



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

King Arthur (Full Book)

Beatrice Clay

- Chapter 1: Arthur's Birth And How He Became King
 - Chapter 2: The Round Table
 - Chapter 3: Merlin The Magician
 - Chapter 4: The Sword Excalibur
 - Chapter 5: Sir Launcelot And The Adventure Of The Castle Perilous
 - Chapter 6: Sir Launcelot And The Falcon
 - Chapter 7: The Adventures Of Sir Gareth
 - Chapter 8: The Coming Of Sir Galahad
 - Chapter 9: How Sir Galahad Won The Red Cross Shield
 - Chapter 10: The Adventures Of Sir Percivale
 - Chapter 11: The Adventures Of Sir Bors
 - Chapter 12: The Adventures Of Sir Launcelot
 - Chapter 13: How Sir Launcelot Saw The Holy Grail
 - Chapter 14: The End Of The Quest
 - Chapter 15: The Fair Maid Of Astolat
-

Chapter 1: Arthur's Birth And How He Became King

Long years ago, there ruled over Britain a king called Uther Pendragon. A mighty prince was he, and feared by all men; yet when he sought the love of the fair Igraine of Cornwall, she would have naught to do with him, so that, from grief and disappointment, Uther fell sick, and at last seemed like to die.

Now in those days, there lived a famous magician named Merlin, so powerful that he could change his form at will, or even make himself invisible; nor was there any place so remote that he could not reach it at once, merely by wishing himself there. One day, suddenly he stood at Uther's bedside, and said: "Sir king, I know thy grief, and am ready to help thee. Only promise to give me, at his birth, the son that shall be born to thee, and thou shalt have thy heart's desire." To this the king agreed joyfully, and Merlin kept his word: for he gave Uther the form of one whom Igraine had loved dearly, and so she took him willingly for her husband.

When the time had come that a child should be born to the king and queen, Merlin appeared before Uther to remind him of his promise; and Uther swore it should be as he had said. Three days later, a prince was born, and, with pomp and ceremony, was christened by the name of Arthur; but immediately thereafter, the king commanded that the child should be carried to the postern-gate, there to be given to the old man who would be found waiting without.

Not long after, Uther fell sick, and he knew that his end was come; so, by Merlin's advice, he called together his knights and barons, and said to them: "My death draws near. I charge you, therefore, that ye obey my son even as ye have obeyed me; and my curse upon him if he claim not the crown when he is a man grown." Then the king turned his face to the wall and died.

Scarcely was Uther laid in his grave before disputes arose. Few of the nobles had seen Arthur or even heard of him, and not one of them would have been willing to be ruled by a child; rather, each thought himself fitted to be king, and, strengthening his own castle, made war on his neighbors until confusion alone was supreme, and the poor groaned because there was none to help them.

Now when Merlin carried away Arthur—for Merlin was the old man who had stood at the postern-gate—he had known all that would happen, and had taken the child to keep him safe from the fierce barons until he should be of age to rule wisely and well, and perform all the wonders prophesied of him. He gave the child to the care of the good knight Sir Ector to bring up with his son Kay, but revealed not to him that it was the son of Uther Pendragon that was given into his charge.

At last, when years had passed and Arthur was grown a tall youth well skilled in knightly exercises, Merlin went to the Archbishop of Canterbury and advised him that he should call together at Christmas-time all the chief men of the realm to the great cathedral in London; "for," said Merlin, "there shall be seen a great marvel by which it shall be made clear to all men who is the lawful king of this land." The archbishop did as Merlin counselled. Under pain of a fearful curse, he bade the barons and knights come to London to keep the feast, and to pray heaven to send peace to the realm.

The people hastened to obey the archbishop's commands, and, from all sides, barons and knights came riding in to keep the birth-feast of Our Lord. And when they had prayed, and were coming forth from the cathedral they saw a strange sight. There, in the open space before the church, stood, on a great stone, an anvil thrust through with a sword; and on the stone were written these words: "Whoso can draw forth this sword is rightful King of Britain born."

At once there were fierce quarrels, each man clamoring to be the first to try his fortune, none doubting his success. Then the archbishop decreed that each should make the venture in turn, from the greatest baron to the least knight; and each in turn, having put forth his utmost strength, failed to move the sword one inch, and drew back ashamed. So the archbishop dismissed the company, and having appointed guards to watch over the stone, sent messengers through all the land to give word of great jousts to be held in London at Easter, when each knight could give proof of his skill and courage, and try whether the adventure of the sword was for him.



Among those who rode to London at Easter was the good Sir Ector, and with him his son, Sir Kay, newly made a knight, and the young Arthur. When the morning came that the jousts should begin, Sir Kay and Arthur mounted their horses and set out for the lists; but before they reached the field, Kay looked and saw that he had left his sword behind. Immediately Arthur turned back to fetch it for him, only to find the house fast shut, for all were gone to view the tournament. Sore vexed was Arthur, fearing lest his brother Kay should lose his chance of gaining glory, till, of a sudden, he bethought him of the sword in the great anvil before the cathedral. Thither he rode with all speed, and the guards having deserted their post to view the tournament, there was none to forbid him the adventure. He leaped from his horse, seized the hilt, and instantly drew forth the sword as easily as from a scabbard; then, mounting his horse and thinking no marvel of what he had done, he rode after his brother and handed him the weapon.

When Kay looked at it, he saw at once that it was the wondrous sword from the stone. In great joy he sought his father, and showing it to him, said: "Then must I be King of Britain." But Sir Ector bade him say how he came by the sword, and when Sir Kay told how Arthur had brought it to him, Sir Ector bent his knee to the boy, and said: "Sir, I perceive that ye are my king, and here I tender you my homage;" and Kay did as his father. Then the three sought the archbishop, to whom they related all that had happened; and he, much marvelling, called the people together to the great stone, and bade Arthur thrust back the sword and draw it forth again in the presence of all, which he did with ease. But an angry murmur arose from the barons, who cried that what a boy could do, a man could do; so, at the archbishop's word, the sword was put back, and each man, whether baron or knight, tried in his turn to draw it forth, and failed. Then, for the third time, Arthur drew forth the sword. Immediately there arose from the

people a great shout: "Arthur is King! Arthur is King! We will have no King but Arthur;" and, though the great barons scowled and threatened, they fell on their knees before him while the archbishop placed the crown upon his head, and swore to obey him faithfully as their lord and sovereign.

Thus Arthur was made King; and to all he did justice, righting wrongs and giving to all their dues. Nor was he forgetful of those that had been his friends; for Kay, whom he loved as a brother, he made seneschal and chief of his household, and to Sir Ector, his foster father, he gave broad lands.

Chapter 2: The Round Table

Thus Arthur was made King, but he had to fight for his own; for eleven great kings drew together and refused to acknowledge him as their lord, and chief among the rebels was King Lot of Orkney, who had married Arthur's sister, Bellicent.

By Merlin's advice, Arthur sent for help overseas, to Ban and Bors, the two great kings who ruled in Gaul.

With their aid, he overthrew his foes in a great battle near the river Trent; and then he passed with them into their own lands and helped them drive out their enemies. So there was ever great friendship between Arthur and the Kings Ban and Bors, and all their kindred, and afterward some of the most famous Knights of the Round Table were of that kin.

Then King Arthur set himself to restore order throughout his kingdom. To all who would submit and amend their evil ways, he showed kindness; but those who persisted in oppression and wrong he removed, putting in their places others who would deal justly with the people. And because the land had become overrun with forest during the days of misrule, he cut roads through the thickets, that no longer wild beasts and men, fiercer than the beasts, should lurk in their gloom, to the harm of the weak and defenceless. Thus it came to pass that soon the peasant plowed his fields in safety, and where had been wastes, men dwelt again in peace and prosperity.

Among the lesser kings whom Arthur helped to rebuild their towns and restore order, was King Leodegrance of Camelard. Now Leodegrance had one fair child, his daughter Guenevere; and from the first he saw her, Arthur gave her all his love. So he sought counsel of Merlin, his chief adviser. Merlin heard the king sorrowfully, and he said: "Sir king, when a man's heart is set, he may not change. Yet had it been well if ye had loved another."

So the king sent his knights to Leodegrance, to ask of him his daughter; and

Leodegrance consented, rejoicing to wed her to so good and knightly a king. With great pomp, the princess was conducted to Canterbury, and there the king met her, and they two were wed by the archbishop in the great cathedral, amid the rejoicings of the people.

On that same day did Arthur found his Order of the Round Table, the fame of which was to spread throughout Christendom and endure through all time. Now the Round Table had been made for King Uther Pendragon by Merlin, who had meant thereby to set forth plainly to all men the roundness of the earth. After Uther died, King Leodegrance had possessed it; but when Arthur was wed, he sent it to him as a gift, and great was the king's joy at receiving it. One hundred and fifty knights might take their places about it, and for them Merlin made sieges or seats. One hundred and twenty-eight did Arthur knight at that great feast; thereafter, if any sieges were empty, at the high festival of Pentecost new knights were ordained to fill them, and by magic was the name of each knight found inscribed, in letters of gold, in his proper siege. One seat only long remained unoccupied, and that was the Siege Perilous. No knight might occupy it until the coming of Sir Galahad; for, without danger to his life, none might sit there who was not free from all stain of sin.

With pomp and ceremony did each knight take upon him the vows of true knighthood: to obey the king; to show mercy to all who asked it; to defend the weak; and for no worldly gain to fight in a wrongful cause: and all the knights rejoiced together, doing honor to Arthur and to his queen. Then they rode forth to right the wrong and help the oppressed, and by their aid, the king held his realm in peace, doing justice to all.



Chapter 3: Merlin The Magician

Of Merlin and how he served King Arthur, something has been already shown. Loyal he was ever to Uther Pendragon and to his son, King Arthur, and for the latter especially he wrought great marvels. He brought the king to his rights; he made him his ships; and some say that Camelot, with its splendid halls, where Arthur would gather his knights around him at the great festivals of the year, at Christmas, at Easter, and at Pentecost, was raised by his magic, without human toil. Bleise, the aged magician who dwelt in Northumberland and recorded the great deeds of Arthur and his knights, had been Merlin's master in magic; but it came to pass in time that Merlin far excelled him in skill, so that his enemies declared no mortal was his father, and called him devil's son.

Then, on a certain time, Merlin said to Arthur: "The time draws near when ye shall miss me, for I shall go down alive into the earth; and it shall be that gladly would ye give your lands to have me again." Then Arthur was grieved, and said: "Since ye know your danger, use your craft to avoid it." But Merlin answered: "That may not be."

Now there had come to Arthur's court, a damsel of the Lady of the Lake—her whose skill in magic, some say, was greater than Merlin's own; and the damsel's name was Vivien. She set herself to learn the secrets of Merlin's art, and was ever with him, tending upon the old man, and with gentleness and tender service, winning her way to his heart; but all was a pretence, for she was weary of him and sought only his ruin, thinking it should be fame for her, by any means whatsoever, to enslave the greatest wizard of his age. And so she persuaded him to pass with her over seas into King Ban's land of Benwick, and there, one day, he showed her a wondrous rock formed by magic art. Then she begged him to enter into it, the better to declare to her its wonders; but when once he was within, by a charm that she had learned from Merlin's self, she caused the rock to shut down that never again might he come forth. Thus was Merlin's prophecy fulfilled, that he should go down into the earth alive. Much they marvelled in Arthur's court what had become of the great magician, till on a time, there rode past the stone a certain Knight of the Round Table and heard Merlin lamenting his sad fate. The knight would have striven to raise the mighty stone, but Merlin bade him not waste his labor, since none might release him save her who had imprisoned him there. Thus Merlin passed from the world through the treachery of a damsel, and thus Arthur was without aid in the days when his doom came upon him.



Chapter 4: The Sword Excalibur

Merlin took up King Arthur, and rode forth with him upon the knight's horse. As they rode King Arthur said, "I have no sword."

"No matter," said Merlin, "hereby is a sword that shall be yours, Sir King."

So they rode till they came to a lake, which was a fair water and a broad; and in the midst of the lake King Arthur was aware of an arm clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in the hand.

"Lo," said Merlin unto the king, "yonder is the sword that I spake of."

With that they saw a damsel going upon the lake. "What damsel is that?" said the king.

"That is the Lady of the Lake," said Merlin, "and within that lake is a reach, and therein is as fair a place as any is on earth, and richly beseen; and this damsel will come to you anon, and then speak fair to her that she will give you that sword."

Therewith came the damsel to King Arthur and saluted him, and he her again. "Damsel," said the king, "what sword is that which the arm holdeth yonder above the water? I would it were mine, for I have no sword."

"Sir king," said the damsel of the lake, "that sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it you, ye shall have it."

"By my faith," said King Arthur, "I will give you any gift that you will ask or desire."

"Well," said the damsel, "go ye into yonder barge, and row yourself unto the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you; and I will ask my gift when I see my time."

So King Arthur and Merlin alighted, tied their horses to two trees, and so they went into the barge. And when they came to the sword that the hand held, King Arthur took it up by the handles, and took it with him: and the arm and the hand went under the water, and so King Arthur came to the land, and rode forth. Then the king looked upon the sword, and liked it passing well.

"Whether liketh you better," said Merlin, "the sword or the scabbard?"

"Me liketh better the sword," said King Arthur.

"Ye are more unwise," said Merlin; "for the scabbard is worth ten of the sword; for while ye have the scabbard upon you ye shall lose no blood, be ye never so sore wounded; therefore keep well the scabbard alway with you."



Then Arthur proclaimed that all the lords, knights, and gentlemen of arms, should draw unto a castle, that was called in those days Camelot, and the king would have a council-general and a great joust. So when the king was come thither, with all his baronage, and lodged as them seemed best, there came a damsel, sent on message from the great Lady Lily, of Avilion; and, when she came before King Arthur, she told him from whom she came, and how she was sent on message unto him for these causes. And she let her mantle fall, that was richly furred, and then she was girded with a noble sword, whereof the king had great marvel, and said, "Damsel, for what cause are ye gird with that sword? It beseemeth you not."

"Now shall I tell you," said the damsel. "This sword, that I am gird withal, doth me great sorrow and remembrance; for I may not be delivered of this sword but by a good knight; and he must be a passing good man of his hands and of his deeds, and without villany or treachery. If I may find such a knight that hath all these virtues, he may draw out this sword of the scabbard. For I have been at King Rience; for it was told that there were passing good knights, and he and all his knights have assayed it, and none can speed."

"This is a great marvel," said King Arthur, "and if besooth, I will myself assay to draw out the sword; not presuming upon myself that I am the best knight, but that I will begin to draw at your sword, in giving example to all the barons, that they shall assay every one after other, when I have assayed."

Then King Arthur took the sword by the scabbard and girdle and pulled at it eagerly, but the sword would not out.

"Sir," said the damsel, "ye need not pull half so hard; for he that shall pull it out shall do it with little might."

"Ye say well," said King Arthur: "now assay ye, all my barons; but beware ye be not defiled with shame, treachery, nor guile."

"Then it will not avail," said the damsel; "for he must be a clean knight, without villany, and of gentle stream of father's side and mother's side."

Most of all the barons of the Round Table, that were there at that time, assayed all in turn, but none might speed. Wherefore the damsel made great sorrow out of measure, and said, "Alas! I weened in this court had been the best knights, without treachery or treason."

"By my faith," said King Arthur, "here are as good knights as I deem any be in the world; but their grace is not to help you, wherefore I am greatly displeased."

It happened so, at that time, that there was a poor knight with King Arthur, that had been prisoner with him half a year and more, for slaying of a knight, which was cousin to King Arthur. The knight was named Balin le Savage: and by good means of the barons he was delivered out of prison; for he was a good man named of his body, and he was born in Northumberland. And so he went privily into the court, and saw this adventure, whereof his heart rose, and would assay it as other knights did; but for because he was poor, and poorly arrayed, he put him not far in press. But in his heart he was fully assured (if his grace happened him) as any knight that was there. And, as that damsel took her leave of King Arthur and the barons, this knight, Balin, called unto her, and said, "Damsel, I pray you of your courtesy, to suffer me as well to assay as these lords; though I be poorly clothed, in mine heart meseemeth I am fully assured as some of these other lords, and meseemeth in my heart to speed right well."

The damsel beheld the poor knight, and saw he was a likely man; but, because of his poor array, she thought he should be of no worship without villany or treachery. And then she said to the knight Balin, "Sir, it is no need to put me to any more pain or labour; for beseemeth not you to speed there as others have failed."

"Ah, fair damsel," said Balin, "worthiness and good graces and good deeds are not all only in raiment, but manhood and worship is hid within man's person; and many a worshipful knight is not known unto all people; and therefore worship and hardiness is not in raiment and clothing."

"By God!" said the damsel, "ye say truth; therefore ye shall assay to do what ye may."

Then Balin took the sword by the girdle and scabbard, and drew it out easily; and when he looked upon the sword, it pleased him well. Anon after Balin sent for his horse and his armour, and so would depart from the court, and took his leave of King Arthur.

The meanwhile that this knight was making him ready to depart, there came into the court a lady, which hight the Lady of the Lake, and she came on horseback, richly beseen, and saluted King Arthur, and there asked him a gift that he had promised her when she gave him the sword.

"That is sooth," said King Arthur, "a gift I promised you; but I have forgotten the name of the sword which ye gave me."

"The name of it," said the lady, "is Excalibur; that is as much to say cut-steel."

"Ye say well," said King Arthur. "Ask what ye will, and ye shall have it, if it lie in my power to give it."

"Well," said the Lady of the Lake, "I ask the head of the knight that hath won the sword, or else the damsel's head that brought it. And though I have both their heads I care not; for he slew my brother, a full good knight and true, and the gentlewoman was causer of my father's death."

"Truly," said King Arthur, "I may not grant you either of their heads with my worship; therefore ask what ye will else, and I shall fulfil your desire."

"I will ask none other thing of you," said the lady. When Balin was ready to depart, he saw the Lady of the Lake there, by whose means was slain his own mother, and he had sought her three years. And when it was told him that she demanded his head of King Arthur, he went straight to her, and said, "Evil be ye found. Ye would have my head, and therefore ye shall lose yours!" And with his sword lightly he smote off her head, in the presence of King Arthur.

"Alas! for shame," said the king. "Why have you done so? You have shamed me and all my court. For this was a lady that I was much beholden unto; and hither she came under my safe conduct. I shall never forgive you that trespass."

"My lord," said Balin, "me forethinketh much of your displeasure; for this lady was the untruest lady living; and by her enchantment and witchcraft she hath been the destroyer of many good knights, and she was the causer that my mother was burnt, through her falsehood and treachery." Then King Arthur and all his court made great dole, and had great shame of the death of the Lady of the Lake. Then the king full richly buried her.

"My time hieth fast," said King Arthur unto Sir Bedivere; "therefore take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it unto yonder water-side; and when thou comest there, I charge thee, throw my sword into that water, and come again and tell me what thou shalt see there."

"My lord," said Sir Bedivere, "your command shall be done, and lightly bring you word again." And so Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, where the pommel and the haft were all of precious stones. And then he said to himself, "If I throw this rich sword into the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss." And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree; and as soon as he might, he came again unto King Arthur, and said he had been at the water.

"What sawest thou there?" said the king. "Sir," said he, "I saw nothing but waves and wind."

"That is untruly said of thee," said King Arthur. "Therefore go thou lightly, and do my command; as thou art to me life and dear, spare not, but throw it in." Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand; and then he thought it sin and shame to throw away that noble sword: and so after he hid the sword and returned again, and told the king that he had been at the water and done his command.

"What saw ye there?" said the king. "Sir," said he, "I saw nothing but the water lap and waves wan."

"Ah! traitor untrue," said King Arthur, "now hast thou betrayed me two times, who would have weened that thou that hast been unto me so self and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and wouldest betray me for the rich sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold; and but if thou do as I command thee, and if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with mine own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead." Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword and lightly took it up and went to the water's side, and there he bound the girdle about the belts. And then he threw the sword into the water as far as he might, and there came an arm and a hand above the water, and met it and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished. And then the hand vanished away with the sword in the water.

So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he had seen. "Alas!" said the king, "help me from hence; for I dread me I have tarried over long." Then Sir Bedivere took King Arthur upon his back, and so went with him to the water's side; and, when they were at the water's side, even fast by the bank hovered a little barge, with many fair ladies in it: and among them all was a queen, and they all had black hoods; and they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur.

"Now put me into the barge," said the king. And so he did softly, and there received him three queens with great mourning; and so these three queens sat them down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head. And then that queen said: "Ah! dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas! this wound on your head hath taken overmuch cold." And so then they rowed from the land; and Sir Bedivere cried, "Ah! my lord Arthur, what shall become of me now ye go from me, and leave me here alone among mine enemies?"

"Comfort thyself," said King Arthur, "and do as well as thou mayest; for in me is no trust for to trust in: for I will into the vale of Avilion, for to heal me of my grievous wound; and, if thou never hear more of me, pray for my soul."

Chapter 5: Sir Launcelot And The Adventure Of The Castle Perilous

Now, as time passed, King Arthur gathered into his Order of the Round Table knights whose peers shall never be found in any age; and foremost among them all was Sir Launcelot du Lac. Such was his strength that none against whom he had lain lance in rest could keep the saddle, and no shield was proof against his sword dint; but for his courtesy even more than for his courage and strength, Sir Launcelot was famed far and near. Gentle he was and ever the first to rejoice in the renown of another; and, in the jousts, he would avoid encounter with the young and untried knight, letting him pass to gain glory if he might.

It would take a great book to record all the famous deeds of Sir Launcelot, and all his adventures. He was of Gaul, for his father; King Ban, ruled over Benwick; and some say that his first name was Galahad, and that he was named Launcelot du Lac by the Lady of the Lake, who reared him when his mother died. Early he won renown by delivering his father's people from the grim King Claudas, who, for more than twenty years, had lain waste the fair land of Benwick; then, when there was peace in his own land, he passed into Britain, to Arthur's Court, where the king received him gladly, and made him Knight of the Round Table and took him for his trustiest friend. And so it was that, when Guenevere was to be brought to Canterbury, to be married to the king, Launcelot was chief of the knights sent to wait upon her.

Now on a day, as he rode through the forest, Sir Launcelot met a damsel weeping bitterly, and seeing him, she cried, "Stay, sir knight! By your knighthood I require you to aid me in my distress."

Immediately Sir Launcelot checked his horse and asked in what she needed his service. "Sir," said the maiden, "my brother lies at the point of death, for this day he fought with the stout knight, Sir Gilbert, and sorely they wounded each other; and a wise woman, a sorceress, has said that nothing may stanch my brother's wounds unless they be searched with the sword and bound up with a piece of the cloth from the body of the wounded knight who lies in the ruined chapel hard by. And well I know you, my lord Sir Launcelot, and that, if ye will not help me, none may."



"Tell me your brother's name," said Sir Launcelot. "Sir Meliot de Logris," replied the damsel. "A Knight of our Round Table," said Sir Launcelot; "the more am I bound to your service. Only tell me, gentle damsel, where I may find this Chapel Perilous." So she directed him, and, riding through forest byways, Sir Launcelot came presently upon a little ruined chapel, standing in the midst of a churchyard, where the tombs showed broken and neglected under the dark yews. In front of the porch, Sir Launcelot paused and looked, for thereon hung, upside down, dishonored, the shield of many a good knight whom Sir Launcelot had known.

As he stood wondering, suddenly there pressed upon him from all sides thirty stout knights, all giants and fully armed, their drawn swords in their hands and their shields advanced. With threatening looks, they spoke to him, saying, "Sir Launcelot, it were well ye turned back before evil befell you."

But Sir Launcelot, though he feared to have to do with thirty such warriors, answered boldly, "I turn not back for high words. Make them good by your deeds." Then he rode upon them fiercely, whereupon instantly they scattered and disappeared, and, sword in hand, Sir Launcelot entered the little chapel. All was dark within, save that a little lamp hung from the roof, and by its dim light he could just espy how on a bier before the altar there lay, stark and cold, a knight sheathed in armor. And drawing nearer Sir Launcelot saw that the dead man lay on a blood-stained mantle, his naked sword by his side, but that his left hand had been lopped off at the wrist by a mighty sword-cut.

Then Sir Launcelot boldly seized the sword and with it cut off a piece of the bloody mantle. Immediately the earth shook and the walls of the chapel rocked, and in fear Sir Launcelot turned to go. But, as he would have left the chapel, there stood before him in the doorway a lady, fair to look upon and beautifully arrayed, who gazed earnestly upon him, and said: "Sir knight, put away from you that sword lest it be your death." But Sir Launcelot answered her: "Lady, what I have said, I do; and what I have won, I keep." "It is well," said the lady. "Had ye cast away the sword your life days were done. And now I make but one request. Kiss me once." "That may I not do," said Sir Launcelot. Then said the lady, "Go your way, Launcelot; ye have won, and I have lost. Know that, had ye kissed me, your dead body had lain even now on the altar bier. For much have I desired to win you; and to entrap you, I ordained this chapel. Many a knight have I taken, and once Sir Gawain himself hardly escaped, but he fought with Sir Gilbert and lopped off his hand, and so got away. Fare ye well; it is plain to see that none but our lady, Queen Guenevere, may have your services." With that, she vanished from his sight.

So Sir Launcelot mounted his horse and rode away from that evil place till he met Sir Meliot's sister, who led him to her brother where he lay, pale as the earth, and bleeding fast. And when he saw Sir Launcelot, he would have risen to greet him; but his strength failed him, and he fell back on his couch. Sir Launcelot searched his wounds with the sword, and bound them up with the blood-stained cloth, and immediately Sir Meliot was sound and well, and greatly he rejoiced. Then Sir Meliot and his sister begged Sir Launcelot to stay and rest, but he departed on his adventures, bidding them farewell until he should meet them again at Arthur's court. As for the sorceress of the Chapel Perilous, it is said she died of grief that all her charms had failed to win for her the good knight Sir Launcelot.

Chapter 6: Sir Launcelot And The Falcon

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 unknightly. 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.



Chapter 7: The Adventures Of Sir Gareth

Gareth was the youngest of the sons of Lot and Bellicent, and had grown up long after Gawain and Mordred left their home for King Arthur's court; so that when he came before the king, all humbly attired, he was not known even by his own brothers.

King Arthur was keeping Pentecost at Kink Kenadon on the Welsh border, and, as his custom was, waited to begin the feast until some adventure should befall. Presently there was seen approaching a youth who, to the wonderment of all that saw, leaned upon the shoulders of two men, his companions; and yet as he passed up the hall, he seemed a goodly youth, tall and broad-shouldered. When he stood before the king, suddenly he drew himself up and after due greeting, said: "Sir king, I would ask of you three boons; one to be granted now and two hereafter when I shall require them." And Arthur, looking upon him, was pleased, for his countenance was open and honest. So he made answer: "Fair son, ask of me aught that is honorable and I will grant it." Then the youth said: "For this present, I ask only that ye will give me meat and drink for a year and a day." "Ye might have asked and had a better gift," replied the king; "tell me now your name." "At this time, I may not tell it," said the youth. Now King Arthur trusted every man until he proved himself unworthy, and in this youth he thought he saw one who should do nobly and win renown; so laughing, he bade him keep his own counsel since so he would, and gave him in charge to Sir Kay, the seneschal.

Now Sir Kay was but harsh to those whom he liked not, and from the first he scorned the young man. "For none," said he, "but a low-born lout would crave meat and drink when he might have asked for a horse and arms." But Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawain took the youth's part. Neither knew him for Gareth of the Orkneys, but both believed him to be a youth of good promise who, for his own reasons, would pass in disguise for a season.

So Gareth lived the year among the kitchen boys, all the time mocked and scorned by Sir Kay, who called him Fairhands because his hands were white and shapely. But Launcelot and Gawain showed him all courtesy, and failed not to observe how, in all trials of strength, he excelled his comrades, and that he was ever present to witness the feats of the knights in the tournaments.

So the year passed, and again King Arthur was keeping the feast of Pentecost with his knights, when a damsel entered the hall and asked his aid: "For," said she, "my sister is closely besieged in her castle by a strong knight who lays waste all her lands. And since I know that the knights of your court be the most

renowned in the world, I have come to crave help of your mightiest." "What is your sister's name, and who is he that oppresses her?" asked the king. "The Red Knight, he is called," replied the damsel. "As for my sister, I will not say her name, only that she is a high-born lady and owns broad lands." Then the king frowned and said: "Ye would have aid but will say no name. I may not ask knight of mine to go on such an errand."

Then forth stepped Gareth from among the serving-men at the hall end and said: "Sir king, I have eaten of your meat in your kitchen this twelvemonth since, and now I crave my other two boons." "Ask and have," replied the king. "Grant me then the adventure of this damsel, and bid Sir Launcelot ride after me to knight me at my desire, for of him alone would I be made knight." "It shall be so," answered the king. "What!" cried the damsel, "I ask for a knight and ye give me a kitchen-boy. Shame on you, sir king." And in great wrath she fled from the hall, mounted her palfrey and rode away. Gareth but waited to array himself in the armor which he had kept ever in readiness for the time when he should need it, and mounting his horse, rode after the damsel.



But when Sir Kay knew what had happened, he was wroth, and got to horse to ride after Gareth and bring him back. Even as Gareth overtook the damsel, so did Kay come up with him and cried: "Turn back, Fairhands! What, sir, do ye not know me?" "Yes," answered Gareth, "I know you for the most discourteous knight in Arthur's court." Then Sir Kay rode upon him with his lance, but Gareth turned it aside with his sword and pierced Sir Kay through the side so that he fell to the ground and lay there without motion. So Gareth took Sir Kay's shield and spear and was about to ride away, when seeing Sir Launcelot draw near he called upon him to joust. At the first encounter, Sir Launcelot unhorsed Gareth, but quickly helped him to his feet. Then, at Gareth's desire, they fought together with swords, and Gareth did knightly till, at length, Sir Launcelot said, laughing: "Why should we fight any longer? Of a truth ye are a stout knight." "If that is

indeed your thought, I pray you make me knight," cried Gareth. So Sir Launcelot knighted Gareth, who, bidding him farewell, hastened after the damsel, for she had ridden on again while the two knights talked. When she saw him coming, she cried: "Keep off! ye smell of the kitchen!" "Damsel," said Sir Gareth, "I must follow until I have fulfilled the adventure." "Till ye accomplish the adventure, Turn-spit? Your part in it shall soon be ended." "I can only do my best," answered Sir Gareth.

Now as they rode through the forest, they met with a knight sore beset by six thieves, and him Sir Gareth rescued. The knight then bade Gareth and the damsel rest at his castle, and entertained them right gladly until the morn, when the two rode forth again. Presently, they drew near to a deep river where two knights kept the ford. "How now, kitchen knave? Will ye fight or escape while ye may?" cried the damsel. "I would fight though there were six instead of two," replied Sir Gareth. Therewith he encountered the one knight in midstream and struck him such a blow on the head that he fell, stunned, into the water and was drowned. Then, gaining the land, Gareth cleft in two helmet and head of the other knight, and turned to the damsel, saying, "Lead on; I follow."

But the damsel mocked him, saying: "What a mischance is this that a kitchen boy should slay two noble knights! Be not overproud, Turn-spit. It was but luck, if indeed ye did not attack one knight from behind." "Say what you will, I follow," said Sir Gareth.

So they rode on again, the damsel in front and Sir Gareth behind, till they reached a wide meadow where stood many fair pavilions; and one, the largest, was all of blue, and the men who stood about it were clothed in blue, and bore shields and spears of that color; and of blue, too, were the trappings of the horses. Then said the damsel, "Yonder is the Blue Knight, the goodliest that ever ye have looked upon, and five hundred knights own him lord." "I will encounter him," said Sir Gareth; "for if he be good knight and true as ye say, he will scarce set on me with all his following; and man to man, I fear him not." "Fie!" said the damsel, "for a dirty knave, ye brag loud. And even if ye overcome him, his might is as nothing to that of the Red Knight who besieges my lady sister. So get ye gone while ye may." "Damsel," said Sir Gareth, "ye are but ungentle so to rebuke me; for, knight or knave, I have done you good service, nor will I leave this guest while life is mine." Then the damsel ashamed, and, looking curiously at Gareth, she said, "I would gladly know what manner of man ye are. For I heard you call yourself kitchen knave before Arthur's self, but ye have ever answered patiently though I have chidden you shamefully; and courtesy comes only of gentle blood." Thereat Sir Gareth but laughed, and said: "He is no knight whom a maiden can anger by harsh words."

So talking, they entered the field, and there came to Sir Gareth a messenger

from the Blue Knight to ask him if he came in peace or in war. "As your lord pleases," said Sir Gareth. So when the messenger had brought back this word, the Blue Knight mounted his horse, took his spear in his hand, and rode upon Sir Gareth. At their first encounter their lances shivered to pieces, and such was the shock that their horses fell dead. So they rushed on each other with swords and shield, cutting and slashing till the armor was hacked from their bodies; but at last, Sir Gareth smote the Blue Knight to the earth. Then the Blue Knight yielded, and at the damsel's entreaty, Sir Gareth spared his life.

So they were reconciled, and, at the request of the Blue Knight, Sir Gareth and the damsel abode that night in his tents. As they sat at table, the Blue Knight said: "Fair damsel, are ye not called Linet?" "Yes," answered she, "and I am taking this noble knight to the relief of my sister, the Lady Liones." "God speed you, sir," said the Blue Knight, "for he is a stout knight whom ye must meet. Long ago might he have taken the lady, but that he hoped that Sir Launcelot or some other of Arthur's most famous knights, coming to her rescue, might fall beneath his lance. If ye overthrow him, then are ye the peer of Sir Launcelot and Sir Tristram." "Sir knight," answered Gareth, "I can but strive to bear me worthily as one whom the great Sir Launcelot made knight."

So in the morning they bade farewell to the Blue Knight, who vowed to carry to King Arthur word of all that Gareth had achieved; and they rode on till, in the evening, they came to a little ruined hermitage where there awaited them a dwarf, sent by the Lady Liones, with all manner of meats and other store. In the morning, the dwarf set out again to bear word to his lady that her rescuer was come. As he drew near the castle, the Red Knight stopped him, demanding whence he came. "Sir," said the dwarf, "I have been with my lady's sister, who brings with her a knight to the rescue of my lady." "It is lost labor," said the Red Knight; "even though she brought Launcelot or Tristram, I hold myself a match for them." "He is none of these," said the dwarf, "but he has overthrown the knights who kept the ford, and the Blue Knight yielded to him." "Let him come," said the Red Knight; "I shall soon make an end of him, and a shameful death shall he have at my hands, as many a better knight has had." So saying, he let the dwarf go.

Presently, there came riding toward the castle Sir Gareth and the damsel Linet, and Gareth marvelled to see hang from the trees some forty knights in goodly armor, their shields reversed beside them. And when he inquired of the damsel, she told him how these were the bodies of brave knights who, coming to the rescue of the Lady Liones, had been overthrown and shamefully done to death by the Red Knight. Then was Gareth shamed and angry, and he vowed to make an end of these evil practices. So at last they drew near to the castle walls, and saw how the plain around was covered with the Red Knight's tents, and the noise was that of a great army. Hard by was a tall sycamore tree, and from it hung a

mighty horn, made of an elephant's tusk. Spurring his horse, Gareth rode to it, and blew such a blast that those on the castle walls heard it; the knights came forth from their tents to see who blew so bold a blast, and from a window of the castle the Lady Liones looked forth and waved her hand to her champion. Then, as Sir Gareth made his reverence to the lady, the Red Knight called roughly to him to leave his courtesy and look to himself: "For," said he, "she is mine, and to have her, I have fought many a battle." "It is but vain labor," said Sir Gareth, "since she loves you not. Know, too, sir knight, that I have vowed to rescue her from you." "So did many another who now hangs on a tree," replied the Red Knight, "and soon ye shall hang beside them," Then both laid their spears in rest, and spurred their horses. At the first encounter, each smote the other full in the shield, and the girths of the saddles bursting, they were borne to the earth, where they lay for a while as if dead. But presently they rose, and setting their shields before them, rushed upon each other with their swords, cutting and hacking till the armor lay on the ground in fragments. So they fought till noon and then rested; but soon they renewed the battle, and so furiously they fought, that often they fell to the ground together. Then, when the bells sounded for evensong, the knights rested again, unlacing their helms to breathe the evening air. But looking up to the castle windows, Gareth saw the Lady Liones gazing earnestly upon him; then he caught up his helmet, and calling to the Red Knight, bade him make ready for the battle; "And this time," said he, "we will make an end of it." "So be it," said the Red Knight. Then the Red Knight smote Gareth on the hand so that his sword flew from his grasp, and with another blow he brought him grovelling to the earth. At the sight of this, Linet cried aloud, and hearing her, Gareth, with a mighty effort, threw off the Red Knight, leaped to his sword, and got it again within his hand. Then he pressed the Red Knight harder than ever, and at the last bore him to the earth, and unlacing his helm, made ready to slay him; but the Red Knight cried aloud: "Mercy! I yield." At first, remembering the evil deaths of the forty good knights, Gareth was unwilling to spare him; but the Red Knight besought him to have mercy, telling him how, against his will, he had been bound by a vow to make war on Arthur's knights. So Sir Gareth relented, and bade him set forth at once for Kink Kenadon and entreat the king's pardon for his evil past. And this the Red Knight promised to do.

Then amid much rejoicing, Sir Gareth was borne into the castle. There his wounds were dressed by the Lady Liones, and there he rested until he recovered his strength. And having won her love, when Gareth returned to Arthur's court the Lady Liones rode with him, and they two were wed with great pomp in the presence of the whole fellowship of the Round Table; the king rejoicing much that his nephew had done so valiantly. So Sir Gareth lived happily with Dame Liones, winning fame and the love of all true knights. As for Linet, she came again to Arthur's court and wedded Sir Gareth's younger brother, Sir Gaheris.

Chapter 8: The Coming Of Sir Galahad

Many times had the Feast of Pentecost come round, and many were the knights that Arthur had made since first he founded the Order of the Round Table; yet no knight had appeared who dared claim the seat named by Merlin the Siege Perilous. At last, one vigil of the great feast, a lady came to Arthur's court at Camelot and asked Sir Launcelot to ride with her into the forest hard by, for a purpose not then to be revealed. Launcelot consenting, they rode together until they came to a nunnery hidden deep in the forest; and there the lady bade Launcelot dismount, and led him into a great and stately room. Presently there entered twelve nuns, and with them a youth, the fairest that Launcelot had ever seen. "Sir," said the nuns, "we have brought up this child in our midst, and now that he is grown to manhood, we pray you make him knight, for of none worthier could he receive the honor." "Is this thy own desire?" asked Launcelot of the young squire; and when he said that so it was, Launcelot promised to make him knight after the great festival had been celebrated in the church next day.

So on the morrow, after they had worshipped, Launcelot knighted Galahad—for that was the youth's name—and asked him if he would ride at once with him to the king's court; but the young knight excusing himself, Sir Launcelot rode back alone to Camelot, where all rejoiced that he was returned in time to keep the feast with the whole Order of the Round Table.

Now, according to his custom, King Arthur was waiting for some marvel to befall before he and his knights sat down to the banquet. Presently a squire entered the hall and said: "Sir king, a great wonder has appeared. There floats on the river a mighty stone, as it were a block of red marble, and it is thrust through by a sword, the hilt of which is set thick with precious stones." On hearing this, the king and all his knights went forth to view the stone and found it as the squire had said; moreover, looking closer, they read these words: "None shall draw me hence, but only he by whose side I must hang; and he shall be the best knight in all the world." Immediately, all bade Launcelot draw forth the sword, but he refused, saying that the sword was not for him. Then, at the king's command, Sir Gawain made the attempt and failed, as did Sir Percivale after him. So the knights knew the adventure was not for them, and returning to the hall, took their places about the Round Table.

No sooner were they seated than an aged man, clothed all in white, entered the hall, followed by a young knight in red armor, by whose side hung an empty scabbard. The old man approached King Arthur, and bowing low before him, said: "Sir, I bring you a young knight of the house and lineage of Joseph of Arimathea, and through him shall great glory be won for all the land of Britain."

Greatly did King Arthur rejoice to hear this, and welcomed the two right royally. Then when the young knight had saluted the king, the old man led him to the Siege Perilous and drew off its silken cover; and all the knights were amazed, for they saw that where had been engraved the words, "The Siege Perilous," was written now in shining gold: "This is the siege of the noble prince, Sir Galahad." Straightway the young man seated himself there where none other had ever sat without danger to his life; and all who saw it said, one to another: "Surely this is he that shall achieve the Holy Grail." Now the Holy Grail was the blessed dish from which Our Lord had eaten the Last Supper, and it had been brought to the land of Britain by Joseph of Arimathea; but because of men's sinfulness, it had been withdrawn from human sight, only that, from time to time, it appeared to the pure in heart.

When all had partaken of the royal banquet, King Arthur bade Sir Galahad come with him to the river's brink; and showing him the floating stone with the sword thrust through it, told him how his knights had failed to draw forth the sword. "Sir," said Galahad, "it is no marvel that they failed, for the adventure was meant for me, as my empty scabbard shows." So saying, lightly he drew the sword from the heart of the stone, and lightly he slid it into the scabbard at his side. While all yet wondered at this adventure of the sword, there came riding to them a lady on a white palfrey who, saluting King Arthur, said: "Sir king, Nacien the hermit sends thee word that this day shall great honor be shown to thee and all thine house; for the Holy Grail shall appear in thy hall, and thou and all thy fellowship shall be fed therefrom." And to Launcelot she said: "Sir knight, thou hast ever been the best knight of all the world; but another has come to whom thou must yield precedence. "Then Launcelot answered humbly: "I know well I was never the best." "Ay, of a truth thou wast and art still, of sinful men," said she, and rode away before any could question her further.

So, that evening, when all were gathered about the Round Table, each knight in his own siege, suddenly there was heard a crash of thunder, so mighty that the hall trembled, and there flashed into the hall a sunbeam, brighter far than any that had ever before been seen; and then, draped all in white samite, there glided through the air what none might see, yet what all knew to be the Holy Grail. And all the air was filled with sweet odors, and on every one was shed a light in which he looked fairer and nobler than ever before. So they sat in an amazed silence, till presently King Arthur rose and gave thanks to God for the grace given to him and to his court. Then up sprang Sir Gawain and made his avow to follow for a year and a day the Quest of the Holy Grail, if perchance he might be granted the vision of it. Immediately other of the knights followed his example, binding themselves to the Quest of the Holy Grail until, in all, one hundred and fifty had vowed themselves to the adventure.

Then was King Arthur grieved, for he foresaw the ruin of his noble Order. And

turning to Sir Gawain, he said: "Nephew, ye have done ill, for through you I am bereft of the noblest company of knights that ever brought honor to any realm in Christendom. Well I know that never again shall all of you gather in this hall, and it grieves me to lose men I have loved as my life and through whom I have won peace and righteousness for all my realm."

So the king mourned and his knights with him, but their oaths they could not recall.



Chapter 9: How Sir Galahad Won The Red Cross Shield

Great woe was there in Camelot next day when, after worship in the cathedral, the knights who had vowed themselves to the Quest of the Holy Grail got to horse and rode away. A goodly company it was that passed through the streets, the townfolk weeping to see them go; Sir Launcelot du Lac and his kin, Sir Galahad of whom all expected great deeds, Sir Bors and Sir Percivale, and many another scarcely less famed than they. So they rode together that day to the Castle of Vagon, where they were entertained right hospitably, and the next day they separated, each to ride his own way and see what adventures should befall him.

So it came to pass that, after four days' ride, Sir Galahad reached an abbey. Now Sir Galahad was still clothed in red armor as when he came to the king's court, and by his side hung the wondrous sword; but he was without a shield. They of the abbey received him right heartily, as also did the brave King Bagdemagus, Knight of the Round Table, who was resting there. When they had greeted each other, Sir Galahad asked King Bagdemagus what adventure had brought him there. "Sir," said Bagdemagus, "I was told that in this abbey was preserved a wondrous shield which none but the best knight in the world might bear without

grievous harm to himself. And though I know well that there are better knights than I, to-morrow I purpose to make the attempt. But, I pray you, bide at this monastery awhile until you hear from me; and if I fail, do ye take the adventure upon you." "So be it," said Sir Galahad.

The next day, at their request, Sir Galahad and King Bagdemagus were led into the church by a monk and shown where, behind the altar, hung the wondrous shield, whiter than snow save for the blood-red cross in its midst. Then the monk warned them of the danger to any who, being unworthy, should dare to bear the shield. But King Bagdemagus made answer: "I know well that I am not the best knight in the world, yet will I try if I may bear it." So he hung it about his neck, and bidding farewell, rode away with his squire.

The two had not journeyed far before they saw a knight approach, armed all in white mail and mounted upon a white horse. Immediately he laid his spear in rest and, charging King Bagdemagus, pierced him through the shoulder and bore him from his horse; and standing over the wounded knight, he said: "Knight, thou hast shown great folly, for none shall bear this shield save the peerless knight, Sir Galahad." Then, taking the shield, he gave it to the squire, and said: "Bear this shield to the good Knight Galahad and greet him well from me." "What is your name?" asked the squire. "That is not for thee or any other to know." "One thing I pray you," said the squire; "why may this shield be borne by none but Sir Galahad without danger?" "Because it belongs to him only," answered the stranger knight, and vanished.

Then the squire took the shield and setting King Bagdemagus on his horse, bore him back to the abbey where he lay long, sick unto death. To Galahad the squire gave the shield and told him all that had befallen. So Galahad hung the shield about his neck and rode the way that Bagdemagus had gone the day before; and presently he met the White Knight, whom he greeted courteously, begging that he would make known to him the marvels of the red-cross shield. "That will I gladly," answered the White Knight. "Ye must know, sir knight, that this shield was made and given by Joseph of Arimathea to the good King Evelake of Sarras, that, in the might of the holy symbol, he should overthrow the heathen who threatened his kingdom. But afterward, King Evelake followed Joseph to this land of Britain, where they taught the true faith unto the people who before were heathen. Then when Joseph lay dying, he bade King Evelake set the shield in the monastery where ye lay last night, and foretold that none should wear it without loss until that day when it should be taken by the knight, ninth and last in descent from him, who should come to that place the fifteenth day after receiving the degree of knighthood. Even so has it been with you, sir knight." So saying, the unknown knight disappeared and Sir Galahad rode on his way.



Chapter 10: The Adventures Of Sir Percivale

After he had left his fellows, Sir Percivale rode long through the forest until, one evening, he reached a monastery where he sought shelter for the night. The next morning, he went into the chapel to hear mass and there he espied the body of an old, old man, laid on a richly adorned couch. At first it seemed as if the aged man were dead, but presently, raising himself in his bed, he took off his crown and, delivering it to the priest, bade him place it on the altar. So when the service was concluded, Sir Percivale asked who the aged king might be. Then he was told that it was none other than King Evelake who accompanied Joseph of Arimathea to Britain. And on a certain occasion, the king had approached the Holy Grail nigher than was reverent and, for his impiety, God had punished him with blindness. Thereupon he repented and, entreating God earnestly, had obtained his petition that he should not die until he had seen the spotless knight who should be descended from him in the ninth degree. (This his desire was fulfilled later when Sir Galahad came thither; after which, he died and was buried by the good knight.)

The next day, Sir Percivale continued his journey and presently met with twenty knights who bore on a bier the body of a dead knight. When they espied Sir Percivale, they demanded of him who he was and whence he came. So he told them, whereupon they all shouted, "Slay him! slay him!" and setting upon him all at once, they killed his horse and would have slain him but that the good knight, Sir Galahad, passing that way by chance, came to his rescue and put his assailants to flight. Then Galahad rode away as fast as he might, for he would not be thanked, and Sir Percivale was left, horseless and alone, in the forest.

So Sir Percivale continued his journey on foot as well as he might; and ever the way became lonelier, until at last he came to the shores of a vast sea. There Sir Percivale abode many days, without food and desolate, doubting whether he should ever escape thence. At last it chanced that, looking out to sea, Sir Percivale descried a ship and, as it drew nearer, he saw how it was all hung with satin and velvet. Presently it reached the land and out of it there stepped a lady of marvellous beauty, who asked him how he came there; "For know," said she,

"ye are like to die here by hunger or mischance."

"He whom I serve will protect me," said Sir Percivale.

"I know well whom ye desire most to see," said the lady. "Ye would meet with the Red Knight who bears the red-cross shield."

"Ah! lady, I pray you tell me where I may find him," cried Sir Percivale.

"With a good will," said the damsel; "if ye will but promise me your service when I shall ask for it, I will lead you to the knight, for I met him of late in the forest."

So Sir Percivale promised gladly to serve her when she should need him. Then the lady asked him how long he had fasted. "For three days," answered Sir Percivale. Immediately she gave orders to her attendants forthwith to pitch a tent and set out a table with all manner of delicacies, and of these she invited Sir Percivale to partake, "I pray you, fair lady," said Sir Percivale, "who are ye that show me such kindness?" "Truly," said the lady, "I am but a hapless damsel, driven forth from my inheritance by a great lord whom I have chanced to displease. I implore you, sir knight, by your vows of knighthood, to give me your aid." Sir Percivale promised her all the aid he could give, and then she bade him lie down and sleep, and herself took off his helmet, and unclasped his sword-belt. So Sir Percivale slept, and when he waked, there was another feast prepared, and he was given the rarest and the strongest wines that ever he had tasted. Thus they made merry, and, when the lady begged Percivale to rest him there awhile, promising him all that ever he could desire if he would vow himself to her service, almost he forgot the quest to which he was vowed, and would have consented, but that his eye fell upon his sword where it lay. Now in the sword-hilt there was set a red cross and, seeing it, Percivale called to mind his vow, and, thinking on it, he signed him with the cross on his forehead. Instantly, the tent was overthrown and vanished in thick smoke; and she who had appeared a lovely woman disappeared from his sight in semblance of a fiend.

Then was Sir Percivale sore ashamed that almost he had yielded to the temptings of the Evil One and earnestly he prayed that his sin might be forgiven him. Thus he remained in prayer far into the night, bewailing his weakness; and when the dawn appeared, a ship drew nigh the land. Sir Percivale entered into it, but could find no one there; so commending himself to God, he determined to remain thereon, and was borne over the seas for many days, he knew not whither.



Chapter 11: The Adventures Of Sir Bors

Among the knights vowed to the Quest of the Holy Grail was Sir Bors, one of the kin of Sir Launcelot, a brave knight and pious. He rode through the forest many a day, making his lodging most often under a leafy tree, though once on his journey he stayed at a castle, that he might do battle for its lady against a felon knight who would have robbed and oppressed her.

So, on a day, as he rode through the forest, Sir Bors came to the parting of two ways. While he was considering which he should follow, he espied two knights driving before them a horse on which was stretched, bound and naked, none other than Sir Bors' own brother, Sir Lionel; and, from time to time, the two false knights beat him with thorns so that his body was all smeared with blood, but, so great was his heart, Sir Lionel uttered never a word. Then, in great wrath, Sir Bors laid his lance in rest and would have fought the felon knights to rescue his brother, but that, even as he spurred his horse, there came a bitter cry from the other path and, looking round, he saw a lady being dragged by a knight into the darkest part of the forest where none might find and rescue her. When she saw Sir Bors, she cried to him: "Help me! sir knight, help me! I beseech you by your knighthood." Then Sir Bors was much troubled, for he would not desert his brother; but bethinking him that ever a woman must be more helpless than a man, he wheeled his horse, rode upon her captor, and beat him to the earth. The damsel thanked him earnestly and told him how the knight was her own cousin, who had that day carried her off by craft from her father's castle. As they talked, there came up twelve knights who had been seeking the lady everywhere; so to their care Sir Bors delivered her, and rode with haste in the direction whither his brother had been borne. On the way, he met with an old man, dressed as a priest, who asked him what he sought. When Sir Bors had told him, "Ah! Bors," said he, "I can give you tidings indeed. Your brother is dead;" and parting the bushes, he showed him the body of a dead man, to all seeming Sir Lionel's self. Then Sir Bors grieved sorely, misdoubting almost whether he should not rather have rescued his own brother; and at the last, he dug a grave and buried the dead man; then he rode sorrowfully on his way.

When he had ridden many days, he met with a yeoman whom he asked if there were any adventures in those parts. "Sir," said the man, "at the castle, hard by, they hold a great tournament." Sir Bors thanked him and rode along the way pointed out to him; and presently, as he passed a hermitage, whom should he see sitting at its door but his brother, Sir Lionel, whom he had believed dead.

Then in great joy, he leaped from his horse, and running to Lionel, cried: "Fair brother, how came ye hither?" "Through no aid of yours," said Sir Lionel angrily;

"for ye left me bound and beaten, to ride to the rescue of a maiden. Never was brother so dealt with by brother before. Keep you from me as ye may!" When Sir Bors understood that his brother would slay him, he knelt before him entreating his pardon. Sir Lionel took no heed, but mounting his horse and taking his lance, cried: "Keep you from me, traitor! Fight, or die!"

And Sir Bors moved not; for to him it seemed a sin most horrible that brother should fight with brother. Then Sir Lionel, in his rage, rode his horse at him, bore him to the ground and trampled him under the horse's hoofs, till Bors lay beaten to the earth in a swoon. Even so, Sir Lionel's anger was not stayed; for, alighting, he drew his sword and would have smitten off his brother's head, but that the holy hermit, hearing the noise of conflict, ran out of the hermitage and threw himself upon Sir Bors. "Gentle knight," he cried, "have mercy upon him and on thyself; for of the sin of slaying thy brother, thou couldst never be quit." "Sir priest," said Lionel, "if ye leave him not, I shall slay you too." "It were a lesser sin than to slay thy brother," answered the hermit. "So be it," cried Lionel, and with one blow struck off the hermit's head. Then he would have worked his evil will upon his brother too, but that, even as he was unlacing Sir Bors' helm to cut off his head, there rode up the good knight Sir Colgrevice, a fellow of the Round Table. When he saw the dead hermit and was aware how Lionel sought the life of Bors, he was amazed, and springing from his horse, ran to Lionel and dragged him back from his brother. "Do ye think to hinder me?" said Sir Lionel. "Let come who will, I will have his life." "Ye shall have to do with me first," cried Colgrevice. Therewith, they took their swords, and, setting their shields before them, rushed upon each other. Now Sir Colgrevice was a good knight, but Sir Lionel was strong and his anger added to his strength. So long they fought that Sir Bors had time to recover from his swoon, and raising himself with pain on his elbow, saw how the two fought for his life; and as it seemed, Sir Lionel would prevail, for Sir Colgrevice grew weak and weary. Sir Bors tried to get to his feet, but so weak he was, he could not stand; and Sir Colgrevice, seeing him stir, called on him to come to his aid, for he was in mortal peril for his sake. But even as he called, Sir Lionel cut him to the ground, and, as one possessed, rushed upon his brother to slay him. Sir Bors entreated him for mercy, and when he would not, sorrowfully he took his sword, saying: "Now, God forgive me, though I defend my life against my brother."

Immediately there was heard a voice saying, "Flee, Bors, and touch not thy brother;" and at the same time, a fiery cloud burned between them, so that their shields glowed with the flame, and both knights fell to the earth. But the voice came again, saying, "Bors, leave thy brother and take thy way to the sea. There thou shalt meet Sir Percivale." Then Sir Bors made ready to obey, and, turning to Lionel, said: "Dear brother, I pray you forgive me for aught in which I have wronged you." "I forgive you," said Sir Lionel, for he was too amazed terrified to

keep his anger.

So Sir Bors continued his journey, and at the last, coming to the sea-shore, he espied a ship draped all with white samite, and entering thereon, he saw Sir Percivale, and much they rejoiced them in each other's company.



Chapter 12: The Adventures Of Sir Launcelot

After Sir Launcelot had parted from his fellows at the Castle of Vagon, he rode many days through the forest without adventure, till he chanced upon a knight close by a little hermitage in the wood. Immediately, as was the wont of errant knights, they prepared to joust, and Launcelot, whom none before had overthrown, was borne down, man and horse, by the stranger knight. Thereupon a nun, who dwelt in the hermitage, cried: "God be with thee, best knight in all this world," for she knew the victor for Sir Galahad. But Galahad, not wishing to be known, rode swiftly away; and presently Sir Launcelot got to horse again and rode slowly on his way, shamed and doubting sorely in his heart whether this quest was meant for him.

When night fell, he came to a great stone cross which stood at the parting of the way and close by a little ruined chapel. So Sir Launcelot, being minded to pass the night there, alighted, fastened his horse to a tree and hung his shield on a bough. Then he drew near to the little chapel, and wondered to see how, all ruinous though it was, yet within was an altar hung with silk and a great silver candlestick on it; but when he sought entrance, he could find none and, much troubled in his mind, he returned to his horse where he had left it, and unlacing his helm and ungirding his sword, laid him down to rest.

Then it seemed to Sir Launcelot that, as he lay between sleeping and waking, there passed him two white palfreys bearing a litter wherein was a sick knight, who cried: "Sweet Lord, when shall I be pardoned all my transgressions, and when shall the holy vessel come to me, to cure me of my sickness?" And instantly it seemed that the great candlestick came forth of itself from the chapel, floating through the air before a table of silver on which was the Holy Grail. Thereupon, the sick knight raised himself, and on his bended knees he approached so nigh that he kissed the holy vessel; and immediately he cried: "I thank Thee, sweet Lord, that I am healed of my sickness."

And all the while Sir Launcelot, who saw this wonder, felt himself held that he could not move. Then a squire brought the stranger knight his weapons, in much

joy that his lord was cured. "Who think ye that this knight may be who remains sleeping when the holy vessel is so near?" said the knight. "In truth," said the squire, "he must be one that is held by the bond of some great sin. I will take his helm and his sword, for here have I brought you all your armor save only these two." So the knight armed him from head to foot, and taking Sir Launcelot's horse, rode away with his squire. On the instant, Sir Launcelot awoke amazed, not knowing whether he had dreamed or not; but while he wondered, there came a terrible voice, saying: "Launcelot, arise and leave this holy place." In shame, Sir Launcelot turned to obey, only to find horse and sword and shield alike vanished. Then, indeed, he knew himself dishonored.

Weeping bitterly, he made the best of his way on foot, until he came to a cell where a hermit was saying prayer. Sir Launcelot knelt too, and, when all was ended, called to the hermit, entreating him for counsel. "With good will," said the hermit. So Sir Launcelot made himself known and told the hermit all, lamenting how his good fortune was turned to wretchedness and his glory to shame; and truly, the hermit was amazed that Sir Launcelot should be in such case. "Sir," said he, "God has given you manhood and strength beyond all other knights; and more are ye bounden to his service." "I have sinned," said Sir Launcelot; "for in all these years of my knighthood, I have done everything for the honor and glory of my lady and naught for my Maker; and little thank have I given to God for all his benefits to me." Then the holy man gave Sir Launcelot good counsel and made him rest there that night; and the next day he gave him a horse, a sword and a helmet, and bade him go forth and bear himself knightly as the servant of God.



Chapter 13: How Sir Launcelot Saw The Holy Grail

For many days after he had left the hermitage, Sir Launcelot rode through the forest, but there came to him no such adventures as had befallen him on other quests to the increase of his fame. At last, one night-tide, he came to the shores of a great water and there he lay down to sleep; but as he slept, a voice called on him: "Launcelot, arise, put on thine armor and go on thy way until thou comest to a ship. Into that thou shalt enter."

Immediately, Sir Launcelot started from his sleep to obey, and, riding along the shore, came presently to a ship beached on the strand; no sooner had he entered it, than the ship was launched—how, he might not know. So the ship sailed before the wind for many a day. No mortal was on it, save only Sir Launcelot, yet were all his needs supplied. Then, at last, the ship ran ashore at the foot of a great castle; and it was midnight. Sir Launcelot waited not for the dawn, but, his sword gripped in his hand, sprang ashore, and then right before him, he saw a postern where the gate stood open indeed, but two grisly lions kept the way. And when Sir Launcelot would have rushed upon the great beasts with his sword, it was struck from his hands, and a voice said: "Ah! Launcelot, ever is thy trust in thy might rather than thy Maker!"

Sore ashamed, Sir Launcelot took his sword and thrust it back into the sheath, and going forward, he passed unhurt through the gateway, the lions that kept it falling back from his path. So without more adventure, Launcelot entered into the castle; and there he saw how every door stood open, save only one, and that was fast barred, nor, with all his force, might he open it. Presently from the chamber within came the sound of a sweet voice in a holy chant, and then in his heart Launcelot knew that he was come to the Holy Grail. So, kneeling humbly, he prayed that to him might be shown some vision of that he sought. Forthwith the door flew open and from the chamber blazed a light such as he had never known before; but when he made to enter, a voice cried: "Launcelot, forbear," and sorrowfully he withdrew. Then where he knelt, far even from the threshold of the wondrous room, he saw a silver table and, on it, covered with red samite, the Holy Grail. At sight of that which he had sought so long, his joy became so great that, unmindful of the warning, he advanced into the room and drew nigh even to the table itself. Then on the instant there burst between him and it a blaze of light, and he fell to the ground. There he lay, nor might he move nor utter any sound; only he was aware of hands busy about him which bore him away from the chamber.

For four-and-twenty days Sir Launcelot lay as in a trance. At the end of that time he came to himself, and found those about him that had tended him in his swoon. These, when they had given him fresh raiment, brought him to the aged king—Pelles was his name—that owned that castle. The king entertained him right royally, for he knew of the fame of Sir Launcelot; and long he talked with him of his quest and of the other knights who followed it, for he was of a great age and knew much of men. At the end of four days he spoke to Sir Launcelot, bidding him return to Arthur's court: "For," said he, "your quest is ended here, and all that ye shall see of the Holy Grail ye have seen." So Launcelot rode on his way, grieving for the sin that hindered him from the perfect vision of the Holy Grail, but thanking God for that which he had seen. So in time he came to Camelot, and told to Arthur all that had befallen him.



Chapter 14: The End Of The Quest

After he had rescued Sir Percivale from the twenty knights who beset him, Sir Galahad rode on his way till nightfall, when he sought shelter at a little hermitage. Thither there came in the night a damsel who desired to speak with Sir Galahad; so he arose and went to her. "Galahad," said she, "arm you and mount your horse and follow me, for I am come to guide you in your quest." So they rode together until they had come to the seashore, and there the damsel showed Galahad a great ship into which he must enter. Then she bade him farewell, and he, going on to the ship, found there already the good knights Sir Bors and Sir Percivale, who made much joy of the meeting. They abode in that ship until they had come to the castle of King Pellès, who welcomed them right gladly. Then, as they all sat at supper that night, suddenly the hall was filled with a great light, and the holy vessel appeared in their midst, covered all in white samite. While they all rejoiced, there came a voice, saying: "My knights whom I have chosen, ye have seen the holy vessel dimly. Continue your journey to the city of Sarras and there the perfect Vision shall be yours."

Now in the city of Sarras had dwelt long time Joseph of Arimathea, teaching its people the true faith, before ever he came into the land of Britain; but when Sir Galahad and his fellows came there after long voyage, they found it ruled by a heathen king named Estorause, who cast them into a deep dungeon. There they were kept a year, but at the end of that time, the tyrant died. Then the great men of the land gathered together to consider who should be their king; and, while they were in council, came a voice bidding them take as their king the youngest of the three knights whom Estorause had thrown into prison.

So in fear and wonder they hastened to the prison, and, releasing the three knights, made Galahad king as the voice had bidden them.

Thus Sir Galahad became king of the famous city of Sarras, in far Babylon. He had reigned a year when, one morning early, he and the other two knights, his fellows, went into the chapel, and there they saw, kneeling in prayer, an aged man, robed as a bishop and round him hovered many angels. The knights fell on their knees in awe and reverence, whereupon he that seemed a bishop turned to them and said: "I am Joseph of Arimathea, and I am come to show you the perfect Vision of the Holy Grail." On the instant there appeared before them, without veil or cover, the holy vessel, in a radiance of light such as almost blinded them. Sir Bors and Sir Percivale, when at length they were recovered from the brightness of that glory, looked up to find that the holy Joseph and the wondrous vessel had passed from their sight. Then they Went to Sir Galahad where he still knelt as in prayer, and behold, he was dead; for it had been with him even as he had prayed; in the moment when he had seen the vision, his soul had gone back to God.

So the two knights buried him in that far city, themselves mourning and all the people with them. And immediately after, Sir Percivale put off his arms and took the habit of a monk, living a devout and holy life until, a year and two months later, he also died and was buried near Sir Galahad. Then Sir Bors armed him, and bidding farewell to the city, sailed away until, after many weeks, he came again to the land of Britain. There he took horse, and stayed not till he had come to Camelot. Great was the rejoicing of Arthur and all his knights when Sir Bors was once more among them. When he had told all the adventures which had befallen him and the good knights, his companions, all who heard were filled with amaze. But the king, he caused the wisest clerks in the land to write in great books this Quest of the Holy Grail, that the fame of it should endure unto all time.



Chapter 15: The Fair Maid Of Astolat

At last, the Quest of the Holy Grail was ended, and by ones and twos the knights came back to Camelot, though many who had set out so boldly were never seen again about the Round Table.

Great was the joy of King Arthur when Sir Launcelot and Sir Bors returned, for, so long had they been away, that almost he had feared that they had perished. In their honor there was high festival for many days in London, where Arthur then had his court; and the king made proclamation of a great tournament that he would hold at Camelot, when he and the King of Nortgalis would keep the lists against all comers.

So, one fair morning of spring, King Arthur made ready to ride to Camelot and all his knights with him, save Launcelot who excused himself, saying that an old wound hindered him from riding. But when the king, sore vexed, had departed, the queen rebuked Sir Launcelot, and bade him go and prove his great prowess as of old. "Madam," said Sir Launcelot, "in this, as in all else, I obey you; at your bidding I go, but know that in this tournament I shall adventure me in other wise than ever before."

The next day, at dawn, Sir Launcelot mounted his horse and, riding forth unattended, journeyed all that day till, as evening fell, he reached the little town of Astolat, and there, at the castle, sought lodgment for that night. The old Lord of Astolat was glad at his coming, judging him at once to be a noble knight, though he knew him not, for it was Sir Launcelot's will to remain unknown.

So they went to supper, Sir Launcelot and the old lord, his son, Sir Lavaine, and his daughter Elaine, whom they of the place called the Fair Maid of Astolat. As they sat at meat, the baron asked Sir Launcelot if he rode to the tournament. "Yea," answered Launcelot; "and right glad should I be if, of your courtesy, ye would lend me a shield without device." "Right willingly," said his host; "ye shall have my son Sir Tirre's shield. He was but lately made knight and was hurt in his first encounter, so his shield is bare enough. If ye will take with you my young son, Sir Lavaine, he will be glad to ride in the company of so noble a knight and will do you such service as he may." "I shall be glad indeed of his fellowship," answered Sir Launcelot courteously.

Now it seemed to the fair Elaine that never had she beheld so noble a knight as this stranger; and seeing that he was as gentle and courteous as he was strong, she said to him: "Fair knight, will ye wear my favor at this tournament? For never have I found knight yet to wear my crimson sleeve, and sure am I that none other could ever win it such honor." "Maiden," said Sir Launcelot, "right gladly would I serve you in aught; but it has never been my custom to wear lady's favor." "Then shall it serve the better for disguise," answered Elaine. Sir

Launcelot pondered her words, and at last he said; "Fair maiden, I will do for you what I have done for none, and will wear your favor." So with great glee, she brought it him, a crimson velvet sleeve embroidered with great pearls, and fastened it in his helmet. Then Sir Launcelot begged her to keep for him his own shield until after the tournament, when he would come for it again and tell them his name.

The next morn Sir Launcelot took his departure with Sir Lavaine and, by evening, they were come to Camelot. Forthwith Sir Lavaine led Sir Launcelot to the house of a worthy burgher, where he might stay in privacy, undiscovered by those of his acquaintance. Then, when at dawn the trumpets blew, they mounted their horses and rode to a little wood hard by the lists, and there they abode some while; for Sir Launcelot would take no part until he had seen which side was the stronger. So they saw how King Arthur sat high on a throne to overlook the combat, while the King of Northgalis and all the fellowship of the Round Table held the lists against their opponents led by King Anguish of Ireland and the King of Scots.

Then it soon appeared that the two kings with all their company could do but little against the Knights of the Round Table, and were sore pressed to maintain their ground. Seeing this, Sir Launcelot said to Sir Lavaine: "Sir knight, will ye give me your aid if I go to the rescue of the weaker side? For it seems to me they may not much longer hold their own unaided." "Sir," answered Lavaine, "I will gladly follow you and do what I may."

So the two laid their lances in rest and charged into the thickest of the fight and, with one spear, Sir Launcelot bore four knights from the saddle. Lavaine, too, did nobly, for he unhorsed the bold Sir Bedivere and Sir Lucan the Butler. Then with their swords they smote lustily on the left hand and on the right, and those whom they had come to aid rallying to them, they drove the Knights of the Round Table back a space. So the fight raged furiously, Launcelot ever being in the thickest of the press and performing such deeds of valor, that all marvelled to see him, and would fain know who was the Knight of the Crimson Sleeve. But the knights of Arthur's court felt shame of their discomfiture, and, in especial, those of Launcelot's kin were wroth that one should appear who seemed mightier even than Launcelot's self. So they called to each other and, making a rally, directed all their force against the stranger knight who had so turned the fortunes of the day. With lances in rest, Sir Lionel, Sir Bors, and Sir Ector, bore down together upon Sir Launcelot, and Sir Bors' spear pierced Sir Launcelot and brought him to the earth, leaving the spear head broken off in his side. This Sir Lavaine saw, and immediately, with all his might, he rode upon the King of Scots, unhorsed him and took his horse to Sir Launcelot.

Now Sir Launcelot felt as he had got his death-wound, but such was his spirit

that he was resolved to do some great deed while yet his strength remained. So, with Lavaine's aid, he got upon the horse, took a spear and laying it in rest, bore down, one after the other, Sir Bors, Sir Lionel, and Sir Ector. Next he flung himself into the thickest of the fight, and before the trumpets sounded the signal to cease, he had unhorsed thirty good knights. Then the Kings of Scotland and Ireland came to Sir Launcelot and said: "Sir knight, we thank you for the service done us this day. And now, we pray you, come with us to receive the prize which is rightly yours; for never have we seen such deeds as ye have done this day." "My fair lords," answered Sir Launcelot, "for aught that I have accomplished, I am like to pay dearly; I beseech you, suffer me to depart." With these words, he rode away full gallop, followed by Sir Lavaine; and when he had come to a little wood, he called Lavaine to him, saying: "Gentle knight, I entreat you, draw forth this spear head, for it nigh slayeth me." "Oh! my dear lord," said Lavaine, "I fear sore to draw it forth lest ye die." "If ye love me, draw it out," answered Launcelot. So Lavaine did as he was bidden, and, with a deathly groan, Sir Launcelot fell in a swoon to the ground. When he was a little recovered, he begged Lavaine to help him to his horse and lead him to a hermitage hard by where dwelt a hermit who, in bygone days, had been known to Launcelot for a good knight and true. So with pain and difficulty they journeyed to the hermitage, Lavaine oft fearing that Sir Launcelot would die. And when the hermit saw Sir Launcelot, all pale and besmeared with blood, he scarce knew him for the bold Sir Launcelot du Lac; but he bore him within and dressed his wounds and bade him be of good cheer, for he should recover. So there Sir Launcelot abode many weeks and Sir Lavaine with him; for Lavaine would not leave him, such love had he for the good knight he had taken for his lord.

Now when it was known that the victorious knight had departed from the field sore wounded, Sir Gawain vowed to go in search of him. So it chanced that, in his wanderings, he came to Astolat, and there he had a hearty welcome of the Lord of Astolat, who asked him for news of the tournament. Then Sir Gawain related how two stranger knights, bearing white shields, had won great glory, and in especial one, who wore in his helm a crimson sleeve, had surpassed all others in knightly prowess. At these words, the fair Elaine cried aloud with delight. "Maiden," said Gawain, "know ye this knight?" "Not his name," she replied; "but full sure was I that he was a noble knight when I prayed him to wear my favor." Then she showed Gawain the shield which she had kept wrapped in rich broderies, and immediately Sir Gawain knew it for Launcelot's. "Alas!" cried he, "without doubt it was Launcelot himself that we wounded to the death. Sir Bors will never recover the woe of it."

Then, on the morrow, Sir Gawain rode to London to tell the court how the stranger knight and Launcelot were one; but the Fair Maid of Astolat rose betimes, and having obtained leave of her father, set out to search for Sir

Launcelot and her brother Lavaine. After many journeyings, she came, one day, upon Lavaine exercising his horse in a field, and by him she was taken to Sir Launcelot. Then, indeed, her heart was filled with grief when she saw the good knight to whom she had given her crimson sleeve thus laid low; so she abode in the hermitage, waiting upon Sir Launcelot and doing all within her power to lessen his pain.

After many weeks, by the good care of the hermit and the fair Elaine, Sir Launcelot was so far recovered that he might bear the weight of his armor and mount his horse again. Then, one morn, they left the hermitage and rode all three, the Fair Maid, Sir Launcelot, and Sir Lavaine, to the castle of Astolat, where there was much joy of their coming. After brief sojourn, Sir Launcelot desired to ride to court, for he knew there would be much sorrow among his kinsmen for his long absence. But when he would take his departure, Elaine cried aloud: "Ah! my lord, suffer me to go with you, for I may not bear to lose you." "Fair child," answered Sir Launcelot gently, "that may not be. But in the days to come, when ye shall love and wed some good knight, for your sake I will bestow upon him broad lands and great riches; and at all times will I hold me ready to serve you as a true knight may." Thus spoke Sir Launcelot, but the fair Elaine answered never a word.

So Sir Launcelot rode to London where the whole court was glad of his coming; but from the day of his departure, the Fair Maid drooped and pined until, when ten days were passed, she felt that her end was at hand. So she sent for her father and two brothers, to whom she said gently: "Dear father and brethren, I must now leave you." Bitterly they wept, but she comforted them all she might, and presently desired of her father a boon. "Ye shall have what ye will," said the old lord; for he hoped that she might yet recover. Then first she required her brother, Sir Tirre, to write a letter, word for word as she said it; and when it was written, she turned to her father and said: "Kind father, I desire that, when I am dead, I may be arrayed in my fairest raiment, and placed on a bier; and let the bier be set within a barge, with one to steer it until I be come to London, Then, perchance, Sir Launcelot will come and look upon me with kindness." So she died, and all was done as she desired; for they set her, looking as fair as a lily, in a barge all hung with black, and an old dumb man went with her as helmsman.

Slowly the barge floated down the river until it had come to Westminster; and as it passed under the palace walls, it chanced that King Arthur and Queen Guenevere looked forth from a window. Marvelling much at the strange sight, together they went forth to the quay, followed by many of the knights. Then the king espied the letter clasped in the dead maiden's hand, and drew it forth gently and broke the seal. And thus the letter ran: "Most noble knight, Sir Launcelot, I, that men called the Fair Maid of Astolat, am come hither to crave burial at thy hands for the sake of the unrequited love I gave thee. As thou art

peerless knight, pray for my soul."

Then the king bade fetch Sir Launcelot, and when he was come, he showed him the letter. And Sir Launcelot, gazing on the dead maiden, was filled with sorrow. "My lord Arthur," he said, "for the death of this dear child I shall grieve my life long. Gentle she was and loving, and much was I beholden to her; but what she desired I could not give." "Yet her request now thou wilt grant, I know," said the king, "for ever thou art kind and courteous to all." "It is my desire," answered Sir Launcelot.

So the Maid of Astolat was buried in the presence of the king and queen and of the fellowship of the Round Table, and of many a gentle lady who wept, that time, the fair child's fate. Over her grave was raised a tomb of white marble, and on it was sculptured the shield of Sir Launcelot; for, when he had heard her whole story, it was the king's will that she that in life had guarded the shield of his noblest knight, should keep it also in death.



Stories help us explore cultures, learn moral lessons, connect with nature — or simply have fun. That's why ririro.com offers 3,000+ free stories — fairy tales, fables, bedtime stories, myths and more — for every age, in 13 languages, with free printable PDFs and often audio. Reading should be a right, not a privilege. Share ririro.com and spread the joy of reading.

Instagram: @ririro_reading · Pinterest: pinterest.com/ririrocom