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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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King Arthur: Sir Launcelot And The Falcon (6/15)

Sir Launcelot rode on his way, by marsh and valley and hill, till he chanced upon a fair castle, and saw fly from it, over his head, a beautiful falcon, with the lines still hanging from her feet. And as he looked, the falcon flew into a tree where she was held fast by the lines becoming entangled about the boughs. Immediately, from the castle there came running a fair lady, who cried: "O Launcelot, Launcelot! As ye are the noblest of all knights, I pray you help me to recover my falcon. For if my husband discover its loss, he will slay me in his anger."

"Who is your husband, fair lady?" asked Sir Launcelot.

"Sir Phelot, a knight of Northgalis, and he is of a hasty temper; wherefore, I beseech you, help me."

"Well, lady," said Sir Launcelot, "I will serve you if I may; but the tree is hard to climb, for the boughs are few, and, in truth, I am no climber. But I will do my best."

So the lady helped Sir Launcelot to unarm, and he led his horse to the foot of the tree, and springing from its back, he caught at the nearest bough, and drew himself up into the branches. Then he climbed till he reached the falcon and, tying her lines to a rotten bough, broke

it off, and threw down the bird and bough to the lady below.

Forthwith Sir Phelot came from among the trees and said: "Ah! Sir Launcelot! Now at length I have you as I would; for I have long sought your life."

And Sir Launcelot made answer: "Surely ye would not slay me, an unarmed man; for that were dishonor to you. Keep my armor if ye will; but hang my sword on a bough where I may reach it, and then do with me as ye can."

But Sir Phelot laughed mockingly and said: "Not so, Sir Launcelot. I know you too well to throw away my advantage; wherefore, shift as ye may."

"Alas!" said Sir Launcelot, "that ever knight should be so unknighly. And you, madam, how could ye so betray me?"

"She did but as I commanded her," said Sir Phelot.

Then Launcelot looked about him to see how he might help himself in these straits, and espying above his head a great bare branch, he tore it down. Then, ever watching his advantage, he sprang to the ground on the far side of his horse, so that the horse was between him and Sir Phelot. Sir Phelot rushed upon him with his sword, but Launcelot parried it with the bough, with which he dealt his enemy such a blow on the head that Sir Phelot sank to the ground in a swoon. Then Sir Launcelot seized his sword where it lay beside his armor, and stooping over the fallen knight, unloosed his helm.

When the lady saw him do that, she shrieked and cried: "Spare his life! spare his life, noble knight, I beseech you!"

But Sir Launcelot answered sternly: "A felon's death for him who does felon's deeds. He has lived too long already," and with one blow he smote off his head.

Then he armed himself, and mounting upon his steed, rode away, leaving the lady to weep beside her lord.

