

# “The Tale of Sir Launcelot du Lake”

from *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory

*Le Morte d'Arthur* is a compilation by Sir Thomas Malory of Romance tales about the legendary King Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, and the Knights of the Round Table. The book interprets existing French and English stories about these figures, with some of Malory's own original material. First published in 1485 by William Caxton, *Le Morte d'Arthur* is perhaps the best-known work of English-language Arthurian literature today.



Camelot by Alan Lee, 1984

When King Arthur returned from Rome, he settled his court at Camelot, and there gathered about his knights of the Round Table, who diverted themselves with jousting and tournaments. Of all his knights one was supreme, both in prowess<sup>1</sup> at arms and in nobility of bearing, and this was Sir Launcelot, who was also the favorite of Queen Gwynevere, to whom he had sworn oaths of fidelity<sup>2</sup>.

One day Sir Launcelot, feeling weary of his life at the court, and of only playing at arms, decided to set forth in search of adventure. He asked his nephew Sir Lionel to accompany him, and when both were suitably armed and mounted, they rode off together through the forest.

At noon they started across a plain, but the intensity of the sun made Sir Launcelot feel sleepy, so Sir Lionel suggested that they should rest beneath the shade of an apple tree that grew by a hedge not far from the road. They dismounted, tethered their horses, and settled down.

“Not for seven years have I felt so sleepy,” said Sir Launcelot, and with that fell fast asleep, while Sir Lionel watched over him.



<sup>1</sup> Prowess: expertise, aptitude

<sup>2</sup> Fidelity: Launcelot swore his loyalty and devotion (here, fidelity) to Queen Gwynevere

Soon three knights came galloping past, and Sir Lionel noticed that they were being pursued by a fourth knight, who was one of the most powerful he had yet seen. The pursuing knight overtook each of the others in turn, and as he did so, knocked each off his horse with a thrust of his spear. When all three lay stunned he dismounted, bound them securely to their horses with the reins, and led them away.

Without waking Sir Launcelot, Sir Lionel mounted his horse and rode after the knight, and as soon as he had drawn close enough, he shouted his challenge. The knight turned about and they charged at each other, with the result that Sir Lionel was likewise flung from his horse, bound, and led away a prisoner.

The victorious knight, whose name was Sir Tarquine, led his prisoners to his castle, and there threw them on the ground, stripped them naked, and beat them with thorn twigs. After that he locked them in a dungeon where many other prisoners, who had received like treatment, were complaining dismally.

Meanwhile, Sir Ector de Marys, who liked to accompany Sir Launcelot on his adventures, and finding him gone, decided to ride after him. Before long he came upon a forester.

“My good fellow, if you know the forest hereabouts, could you tell me in which direction I am most likely to meet with adventure?”

“Sir, I can tell you: Less than a mile from here stands a well-moated castle. On the left of the

entrance you will find a ford<sup>3</sup> where you can water your horse, and across from the ford a large tree from which hang the shields of many famous knights. Below the shields hangs a cauldron, of copper and brass: strike it three times with your spear, and then surely you will meet with adventure—such, indeed, that *if* you survive it, you



will prove yourself the foremost knight in these parts for many years.”

“May God reward you!” Sir Ector replied.

The castle was exactly as the forester had described it, and among the shields Sir Ector recognized several as belonging to Knights of the Round Table. After watering his horse, he knocked on the cauldron and Sir Tarquine, whose castle it was, appeared.

The jousted, and at the first encounter Sir Ector sent his opponent’s horse spinning twice about before he could recover.

“That was a fine stroke; now let us try again,” said Sir Tarquine.

This time Sir Tarquine caught Sir Ector just below the right arm and, having impaled him on his spear, lifted him clean out of the saddle and rode with him into the castle, where he threw him on the ground.

“Sir,” said Sir Tarquine, “you have fought better than any knight I



*How Sir Turquine Bare Sir Ector Clean Out of His Saddle by Alfred Kapps, 1880*

have encountered in the last twelve years; therefore, if you wish, I will demand no more of you than your parole<sup>4</sup> as my prisoner.”

“Sir, that I will never give.”

“Then I am sorry for you,” said Sir Tarquine, and with that he stripped and beat him and locked him in the dungeon with the other prisoners. There Sir Ector saw Sir Lyonel.

“Alas, Sir Lyonel, we are in a sorry plight. But tell me, what has happened to Sir Launcelot? For surely he is the one knight who could save us.”

“I left him sleeping beneath an apple tree, and what has befallen him since then I do not know,” Sir Lyonel replied; and then all the unhappy prisoners once more bewailed their lot.

While Sir Launcelot still slept beneath the apple tree, four queens started across the plain. They were riding white mules and accompanied by four knights who held above them, at the tips of their spears, a green silk canopy to protect them from the sun. The party was startled by the neighing of Sir Launcelot’s horse and, changing direction, rode up to the apple tree, where they discovered the sleeping knight. And as each of the queens gazed at the handsome Sir Launcelot, so each wanted him for her own.

“Let us not quarrel,” said Morgan le Fay.<sup>5</sup> “Instead, I will cast a spell over him so that he remains asleep while we take him to my castle and make him our prisoner. We can then oblige him to choose one of us for his paramour.”

Sir Launcelot was laid on his shield and borne by two of the knights to the Castle Charyot, which was Morgan le Fay’s stronghold. He awoke to find himself in a cold cell, where a young noblewoman was serving him supper.

“What cheer?”<sup>6</sup> she asked.

“My lady, I hardly know, except that I must have been brought here by means of an enchantment.”

“Sir, if you are the knight you appear to be, you will learn your fate at dawn tomorrow.” And with

<sup>4</sup> Parole: A knight’s *parole* was his pledge to fulfill certain conditions in exchange for freedom

<sup>5</sup> Arthur’s half-sister, Morgan le Fay is a powerful witch who often serves as an antagonist to Arthur and Guinevere

<sup>6</sup> “What cheer?” is like “How are you?” or “What’s shakin’?”

<sup>3</sup> Ford: a shallow part of a river

that, the young noblewoman left him. Sir Launcelot spent an uncomfortable night but at dawn the four queens presented themselves and Morgan le Fay spoke to him:

“Sir Launcelot, I know that Queen Gwynevere loves you, and you her. But now you are my prisoner, and you will have to choose: either to take one of us for your paramour, or to die miserably in this cell—just as you please. Now I will tell you who were are: I am Morgan le Fay, Queen of Gore; my companions are the Queens of North Galys, of Estelonde, and of the Outer Isles. So make your choice.”

“A hard choice! Understand that I choose none of you, lewd sorceresses<sup>7</sup> that you are; rather will I die in this cell. But were I free, I would take pleasure in proving it against any who would champion<sup>8</sup> you that Queen Gwynevere is the finest lady of this land.”

“So, you refuse us?” demanded Morgan le Fay.

“On my life, I do,” Sir Launcelot replied, and so the queens stormed from the cell.

Sometime later, the young noblewoman who had served Sir Launcelot’s supper reappeared.

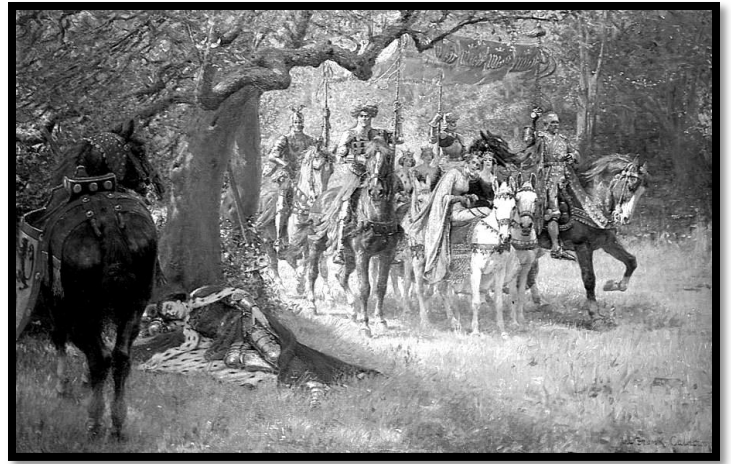
“What news?” she asked.

“It is the end,” he replied mournfully.

“Sir Launcelot, I know that you have refused the four queens, and that they wish to kill you out of spite. But if you will be ruled by me, I can save you.

I ask that you will champion my father at a tournament next Tuesday, when he has to combat the King of North Galys, and three Knights of the Round Table, who last Tuesday defeated him ignominiously.”<sup>9</sup>

“My lady, pray tell me, what is your



How Four Queens Found Sir Lancelot Sleeping by William Frank Calderon, 1908

father’s name?”

“King Bagdemagus.”

“Excellent, my lady, I know him for a good king and a true knight, so I shall be happy to serve him.”

“May God reward you! And tomorrow at dawn I will release you, and direct you to an abbey<sup>10</sup> which is ten miles from here, and where the good monks will care for you will I fetch my father.”

“I am at your service, my lady.”

As promised, the young noblewoman released Sir Launcelot at dawn. When she had led him through the twelve doors to the castle entrance, she gave him his horse and armor, and directions for finding the abbey.

“God bless you, my lady; and when the time comes I promise I shall not fail you.”

Sir Launcelot rode through the forest in search of the abbey, but at dusk had still failed to find it, and coming upon a red silk pavilion,<sup>11</sup> apparently unoccupied, decided to rest there overnight, and continue his search in the morning.

He had not been asleep for more than an hour, however, when the knight who owned the pavilion returned, and got straight into bed with him. Having arranged a rendezvous with his paramour, the knight supposed at first that Sir Launcelot was she, and taking him into his arms, started kissing him. Sir Launcelot awoke with a start, and seizing his sword, leaped out of bed and out of the pavilion, pursued closely by the other knight. Once in the open they set to with their swords, and before long

<sup>7</sup> Lewd means...um...romantically impure.

<sup>8</sup> As a verb, *champion* means “to defend a person or cause”

<sup>9</sup> Shamefully or dishonorably, like how the Bears lost to the Packers in the 2010 NFC Championship game.

<sup>10</sup> Church

<sup>11</sup> A pavilion is a giant tent

Sir Launcelot had wounded his unknown adversary so seriously that he was obliged to yield.

The knight, whose name was Sir Belleus, now asked Sir Launcelot how he came to be sleeping in his bed, and then explained how he had an assignation with his lover, adding:

“But now I am so sorely wounded that I shall consider myself fortunate to escape with my life.”

“Sir, please forgive me for wounding you; but lately I escaped from an enchantment, and I was afraid that once more I had been betrayed. Let us go into the pavilion and I will staunch your wound.”

As soon as it was daylight, Sir Launcelot armed, mounted, and rode away in search of the abbey, which he found in less than two hours. King Bagdemagus’s daughter was waiting for him, and as soon as she heard his horse’s footsteps in the yard, ran to the window, and, seeing that it was Sir Launcelot, herself ordered the servants to stable his horse. She then led him to her chamber, disarmed him, and gave him a long gown to wear, welcoming him warmly as she did so.

King Bagdemagus’s castle was twelve miles away, and his daughter sent for him as soon as she had settled Sir Launcelot. The king arrived with his retinue<sup>12</sup> and embraced Sir Launcelot, who then described his recent enchantment, and the great obligation he was under to his daughter for releasing him.

“Sir, you will fight for me on Tuesday next?”

“Sire, I shall not fail you; but please tell me the names of the three Round Table knights whom I shall be fighting.”

“Sir Modred, Sir Madore de la Porte, and Sir Gahalantyne. I must admit that last Tuesday they defeated me and my knights completely.”

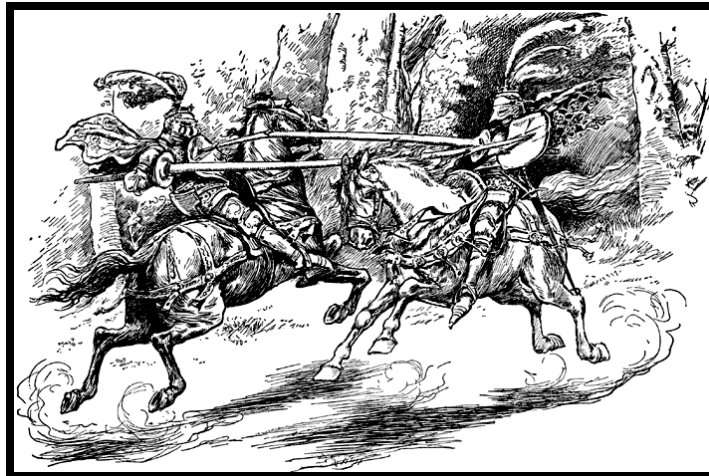
“Sire, I hear that the tournament is to be fought within three miles of the abbey. Could you send me

thereof you most trustworthy knights, clad in plain armor with no ornaments, and a fourth suit of armor which I myself shall wear? We will take up our position just outside the tournament field and watch while you and the King of North Galys<sup>13</sup> enter into combat with your followers; and then, as soon as you are in difficulties, we will come to your rescue, and show your opponents what kind of knights you command.”

This was arranged on Sunday, and on the following Tuesday, Sir Launcelot and the three knights of King Bagdemagus waited in a thicket of trees, not far from the pavilion which had been raised for the lords and ladies who were to judge the tournament and award the prizes.

The King of North Galys was the first on the field, with a company of ninescore knights; he was

followed by King Bagdemagus with fourscore knights, and then by the three Knights of the Round Table, who remained apart from both companies.<sup>14</sup> At the first encounter, King Bagdemagus lost twelve knights, all killed, and the King of North Galys six.



With that, Sir Launcelot galloped on to the field, and with his first spear unhorsed five of the King of North Galys’ knights, breaking the backs of four of them. With his next spear he charged the king, and wounded him deeply in the thigh.

“That was a shrewd blow, commented Sir Madore, and galloped onto the field to challenge Sir Launcelot. But he too was tumbled from his horse, and with such violence that his shoulder was broken.

Sir Modred was the next to challenge Sir Launcelot, and he was sent spinning over his horse’s tail. He landed head first, his helmet became buried

<sup>13</sup> North Galys is in western Ireland. This king’s name is King Cradilment, by the way.

<sup>14</sup> If one *score* is twenty, how many knights are gathered on the field of mock-battle?

<sup>12</sup> A retinue is an entourage or group of followers



in the soil, and he nearly broke his neck, and for a long time lay stunned.

Finally, Sir Gahalantyne tried; at the first encounter both he and Sir Launcelot broke their spears, so both drew their swords and hacked vehemently at each other. But Sir Launcelot, with mounting wrath, soon struck his opponent a blow on the helmet which brought the blood streaming from eyes, ears, and mouth. Sir Gahalantyne slumped forward in the saddle, his horse panicked, and he was thrown to the ground, useless for further combat.

Sir Launcelot took another spear and unhorsed sixteen more of the King of North Galys's knights, and with his next, unhorsed another twelve; and in each case with such violence that none of the knights ever fully recovered. The King of North Galys was forced to admit defeat, and the prize was awarded to King Bagdemagus.

That night Sir Launcelot was entertained as the guest of honor by King Bagdemagus and his daughter at their castle, and before leaving, he was loaded with gifts.

"My lady, please, if ever again you should need my services, remember that I shall not fail you."

The next day Sir Launcelot rode once more through the forest, and by chance came to the apple tree where he had previously slept. This time he met a young noblewoman riding a white palfrey.<sup>15</sup>

"My lady, I am riding in search of adventure; pray tell me if you know of any I might find hereabouts."

"Sir, there are adventures hereabouts if you believe that you are equal to them; but please tell me, what is your name?"

"Sir Launcelot du Lake."

"Very well, Sir Launcelot, you appear to be a sturdy enough knight, so I will tell you. Not far away stands the castle of Sir Tarquine, a knight who in fair combat has overcome more than sixty opponents whom he now holds prisoner. Many are from the court of King Arthur, and if you can rescue them, I will then ask you to deliver me and my companions from a knight who distresses us daily, either by robbery or by other kinds of outrage."

"My lady, please first lead me to Sir Tarquine, then I will most happily challenge this miscreant knight<sup>16</sup> of yours."

When they arrived at the castle, Sir Launcelot watered his horse at the ford, and then beat the cauldron until the bottom fell out. However, none came to answer the challenge, so they waited by the castle gate for half an hour or so. Then Sir Tarquine appeared, riding toward the castle with a wounded prisoner slung over his horse, whom Sir Launcelot recognized as Sir Gaheris, Sir Gawain's brother and a knight of the Round Table.

"Good knight," said Sir Launcelot, "it is known to me that you have put to shame many of the Knights of the Round Table. Pray allow your prisoner, who I see is wounded, to recover, while I vindicate<sup>17</sup> the honor of the knights whom you have defeated."

"I defy you, and all your fellowship of the Round Table," Sir Tarquine replied.

"You boast!" said Sir Launcelot.

At the first charge the backs of the horses were broken and both knights stunned. But they soon recovered and set to with their swords, and both struck so mightily that neither shield nor armor could resist, and within two hours they were cutting each other's flesh, from which the blood flowed liberally. Finally they paused for a moment, resting on their shields.

---

<sup>16</sup> A *miscreant knight* is an evil, villainous one

<sup>17</sup> Launcelot wishes to defend against opposition, or *vindicate*, the honor of Tarquine's prisoners.

---

<sup>15</sup> A palfrey is a gentle saddle horse

“Worthy knight,” said Sir Tarquine, “pray hold your hand for a while, and if you will, answer my question.”

“Sir, speak on.”

“You are the most powerful knight I have fought yet, but I fear you may be the one whom I most hate in the whole world. If you are not, for the love of you I will release all my prisoners and swear eternal friendship.”

“What is the name of the knight you hate above all others?”

“Sir Launcelot due Lake; for it was he who slew my brother, Sir Carados of the Dolorous Tower,<sup>18</sup> and it is because of him that I have killed a hundred knights, and maimed as many more, apart from the sixty-four I still hold prisoner. And so, if you are Sir Launcelot, speak up, for we must then fight to the death.”

“Sir, I see now that I might go in peace and good fellowship, or otherwise fight to the death; but being the knight I am, I must tell you: I am Sir Launcelot du Lake, son of Ban of Benwick, of Arthur’s court, and a knight of the Round Table. So defend yourself!”

“Ah! This is most welcome!”

Now the two knights hurled themselves at each other like two wild bulls; swords and shields clashed together, and often their swords drove into the flesh. Then sometimes one, sometimes the other, would stagger and fall, only to recover immediately and resume the contest. At last, however, Sir Tarquine grew faint, and unwittingly lowered his shield. Sir Launcelot was swift to follow up his advantage, and

<sup>18</sup> Thought by some to be a giant—his nicknames were “The Huge” and “The Cruel”—Sir Carados hated King Arthur so he captured so many Knights of the Round Table (including Sir Gawain) that Arthur declared war. Lancelot killed “The Huge” with his own magic sword, the only weapon that could kill him.

Carados was such a popular villain that he appears in a sculpture on an arch of a cathedral in Modena, Italy, which was constructed in the early 12<sup>th</sup> century.

“Dolorous” means *painful* or *causing sorrow*.

dragging the other down to his knees, unlaced his helmet and beheaded him.

Sir Launcelot then strode over to the young noblewoman: “My lady, now I am at your service, but first I must find a horse.”

Then the wounded Sir Gaheris spoke up: “Sir, please take my horse. Today you have overcome the most formidable knight, excepting only yourself, and by so doing have saved us all. But before leaving, please tell me your name.”

“Sir Launcelot du Lake. Today I have fought to vindicate the honor of the knights of the Round Table, and I know that among Sir Tarquine’s prisoners are two of my brethren, Sir Lyonel and Sir Ector, and also your own brother, Sir Gawain. According to the shields there are also Sir Brandiles, Sir

Galyhuddis, Sir Kay, Sir Alydukis, Sir Marhaus, and many others. Please release the prisoners and ask them to help themselves to the castle treasure. Give them all my greetings and say I will see them at the next Pentecost.<sup>19</sup> And please request Sir Ector and Sir Lyonel to go straight to the court and await me there.”

When Sir Launcelot had ridden away with the young noblewoman, Sir Gaheris entered the castle, and finding the porter<sup>20</sup> in the hall, threw him on the ground and took the castle keys. He then released the prisoners, who, seeing his wounds, thanked him for their deliverance.

“Do not thank me for this work, but Sir Launcelot. He sends his greetings to you all, and asks you to help yourselves to the castle treasure. He has ridden away on another quest, but said that he will see you at the next



*Launcelot Slays the Caitiff Knight Sir Tarquine and Rescues the Fair Lady and the Knights in Captivity by Frank Cadogan Cowper, 1954-1955*



<sup>19</sup> Pentecost: A Christian festival held 50 days after Easter

<sup>20</sup> A porter is a gatekeeper.

Pentecost. Meanwhile, he requests Sir Lyonel and Sir Ector to return to the court and await him there.”

“Certainly we shall *not* ride back to the court, but rather we shall follow Sir Launcelot wherever he goes,” declared Sir Ector.

“And I too shall follow him,” said Sir Kay.

The prisoners searched the castle for their armor and horses and the castle treasure; and then a forester arrived with supplies of venison, so they feasted merrily and settled down for the night in the castle chambers—all but Sir Ector, Sir Lyonel, and Sir Kay, who set off immediately after supper in search of Sir Launcelot.



Sir Launcelot and the young noblewoman were riding down a broad highway when she said they were within sight of the spot where her tormenter generally attacked her.

“For shame that a knight should so degrade his high calling,” Sir Launcelot replied. “Certainly we will teach him a much-needed lesson. Now, my lady, I suggest that you ride on ahead, and as soon as he attacks you, I will come to the rescue.”

Sir Launcelot halted and the young noblewoman rode gently forward. Soon the knight appeared with his page, and seized the young noblewoman from her horse; she cried out at once, and Sir Launcelot galloped up to them.

“Scoundrel! What sort of knight do you think you are, to attack defenseless women?”

In answer, the other knight drew his sword. Sir Launcelot did likewise, and they rushed together. With his first stroke Sir Launcelot split open the knight’s head, down to the throat.

“Let that be your payment, though long overdue,” said Sir Launcelot.

“Even so; he certainly deserved to die. His name was Sir Percy of the Forest Sauvage.”

“My lady, do you require anything more of me?”

“No, good Sir Launcelot; and may you be blessed and protected, for certainly you are the bravest and gentlest knight I have known. But pray tell me one

thing: why is it you do not take to yourself a wife? Many good ladies, both high born and low born, grieve that so fine a knight as yourself should remain single. It is whispered, of course, that Queen Gwynevere has cast a spell over you so that you shall love no other.”

“As for that gossip, people must believe what they will about Queen Gwynevere and me. But married I will *not* be, for then I should have to attend to my lady instead of entering for tournaments and wards, or riding in search of adventure. And I will not take a lover, both for the fear of God and in the belief that those who do so are always unfortunate when they meet a knight who is purer of heart; for whether they are defeated or victorious in such an encounter, either result must be equally distressing and shameful. I believe that a true knight is *neither* adulterous *nor* lecherous.”<sup>21</sup>

Sir Launcelot then took his leave of the young noblewoman, and for two days wandered alone through the forest, resting at night at the most meager of lodgings. On the third day, as he was crossing a bridge, he was accosted by a rude, churlish porter, who, after striking his horse on the nose so that it turned about, demanded to know by what right Sir Launcelot was riding that way.

“And what right do I need to cross this bridge? Surely, I cannot ride beside it,” said Sir Launcelot.

“That is not for you to decide,” hissed the porter,

and with that he lashed at Sir Launcelot with his club. Sir Launcelot drew his sword, and after deflecting the blow, struck the porter on his head and split it open.



At the end of the bridge was a prosperous-looking village, overtopped by a fine castle. As Sir Launcelot advanced, he heard someone cry, “Good knight, beware! You have done yourself no good by killing the chief porter of the castle.”

<sup>21</sup> According to the knightly code, a true knight is pure. He doesn’t commit adultery, nor is he preoccupied with indecent thoughts and desires. Plus, Launcelot wants to be focused on his adventures.

Sir Launcelot rode on regardless, through the village and into the castle court, which was richly grassed. Thinking to himself that this would be a good place for combat, Sir Launcelot tied his horse to a ring in the wall and started across the lawn. Meanwhile, people were peering at him from every door and window, and again he heard the warning: “Good knight, you come here at your peril!”

Before long, two giants appeared, fully armed except for their heads, and brandishing huge clubs. Together they rushed at Sir Launcelot, who raised his shield to defend himself, and then struck at one of the giants and beheaded him. Thereupon the second giant roared with dismay and fled into the forest, where Sir Launcelot pursued him. In a few minutes, Sir Launcelot drew abreast of the giant and struck him on the shoulder with a blow that carried through to the navel, and the giant dropped dead.

When Sir Launcelot returned to the castle, he was greeted by threescore ladies, who all knelt before him. “Brave knight! We thank you for delivering us. Many of us have been prisoners for seven years now, and although we are all high born, we have had to work like servants for our keep, doing silk embroidery. Pray tell us your name, so that our friends can know who has saved us.”

“My ladies, I am called Sir Launcelot du Lake.”

“Welcome, Sir Launcelot! It was you alone whom the giants feared, and you alone who could have overcome them. How often have we prayed for your arrival!”



*Lancelot With the Slain Giants*, this miniature was cut from *Livre du Lancelot del Lac*, which was printed on vellum (mammal skin) in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century. In 2008, this was sold in London for \$48,875.



“My ladies, please greet your friends for me; and when I pass through this country again, grant me what hospitality you may feel is my due. Please recompense<sup>22</sup> yourselves from the castle treasure, and then insure that the castle is restored to the rightful owner.”

“Sir Launcelot, this is the castle of Tintagil, and belonged formerly to the duke of that name. But after his death, Igraine, who had been his wife, was made queen by King Uther Pendragon, to whom she bore Arthur, our present king.”

“And so, after all, I know the owner of this castle. My ladies, I bless you, and farewell.”

Always in quest of adventure, Sir Launcelot rode through many different countries, through wild valleys and forests, and across strange rivers; and at night he slept where he could, often in the roughest of lodgings. Then one day he came to a well-kept house where the lady offered him the best of hospitality. After supper he was taken to his chamber, which overlooked the front door, and there Sir Launcelot disarmed and fell comfortably asleep.

He was awakened a short time later by a tremendous knocking at the door below, and looking through the window, he recognized Sir Kay in the moonlight, and three knights galloping toward him with drawn swords. The moment they got to the house, they dismounted and set upon Sir Kay, who turned about and drew his sword to defend himself. Sir Launcelot hastily armed, saying to himself, “If they kill Sir Kay I shall be a party to his death, for three against one is unjust.”

<sup>22</sup> Launcelot invites the ladies to divide the treasure among themselves as a way to make up for their mistreatment by the giants.





He let himself down from the window by means of his sheet, and then challenged the three attackers, whispering to Sir Kay to stand by while he dealt with them. Sir Kay did as he was advised, and then Sir Launcelot, with seven tremendous strikes, brought all three knights to their knees and begging for mercy.

“Your lives will be spared if you yield to Sir Kay,” said Sir Launcelot.

“Sir, it is surely you to whom we should yield, since we could easily have overcome Sir Kay.”

“If you wish to be spared, you *will* go as prisoners of Sir Kay, and yield to Queen Gwynevere.”

Each of the knights then swore on his sword to abide by the conditions of his surrender, and Sir Launcelot knocked once more at the door of the house.

“Why, I thought you were safely in bed,” said the landlady, recognizing Sir Launcelot as she opened the door.

“Madam, I was, but then I had to jump out of the window and rescue this comrade of mine.”

As they came into the light, Sir Kay recognized Sir Launcelot and thanking him humbly for *twice* saving his life.

“It was no more than I should have done, but come up to my chamber; you must be tired and hungry.”

When Sir Kay had eaten, each man rested on his own bed and they slept until dawn. Sir Launcelot woke first, and rising quietly, clad himself in Sir Kay’s armor, and then, mounting Sir Kay’s horse, rode away from the house.

When Sir Kay awoke, he was astonished to find that Sir Launcelot had exchanged armor with him,

but then he realized he had done it so that he should ride home unmolested, while Sir Lancelot encountered his opponents. And when Sir Kay had taken his leave of the landlady he rode back to Camelot without further incident.

For several days, Sir Launcelot rode through the forest, and then he came to a countryside of low meadows and broad streams. At the foot of a bridge he saw pavilions, and a knight standing at the entrance to each, with a white shield hanging above, and a spear thrust into the ground at once side. Sir Launcelot recognized the three knights, who were from Arthur’s court: Sir Gawtere, Sir Raynolde, and Sir Gylmere. However, he rode straight past them, looking neither to right nor to left, and without saluting them, which they immediately took as a disgrace.

“Why, there rides Sir Kay, the most overbearing<sup>23</sup> knight of all, in spite of his *many* defeats. I think I will challenge him and see if I cannot shake his pride a little,” said Sir Gawtere.

He then galloped up to Sir Launcelot and challenged him. They jousting, and Sir Gawtere was flung violently from the saddle.

“That is certainly *not* Sir Kay,” declared Sir Raynolde. “For one thing, he is very much bigger.”

“Probably it is some knight who has killed Sir Kay and is riding in his armor,” Sir Gylmere replied.

“Well, since he has clearly overcome our brother we shall have to challenge him. But I think it must be either Sir Launcelot, Sir Tristram, or Sir Pelleas; and we may not come well out of this.”

Sir Gylmere challenged Sir Launcelot next, and was also quickly overthrown. Then Sir Raynolde rode up to him.

“Sir, I would prefer not to challenge a knight so powerful as you, but since you have probably killed my brothers, I am obliged to; so defend yourself!”

They jousting; both broke their spears and they continued the combat with swords. Sir Gawtere and Sir Gylmere recovered, and attempted to rescue their brother, but Sir Launcelot saw them in time, and using more strength than hitherto, struck each

---

<sup>23</sup> An overbearing person is excessively proud and superior in attitude and behavior.

off his horse again. At this, Sir Raynolde, badly wounded as he was, and with blood streaming from his head, picked himself up and once more rushed at Sir Launcelot.

“Sir, I should let things be,” said Sir Launcelot. “I was not far away when you were knighted, and I know you to be worthy: therefore do not oblige me to kill you.”

“May God reward you!” Sir Raynolde replied. “But speaking both for myself and my brothers, I would prefer to know your name before yielding to you, because we know very well that you are not Sir Kay, whom any one of us could have overcome.”

“That is as may be; but I still require that you yield to Queen Gwynevere at the next Pentecost, and say that Sir Kay sent you.”

The three brothers took their oath, and Sir Launcelot left them. He had not ridden much further when, coming to a glade, he found four more knights of the Round Table: Sir Gawain, Sir Ector, Sir Uwayne, and Sir Sagramour le Desyrus.

“Look!” said Sir Sagramour. “There rides Sir Kay. I will challenge him.”

“Sir Sagramour first, then each of the other knights in turn, challenged Sir Launcelot, and each was flung from his horse. Sir Launcelot left them gasping on the ground and said to himself as he rode away: “Blessed be the maker of this spear; with it I have tumbled four knights off their horses!” Meanwhile, the four knights were picking themselves up and consoling each other.

“To the devil with him! He is indeed powerful,” said one.

“I believe that it must be Sir Launcelot,” said another.

“Anyhow, let him go now; we shall discover when we return to Camelot,” said a third, and so on...

Sir Launcelot returned to Camelot two days before the feast of Pentecost, and at the court was acclaimed<sup>24</sup> by many of the knights he had met on his adventures.

Sir Gawain, Sir Uwayne, Sir Ector, and Sir Sagramour all laughed when they saw him in Sir Kay’s armor, but without the helmet, and readily forgave his joke at their expense.

Sir Gaheris described to the court the terrible battle Sir Launcelot had fought with Sir Tarquine, and how sixty-four prisoners had been freed as a result of his victory.

Sir Kay related how Sir Launcelot had twice saved his life, and then exchanged armor with him, so that he should ride unchallenged.

Sir Gawtere, Sir Gylmere, and Sir Raynolde described how he had defeated them at the bridge, and forced them to yield as prisoners of Sir Kay; and they were overjoyed to discover that it had been Sir Launcelot nevertheless.

Sir Modred, Sir Mador, and Sir Gahalantyne described his tremendous feats in the battle against the King of North Galys; and Sir Launcelot himself described his enchantment by the four queens, and his rescue at the hands of the daughter of King Bagdemagus...

And thus it was, at this time, that Sir Launcelot became the most famous knight at King Arthur’s court.



<sup>24</sup> Greeted with loud, enthusiastic praise