fully wake, and he could not understand why joy and pain came to him in the same places.

Of all the places in Tintagel, he loved the garden best. There were fruit trees there, clear paths, and a marble fountain. Long before, he and Belle Isoult had walked together in that garden, speaking in low voices under the trees. Now he did not remember this clearly, but his heart remembered it in silence. One warm day, he sat beneath an apple tree beside the fountain and looked at the water as if it might show him the lost shape of his life.

While he sat there, Belle Isoult came into the garden with Bragwaine and her dog Houdaine. The dog had once belonged to Tristram and had been sent to Isoult as a gift. Belle Isoult saw the man under the tree and asked who had come into her private garden. Bragwaine answered that he was the poor forest madman whom Sir Launcelot had brought to the castle. Belle Isoult felt pity and wished to see him more closely.

When Tristram heard them coming, he turned and saw Belle Isoult. In that instant, all his memory came back to him. He knew who he was, where he was, and all the sorrow that had brought him there. He also knew the lady before him, and love and shame rose together in his heart. But Belle Isoult did not know him, because grief and wild living had changed his face and body.

Tristram turned his face away and bowed his head. He did not want her to see him in such a poor state. But Houdaine ran to him suddenly, smelling him with

joy. The dog fell at his feet, licked his hands, jumped against him, and cried softly like a creature that had found its master after long loss. Belle Isoult and Bragwaine watched in wonder, and then Bragwaine understood the truth.

Bragwaine took Belle Isoult by the arm and said, “Lady, do you not know him? This is Sir Tristram.” At those words, Belle Isoult seemed for a moment unable to move. Then she gave a great cry and ran to him. She fell at his feet and held his knees, crying that he was alive though she had been told he was dead. Tristram raised her quickly, for he knew the danger. “Do not cry out,” he said. “If they know me here, we are both lost.”

Belle Isoult could hardly control herself, for joy and grief had come upon her together. Tristram turned to Bragwaine and begged her to take the Queen away. He promised that he would find a way to speak with Isoult later in safety. Bragwaine understood and led her lady from the garden, though Belle Isoult walked like a person in a dream. Tristram remained under the apple tree, shaken by what had happened.

But they had not been alone. Sir Andred had been standing in a balcony that looked down into the garden. He had seen the dog recognize Tristram, and he had seen Belle Isoult’s cry of joy. At once he knew that the madman was Sir Tristram. Fear and hatred seized him, because he had taken Tristram’s lands and goods. If Tristram lived openly again, Andred would lose everything he had stolen.

Sir Andred went quickly to King Mark. Mark saw his face and asked what news he brought. Andred said, “Do you know who the madman is? He is Sir Tristram.” At that name, Mark trembled with fear and rage. Then he laughed in a cruel way and said that Tristram had been delivered into his hands. He ordered Andred to gather armed men, seize Tristram, bind him, and have him put to death as soon as possible.

Andred armed himself and brought knights and servants to the garden. They found Tristram still sitting there, deep in thought. When Tristram saw them coming, he rose quickly, but he had no armor and no weapon. Andred shouted for them to seize him before he could strike. Many men rushed upon him at once, threw him to the ground, and bound his hands together with strong cords.

They lifted him to his feet, breathing hard and wild with anger. His clothes were torn, his body was half bare, and his eyes burned like fire. Two armed knights stood beside him with naked swords, one on his right and one on his left. Then Andred came close and mocked him. He said that Tristram would not die as a knight, but would be hanged like a thief.

Then Andred struck Tristram across the face with his open hand. That shameful blow broke the last bond of Tristram's patience. Though his hands were tied, he turned suddenly and struck the knight on his left with both bound fists. The knight fell, and his sword dropped from his hand. Tristram caught the sword, turned on the knight at his right, and struck him down too.

Then Tristram turned upon Andred. He lifted the sword with both hands still tied and struck him a terrible blow. Andred fell dead at his feet. The others stood frozen with fear for a moment, unable to believe what they had seen. Then Tristram rushed at them with the bloody sword, and they broke and fled before him like frightened sheep.

Tristram chased them into the courtyard. Some fell beneath his blows, and the rest escaped in terror. Then he stood alone, breathing hard, like a hunted lion. He set the point of the sword on the stones, pressed the handle against his chest, and drew the cords across the edge until they broke. Now his hands were free, but he knew that the whole castle would soon rise against him.

He looked around and saw the chapel door standing open. He ran inside, shut the doors, and barred them. For a little while, he was safe. But when evening came, many of King Mark's men gathered outside the chapel. They brought heavy beams and began to batter the door. Tristram heard the wood breaking and knew that he would soon be taken by force.

Then he ran to a high window and opened it. Far below lay the sea and the rocks under the castle wall. The fall was terrible, but death in the water seemed better than death at the hands of Mark's men. So Tristram climbed onto the window ledge and leaped down into the dark sea. No one saw him fall, and for a moment the water closed over him.

Tristram rose again safely, because he had missed the rocks. He swam toward

a cave in the cliff and hid there in the darkness. When the men broke into the chapel, they found no one. At last they saw the open window and understood that he had leaped into the sea. They thought he must be dead or soon would be, so they left the place until morning.

Gouvernail returned to Tintagel after these things had happened. He heard many people speaking of Tristram's leap, but he said nothing. Instead, he found Sir Santraille, one of Tristram's faithful friends. Together they made a long rope from sheets and cloths, then lowered it from the chapel window to the rocks below. Tristram climbed up from the dark place by that rope and stood again among his friends near midnight.

Tristram's first words were not about his own danger. He asked, "How is Belle Isoult?" Sir Santraille told him that she had been shut in a tower and kept as a close prisoner. Tristram then asked how many knights would stand with him. Gouvernail said that twelve good knights, besides themselves, were ready to follow him in life or death. Tristram ordered armor, horses, and weapons to be prepared at once.

When all was ready, Tristram and his friends went openly to the tower where Belle Isoult was held. They broke open the doors and climbed the stairs with torches in their hands. Belle Isoult and Bragwaine were in the upper room. When Belle Isoult saw Tristram alive, her face shone with love and wonder. Tristram told her that he had come to take her from that evil castle and would never again leave her in King Mark's power.

Belle Isoult said that she would go with him anywhere, even into death itself, if he were beside her. Tristram was filled with sorrow when he heard this, because he felt that his love had brought suffering upon her. But she told him that his love had not brought unhappiness, because even sorrow was bearable while they loved each other. Then Tristram carried her down the stairs, set her on her horse, and rode out with her, Bragwaine, Gouvernail, and his knights. No one in the castle dared to stop them.

Tristram took Belle Isoult to one of his own castles in the forest. Two days later, Sir Launcelot returned to Tintagel and asked King Mark about the forest

madman he had left there. When he learned that the man had been Tristram, and that Mark and Andred had treated him so shamefully, Launcelot was filled with anger. He rebuked Mark before his court and said that Mark had always repaid Tristram's faithful service with jealousy and wrong. Then Launcelot left Tintagel and went to find Tristram.

Launcelot came to Tristram's forest castle and was received with great joy. After two days, he advised Tristram and Belle Isoult to leave that dangerous place. He told them to come to Joyous Gard, where Belle Isoult could live in peace and honor. Tristram and Isoult accepted his counsel. Soon they traveled to Joyous Gard, and there Belle Isoult lived for three years as a queen among loyal friends.

Those three years were the happiest years of Belle Isoult's life. Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram served her with honor, and many good knights gathered there. There were games, feasts, and famous deeds of arms, but no one forced sorrow upon her. Then King Arthur came to Joyous Gard and was received with great gladness. During his visit, he asked Belle Isoult whether it was better to live in honor with sadness or in dishonor with joy.

Belle Isoult was deeply troubled by that question. She did not answer Arthur, but she thought about his words for three days. Then she came to Tristram and said that she must return to Cornwall. Tristram turned his face away, because he had feared that this day would come. Peace was made between Tristram and King Mark, and between Belle Isoult and King Mark, with Arthur as peacemaker. So Tristram and Belle Isoult returned to Cornwall.

For a time, they lived there in seeming peace. But Belle Isoult would not speak with King Mark or share his life. She lived apart in her own rooms, and this filled Mark with bitter pain. He saw her near him, yet she was farther from him than ever. His old hatred of Tristram grew again, and he set spies to watch both of them day and night.

One day, Belle Isoult longed so strongly to see Tristram that she sent him a note asking him to come. Tristram feared danger, but he went because she had asked him. The spies quickly carried the news to King Mark. Mark went secretly to her rooms and looked through the curtains. He saw Tristram and Belle Isoult

sitting at a chessboard, not playing, but speaking together sadly. Bragwaine sat near them, so that they were not alone.

King Mark's jealousy became madness. He went back into the passage, took a long weapon from the wall, and returned silently. Tristram's back was turned to him. Mark entered softly, lifted the weapon, and struck. Tristram fell without a sound, and it seemed that he knew nothing of the blow until his soul had already passed from the world.

Belle Isoult rose, and the chessmen fell from the board. She did not cry out. She only looked down at Tristram, then knelt beside him and touched his face. When she knew that he was dead, she fell across his body. Bragwaine screamed so loudly that the whole castle heard her, and Tristram's knights rushed into the room.

A young knight named Sir Alexander looked at King Mark and asked if this was his work. Mark answered that it was. Then Sir Alexander cried that Mark had lived too long. He drew his dagger and struck the king, and King Mark fell and died there. When the knights lifted Belle Isoult from Tristram's body, they found that she too was dead.

So ended the story of Sir Tristram and Belle Isoult. They were buried close together, and many people said that a rose tree grew from Tristram's grave and reached down to Isoult's grave. On Tristram's side, the roses were red, and on Isoult's side, they were white. Thus their love was remembered after death, with sorrow, beauty, and wonder.

Part 21 — Percival Enters the World

Sir Percival was the youngest son of King Pellinore. When Percival was still a small child, his father had to live in the forest because of the wars around Arthur's kingdom. Later, King Pellinore made peace with Arthur, but trouble still followed his house. Pellinore and two of his sons were killed by treachery, and only Lamorack and Percival remained. Percival's mother heard this sad news in her lonely tower among the mountains, and fear entered her heart.

She had hidden Percival there for many years, far from knights, courts, and battles. He grew tall, strong, and beautiful, but he knew almost nothing of the world. He had never seen a city, a court, or a knight in armor. His mother allowed him to use only a small hunting spear, but he learned to throw it with wonderful skill. He could strike a bird in the air, though he had never held a sword.

One spring morning, Percival stood on a high rock and looked down into a valley. There he saw a knight riding below him, and the sun flashed on the knight's armor. Percival did not know what he saw. He ran to his mother and cried, "Mother, I have seen a wonderful thing. It looked like a man on a horse, but it shone like light." His mother was frightened and said that perhaps he had seen an angel.

The next day, Percival and his mother went down into the forest to gather early flowers. While they were there, five knights rode among the trees. Percival saw them through the young leaves and cried that more angels had come. He ran to meet them before his mother could stop him. The first knight was Sir Ewaine, who spoke kindly to him and told him that they were not angels, but knights.

Percival asked many questions. He asked what a saddle was, what a sword was, what a shield was, and what many other things were. Sir Ewaine answered him patiently, because he liked the young man's open face and simple heart. Then Percival told the knights that he had seen another knight ride west the day before. The knights thanked him and rode away, but Percival's heart had changed forever.

When Percival returned to his mother, she knew that she could not keep him in the mountains any longer. He told her that he wished to become a knight. She wept, but she remembered what King Pellinore had commanded long ago. So she brought him an old pack horse, gave him bread and cheese for the road, and placed King Pellinore's ruby ring on his finger. She told him to go to Arthur's court and seek Sir Lamorack of Gales, who was his brother.

Before he left, his mother gave him simple rules for life. She told him to pray when he saw a church or holy place. She told him to help anyone in trouble, especially women and children. She told him to speak courteously, to be brave, to take only what he needed, and to give freely when he could. Percival promised to remember everything, then rode away, telling her that he would return when he

had won honor.

After he had ridden for a long time, Percival came to a stream where many willow trees grew. He remembered the shining armor of the knights and wished to look like them. So he cut willow branches and wove them into a rough kind of armor. Then he put this strange armor over his clothes and felt very proud. He thought that now he was dressed almost as well as any knight he had seen.

Soon he came to a village. The people saw his old horse, his rough saddle, his willow armor, and the small spear in his hand. They began to laugh and call out to one another. Percival did not understand that they were mocking him. He laughed back at them with joy and thought, "The world is a very merry place." So he rode onward happily.

Near evening, he came to a beautiful yellow pavilion among the trees. He thought it must be a church, because his mother had told him to pray at holy places. He got down from his horse, knelt before the pavilion, and said a prayer. Then he went inside and found a young lady sitting there, sewing with gold and silver thread. She was Lady Yvette, daughter of King Pecheur, though Percival did not know this.

Lady Yvette looked at him in amazement. His willow armor made him seem foolish, but his face was noble and gentle. Percival asked if the pavilion was a church, and at first she thought he was mocking her. Then she saw that he truly did not know. He said he was hungry, and because his mother had told him to eat when he found food, he sat at the table and ate from the dishes prepared there.

Yvette laughed, but not unkindly. Percival then saw a beautiful ring on her finger and asked for it. He said that she was the most beautiful lady he had ever seen and that he loved her. Yvette was moved by his simple words and gave him the ring. In return, Percival gave her the ruby ring from his own finger and asked her to wear it until he had won honor as a knight.

Then Percival asked if he might greet her as his mother had told him to greet ladies. Yvette gave him leave, and Percival kissed her, because he knew no other way. Her face turned red, and he left the pavilion, very happy. He did not understand how large the world was or how hard it might be to find her again. He

only knew that he had chosen a lady to serve.

That night, he slept among poor woodcutters in the forest. They thought he was a harmless foolish young man, but they treated him kindly. The next day, he rode on through the green spring woods, full of wonder at birds, streams, trees, and light. Everything seemed new to him. He felt so happy that he could hardly keep from crying.

At that same time, King Arthur and some of his court were hunting with hawks in the forest. Queen Guinevere had grown tired, so a rose-colored pavilion had been set up for her in a glade. Percival came there and asked a page whose pavilion it was. The page laughed at his strange appearance and said that it belonged to Queen Guinevere. Percival was glad, because he hoped Arthur's court might lead him to Sir Lamorack.

Percival tried to enter the Queen's pavilion, but the page stopped him. Percival struck the page so hard that he fell to the ground. Then Percival went inside. He saw Guinevere sitting with her ladies, while Sir Kay stood nearby. Percival asked which lady was the Queen and said that he wanted King Arthur to make him a knight.

Sir Kay was angry and called him a fool. Percival answered that Kay should not judge him by his poor clothing. Before the quarrel could go farther, a fierce knight named Sir Boinegardus entered the pavilion. He was feared in that part of the land, because he robbed travelers and lived like a wild man in the forest. He asked for Arthur, but Arthur was not there.

Since Arthur was absent, Boinegardus chose to insult the Queen instead. He struck the arm of the page who held Guinevere's wine, and the wine spilled over her face and clothes. The Queen cried out in fear and shame. Sir Kay spoke against Boinegardus, but he would not fight him because he had no armor. Boinegardus laughed, took the golden cup, and rode away.

Percival was angry when he saw Guinevere weeping. He told Sir Kay that a true man should defend a lady whether he had armor or not. Then he asked the Queen's permission to take her quarrel himself. Guinevere gave it, because Sir Kay would not act. At that moment, a maiden named Yelande, who had long been

silent at court, spoke kindly to Percival and said he would one day be a great knight.

Sir Kay was ashamed and angry that Yelande had spoken for this strange young man. He struck her across the face. Percival came close to him and warned him that one day he would repay that blow. Then he went out, mounted his poor horse, and followed Sir Boinegardus. When he found him in a meadow, Boinegardus mocked him and struck him down with a spear.

Percival rose in fierce anger. He seized the spear, pulled it from Boinegardus's hands, and broke it across his knee. Then Boinegardus drew his sword to kill him. Percival stepped back, took his small spear, and threw it with perfect aim. The spear struck through the opening of Boinegardus's helmet, and the savage knight fell dead.

Soon after this, Arthur returned to the Queen's pavilion and heard what had happened. He was angry with Sir Kay and worried for Percival, because the young man had gone after a terrible knight without armor or training. Arthur sent Sir Launcelot and Sir Lamorack after him. They found Percival in the meadow, trying to pull the armor from the dead knight. He did not know how armor was fastened and was dragging the body about in great confusion.

Launcelot laughed kindly and showed him how to remove the armor. Percival told them how he had killed Boinegardus, and both knights were amazed. Then Launcelot told him his name, and Lamorack also gave his name. Percival's heart leaped when he heard Lamorack's name, for he knew this was his brother. But he did not yet reveal himself, because he feared Lamorack might be ashamed of such an untrained young man.

Launcelot and Lamorack armed Percival in Boinegardus's armor and brought him back to Arthur. Arthur praised him greatly and asked what gift he wanted. Percival knelt and asked to be made a knight. Arthur promised to do this the next morning. That night, Percival watched beside his armor in a forest chapel, and in the morning Arthur made him a knight with his own hands.

After this, Percival asked leave to ride out and win honor. Before he left, he warned Sir Kay again that he had not forgotten the blow given to Yelande. Sir

Lamorack felt a strange love for Percival and asked to ride with him. Arthur gave permission, and the two rode away together. As they traveled, Lamorack taught Percival many things about knighthood, not knowing that he was teaching his own brother.

They came to a town called Cardennan and were welcomed in its castle. Percival was full of wonder at the streets, the shops, the people, and the bright colors. He thought the city was vast, but Lamorack told him it was small compared with Camelot. That night they were given soft beds and good food. While Lamorack slept, Percival decided to leave quietly and seek honor alone.

Before dawn, Percival rose, armed himself, and looked once more at his sleeping brother. He loved Lamorack deeply, but he wished first to become worthy of him. Then he rode away alone. Later that morning, he came to a small chapel where a hermit was ringing a bell. Nearby stood a white knight in shining armor, and that knight courteously asked him to joust before breakfast.

Percival accepted gladly, though he said he had been made a knight only the day before. They rode against each other, and Percival broke his spear well. But the white knight's spear held, and Percival was thrown hard to the ground. The white knight came to him, raised his helmet, and showed that he was Sir Launcelot. Then Launcelot said that Percival had great courage, but still needed training.

Launcelot took Percival to Joyous Gard and taught him for a full year. He taught him how to use sword, spear, shield, and horse. He also taught him how a knight should speak, serve, and carry himself in court. When that year ended, Percival was no longer the wild young man in willow armor. He had become one of the strongest and most courteous knights in the world.

Part 22 — Percival Learns Sorrow and Love

After Sir Percival had lived for a year at Joyous Gard, Sir Launcelot sent him out again into the world. He was no longer the simple youth who had worn willow armor and ridden an old pack horse. He now knew how to use sword, spear, shield, and horse with great skill. He also knew how a knight should speak and act before

ladies, kings, poor people, and enemies. Yet his heart was still very pure, and he still looked at the world with wonder.

For several days, Percival rode through open country and deep woods, seeking adventure but finding none. Then he came to a forest so silent and strange that it seemed to belong to another world. No birds sang there, and no wind moved the leaves. The light was green and soft under the trees. Percival thought that some magic must surely live in that place, but he was not afraid, because he had learned to trust God and keep his courage.

After a while, he heard voices speaking together among the trees. He rode toward the sound and saw a knight and a lady waiting for him in the path. Both were dressed in green, and both wore bright collars of gold and green stones. Their faces were pale and beautiful, and their eyes shone strangely. Percival knew at once that they were not common people.

The knight was Sir Pellias, and the lady was Nymue, the Lady of the Lake. Percival dismounted quickly and bowed before them with great respect. Nymue smiled kindly and told him to rise. She asked why he had come into the Forest of Adventure. Percival answered that he was seeking some worthy deed to do, and that he would gladly serve her if she knew of one.

Nymue told him to ride farther along that path until he saw a bird whose feathers shone like gold. He must follow that bird, and it would lead him to a knight who needed help. Then she took a small golden charm from her neck and hung it around Percival's neck. She told him that it would protect him from evil magic. Percival thanked her deeply, and then the knight and the lady went away among the trees.

Percival rode forward as she had commanded. Soon he saw the golden bird sitting in the path before him. When he came near, it flew a little farther and waited again. In this way, it led him through the silent forest for a long time. At last, the trees grew thin, and Percival came out into a wide, empty plain.

In the middle of that plain stood a strange castle. Some parts of its walls were red, and other parts were deep blue, and many lines of gold shone upon them. The castle looked bright and beautiful, but it also seemed cold and dangerous. Percival

sat still on his horse for a moment and looked at it. Then the golden bird flew back into the forest, and Percival knew that he must go on alone.

A stone bridge led toward the gate of the castle. On that bridge, Percival saw a knight chained to a pillar. The knight's head hung low, and his body was bent with pain. His armor was gone, and the chains had cut cruelly into his flesh. Percival rode near and cried, "Sir, who has done this to you?"

The chained knight could hardly speak. He asked first for water, because his mouth was dry and his strength was almost gone. Percival leaped down, found water nearby, and gave it to him. Then he took his sword and struck the chains with one strong blow. The chains broke, but the force of the stroke shook the poor knight so hard that he fell to the ground.

Percival lifted him gently and helped him drink again. After a little while, the knight was able to speak. He said that a beautiful lady in red had ruled the castle. She had welcomed him with kind words, rich food, music, and wine. But when his mind grew weak, she had used magic against him. She had taken away his armor and had chained him to the pillar, where he had suffered for many days.

When Percival heard this, he was filled with anger. He understood that the lady must be Vivien, the same enchantress who had once brought sorrow upon Merlin. He left the knight in a safe place and went toward the castle gate. Inside, he found rich rooms, shining cloths, and many strange signs of magic. Then Vivien herself appeared before him, dressed in red and gold, with a smile that was fair to see but false at the heart.

Vivien tried to speak sweetly to Percival. She welcomed him as if he were an honored guest and asked him to rest in her castle. But the golden charm from Nymue lay warm upon his breast, and her magic could not enter his heart. Percival told her that he had come not to feast, but to end her cruelty. He ordered her to free all those whom she had harmed and to go to Arthur's court to answer for her deeds.

Vivien's smile changed, and her eyes grew hard. Still, she saw that Percival was too pure and too strong for her magic. She promised to do as he commanded, but her promise was false. When Percival turned for a moment, she struck her

hands together and vanished from sight. At the same time, the bright castle began to fade like mist under morning light.

Percival hurried back to the bridge, and the wounded knight cried out in wonder. The red and blue walls, the golden towers, the shining gate, and the strange windows all disappeared. Soon only empty ground remained where the castle had stood. The knight then told Percival that his name was Sir Percydes. He thanked Percival with tears, because he had been saved from death and shame.

Sir Percydes was weak, so Percival helped him to his horse and rode with him slowly to his own castle. There Percydes was received with great joy, for his people had feared that he was lost forever. They cared for his wounds and gave Percival a noble welcome. That night, while they sat together after supper, Percydes looked closely at the ring on Percival's hand. He knew it at once as the ring of Lady Yvette, the young lady whom Percival had met long before in the yellow pavilion.

Percival was glad and troubled when he heard her name. He asked Sir Percydes if he knew where she was. Percydes said that he knew her well and that she was a very noble lady. Percival then said that he would seek her one day, but not yet. He was still young, and he wished first to win enough honor to stand before her without shame.

Sir Percydes liked this answer and thought Percival very noble. Then he told him of a great adventure not far away. A strong knight named Sir Clamadius, also called the King of the Isles, had long loved Lady Blanchefleur of Beaurepaire. She did not love him, so he had surrounded her castle with many knights. No one could enter or leave, and the people inside were near hunger.

Percival listened with deep attention. Sir Percydes said that if Percival could free Blanchefleur and her people, he would win great honor in every court. Percival answered that this was exactly the kind of adventure a young knight should try. If he failed, there would be no shame, because Clamadius was very strong. If he won, then he would have done a good deed for a lady in danger.

The next morning, Percival rose early and left Sir Percydes. He rode toward Beaurepaire under a clear sky, thinking of the lady held in fear inside her castle.

Near midday, he stopped at a poor house in a green valley and ate a simple meal. While he was there, another knight came riding along the same road. This knight also wished to go to Beaurepaire and win the adventure for himself.

The two knights spoke courteously at first, but both were young and proud in arms. Each wished to take the quest, and neither wished to give way. At last they agreed to joust, and the winner would continue toward Beaurepaire. They rode apart, turned, and charged. Percival struck the other knight so hard that he flew from the saddle and fell heavily to the ground.

Percival dismounted quickly and went to him. When the fallen knight came back to himself, he gave his name as Sir Lionel. Percival was deeply sorry, because he knew that Lionel was close in blood and love to Sir Launcelot. He helped him up, spoke to him with honor, and asked him to go to Arthur's court. There Lionel was to tell Lady Yelande that the young knight who killed Boidegardus still remembered her, and that Sir Kay would one day answer for the blow he had given her.

After this, Percival rode on toward Beaurepaire. In the afternoon, he came to a high place and saw the castle far below. It stood on an island in a lake, with a town around it and a long bridge joining it to the land. The place was beautiful, but the fields around it were full of enemy tents and armed men. Percival knew that Sir Clamadius held the castle tightly, as a hand closes around a bird.

As Percival rode down into the valley, a red knight came before him. The knight's armor, shield, spear, and horse trappings were all red, and he looked proud and fierce. He asked Percival where he was going. Percival answered that he was going to Beaurepaire to help Lady Blanchefleur. The red knight said that he was Sir Engeneron, seneschal to King Clamadius, and that no one would pass that way unless he first rode over him.

Percival answered that he had no private quarrel with him. But if Sir Engeneron would not let him pass, then they must fight. They rode apart and made ready. Then they charged with great speed, and the sound of their meeting was like thunder. Sir Engeneron's spear broke into pieces, but Percival's spear held firm, and Sir Engeneron was thrown over the back of his horse and down upon

the ground.

Percival leaped down and took off Sir Engeneron's helmet. Sir Engeneron woke and begged for his life. Percival spared him, but only on two conditions. First, Engeneron must go to Arthur's court and yield himself to Lady Yelande, with the same message for Sir Kay. Second, he must give Percival his armor, so that Percival could pass through the enemy lines without being known.

Sir Engeneron agreed, because he wished to live. So the two knights changed armor. Engeneron took Percival's armor and rode away toward the hermit's chapel, where he was to leave it safely. Percival put on the red armor and rode toward the bridge of Beaurepaire. The men of Clamadius saw him and thought he was their own seneschal returning with news, so none of them stopped him.

Percival crossed the long bridge and came to the gate. He called loudly to those inside and asked them to open. A pale woman looked down from an upper window and refused, because she thought he was Sir Engeneron. Percival lifted his helmet and showed his face. He told her that he had defeated Engeneron and had come as a friend. Then she ran inside, and soon the drawbridge was lowered and the gate opened.

The people of Beaurepaire came around him, thin and pale from hunger. They asked who he was and how he had come there. Percival told them that he had been trained by Sir Launcelot and had come to serve Lady Blanchefleur. When they heard this, hope returned to their faces. They took his horse, removed his armor, gave him a bath, and dressed him in soft gray clothes.

Then they led him into a large room where a poor supper had been prepared. Soon the door opened, and Lady Blanchefleur entered with several attendants. Percival knew at once that this must be the lady he had come to help. She was very beautiful, but sorrow had made her face pale. Her black dress was worked with small golden stars, and she moved with quiet grace.

Blanchefleur came to Percival and gave him her hand. She thanked him for coming to a place where all others had been afraid to come. Then her courage failed for a moment, and tears came into her eyes. She told him that food was almost gone and that Sir Clamadius would soon take the castle if help did not

come. She also said that she had a small dagger hidden in a silver box and would die before she gave herself to Clamadius.

Percival was deeply moved by her grief. He told her that while he lived, he would not willingly let such sorrow come upon her. Blanchefleur tried to smile and led him to supper. There was little food, only some fish, a little bread, and a little wine, but Percival ate it with thanks. Afterward, Blanchefleur played the harp and sang, and her song filled the poor hall with strange sweetness.

That night, Percival slept in the castle. Outside the walls, the men of Clamadius heard that Sir Engeneron had been defeated and that a red knight had entered Beurepaire. Clamadius was very angry, but one of his older counselors advised trickery. He said that ten knights should challenge the castle and then pretend to flee. If the defenders followed too far, the army outside could close around them.

The next morning, ten knights rode near the gate and called for battle. Percival went out with nine knights of Beurepaire. The enemy knights turned and fled as if afraid. But Percival did not lose his judgment. He followed only far enough to strike them down, and before the trap could close, he led his company safely back to the castle.

Six of the enemy knights were overthrown, and four were taken prisoner. When the people of Beurepaire saw Percival return, they cried out with joy from the walls. Blanchefleur looked down at him with hope in her eyes. For the first time in many days, the people believed that they might live. That evening, they gave thanks, though their food was still poor and their danger was not yet ended.

The next day, Sir Clamadius himself rode before the castle. He called for the red knight to come out and fight him man to man. Percival armed himself and went first to Blanchefleur. He asked if she would accept him as her champion. She answered that she feared for him because he was young, but that her heart trusted him. Then Percival rode out through the gate.

Sir Clamadius was a powerful knight, and the battle was hard. They struck each other first with spears and then with swords. Sparks flew from their helmets and shields, and the men on both sides watched in silence. Percival was young, but his year with Launcelot had taught him well. At last, he struck Clamadius so

strongly that the proud king fell to the ground.

Percival stood over him with sword raised. Sir Clamadius, who had brought fear and hunger to Beurepaire, now begged for mercy. Percival spared him, but gave him the same command he had given the others. He must disarm himself, go to Arthur's court, and place himself in service to Lady Yelande. He must also tell Sir Kay that Percival would come in time to repay the blow given to the maiden.

Sir Clamadius accepted these terms. That same day, he withdrew his army from around Beurepaire. The roads were opened, the bridge was free, and food could come again to the hungry people. Blanchefleur and all her household gave thanks to Percival with deep joy. Thus Sir Percival completed the adventure of Beurepaire and set the lady and her people free from fear.

Part 23 — Percival's Vow and Future

After Sir Percival had freed Beurepaire, he stayed there for a little while. The people loved him greatly, because he had saved them from hunger and fear. Lady Blanchefleur also honored him with deep kindness, and there was peace again in the castle. Yet Percival did not forget the promises that lay behind him. He remembered Lady Yvette, whose ring he still wore, and he remembered Sir Kay, who had once struck the maiden Yelande.

One morning, Percival took leave of Blanchefleur and her people. Blanchefleur thanked him again, and the people of Beurepaire came to the gate to watch him go. Percival rode out slowly across the bridge, while the lake shone in the early light. He was glad that he had done a good deed there, but his heart had already turned toward another duty. He had won honor now, and he believed he could at last seek the lady of the yellow pavilion.

After several days of travel, Percival came into a quiet forest. He rode slowly, thinking of Yvette and of the strange beginning of his life as a knight. He remembered how foolish he had been when he first entered her pavilion. He remembered how she had given him her ring and how he had given her his own. Now he hoped to come before her not as a wild boy, but as a true knight.

As he rode with these thoughts in his mind, he saw a knight resting under a tree. The knight's helmet was off, and his shield lay beside him. Percival did not at first look carefully at the man's face, because his mind was still far away with Yvette. The knight spoke to him in a sharp voice and asked why he stared ahead like a dreamer instead of greeting a fellow knight. Percival was startled out of his thoughts and answered too quickly.

The knight spoke again in a mocking way, and Percival's old anger rose suddenly. He struck the knight with his fist, not with a sword, and the blow was so hard that the knight fell senseless to the ground. Only after the man had fallen did Percival look closely and know him. It was Sir Kay. Then Percival understood that the promise he had made long ago had at last been fulfilled.

Sir Gawaine and Sir Geraint came riding near that place and saw what had happened. They asked Percival why he had struck the knight so violently. Percival said that he was sorry he had been so hasty, but that this knight had disturbed him while he was thinking of his lady. Then he added that he could not be fully sorry for the blow itself. He had long promised to repay Sir Kay for the cruel blow that Kay had once given to Yelande, the silent maiden.

When Sir Gawaine and Sir Geraint learned that this knight was Sir Percival, they were filled with joy. They told him that they had been searching for him, because his fame had spread through many courts. They said that Arthur wished him to come to Camelot and take his proper place among the knights. Percival was glad to hear this, but he asked them to excuse him for a time. He said that he had first to keep his promise to the lady whose ring he wore.

Sir Gawaine agreed that Percival was right. He said that even a king's command should not come before a true promise of love and honor. Sir Kay was now waking on the ground, very confused and sore from the blow. Sir Gawaine looked at him and could not help laughing a little. He said that Sir Kay had received exactly the payment that had long been waiting for him. Then Percival took leave of them and rode away to seek Lady Yvette.

Toward evening, Percival came again to the castle of Sir Percydes. Sir Percydes welcomed him with great gladness, because Percival's fame had now

reached far across the land. They sat together at supper and spoke of many things, but at first Percival said nothing of what lay closest to his heart. He was not a man who rushed into speech. Only after they had eaten and drunk did he ask Sir Percydes to keep the promise he had once made.

Percival showed him the ring and said, "Friend, you once told me that when I was ready, you would tell me who this lady is and where I may find her. I think I am more worthy now than I was when I first came into the world. Please tell me her name and where she lives." Sir Percydes looked at him with affection and answered that the lady was his own sister, Yvette, daughter of King Pecheur. She lived in their father's castle by the western sea.

When Percival heard this, joy filled him. He embraced Sir Percydes and said that it made him happy to learn that Yvette was his friend's sister. Then Sir Percydes asked Percival more about his own house. Percival told him that his father was King Pellinore and that Sir Lamorack was his brother. Sir Percydes cried out in surprise, because their mothers were sisters. So the two young knights learned that they were cousins, and this gave both of them great joy.

Percival stayed with Sir Percydes for two days. Then he rode west toward King Pecheur's castle. The road was long, and for three days he asked his way through villages, fields, and forest paths. On the morning of the fourth day, he saw the castle at last. It stood near the sea, where gray waves moved under a cold sky. Percival's heart beat quickly, because he thought that after all his labor he would soon see Yvette again.

King Pecheur received Percival with honor. Percival told him who he was and why he had come. He said that he had carried Yvette's ring faithfully and had won such honor as he could. Now he wished to return her ring and receive his own from her hand. King Pecheur listened, and tears came into his eyes. He said that Percival's fame had already reached that far place. Then he rose and said, "Come with me. I will take you to my daughter."

The king led Percival to a tower. They climbed a long winding stair and came to a quiet room at the top. The windows stood open, and a cold wind came in from the sea. In the middle of the room stood a couch covered in black cloth. On that

couch lay Lady Yvette, dressed in white and very still. Candles burned near her head and feet, and their small flames moved in the wind.

Percival stood at the door as if his body had become stone. He could not speak, and for a time he could not move. Then he went slowly to the couch and looked down at her. Her face was pale and peaceful, and her dark hair moved softly in the cold air. The lady he had carried in his heart through all his adventures was dead.

Percival did not cry. His sorrow was too deep for tears. He spoke to her as if she could still hear him. He told her that he had come at last after all his work and danger. He said that she would remain his lady until the end of his life and that he would serve no other. Then he took his own ring from her cold hand and placed her ring back upon her finger.

King Pecheur asked him gently, "Have you no tears?" Percival answered, "No. I have none." Then he left the room, and the king went with him. For three days, Percival remained in that castle. King Pecheur, the queen, and their sons pitied him and wept for him. But Percival spoke little and still did not weep. His grief had gone too far inside him.

On the third day, which was Christmas Day, Percival sat alone in the hall. He was thinking of Yvette, of his mother, of Launcelot, of Arthur, and of all the long road that had brought him there. Then a wonderful thing happened. Two shining youths entered the hall. One carried a great spear, and drops of blood fell from its point. The other carried a golden cup wrapped in fine white cloth.

Percival was afraid at first, because the sight was too holy and strange for common eyes. Then the youth who carried the cup spoke to him. He told Percival not to fear. He said that the cup was the Holy Grail and that the spear was the Spear of Sorrow. He told Percival that his own sorrow must not make him bitter. Instead, it should make his life more holy and more gentle.

Percival asked whether these things were real or only a dream born from grief. The two youths answered that they were real. Then a great peace came into Percival's heart. It did not take away his sorrow, but it changed the sorrow into something quiet and strong. After the youths went away, Percival knelt and prayed

for a long time. This was the first time that one of Arthur's knights saw the Grail, which Percival would later help to seek and achieve.

When Percival came out from the hall, everyone saw that something had changed in him. His face was calm, and his eyes had a peace that had not been there before. He did not tell them what he had seen. He only told King Pecheur and his family that the time had come for him to go to Arthur's court. He must obey the king, and he must also make himself known fully to his brother Sir Lamorack.

So Sir Percival left the castle by the western sea. He carried no hope of earthly love with him now, but he carried a higher peace. His first young dream had ended beside Yvette's deathbed, yet another road had opened before him. That road would one day lead him to the Grail, with Sir Bors and Sir Galahad. For now, he turned his horse toward Camelot, where Arthur's court and his future were waiting.

Book III — The Story of Sir Launcelot and His Companions

Part 24 — The Chevalier of the Cart

One May morning, Queen Guinevere wished to go into the fields with her court. She chose ten knights of the Round Table to ride with her, and each knight took a lady behind him on his horse. All of them wore green, because it was the season of flowers and new leaves. They rode out from Camelot while the birds were singing and the grass was wet with dew. Everyone was happy, and no one thought that danger was near.

They spent the morning among flowers and trees. At noon, they sat in a meadow near the river, where they could see the towers of Camelot far away. Servants spread a white cloth on the grass and set out food and wine. The ladies made flower crowns for the knights, and the minstrels sang. It seemed more like a child's holiday than the journey of a queen.

Suddenly, a horn sounded from the forest. The Queen and her court looked toward the trees and saw an armed knight ride into the meadow. Behind him came many armed men, far more than the Queen's party could fight easily. The knight was Sir Mellegrans, son of King Bagdemagus. His father was a good king, but Mellegrans was not like him. He hated Arthur because Arthur had once judged against him in a matter of land.

When Mellegrans understood that the Queen was there with only lightly dressed knights, his heart filled with evil joy. He told her that heaven had placed her in his hands. He said he would take her and her court to his castle and hold them there until Arthur returned the land that he wanted. Guinevere answered bravely that he was acting like a traitor. But Mellegrans did not care, because he had come with armed men and believed he could do as he wished.

The ten knights of the Queen had no armor, but they drew their swords at once. Sir Kay, Sir Agravaine, Sir Brandiles, Sir Sagramore, Sir Dodinas, Sir Osanna, Sir Ladynas, Sir Persavant, Sir Ironside, and Sir Percydes stood around the Queen and her ladies. They were badly outnumbered, but they fought like men who

would rather die than see shame come to their lady. Many of Mellegrans's men fell before them, though the knights of the Queen had little protection from the enemy's blows.

The fight went on until the green clothes of the May party were red with blood. One by one, the Queen's knights fell wounded to the ground. At last only three still stood: Sir Brandiles, Sir Ironside, and Sir Percydes. They stood back to back, weak from blood loss, but still ready to fight. When Guinevere saw their terrible wounds, pity overcame her, and she cried out that she would go with Mellegrans if he would spare their lives.

Mellegrans was glad to end the fight, because his own men had suffered greatly. The wounded knights were lifted onto their horses, and the sad company was taken away through the forest. They rode all day and into the night. Near midnight, they came out of the trees into a stony place and saw Mellegrans's castle standing dark on a hill. Behind it were the lights of a small town, and a bell was sounding in the night.

During that sorrowful ride, Guinevere had spoken quietly to a young page named Denneys. She told him that if he found a chance to escape, he must carry news of her danger to someone who could help. When the company reached the steep road below the castle, there was confusion for a moment. Denneys drew his horse aside, then suddenly struck it with his heels and fled down the stony road into the dark forest. Mellegrans sent men after him, but Denneys escaped them all.

Denneys rode through the forest until morning. He was tired, hungry, frightened, and stained with blood from the trouble of the night. At last he came to a small hut in the woods, where a hermit lived. The hermit took pity on the boy and brought him inside. There Denneys saw another person in the hut, and when he looked more carefully, he knew him. It was Sir Launcelot of the Lake.

Denneys fell at Launcelot's knees and began to weep. Launcelot was deeply alarmed and asked where the Queen was. Denneys told him everything: the May party, the attack, the wounded knights, the capture, and the castle of Sir Mellegrans. When Launcelot heard this, he rose at once and cried out for his armor. The hermit asked him to wait until daylight, but Launcelot would not wait even a

little while.

Denneys and the hermit helped him put on his armor. Then Launcelot mounted his horse and rode into the darkness. He rode all night through the forest, following such paths as he could find. After dawn, he heard the sound of rough water and came to a stone bridge over a violent stream. On the far side of the bridge stood many armed men, led by a knight in green armor. They were Mellegrans's men, sent to stop anyone who came to rescue the Queen.

Launcelot called across the bridge and asked if that road led to the castle of Sir Mellegrans. The Green Knight asked his name, and Launcelot gave it. Then the Green Knight said that Launcelot could go no farther. Launcelot laughed and asked how they would stop him. The Green Knight answered that they would stop him by their number, because many men could hold one man back.

Then Launcelot rode onto the bridge. The place was narrow, so the enemy could not all come at him together. This helped him greatly. He struck the Green Knight down and then fought the others one by one as they tried to hold the passage. The noise of swords, shields, horses, and water filled the air, and for a while the bridge became a hard and dangerous place of battle.

Launcelot won through the pass, but the fight cost him dearly. His horse was killed, and he was left standing alone on the road with his shield and spear. His enemies had been driven away, yet he could not ride forward. This troubled him more than his wounds, because the Queen was still a prisoner. He stood still for a short time, thinking hard, and then he heard the sound of an axe in the forest.

Launcelot followed the sound and came to a small open place where a poor woodcutter was cutting wood. The man had a horse and cart nearby. Launcelot asked him to take him in the cart until he could find another horse. The woodcutter was shocked, because in those days carts were often used to carry criminals to punishment. He told Launcelot that such a cart was not fit for a noble knight.

Launcelot answered that shame did not come from the cart itself. Shame came from doing wrong or failing to do one's duty. He said that if he refused the cart because of pride, while the Queen was still in danger, then he would deserve shame indeed. The woodcutter heard also that Launcelot would pay him well, so

he made the cart ready. In this way, the greatest knight of the Round Table rode toward Mellegrans's castle in a poor cart.

As the cart moved along the road, many people stared at him. Some laughed, and some whispered, because they thought it strange and low for a knight to ride in such a way. Launcelot heard them, but he kept silent. He thought only of Guinevere and the wounded knights of her court. At last the cart reached the castle gate, and the people inside brought word to Sir Mellegrans that Launcelot had come in a cart.

Mellegrans looked down from the gate tower and saw him there. At first he was afraid, because he knew Launcelot's strength. Then he began to think of a false plan. He spoke softly and said that he was sorry for what he had done. He promised to let Launcelot inside and bring him to the Queen, if Launcelot would ask her to forgive him. Launcelot did not fully trust him, but he accepted the risk because the Queen was inside.

Mellegrans came down unarmed and opened the gate. He led Launcelot through the castle by a dark passage. But the floor had been prepared with a hidden trap. Suddenly, the boards opened under Launcelot's feet, and he fell into a deep pit. The fall hurt him badly, and he lay in darkness, unable to climb out. Above him, Mellegrans closed the trap and went away, thinking that his enemy was finished.

Launcelot was filled with anger and sorrow. He thought of the Queen, who might believe that he had failed her. He also thought of the shame of the cart and the greater shame of being trapped by a false man. For many hours he lay in that dark place and could find no way out. Near midnight, he saw a little light at the door of the dungeon, and then he heard keys in the lock.

The door opened, and a lady came in with a lamp. It was Elouise the Fair, the daughter of King Bagdemagus and sister of Sir Mellegrans. She was the same lady who had once helped Launcelot escape from Morgana. Her eyes were red from weeping, because she was ashamed that her own brother had done such evil. She told Launcelot that she had come to set him free, but asked him, if he could, to show mercy to her brother.

Launcelot was moved by her kindness, but he could not promise full mercy before justice was done. He said that Mellegrans had wronged the Queen and had acted treacherously, and that such evil had to be answered. Still, for Elouise's sake, he would not act with needless cruelty. Elouise accepted this and led him out of the dungeon by a secret way. Then she brought him to a place where he could arm himself again and return to the Queen.

When Launcelot came before Guinevere and her court, many people cried out with joy. But the Queen's face was cold at first, because she had heard that he came in a cart and had thought too much about the shame of it. Launcelot did not defend himself with many words. He only told her that he had come as quickly as he could and that nothing would keep him from her service. Then the truth of his suffering began to soften her heart.

Sir Mellegrans tried to avoid battle, because he knew now that his trap had failed. Launcelot called him coward and traitor, and at last Mellegrans agreed to fight only because Launcelot offered him a great advantage. Launcelot removed his shield, his helmet, and the armor from the left side of his body. He stood half unarmed before a fully armed enemy. Mellegrans thought that this was his best chance to win, so he came down proudly into the courtyard.

The fight began before the Queen, her ladies, the wounded knights, and the people of the castle. Mellegrans struck at Launcelot's unarmed side with all his strength. But Launcelot moved with wonderful skill, turning the blow aside and striking back. Soon Mellegrans knew that even half-armed Launcelot was too strong for him. Fear entered his heart, and his strokes became wild and weak.

Launcelot pressed him hard. At last Mellegrans fell and begged for mercy. Launcelot looked to the Queen, because the wrong had been done chiefly to her. Guinevere allowed mercy, though not without judgment. Mellegrans had to yield himself and accept punishment from Arthur. The Queen, her ladies, and all her wounded knights were set free. Thus Launcelot rescued Guinevere from the castle of Mellegrans, though he had come there in a cart and had suffered shame for her sake.

Part 25 — Gareth Comes to Arthur's Court

Now we must leave Sir Launcelot for a time and speak of Sir Gareth of Orkney. Gareth was the youngest son of King Lot and Queen Margaise, and so he was brother to Sir Gawaine, Sir Gaheris, Sir Agravaine, and Sir Mordred. He was also nephew to King Arthur, because Queen Margaise was Arthur's sister. Yet when he was still young, Gareth did not wish to come to Arthur's court with a great name and a high place already prepared for him.

Gareth had a proud but honest heart. He wished to win honor by his own deeds, not by his birth. For that reason, he asked his mother to allow him to go secretly to Arthur's court. Queen Margaise loved him dearly and feared for him, because the world of knights was full of danger. At last she agreed, but only under a hard condition. He must go unknown, ask Arthur for food and lodging for a year, and hide his name until the right time came.

Gareth accepted this condition gladly. He dressed himself simply and took with him only a dwarf named Axatalese, who knew who he truly was. Then he traveled to the Castle of Kynkennedon, where King Arthur was holding court. Many nobles, knights, and ladies were gathered there, and the hall was bright with color and noise. Gareth entered quietly, but his tall body, fair face, and calm manner made many people look at him.

He came before Arthur and knelt. Arthur asked him who he was and what he wanted. Gareth answered that he would not tell his name yet. He asked only for food and drink for one year, and after that, one other gift when he should ask for it. Arthur looked at him carefully and saw that he was no common beggar. His face was noble, and his hands were white and fine, like the hands of one born to gentle life.

Arthur granted his request. He said that no man who came to his court in need should be refused food. He also promised that if the later gift was right and honorable, he would grant it. Then Gareth was given into the care of Sir Kay, who was Seneschal of the court. This was not a happy thing for Gareth, because Sir Kay was sharp of tongue and often cruel in jest.

Sir Kay looked at Gareth's white hands and began to mock him. He said that such hands could not belong to a strong fighter, but only to a lazy kitchen servant. Because the hands were fair, he called the young man Beaumains, which means Fair Hands. From that time, many people at court used that name. Some laughed kindly, but others laughed with real scorn.

Gareth bore all this with patience. He ate at a side table, not with the knights and lords. Sir Kay would not allow him to sit among gentle people, though Gareth was more gently born than many of them. He was given much food, and Kay mocked him for eating well. Yet Gareth made no complaint. He remembered his mother's condition and waited for the year to pass.

Sir Gawaine noticed the young man and did not like the way Kay treated him. Something in Gareth's manner seemed familiar and noble, though Gawaine did not know the truth. He warned Kay to be careful. He reminded him how Kay had once mocked young Percival and had later received a hard blow for it. Kay only answered that this kitchen boy was no Percival, and he continued to laugh at him.

So a full year passed. Gareth lived in the court, ate at the side table, and endured many insults. Yet he watched the knights, listened to their speech, and learned the ways of Arthur's hall. He did not grow bitter. He kept his strength hidden, as a sword may lie hidden under a plain cloth. Then, at last, the day came when he could ask the second gift that Arthur had promised.

On that day, a young damsel rode into the hall. She was beautiful, proud, and fierce in her manner. Her name was Lynette. She came before King Arthur and asked for a knight to help her sister, who was in great danger. A terrible Red Knight had laid siege to her sister's castle and would not leave unless he was defeated in battle.

Arthur listened carefully and asked Lynette to tell him her sister's name and rank. Lynette refused. She said that she had been ordered not to speak those things until a champion had accepted the adventure. Arthur was troubled by this answer. He did not wish to send one of his knights into a matter that was not fully explained. Many knights in the hall also remained silent, because they did not know whether the quest was honorable or foolish.

Then Gareth rose from his side table. He came before Arthur and knelt as he had done one year before. "My lord," he said, "now I ask the gift you promised me. Let me take this adventure." Everyone in the hall was amazed. Some laughed openly, because they thought the kitchen boy had lost his senses. Lynette's face grew dark with anger, for she had come to Arthur's court expecting a famous knight.

Sir Kay laughed more loudly than anyone else. He said that the damsel had asked for a champion and had received a kitchen servant. Lynette cried out that Arthur had dishonored her by giving her such a helper. But Arthur looked at Gareth and saw courage in his face. He also knew that strange things often began in humble ways. So he granted the request and allowed Gareth to go with Lynette.

Gareth then asked one more thing. He asked that Sir Launcelot should make him a knight. Arthur was pleased by this request, because it showed good judgment. Launcelot was the greatest knight in the world, and to receive knighthood from him was a high honor. Arthur agreed. But Lynette was still angry and left the hall in sharp disappointment, saying that she would rather have no champion than such a one.

Gareth did not answer her anger. He only went out to prepare himself. Axatalese brought him armor and a horse that had been kept ready for him. When Gareth armed himself, he no longer looked like a kitchen servant. He looked like a young prince made for battle. But Lynette would not look kindly at him. She rode ahead and called him Beaumains in a voice full of scorn.

Sir Kay could not let the matter rest. He armed himself quickly and rode after Gareth. He thought to bring the kitchen boy back by force and punish him for his boldness. When Kay caught up with him, he called out that Gareth had no right to ride as a knight. Gareth answered quietly that he had Arthur's leave and would not turn back. Then Kay lowered his spear and rode at him.

Gareth met him without fear. The two horses came together, and Gareth struck Sir Kay so hard that Kay fell from his saddle to the ground. The blow was clean and strong, and all who saw it knew that this was no kitchen boy in truth. Gareth took Kay's horse and armor, because Kay had attacked him wrongly. Then he

continued after Lynette, while Kay lay stunned and ashamed beside the road.

Sir Launcelot had followed to see what would happen. He had not come in anger, but in wonder. When he saw Gareth defeat Kay, he knew that this young man had great strength. Still, he wished to test him before giving him knighthood. So Launcelot rode forward and challenged him courteously. Gareth accepted, though he knew very well who stood before him.

They rode against each other, and their spears broke. Then they drew swords and fought on foot. Gareth fought so well that Launcelot was deeply surprised. He saw that the young knight had both courage and skill. At last, Launcelot called for a pause and asked Gareth to tell him his true name. Gareth trusted Launcelot and spoke the truth quietly.

When Launcelot learned that he was Gareth of Orkney, brother of Gawaine and nephew of Arthur, he was filled with joy. He said that Gareth had done wisely to hide his name until he could prove himself. Then, because Arthur had allowed it and Gareth had asked it, Launcelot made him a knight there beside the road. He gave him the stroke of knighthood with deep respect, not as a favor to a prince, but as honor to a worthy man.

Lynette watched all this, but her pride was not yet softened. Even after Launcelot made Gareth a knight, she still called him a kitchen servant. She said that one lucky blow against Kay did not prove him a true champion. Gareth answered her with patience. He said that she might call him what she pleased, but he would still follow her and serve her sister if he could.

Launcelot then took leave of Gareth. He told him that he must follow another road and could go no farther with him. He also told him of a priory in the forest where Gareth, Lynette, and the dwarf might rest for the night. Gareth thanked him with deep feeling, because Launcelot had given him both a test and a great honor. Then Launcelot rode away, leaving the young knight to begin his own adventure.

Gareth followed Lynette along the forest road. She rode ahead, proud and angry, and he rode behind her without complaint. Axatalese followed them on the horse taken from Sir Kay. The evening light fell through the trees, and the road grew quiet around them. Thus Gareth, now truly a knight, went forward toward

the dangers that waited for Lady Layonnesse.

Part 26 — Gareth Proves Himself

The next morning, Lynette left the priory before Sir Gareth was awake. She did not send him word, because her pride was still not fully broken. She wished to ride on alone, as if the young knight behind her were not worthy to be her true champion. The morning was bright and cool, with birds singing in every tree. But Lynette kept looking behind her, because in her heart she expected him to follow.

When Gareth woke and found that she had gone, he was greatly troubled. He armed himself quickly and mounted his horse. Axatalese followed him on the horse taken from Sir Kay. They rode hard through the fields and soon saw Lynette entering the dark edge of the forest. Gareth called to her kindly, but she turned and said, “So, kitchen boy, you are still following me.”

Gareth answered calmly that he had promised to serve her, and so he would follow while the adventure lasted. Lynette mocked him again and told him not to ride too near her, because she still believed he smelled of the kitchen. Gareth smiled a little and fell back the distance she wanted. He did not answer her bitter words with bitter words of his own. He knew that deeds would speak better than anger.

After some time, they came to a river that ran strongly between steep banks. A narrow ford crossed it, and near the ford stood a pavilion. Two armed knights kept the crossing and would not allow travelers to pass unless they first fought them. Lynette told Gareth that these knights were dangerous and that many better men than he had failed there. Gareth only said that if the river lay in their road, then he must win the road.

The first knight came against him with a loud cry. Gareth met him in midstream, where the water flew up around the horses' legs. Their spears struck, and the knight of the ford fell backward into the water. The second knight then came fiercely against Gareth, angry because his companion had fallen. Gareth turned quickly, met the second charge, and threw that knight down also. The sound

of the water almost covered the noise of the fall.

Gareth allowed both knights to live, but he commanded them to go to Arthur's court. They were to say that Beaumains, the kitchen servant, had sent them there. Lynette watched all this without speaking for a while. She could not deny what she had seen, but her pride still fought against her judgment. At last she said that one good morning did not make a great knight. Gareth answered that one morning was enough if it helped them forward.

They rode on into a darker part of the country. There the land was rough, and the trees grew close together. By afternoon, they came to the borders of the Black Lands. A black pavilion stood near the road, and from it came Sir Perard, the Black Knight. He was a strong and famous knight, and Lynette warned Gareth again that this man was no common fighter. Gareth thanked her for the warning and rode forward.

Sir Perard demanded Gareth's name and rank. Gareth refused to tell him, but said that he was on his way to help a lady in danger. The Black Knight laughed when Lynette called him a kitchen boy. Yet he soon stopped laughing, because Gareth lowered his spear and came at him with great speed. The two knights met so hard that both spears broke, and then they drew swords and fought on foot.

The battle was long, for Sir Perard was strong and skillful. But Gareth fought with steady courage. He watched every movement, waited for each opening, and struck only when he could strike well. At last he beat down the Black Knight and stood over him with his sword raised. He told Lynette that he would spare the knight only if she asked him to do so.

Lynette was angry at first. She did not like to ask a favor from the man she still called Beaumains. But Sir Perard begged her to speak for him, and she could not let a worthy knight die. So she asked Gareth to spare his life. Gareth did so at once. Then he commanded Sir Perard to go to Arthur's court and tell the king that Beaumains was well and still going forward.

That evening, Gareth, Lynette, and Axatalese came near another forest. Suddenly, a young man ran out from among the trees, crying for help. He said that six thieves had seized his lord, a good knight, and were going to kill him. Gareth

did not wait to hear more. He spurred his horse into the trees and soon came upon six rough men holding a knight bound near an old oak.

Gareth attacked them before they could prepare themselves. Three of the thieves ran when they saw an armed knight coming so fiercely. The other three tried to fight, but Gareth struck them down. Then he cut the bonds of the captive knight and helped him to stand. The freed knight thanked him again and again, saying that his life had been saved by God and by Gareth's strong hand.

That knight brought Gareth and Lynette to his castle for the night. Lynette was treated with honor, but she still told the servants not to serve Gareth as a noble knight. She said he was only a kitchen boy and could care for his own horse. Gareth heard this, and his eyes flashed for a moment, but his face remained calm. He asked only where the stable was, then took care of his horse with his own hands.

The lord of the castle knew better than Lynette. He had seen Gareth save his life, and he understood that this young knight was of high worth. Secretly, he told his steward to serve Gareth with every honor. So Gareth was given good food, clean clothing, and a quiet place to rest. The next morning, before they left, the knight asked if he could do any service in return.

Gareth told him to go to King Arthur's court. He was to say that Beaumains, the kitchen servant, had sent him, and he was to tell Arthur and Sir Gawaine how far the adventure had gone. The knight promised to do this. Then Gareth, Lynette, and Axatalese rode away again, with Lynette in front and Gareth following behind. Though she still mocked him, her voice was not quite as hard as before.

Later that day, they came to a high hill and looked down into a fair valley. Many rich pavilions stood below, with flags moving in the wind. In the middle of them was a great red pavilion, marked with a black and silver leopard. Lynette told Gareth that this was the camp of Sir Percevant of Hind. She warned him that Percevant was proud, strong, and not easy to pass. Gareth answered that they would speak with him all the same.

They rode down into the valley. Some esquires tried to stop them and asked Gareth's name. Gareth said that his name did not matter, because he had come

only to speak with Sir Percevant. Then he rode straight to the great pavilion and struck the shield hanging before it. The sound rang out loudly, and Sir Percevant came forth in anger. He demanded to know who had dared to strike his shield.

Gareth told him to ask Lynette who he was. Lynette answered in her old way, saying that he was Beaumains, the kitchen boy from Arthur's court. Sir Percevant was insulted and angry. He said that no kitchen boy should strike his shield and live. Soon the two knights armed themselves and rode against each other in the open space before the tents.

Sir Percevant was powerful, and at first the fight was very hard. But Gareth had already learned much from each battle that day and the day before. He kept his seat firmly, guarded himself well, and struck with growing confidence. At last he overcame Sir Percevant and made him yield. Then Gareth spared him and commanded him also to go to Arthur's court with news from Beaumains.

After this, Gareth and Lynette rode on until they came in sight of Castle Dangerous. It stood on a hill above a town, and outside the walls lay the many tents of the Red Knight of the Red Lands. Shields hung from willow trees near the camp, each one taken from a knight whom the Red Knight had defeated. Lynette pointed to them and said that some of those knights had been killed and others had been sent away in shame.

Gareth looked at the shields and understood the greatness of the danger. Still, he did not turn back. He rode through the Red Knight's camp until he came to the chief pavilion. The Red Knight came out in a robe of scarlet silk. He was large, fierce-looking, and red in hair and beard. When Gareth said that he had come from Arthur's court to serve Lady Layonnesse, the Red Knight laughed loudly at him.

Gareth asked first to speak with Lady Layonnesse. The Red Knight allowed it, perhaps because he thought the young knight would soon be dead. Gareth and Lynette rode up toward the castle. Lady Layonnesse appeared at a high window and asked who he was. Gareth looked up and saw her face. She was so beautiful that his heart rose toward her at once.

Gareth told her that he had come to serve as her champion. She asked his name and reputation, but he said that he could not yet reveal his name. He admitted that

he was newly made a knight, but said that his heart was strong for the adventure. Lady Layonnesse was troubled that Arthur had sent an unknown knight, yet Lynette spoke for him. She said that she believed he was one of the noblest knights she had ever seen.

Because Lynette spoke so strongly, Lady Layonnesse accepted Gareth as her champion. Gareth then returned to the meadow and prepared for battle. The Red Knight armed himself fully, and many people came to watch from the walls, the town, and the tents. The two knights rode apart, lowered their spears, and charged. Their first meeting was terrible, and the shock seemed to shake the earth.

The battle lasted a long time. They broke spears, fought with swords, and wounded each other deeply. Gareth grew tired, and the Red Knight pressed him hard. Then Gareth looked up and saw Lady Layonnesse watching from the wall. New strength came into him. He struck the Red Knight again and again, until at last the great knight fell and could not rise.

The Red Knight begged for mercy. Gareth was slow to grant it, because the man had brought much suffering to others. But the Red Knight said that he had acted partly because a lady had once made him swear a cruel oath. Gareth told him that this did not excuse his evil, but mercy was still better than needless death. So he spared him and ordered him to go to Arthur's court and submit to the king's judgment.

That night, Gareth rested in the Red Knight's pavilion, wounded and very tired. While he slept, Sir Gringamore, brother of Lady Layonnesse and Lynette, came secretly with Lynette and stole Axatalese the dwarf. They did this not from cruelty, but because they wished to know Gareth's true name. They brought the dwarf to the castle and questioned him. Axatalese, trembling with fear, told them that his master was Sir Gareth of Orkney, son of King Lot and Queen Margaise, brother of Gawaine, and nephew of King Arthur.

Lynette cried out in joy when she heard this. She said that she had known in her heart that he was no kitchen servant. Lady Layonnesse was also filled with happiness, because such a noble knight had saved her. Sir Gringamore brought the dwarf back quietly and decided that Gareth should first be allowed to rest. In

the morning, he went to the pavilion and greeted him by his true name.

Gareth was greatly surprised and asked how his name had been learned. Sir Gringamore told him the truth and asked forgiveness for taking the dwarf. Then he said that Lady Layonnesse wished to thank him. Gareth asked that she should come in. When she entered and knelt beside his bed, he saw her face near him and loved her more deeply than before.

Gareth was carried to the castle and cared for there. For two weeks, Lady Layonnesse and her people tended his wounds, and he grew strong again. During that time, he and Layonnesse came to love each other truly. At the end of the two weeks, Gareth said that he must return to Arthur's court and reveal himself to his brothers. His adventure was complete, and Beaumains the kitchen boy had become known as Sir Gareth of Orkney.

Part 27 — Launcelot and the Worm of Corbin

After Sir Launcelot left Sir Gareth, he rode away in a very good humor. He thought again and again of Lynette, who had believed that Gareth was only a kitchen boy. Each time he remembered it, he laughed softly to himself. The road was quiet, the day was gentle, and his heart was light because Gareth had shown himself a true knight.

He rode until the sun went down and the world grew dim. The sky changed from gold to gray, and the trees became dark shapes on both sides of the road. Then Sir Launcelot began to feel hungry and thirsty, for he had ridden far without food or drink. As he looked ahead, he saw a small red light shining among the trees, and he turned his horse toward it.

Soon he came to a merry group of traveling minstrels sitting around a fire. Some wore blue, some wore red, some wore yellow, and some wore clothes of many colors. They had food, drink, songs, and laughter, and they welcomed the strange knight gladly. Sir Launcelot sat with them beside the fire and shared their supper like a friendly guest.

The minstrels did not know who he was, for he had not told them his name.

They spoke of many famous knights, and soon the name of Sir Launcelot came into their talk. One man said that no knight in the world could do what Sir Launcelot could do. Sir Launcelot laughed and said, "I have seen Sir Launcelot often, and I do not think he is stronger than I am."

At this the minstrels laughed loudly, because they thought he was only a proud knight making a joke. Sir Launcelot laughed with them, and he was not angry. Then he asked whether there was any adventure near that place which a good knight might try. One of the minstrels grew more serious and asked, "Have you heard of the Worm of Corbin?"

Sir Launcelot said that he had not heard of it, and the minstrel began to tell the story. There was, he said, a fair town called Corbin, ruled by King Pelles. Once Queen Morgana le Fay and the Queen of North Wales had visited that town. King Pelles had held a feast and games in their honor, and many lords and ladies had been present.

While they were at the feast, a strange lady came in with a golden ring on a silver dish. She said that the ring could be worn only by the fairest and worthiest lady in the room. Queen Morgana tried to put it on, but the ring was too small for her finger. Then the Queen of North Wales tried it, but it became too large and fell from her hand onto the table.

Many other ladies tried the ring, but none could wear it. At last Lady Elaine, the daughter of King Pelles, took the ring and placed it on her finger. It fitted her perfectly, as if it had been made for her alone. Queen Morgana and the Queen of North Wales were filled with shame and anger, though they hid their anger in front of the court.

The next morning the two queens left Corbin. When they came to the marketplace, Queen Morgana saw a great flat stone lying there. She cursed the stone and said that under it a terrible Worm would live. She also said that no man would be able to lift the stone, and that the Worm would come out at night to carry away young women from the town.

The minstrel said that the curse had come true. The Worm lived beneath the stone and brought sorrow to Corbin. From time to time, a young woman

disappeared, and the people believed that the Worm had taken her. No one had been able to lift the stone, because Morgana's magic held it fast.

Sir Launcelot stood up when he heard this. He thanked the minstrels for their food and their story, and he said that he would go to Corbin at once. The minstrels begged him to wait until morning, but he would not. He said that a knight should not sleep easily while innocent people were in fear.

So Sir Launcelot mounted his horse and rode away through the night. Before the next day was far advanced, he came out of the forest and saw Corbin before him. It was a beautiful town, standing above a shining river, with walls, towers, and many bright windows. Yet the people he met on the road looked sad, as if a shadow lay over all their lives.

An old man told him again about the Worm and warned him that no one could lift the stone. Sir Launcelot showed the ring on his own finger and said that it had power against evil magic. He did not boast, but he spoke with calm courage. The old man and the others looked at him with sudden hope, and some of them began to follow him toward the town.

As Sir Launcelot rode through the gate of Corbin, people came running from every side. They called blessings after him, and some tried to touch his horse as he passed. Their fear had been so long and so deep that even a little hope seemed like sunlight to them. Sir Launcelot rode quietly through the crowd toward the market-place.

In the middle of the market-place lay the great stone. It was wide and heavy, and strange signs had been cut into it. Sir Launcelot told the people to stand far back. Then he put aside his shield and sword, bent down, and took hold of the stone with both hands.

For a moment the stone did not move. Then the power of the ring broke the magic that held it down. Sir Launcelot pulled again with all his strength, and the stone stirred in its place. The people cried out together, and on the third great pull the stone rose and rolled over onto the ground.

Under the stone there was a dark hole. Sir Launcelot looked down and saw two green eyes shining in the blackness. Then a horrible creature began to crawl

out. It was long and huge, covered with hard scales, and its many feet ended in sharp claws.

The Worm lifted its front body high into the air and opened its mouth. Its teeth shone white, and its breath was foul and deadly. The people screamed and drew farther back, but Sir Launcelot did not run. He took up his sword and moved toward the creature.

He struck the Worm with a blow strong enough to split a tree. But the sword slid off the hard scales and did not cut them. The Worm hissed and reached toward him with many claws. Sir Launcelot sprang aside, struck again, and again found that the scales were too hard.

The fight went on for a long time. Sir Launcelot moved from side to side, trying to find a place where his sword could enter. But the heavy armor tired him, and the Worm was quick with its terrible claws. At last one claw caught him, and in a moment many claws closed around him.

The Worm tore at his armor and flesh. It ripped away part of the armor from his shoulder and thigh, and blood ran down his side. Sir Launcelot felt great pain, but he knew that he must not give way. With all his strength, he tore himself free before the creature could bite him.

Then Sir Launcelot rushed straight at the Worm's open mouth. He drove his sword deep into its throat, so far that the hilt struck against its teeth. The Worm roared and rolled over, beating the ground with its long body. As it turned, Sir Launcelot saw a softer place under the hard scales, near its belly.

He ran to that place and struck with all the strength left in him. Thick black blood came out, and the Worm shook in pain. Sir Launcelot struck again and again at the soft places beneath the scales. At last the great creature stopped roaring, moved weakly for a little while, and lay still in death.

For a moment Sir Launcelot stood leaning on his sword. He was covered with blood, slime, and dust, and his breath came hard. Then the people of Corbin understood that the Worm was dead. They shouted with joy, crowded into the market-place, and looked at Sir Launcelot as if he had come from heaven to save them.

Knights from the castle came riding through the crowd. Their leader asked whether Sir Launcelot was the knight who had killed the Worm. Sir Launcelot answered that the dead creature before them was proof enough. The knights saw that he was badly wounded, so they brought a litter and carried him carefully to the castle of King Pelles.

In the castle, servants removed his broken armor and washed his wounds in warm water with healing herbs. A skilled doctor cleaned and bound the cuts in his shoulder and thigh. Then they laid him on a soft bed with clean white linen. His body was still full of pain, but at last he could rest.

Soon King Pelles came to see him, and with the king came his son, Sir Lavaine, and his daughter, Lady Elaine the Fair. Sir Launcelot looked at Elaine and was amazed by her beauty and gentle face. King Pelles knelt beside the bed and thanked him for saving the land. Sir Launcelot answered that thanks should first be given to God, because he had only been the tool used for the work.

King Pelles then asked the knight to tell his true name. Sir Launcelot said that he could not do that yet, because some people thought shame rested on his name. He asked them to call him the Knight Who Had Done Wrong. In the old speech of the court, this name was le Chevalier Malfait, and so the people of Corbin called him by that name.

Sir Launcelot did not heal quickly. The poison from the Worm's claws had entered his blood, and his strength returned only slowly. Month after month passed, and still he remained in the castle of Corbin. King Pelles, Sir Lavaine, Lady Elaine, and all the court treated him with great kindness.

At the end of a year, Sir Launcelot was healed in body, though the long sickness had changed him. King Pelles asked him to remain at Corbin, saying that all the people loved him. Sir Launcelot answered that he also loved them, because they had cared for him in his weakness. So he stayed there as a knight of King Pelles's court, while far away at Camelot everyone wondered where Sir Launcelot had gone.

While Sir Launcelot was still living at Corbin, King Arthur announced a great tournament at Astolat. The news went through all the land, and many kings, lords, and knights began to prepare for it. At Corbin, King Pelles also made ready to go with his court. Sir Launcelot heard the news and became troubled. He wished to fight, but he did not want anyone from Arthur's court to know him yet.

King Pelles saw that he was uneasy and asked him what was wrong. Sir Launcelot said that if he went to Astolat in his own armor, many knights would know him at once. He still felt hurt because some of his own kinsmen had spoken sharply of him after he rode in the cart to rescue Queen Guinevere. His pride was still wounded, and he wished to remain hidden until he had proved himself again. King Pelles understood and found a way to help him.

There was a young knight at that court named Sir Tyre. He was near Sir Launcelot in size, and his armor would fit him well enough. So it was decided that Sir Launcelot should wear Sir Tyre's armor at the tournament. In this way, no one would know him by his shield or by the look of his arms. Sir Launcelot was grateful, because this allowed him to fight and still keep his secret.

Before he left, Lady Elaine came to him. Her heart had long been given to him, though she knew that his heart was not free. She asked him to wear her sleeve as a favor in the tournament. Sir Launcelot had never before worn the favor of any lady in such a public way. Yet he saw how much the request meant to Elaine, and because she had cared for him through his long sickness, he could not refuse her.

Elaine gave him a red sleeve worked with pearls. Sir Launcelot wound it around the crest of the helmet he would wear. It shone brightly, and everyone who saw it would know that he was carrying a lady's favor. Then Sir Launcelot gave Elaine his own shield and armor. He asked her to keep them safely and let no one touch them until he returned.

Sir Lavaine, Elaine's brother, then asked to ride with him to the tournament. He was young and eager for honor, and he believed that he could win great fame beside so strong a knight. Sir Launcelot looked at him with kindness and accepted him gladly. He liked Lavaine's brave and open heart. So the next day, Sir

Launcelot in Sir Tyre's armor and Sir Lavaine in his own armor rode toward Astolat together.

On the road, they met two knights of Arthur's court. These were Sir Gawaine and Sir Mador de la Porte. Sir Gawaine did not know Sir Launcelot, because the armor and shield were not his own. Yet the two parties soon came into a quarrel of arms. Sir Launcelot fought Sir Gawaine and struck him so hard that Gawaine fell and lay in a deep faint.

Sir Mador was angry and frightened, because Sir Gawaine was one of Arthur's greatest knights. He cried out that the unknown knight had done a terrible thing. Sir Launcelot answered that the quarrel had not been of his seeking. Still, he and Sir Lavaine rode away quickly, because they wished to reach Astolat and remain unknown. An old knight named Sir Bernard of Astolat followed them and offered them lodging in his house.

Sir Bernard had seen how strongly the unknown knight had fought. He told Sir Launcelot that every lodging in Astolat was already full because of the tournament, but that his own house had room. Sir Launcelot accepted on one condition. He and Sir Lavaine must be lodged privately, and no one must ask too many questions about them. Sir Bernard agreed, and that night the two knights rested quietly in his house.

The next day, the tournament began. King Arthur's side was very strong, because many of the Round Table fought with him. The other side was led by several kings, and at first it seemed that they might lose. Then Sir Launcelot and Sir Lavaine rode into the field. No one knew them, but all eyes turned toward the red sleeve on the unknown knight's helmet.

Sir Launcelot rode like a storm. He struck down knight after knight, and Sir Lavaine followed him with wonderful courage. The party that had been losing took new heart when they saw these two fight. Sir Launcelot's spear broke, and then he took another. When that too was broken, he drew his sword and went deeper into the press of battle.

Many knights of the Round Table came against him, not knowing who he was. Sir Lionel, Sir Bors, Sir Bleoberis, Sir Blamor, and even Sir Ector de Maris were

struck down or driven back by him. Sir Launcelot fought so fiercely that men wondered if he could be a human knight at all. Sir Lavaine also won great honor that day, for he stayed close to him and defended him whenever the press became too dangerous.

But in the middle of the battle, Sir Launcelot received a terrible wound. A spear pierced his side and left the iron head deep in the flesh. The pain was great, but he would not leave the field. Instead, the pain made him fight more wildly than before. He struck right and left, hardly seeing who stood before him, until the other side was driven back and the victory was won.

After the battle, several kings came to the unknown knight and asked him to receive the prize of the tournament. But Sir Launcelot could hardly sit his horse. His face was pale behind his helmet, and his voice sounded weak and far away. He asked only to be allowed to leave the field, because he was badly hurt and needed help. The kings were troubled, but they let him go, and Sir Lavaine rode beside him into the forest.

They had ridden only a few miles when Sir Launcelot could bear the pain no longer. He bent low over his saddle and groaned. Sir Lavaine caught him and helped him down from his horse. When he removed the armor, he saw the deep wound and the broken spear head still fixed in Sir Launcelot's side. Sir Lavaine began to weep, because he feared that if he pulled it out, Sir Launcelot would die.

Sir Launcelot begged him to draw it out. He said that the iron lay near his heart and that the pain was more than he could endure. Sir Lavaine took hold of the broken shaft and pulled with all his strength. At last the spear head came free, and blood poured from the wound. Sir Launcelot fainted, and Sir Lavaine thought for a moment that he had killed him.

Near that place, they found a poor hermit who lived beside a small chapel in the forest. Sir Lavaine carried Sir Launcelot there with great difficulty. The hermit was skilled in healing wounds, and he washed and bound the injury as well as he could. Sir Launcelot lay white and still on a simple bed, and for many days his life hung between death and recovery.

Meanwhile, Sir Gawaine recovered enough to seek the unknown knight. He

remembered that the knight had called himself le Chevalier Malfait and that his companion was Sir Lavaine, son of King Pelles. So he went to the lodging of King Pelles and asked who the wounded knight was. King Pelles said that he did not know his true name. He knew only that the knight had come to Corbin, killed the Worm, and had lived there for more than a year.

Then Elaine said that she had kept the knight's own shield and armor for him. Sir Gawaine asked to see the shield. Elaine brought it out, and when Gawaine saw it, he knew it at once. It was the shield of Sir Launcelot of the Lake. Gawaine cried out in wonder, because now he understood that the unknown knight of the tournament was the greatest knight in the world.

This news troubled Elaine greatly. She now knew that the wounded knight she loved was not only le Chevalier Malfait, but Sir Launcelot himself. When she heard that he had gone away wounded and had not returned, fear seized her heart. She could not remain at Corbin and wait for news. So she gathered attendants and went to seek him, following such signs and reports as she could find.

After much searching, Elaine came at last to the hermit's chapel in the forest. She entered softly and saw Sir Launcelot lying on the bed, white and still, as if he were more spirit than living man. She knelt beside him and began to weep. Sir Launcelot opened his eyes and saw her there. He smiled faintly and asked if she had come all that way only to find him.

Elaine answered yes, and then she bowed her head. Sir Launcelot understood the love that had brought her there, and his heart was full of pity. He told her that he was not a happy man. Happiness seemed near him, but he could not reach out and take it. His faith and service were already given to another, and whether that was right or wrong, he could not change his heart.

Elaine knew that he spoke of Queen Guinevere. She wept quietly and said that she pitied both him and herself. After that, she did not leave him. She set up her small court around the hermit's chapel and stayed there while he slowly healed. Those days were the happiest days she had ever known, because she could care for him and be near him without fear.

When Sir Launcelot was strong enough, Elaine brought him back to Corbin.

King Pelles welcomed him with great joy, and Sir Lavaine loved him even more after all they had suffered together. Yet Sir Launcelot grew sad again after a time. His body healed, but his thoughts turned toward Camelot, Arthur, the Round Table, and Queen Guinevere. Elaine saw this sadness and knew that she could not keep him by her own wish.

One day, she called him to her and told him to return to Arthur's court. Sir Launcelot turned away, because joy came into his face before he could hide it. He said that if she commanded him to go, he must obey, but he would return after a little while. Elaine looked at him with sorrow and said only that he must go. When he asked her to bid him stay, she would not. So the next day Sir Launcelot left Corbin and rode toward Camelot.

When he reached Camelot, news of his return spread everywhere, and the court rejoiced. But Sir Launcelot went first to Queen Guinevere and stood before her. She received him coldly and asked why he had come. He answered that her word had power to bring him from peace, happiness, or any place in the world. But Guinevere's heart was troubled, because she had heard that he had worn Elaine's sleeve at Astolat.

She asked him if this was true, and he said that it was. Then jealousy and anger overcame her. She accused him of being false in knighthood because he had worn another lady's favor. She also threw at him the old shame of the cart. Sir Launcelot's face changed as if the words had struck him like a weapon. He staggered back, cried out in pain, and turned toward an open window.

Before anyone could stop him, Sir Launcelot leaped from the window into the courtyard below. He struck the ground with a terrible sound, but rose at once like a man who no longer felt pain. Then he ran away, bruised and bleeding, as if madness had taken him. Guinevere screamed and called for him to be brought back, but no one could find him. He had mounted his horse and ridden away from Camelot, and no one knew where he had gone.

Part 29 — Launcelot's Madness and Healing

After Sir Launcelot had fled from Camelot, Queen Guinevere was filled with terror and sorrow. She had spoken in anger, but now her anger was gone, and only fear remained. She commanded that knights should go out and search for him, though many of those knights were angry with her because of the words she had used. So began the Quest of Sir Launcelot, and many knights rode out to seek him in forest, field, and lonely road.

Sir Launcelot himself knew nothing of that search. He rode through the forest like a man chased by enemies, though the only enemy was the grief inside his own heart. He rode all night, tearing through branches and thorns, until his horse was wet with sweat and the dawn began to show between the trees. At last he came to the cell of the hermit who had once cared for him after the tournament at Astolat.

Sir Launcelot rushed into the poor man's dwelling and cried out in a wild voice. Then he fell forward upon the floor and lay there without speech or movement. The hermit was greatly troubled when he saw him, for he knew that some terrible sorrow had broken him. He tried to comfort him and care for him, but when Sir Launcelot woke again, his mind was no longer clear.

He did not remember who he was. He did not remember Camelot, Arthur, the Round Table, Elaine, or even his own great name. He looked about him with strange and fearful eyes, as if every living thing might hurt him. Then, when the hermit was not ready for him, he escaped from the cell and ran into the forest.

From that time, Sir Launcelot lived like a wild man among the trees. His hair and beard grew long, his clothes were torn, and his body became thin with hunger and wandering. Sometimes woodcutters or shepherds saw him at a distance, but they were afraid to come near him. Soon people in that country began to speak of a strange madman who roamed the forest like a creature without a home.

One day, in his wandering, Sir Launcelot came to a pleasant open place in the forest. There stood a bright pavilion, and near it hung a shield, a sword, and a spear. When Sir Launcelot saw the weapons, something old and deep awoke in him. Though his mind was broken, his hands still remembered the life of knighthood.

He went to the weapons and drew the sword from its sheath. Then he struck

the shield again and again, making a great noise that rang through the quiet place. A dwarf came running from the pavilion and tried to take the sword away from him. But Sir Launcelot caught the dwarf and threw him down so hard that the poor creature lay still with fear.

Then Sir Blyant, the lord of that place, came out of the pavilion. He was dressed richly and seemed noble and gentle. When he saw the wild man standing with the sword, he did not rush at him in anger. Instead, he spoke kindly and told him to put the sword down, saying that he seemed to need food, warm clothes, and help more than battle.

But Sir Launcelot did not understand kindness. He waved the sword and cried out that Sir Blyant must keep away, or he would slay him. In his madness, he ran into the pavilion, frightened Sir Blyant's lady, and then threw himself upon a soft bed. There he fell into a deep sleep, like a man who had spent all his strength.

Sir Blyant went in and looked closely at him. He saw the scars on his body, and he saw the rich ring upon his hand. Then he knew that this was no common beggar or forest fool. He said that this man must be some great champion who had fallen into terrible misfortune, and he ordered that he should be carried to his castle and cared for.

So Sir Launcelot was taken to the castle of Sir Blyant while he still slept. There his hair and beard were cut, and clean clothes were put upon him. When the people saw how noble he looked, even in his broken state, they wondered who he could be. But they were afraid of his wild strength, so they placed light but strong chains upon his wrists and ankles.

Sir Launcelot stayed in that castle for a year and a half. His mind still wandered, and he did not know himself or those around him. Yet the people treated him gently, and Sir Blyant was especially kind to him. Because of that kindness, Sir Launcelot loved Sir Blyant in a simple way and followed him about like a faithful animal.

Then, one day, Sir Blyant rode alone in a wood near his castle. There he met two knights who hated him. They were Sir Breuce sans Pitie and Sir Bertolet, and they blamed Sir Blyant because their brother had died after the tournament at

Astolat. Sir Blyant told them that the death had happened by the chance of battle, but they would not listen.

The two knights attacked him together. Sir Blyant fought bravely, but he was one against two, and after a while he was wounded in several places. At last he knew that he could not live long if he stayed in that fight. So he forced a way past one of his enemies and fled toward his castle as fast as his horse could carry him.

From a window or opening of the castle, Sir Launcelot saw his kind master in danger. At once a wild strength came upon him. He broke the chains from his arms, though the iron tore his wrists and hands. Then he seized a sword and rushed out to help Sir Blyant.

The two enemies followed Sir Blyant close behind, thinking to finish him before he could reach safety. But suddenly the madman came upon them like a storm. He had no armor and no shield, only the sword in his hand. Yet he struck with such terrible power that both knights were filled with fear.

Sir Bertolet could not stand against him and fled. Sir Breuce also saw the danger and turned his horse away. So Sir Launcelot, though he did not know his own name, saved the life of Sir Blyant by the strength that had once made all the world honor him. When Sir Blyant saw his torn and bleeding hands, he was deeply moved and ordered that no chains should ever again be placed upon him.

After that, Sir Launcelot walked freely in the castle. He harmed no one, and all the people grew fond of him. Yet somewhere inside him there remained a hidden memory that he had once been greater than a poor madman in another knight's house. So one night, when no one saw him, he dropped from the castle wall into the moat, swam across, and escaped again into the forest.

At that time, a great wild boar was troubling the land. It was called the boar of Lystenese, and many people feared it because of its size, rage, and terrible tusks. King Arthur heard of this beast and decided to hunt it. So he came with hounds, hunters, and knights to the forest where Sir Launcelot was wandering.

Sir Launcelot heard the hounds before he saw anything. The sound stirred another old memory in him, and he began to run toward the noise. Then the great boar burst out of the bushes, white foam on its mouth and fire in its eyes. Sir

Launcelot shouted like a huntsman and ran with the dogs after the beast.

At last the boar stood at bay against a rock, while the dogs circled it but dared not come too close. King Arthur, who had outridden the others, came first to that place. He set his lance and rode at the boar, but the beast charged him before he could strike truly. The King's horse was ripped by the tusks and fell, trapping Arthur beneath it.

Then Sir Launcelot saw the King lying in danger, though he did not know that this was his own lord. He ran forward, drew Arthur's sword, and attacked the boar. His foot slipped in the blood of the fallen horse, and he fell hard upon the ground. But he rose again and fought the beast with such fury that at last the boar was slain and the King was saved.

Sir Launcelot himself was wounded in that struggle. The boar had torn his thigh, and blood ran from the wound. When the other hunters came, they found King Arthur alive and the wild madman lying wounded near the dead beast. They did not know who he was, but they understood that he had saved the King's life.

Sir Launcelot was carried once more to the hermit's cell. The good hermit washed the wound, put healing balm upon it, and bound it with clean white cloth. But Sir Launcelot would not eat, though he was weak with hunger. For three days he lay there, turning away from the food that the hermit offered him.

On the fourth day, while the hermit was at prayer, Sir Launcelot rose from his bed. Though he was weak and wounded, some strange desire drew him away. He crawled out of the cell and hid himself in the forest. The hermit searched for him, but he could not find him, and he feared that the poor madman would die alone among the trees.

But one thought still lived in Sir Launcelot's broken mind. He must go back to Corbin. He did not know why he must go there, and he could not have spoken the reason clearly. Yet his feet turned eastward, and through hunger, pain, and darkness he made his way toward the castle of King Pelles.

At last he came near Corbin, thin, wounded, and almost dead. Those who saw him thought he was only a poor madman from the forest. But Lady Elaine looked upon him with eyes of love, and little by little she knew him. Beneath the torn

hair, the wasted face, and the wild eyes, she saw Sir Launcelot.

Elaine ordered that he be brought inside and cared for. She had him washed, clothed, fed, and laid in a quiet room. At first he did not know her, and often he turned away like a frightened child. But Elaine did not leave him, and day after day she spoke gently to him, watched beside him, and gave him such food and medicine as he could bear.

Slowly, his body began to heal. More slowly, his mind began to return. There were times when he looked at Elaine and seemed almost to remember her, and then the light in his eyes would fade again. But at last memory came back, not all at once, but like morning light entering a dark room.

When Sir Launcelot understood who Elaine was and what she had done for him, he was filled with shame and gratitude. He remembered how deeply she had loved him and how much sorrow he had brought into her life. He told her that he had wronged her and that he had nothing to give in return except his broken life. Elaine listened quietly, for she had waited long for words that came from the heart.

She told him that words alone could not heal wrong. If his lips spoke of duty, that was not enough. His heart must speak also. Then Sir Launcelot said that he had looked into his heart and had found love, honor, and deep reverence for her there.

After that, peace came between them. Sir Launcelot took Elaine by the hand, and she came to him without fear. In time, when he was fully healed, they were married. King Pelles rejoiced greatly and gave them a beautiful castle for their home.

That castle stood on an island in a clear lake. Around it were gardens, orchards, meadows, and bright water shining in the sun. Sir Launcelot called the place Joyous Isle, because he hoped to find joy and peace there. For a time, it seemed that he had found both.

So Sir Launcelot lived with Elaine at Joyous Isle in honor, comfort, and quiet happiness. Yet even there, another part of his heart was not at rest. Sometimes he remembered Camelot, the Round Table, King Arthur, and the great deeds of his former life. And sometimes, though he had no right to do so, he remembered

Queen Guinevere, and the old sorrow woke again within him.

Part 30 — Ewaine and the Fountain

During the Quest of Sir Launcelot, Sir Ewaine and Sir Percival rode together as companions. They searched many roads, many forests, and many castles, but nowhere did they hear clear news of the lost knight. They asked shepherds, woodcutters, travelers, monks, and lords of castles. Some had heard strange stories of a madman in the woods, but none could say that this was Sir Launcelot. So the two knights went on, keeping hope alive though each day made that hope weaker.

One evening, they came to a castle and asked for lodging. The lord of the castle welcomed them gladly, because they were knights of Arthur's court. While they were resting, they heard that another knight had come there before them in a very strange condition. This knight had no shield and no war-horse. Instead, he rode upon a white mule, as if he were some poor traveler and not a knight of the Round Table.

Sir Ewaine and Sir Percival were greatly surprised when they heard that this knight was Sir Sagramore. They asked to speak with him at once. When Sagramore came before them, he hung his head low, because he was ashamed of his poor appearance. Sir Ewaine spoke kindly and asked how such a thing had happened to him. Sagramore answered that it had not come through cowardice, but through failure in a strange adventure.

The lord of the castle then invited them all to supper before the story was told. They sat together at a good table, with meat, bread, and red and white wine. After they had eaten, Sir Ewaine asked Sagramore to tell them everything. Sagramore began by saying that he too had gone out to seek Sir Launcelot, but had found no news of him. Then, two days before, he had entered a valley so beautiful that he thought it must be a place of magic.

In that valley, Sagramore saw flowering meadows, bright trees, clear water, and birds with strange colors. In the middle of the valley stood a fine castle. Near

the castle, two young men in bright red clothes were shooting arrows at a mark. They welcomed him and took him to the lady of the castle, who was Vivien. She received him with smiles, but Sagramore did not fully trust her, because he knew her name and her old evil against Arthur.

Vivien told him of an adventure called the Adventure of the Fountain. She said that if he wished to try it, he must first speak with a great black herdsman who sat on a mound among cattle. Sagramore left the castle and found that strange being just as she had said. The herdsman was huge, dark, and covered with rough hair. He laughed at Sagramore and told him to follow a path to a fountain beside a lake.

Sagramore followed the path and came to the fountain. Beside it stood a tree, and near the water lay a marble slab. A silver bowl was fastened to the slab by a silver chain. Sagramore dipped water from the fountain and threw it on the slab. At once the earth shook, the sky grew dark, thunder sounded, a wild wind blew, and heavy rain fell as if the whole world were being drowned.

When the storm ended, many small birds came to the tree and began to sing. Their song was so sweet that Sagramore forgot his danger for a moment. Then a knight came riding across the valley in great anger. This knight was the defender of the Fountain. He attacked Sagramore, and the battle was hard, but Sagramore could not overcome him. The knight defeated him, took his horse and shield, and sent him away on the white mule.

When Sagramore finished his story, Sir Ewaine sat silent for a little while. Then he said that he would take up the adventure himself. Sir Percival wished to go with him, but Ewaine refused. He said that Sagramore's honor and the honor of Arthur's court had been touched, and one knight must answer for it. Percival saw that Ewaine's mind was fixed, so he agreed to wait for him at the castle.

The next morning, Sir Ewaine armed himself and rode out alone. He found the road of which Sagramore had spoken and came first to the mound where the black herdsman sat among his cattle. The giant-like man laughed when he saw him and called him a little man. He said that another knight had come that way only two days before and had had a poor end to his adventure. Sir Ewaine answered calmly that he would take the path all the same.

He rode through the forest for a long time. At last he came to a hill and saw the valley below him. It was as fair as Sagramore had said, with fields, trees, a lake, and the fountain beside the lake. Sir Ewaine rode down the hill and came to the tree and the marble slab. He took the silver bowl, dipped it into the water, and threw the water on the stone.

The same great storm came again. The ground shook under his horse's feet, and thunder rolled across the sky. Clouds covered the sun until the day became dark like night. Then the wind came with such force that Sir Ewaine had to hold fast to his horse, and rain fell so heavily that he could hardly see. Far away, he heard many voices crying in sorrow, as if the storm were hurting a whole hidden people.

Then the rain stopped, the clouds passed away, and the sun shone again. A great number of birds flew into the tree above the fountain. They sang with such sweetness that Sir Ewaine felt as if he were listening to music from heaven. Yet he kept his hand near his sword, because he remembered Sagramore's story. Soon he saw a knight riding toward him with great speed across the plain.

The knight came in anger and cried that Sir Ewaine had brought harm upon the land by troubling the fountain. Sir Ewaine answered that he had come openly, as a knight seeking adventure, and would defend his deed. They set their spears and charged. The first meeting broke both spears, and then they fought with swords. The defender of the Fountain was very strong, but Sir Ewaine fought with steady courage and at last wounded him deeply.

The wounded knight turned and fled toward his town. Sir Ewaine did not wish to kill him, but he wished to know who he was and to help him if he could. So he followed him closely. The knight passed through a gate in the town wall, and Sir Ewaine rushed after him without thinking. As soon as he entered, a heavy portcullis fell behind him, and another barrier closed before him. His horse was cut in two beneath him, and he was trapped like an animal in a narrow place between gates.

Sir Ewaine stood there with his sword in hand, but he could not escape. People gathered above and around him, crying that he had slain or mortally wounded

their champion. They wished to kill him at once, and he knew that he was in great danger. Yet he did not cry for mercy. He only waited, watching the doors and windows, ready to sell his life dearly if they came against him.

After a little while, a young damsel came near the gate and looked at him through a small opening. She had fair yellow hair and a kind face. Sir Ewaine saw that she did not hate him as the others did. He asked why she came to look upon a prisoner who was waiting for death. She answered that she pitied him, because he seemed too noble to die in such a cruel way.

The damsel asked why he had hurt the champion of the Fountain. Sir Ewaine told her the truth. He had not come to harm the land. He had come because Sir Sagramore had failed there, and he wished to restore the honor of Arthur's court. In battle, a knight could not always measure the force of his blow. When he saw that he had wounded the champion too badly, he had followed him first to help him, but the chase had ended in this trap.

The damsel then asked his name. When he said that he was Sir Ewaine, son of King Uriens and Queen Morgana le Fay, she was amazed. She said that so famous a knight should not die in a gate like a common prisoner. Her name was Elose, and she served Lady Lesolie of the Fountain. She told Ewaine that she would help him if he would trust her and obey what she asked.

Sir Ewaine promised that he would do anything that did not stain his honor. Then Elose opened a small locket and took from it a ring with a bright red stone. She said that Merlin had once given this ring to her father, King Magnus of Leograns. If Ewaine turned the stone inward into his palm, he would become invisible. If he turned the stone outward again, he would be seen.

Sir Ewaine thanked her with all his heart and put the ring on his finger. He turned the stone inward, and at once he vanished from sight. Elose quickly left the gate so that no one would find her there. Soon armed men rushed in to kill the prisoner, but they saw only the dead horse, the saddle, and the empty space where Ewaine had stood. While they shouted in confusion, Sir Ewaine passed among them unseen and entered the town.

Following Elose's command, Sir Ewaine went to the private garden of the

castle. The garden was quiet, with trees, flowers, fountains, and long walks. Several damsels were there, weeping because the champion of the Fountain was near death. Sir Ewaine waited unseen until Elose came among them. Then he laid his hand gently on her shoulder, and she knew that he had escaped.

Elose led him secretly to a safe room and gave him food, water, clean clothing, and rest. She also arranged for him to be bathed and dressed like a prince, with a golden circlet for his head. Then she went to Lady Lesolie, who was grieving for her champion. Elose spoke cheerfully on purpose, and Lady Lesolie rebuked her sharply for smiling at such a sad time. But Elose said that the lady might have reason to be less hopeless than she thought, and so she drew Lady Lesolie aside to tell her of Sir Ewaine.

Part 31 — Ewaine's Failure and Return

Elose told Lady Lesolie that a great knight was already in her castle. She said that this knight loved her deeply and would gladly defend the Fountain in place of the dead champion. Lady Lesolie listened with surprise, because she had not known that any such knight was near her. When Elose said that the knight was Sir Ewaine of Arthur's Round Table, the lady became even more surprised. She ordered Elose to bring him before her at once.

Elose went quickly to Sir Ewaine and told him that her lady wished to speak with him. Sir Ewaine came with her, dressed in fine clothes and looking very noble. When he saw Lady Lesolie, he bowed before her with great respect. She looked at him for a long time and understood that he was no common knight. Still, she knew that this same knight had wounded and killed Sir Sagron, her former champion.

Lady Lesolie asked him whether he thought he had done well by bringing sorrow to her land. Sir Ewaine answered honestly. He said that he had not come to hurt her or her people, but only to take an adventure as any knight might do. In battle, one knight took his chance against another, and the result lay in God's hands. Yet he was sorry for her grief, and if she would accept him, he would serve

as her new champion.

Lady Lesolie saw that his words were brave and his manner was true. She told him that she would accept him as champion of the Fountain for a year and a day. If he served faithfully through that time, she would then think of what else he might ask of her. Sir Ewaine accepted this with joy, because he already loved her. From that day, he defended the Fountain against every knight who came to challenge it.

Nearly a year passed in that valley. Sir Ewaine overthrew every knight who poured water on the stone and brought the storm upon the land. From each defeated knight he took horse and shield, and he sent the knight away on foot. The fame of the new Knight of the Fountain began to spread far and wide. During that same year, Sir Ewaine and Lady Lesolie came to love each other more deeply, and they were promised to one another.

Yet even in happiness, Sir Ewaine sometimes thought of Arthur's court. He wondered how King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, Sir Percival, and the other knights were faring. He also wondered whether anyone had found Sir Launcelot. Lady Lesolie saw that these thoughts troubled him, and one day she asked him what lay so heavily on his mind. Sir Ewaine told her the truth, saying that he loved her and was content, but longed to hear news of his old friends.

Lady Lesolie feared that his heart might grow restless if she kept him always beside her. So she told him to go to Camelot and speak again with his friends. But she also asked him to return as soon as he could, because the land needed its champion and she needed the man she loved. Sir Ewaine promised that he would not stay away longer than he must. The next morning, he took leave of her and rode away from the Valley of the Fountain.

On his journey back, Sir Ewaine passed again through the strange country near Vivien's castle. Vivien saw him coming and welcomed him with great joy, though her joy was false. She knew that he had won the Adventure of the Fountain, and she hated the thought that any knight of Arthur's court should win honor. So she greeted him sweetly, gave him food and soft clothes, and treated him as an honored guest.

Sir Ewaine did not suspect her. He sat with her and spoke freely, thinking that he had found kindness on the road. Then Vivien gave him a ring as a sign of friendship. She told him never to take it from his finger, because their friendship would end if he did. Sir Ewaine accepted the ring, not knowing that it was a ring of forgetfulness. As soon as he put it on, he forgot Lady Lesolie, Elose, and all his promises at the Fountain.

He remembered the battle at the Fountain, and he remembered leaving Arthur's court to seek Launcelot. But the whole year of love and duty was now like a dream that had vanished. When he reached Camelot, he was shocked to learn that nearly a year had passed. He could not explain what had happened to him, and he feared that others would think him strange or foolish. So he said little and remained for a time among his old companions.

One warm day, King Arthur went into the fields with the Queen and several knights. A pavilion was set up, and they sat together at a pleasant feast. While they were eating, a beautiful damsel came riding toward them. Her clothes shone with bright colors and gold, and all the court looked at her with wonder. This damsel was Elose, though Sir Ewaine did not know her because of the magic ring.

Elose entered the pavilion and asked whether Sir Ewaine was there. Arthur pointed to him, and she went straight to him with anger in her face. "Sir Ewaine," she said, "I call you a false knight." Ewaine stared at her in confusion. Something in her face almost woke memory in him, but the ring held his mind fast. He said that he did not know her.

Elose's anger became sharper. She told him that he had not forgotten her when she saved his life at the Castle of the Fountain. She said that she might forgive him for forgetting her, but she could not forgive him for forgetting Lady Lesolie, to whom he had promised faith. Sir Ewaine cried out that he did not know what she meant. Then Elose struck him on the face with her glove and left the pavilion before all the court.

After she had gone, Arthur asked Sir Ewaine who she was. Ewaine answered that he did not know and could not remember ever seeing her. The court became cold toward him, because many thought he was lying to escape shame. Ewaine

felt their eyes upon him and heard their whispers. At last, he could bear it no longer. He asked Arthur for leave to go away until he could prove his honor, and Arthur gave him leave.

Sir Ewaine rode from court with bitterness in his heart. He did not understand his own disgrace, and that made the pain worse. Night came while he was traveling through a forest. At last he found a rough hut and asked for lodging. An old woman opened the door, and though she looked cruel and ugly, she allowed him to come inside.

The hut seemed poor, but there was a large fire, a pot of hot stew, and many wooden dishes ready for a meal. Sir Ewaine ate and drank, then lay down to sleep, using his helmet as a pillow. But the hut was not a safe house. It was a den of thieves, and the old woman kept it for them. In the middle of the night, twenty-seven robbers returned with stolen goods and found Sir Ewaine sleeping there.

They bound him before he could fully wake. They took away his weapons, his golden chain, and then the ring from his finger. The moment the ring was removed, the spell broke. Sir Ewaine remembered everything: Lady Lesolie, Elose, his promise, his year at the Fountain, and Vivien's false kindness. The truth struck him like a sword through the heart. He cried out, "Betrayed! Betrayed! Betrayed!"

In a sudden storm of grief and anger, Sir Ewaine broke his bonds. He had no sword, so he seized a heavy wooden bench and used it as a weapon. He struck the thieves on every side, and many fell before him. But the captain of the robbers took a javelin and threw it at him. The javelin passed through Sir Ewaine's shoulder and pinned him against the wall.

Sir Ewaine tore himself free from the wall, though the pain was terrible. With the broken javelin still in his shoulder, he rushed at the thieves, and they scattered before him in fear. Then he reached the door, burst it open, and fled into the forest. The thieves followed for a while, but they feared his fury and soon lost him in the darkness. Alone under the trees, Sir Ewaine broke the javelin, pulled the point from his wound, and nearly fainted from the blood.

All that night, he wandered through the forest. Sometimes he walked, sometimes he fell, and sometimes he rose again without knowing how. Near dawn,

a poor woodcutter found him. The man was frightened at first, because Sir Ewaine looked almost like a ghost, pale and covered with blood. But when Ewaine begged for help, the woodcutter pitied him and laid him on a bed of leaves in his cart.

The woodcutter carried him out of the forest. But when Sir Ewaine fell into a deep faint and seemed dead, the poor man became afraid. He feared that people would think he had killed the wounded man. So he lifted Sir Ewaine from the cart and laid him gently beside a quiet lake in a park near a castle. Then he went away quickly, leaving him under an oak tree.

That morning, the lady of the castle walked in the park with her damsels. She saw the wounded man lying near the lake and sent one of her maidens to look at him. The maiden thought first that he was dead, but then she felt a faint beating of the heart. The lady was moved with pity. She returned to the castle, took a precious healing balm, and ordered the maiden to anoint the wounded man and leave clothes and a horse for him.

The maiden did as she was told, but she used all the balm instead of only a little. Soon Sir Ewaine stirred and woke. His strength came back enough for him to rise, wash himself in the lake, and put on the clothes left for him. The maiden came out from hiding and told him that her lady had saved him. When Sir Ewaine gave his name, she was astonished and brought him to the castle.

The lady of the castle welcomed him with great honor. At first she was angry that so much precious balm had been used, but when she learned who he was, she rejoiced. Sir Ewaine then heard that she was a widow and that a cruel neighboring lord had taken one of her estates. Now that lord was threatening to take the last castle she owned unless she agreed to marry him. Sir Ewaine offered at once to be her champion, because she had saved his life.

He stayed there until his wound was healed. Then the cruel lord came with six other knights and set up their tents before the castle. They mocked the lady and dared anyone to come out against them. Sir Ewaine armed himself in rich armor that the lady had given him and rode out across the drawbridge. The people on the walls shouted with joy when they saw that they now had a champion.

The enemy lord first sent his strongest knight against Sir Ewaine. Sir Ewaine

struck that knight down with one great meeting of spears. Then the other knights rushed at him together, thinking to win by numbers. Sir Ewaine fought them all, one after another, with such force that they could not stand against him. At last he overthrew the cruel lord himself and carried him back across his saddle into the castle yard.

The lady of the castle was full of joy and gratitude. She called Sir Ewaine her savior, but he answered that he was still a man under shame, though he had done that wrong without knowing it. He gave the captured lord into her hands and told her to judge him as she wished. Then he said that he could not stay. His heart was drawing him back to the Fountain, where he had first broken faith and where he must seek forgiveness.

The next day, Sir Ewaine put aside the armor the lady had given him. He asked instead for the clothes of a pilgrim. Dressed in that humble way, he left the castle and wandered for several weeks. At last, his road brought him back to the Valley of the Fountain. When he saw the town, the castle, and the land he had once defended, tears filled his eyes so fully that the whole valley seemed to swim before him.

He came to the postern gate of the castle and asked to speak with Lady Lesolie. Because his pilgrim's hood and hat hid his face, no one knew him. When he was brought before Lesolie, Eloise was with her. Lady Lesolie asked what he wanted, and he said that he carried news of Sir Ewaine, who had done her wrong without knowing it.

Lady Lesolie's face hardened when she heard his name. She said that if he came from that false knight, he could return at once. Sir Ewaine answered that he could not return to him, because that would be impossible. Then he told her a sorrowful story. He said that Sir Ewaine had been betrayed by magic, had forgotten against his will, had been shamed at Arthur's court, had fallen among thieves, and had been found dying beside a lake.

When Lady Lesolie heard this, she cried out and fainted. When she woke, she wept bitterly and said that she had lost the best and truest knight in the world. Sir Ewaine then asked if she still held such love for him. She answered that she did

and always would. Then he threw back his hood and said, “Lady, Sir Ewaine is not dead. I am that man, and I have come back to you if you can forgive me.”

Lady Lesolie and Elose both cried out in wonder and joy. Lesolie forgave him, because she now knew that he had not willingly broken faith. The castle and town were filled with celebration at the return of the Knight of the Fountain. For seven days there were feasts, lights, banners, music, and jousts. At the end of that joy, Sir Ewaine and Lady Lesolie were married with great honor, and he remained as the defender of the Fountain.

Part 32 — The Return of Launcelot

After Sir Ewaine left Sir Percival and Sir Sagramore to take the Adventure of the Fountain, those two knights continued the search for Sir Launcelot together. They rode for many months through forests, towns, open roads, and lonely hills. Sometimes they slept in castles, sometimes in abbeys, and sometimes under the trees with only their cloaks around them. They met many people and heard many strange tales, but no clear news of Sir Launcelot came to them. Still they did not turn back, because Queen Guinevere had sent them on that quest, and both wished to find the lost knight.

After more than a year of wandering, they came one day into a green valley with a bridge across a stream. On the other side of the bridge stood a knight in strong armor, sitting quietly upon his horse. Sir Sagramore rode first and asked the knight to let them pass. The stranger answered that he would not refuse the road, but that he would first gladly try a fall with any knight who came that way. Sagramore was quick in spirit and accepted the challenge at once.

The two knights rode apart and then charged upon the bridge. Their spears met with great force, but the stranger’s spear struck more truly. Sir Sagramore was thrown from his horse and fell heavily upon the ground. Percival saw this and grew very angry, because Sagramore was his companion. He rode forward at once and called to the stranger to defend himself.

Then Sir Percival and the unknown knight fought fiercely. First they used

spears, and then swords, and for a long time neither could win. Percival was amazed, because few knights in the world could stand against him in such a way. At last he stepped back and cried, "Sir, stop for a moment. You fight so well that I think you must be either Sir Launcelot or my brother Sir Lamorack."

At those words, the other knight cried out in wonder. He lifted the front of his helmet, and Percival saw that it was indeed Sir Lamorack of Gales. Percival lifted his own helmet too, and the two brothers ran to each other. They embraced and kissed each other with great joy. Sagramore, now awake and sitting on the grass, was also filled with wonder when he learned who the stranger was.

For a while, the three knights sat beside the stream and spoke together like old friends. Sir Lamorack asked Percival many questions, because he had long wished to know what had become of his youngest brother. Percival told him of his childhood in the mountain tower, of his mother, of Arthur's court, of Sir Launcelot's teaching, and of the adventures that had followed. Lamorack listened with deep love and pride, and he thanked God that his brother had become such a knight.

Then Sir Lamorack said that they must visit their mother. She now lived at St. Bridget's Priory, where she had taken a holy life after so many sorrows. Percival's heart was moved when he heard this, because he had left her long ago and had not returned. He feared that she might blame him for leaving her lonely. But Lamorack said that she would rejoice to see both her sons alive and honored.

So Percival and Lamorack left Sir Sagramore with friendly words and rode together toward the priory. The road led through quiet fields and soft woodlands, and the brothers spoke much as they went. Percival felt as if a lost part of his life had been given back to him. Lamorack also felt great comfort, because so many of their house had died by treachery, and now one brother remained beside him.

Near evening, they came to St. Bridget's Priory. It was a peaceful place, with low gray walls, a small chapel, and apple trees near the gate. The nuns received them gently and brought word to the prioress. When their mother came and saw Lamorack and Percival together, she could not speak at first. Then she stretched out her hands to them and wept, and both knights knelt before her.

Their mother blessed them and kissed them many times. She looked long at Percival, because he had been a wild boy when she last saw him and now stood before her as a famous knight. She asked if the world had been kind to him, and he answered that the world had given him both joy and sorrow. She said that this was the way of earthly life. Then she told both brothers to keep clean hearts, because strength without goodness would only bring ruin.

They stayed that night at the priory. In the morning, after prayer, their mother blessed them again before they rode away. As they left, Percival turned many times to look back at the gray walls and the small chapel. He knew that he might not see his mother often again. Yet her blessing lay upon him like a quiet light, and he rode on with a steadier heart.

Around midday, the brothers heard a cry of sorrow in the forest. They followed the sound and found a wounded knight lying on the ground. Beside him knelt an esquire, wiping his face and calling for help. The wounded knight was Sir Tarn. He told them, weakly, that a cruel lord named Sir Godwin had attacked him and had carried away his lady to a castle nearby.

Sir Lamorack and Sir Percival dressed Sir Tarn's wounds as best they could. Then they promised to rescue his lady. They rode to Sir Godwin's castle and demanded entrance. The porter let them in, thinking they would be trapped inside. But the two brothers were not afraid. They fought Sir Godwin and his men in the courtyard and overcame them with great strength.

They freed the lady of Sir Tarn and all others who had suffered in that place. Then Sir Lamorack said that such a nest of thieves should not remain standing. He ordered everyone, both high and low, to leave the castle. When all had come outside, torches were set to the buildings. As night fell, the castle burned behind them, and the red light of the fire shone through the trees.

After this adventure, the brothers brought Sir Tarn's lady back to him. Sir Tarn had recovered enough to sit up, and when he saw his lady safe, tears came into his eyes. He thanked them as men thank those who have saved more than life. Then Percival and Lamorack rode away together into the night. They slept under the trees, wrapped in their cloaks, tired but peaceful after the good deed they had done.

Before dawn, Sir Percival woke while Lamorack still slept. He looked at his brother for a long time and felt love and sadness together. He knew that Lamorack was not upon the same quest. Percival had promised to seek Sir Launcelot, and that duty still lay before him. So he armed himself quietly, mounted his horse, and rode away alone, leaving Lamorack asleep under the trees.

About midmorning, Percival came to a crossroad where a small chapel and a wayside shrine stood under a great tree. There he saw a knight kneeling in prayer, with his helmet off and his horse standing nearby. Percival waited quietly until the knight had finished praying. When the knight rose, Percival knew him at once. It was Sir Ector de Maris, the brother of Sir Launcelot.

Sir Ector was glad to see him, and the two embraced like close friends. They sat together in the grass and spoke of their long search. Sir Ector had no news of Launcelot, and Percival had no news either. Still, both felt that God had brought them together for a reason. So they agreed to continue the quest as companions from that hour.

They rode until afternoon, and then they came to a high place above a beautiful valley. In the middle of the valley lay a clear blue lake. In the middle of the lake there was an island, and on the island stood a fair castle with red roofs shining in the sun. Green meadows and bright flowers covered the island around it. Sir Ector said that he had never seen a lovelier place in his life.

The two knights rode down to the edge of the lake. There they saw a lady standing in the meadow on the island, with a sparrow-hawk on her wrist. Percival called across the water and asked who ruled that castle. The lady answered that the lord of the castle was the champion of Joyous Isle and that no knight might enter unless he first fought that champion. Percival's heart rose at this, because a worthy adventure stood before him.

A ferryman came and carried Percival across the lake, while Sir Ector waited on the shore. Percival rode through the flowered meadow toward the castle. Soon a knight came out to meet him, fully armed and riding a great horse. The two knights spoke courteously, but neither gave his name. Then they rode apart and prepared to fight.

The battle was strong and close. Percival felt at once that the knight before him was one of the greatest fighters in the world. They broke spears, drew swords, and fought with great power in the meadow below the castle. Many people watched from the walls and balconies, and Lady Elaine herself looked down with fear. She knew that her lord had found an enemy worthy of him.

At last, Percival struck so hard that the other knight staggered. The knight answered with a blow so great that Percival's shield shook upon his arm. Then Percival drew back and asked the knight to tell his name, because he had never met such strength except in Sir Launcelot or Sir Lamorack. The knight knelt suddenly before him and said, "Sir Percival, I am the man whom people once called Sir Launcelot of the Lake."

Percival cried out with joy. He lifted Launcelot from his knees, embraced him, and kissed him. Both men wept, because the long search was ended at last. Then Launcelot led Percival up to the gallery where Lady Elaine sat with her ladies. Percival looked at Elaine and understood why Launcelot had stayed in that island of peace. He greeted her with deep honor, and she welcomed him kindly.

Percival then remembered Sir Ector waiting across the lake. He told Launcelot that his own brother stood on the far shore and knew nothing yet. Launcelot was overcome with joy and told Percival to bring him at once. So Percival returned across the water and told Ector that the lord of the castle was Launcelot himself. Ector could hardly believe it, but he followed Percival into the ferry with all possible speed.

When Ector came to the island, Launcelot rode out with Elaine to meet him. The two brothers leaped from their horses and ran into each other's arms. They embraced and wept before all the people of Joyous Isle. Elaine watched them with a shining face, because their joy made her own heart happy. Then all went up to the castle together, and for many days there was feasting, music, and glad welcome.

Yet Sir Ector did not forget the command that had brought him there. One day, he walked alone with Launcelot in the garden. He asked him a question as if it were a riddle. If a queen to whom a knight had sworn service sent word

commanding him to return to court, should that knight obey her? Launcelot turned his face away and answered that he would not return.

Ector spoke more plainly then. He said that Queen Guinevere had commanded them to find Launcelot and bring him back. He also said that duty was not always easy, but a knight must not hide from one duty because he feared another. Launcelot became deeply troubled. He said that a greater duty held him at Joyous Isle, because he had given his faith to Elaine. Yet Ector's words entered his heart and would not leave it.

Elaine soon saw that something was wrong. She came to Launcelot and asked what troubled him. At first he would not tell her, but she already understood. She knew that the call from Camelot had come at last. She also knew that if she forced him to stay, his body might remain with her, but his spirit would be divided and unhappy. So she told him gently that he must return to Arthur's court.

Launcelot said he would not go unless Elaine went with him. If she would not come, he would stay and disobey the Queen's command. Elaine looked at him sadly, but there was courage in her face. She answered that if he needed her beside him in order to do his duty, then she would go. So it was decided that they would leave Joyous Isle for Camelot, together with Percival, Ector, Sir Lavaine, and a noble company.

Three days later, they departed with great state. Many knights, ladies, servants, and pages rode with them. Bright pavilions, fine clothing, shining armor, and rich horse-trappings made the road look like a moving court. Wherever they stopped, the fields seemed suddenly full of color and life. Yet beneath the joy of the journey, Launcelot and Elaine both carried quiet fears about what waited for them at Camelot.

On their way, they came near the Valley of the Fountain. There they passed the great black herdsman on his mound, and he laughed like thunder as they went by. After a time, they reached the fountain itself. Sir Lavaine, still young and eager for adventure, took the silver bowl and poured water upon the stone. At once the storm came, with thunder, wind, and rain, just as it had come before for Sir Ewaine.

When the storm ended and the birds sang in the tree, a knight rode toward them

in anger. It was Sir Ewaine, now the champion of the Fountain. But when he came near and saw Launcelot, Percival, Ector, Elaine, and Lavaine, his anger turned to joy. He greeted them warmly, and they all sat together in friendship. Then Ewaine told them the whole story of how he had won the Fountain, forgotten his duty through magic, suffered shame, and returned to Lady Lesolie.

After this, Sir Ewaine brought them to the castle of the Fountain. Lady Lesolie received them with honor, and for several days there were feasts, games, and happy talk. In the garden, Launcelot asked Ewaine to come with them to Camelot and bring Lady Lesolie also. Ewaine gladly agreed, because he wished Arthur and Guinevere to know his wife and to hear the truth of his adventure.

So, after three more days, the whole company left the Valley of the Fountain and turned toward Camelot. Sir Launcelot rode with Elaine, Sir Ewaine rode with Lesolie, and Percival, Ector, and Lavaine rode near them. The road was full of voices, hoofbeats, banners, and bright armor under the sun. Thus Sir Launcelot, long lost to Arthur's court, returned at last toward the world he had left behind.

Part 33 — The Birth of Galahad

Sir Launcelot came back to Camelot, and the whole court was filled with talk and joy. Many knights and ladies were glad to see him again, because he had been lost to them for so long. Yet Sir Launcelot did not go first to the King or to the knights. He went straight to Queen Guinevere and stood before her with a sad and troubled face. His return should have been a happy thing, but even at that moment peace could not fully enter his heart.

Queen Guinevere received him coldly. She asked why he had come, though she herself had sent the command that had brought him back. Sir Launcelot answered that her word had power over him wherever he might be. He said that he had left peace, duty, and happiness because she had called him. But Guinevere's heart was not calm, and she could not give him the kindness for which he had hoped.

Then the whole company from Joyous Isle was received at court. Lady Elaine

came also, with Sir Lavaine and her own attendants. Queen Guinevere greeted Elaine with outward kindness, but her heart was not free from jealousy. She arranged that Elaine should have rooms far from Sir Launcelot's rooms. In this way, under a show of honor, she separated husband and wife.

Lady Elaine was already weak in health, and this separation was very hard for her. She had left Joyous Isle because she believed it was right to follow Launcelot, but now she found herself alone in a strange court. She ate little, slept little, and wept often when no one saw her. Dame Brysen, who loved her and had long served her, saw that sorrow was making her sick.

Dame Brysen went secretly to Sir Launcelot and spoke to him very plainly. She told him that Elaine would fall into dangerous illness if he did not see her. Sir Launcelot was troubled, because he knew that a secret visit might bring anger and misunderstanding. But he also knew that Elaine was his wife and that he owed her comfort. So he agreed to come to her rooms late at night, when the castle was quiet.

That night, Dame Brysen led Sir Launcelot through a hidden way. When Elaine saw him, joy came over her like sudden light. She held him and cried again and again that he had come. Sir Launcelot comforted her gently, speaking softly until her fear and sorrow grew quieter. He stayed with her until the early morning, when at last she fell asleep like a tired child.

But a young damsel of Queen Guinevere's court had watched Sir Launcelot. In the morning, she went to the Queen and told her what she had seen. Guinevere's anger became terrible, because jealousy and wounded pride burned together in her heart. She sent for Sir Launcelot and ordered that no one else should remain in the room when he came. When he stood before her, she asked him whether he had gone to Elaine during the night.

Sir Launcelot did not lie. He said that he had gone to comfort Lady Elaine because she was ill and lonely. Guinevere heard the truth, but the truth did not soften her. She spoke to him with bitter words and called him false. Sir Launcelot answered with pain that Elaine was his wife and that he could not refuse her comfort when she needed him. Yet even as he spoke, he knew that no answer

could make Guinevere's heart gentle toward him that day.

After that quarrel, the court was no place of peace for Elaine. Her sickness grew worse, and she knew that she could not remain in Camelot. So she left the court with Sir Lavaine, Dame Brysen, and her own people, meaning to return toward her father's country. They traveled quietly, with little sound of music or laughter. Elaine was carried gently, because she had become too weak to ride for long.

On the road, they came to a peaceful priory in a green valley. White walls and red roofs stood beside a smooth river, and fields and orchards lay around the holy house. Elaine looked at the quiet place and said that it was good they had come there. She said that this was a house of peace and that she was very ill. So her people carried her inside, and the sisters of the priory gave her such comfort as they could.

Meanwhile, Sir Launcelot remained at Arthur's court with a heavy heart. He did not know how sick Elaine had become. If he had known, he would have ridden to her at once, no matter what anger or shame stood in his way. But no word reached him, and so he stayed where he was, pulled one way by remorse and another way by the old power that Guinevere still held over him. In this way, the punishment of his divided heart came closer.

At that same time, Sir Gawaine and Sir Bors de Ganis were still riding in search of Sir Launcelot. They had ridden together for many months after leaving Arthur's court. Spring had passed, summer had passed, and autumn had come with clear cold mornings and golden leaves. They had shared many small adventures and many nights on the road. But still they had not found the man they sought.

One day, as they rode through the autumn forest, they came to a place where two roads divided. While they were speaking about which road to take, a small golden bird appeared near them. It shone strangely among the yellow leaves and chirped as if calling them. Sir Gawaine remembered that such a bird had once belonged to the Lady of the Lake and had led him before to a strange adventure. The bird flew down one road, and the two knights followed it.

After some time, the bird led them to a fair place in the forest. There they met

a company of people in bright flame-colored clothing, and in the middle of them rode Lady Vivien. Sir Gawaine knew her and stopped her horse. He told her that she had brought much trouble to the Valley of the Fountain. He demanded that she remove the evil magic she had set there and free the land from that sorrow.

Vivien's face changed with anger. She told Gawaine to take his hand from her bridle. He refused, saying that he would not let her go until she promised to undo the harm she had done. Then Vivien lifted a white wand and struck him on the shoulder. She cried out that he should lose his own shape and become a misshapen dwarf. At once Sir Gawaine shrank and changed, while Vivien and her people laughed and rode away.

Sir Bors could not stop the magic, and in that confusion the two companions were separated. Sir Gawaine, now small and deformed, was full of terror and shame. He ran through the wood, calling for mercy, but Vivien had gone. After a time, the golden bird appeared again and began to lead him away. Gawaine followed it because he hoped that it might lead him to help.

The bird brought him to a bare and lonely valley. The ground was dry and covered with stones, and in the middle stood a thick pillar of mist. The golden bird rested in a tree, as if its work had brought Gawaine to the right place. Gawaine went near the mist and heard a voice call his name. The voice was Merlin's, though Merlin had long been hidden from the world.

Merlin spoke from inside the mist and told Gawaine not to fear. He said that the shape given by Vivien would pass from him. Then he spoke of a child who would soon be born, a child of Sir Launcelot and Lady Elaine. This child would be greater in purity than all other knights. He would one day achieve the Holy Grail and bring the highest glory to the Round Table before its fall.

As Merlin spoke, the mist seemed filled with a strange light. Gawaine listened in awe, and the weight of the prophecy entered his heart. Merlin told him to follow the golden bird again when it came. He also told him that he would meet Sir Bors, and that together they would be led to the place where the child would be born. Then the voice faded, the mist grew still, and Gawaine found that his own body had returned to its true shape.

The golden bird appeared again the next day and led Sir Gawaine through the forest. About noon, he came to the hermit's cell that had appeared more than once in these stories. There he saw a black war-horse, a spear, and a shield. By the sign on the shield, he knew that Sir Bors was inside. The hermit came to the door and welcomed Gawaine, saying that Bors had dreamed he would come there that day.

Sir Gawaine entered the little cell and found Sir Bors kneeling in prayer. He waited until Bors had finished, and then the two knights embraced each other with great joy. They sat down together while the hermit brought them simple food. Gawaine told Bors all that had happened to him: Vivien's anger, the spell, the golden bird, the pillar of mist, and Merlin's prophecy. Bors listened with wonder, for he too had dreamed of holy things in those same days.

When Sir Bors heard the prophecy about the child, he became very serious. He said that they should not delay. The matter was too high and too strange for them to treat lightly. So they thanked the hermit, mounted their horses, and rode away together. At once the golden bird appeared again and flew before them, chirping as if it were calling them onward.

They followed the bird for many hours through the forest. Toward evening, the trees became thinner, and they heard the sound of a bell. Soon they came out into a fertile valley beside a smooth river. There stood the same priory where Lady Elaine lay sick. Its white walls and red roofs shone in the late sunlight, and the whole valley was filled with a quiet golden light.

When the two knights entered the valley, the bird gave a sharp cry and flew high into the air. Then it disappeared over the trees. Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine knew that this was the place to which they had been led. They rode toward the priory with deep awe, for they felt that a holy and sorrowful event was waiting there. Neither spoke loudly, and even their horses seemed to move more softly.

As they came near the gate, it opened, and Sir Lavaine came out. His face was pale and stern, and he did not smile when he greeted them. He told them that they had come just in time. Then he ordered them to dismount and follow him. Servants took their horses away, and Sir Lavaine led them through quiet halls to a small white cell.

In the middle of that cell lay Lady Elaine upon a couch. Her golden hair spread over the pillow, and her face was very white. Her eyes were open, but they seemed to look at something far beyond the room. Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine came close, and Sir Lavaine lifted the cover softly. Beside Elaine lay a newborn child, wonderfully beautiful and very still.

At once the two knights understood. This was the child of Sir Launcelot and Lady Elaine, the child spoken of by Merlin. It seemed to them that a soft light came from the baby's face. Sir Bors and Sir Gawaine knelt beside the couch and joined their hands in prayer. Sir Lavaine stood near them, silent with grief and wonder.

Then Elaine spoke in a faint but clear voice. She asked whether Sir Bors was there, and Bors answered that he was. She told him to look at the child, because this was the one who would achieve the Quest of the Holy Grail. She said that he would become the greatest knight the world had ever seen, yet he would also be gentle, pure, and innocent. Therefore, she said, his name would be Galahad.

Elaine then said that her own time was near. She spoke as if she could already see the gates of heaven through a mist. Soon, she said, the mist would pass, and she would leave the sorrowful world behind. But the child beside her would remain and would bring light to the world from which she was departing. Sir Bors wept as he listened, because her words were peaceful and terrible at the same time.

Then Elaine gave Sir Bors one command. He was to take the child away at once and carry him to a place that would be shown to him. A golden bird would go before him and lead him there. He must leave the child in that place and tell no one where it was. Galahad had to be hidden until the time came for him to be shown to the world.

Sir Bors answered through tears that he would obey. Elaine told him not to wait until her death, because the end was very near. So Bors rose from his knees, took the child gently, and wrapped him in his cloak. Then he went out from the room, carrying the baby Galahad in his arms. Sir Gawaine and Sir Lavaine remained beside Elaine, both of them weeping.

That same night, Lady Elaine died in peace. Sir Lavaine and Sir Gawaine were

with her when she passed from the world. Afterward, Gawaine wanted to send for Sir Launcelot at once, but Lavaine spoke sternly. He said that Launcelot was not worthy to be brought there at that hour. He asked Gawaine to return to Arthur's court and say nothing yet about Galahad's birth or Elaine's death.

Sir Gawaine promised to keep the matter hidden for the time. Then he mounted his horse and left the priory, leaving Sir Lavaine alone with his dead sister. He rode back to Camelot and told only the adventures that had happened to him with Vivien and the golden bird. But he said nothing of the child Galahad and nothing of Elaine's passing. Those secrets remained in his heart, and in the heart of Sir Bors, until the time came for Galahad to appear before the world.

Book IV — The Story of the Grail and the Passing of Arthur

Part 34 — Geraint, Enid, and the Sparrow-Hawk

One autumn morning, King Arthur held a great hunt near his court at Carleon upon Usk. The air was clear and fresh, and the grass shone with dew. Many knights, ladies, servants, and hunters gathered in the castle yard, ready to ride into the forest. Arthur looked around and saw that Queen Guinevere was not there. When someone said that she was still asleep, the King smiled and said that she should not be wakened if she wished to rest.

Sir Geraint was also not present when the hunt began. Arthur laughed again and said that if Geraint also wished to sleep, he might sleep. Then the King and his company rode away into the morning, with hounds, horns, and many bright horses. A little later, Guinevere woke and learned that the hunt had already gone. She was displeased that no one had called her, so she dressed quickly and rode out with several ladies and attendants to find the King.

As Guinevere and her ladies rode quietly through the forest, they heard a horse coming behind them at a quick pace. The Queen turned and saw that the rider was Sir Geraint. She laughed and told him that because he too had been late, he must now serve her as punishment. Geraint answered that to serve her was no punishment, but a pleasure. So he rode beside the Queen, and they spoke together as they followed the forest road.

After a while, they saw a small company coming toward them between the trees. First rode a knight, and beside or near him rode a beautiful lady. Behind them came a dwarf, small in body but fierce and ugly in manner. The unknown knight seemed proud and did not stop to greet the Queen. Guinevere was surprised by this discourtesy and sent one of her maidens to ask who he was.

The maiden rode forward and spoke gently to the dwarf. But the dwarf answered with cruel words and struck her across the arm with his whip. The maiden cried out and returned to the Queen in pain and shame. Guinevere was greatly angered, and Geraint's face grew dark. He asked leave to go and demand

an answer himself, and the Queen allowed him to do so.

Geraint rode after the strange company and spoke to the dwarf. He asked the name of the knight and why such an insult had been given to the Queen's maiden. The dwarf answered him with the same pride and cruelty. Then he struck Geraint also with his whip. Geraint had no armor, and he carried no proper weapon for battle, so he could not fight the armed knight at that moment without folly.

The insult burned in Geraint's heart, but he held himself back. He returned to Guinevere and told her what had happened. The Queen was deeply offended, but she also knew that Geraint could not fight wisely while unarmed. Geraint asked permission to follow the knight, learn his name, and later avenge the insult. Guinevere agreed and told him to return when he had done what honor required.

So Sir Geraint followed the knight, the lady, and the dwarf through the forest. He kept at a distance, because he did not wish to be seen too clearly. The road went through woods, fields, and narrow lanes, and the day slowly passed. Toward evening, they came to a town in a valley. On a hill beyond the town stood a ruined castle, old, broken, and poor-looking.

The knight, the lady, and the dwarf entered the town, and at once the streets became full of noise. People shouted, laughed, and crowded around them. Some called out, "The Sparrow-Hawk!" again and again. Geraint asked several people what this meant, but they only repeated the same words and hurried away. At last he caught a stout man by the collar and said that he would not let him go until he explained the matter.

The man then told him that the knight was called the Knight of the Sparrow-Hawk. The next day there would be a contest for a silver sparrow-hawk set upon a pole. Any knight who wished to claim that honor must bring a lady and say that she was the fairest lady there. If another knight denied it, they would fight for the prize. The man also told Geraint that no lodging or armor could be found in the town, because everything had been taken for the great event.

Then the man advised Geraint to go to the ruined castle across the valley. Perhaps, he said, the people there might give him lodging, and perhaps he might find some old armor there. Geraint let the man go and rode toward the ruined

castle. As he came near, he saw an old man walking on the wall. The old man came down to the gate and greeted him with dignity, though his clothes were poor and worn.

Geraint asked if he might have lodging for the night. He also asked if there was any armor in the castle that a knight might wear. The old man answered that his house was poor and broken, but that a guest of noble bearing would still be welcome. He led Geraint inside with great courtesy. Though the castle was ruined, the old man's manner showed that he had once been a lord of high rank.

Inside the castle, Geraint met the old man's wife and daughter. The daughter was named Enid, and when Geraint saw her, he thought that he had never seen a more beautiful maiden. Yet her dress was old and faded, because her family had fallen into poverty. She moved quietly and served their guest with gentle care. Geraint looked at her often, but he spoke with respect and did not stare rudely.

The old lord sent his wife into the town to buy the best food she could with the little money he had. While supper was being prepared, he walked with Geraint in the garden and told him the story of his fall. He had once been the rightful lord of the town. But his younger brother had taken power from him little by little, until he himself had been left poor in the ruined castle. Now that brother ruled the town and supported the Knight of the Sparrow-Hawk.

The old lord said that the Knight of the Sparrow-Hawk was Sir Gaudeamus of the Moors. For two years he had won the silver bird against all challengers. If he won again on the next day, he would hold the title fully and without dispute. Geraint listened carefully and then said that he would challenge Sir Gaudeamus himself. He asked for the old armor and said that he was not ashamed to wear it, if it could serve him in a just cause.

Then Geraint asked about Enid. He said that if she had no knight to serve her, he wished to fight in her name for the sparrow-hawk. The old lord was moved by this request. He said that Enid was his only child and that he would be honored if she accepted Geraint as her knight. When Enid was asked, she answered modestly that she would do as her father wished. In her heart, she was frightened, but she also trusted Geraint's noble face and steady voice.

That night, Geraint ate supper with the poor family in the ruined hall. The food was simple, but it was offered with such kindness that it seemed better than rich dishes in a proud house. After supper, the old armor was brought out. It was worn, darkened, and dented from old battles. Yet Geraint examined it carefully and found that it was still strong enough for use.

The next morning, Enid helped prepare what she could, while the old lord's servants made ready Geraint's horse. Geraint put on the old armor and looked more like a knight from a forgotten time than a knight of Arthur's court. Enid wore her poor dress, though Geraint thought her beauty needed no rich clothing. Then they rode down from the ruined castle toward the town, where the people had already gathered for the contest.

In the field of the Sparrow-Hawk, many people stood around the lists. The silver bird shone on its tall staff, and Sir Gaudeamus sat proudly with his lady nearby. Several knights had come, but none seemed eager to challenge him. Then Geraint entered the field with Enid and the old lord. Many people laughed when they saw his old armor and her poor dress. They thought no such pair could stand against the proud knight of the town.

Geraint rode to the place of challenge and said that Enid was the fairest lady there. Sir Gaudeamus laughed and denied it loudly. He said that no maiden in poor clothing could be called fairer than his lady. Geraint answered calmly that beauty did not depend on gold or silk. Then both knights took their spears and made ready to fight.

The first charge was hard. Their spears broke, and both horses staggered, but neither knight fell. They took new spears and charged again. This time Geraint struck Sir Gaudeamus with such strength that the proud knight was thrown from his saddle. The people cried out, but Sir Gaudeamus sprang up and drew his sword, refusing to accept defeat so easily.

Geraint also dismounted, and they fought on foot. Sir Gaudeamus was strong and used to victory, but Geraint fought with quiet power and clear purpose. Blow after blow rang against shield and helmet. At last Geraint struck him down and stood above him with sword raised. Sir Gaudeamus yielded, because he could do

nothing else.

Geraint spared him, but he gave him a command. Sir Gaudeamus must go with his lady and the cruel dwarf to Queen Guinevere and ask pardon for the insult given in the forest. He must also submit himself to King Arthur's judgment. Sir Gaudeamus agreed, though his pride was deeply wounded. The people then knew that the old order in that town had been broken.

After this, the younger brother who had stolen the old lord's power was also brought to judgment. The truth of his wrongs became clear before the people. The old lord was restored to his place and honor. The town that had laughed at Enid now looked upon her with wonder. She had come in poor clothing, but she had been made the lady of victory.

Geraint did not remain long to enjoy praise. He had done what he came to do, and now he wished to return to Arthur's court. But before he left, he asked the old lord for Enid's hand in marriage. The old lord gladly agreed, and Enid accepted him with quiet happiness. Geraint said that he would take her first to Queen Guinevere, still wearing the same poor dress in which he had won honor for her. Later, she would be clothed as a lady of her worth.

So Sir Geraint, Enid, her father, and others rode toward Carleon. Sir Gaudeamus, his lady, and the dwarf also went there as they had been commanded. When they came before Queen Guinevere, the dwarf's wrong was confessed, and pardon was asked. Guinevere received Enid with great kindness and loved her at once. Arthur also welcomed Geraint with honor, because he had defended the Queen's dignity and restored justice in the town.

Soon afterward, Geraint and Enid were married at Arthur's court with great joy. Guinevere herself gave Enid rich clothing, jewels, and all that was proper for so noble a bride. But many people remembered that Geraint had first chosen her in poverty and plain dress. This made his love seem purer and stronger. In those days, their happiness appeared complete, and no one guessed what shadow would later come between them.

Part 35 — Geraint's Suspicion

After Sir Geraint and Enid were married, they lived for a time at Arthur's court. Enid was young, bright, and full of life. She enjoyed games, music, dancing, and cheerful talk with the young people of the court. Sir Geraint was older and more serious, and he often stood apart while she joined those happy sports. He loved her deeply, but love did not make his heart peaceful.

Among the young lords at Arthur's court was Sir Peregrins, the son of King Ludd of Cornwall. He was handsome, lively, and always ready for sport. Because he and Enid were both young, they were often together in games and talk. There was no wrong in this, and Enid thought no evil of it. But Sir Geraint watched from a distance, and dark thoughts slowly grew inside him.

He did not speak openly to Enid about his pain. Instead, he kept it hidden, and that made it worse. He began to think that perhaps Enid would have been happier with a young man like Sir Peregrins. Then he began to feel that she had been tied to a man too old and too grave for her joy. Enid saw that he was troubled, but she did not understand why. This silence between them became like a cold wall.

One day, Enid came to him while he sat alone, looking out over the fields and river. He was looking at the bright land, but he did not truly see it. His thoughts were turned inward, and everything inside him seemed dark. Enid sat on his knee and put her arms around his neck. She asked him gently whether she had offended him in any way.

Geraint answered that she had not offended him. Enid then asked what troubled him, but he said that nothing troubled him. After a moment, he changed his words and said that he longed to see his own home again. His father and mother lived at Amadora, and it had been many years since he had seen that place. Enid answered at once that they should go there if he wished it.

So Geraint asked King Arthur for leave to depart, and Arthur gave it. The next day, Geraint and Enid left the court with a small company of attendants. They traveled for three easy days and came to Amadora, the castle of Geraint's father. There they were received with joy, and for some months life was pleasant. There was hunting, hawking, feasting, and sport each day.

Yet in all that time, Geraint did no great knightly deed. He did not ride out against wrongdoers, seek dangerous adventures, or win new honor in arms. The people of Amadora began to speak of this among themselves. They said that their lord had once been famous for brave deeds, but now he seemed to live only for his wife. These words were not meant for Enid's ears, but in time she heard them.

Enid was deeply troubled. She did not think Geraint was weak, but she feared that her love had somehow held him back. One summer morning, she woke very early and saw Geraint sleeping beside her. His arms and shoulders were strong, broad, and beautiful in the morning light. Then she looked at her own thin white arm and thought how small and weak she was beside him.

She asked herself whether the people were right. Had her soft arms kept such a great knight from the deeds that belonged to him? Had love made his world too narrow? She did not believe that love itself was wrong, because many married knights still did brave deeds. Then she sighed deeply and whispered, "The fault must be in me. I am not a true and right wife for this noble man."

Sir Geraint had woken, though his eyes were still closed. He heard only the last words, and he understood them wrongly. He thought Enid was saying that she had been false to him. The thought struck him like a knife. He opened his eyes and looked straight at her, and when she smiled at him, he did not smile back.

Suddenly he rose from the bed and told her to dress. Enid obeyed, though she was frightened by his cold voice. Geraint put on his full armor, then told her to follow him. She asked where they were going, but he gave no answer. Together they went down the stairs, across the courtyard, and into the stable while the castle still slept.

The sun had just risen, and the morning was fresh and bright. Birds sang loudly, and the river sounded far below the castle. Geraint brought out his own horse and Enid's horse. He helped Enid mount, then mounted his own horse. At the gate, he turned to her and spoke in a hard voice.

He told her that he would now prove that strength and courage had not left him. She must ride ahead of him and choose the road. He would follow behind her at some distance. But she must not speak to him unless he gave her leave. Enid said

only that she would do as he commanded, and they rode away from the castle before anyone knew they had gone.

They rode for several hours, with Enid ahead and Geraint behind. The sun rose higher, and the day became hot. At last, they came near a dark forest. As Enid rode toward it, she saw the shine of armor among the leaves. Then she heard men speaking in low voices from the thicket.

There were three armed robbers hidden there. Their chief said that a fine prize was coming to them: one knight deep in thought, one beautiful lady, and good horses and armor. He said that three men could surely kill one man and take all that he had. Enid heard this and became afraid for Geraint. She knew his command, but she also knew that silence might bring his death.

She turned her horse and rode back to him. Geraint looked angry when he saw her coming. Enid asked if she might speak, and he answered bitterly that she had already taken that right. Then she told him of the three armed men waiting near the forest. Geraint accused her of perhaps wishing to see him fall, but he rode forward to meet them.

The three robbers rushed from the trees and charged at him together. Their spears struck his shield, but he turned the blows aside. His own spear held firm and passed through the first robber, throwing him dead from his horse. Then Geraint drew his sword and struck down the other two with terrible force. In a short time, all three lay dead upon the ground.

Geraint took their horses and armor and tied the armor upon the horses. Then he gave the three horses to Enid and told her to lead them. He said that she could see he was still strong enough to defend himself. He also warned her again not to speak to him. Enid accepted the horses and rode on ahead, her heart full of pain and love.

Not long afterward, Enid heard more voices in the forest. This time four armed men were waiting in another hidden place. Their chief said that now the prize was even better, because the lady led three horses loaded with armor. They would kill the knight and take the lady, the horses, and everything else. Enid's heart shook, but she again turned back to warn her husband.

Geraint's face darkened when she came near. Enid told him what she had heard, and he rebuked her for speaking again. Still, he rode forward to face the four men. They came at him two by two because the road was narrow. Geraint killed the first with his spear and struck down the second with his sword. Then he charged the other two and killed them also.

After the fight, he stripped their armor and placed it on their horses. He tied those four horses to the three Enid already led, so that she now had seven horses in her charge. He told her that his manhood and strength were still alive. Then he warned her that if she spoke again, his battle-anger might make him strike her before he could control himself. Enid answered softly that she would obey.

They rode deeper into the forest. Enid now had great trouble leading seven horses, but she did not complain. Then, from another thicket, she heard five men planning to attack. They said that the lady, the seven horses, and the knight behind her would all be easy prey if they struck from two sides. Enid thought that she might die if she disobeyed Geraint again, but she would rather die by his hand than let him be murdered.

She rode back a third time. Geraint asked if he had not told her to speak no more. Enid said that this time she had to speak, because five men lay in ambush ahead. Geraint told her to wait with the horses while he cleared her path. Then he rode forward into the place where the men were hidden. They sprang out around him, and a fierce fight began.

For a while, Enid could hardly see him in the press of men and horses. His sword flashed, and his battle cry rang through the trees. First five men stood against him, then four, then three, then two. At last only one remained, and that man begged for mercy. But Geraint was still burning with battle-rage and killed him where he stood.

Then Geraint returned to Enid. He placed the five new suits of armor on the five new horses and tied them to the others. Now Enid had twelve horses to lead through the forest. The task was very hard, and Geraint saw how tired she was. He felt pity for her, but his anger and false suspicion still kept him from speaking kindly.

Evening came, and the forest grew dim. The moon rose bright above the trees and laid silver light on the ground. Geraint told Enid that they would not leave the forest that night, so they must rest beneath the trees. Enid asked if she might speak, and this time he allowed it. She asked what they would do for food, because she was very hungry.

Geraint answered that a knight often had to go without food for a whole day or longer. Enid said no more, though hunger and weariness made her weak. Geraint gathered leaves into a bed and spread a cloak over them. Then, seeing how tired she was, he told her to lie down while he kept watch. Enid lay on the leaves, listened to the horses moving nearby, heard a nightingale far away in the dark, and at last fell asleep.

Very early the next morning, Geraint woke her. She was still hungry, but she made no complaint. She mounted her horse and took the reins of the twelve horses in her hands. Then they rode on as before, with Enid ahead and Geraint behind. After a while, the trees grew thinner, and sunlight began to fall more freely through the branches.

At last they came out of the forest into open country. There were fields, hedges, meadows, and men mowing grass in the morning light. Before them lay a river, and they crossed it at a ford. The horses lowered their heads and drank as they passed through the water. On the far bank, they saw a slender yellow-haired youth carrying bread, cheese, and a pot of milk to the mowers.

Geraint asked the youth where he came from. The youth told him that there was a town beyond the hill. Seeing their tired faces, he guessed that they had spent the night in the forest and must be hungry. He offered them the bread, cheese, and milk that he carried. Geraint thanked him and accepted, chiefly for Enid's sake.

They sat beneath a crab-apple tree and ate the simple food. To Enid, it seemed better than a feast, because she had eaten nothing since the morning before. When they had finished, Geraint asked the youth to go to the town and find them good lodging at an inn. As payment, he told the youth to choose one of the horses and one suit of armor for himself. The youth was amazed by so rich a gift, but Geraint ordered him to take it.

The youth went into town with the horse and armor. A servant of the Earl saw him and asked where he had received such things. The youth told him of the noble knight and the lady who led many horses loaded with armor. The servant brought him before the Earl, and the youth repeated the story. The Earl was very interested and sent him back to invite the knight and lady to lodge at his castle.

But Geraint did not wish to stay with the Earl. When the youth returned with that message, Geraint was displeased. He said that he had asked for an inn, not a castle. So the youth led them into the town and brought them to the best inn. There Geraint ordered the best room and told Enid to remain on one side of the chamber while he rested on the other.

While Geraint slept, the youth went back to the Earl and told him where the knight was staying. Later that day, Geraint woke and ordered the landlord to prepare a fine meal. He also told the landlord to invite his friends, because although he himself was unhappy, he liked to see others merry. Soon the inn was full of food, drink, laughter, and guests. Geraint paid for everything with a careless hand.

That evening, the Earl came to visit Geraint with twelve of his best knights. Geraint welcomed him and spoke with him courteously. The Earl asked why he was traveling, and Geraint said that he had no purpose except to seek adventure. Then the Earl saw Enid sitting apart. He looked at her closely and thought that he had never seen any lady so beautiful.

The Earl asked permission to speak with Enid, and Geraint gave it. The Earl went to her and said that such a delicate lady should not ride through the rough world with a hard knight. He said she should have servants, fine clothes, and a rich house. Enid answered that she would rather travel alone with Geraint than live in state with anyone else. Then the Earl told her plainly to leave Geraint and come with him.

Enid was angry and answered bravely. She said that Geraint was dearer to her than all the lands and castles in the world. The Earl then threatened that he could kill Geraint and take her by force. Enid saw that they were in great danger, because many men in that town served the Earl. So she hid her anger and pretended to

change her mind. She told the Earl to come in the morning with twelve armed knights and carry her away, so that it would seem she had yielded only by force.

The Earl believed her and went away pleased. Enid said nothing to Geraint that night, because she feared his anger might make him attack the Earl at once. When Geraint slept, she rose quietly and placed his armor piece by piece where he could reach it easily. Then she lay down for a short time. Before dawn, she woke him and told him all that the Earl had said and all that she had answered.

Geraint was filled with rage and said that her beauty brought evil wherever she went. He wanted to kill the Earl before leaving the town. But Enid begged him to escape instead, because there were too many enemies around them. This time Geraint saw that she spoke wisely. He put on his armor, called the landlord, and gave him the remaining horses and armor as payment for their stay.

The landlord led them out of town by a secret road. When the Earl came to the inn with his twelve knights, he found that Geraint and Enid had gone. He forced the landlord to tell him which way they had traveled. Then he and his knights rode after them at great speed. Soon Enid looked back and saw the dust rising behind them.

She cried to Geraint that his enemies were coming. Geraint turned and waited in the road. The Earl rode up and falsely said that he wanted only the lady, because she wished to go with him. Geraint asked Enid if this was true. She answered that she would rather go with Geraint to death than go with the Earl to joy. Then the Earl saw that he had been tricked.

The Earl ordered his twelve knights to fight for Enid. One after another, they came against Geraint, and one after another, he overthrew them. Some were thrown so hard that they could not rise. At last, all twelve had fallen in the road. The Earl then told Geraint that he had fought well and could go free. But Geraint said that one enemy still remained, and that enemy was the Earl himself.

So Geraint and the Earl rode against each other. Their spears met with a great crash. The Earl's spear broke, but Geraint's spear held and threw him far behind his horse. Geraint ran to him, tore off his helmet, and raised his sword to kill him. The Earl begged for mercy, but Geraint would not listen, because the man had

tried to take both his life and his honor.

Then Enid came and held Geraint's arm. She begged him to spare the Earl's life, asking what good could come from killing him. Geraint looked at her and slowly lowered his sword. He said that because she asked it, the Earl's life belonged to her. Enid told the Earl to rise and go away in peace. Then Geraint mounted again, and he and Enid rode onward, with Enid ahead and Geraint following behind as before.

Part 36 — Geraint and Enid Reconciled

After Sir Geraint spared the Earl's life because Enid asked him to do so, he and Enid rode away from that place. As before, Enid rode far ahead, and Geraint followed behind her. The sun was high, and the road was dry and bright. Enid's heart was heavy, because she had seen how much anger still ruled her husband. Geraint also rode in silence, but his pride still held him fast, and he would not yet speak kindly to her.

After some time, they came through a thin wood and saw a wide valley before them. A smooth river ran through the middle of it, and on both sides were fields, meadows, and green places. A large town stood near the river, with strong stone walls around it. A tall castle rose above the town, and a bridge crossed the river before the town gate. The place looked rich and fair, but Geraint did not know whether friend or danger waited there.

As they looked down from the road, a horseman came out from the town and crossed the bridge. When he came near, Geraint greeted him and asked the name of the town and its lord. The horseman answered that the town was called Redlands. Its lord was a brave Earl whom men called the Little King, because he ruled that valley almost like a king in his own right. Geraint then asked whether a traveler might pass by the bridge without entering the town.

The horseman said that this could be done, but not without danger. The Little King was a proud and strong knight, and he did not like armed strangers to pass his town without speaking with him. If Geraint took the lower road by the river,

the Little King might ride out to challenge him. Geraint listened and said that he did not wish to stay in the town. Then he ordered Enid to take the lower road, and he followed after her as before.

They had not gone far along the river when armed men came from the town. At their head rode the Little King himself. He was small in body, but strong, fierce, and quick in arms. He called to Geraint and asked why he passed so proudly by his town without greeting him. Geraint answered that he wished to go on his way and had no quarrel with him.

But the Little King would not let the matter pass. He said that no armed knight should ride through his land in that manner unless he first proved himself. Geraint was already tired from the fights of the day before, and his wounds had not fully closed. Still, he would not turn back. He took his spear and made ready, while Enid watched from the roadside with fear in her heart.

The two knights charged hard at each other. Their spears struck with a sharp crash, and both horses staggered under the shock. Geraint kept his seat, and so did the Little King. They charged again, and again neither man fell. Then they drew swords, and the battle became close and bitter.

The Little King was stronger than his small body suggested. He struck Geraint more than once, and the old wounds beneath Geraint's armor began to open again. Blood ran down inside his armor and stained the plates at his legs and side. Geraint fought on with his usual courage, but each movement brought him pain. At last, he struck the Little King so hard that the smaller knight could fight no more.

When the Little King learned who Geraint was, he was full of regret. He said that he would never have fought him if he had known his name. He also saw how badly Geraint was wounded and begged him to come to the castle and rest. Enid hoped with all her heart that Geraint would accept. But Geraint refused, saying that he would go on his way and would not turn aside.

The Little King tried again to persuade him. He said that another adventure might kill him if he traveled in such a state. He also asked who would protect Enid if Geraint fell. But these words only made Geraint more stubborn. He called Enid forward and ordered her to ride ahead again. Then they left the Little King and his

men standing by the road, troubled by what they had seen.

The day grew hotter. Geraint's wounds dried and stuck to his armor, and this made his pain worse. At last he could bear it no longer. He called Enid to stop near a place where oak trees gave shade beside the road. She wanted to help him from his horse, but he would not allow her to touch him. He told her to stand beneath another tree while he stood alone beneath his own.

Enid went where he told her, but she wept as she stood there. Geraint leaned against the tree, white with pain and loss of blood. At that time, Sir Kay came near with some of Arthur's court, for King Arthur and Queen Guinevere were not far away in a woodland camp. Sir Kay saw a wounded knight under the tree and asked who he was. Geraint answered sharply and would not give his name.

Sir Kay, being Sir Kay, spoke too roughly. He tried to question the wounded man in a way that angered him. Geraint, weak though he was, struck him so suddenly and so hard that Kay fell down senseless. After a little while, Kay rose in shame and went away. He did not care to stay with a wounded man who could still give such a blow.

Sir Kay went to Sir Percival and told him that a strange wounded knight was standing under a tree nearby. Percival went to the place and spoke gently to Geraint. He asked him to come to King Arthur's tent and have his wounds treated. Geraint refused and said that he would go forward. Then Enid came from behind the tree, her face wet with tears, and begged Percival to make him go.

Percival knew Enid at once. Then he understood that the wounded knight must be Sir Geraint. He cried out in surprise, but Geraint still denied his own name. Percival did not argue. He quietly sent a page to bring King Arthur. Then he spoke softly to Enid and asked how she and her lord had come into such misery. Enid could only say that Geraint had commanded her to ride with him, and she had obeyed.

Soon King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, and many of the court came to the place. Percival told Arthur that the wounded man was Sir Geraint. Arthur looked at his knight and was filled with pity and anger together. He asked Enid how all this had happened, but Enid could not explain the dark thought that had driven her husband.

She only said that wherever Geraint went, she was bound to follow.

Arthur would not allow Geraint to travel farther. Geraint begged to be left alone, but Arthur refused him firmly. A tent was set up at once, and a soft couch was placed inside it. Arthur's physicians came and removed the blood-stained armor carefully from Geraint's body. They washed his wounds, treated them with healing medicine, and bound them with clean cloth.

Queen Guinevere took Enid to her own pavilion. She gave her clean clothes and food, and then asked her gently to tell the whole story. Enid told of the morning when Geraint had misunderstood her words, of the journey through the forest, of the robbers, of the Earl, and of all the hardship that had followed. Everyone who heard her was amazed by her patience and sorrow. Guinevere comforted her and kept her near her during the days that followed.

For nearly a month, Geraint and Enid stayed in Arthur's woodland court. Geraint slowly healed, though Enid was not allowed to see him or speak with him. Each day she asked about him, and each day she heard that he was stronger. Yet as his body healed, his dark thoughts returned. He remembered again the words he had misunderstood, and his old suspicion woke inside him like a sickness that had not been cured.

At last Geraint asked Arthur to let him leave. Arthur asked where he wished to go, and Geraint answered that he did not know. He only wished to ride in search of adventure. Arthur told him that Enid should remain safe with the Queen. Geraint refused and said that she must go with him wherever he went. Arthur called this madness, but when the physicians said that Geraint's wounds were healed enough for travel, the King allowed him to depart.

So Geraint and Enid rode away again in the same sad order as before. Enid rode ahead, and Geraint followed behind. After a time, they entered a thick and gloomy wood. There they heard a woman crying in great grief. They followed the sound and came into an open glade, where a lady sat beside a dead knight covered with blood.

Geraint asked what had happened. The lady said that she and her knight had been attacked by three huge men, like giants, who had killed her husband and

gone away along a forest path. Geraint told Enid to remain with the grieving lady while he rode after the killers. Enid begged him to remember that he had only just risen from a bed of pain. But he would not listen, and he rode into the dark trees.

Before long, Geraint saw the three giants walking ahead of him. Each wore a rough body-piece of armor, and each carried a great iron-bound club. Geraint set his spear and charged. He drove the spear through the first giant, pulled it free, and then struck the second in the same way. But before he could draw the spear back again, the third giant struck him with his club.

The blow was terrible. Geraint's shield split, his helmet cracked, and the armor was beaten from one shoulder. He fell to his knees, and all his half-healed wounds opened again. Blood ran down his body as if the old battles had returned at once. Yet he rose, drew his sword, and struck the third giant with such force that the man fell dead beside the other two.

Geraint mounted again and rode back toward Enid and the widowed lady. When he reached them, he tried to speak, but his strength failed. He said only one word, and then his body swayed in the saddle. Before Enid could reach him, he fell from his horse to the ground like a dead man. Enid ran to him and cried over him, believing that the end had come at last.

While she wept beside him, a knight of that country came riding with his men. This was the Earl of Limours. He saw the beautiful Enid, the dead-like knight on the ground, and the grieving lady beside her. He asked what had happened, and when he heard part of the story, he ordered that Geraint should be laid in a shield and carried to his house. He also ordered Enid to come with him, though she did not wish to leave her husband's side.

At the Earl's house, Geraint was placed upon the floor in the hollow of the shield, as if he were dead. Enid sat near him and would not eat or drink. The Earl of Limours looked at her and began to desire her for himself. He told her that her husband was dead and that she should forget him. Enid answered that she would never forget him and would not take food while he lay before her in such a state.

The Earl grew angry because she refused him. He commanded food and wine to be brought, and again told her to eat. Enid still refused. Then he struck her

across the face. The blow was cruel, and Enid cried out in pain and grief. At that cry, Geraint's soul seemed to wake inside his body.

Geraint had not been dead. He had been lying in a deep swoon, hearing little by little what was happening around him. He heard Enid refuse food, and he heard the Earl speak to her. When he heard the blow and her cry, his heart opened at last. He understood how faithful she had been through every trial. Shame and love rose together in him, and the last shadow of his suspicion passed away.

He grasped the sword that lay near him and rose from the shield. The people in the hall screamed, because they thought a dead man had come back to life. Geraint went straight to the Earl of Limours. "Would you dare to strike my wife?" he cried. Then he struck the Earl with such force that the man fell dead at the table.

Everyone fled from the hall in terror, leaving only Geraint, Enid, and the dead Earl. Enid looked at her husband and could hardly believe what she saw. "My lord," she said, "are you dead or alive?" Geraint answered, "Beloved, I am alive." Then he told her that they must leave quickly before the Earl's men returned with courage. They found his horse, and he lifted Enid behind him, because her own horse could not be found.

They rode away from that place, and no one dared to stop them. Those who saw them thought that a living woman rode with a man returned from death. When they came out into the sunlight, Geraint turned and looked at Enid. He saw how pale and thin she had become because of the suffering he had caused her. He bowed his head in shame and asked if she could forgive him.

Enid answered that she forgave him, though she would never forget what had happened. Tears ran down her face as she spoke, and Geraint turned away because he could not bear the sight of them. They rode on in silence, but the silence was different now. It was no longer the silence of anger. It was the silence of two wounded hearts beginning to understand one another again.

After a while, they came to a road with high hedges on both sides. They heard many horses coming toward them and saw spear points above the hedge. Geraint hid Enid on the other side and prepared to defend her once more. But the riders were not enemies. At their head was the Little King, who had heard that Geraint

was in trouble and had come to seek him.

At first, the Little King did not know Geraint, because blood and hardship had changed his appearance. When Geraint named himself, the Little King came forward and embraced him. Enid came out from her hiding place, and the Little King greeted her with deep respect. Then he brought them both to his castle. There Geraint's wounds were cared for, and at last he was given the rest he had refused before.

Thus the hard trial of Sir Geraint and Lady Enid came to its end. Geraint had proved his strength again and again, but that was not the deepest lesson of the journey. He had also learned how blind pride can become when it feeds on suspicion. Enid had proved her truth not by proud words, but by patience, fear, hunger, danger, and pain. From that time, Geraint knew her heart better, and their love was healed, though the memory of suffering remained.

This ends the story of Sir Geraint and Lady Enid in its proper place. It belongs here because it is one of the famous stories of Arthur's court and of the knights of the Round Table. Now the story must turn from the trials of husband and wife to a higher and stranger matter. Next comes the coming of Sir Galahad and the Quest of the Holy Grail, where some knights will be lifted to great holiness and others will fail.

Part 37 — Galahad Comes to Camelot

One day, while Sir Launcelot sat at Arthur's court with many lords and ladies, a maiden entered the hall. She was dressed all in white, with a red belt around her body. She stood at the door and called in a clear voice, asking which knight was Sir Launcelot of the Lake. Sir Launcelot rose and answered that he was the man she sought. Then the maiden told him to follow her, but she would not yet tell him why.

Sir Launcelot went with her at once. Outside the hall, two horses were waiting: a white horse for the maiden and a black horse for him. They mounted and rode away from Camelot into the forest. All that day they traveled through woods,

fields, and quiet places. Toward evening, they came to a beautiful valley, rich with orchards, grain fields, cattle, and soft light.

In the middle of that valley stood a nunnery with white walls. The maiden told Sir Launcelot that this was the place to which she had brought him. They entered the gate and crossed the open yard. Then the maiden led him into the chapel. There Sir Launcelot saw four ladies kneeling before the altar, and beside them were two knights whom he knew well: Sir Bors and Sir Lionel.

When the prayers were finished, Sir Bors and Sir Lionel rose and greeted him. They said that each of them had also been brought there by a maiden and that they had waited for him. Sir Launcelot asked why they had all been called. Then the Abbess gave an order to one of the nuns. After a short time, the nun returned with a tall young man dressed in white.

Sir Launcelot looked at the young man with wonder. The Abbess told him that this was Galahad, his own son, and that Galahad's mother had been Lady Elaine the Fair. Sir Launcelot was deeply shaken, because he had known of Elaine's death but had not known that she had left a son. The Abbess said that Galahad had lived there in secret since his birth. Now the time had come for him to leave hidden life, because he was the knight who would achieve the Holy Grail.

Sir Launcelot was asked to make Galahad a knight. He felt great joy and fear together, because this was his own son and because the matter seemed holy. That night, Galahad watched beside his armor in the chapel. Sir Bors and Sir Lionel stayed near him through the night. In the morning, Galahad was bathed, dressed in white, and brought before Sir Launcelot.

Sir Launcelot made Galahad a knight according to the custom of chivalry. He placed the sword upon him and gave him the honor of knighthood. Then he asked Galahad to come with him to Arthur's court. Galahad answered that he could not yet go with them. He said that when the right time came, he would appear there, but first other things had to be fulfilled.

So Sir Launcelot, Sir Bors, and Sir Lionel returned to Camelot without Galahad. They said nothing to the court about what had happened, because the matter was still to remain hidden. Then Pentecost Day came, the day when the

Feast of the Round Table was held. On that morning, water-carriers went down to the river and saw a strange thing. A red block of marble stood beside the water, and a beautiful sword was fixed deep in it.

The sword shone brightly, and its handle was covered with precious stones. News of this wonder was brought to King Arthur, and he went down to the river with many knights. Sir Launcelot, Sir Percival, Sir Bors, Sir Lionel, Sir Ector, Sir Gawaine, and others went with him. Around the sword were written words. Sir Launcelot read them aloud, and they said that the sword belonged to the greatest knight in the world and to the man who would win the Holy Grail.

The writing also warned that anyone who tried and failed to draw the sword would be wounded by it. Arthur asked Sir Launcelot to try, because Launcelot had long been known as the greatest knight. But Launcelot refused. He said that he was a sinful man and feared that he would not be worthy to win the Grail. Arthur then commanded Sir Gawaine to try, and Gawaine obeyed because it was his king's order, but the sword did not move at all.

Sir Percival then asked to try the sword too. He said that if harm came to Sir Gawaine for trying, he wished to share that danger. Arthur allowed him to make the attempt. Percival pulled with all his strength, but the sword remained fixed in the stone. After that, no other knight dared to touch it, and all went back to the castle in wonder.

Later that day, the knights gathered in the Hall of the Round Table. Each knight sat in his own seat, and young knights stood behind them to serve food and drink. Suddenly there was a movement at the door. An old man dressed all in white entered the hall. He was the Hermit of the Forest, and beside him came a tall young knight in flame-colored armor.

The old hermit spoke before all the court. He said that he had brought the knight who would be the greatest knight the world had ever seen. He also said that this knight would achieve the Holy Grail. King Arthur listened with deep wonder. Then he said that they would test this claim at once, because the Seat Perilous still stood empty at the Round Table.

The Seat Perilous was the seat that no ordinary knight could sit in safely. It

had been kept for the perfect knight, the one without stain of the flesh. The old hermit took Galahad by one hand, and King Arthur took him by the other. Together they led him to the dangerous seat. Galahad sat there, and no harm came to him.

Then Sir Launcelot drew away the silk cover from the back of the seat. There, in golden letters, was written the name Sir Galahad. A great cry rose through the hall, because the Seat Perilous had at last been filled. The Round Table was now complete. Arthur understood that the long-awaited knight had come at last.

Then Arthur led Galahad and the whole court back to the river. Galahad looked at the sword in the red marble and said that it was surely his, because he had come without a sword. He placed his hand on the handle and drew the blade out easily, as if the stone had never held it. No mark was left in the marble. Galahad placed the sword in his empty sheath, and now he was fully armed.

Arthur kissed Galahad and greeted him as the greatest wonder of his reign. He wished to bring him to Queen Guinevere at once, but Galahad said he could not stay. He said that someone was coming for him and that he must first seek the shield of Balan. That shield had to be found before he could go fully into the Quest of the Grail. He also said that two knights of the Round Table would achieve the Grail with him, but he could not yet name them.

As he finished speaking, a maiden in white came riding toward them on a white horse. By her hand she led a great black charger. She asked Galahad if he was ready, and he answered that he was. Galahad mounted the black horse, greeted Arthur, Launcelot, Bors, and Lionel, and then rode away with her. The court watched him go, amazed by his coming and his sudden departure.

After Galahad had gone, the court went to hear mass. On the way, Sir Gawaine said to Launcelot that this must be a sad day for him, because now a greater knight had appeared in the world. Launcelot answered that it was not sad for him. Galahad was his own son, and a father could gladly give his honor to such a son. Thus the court learned openly that Galahad was the son of Sir Launcelot.

After mass, the knights returned to the Hall of the Round Table. Arthur spoke to them about Galahad's words. Since two knights of the Round Table were to find the Grail with him, Arthur thought that the chief knights should go out in

search of it. At once, every knight rose in his place. Each drew his sword and held the handle before his face like a cross. Each swore to seek the Holy Grail until he found it, died, or learned that the Grail had been achieved.

When Arthur heard this oath, sorrow filled him. He had not wished all his knights to leave him at once. He knew that many would never return. He also remembered Merlin's old warning, that when the Round Table was filled, its breaking would soon begin. Launcelot tried to comfort him, saying that the Grail would bring glory to Arthur's reign. But Arthur answered that glory and sorrow often came so closely together that sorrow hid the glory from a man's eyes.

So the knights of the Round Table went out in quest of the Grail. There were fifty of them in all. Many would have strange adventures, and many would die before they came home. But this story follows chiefly Sir Galahad, Sir Launcelot, Sir Gawaine, Sir Percival, Sir Bors, and a few others. Their lives now turned away from the ordinary battles of knighthood and toward a higher and more dangerous road.

Galahad rode after the white maiden until they reached the edge of the forest. There she stopped and told him that she must leave him. She pointed to a path and said that if he followed it, he would be received where he needed to go. Then she departed, and Galahad rode alone into the forest. After a long journey, he came into the Forest of Arroy, the Forest of Adventure.

At last the trees opened before him, and he saw a wide plain full of lilies and daffodils. The light there was not like sunlight or moonlight. It was soft and golden, and the flowers moved gently in the air as if they were greeting him. In the middle of the plain lay a quiet lake, clear and still like a mirror. Galahad understood that this was not common earth, but a place of fairy power.

Voices called out to him, welcoming him by name. He saw a green silk pavilion and many bright people weaving flowers into garlands. They were the people of the Lady of the Lake, though Galahad did not yet know this. He stayed there for three days. They feasted, sang, danced, and told pleasant stories, and the days passed quickly in peace.

On the fourth morning, a wonderful lady appeared among them. She was

dressed in green, with black hair, pale skin, and bright eyes. Gold and green stones shone at her neck and arms. Galahad knelt before her, but she told him to rise, saying that she was not a spirit but of the earth. Then she asked where his shield was, and Galahad answered that he had none.

The lady said that they would go and find him a shield. Servants brought Galahad's black horse and a white horse for the lady. They rode together through the forest for the whole day. Near evening, they came to the edge of the woods opposite the country of Camelot. There stood a monastery of White Friars, and the lady told Galahad that he would find his shield there.

Before Galahad could thank her, she vanished. The monastery bell began to ring, and Galahad rode down to the gate. The friars welcomed him and took his horse. They led him inside, gave him a bath, and dressed him in soft clean clothing. Then they brought him into the hall, where two knights were already staying. They were Sir Ewaine and Sir Bagdemagus, both knights of the Round Table.

Ewaine and Bagdemagus greeted him gladly. Galahad told them how he had been led by the lady through the fairy land and brought to the monastery. Ewaine said that the lady must surely have been the Lady of the Lake. Then the Abbot came, and Bagdemagus asked about the shield. The Abbot said that a strange white shield with a red cross hung behind the altar, but that it would be shown in the morning, not that night.

The next morning, the Abbot led the three knights into the chapel. Behind the altar hung the shield, white and shining like silver, with a bold red cross upon it. Bagdemagus desired it greatly. The Abbot warned him that only the one for whom it was meant could wear it safely. But Bagdemagus said that perhaps he might be that man, and he took the shield for himself.

Bagdemagus rode into the forest with the shield around his neck. At a place where two roads met, he saw a knight in white armor on a white horse. The White Knight told him to return the shield, because it did not belong to him. Bagdemagus refused unless he was beaten in battle. So they charged at each other, and the White Knight's spear pierced Bagdemagus through the shoulder. Bagdemagus fell badly wounded.

The White Knight did not leave him to die. He lifted him carefully, placed him on his horse, and led him back to the monastery. Then the White Knight disappeared. Bagdemagus lay near death for some time, but he did not die. The next day, he called Galahad to him and said that he had been wrong to take the shield. He believed now that it belonged to Galahad.

Galahad accepted the shield and took the danger that came with it. Then he mounted his horse and rode away from the monastery. Late in the afternoon, he came to a meadow where a pavilion stood. In front of the pavilion was a tall knight in white armor. The knight asked if he was Galahad, and when Galahad said yes, the White Knight welcomed him and said that he had waited for him.

Galahad entered the pavilion and found a meal prepared. Three green-clothed esquires served them, and the food was good. After they ate, the White Knight said that they would ride together the next day. Galahad slept there that night, and in the morning both knights armed themselves and rode away together. As they rode, the White Knight began to tell him the story of the Grail and of the shield.

He told Galahad that in the old days of Uther-Pendragon there had been twin brothers, Balin and Balan. In the holy city of Sarras were kept two great holy things: the spear that had wounded Christ's side and the cup that had received His blood. Balan once came to that city and was attacked by King Pischer and his men. To defend himself, he seized the holy spear and wounded the king with it. Because the holy thing had been used in anger and blood, a terrible earthquake came, the castle fell, and the Grail and spear vanished from the world.

King Pischer lived, but his wound would not heal, and he suffered for many years. Later, Balan fought another knight near a ford. The battle lasted a long time, and both men were terribly wounded. When Balan struck his enemy down and removed his helmet, he saw that the fallen knight was his own twin brother, Balin. Balin forgave him and asked to be buried under a thorn tree nearby.

Balan carried out his brother's last wish, but his own heart was broken. The White Friars took him to their monastery, where he died soon afterward. Before his death, he drew a red cross on his shield with his own blood. He told the friars to keep that shield until the knight came who would achieve the Holy Grail and

return it to Sarras. He also said that no weapon made by human hands would ever pierce that shield.

Galahad listened closely to the story. When the White Knight finished, Galahad asked who he was. The knight only smiled and said that he could not tell his name. He said only that he had watched over the shield until the right knight came for it. They rode together until sunset. Then, at a parting of the road, the White Knight told Galahad to continue alone toward a chapel where he could rest.

Galahad turned once to look back at him, but the White Knight had already vanished. Nothing remained there but trees and the red light of evening on the ground. Galahad rode on until he heard a bell ringing. Soon he saw the chapel of the Hermit of the Forest. The old hermit was ringing the bell for evening prayer, and birds and gentle wild creatures gathered near him as if they loved him.

Galahad came to that quiet place and was welcomed by the hermit. There he found rest after many wonders. He had now been made a knight, had entered the Seat Perilous, had drawn the sword from the marble, and had received the shield marked with the blood-red cross. The Quest of the Grail had truly begun, and Sir Galahad was now armed for the holy road before him.

Part 38 — Galahad, Melyas, Launcelot, and Percival

The next morning, Sir Galahad left the chapel of the Hermit of the Forest. He had eaten and rested there, and now he rode out with the white shield marked by the red cross. The forest was still cool and gray with morning light. Birds sang softly above him, and the road ran between quiet trees. Galahad rode alone, but he did not feel lonely, because his heart was fixed on the Grail.

After some time, he came to a place where two roads crossed. A stone cross stood there, and near it there was a clear fountain of cold water. Beside the fountain sat a young knight with his helmet off, letting the fresh air touch his face. He looked tired and hungry, but he was fair and noble in appearance. Galahad greeted him kindly and asked his name.

The young knight answered, "I am Sir Melyas, son of the King of Denmark. I

came into this forest last night, and I have eaten nothing since yesterday morning.” Then he asked Galahad’s name in return. Galahad said, “I am called Galahad, and I was lately made a knight of King Arthur’s Round Table.” Sir Melyas looked at him with deep interest, because the name of Galahad had already begun to sound like a wonder among knights.

Galahad saw that Melyas needed help more than talk. He told him to take the road by which he himself had come. If Melyas followed it, he would soon reach the chapel of the Hermit of the Forest. There he would receive food, drink, and rest. Melyas thanked him, put on his helmet, mounted his horse, and rode away. The two young knights parted with courtesy, each going in a different direction.

Sir Melyas had not gone very far when he met two armed knights. One of them stopped him and asked who he was and where he was going. Melyas answered mildly that he was Sir Melyas and was riding toward the hermit’s chapel. The knight said that since Melyas had come that way, he must fight a course with him. Melyas did not wish to fight, but he knew he could not pass without battle.

The two knights made ready and charged at each other. Sir Melyas struck bravely, but his spear broke into pieces against the other knight’s shield. The stranger’s spear held firm and pierced Melyas through the shield and into the side. Melyas was thrown violently from his horse and lay on the ground as if dead. The stranger leaped down, tore off his helmet, and placed a dagger at his throat.

At that very time, Sir Galahad was riding away through the forest. Suddenly, a voice seemed to speak close to his ear. It said, “Return, Galahad. Sir Melyas is in danger of death.” The voice spoke again, more strongly, and Galahad turned his horse at once. He did not stop to question whether the voice came from heaven, from his own heart, or from some holy messenger. If there was even a chance that Melyas needed him, he had to return.

Galahad rode back as fast as his horse could carry him. Soon he came to the place where Melyas had fallen. He saw the stranger kneeling over the wounded knight with a dagger at his throat. Galahad cried out, “Stop. Turn to me. I am here to defend that fallen knight.” The stranger rose in anger and asked who he was, but Galahad answered only that he had come to protect Melyas.

The stranger mounted again, and the two knights prepared to fight. They charged at full speed. The stranger's spear struck Galahad's shield, but it slid away and broke. Galahad's spear struck true, pierced the other knight's shield and body, and threw him dead to the ground. The second knight cried out that Galahad had killed his brother, and he rushed forward with his sword.

Galahad cast away his broken spear and drew his own sword. The second knight struck first, but Galahad turned the blow aside. Then Galahad rose in his stirrups and struck with such force that the knight fell from his horse, badly wounded. Galahad did not kill him after he had fallen. He told him to leave that place and not trouble wounded or helpless knights again.

Then Galahad went to Sir Melyas. Melyas was weak and pale, and blood had run from the wound in his side. Galahad lifted him carefully and spoke to him with gentle words. He told him that the danger was past and that he must now be taken to the hermit. Melyas could hardly speak, but he understood that Galahad had saved his life.

Galahad put Sir Melyas on his horse and led him slowly back through the forest. The way was not long, but it seemed long because Melyas was in great pain. At last they reached the hermit's chapel, and the old hermit came out to meet them. He saw at once that Melyas was badly hurt. He brought him inside, washed the wound, placed healing herbs upon it, and bound it with clean cloth.

The hermit told Galahad that Sir Melyas would live if he rested there for a time. Galahad was glad to hear this, but he could not stay long. Melyas thanked him and said that he owed him his life. Galahad answered that thanks should be given to God first. Then he took leave of Melyas and the hermit, mounted his horse again, and returned to the road of the Grail.

The next day, Sir Galahad came out of the forest onto a fair plain. There he met an old man and a young boy walking together. Galahad greeted them and asked whether there was any adventure nearby that a young knight might take honorably. The old man answered that there was indeed such an adventure. Not far away stood a place called the Castle of Maidens.

The old man told him that ten cruel knights held that castle. They forced tribute

from all who passed by, and they ruled the people around them with great harshness. They took taxes that were not owed, made the poor suffer, and kept fair maidens as prisoners. The whole land groaned under their power. "If you pass that castle," the old man said, "you will find adventure enough."

Galahad thanked him and rode in the direction he pointed out. Soon he came to a high hill. From its top he saw a large castle below, with red roofs and many birds flying around them. A river ran beside the walls, and near the castle stood a busy town. People moved through the streets, but from far away the place seemed heavy and uneasy. Galahad thought that this must be the Castle of Maidens.

He rode down the hill toward the castle. As he passed near the wall, he heard voices calling to him from above. He looked up and saw ten young maidens standing on a small tower. They were fair and richly born, but their faces were pale from fear and sorrow. They told him that they were prisoners there, held by the ten wicked knights. They warned him that if he rode farther, those knights would surely come against him.

Galahad looked up at them and answered with calm courage. He said that he did not know whether one knight could defeat ten. But if those ten knights stood for the ten deadly sins, then he believed strength would be given to him to fight them. The maidens told him that near the bridge he would find an iron horn hanging from a stone post. If he blew that horn, the ten knights would come out to battle.

Galahad thanked them and rode to the bridge. There he found the iron horn, just as they had said. He lifted it to his lips and blew a loud, sharp sound. The sound echoed against the castle walls and rolled across the water. Soon the gates opened, the bridge fell, and ten knights rode out together in full armor.

The leader came first and asked Galahad if he had made peace with God, because he was about to die. Galahad answered that death was in God's hands, not in theirs. The ten knights laughed and spread out around him. Then they charged. Galahad set his shield before him and rode straight into them.

The first meeting was terrible. Galahad struck down the leading knight with his spear and broke the line of the others. Then he turned quickly and struck

another from his horse. The ten knights had expected fear, but now fear began to move among them. Galahad seemed to be everywhere at once, calm, swift, and terrible in battle.

His white shield could not be pierced. Spears struck it and slid away as if they had struck stone. Swords rang upon it and did no harm. Galahad's own sword flashed with clean, sure blows. Some of the ten knights fell wounded, some fell dead, and some fled toward the gate. The people of the town, watching from far away, began to cry out in wonder.

At last the battle was ended. The ten cruel knights were either slain, wounded, or put to flight. Galahad rode through the gate and entered the castle. The ten maidens came down from the tower, weeping with joy. The people of the town also came running, shouting blessings and thanks. For the first time in many years, they were free from fear.

Galahad told the maidens that their enemies would not trouble them again. He also told the people that they must govern the land justly and not fall into the same cruelty that had ruled them before. The eldest maiden asked him to stay with them for a while. Galahad answered that he could not rest there, because his time was short and much remained to be done. So he left the Castle of Maidens with their blessings following him down the road.

Now the story turns for a time to Sir Launcelot. After the knights of the Round Table left Camelot to seek the Grail, Launcelot rode from place to place but found no great adventure. One evening he came to a farmhouse near the edge of a forest and asked for lodging. The farmer's wife welcomed him kindly and told him that another knight had already come there for the night. When Launcelot entered the house, he saw that the other knight was Sir Percival.

The two were very glad to meet. They ate together, spoke of the Grail quest, and slept under the same roof. The next morning, after they had broken their fast, they rode away side by side. Their hearts were friendly and warm toward each other, but both were serious. They knew that this quest was not like other quests, because it tested the soul as much as the sword arm.

Near noon, they came to a pleasant valley. Green hills rose on both sides, and

clear streams ran through the grass. Flocks and herds fed quietly in the meadows. A small wooden bridge crossed a smooth river at the bottom of the valley. As Launcelot and Percival came to one end of the bridge, another knight came to the other end.

This other knight was Sir Galahad, though neither Launcelot nor Percival knew him in that armor. Launcelot lifted his hand and asked him to wait, because three knights could not pass on the narrow bridge at once. Galahad answered that his business did not allow him to wait. He asked them to let him pass. Launcelot, not knowing who he was, said that the matter must be decided by a charge of spears.

Galahad agreed, and the two knights took their places. They charged across the bridge with great force. Launcelot's spear struck Galahad's shield in the very center, but it slid aside and broke. Galahad's spear struck Launcelot's shield and held fast. The blow was so strong that Launcelot and his horse were thrown down upon the wooden bridge.

Sir Percival was filled with amazement and anger. He had never seen Launcelot overthrown in such a way. He cried out to the unknown knight and rushed forward with his sword. Galahad threw away his spear and drew his sword also. The two met in the middle of the bridge, and Percival struck with all his strength.

Galahad turned the blow with his shield and answered with one stroke. That stroke cut through Percival's shield and helmet, and even through the iron cap beneath. If the blade had not turned in Galahad's hand, Percival would have died there. As it was, the blow stunned him so deeply that he fell from his saddle and lay still on the bridge.

Galahad did not stay. His work called him forward, and he had not fought from anger. He rode past them and went on his way. After a little while, Launcelot rose painfully and came to Percival. Percival also began to wake, though his head was heavy and full of darkness. The two knights looked after the stranger, who was now far down the road.

Launcelot spoke first, and his voice was full of wonder. He said that no knight

in the world had ever overthrown him in that manner. Percival answered that he too had never felt such a blow. Then both began to understand. Only one knight could have done this: Galahad, the son of Launcelot, the knight of the Seat Perilous, the knight of the Grail.

Launcelot's heart was shaken by joy and sorrow together. He was proud that his son was so great, yet he felt his own unworthiness more sharply than before. Percival, too, was moved. He knew that the Quest of the Grail was passing into a higher place than common knighthood. The two men mounted again and rode on slowly, each deep in thought.

That evening, Launcelot came to a lonely chapel in the forest. He wished to enter and pray, but the door was closed and would not open to him. He tried again and again, but no hand or strength could move it. At last he lay down outside the chapel, tired in body and heavy in heart. Sleep came over him, and while he slept he saw a vision.

In the vision, a sick knight was brought near the chapel. The knight was weak, pale, and almost without life. Then a great light appeared, and in that light the Holy Grail came before him. A spear also appeared, and from the spear blood fell. As the holy things came near, the sick knight rose and became whole again. Color returned to his face, strength returned to his limbs, and he knelt in prayer before the Grail.

Launcelot saw all this as in a dream, but he could not wake. He wished to rise, to kneel, to pray, and to look fully upon the Grail with open eyes. But his body lay heavy, and his soul seemed bound by his sins. Slowly the light faded. First the spear disappeared, then the hands that held it, and at last the Grail itself passed away. Darkness returned to the place.

Then Launcelot heard voices near him. An esquire asked the healed knight why the sleeping man did not wake while such wonders passed before him. The knight answered that the sleeping man was Sir Launcelot of the Lake, a very sinful knight. He said that Launcelot had wronged a good and gentle wife, Lady Elaine, and had given his heart wrongly to Queen Guinevere. Because of that sin, he could not wake to behold the Grail.

The esquire then saw Launcelot's strong horse. He told the healed knight to take that horse, because his own was tired and weak from battle. The knight agreed. He took Launcelot's horse and left his own weary horse in its place. Then the knight and the esquire rode away into the night, and Launcelot still slept outside the chapel.

After they had gone, Launcelot woke. At first he thought all he had seen was only a dream. Then he saw that his own horse was gone and that the tired horse of the other knight stood nearby. He knew then that the vision had been real. A cry came from him like the cry of a man whose heart has broken. "My sin has found me," he said.

He ran about the chapel, searching for some way to enter, but he could find none. The door remained closed against him. When morning came, he mounted the tired horse and rode away with his head bowed low. After a while, he came again to the Hermit of the Forest. There he confessed his sorrow, and the hermit gave him comfort and holy counsel. Launcelot had seen the Grail, but only as one who sleeps while grace passes near him, and this knowledge wounded him more deeply than any sword.

Part 39 — Percival and Bors in the Grail Quest

After Sir Percival and Sir Launcelot were parted again in the forest, Percival rode for many days through rough and lonely country. His heart was still fixed upon the Grail, but the road was hard. One day, he came into a waste land where there were many stones and little grass. His horse began to limp, and each mile made the poor animal worse. At last Percival had to get down and lead the horse by the bridle.

He walked in this way for a long time, tired and troubled. There was no house in sight, no rider, no shepherd, and no village smoke rising in the distance. The land seemed empty, as if all people had left it long ago. Percival looked at his horse and knew that it could not carry him much farther. Yet he did not know what else to do, so he went on slowly, step by step.

After some time, the stony waste ended, and he came into a greener country. Fields and trees appeared, and the land became softer under his feet. Near a small fountain, he saw a fair damsel sitting by the water. She was dressed all in red, and beside her stood a small riding horse and a great black horse. The black horse was strong and beautiful, with bright eyes and a dark mane that seemed almost like night.

Percival looked at the black horse with desire, because his own horse was almost useless now. He said to the damsel, "That is a very fine horse. Will you sell it to me?" The damsel looked at him and asked, "Are you not Sir Percival of Gales?" Percival was surprised that she knew his name, but he answered that he was. Then she said that she could not take money from him. The horse had been sent for him, and he might take it freely.

Percival wondered greatly at this, but he thanked her. He gave her the reins of his lame horse and took the black horse. Then he mounted in one quick movement. For a moment, the horse stood perfectly still. Then suddenly it put its head down, took the bit in its teeth, and rushed away with terrible speed. Percival tried to guide it, but he could do nothing.

The horse ran southward like a wild wind. Its mane and tail streamed behind it, and its feet struck the earth so fast that the ground seemed to fly under them. Percival held the reins with all his strength, but the horse would not obey. It was as if the beast had no mind of an ordinary horse. Percival asked himself whether he rode a horse, a wild lion, or some evil spirit in the shape of a horse.

Evening fell as the horse carried him onward. Soon Percival saw the sea far ahead, bright like a silver line under the darkening sky. Then he heard the sound of waves beating against rocks. The black horse did not slow until it came close to a dangerous shore, where white water leaped and broke among the stones. There, all at once, it stopped, shaking and covered with foam.

Percival dismounted quickly. As soon as his foot touched the ground, the black horse vanished. One moment it stood beside him, and the next moment there was nothing there. Percival stood alone on the shore in the moonlight, with the sea before him and the empty land behind him. He understood then that the horse had

been no common beast. It had almost carried him to death, and only God's mercy had saved him from the rocks.

While he stood wondering, he saw a boat coming across the water. It had no sail and no oars, yet it moved swiftly toward the shore. In the boat sat a beautiful lady dressed all in red, and with her were seven damsels also dressed in red. Gold shone on their clothes, their necks, and their arms, so that the boat seemed full of red fire and golden light. When it touched the sand, Percival helped the lady step out.

The lady greeted him by name and wished him peace. Percival asked who she was, since she knew him though he did not know her. She answered that she and her damsels were not of ordinary earth and knew many things hidden from men. Then she ordered her attendants to set up a red pavilion on the shore. They did so quickly, and a white banner with a golden leopard was raised above it.

Inside the pavilion, they placed a golden table and covered it with fine white cloth. The lady took Percival by the hand and led him in. They sat together, and the damsels served them with rich food, sweet wine, and music from harps. Percival had been tired, hungry, and lonely, so the warmth and beauty of the place touched him strongly. He ate, drank, and listened, and the wine moved powerfully through his body and mind.

After a while, the lady came very close to him. She placed her arms around him and spoke to him in a soft voice. She told him that this was the pavilion of love and that he should take the joy offered to him. Percival's head was confused by the wine, by the music, and by her beauty. He almost forgot the holy road on which he had set his feet. He leaned toward her and kissed her.

In that moment, another memory rose in him. He remembered Lady Yvette, whom he had loved in his first young days as a knight. He remembered finding her dead in the cold room by the sea. He remembered the vision of the Grail and the Spear of Sorrow that had come to him after that grief. Then his heart was struck as if by cold wind. He cried out to God, made the sign of the cross on his forehead, and drew back in fear of what he had nearly done.

At once the beautiful lady screamed. The light of the pavilion changed, and

Percival saw the truth. The lady was not a heavenly or fairy woman at all. She was Vivien, the enchantress, dressed in red and shining with jewels. She had tried to turn him from the Grail by desire and pleasure. Percival reached for his sword, but before he could draw it, Vivien struck her hands together and vanished.

The red pavilion vanished too. The golden table, the food, the wine, the harps, the damsels, and the boat all disappeared as if they had been smoke. Percival found himself sitting alone on the lonely shore beneath the moon. The sea beat against the rocks nearby, and the wind moved coldly over the sand. He knelt down at once and prayed. He thanked God for saving him by the memory of sorrow and holiness.

He prayed for a long time. When he rose, his heart was calmer, but he understood how close he had come to spiritual ruin. Then he saw another boat coming toward him from the dark sea. This boat had no rower, no sail, and no sound. Inside it was a couch covered with pure white linen. There was no red cloth, no music, no wine, and no bright false beauty. It came quietly, like a place of rest sent by heaven.

Percival stepped into the boat. As soon as he entered, the boat moved away from the shore. He lay down upon the white couch, because he was worn out in body and soul. The sea carried him gently, and the moonlight lay across the waves like silver. Soon he slept in great peace. After the fire of temptation and the fear of death, the white boat gave him rest and comfort.

Now the story turns to Sir Bors de Ganis. After the knights had gone out in search of the Grail, Bors came to the Hermit of the Forest and confessed his sins. He wished to make his heart clean for the holy quest. The hermit listened to him and gave him counsel. Bors then made a vow that he would eat no meat and drink no wine until he had advanced in the quest of the Grail.

After this, Bors rode on in a plain and humble state. He did not seek rich food, soft lodging, or earthly pleasure. His mind was set on the Grail, and he wished to carry his body through hardship so that his soul might become stronger. Yet he was still a knight, and when he found injustice, he could not pass it by. So his road soon brought him to a lonely castle where a sorrowful lady lived.

This lady was named Leisette. She told Bors that her father had once ruled the country around them. After her mother died, her father married another woman, cruel and proud. When the father died, that woman took the kingdom for herself and drove Leisette from one place to another. Now Leisette had only this last poor castle, with an old porter and his wife to serve her. The false queen was coming the next day with armed men to drive her out even from that place.

Bors was deeply moved by her story. He told her that if he had armor, he would defend her. Leisette answered that there was an old suit of armor in the castle, though it was out of date and not very fine. Bors smiled and said that old armor could still serve a good cause. That night the old porter brought the armor to him. It fitted him well enough, and Bors was glad, because now he could stand for justice.

The next day, the false queen came with her knights and people. She came proudly, as if the land were truly hers. Bors rode out to meet her champion. The champion thought he had only to defeat a stranger in old armor, but he soon learned otherwise. Bors fought with steady strength and overthrew him. Then he rode straight to the false queen, seized the bridle of her horse, and led her into Leisette's castle as a prisoner.

No one dared stop him. From the wall, Bors told the false queen's followers to go back to their towns. He said that their queen would remain a prisoner until justice was done to Lady Leisette. The people went away in fear and wonder. That same afternoon, three knights came from three towns of the kingdom. They said that the people had done wrong and now accepted Leisette as their true queen.

The three knights brought rich clothing, jewels, and golden ornaments fit for a queen. Leisette put them on, and her beauty shone in a new way, because justice had returned to her. Then Bors, Leisette, the three knights, and their attendants rode to the chief city. Great crowds came into the streets to welcome her. Banners flew from the houses, and the air was full of voices. Thus Leisette became queen again.

For a time, Bors remained in that kingdom. Leisette loved him and wished him to stay. The people also wanted him to marry her and rule beside her, because they

trusted his courage and judgment. Bors himself felt deep affection for her. He thought that perhaps, after the quest was done, he might return and become her husband. The thought was sweet to him, because the life offered there was full of honor, love, and peace.

But one night Bors had a dream. In the dream, a voice warned him that the Grail quest could not wait. He had not sworn to seek the Grail only when life was easy. He had sworn to seek it above all other things. When morning came, his heart was heavy, because he knew what he must do. Leisette begged him not to leave, saying that her enemies might rise again and that her love would grow cold in his absence.

Bors answered that his love would not grow cold, but that his vow stood above every earthly joy. He said that the Grail was the highest work of the Round Table. If he could help in finding it, then his life would not have been wasted. Leisette wept and said that if he left now, he would never return to her. Bors bowed his head, because the words hurt him deeply. Yet he still knew that he must go.

So Sir Bors left without a long farewell. He armed himself, mounted his horse, and rode away from the city. He did not see Leisette again before going, because he feared that the parting would only bring more pain to both of them. Behind him lay a kingdom, a crown, and a woman who loved him. Before him lay hardship, uncertainty, and the mystery of the Grail. He chose the harder road because his vow called him there.

After many miles, Bors came near the seashore. There he met a White Knight, bright and still, as if he belonged partly to another world. The White Knight spoke to him and told him to follow. Bors obeyed, for he felt that this guide had been sent for the Grail quest. They rode together until they came to a rocky shore under the moon.

Beside the rocks lay a boat. It was lined with pure white linen, and in the middle of it was a couch. On that couch a knight lay sleeping. Bors looked more closely and saw that the sleeping knight was Sir Percival. The White Knight said, "Enter the boat, Bors. Only in this way will you find the Grail." So Bors dismounted and stepped into the boat.

As soon as Bors entered, Percival woke and sat up. The two knights greeted each other with deep joy, because both had suffered much and had now been brought together by a power greater than chance. Then the White Knight pushed the boat from the shore. The boat moved away at once into the night sea. Bors and Percival looked back and saw the White Knight sitting motionless on his horse, like a figure carved from pale stone.

Slowly the White Knight faded into the moonlight and was gone. The boat carried Bors and Percival out over the moving sea. Around them, the waves rose and fell, and the moonlight shook upon them like broken silver. Neither knight knew fully where they were going. Yet both felt that the Grail quest had now entered a deeper and more holy part. They were no longer riding through forests as separate knights. They were being carried together toward the place where the Grail would be revealed.

Part 40 — Galahad and the Achievement of the Grail

After Sir Galahad had struck down Sir Launcelot, he rode for a long time through a wild forest. Many strange adventures came to him there, but the old story does not tell them one by one. He slept under trees, drank from streams, and ate when forest people gave him food. Still he did not turn aside from the Grail. His heart was quiet, because he knew that he was being led, though he did not yet know where.

One morning, he came out of the forest into open land. Before him the ground fell away into a deep valley, shaped almost like a great bowl in the earth. Far below, he saw a castle, and around that castle were many knights. Their armor caught the early sun, so that the valley flashed with points of white fire. Galahad sat still for a moment on his horse and looked down. Then he said to himself, "I will go there and learn why so many knights are gathered."

He rode down into the valley and came near the castle. There he learned that many knights were besieging seven knights inside the walls. A young knight had been killed in a tournament, and his friends had come to take revenge. They meant

to seize the seven knights in the castle and punish them. Galahad listened, and his face became grave. He said, "It is shameful for many knights to press seven men in this way. Leave this place and let them come out freely."

The knights laughed at him and would not go. They said they had come for revenge and would not leave until they had taken the seven men. Then Galahad said, "If you will not leave, I will fight you on this side, and the knights inside the castle shall come out on the other side. In that way this siege shall end." The knights laughed again, because they did not believe that one man could stand against them. But Galahad lifted his shield, drew his sword, and rode into them with great strength.

He struck to the right and to the left, and the knights drew back before him. Though he was alone, he made a wide space around himself. Among those knights were Sir Gawaine and Sir Ewaine, but they did not know Galahad. His armor had been marked and worn by many battles, and his shield was covered with leather. Galahad also did not know them, for in the rush of battle all faces were hidden behind helmets.

Sir Gawaine was angry that so many knights had been driven back by one man. He cried, "For shame! Shall we all stand away from one knight?" Then he rode forward to meet Galahad. Galahad waited until Gawaine came near. Then he rose in his stirrups and struck a terrible blow. The sword cut through Gawaine's shield, through his helmet, and deep into the iron and bone beneath.

Gawaine swayed in the saddle. The world seemed to move under him like water, and he would have fallen if Sir Ewaine had not caught him. Then Gawaine spoke weakly and said, "That was Galahad. No other knight could strike such a blow. Now the old warning about the sword has come true." After this, his strength left him, and he fell into a faint. Ewaine held him and called loudly for the battle to stop.

The gates of the castle were opened, and the seven knights inside came out. But Ewaine cried, "Stop! A noble knight lies badly wounded here. He is King Arthur's nephew." When Galahad heard this, sorrow filled him. He understood that he had struck Sir Gawaine without knowing him. He said, "Alas, the prophecy

of the sword has been fulfilled. It was said that this sword would wound Sir Gawaine deeply, and now it has done so.”

Galahad told them to carry Gawaine into the castle and care for his wound. The people of the castle obeyed him at once. They laid Gawaine on a couch, washed the wound, and put healing medicine upon it. The knights begged Galahad to stay, but he would not. He said, “I must go on. I have work to do, and I do not know where that work will lead me.” Then he rode away from the castle, leaving Gawaine in the care of those people.

At noon, Galahad came to the house of a farmer. The farmer’s wife and daughter stood in the doorway and looked at him with wonder, for he seemed to them very noble and calm. He asked them for food, and they brought him bread, cheese, and cider. He sat under a wide tree and ate in silence. The simple food pleased him, because he did not seek rich things. He wanted only strength enough to continue the holy quest.

That evening, after the sun had gone down, Galahad found himself on a wide moor. The land was empty, and there was no town or house near him. Then the moon rose, clear and bright, and he saw a small chapel not far away. He rode to the door and knocked. A holy man opened it, welcomed him kindly, and gave him a poor but clean meal. Galahad thanked him and sat down to eat.

While he was eating, there came another knock at the door. The holy man opened it and saw a beautiful lady dressed all in white. Her horse was also pale and bright under the moon. She asked, “Is there a knight here named Galahad?” Galahad rose and came forward. He said, “Lady, I am Galahad. What do you ask of me?” She answered, “Come with me, and I will lead you to an adventure greater than any you have yet known.”

Galahad did not ask many questions. He armed himself, mounted his horse, and followed her into the night. They rode over the moor for a long time without speaking. The moonlight lay white on the grass, and their shadows moved beside them like dark companions. At last they came to high ground, and Galahad saw the sea shining below. The lady said, “Yes, that is the sea. It is there that I am taking you.”

They rode down toward the shore. The waves moved softly against the rocks, and the moon made a white road across the water. On a rocky point, Galahad saw a boat. It had no rope, yet it rested close to the shore as if waiting for him. Inside the boat were two knights. Their faces were pale in the moonlight, and Galahad knew them at once. They were Sir Percival and Sir Bors.

Percival and Bors cried out with joy when they saw him. Galahad sprang down from his horse, crossed the rocks quickly, and stepped into the boat. He kissed them both, and they kissed him in return. Galahad asked, "What are you doing here?" They answered, "We are waiting for you." Then they looked at the lady in white, who had come down to the edge of the rocks.

Percival saw her clearly and cried, "I know you. You are my sister." She answered, "Yes, brother, I am." Percival asked why she had come, and she said, "I have come to tell you what must happen next. This boat will carry you away. Soon you will find another ship, a greater ship, called the Ship of Solomon. In that ship you will find the Grail, and the ship will take you to the city of Sarras, where the Grail belongs."

Then she turned to Galahad and spoke with great seriousness. She said, "Galahad, I am allowed to tell you this. When you wish it, your soul may leave your body and rise to heaven." Galahad listened in silence, and the words entered deeply into him. The lady then said farewell. She mounted her horse and rode away, weeping, because she knew that she would never see her brother Percival again.

After she had gone, the boat moved away from the shore. It passed the headland and went out into the open sea. The land slowly disappeared into the silver light behind them. All night the boat carried the three knights over the waves. They did not know who guided it, but they felt no fear. The sea was great around them, yet the boat moved as gently as a cradle.

When morning came, they saw another ship before them. It was larger and more wonderful than any ship they had ever seen. It was made of beautiful wood, colored red and blue, and bright with gold. Its sails were of many-colored silk, and rich carpets lay upon its deck. No sailor, pilot, or servant could be seen

anywhere. Percival said, "This must be the Ship of Solomon. We are meant to enter it."

The three knights went from their boat into that great ship. There they found a silver table, and upon the table stood the Holy Grail. Near it was the holy spear. A soft light came from them, not like fire and not like sunlight, but pure and living. The three knights knelt down at once. None of them spoke for a long time, because each felt that words were too small for what stood before them.

Then the ship began to move. No wind drove it, and no human hand guided it. It went over the sea toward the city of Sarras. For many hours they prayed and watched, and the light of the Grail stayed with them. At last they saw a city before them in the evening light. Its towers and high roofs shone like gold in the setting sun. The ship came to a wharf and stopped there.

Galahad said, "Let us carry the Holy Chalice to the great church, for this is where it belongs." So the three knights lifted the silver table by three corners and carried it toward the city gate. At the gate sat a crippled man who had not walked for thirty years. Galahad said to him, "Come and help us carry the fourth corner." The man answered, "Sir, I cannot. I have been unable to walk for thirty years."

Galahad said again, "Rise and come." The man stood up with his crutches and touched the table. As soon as his hands touched it, strength flowed into his body. His legs became firm, and his pain left him. He cried, "I am healed!" Then he leaped and walked beside them, carrying the fourth corner of the table. The people at the gate saw this and began to shout in wonder.

The news spread through the city like a great wind. Crowds filled the streets and followed the knights toward the church. More and more people came, until the sound of their voices was like the sound of many waters. At last the knights entered the great church, and the Bishop saw them. He asked, "What do you bring here?" Galahad answered, "This is the Holy Grail. We have achieved the quest and have brought it to the place where it belongs."

The Bishop asked to see it. Galahad lifted the covering from the Grail, and its glory shone out. The whole church was filled with light, as if the sun had suddenly entered the building. Everyone who saw it bowed down and prayed. The three

knights knelt before the high altar, and the Grail stood there before them. Their long quest had come to its highest moment.

Then a voice spoke from above. It said that the Grail had been recovered and would now be taken from earth to heaven. As the voice ended, two shining hands appeared and took the Grail. Two other hands appeared and took the spear. No bodies could be seen, only the hands themselves. They lifted the holy things upward, and the Grail and the spear passed through the roof in a burst of light.

For a little while, that glory stayed in the air, and then it faded. The three knights heard music from above, deep and beautiful like a great organ. No one else in the church heard it as they did. They knew that heaven was rejoicing because the Grail had returned. Joy filled them, but it was also a fearful joy, too great for ordinary human hearts.

Then Galahad lifted his face and said, "There is nothing left for me to live for. Let me go in peace." As he spoke, Percival and Bors saw his soul leave his body. They saw it rise in heavenly light, and they heard the music grow greater. Then the brightness closed, and the church became dark and quiet again. Galahad's body lay before them, still and dead. He was not yet twenty years old.

Bors went to the Bishop and said, "Sir, this knight was good, pure, and perfect. We ask that his body may rest here in this church, in the place where the Grail rose into heaven." The Bishop answered that it should be done. So Galahad's body was laid there with honor. Percival and Bors stayed for several days, praying and mourning their friend. Their grief was deep, yet they also knew that Galahad had received the end he had been promised.

On the fourth day, Bors asked Percival where they should go next. Percival answered, "I shall not go anywhere. I will stay here, take holy orders, and live as a monk until I die. But you must return to King Arthur's court. Tell them how the Grail was achieved, how it rose into heaven, and how Galahad's soul went with it." Bors agreed, though the parting was painful. The next day the two knights kissed each other and wept, and then Bors left Sarras.

Bors rode for a year and a day before he reached Camelot. When he came there, the court rejoiced, because many had thought he was dead. By then all the knights

who had lived through the Grail Quest had returned, except Sir Launcelot. Bors told King Arthur and the court everything that had happened: how Percival, Galahad, and he had found the Grail, how it had been taken into heaven, and how Galahad had passed from the world.

King Arthur ordered the whole story to be written down in great books, so that people would remember it. Thus the Grail Quest became the highest glory of his reign. Yet it was also the beginning of the end. The Round Table had reached its greatest honor, but after its greatest honor came loss, division, and sorrow. Sir Bors remained at Camelot, and there he waited for the dark events that would follow.

Part 41 — Guinevere Accused

After the Quest of the Grail, many knights returned to Arthur's court. Some came back changed by what they had seen, and some came back in sorrow because they had failed. But Sir Launcelot did not return with the others. He stayed in the forest near the cell of the Hermit of the Forest. There he lived in prayer, fasting, and thought, because his sin had stood between him and the Grail.

Several knights saw him there and brought news of him to Camelot. They said that Sir Launcelot, once the brightest knight in the world, now lived like a poor holy man among the trees. His face was thin, his clothes were rough, and his eyes had lost their old joy. King Arthur heard this and felt deep pity. He said that it was sad for the greatest knight in the world to hide himself away from the world where his strength was needed.

Queen Guinevere also heard the news. She sat in her room and thought about it for a long time. At last she called a page and told him to ride into the forest. He was to find Sir Launcelot and command him, in her name, to return to Arthur's court. She also told the page to say that all the court missed him and wished to see him again.

The page rode to the forest and found Sir Launcelot in his poor cell. He knelt before him and gave the Queen's message. Sir Launcelot listened without moving.

Then he answered that he would not return. He said that he had found peace in the forest and wished to spend the rest of his life in repentance, because his sins had made him sleep while the Grail passed before him.

The page returned to Guinevere and told her what Sir Launcelot had said. The Queen's pride and desire rose together. "He will not come?" she said. "Then I will go and bring him myself." She ordered a great white horse to be made ready. She also had rich clothing prepared, the kind of clothing that a noble knight might wear at court. Then she rode into the forest with knights, ladies, and pages around her.

When Guinevere came near Sir Launcelot's cell, the quiet forest became full of movement and sound. Bright clothes passed between the trees, horses stepped through the leaves, and voices rang where there had been silence. Sir Launcelot came out to meet her, but he stood far away from her. "Lady," he said, "why have you come here?" Guinevere answered that she had come to bring him back, because the greatest knight in the world should not hide in such a lonely place.

Sir Launcelot cried out that she should leave him. He said that because of her, he had wronged Elaine, his wife, and because of that wrong Elaine had died in sorrow. He said that this sin and many others had kept him from fully seeing the Grail. He wished now to purify his soul in the forest. Guinevere listened, but she would not accept his answer.

She came closer and spoke in a strong voice. She said that sin could not be conquered by running away from the world. Sin was like an enemy, and a knight must face an enemy, not hide from it. She told him to rise, return to the world, and fight his spiritual battle there. Sir Launcelot groaned and covered his face, but her words touched the old part of him that still longed for Camelot.

Then he said that he could not go because he had no horse. Guinevere smiled and answered that she had brought him a horse. He then said that he had no clothes fit for court. Again she smiled and said that she had brought clothes also. Her pages carried a chest into his poor cell, opened it, and showed him silk, velvet, gold, jewels, silver, and fine cloth.

Sir Launcelot let the pages dress him. When he came out again, he no longer

looked like a thin hermit of the forest. He looked once more like a great knight, bright and noble, though sorrow still lay on his face. He mounted the white horse that Guinevere had brought him. Then he rode with her back to Camelot, while the forest grew silent behind them.

At court, not everyone was glad that Sir Launcelot had returned. Some hated him because they were jealous of his fame. Some disliked him because they feared his power. Among his enemies were Sir Mordred and Sir Agravaine, brothers of Sir Gawaine. Sir Kay, Sir Florence, and Sir Lovel also spoke against him, each for his own reason.

These men whispered that Sir Launcelot had refused the court until the Queen herself went to him. They said that he had come from the forest not for Arthur, not for the Round Table, but for Guinevere. Their words reached Launcelot's ears. Because of this, he began to keep away from the Queen. He spent more time with other lords and ladies, hoping that silence would protect her name.

Guinevere noticed this and was hurt by it. One day she sent for him and looked at him for a long time before speaking. Then she asked why he avoided her. Sir Launcelot answered that he avoided her for her sake, not for his own. He said that people were linking their names together in harmful talk. He feared no talk for himself, but he feared any word that might stain her honor.

Guinevere did not receive this gently. Her pride was quick, and her heart did not like being kept at a distance. She said that if he wished to avoid her, he might avoid her completely. Sir Launcelot was wounded by her anger, because he had tried to protect her. He left her presence with deep pain, and soon afterward he left Camelot again. This time he went not back to his hermit's cell, but to the castle of Sir Blasius, where he could live away from the court.

Then a new sorrow came upon Queen Guinevere. She wished to honor several knights of the Grail Quest and to bring back some peace to the court. So she prepared a fine feast and invited many knights, including Sir Gawaine and several of his kin. The hall was bright with rich dishes, cups of wine, and polished plates. Yet beneath the outer beauty of the feast, old hate and old suspicion were still alive.

Among those present was Sir Patrice of Ireland, a cousin of Sir Mador de la Porte. Another knight there was Sir Pinal the Savage. Sir Pinal hated Sir Gawaine and wished secretly to kill him. He knew that Gawaine liked apples very much, so he placed a poisoned apple among the fruit on the table. He meant that Gawaine should eat it and die.

But evil plans often turn from the path chosen for them. Sir Gawaine did not take the poisoned apple. Instead, Sir Patrice took it and ate it. Almost at once, his face changed, and he cried out in pain. He rose from the table, staggered, and fell among the guests. Before anyone could save him, he died there in the Queen's hall.

A terrible cry went through the room. Knights leaped up from the table, ladies screamed, and servants ran in confusion. Some stood staring at the dead knight, unable to understand what had happened. Others looked at the dishes and the fruit with fear. Since the feast had been prepared by Queen Guinevere, many eyes soon turned toward her.

Sir Gawaine spoke first in anger. He said that the poison must have been meant for him and that Sir Patrice had eaten it by mistake. His old dislike of Guinevere made his words even harsher. Others quickly took up the same thought. Since the food had been served at her feast, they said, she must answer for the death. Guinevere was struck with horror, not only because a man had died at her table, but because people could believe such evil of her.

Sir Mador de la Porte was overcome with grief and rage. Sir Patrice was his cousin, and he loved him. He did not stop to ask carefully who might have placed the poison there. He saw only that Patrice had died at the Queen's feast. So he went before King Arthur and accused Queen Guinevere of murder and treason.

Arthur turned white when he heard the charge. He loved Guinevere and did not believe that she could do such a wicked thing. Yet he was king, and the law had to be heard even when it cut his own heart. Sir Mador threw down his glove before the King and said that he would prove his accusation by battle. He declared that Queen Guinevere had poisoned Sir Patrice and must answer for it.

Arthur sent for the Queen. She came with two ladies supporting her, because

she had been weeping since the feast. Her veil covered her face, and many in the hall looked at her with pity. Others looked at her with satisfaction, because they were her enemies. Arthur asked what she had to say. Guinevere lifted her veil, and though her face was very pale, her eyes were proud and hard.

She said that Arthur knew her better than any person alive. She admitted that she had many faults, but she said she could never poison a guest at her own table. She also said that she had many enemies at court, especially Sir Gawaine, who had long hated her. If Sir Launcelot had been there, she said, she would have had a champion at once. But she had driven him away by pride and anger, and now he was absent when she needed him most.

Arthur was deeply sorrowful. He said that he himself wished to defend her, because she was the wife of his youth. But he could not do so, because he was king and stood above the law as its keeper. So Sir Mador's glove was left on the floor as a challenge. If no champion came for the Queen, then the matter would go badly for her. Arthur said that he believed someone would rise to defend her innocence.

That night, Guinevere sent for Sir Bors. When he came to her room, Arthur was there also. Guinevere asked Bors to become her champion. Bors hesitated, not because he believed her guilty, but because many people involved were his friends. If he fought for one side, others might turn against him. Guinevere heard this and was wounded by it.

She asked him whether he too believed she had poisoned a guest at her own feast. Bors answered that he believed no such thing. But he said that the quarrel was dangerous and that powerful men stood on both sides. Then Guinevere began to weep and cried out for Sir Launcelot. She said that once Launcelot had always defended her, but now she had driven him away and did not know where he was.

Sir Bors could not bear her grief. At last he promised to take the quarrel upon himself, unless a better champion came. The Queen thanked him, and Arthur was relieved. Still, Bors knew that the matter was not simple. Many knights came to him afterward. Some praised him secretly for defending the Queen, while others were angry because they believed she was guilty.

Sir Gawaine was among those who spoke against him. He said that the poison had surely been meant for himself, not for Sir Patrice. Therefore, he believed the Queen had tried to kill him and had killed another by mistake. Sir Bors answered calmly that Gawaine was wrong. He said that the Queen had not placed the poison there. He also said that one day the true guilty person would be known.

The next day, Sir Bors rode to the castle of Sir Blasius, where Sir Launcelot was staying. He found Launcelot there and told him everything. When Launcelot heard that Guinevere had been accused of murder, he became very angry. "They dare do this," he said, "because they think I am not there to defend her." Bors answered that many at court were ready to believe evil of her, and some powerful men stood with the accusers.

Launcelot told Bors to keep the championship until the day of battle. He himself would come when the time was right. He also told Bors not to tell anyone that they had spoken. Bors then told him that the Queen believed Sir Pinal the Savage had placed the poison at the feast. But she could not accuse him openly until her own name had first been cleared. Launcelot listened with a dark face and said only that he would be there.

So Sir Bors returned to Camelot before dawn. On the evening before the battle, Guinevere asked him again what he meant to do. Bors said that he still believed her innocent and would fight for her as he had promised. Yet he asked that the battle be delayed until noon, if possible. He hoped that by that hour a better champion might come. Guinevere did not fully understand his hope, but she accepted his words.

The next day, Sir Mador came into the lists ready for battle. He was armed and angry, and many people watched from around the field. Some came to pity the Queen, but others came because they wished to see her fall. Sir Bors also armed himself, but before the fight began, he asked Sir Mador to wait until noon. Sir Mador refused. He said that Bors must fight at once or leave the field for another.

Sir Bors went to prepare himself. But as he came out, he looked toward the forest and saw a strange knight riding toward the field. The knight wore plain armor and carried a shield with no sign on it. Others did not know him, but Bors

knew him at once. It was Sir Launcelot. The unknown knight rode to Bors and thanked him for taking the Queen's quarrel until he could come.

Bors led him before King Arthur. Arthur asked who the new knight was, because he could not allow an unknown man to take such an important battle without some assurance. Bors said that he knew the knight and that the knight was better than he himself. Therefore he gave up his right to fight for the Queen. Sir Mador agreed to accept the new champion, because he was ready to fight any man who stood against him.

Then the two knights rode to opposite ends of the lists. At the signal, they charged with full speed. Their spears met in the middle with a loud crash. Sir Mador's spear broke into pieces, but the spear of the unknown knight held firm. Sir Mador and his horse were thrown down into the dust.

Sir Mador rose quickly and drew his sword. He did not want the battle to end with one fall from a horse. The unknown knight also came down and drew his sword. They fought on foot, and the sound of their blows rang across the field. Sir Mador was brave and strong, but the other knight moved with a power that no one else at court could match.

Blow by blow, the unknown champion drove Sir Mador backward. At last he struck him so hard that Mador fell to the ground and could no longer defend himself. The knight stood above him and ordered him to yield. Sir Mador, seeing that death was near, yielded and begged for mercy. Then the unknown knight lifted his helmet, and all the court saw that he was Sir Launcelot of the Lake.

A great cry rose from the people. Queen Guinevere covered her face and wept, because shame, relief, love, and sorrow had all come upon her at once. King Arthur was glad that Launcelot had returned, but his joy was mixed with fear. The Queen had been saved, and Sir Mador had been overthrown. Yet the court had shown how ready it was to divide, accuse, and hate. The first great crack in the Round Table had opened before all eyes.

Part 42 — The Court Breaks Apart

After Queen Guinevere was saved from Sir Mador, the court did not become peaceful again. Instead, the old anger grew stronger. Some knights said that the Queen had been treated cruelly and that Sir Launcelot had done only what any true champion should do. Other knights said that the Queen had brought shame upon the King and that Sir Launcelot's love for her had become treason. So the court was divided, and men who had once sat together as friends now looked at one another with cold eyes.

Sir Mordred and Sir Agravaine were the boldest among those who hated Sir Launcelot. They said openly that Launcelot was false to King Arthur. They also said that because he was the strongest knight alive, one man could not safely accuse him and take him. But several knights together might overcome him. If they could catch him in the Queen's rooms, they believed that Arthur would have to act against him.

Sir Gawaine heard them speak and was deeply troubled. He did not love the Queen, and he had often spoken harshly of her. Yet he would not join in a secret trap. He said that if any man wished to accuse the Queen, he should do it openly before the King and before all the court. As for Sir Launcelot, Gawaine said that Launcelot had been his dear companion in arms for many years, and he would not help in treachery against him.

Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris agreed with Gawaine. Gareth said that he would never forget that Sir Launcelot had made him a knight. Gaheris also said that he would not join in a secret attack. But Mordred and Agravaine would not listen. They gathered those who hated Launcelot, and among them were Sir Florence and Sir Lovel, two sons of Sir Gawaine. Thus even the house of Gawaine was divided against itself.

One night, Sir Mordred called a page of the Queen's court. The page's name was Lanadel, and he suspected no evil. Mordred told him to go to Sir Launcelot and say that Queen Guinevere wished to speak with him in her room. The page obeyed at once, because the message seemed to come from the Queen. Sir Launcelot also suspected no evil, and he went quietly to the Queen's apartments.

When Launcelot entered, Guinevere was surprised. She asked why he had

come, and he said that her own page had brought him a message. Guinevere answered that she had sent no such message. Then both understood that some danger had been prepared for them. Launcelot listened carefully and heard movement outside the door. He knew at once that enemies were near.

At that moment, the Queen's ladies saw Mordred, Agravaine, and their company coming down the passage. They screamed and ran to bar the door. Thirteen armed knights stood outside, and they called to Launcelot to come out and yield himself. They accused him of treason against the King and dishonor toward the Queen. Guinevere turned white with fear, because she knew that no explanation would now be heard.

Launcelot had no armor with him, and only his sword was near at hand. Still, he did not lose his courage. He told the Queen and her ladies to stand far back from the door. Then he called through the wood and said that he would come out if they gave him room. But the knights outside meant to rush him as soon as the door opened. Their voices were harsh and angry, and the noise of their weapons filled the passage.

Launcelot looked around the room and thought quickly. He saw that the door was strong but not strong enough to hold forever. He also knew that if the enemies broke in together, the Queen and her ladies might be hurt in the confusion. So he opened the door suddenly, just wide enough for one man to enter. Sir Colgrance rushed first into the room, and Launcelot struck him down at once.

Then Launcelot dragged the fallen knight inside and shut the door again. With the help of the Queen's ladies, he quickly took the dead knight's armor and put it on as well as he could. It did not fit him perfectly, but it gave him some protection. Outside, the others beat upon the door and cried out that he had killed their companion. Launcelot said nothing. He only tightened the straps and took his sword again.

Then he opened the door and came out upon them. The passage was narrow, and this helped him, because not all his enemies could strike at once. They pressed against him with spears, swords, and shields, but he stood like a wall before the door. His blows were terrible, because fear for the Queen and anger at the

treachery gave him the strength of many men. One knight after another fell before him.

Sir Agravaine came fiercely against him, crying that this was the end of Launcelot's pride. Launcelot answered with his sword and struck him down. Sir Florence and Sir Lovel came also, not knowing that their own father Gawaine would one day mourn them bitterly. Launcelot struck them in the heat of battle, and they fell among the others. He could not stop to ask who each man was, because the press of enemies was too hard and too sudden.

Sir Mordred alone escaped death. He was wounded badly, but he drew back and fled down the passage. The others were slain or driven away. Launcelot stood there covered with blood, breathing heavily, his armor broken and red. Then he returned to the Queen's chamber. When Guinevere saw him, she cried out, because she thought he had received a mortal wound.

Launcelot told her not to fear for him. He said that her enemies had been put to flight, but that the end of their old life had now come. In defending her and himself, he had slain men of Arthur's blood and men of Gawaine's house. Arthur would now be forced to stand against him. He also said that he could not leave her alone, because her enemies would surely bring her to trial and death.

Guinevere began to weep. She saw that the matter had gone beyond anger, jealousy, or courtly quarrels. Blood had been shed inside the King's own house. Launcelot told her that he would gather his kinsmen and friends. When she was brought out for judgment, they would come for her and carry her away. Guinevere asked if this was truly the end, and Launcelot answered that it was.

Launcelot then went to Sir Bors. Bors was shocked when he saw him, because Launcelot was covered with blood from head to foot. Launcelot told him all that had happened. Bors sent for Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Lionel, Sir Ure, and many other knights of Launcelot's kin and friendship. When they were gathered, they listened in deep silence, because each man understood that a great break had come.

Sir Bors said that the Queen had been wronged by false trickery. He also said that Sir Launcelot had been drawn into her chamber by a false message. Therefore, they could not stand aside while Guinevere was destroyed by the same enemies

who had set the trap. All agreed that they would help Launcelot. Yet their faces were dark, because they knew that helping him meant fighting against Arthur's law.

The next day, the Queen was brought forth for judgment. Her enemies spoke fiercely against her. Sir Mordred, wounded but living, told the worst story that he could tell. Arthur was crushed by grief, but he could not set aside the law in open court. The matter had gone too far. Guinevere was condemned, and the day of her punishment was set.

When that day came, the city was full of sorrow and fear. Some people believed the Queen was guilty, but many others pitied her and did not believe she had done the evil charged against her. She was brought out in a plain robe, with her ladies weeping around her. Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris came near the place, but they wore no armor. They did not believe there would be a battle there, and they had refused to take part against Launcelot.

Suddenly, Launcelot and his knights rode into the place with great force. They came to rescue the Queen before the sentence could be carried out. The King's knights rushed to stop them, and in a moment the square became a battlefield. Horses cried out, swords rang, and men fell on every side. Launcelot struck through the press, seeking only to reach Guinevere and carry her away.

In that terrible confusion, he did not know all whom he struck. Sir Gareth came forward, perhaps to stop the bloodshed or perhaps only because he was caught in the press. Launcelot did not know him, for the rush and dust of battle hid faces and signs. His sword fell, and Gareth was slain. Then Sir Gaheris also came into his path, and he too was struck down and killed.

At last Launcelot reached the Queen. His men closed around her, placed her on a horse, and led her away through the fighting. Many knights fell in that rescue, both on Arthur's side and on Launcelot's side. Among the dead were Sir Kay, Sir Griflet, Sir Gareth, and Sir Gaheris. When Launcelot and his company broke free, they rode hard until they reached the safety of Joyous Gard.

When news of the rescue came to King Arthur, he was filled with grief and anger. He said that he saw the end of his reign in this quarrel. The joy of the Round

Table was gone, and it would never return. He asked whether Sir Gawaine knew that his brothers had been slain. Some said he did not know yet, and Arthur ordered that he should not be told too quickly, because his grief would surely become a fire of vengeance.

But the news reached Sir Gawaine before it could be hidden. A messenger came to him and said that Guinevere had escaped with Launcelot. Gawaine's face became white, because he feared what else the messenger would say. Then he asked who had been killed. When he heard the names of Gareth and Gaheris, his heart seemed to break inside him.

Gawaine did not weep gently. His grief became rage. He said that Sir Launcelot had slain his brothers, and especially Gareth, who had loved Launcelot and had received knighthood from his hand. From that hour, Gawaine would not hear of friendship or mercy. He went to King Arthur and demanded war against Joyous Gard. Arthur was already angry, but Gawaine's rage drove the matter forward with greater force.

So King Arthur gathered an army and rode against Joyous Gard. Launcelot held the castle strongly, with the Queen inside and his kinsmen around him. Yet he did not wish to fight Arthur or Gawaine. He still loved Arthur as his king and friend, and he still remembered Gawaine as the companion of many past adventures. Because of this, he fought only where he had to fight and kept away from the places where Arthur and Gawaine stood.

The siege was long and bitter. Sir Gawaine rode every day under the walls and called for Launcelot to come out and fight him. Launcelot refused again and again. He sat inside the castle in grief, while Gawaine shouted that he was a coward and traitor. Sir Ector begged Launcelot to let him answer Gawaine's challenge, but Launcelot refused at first, because he feared that one of the two men he loved would die.

At last, after much pleading, Launcelot allowed Sir Ector to go out. Ector fought Gawaine, but Gawaine was strong with rage and with a strange force that seemed to grow during the morning hours. He overthrew Ector and wounded him. Then others from Launcelot's side came out in turn, but Gawaine drove them back

also. The war was no longer only about the Queen. It had become a war of family blood and broken friendship.

In one fierce battle before Joyous Gard, Sir Lionel rode out among Launcelot's men. He had once been Launcelot's companion in early adventures, and his death would be a wound to all of Launcelot's house. The fighting grew confused and close, with many knights pressing together near a gate. In that battle, Sir Lionel was slain. Sir Bors saw him fall and cried out in grief, but before he could reach him, he too was struck down and badly wounded.

When Launcelot learned that Lionel was dead and Bors wounded, sorrow nearly overcame him. He had tried to hold back from the full violence of war, but war had still taken those dear to him. Now blood answered blood, and every death called for another death. The walls of Joyous Gard, once a place of music and noble welcome, had become a place of grief.

Then the Bishop of Rochester came between King Arthur and Sir Launcelot. He begged the King to consider how much Christian blood had already been shed. He said that this quarrel would destroy the flower of knighthood if it continued. Arthur listened, because part of his heart still longed for peace. Yet Gawaine would not accept peace easily, and Launcelot himself could not undo what had already been done.

The Bishop carried words between the two sides. Launcelot said that he wished no harm to Arthur and would gladly make peace if Guinevere's life and honor could be protected. Arthur said that the Queen must return to him, because she was his wife and the Queen of Britain. The matter was not settled that day, but a narrow road toward peace had opened. Still, every man there knew that even if swords were put away for a time, the Round Table had already been broken in spirit.

Part 43 — Launcelot Leaves England

After the Bishop of Rochester had spoken between King Arthur and Sir Launcelot, a hard peace was made for a little while. It was agreed that Sir

Launcelot should bring Queen Guinevere back to Camelot. He would return her openly, before Arthur, the bishops, the knights, and all the court. He would also declare before everyone that she had lived at Joyous Gard with full honor. In this way, the Queen would be restored to her place, and Launcelot would no longer keep her under his protection.

The day came when this was to be done. Camelot was full of armed men, bishops, lords, ladies, and people from the town. No one laughed, and no one spoke loudly. The joy that had once filled that place was gone. Everyone knew that this return of the Queen was not like a happy wedding procession. It was more like a funeral for the old peace of Arthur's world.

King Arthur sat on his throne in the great hall. He wore white clothing and his crown, and a heavy gold chain lay on his breast. Beside him, on his right, stood the empty throne where the Queen should have sat. On his left stood bishops in their robes. Below him sat Sir Gawaine, pale and hard-faced, with grief and hate still burning in him. Around the hall stood many knights in full armor, so that the whole place shone with iron and gold.

Then the doors opened, and the company from Joyous Gard entered. First came Sir Launcelot's knights and esquires. They moved into two lines, leaving a clear path between them. Then came Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere, walking hand in hand. Both were dressed in white, and the Queen carried an olive branch as a sign of peace. Sir Launcelot wore a wreath of olive leaves, but his face was pale and full of fear for the Queen.

Behind them came the Queen's ladies. They too were dressed richly, but they walked with bowed heads. The hall was so silent that the sound of their steps could be heard on the stone floor. Queen Guinevere looked neither right nor left. She came forward with Sir Launcelot until they stood before the throne. Then Sir Launcelot knelt before King Arthur, while the Queen stood beside him.

Sir Launcelot spoke first. His voice was steady, though his face showed deep pain. He said that he had brought Arthur's Queen back to him, as he had promised. He said that if he had taken her away in haste and sorrow, he now returned her in peace and honor. For thirteen weeks, she had stayed at Joyous Gard with every

respect due to a queen. No man or woman there had treated her with anything except honor.

Then Sir Launcelot spoke more strongly. He said that Queen Guinevere had come back to Arthur as pure and honorable as she had been when Arthur first loved her at Cameliard. If any knight in that hall denied this, Sir Launcelot would answer him with his body in battle. He looked around the hall as he spoke. Many knights lowered their eyes, because none wished to meet him in such a quarrel.

Arthur listened without moving. His face was kingly, but sorrow lay behind the stillness. He did not want to speak against Guinevere, and he did not want to speak against Launcelot. Yet he also could not forget the deaths of his knights, the rescue from the place of judgment, the siege of Joyous Gard, and the blood of his own house. He sat between love, law, and grief, and each of them hurt him.

At last Arthur rose. He came down from his throne and took Guinevere by the hand. He led her to the empty throne beside his own and placed her there. Then he turned to the bishops and the court and said that the Queen had been returned to him under terms of peace. For that day, at least, no man should speak further accusation against her. The court bowed its head, but the silence that followed was heavy and cold.

Sir Gawaine could not keep his anger fully hidden. He looked at Sir Launcelot with eyes like fire. He said that many words had been spoken of peace, but no peace could bring back Gareth and Gaheris. He said that Sir Launcelot might speak proudly of honor, but the dead brothers of Gawaine could not answer from their graves. Some knights near him murmured agreement, while others stood in sorrow, knowing that his grief was terrible.

Sir Launcelot turned toward Gawaine and answered gently. He said that of all sorrows in his life, the death of Gareth was among the greatest. Gareth had loved him, and he had loved Gareth. If he had known him in the press of battle, he would have cut off his own hand before striking him. But Gawaine's face did not soften. He said that chance or mistake did not make the dead live again.

Then Sir Launcelot bowed again before Arthur. He said that he would not remain in England to stir new quarrels. He would leave the land with his own

knights and cross the sea to his own country. If Arthur ever needed him against a foreign enemy, he would come at once, because Arthur had made him a knight. But he would not stay in Britain while his presence brought bloodshed to the King's house.

Arthur's face changed when he heard this. For a moment, he seemed less like a king and more like a tired man who had lost his dearest friend. He said that Launcelot had once been the chief flower of his court. The Round Table had never been brighter than when Launcelot sat among its knights. But now the time for such words was gone. Launcelot must do what his own judgment commanded.

So Sir Launcelot left the hall. He did not look again at Guinevere, because that look would have broken both their hearts. Guinevere sat still on her throne, white and silent, holding the olive branch in her hand. When Launcelot passed out through the doors, many knights watched him with tears in their eyes. Others watched him with hatred. Thus the greatest knight of the Round Table went out from Camelot as an exile.

Soon afterward, Sir Launcelot gathered his kinsmen and friends. Sir Bors, Sir Ector de Maris, Sir Blamor, Sir Bleoberis, and many others went with him. They rode from Joyous Gard to the sea and took ship for France. Behind them they left Camelot, England, the Round Table, and the broken friendship of Arthur's court. Ahead of them lay their own lands beyond the sea, but even there peace did not wait for long.

Sir Gawaine would not allow the quarrel to end. Day after day, he pressed King Arthur to follow Launcelot. He said that the blood of Gareth and Gaheris cried out for vengeance. Arthur resisted for a while, because his heart was weary of war. But Gawaine's grief was strong, and he would not be quiet. At last Arthur gathered an army and crossed the sea to make war upon Sir Launcelot in his own land.

Before Arthur left Britain, he placed the kingdom in the hands of Sir Mordred. This was a terrible mistake, but Arthur did not yet know how false Mordred's heart had become. Mordred bowed before the King and promised to guard the land faithfully. Yet even then, hidden desire moved inside him. He saw that Arthur was taking many of the best knights away, and he thought that Britain might soon

be his if fortune helped him.

Arthur and Gawaine crossed the sea with a great host. They came to the land of Sir Launcelot and laid siege to one of his strongest castles. Launcelot held the castle with his knights, but he was sick at heart. He did not wish to fight Arthur. He did not wish to fight Gawaine. Again and again, he told his men that he would defend himself if he must, but that he would not gladly strike the King who had once loved him.

Around the castle there were many battles. Arthur's army was larger and could replace its losses, because more men came from Britain to join him. Launcelot's army was smaller, and each knight he lost was hard to replace. Still, the castle held firm. Sir Bors and the others urged Launcelot to fight more fiercely. They said that Arthur and Gawaine would destroy them if they remained too gentle.

Sir Gawaine rode each day before the walls and called for Sir Launcelot to come out. He shouted that Launcelot had slain his brothers and must answer for their blood. Launcelot heard him and suffered deeply, but still he would not come. He remembered many old days when he and Gawaine had ridden together as friends. He could not yet bring himself to turn fully against such a man.

Then Sir Gawaine sought help from a wise physician in Arthur's camp. He asked whether there was any medicine that would protect him from wounds. The physician said no such medicine could be made. But he could prepare a drink that would give Gawaine the strength of ten men from the ninth hour of the morning until noon. Gawaine accepted this gladly, because he believed that such strength would help him overcome Launcelot.

The next day, after taking the medicine, Gawaine rode beneath the castle walls again. His voice rang like a trumpet as he called Launcelot coward and traitor. Launcelot sat inside the castle and groaned. Bors and Ector begged him to answer, because the insult was too great. Still, Launcelot would not go out. He said that Gawaine's grief spoke through those words, and grief should be pitied before it was punished.

But Gawaine returned again and again. Each morning, while the medicine gave him terrible strength, he called out with greater fury. At last, Launcelot understood

that if he did not answer, the courage of his own people would fail. He also saw that Gawaine would never stop. So he armed himself in full armor, took a strong spear, and ordered the gate to be opened.

When Sir Launcelot rode out, the whole army grew still. Sir Gawaine came toward him and asked if he was truly Launcelot, because he had refused so many challenges before. Launcelot answered that he was indeed Launcelot. He also said that he had avoided this battle for love of old friendship. He begged Gawaine, even then, to put away hatred and let the quarrel rest.

Gawaine would not listen. He said that Launcelot had killed Gareth and Gaheris, and that there could be no peace between them while one of them lived. Then the two knights rode apart and prepared to fight. The morning sun shone on their helmets, their horses stamped the earth, and both armies watched in silence. Everyone knew that this battle was not only between two men. It was between the old love of the Round Table and the hatred that had destroyed it.

They charged first with spears. The meeting was hard, and both spears broke. Then they drew swords and fought on foot. Because of the medicine, Gawaine's strength was terrible. He struck again and again, so fiercely that Launcelot had to defend himself with all his skill. From the ninth hour until noon, Gawaine seemed almost more than human.

Launcelot received many wounds. Blood ran from his armor, and his shield was cut and broken. Yet he did not try to end the fight quickly. He defended himself and waited, because he felt that Gawaine's strength was not natural and might fade with time. Gawaine pressed him harder and harder, hoping to break him before noon came. The sound of their swords rang across the field like iron bells.

At last, the sun reached noon. Gawaine's borrowed strength began to pass away. His blows became slower, and his shield dropped lower. Launcelot saw the change at once. Now he moved from defense to attack. He struck Gawaine again and again, driving him backward across the ground. Gawaine tried to stand firm, but the force had gone out of his body.

Then Launcelot saw an opening. He lifted his sword and struck Gawaine on

the head with a terrible blow. The blade broke through the helmet and wounded the head beneath it. Gawaine sank to his knees, and his sword fell from his hand. Launcelot stepped forward, tore off his helmet, and told him to yield.

Gawaine looked up at him and refused. He said that Launcelot might kill him if he wished, but he would never yield. Then Launcelot's anger passed away. He saw not an enemy before him, but the old companion he had loved. Tears filled his eyes. He told Gawaine that even if Gawaine would not ask for life, he would give it to him freely.

Gawaine warned him that this mercy was foolish. He said that when he was healed, he would come again and fight him again, because the quarrel could end only in death. Launcelot answered that he did not care. He could not kill Gawaine while Gawaine lay wounded before him. Then he mounted his horse and rode back to the castle, weeping so hard that he could hardly see the road.

Gawaine was carried back to Arthur's camp. His wound was terrible, but for a time he did not die. The physicians cared for him, and after many days he grew strong enough to speak again. Yet his hatred did not heal with his body. He told Arthur that he would challenge Launcelot again when he was able. Arthur heard this and grieved, because he saw no end to the bloodshed.

The war continued around the castle. Launcelot still defended himself, and Arthur still pressed the siege. But while the best knights of Britain fought one another across the sea, Mordred began his treason at home. He told the people that Arthur might never return. He said that the kingdom needed a ruler present in Britain, not a king far away in a private war. Many who were tired of war listened to him.

Mordred then tried to make himself king. He sent for the Archbishop of Canterbury and ordered him to crown him. The Archbishop refused, saying that Arthur was alive and was the rightful king. Mordred grew angry and threatened him, but the Archbishop would not yield. Instead, he fled from Mordred's power and went toward Dover, where Arthur was expected to land if he returned.

News of Mordred's treason crossed the sea and reached Arthur. The King was struck with grief and shame. He had left Britain in Mordred's hands, and now

Mordred had betrayed him. Arthur could no longer remain to fight Launcelot, even though Gawaine still thirsted for vengeance. The kingdom itself was in danger, and the King had to go home.

So Arthur raised the siege and prepared to return to Britain. Sir Gawaine, still wounded and bitter, went with him. Launcelot watched them depart from the walls of his castle. He felt no joy in their leaving. He knew that the war between them had weakened Arthur's kingdom and had opened the door for Mordred's treason. The old fellowship of the Round Table had broken, and now Britain itself was about to bleed.

Part 44 — Arthur's Last Battle

After King Arthur had decided to return to Britain, Sir Gawaine's wound grew worse. The blow that Sir Launcelot had given him had never truly healed, and the long pain of travel and war opened it again. Gawaine knew that death was near. He called Arthur to him and spoke without anger for the first time in many days. He said that he had been wrong to let hatred rule him, and that Arthur must not delay his return because of him.

Arthur tried to comfort him and said that he would yet recover. But Gawaine shook his head. He said that a dying man often sees clearly what living men cannot see. He warned Arthur again that Mordred was false and ambitious. He said that Mordred had no true love for anyone except himself, and that if Arthur did not return quickly, Mordred would take the crown and hold it by force.

That night, in the second hour after midnight, Sir Gawaine died. Arthur was beside him when he passed, and several knights of the Round Table were also there. Gawaine did not die alone, but in the company of those who had known his greatness and his faults. When his last breath left him, Arthur wept over him like a father over a son. He said that Gawaine had been passionate and often violent, but he had also been faithful, brave, and dear to him.

The next morning, a messenger came from Britain with terrible news. Sir Constantine of Cornwall had sent the message in haste. Mordred had seized the

throne and was holding the crown as if Arthur were dead. He had told the people that Arthur had fallen in France before the castle of Chillion. He had also begun to gather men around him, promising them peace if they accepted him as king.

Arthur buried Sir Gawaine with great honor before he left France. Bishops said prayers for him, and the whole army knelt. Even those inside Launcelot's castle prayed for Gawaine, because all knew that he had been one of the greatest knights in the world after Launcelot himself. When the funeral was over, Arthur ordered the siege to be raised. The army then prepared to cross the sea and return to Britain.

In Britain, Mordred heard that Arthur was still alive and was coming home. This news struck him like a blow. He sat with his head low, not eating or drinking, while his friends stood around him. Sir Mador de la Porte, who had become Arthur's enemy, told him not to despair. He said that Arthur had spent a year in war, while Mordred had kept peace in Britain. If Mordred promised peace, many tired people might still stand with him.

Mordred listened to this advice and took heart from it. He sent for the Archbishop of Canterbury and demanded to be crowned king. The Archbishop refused him with firm words. He said that Arthur was alive and was still the rightful king. Mordred had only been trusted with the kingdom for a time, and he had no right to keep it as his own.

Mordred became very angry and threatened the Archbishop. The Archbishop then left him and fled from that place with his own people. He went toward Dover, because he believed Arthur would land there when he returned. Mordred could not now gain the blessing of the Church, but he still gathered soldiers. He prepared to meet Arthur with an army, because open treason had now become open war.

Soon Arthur's ships came near the shore at Dover. From the sea, Arthur saw an army standing on the beach. At first he did not know whether those men had come to welcome him or fight him. Then he saw Mordred in the front, and he understood. A deep groan came from him, because more blood had to be shed. He said that he would never give up his throne to Mordred unless he gave it up with his life.

Arthur's men leaped from the ships into the water and waded toward the shore.

Mordred's army came down to stop them. The battle began in the shallow sea, with waves breaking around the fighters' legs. The water turned red with blood, and each wave carried that red color up the white sand. Men fell in the water and were struck by swords, spears, and the feet of horses.

But Mordred could not keep Arthur's army from landing. More and more men came from the ships, and they pressed forward with great force. At last Mordred's men were driven back from the shore. Arthur stood once more on the soil of Britain. Then the Archbishop of Canterbury came to him and welcomed him as the true king, saying that he had refused to crown Mordred.

Mordred withdrew from Dover and gathered more men at Barendown. Many who hated Arthur, or who had once loved Launcelot and now believed Arthur was Launcelot's enemy, joined Mordred there. He placed his army on three steep hills, so that Arthur's men would have to charge upward. Arthur saw the danger and divided his own army into three parts. He led the center himself, gave one side to the King of North Wales, and placed the other under Sir Ewaine.

The battle of Barendown was hard and costly. Arthur's men charged up the hills again and again, but Mordred's soldiers held the high ground and beat them back. Then Sir Ewaine led his men around the side of Mordred's army and attacked from an unexpected place. This broke one wing of Mordred's force and threw the center into confusion. Arthur then charged once more and took the middle hill.

Mordred's army broke and fled toward Salisbury. Arthur had won the battle, but the victory was bitter. Many good knights had fallen, and among them Sir Ewaine was mortally wounded. When Arthur heard this, he went at once to Ewaine's pavilion. Ewaine lay pale and weak, with death already on his face. Arthur knelt beside him, held him, and wept over him.

Ewaine asked Arthur to send for Sir Launcelot. He said that Launcelot was still the strongest knight in the world and had many good knights with him. If Launcelot came, many men now standing with Mordred would leave Mordred and return to Arthur. Arthur answered that he did not know how he could ask help from the man who had taken Guinevere from him and had slain his nephews. But

Ewaine begged him to let the past be past, because the kingdom itself was in danger.

Ewaine asked for parchment and ink. His wounds broke open while he was raised up to write, but he would not stop. He wrote to Launcelot with his dying strength, asking him to come quickly to Arthur's aid. He wrote that the old quarrel must be ended and that the king who had made Launcelot a knight needed him now. Arthur sent the letter across the sea, and when Launcelot received it, he called his knights together and all agreed to go to Britain.

After the letter was sent, Sir Ewaine died with Arthur holding his hand. Arthur mourned him deeply, for Ewaine had been his nephew and had served him faithfully. Ewaine was buried with honor, and then Arthur moved after Mordred toward Salisbury. There, not far from the sea, the two armies stopped near each other. Arthur knew that another battle might come very soon, and his heart was heavy with fear and weariness.

That night, Arthur slept in his pavilion. In his sleep, he dreamed that he sat on his throne upon a huge wheel. The wheel rose higher and higher until he sat in bright sunlight and felt all the joy of power and glory. Then the wheel turned downward. It carried him toward a deep black pool filled with blood, and he felt himself slipping from the throne. He cried out in fear, and his attendants ran in and woke him.

After that, Arthur slept again, but this sleep was like a vision. He saw Sir Gawaine come into the tent, smiling and calm. Behind Gawaine came fourteen ladies, those whom Gawaine had once helped or saved in his life. Arthur asked how Gawaine could be there, since he had been buried in France. Gawaine answered that the body had been buried, but he himself had come from Paradise.

Gawaine warned Arthur not to fight Mordred the next day. He said that if Arthur fought, he would surely die. He also said that Launcelot was already coming to help him, because Ewaine's letter would reach him. If Arthur could make peace or delay the battle for a month and a day, Launcelot would arrive, and many lives would be saved. Then Gawaine touched Arthur's hand and left a white mark there as proof that the vision was true.

In the morning, Arthur showed the mark to his bishops and counselors. They agreed that he should not fight that day. Instead, he sent messengers to Mordred to make terms. After much talk, a hard agreement was made. Mordred would hold Cornwall and Kent during Arthur's life, and after Arthur's death he would rule all Britain. Arthur hated these terms, but he accepted them for a time, because he wished to avoid the battle foretold in the vision.

It was arranged that Arthur and Mordred would meet in a valley between the two armies and sign the treaty. Each would bring six knights, and no weapon was to be drawn. But neither side trusted the other. Arthur told his knights that if any man of Mordred's party drew a sword, they must draw at once and defend him. Mordred gave the same command to his own men, because treason had made him fear treason everywhere.

At noon, Arthur and Mordred entered the pavilion in the middle of the valley. Their knights stood outside, six on each side. The two armies watched from the hills, ready and tense. Then, by chance, an adder came out of a bush and stung one of Mordred's knights in the heel. The knight looked down, saw the snake, and drew his sword to kill it.

Arthur's knights saw the sword flash in the sun and thought betrayal had begun. They cried out, "Treason!" and drew their own swords. Mordred's knights drew theirs also. Inside the pavilion, Arthur heard the cry and seized Mordred by the throat, thinking that he had been betrayed. Mordred tore himself free and rushed outside, calling to his men.

Then both armies came down from the hills like two storms. The sound of horses was like thunder coming closer and closer. Dust rose into the sky, and the sun flashed on thousands of helmets and spear points. Arthur mounted quickly and rode back to his men. An esquire gave him a strong spear, and he turned his horse toward the battle.

The two armies met with a terrible crash. Men and horses fell together, and many who fell never rose again. Spears broke, shields split, and swords were drawn in the press of bodies. The valley became so crowded that horsemen could hardly move, so many threw away their spears and fought with swords at close

range. After the riders came foot soldiers, and they ran among the fallen, killing or being killed in the dust and blood.

The battle began before noon and continued through the afternoon. It went on through the red light of evening and into the coming darkness. This was the last and greatest battle Arthur ever fought. Thousands of knights, gentlemen, and footmen died there. At last, when night fell, Mordred's army broke and fled, and Arthur remained victor on the field.

Yet Arthur did not rejoice. He sat on his horse among the dead and wept until the tears ran into his beard. Almost all the bright company of his Round Table was gone. The ground was thick with dead men, as a shore is thick with stones. The groans of the wounded rose around him, and the moon began to shine on faces that would never speak again.

Arthur said that his fate had overtaken him. His kingdom was still his, but it seemed empty now. The knights who had once filled his court with glory had fallen by one another's hands. The Round Table had not been destroyed by a foreign enemy, but by jealousy, anger, pride, and broken love. Arthur rode slowly across the field with Sir Bedivere and Sir Lucian, looking for those who still lived and those who had died.

The moon was full and bright, so they could see far across the battlefield. Sir Lucian rode with them, though he was badly wounded and near death. He said nothing about his pain, and neither Arthur nor Bedivere knew how deeply he was hurt. As they moved among the bodies, they found Sir Mador de la Porte lying dead. Arthur looked at him sadly and said that Mador had once been a good knight and friend, but his accusation against Guinevere had helped begin all this ruin.

Then they rode farther and saw a knight standing alone beside a bramble bush. He was still as a statue, and moonlight shone on his armor. Around him lay dead knights, both his own men and Arthur's. His horse was dead, and he himself was wounded in both thighs, so he could not escape. The knight was Sir Mordred.

Arthur looked at him and was filled with a final, terrible anger. He said that Mordred had destroyed his joy, his court, and his kingdom. Sir Bedivere begged him not to attack. He warned him to remember Gawaine's vision and to let others

take Mordred if they found him. But Arthur answered that he had nothing left to lose. He said that life without his Queen, his knights, and his Round Table was only an empty kingship.

Sir Bedivere gave him a spear. Mordred saw what Arthur meant to do and drew his sword. The blade flashed white in the moonlight. Arthur set the spear and drove his horse forward. The spear struck Mordred below the shield, passed through his body, and came out behind him. Mordred had received his death wound.

But Mordred did not fall at once. With desperate strength, he pressed himself up along the spear until he reached Arthur. Then he lifted his sword in both hands and struck the King on the helmet. The blow cut through the helmet and deep into Arthur's head. Arthur reeled in the saddle and would have fallen if Bedivere had not caught him. Mordred fell to the ground laughing that his work was done, and then he died.

Arthur knew that his own wound was mortal. He asked Bedivere and Lucian to take him to a small chapel on the battlefield. Bedivere led the King's horse, while Lucian held Arthur upright in the saddle. They brought him safely to the chapel and laid him on a bench. But when Lucian helped lift the King, his own wounds opened again. He fell to the floor, and soon he died without complaint.

Bedivere cried over his brother, but Arthur told him that he himself would soon join the dead. Then Arthur asked Bedivere to remove his helmet and look at the wound. Bedivere saw that it was deep and terrible, and he knew that no earthly doctor could heal it. Arthur then ordered him to take Excalibur and throw it into the sea. Bedivere unbuckled the sword from the King's side and carried it out into the moonlight.

When Bedivere saw the sword in the moonlight, his heart failed. The hilt was rich with gold and jewels, and it shone with many colors. He thought it was wrong to throw away such a wonder. He hid the sword under the roots of a dead tree and returned to Arthur. When Arthur asked what he had seen, Bedivere said that he had seen only waves and moonlight.

Arthur knew at once that Bedivere had lied. He called him unfaithful and told

him to go again. Bedivere went out, took up the sword, and again looked at its shining beauty. A second time he could not throw it away. He returned and again said that he had seen only the sea. Then Arthur cried out in sorrow that even his friend now failed him at the edge of death.

This time Bedivere truly obeyed. He ran to the shore, wrapped the belt around the sword, and threw Excalibur far out over the water. The sword turned in the moonlight like a circle of fire. Before it touched the sea, an arm rose from the water. The arm was covered in white silk and wore many golden bracelets. The hand caught Excalibur, lifted it three times, and drew it down beneath the waves.

Bedivere returned in wonder and told Arthur what he had seen. Arthur said that now the command had been truly done. Then he asked Bedivere to lift him on his shoulders and carry him down to the shore. Bedivere obeyed. Arthur's arms hung weakly around his neck, and the wounded King groaned as he was lifted. Slowly, Bedivere carried him out of the chapel and down the rocks toward the sea.

At the shore, a boat was waiting. In it stood three queens and their ladies. Bedivere knew Queen Morgana le Fay and the Queen of North Wales, but the third lady was unknown to him. She was the Lady of the Lake, standing at the tiller, pale and beautiful in the moonlight. When Bedivere came near with Arthur, the ladies lifted their voices in a sound of deep mourning. Morgana and the Queen of North Wales reached out and received Arthur into the boat.

They laid him on a couch, with his head resting on Morgana's lap. Bedivere looked at his King and thought his face was as white as ashes. He cried out, asking what he should do now that his lord was leaving him alone among enemies. Then Arthur opened his eyes and spoke. He said that Bedivere had no enemies near him now, because Mordred's forces were defeated and Launcelot would soon come as a friend.

Arthur told Bedivere to go back into the world and tell what he had seen. He said that he would not die in that place. He would go with the queens to Avalon, where his wound would be healed. One day, after many years, he would return to Britain, and with that return peace would come. Then the ladies cried out again, and the boat moved away from the shore.

Bedivere watched as the boat went farther into the moonlight. At first he could see it clearly. Then it grew pale and uncertain, like a dream on the water. At last it disappeared into the whiteness of the night. Bedivere stood alone on the shore, weeping so hard that he could hardly see the stones beneath his feet.

Through the rest of the night, Bedivere walked without knowing where he went. In the morning, he came near a city where there was much movement and trouble among the people. He asked who was there, and he was told that the Archbishop of Canterbury was in that place. Bedivere asked to be brought to him. When the Archbishop saw Bedivere's pale face, he knew that he carried terrible news.

Bedivere told him everything: the last battle near Salisbury, the death of Mordred, the mortal wound of Arthur, the casting away of Excalibur, and the boat that had carried Arthur away. The Archbishop listened in great wonder and sorrow. Then he asked who was nearest in blood to Arthur. Bedivere answered that Sir Constantine of Cornwall was nearest. So Constantine was later crowned King of Britain at Camelot.

Yet many people did not believe that Arthur truly died. They said that he had been taken to Avalon by Morgana and the other queens. There, in that beautiful western island, his wound would be healed. Avalon was said to be a land of spring, peace, green hills, bright towers, and gentle people. In that place, many believed, Arthur still slept and waited.

The old story says that Arthur will one day return. When he comes again, war will pass away, and peace will rule among people. Whether this is true or only a beautiful hope, the story keeps his name alive. Arthur's kingdom had fallen, and the Round Table had broken, but the dream of Arthur did not die. It remained in the hearts of people who longed for justice, mercy, courage, and peace.

Part 45 — Guinevere, Launcelot, and the End

Now it hath already been told how Sir Launcelot received the letter written by Sir Ewaine with his dying hand. When he read that letter, he knew that King

Arthur was in great need. So Sir Launcelot called together the knights who were with him, and all agreed that they would go to Britain and help the King. They made ready ships and galleys, and with two hundred and twelve knights Sir Launcelot crossed the sea.

They landed at Dover, where Arthur himself had landed not long before. But no glad welcome met them there. Instead, a messenger came quickly to Sir Launcelot and told him the heavy news. The great battle had already been fought near Salisbury. Sir Mordred had been slain, and King Arthur had passed from the world because of the wound he had received.

The messenger also said that Sir Constantine of Cornwall had been crowned King of Britain in Arthur's place. When Sir Launcelot heard these things, he stood still as if a spear had struck him through the heart. The knights around him also bowed their heads. They had come to save Arthur, but they had come too late. The kingdom they had known was already gone.

Then Sir Launcelot cried out in sorrow for King Arthur. He said that Arthur had been his noble lord, his gracious king, and the maker of all his honor. He blamed himself bitterly, saying that he had slain Sir Agravaine long ago but had spared Sir Mordred, and now Mordred's treason had destroyed everything. He said that if Mordred had died at the beginning, many good knights might still have lived.

Sir Launcelot then named those who had fallen. Sir Gawaine was dead, Sir Lionel was dead, Sir Ector was dead, Sir Ewaine was dead, Sir Gareth was dead, and Sir Geharis was dead. Many others of the Round Table had also passed away. As he spoke, tears ran down his face. The greatest knight in the world did not try to hide his grief.

Then Sir Launcelot asked what was left for them now. He said that none of them could serve King Constantine as they had served Arthur. The old bond was broken, and the old court was no more. Then he asked where Queen Guinevere was. The answer came that she was at the convent of Saint Bridget in Rochester, and that she had become the Abbess there.

When Sir Launcelot heard this, his face changed again. He was told that Queen

Guinevere now wore the black and white robes of a nun. She had given herself to the church, and she no longer lived as a queen of this world. So that night Sir Launcelot took horse and rode away alone. He rode through the darkness toward Rochester.

When he reached the convent, he entered and asked to speak with the Abbess. The nuns went to call her, and after a little while Queen Guinevere came into the room. Sir Launcelot stood in the middle of the place and looked at her. Her face was white and thin, and she wore the simple robes of her new life. She no longer looked like the proud queen of Camelot.

Guinevere looked at him and knew him at once. She cried out in a loud and painful voice, "Is it thou?" Then her strength left her. She reached behind her as if she could not see, found a seat, and fell upon it in a swoon. Her head fell backward, and for a moment Sir Launcelot thought that she had died before his eyes.

He called loudly for help. Several nuns came running and loosened the robes at Guinevere's throat. They rubbed her hands and bathed her forehead until she slowly came back to herself. When she opened her eyes, she saw Sir Launcelot kneeling before her. He had come as the great knight of the world, but he knelt there like a broken man.

For a while neither of them could speak. All the years between them seemed to stand in that room. There were memories of Camelot, of tournaments, of rescue, of joy, of anger, of exile, and of war. There was also the memory of Arthur, whose shadow now lay across everything. At last Guinevere spoke first.

She told Sir Launcelot that he must not ask her to return to the world. That life was finished for her forever. She had been a queen, but now she was a servant of God. She had known love, pride, fear, and sorrow, but now she wished only for peace. She said that the doors of the convent had closed behind her old life.

Sir Launcelot begged that he might at least remain near her and serve her. He said that everything else had been taken away. Arthur was gone, the Round Table was gone, and the knights who had loved him were dead or scattered. If Guinevere also sent him away, then he had no place left in the world. Yet she would not

change her mind.

Guinevere said that if he loved her truly, he must leave her. Their old bond had brought sorrow upon many people, even if they had not meant such sorrow to come. Arthur had suffered, the Round Table had broken, and many noble knights had died. Now they must not make more grief by clinging to what was finished. She asked him to go and seek peace in the only way left to him.

These words were very hard for Sir Launcelot to hear. Yet he knew that she spoke from a place deeper than anger. She was not the proud and wounded queen who had once driven him away in passion. She was a woman who had looked upon ruin and had chosen to leave the world behind. So Launcelot bowed his head and accepted her command.

He told her that he too would not return to worldly glory. He would not serve another king, and he would not seek another court. Since the queen had become a nun, he would become a hermit. Since she had left earthly honor, he would leave it also. They would not be together in the world, but each would seek mercy in the life that remained.

Then they parted with great sorrow. Sir Launcelot did not try to take her from that place, and Guinevere did not ask him to stay. They both understood that the past could not be repaired by desire. He left the convent with a heart that seemed empty of all earthly hope. She remained there in silence among the nuns.

Sir Launcelot returned to his knights and told them what had happened. He said that Queen Guinevere would remain in the convent and that he himself would leave the world. The knights were troubled when they heard this. Some would have wished him to take his lands again, or to gather power, or to serve in some new kingdom. But Launcelot would not do any of these things.

Sir Bors spoke to him and said that a knight's duty was usually to live in the world and work in the world. A knight should help those in need, defend the weak, and answer any true call of duty. But Sir Launcelot answered that if such a call came, he would obey it. Until then, his time for battle was finished. He was no longer young, and he wished to live quietly in the forest.

Then Sir Bors said that they were Launcelot's followers and friends. If he

remained in the forest, they would remain there also. His life would be their life, and his food would be their food. Sir Launcelot accepted this. So seven of his fellows stayed with him, and they all took the life of hermits.

They went into the forest and lived there in great quietness. They prayed, worked, fasted, and slept in small cells. They cultivated little plots of barley and simple food. They did not hunt or harm the animals of the forest. In time, the wild creatures came near them without fear.

The deer would stand beside them and not run away. Birds came close to their hands. The forest, which had once heard the sound of armor and horses, now heard the sound of prayer. People also came from far places to ask for their blessing. So the fame of their holiness spread through the land.

They lived in that way for three years. During that time, Sir Launcelot grew thinner and quieter. The old fire did not leave him completely, but it no longer burned outward in battle. It burned inward, in prayer and memory. He thought often of Arthur, of Galahad, of Elaine, of Guinevere, and of all those whose lives had touched his own.

One night, in the second watch, Sir Launcelot had a dream. In that dream Queen Guinevere stood before him, but not as she had looked at Rochester. Her face was bright and full of peace. A light seemed to shine through it from within. She wore a robe that shone like gold, and ornaments of gold were upon her neck and arms.

In the dream, Guinevere spoke to him. She told him to rejoice, because her troubles and cares were ended. She said that she was now in Paradise and that her body was dead. Then the vision passed away. Sir Launcelot awoke and saw that morning had come and that the sun was shining.

He went at once to the Hermit and told him the dream. The Hermit listened carefully and said that it seemed the Queen had truly died and that her soul had been taken to Paradise. He told Sir Launcelot to go to Rochester and see if this was so. So Launcelot and his seven companions mounted their horses and rode to the convent.

When they reached the nunnery, Sir Launcelot asked where the Abbess was.

The nuns told him that she had died the night before, during the second watch. This was the very time of his dream. Sir Launcelot then asked to be brought to her. They led him into an upper room where the windows were open and a cold breeze moved softly through the air.

There lay the body of Queen Guinevere upon white linen. Her face was pale like wax, but her lips seemed to hold a gentle smile. Sir Launcelot looked at her and knew that this was the smile he had seen in his dream. He did not weep aloud. He only stood there with his hands clasped tightly together, thinking of all that had passed between them.

He remembered the first time he came to Arthur's court. He remembered the glory of Camelot and the love and trust that had once filled that place. He remembered Elaine, whose life had been broken by his own divided heart. He remembered the battles he had fought for Guinevere and the blood that had been shed because of them. Some memories gave him comfort, but others wounded him like knives.

At last Sir Launcelot spoke softly. He said that he wished he might lie as Guinevere lay, because then he too would be at peace. Guinevere had died in the forty-sixth year of her age, and even in death she was beautiful. The eight knights remained at the convent for two days. On the third day, her body was buried before the altar of the nunnery.

After Guinevere's burial, Sir Launcelot and his companions returned to the forest. There they again lived as they had lived before. Two or three more years passed in quietness. The world outside changed under King Constantine, but they took little part in it. Their old life had become like a tale told by other men.

Then, one morning in May, all the hermits rose early for prayer. The trees were in leaf, and the apple trees were covered with blossom. When the warm wind moved through the branches, the blossoms fell like pink snow upon the grass. Birds sang in every bush and tree, and all the air was full of their music.

When the brothers gathered for morning prayers, they saw that Sir Launcelot was not among them. They wondered why he had not come. Sir Bors went to his cell to call him. When he entered, he saw Sir Launcelot lying peacefully upon his

couch. His hands were folded upon his breast, and a smile of deep peace was upon his lips.

Sir Bors came closer and saw that Sir Launcelot was dead. He went to the door and called the others. When they came, they stood around the body in silence. Sir Bors said that what lay before them had once been Sir Launcelot, though the living knight was now gone from it. He thanked God that Launcelot had died in such peace.

Then they prepared to carry the body to Joyous Gard. Sir Bors said that Launcelot would have wished to be buried there. So they laid the body upon a horse bier and covered it, so that no passer-by might look upon it. They bore him away from the forest and brought him to Joyous Gard. There, after many wars, sorrows, and broken hopes, the body of Sir Launcelot lay in peace.

Those knights did not return to the forest after that. They stayed at Joyous Gard and kept watch beside Launcelot's tomb. One of them always sat there in vigil, and seven wax candles burned beside the tomb. So long as those knights lived, that place was never dark. The light of the candles stood for the love and faith that remained after all the glory had passed away.

Last of all those knights to die was Sir Bors de Ganis. He lived to be very old, more than fourscore years of age. One morning a priest came to the tomb and found Sir Bors sitting there beside it. Sir Bors had died quietly in that place. One of the seven candles had burned out, as if his own life had gone out with its flame.

So ended the lives of those knights of the Round Table. Arthur had passed away toward Avalon. Guinevere had died as a nun at Rochester. Launcelot had died as a hermit, not with a sword in his hand, but with peace on his face. The Round Table was broken, and Camelot was gone, but the memory of those lives did not disappear.

The old story teaches that true greatness is not only found in victory. It is also found in patience, labor, loyalty, mercy, and the will to help those in trouble. Arthur and his knights made many mistakes, and some of those mistakes brought terrible sorrow. Yet they also tried to make the world better than they found it. For that reason, their story continued to be told.

Thus the tale of King Arthur, Queen Guinevere, Sir Launcelot, Sir Galahad, Sir Gawaine, Sir Bors, and all the others comes to its end. There were many joys in it and many griefs. There was glory, love, pride, sin, courage, repentance, and peace. And though the kingdom itself passed away, the dream of justice and noble service remained.