Part III
Lancelot becomes a knight

Some of the chairs of the Round Table were still empty, and others became empty when their owners fell in battle. But there were always enough proud young men who wanted to become one of Arthur's knights. Of these, Lancelot of the Lake was the best.

He was called "of the Lake" because, as a child, he had lived in the magic Land of the Lake. Nimue, the Lady of the Lake, had looked after him. Now that Lancelot was a man, she took him to Camelot to King Arthur's great hall. "I bring you a new knight, Arthur. Before Merlin went under the ground, he told me I must lead Lancelot to you. Look – already his name is appearing in golden letters on that chair!"

The guests at the table were surprised and excited to see the new name and even more to see the young man, who was wonderful to look at. Queen Guinevere especially lost all the colour from her face as she watched the beautiful young man take his chair. When Lancelot saw Queen Guinevere he thought that she was the most wonderful woman in the world. At that moment they both knew that they loved each other. King Arthur gave Lancelot a warm welcome and, without any more questions, made him a Knight of the Round Table.

Now, this annoyed some of the older knights. "Who does he think he is?" Sir Kay angrily asked his neighbour. "He has fought no battles and he has had no adventures, he is no more than a boy, and already a knight! It's not right!" (In fact, Sir Kay himself was not exactly the best of the knights and he was jealous of Lancelot.) Sir Lancelot heard the trouble among the knights, and he knew he was as good as any of

them; he only had to show it. "I will leave King Arthur's court," he thought to himself, "and I will find adventures which will prove my courage to the world. … And perhaps they will help me forget Queen Guinevere."

The next year, all the adventures were his. But it would take too long to tell them all: How he healed an injured knight when he touched him with his hand; how he fought the wicked knight Sir Turquyn and so saved his brother Sir Hector from prison; or how four beautiful queens tried to win his love. The year was nearly over when Lancelot decided to return to Camelot for the feast.

On his way, he met a lady who was standing under a great tree and crying. "Oh, dear Lancelot," she cried, "you are the best knight in the land. Look up there, my husband's hawk is caught at the top of the tree. If I come home without it, he will do something terrible to me. You must help me!" Lancelot did not think twice but took off his armour and climbed the tree.

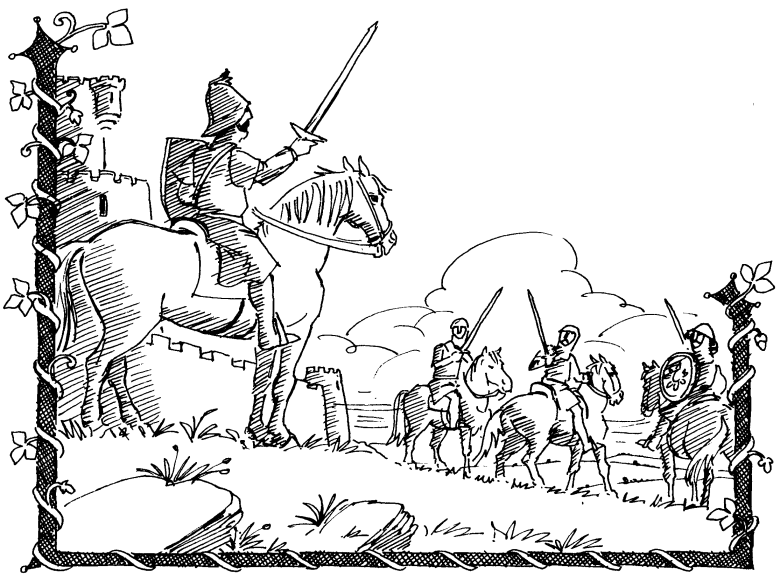
Half way up, he suddenly heard a man on the ground who was laughing loudly at him. "Ha, ha, ha, Sir Lancelot," laughed the false knight, "now I've got you without your armour and without your sword. This will be the end of you!" – "Sir Knight!" said Lancelot. "You know that isn't a fair battle. Let me go." But the knight only waited for him, with his sword ready in his hand.

Then Sir Lancelot suddenly thought of something. He broke a large piece of dead wood from the tree and jumped to the ground. "Now you can fight with me," he said. The false knight ran at Lancelot and tried to hit his unprotected body with his sword. But Lancelot was too quick for him. He threw his heavy piece of wood so hard against the knight's head that even his armour was no help to him. For a moment, the

knight let his sword fall. Lancelot quickly took it, and before the knight could remember where he was and throw his spear at him, Lancelot cut off his head.

"My husband – he's dead! You wicked, wicked knight, Lancelot!" cried the lady. "It was him or me," said Sir Lancelot. "You both wanted me dead, didn't you?" and he rode away.

That night, Lancelot was just going to bed in a castle near Camelot when he heard loud shouts. He looked out of the window and saw Sir Kay on one side of a field and three knights on the other. "Oh no!" thought Lancelot. "He's in bad trouble!" And he quickly put his armour on again and rode to the field of battle. "Turn around!" he called, and at once the three knights lifted their swords against him, and the battle started. But in the end, only Lancelot was still on his horse, while the three knights were glad they still had their lives. Lancelot looked at the frightened Sir Kay, smiled and said, "Listen, you three knights: Go to Camelot Castle



and give yourselves up to King Arthur, and tell him this: 'Sir Kay sent us'." The knights did not want to do so, for Kay was no fighter, but they remembered Lancelot's strict words and went.

Sir Kay thanked Sir Lancelot and both spent the night in the castle. In the morning, Lancelot saw that the other knight was still sleeping, and he had an idea. "What a good joke it would be to wear Sir Kay's armour and to ride into Camelot as Sir Kay. Then nobody will recognize me or him. Let's see what will happen!"

He rode away, and Sir Kay of course had to put on Lancelot's armour. Kay did not mind; in fact he really enjoyed riding into Camelot like that. No other knight stopped him or annoyed him. It was the first time that he arrived home without any trouble.

But Lancelot had his fun, too. Lots of knights shouted, "Look, here comes proud Sir Kay! Let's see if he is as good as he always says he is!" And they rode against the knight, ready for a nice, easy fight. They were very surprised when he knocked them off their horses, and they lay on the ground, their legs in the air, and asked themselves what had happened.

Next day, the Knights of the Round Table came together again, and Sir Kay told the story of how he had ridden home in peace while Lancelot had played a joke on so many knights who came to fight with him. Then everybody laughed, King Arthur most of all. Sir Hector told how Lancelot had rescued him and some other Knights of the Round Table from prison. And still there was more talk of this young knight's dangerous and successful adventures.

This time, Sir Lancelot had the greatest name of all the knights, and nobody talked any more about a boy who had become a knight for nothing.

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