

## Mixed Fealties<sup>1</sup>

By Thomas Malory

One day when Arthur and many of his knights had ridden into a great forest to hunt, it chanced that King Arthur, King Uriens, and Sir Accolon of Gaul, followed a great hart, and chased it so fast that within a while they were ten miles from the company. At last the horses underneath them died from their mad chase and they were forced to travel on foot, and still they saw the hunted animal before them panting and very weary.

“What will we do?” said King Arthur. “We are in bad straits.”

“Let us go on foot,” said King Uriens, “till we come to some place to rest.”

Then they discovered the hart lying on a great river bank and saw that one of the hounds in the chase was biting on its neck, and watched as more hounds arrived on the bank. King Arthur declared the capture and dressed the game. Then, looking about in the wood, the king suddenly saw a little ship before him in a lake, all decorated with silk down to the water, and the ship came right to them and landed on the sands. Arthur went to the bank and looked in, but saw nothing inside. “Sirs,” said the king, “let us go and see what is in this ship.”

The three of them went in, and found it richly draped with silk cloth. By then it was dark night, and suddenly there were a hundred torches about them set upon all the sides of the ship boards, and it gave a bright light. Meanwhile, twelve fair ladies came out and greeted King Arthur on their knees, and called him by his name. They said that he was very welcome, and said that such food and drink as they had, he should have of the best. The king thanked them heartily.

They then led the king and his two fellows into a handsome chamber, and there was a cloth laid, richly furnished with all that was fit for a table. There they were served all wines and meats imaginable. The king marveled, for he had never fared better in his life at a feast.

When they had dined at their leisure, King Arthur was led into a chamber. Never had he seen one more richly furnished. King Uriens was also served, and led into another such chamber, and likewise Sir Accolon into a third chamber, also very richly furnished. All three, then, lay comfortably in their beds and fell asleep instantly, and slept very heavily the entire night.

On the morrow King Uriens was in Camelot in bed. And when he awoke, he wondered how he had arrived there, for on the evening before, he was two days' journey from Camelot. And when King Arthur awoke he found himself in a dark prison, listening to the many plaintive sounds of the knights around him.

“Who are you that complain so?” said King Arthur.

“We twenty knights are prisoners,” said they, “and some of us have lain here seven years, and some more and some less.”

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<sup>1</sup> from Thomas Malory's *Death of Arthur*; adapted by William Walter

“How did this come to pass?” asked Arthur.

“We shall tell you,” said the knights. “The lord of this castle, his name is Sir Damas. He is the most deceitful knight that lives, a treasonous man, and as cowardly as any that breathe. He has a younger brother, a good, skillful knight. His name is Sir Ontzlake. This traitor Damas will give his younger brother no part of his property except that which Sir Ontzlake looks after himself. And so the miscreant keeps from him a rich and sizeable manor. Sir Ontzlake dwells on these lands respectably, and is well beloved of all people, but Sir Damas, our master, is hated, for he is merciless and cowardly.

“Though there has been great war between them both, Ontzlake is the better man. He continually challenges Sir Damas to fight for the lands, body for body, but he will not accept. He also has given him the option of finding a knight to fight for him. Sir Damas has agreed to this, but he is so hated, that no knight will fight for him.

“When Damas saw this—that no knight would fight for him—he decided to lie in wait, ready to ambush the knights of the country that pass by on their adventures. Accompanied by his many henchmen, he takes the knights by force and brings them to his prison. And that is how he has taken us all as we rode on our adventures. Many good knights, as many as eighteen, have died of hunger in this prison. If any of us had agreed to fight with his brother Ontzlake, he would have freed us. But because this Damas is so deceitful and treasonous, we refuse to fight and die for him. We are lean from hunger and can hardly stand on our feet.”

“May you be mercifully delivered from this,” said Arthur.

Meanwhile there came a lady to Arthur, who asked him, “How are you?”

“I cannot say,” said he.

“Sir,” said she, “if you will fight for my lord, you shall be delivered out of prison. Otherwise you will never escape.”

“That is a hard choice,” said Arthur, “yet I had rather fight with a knight than die in prison. If I may be delivered and all these prisoners, I will do the battle.”

“Agreed,” said the lady.

“I am ready,” said Arthur, “if I am provided with armor and a horse.”

“You shall have both,” said the lady.

“It seems to me, lady, that I have seen you before in the court of Arthur.”

“No,” said the lady, “I have never been there. I am the lord’s daughter of this castle.” She was lying, though, for she was one of the ladies of Morgan le Fay.

She then went to Sir Damas, and when she had told him that Arthur would do battle for him, he sent for him. And when he came, he saw that Arthur was well-built and fit, and that all knights that saw him said it was pity that such a knight should die in prison. Sir Damas and Arthur then agreed that he would fight for him upon condition that all the other knights would be delivered. Sir

Damas swore to this, and Arthur, too, swore to fight to the last in the contest. Accordingly, all of the twenty knights were brought out of the dark prison into the hall, and released to watch the battle.



Now we turn to Accolon of Gaul. When he awoke he found himself by a deep well side, within half a foot, in great danger of dying. Out of that fountain came a pipe of silver, and out of the pipe sprang up water on a stone of marble. When Sir Accolon saw this, he blessed himself and said, "May my lord King Arthur and King Uriens be saved from their peril! Those ladies in the ship have betrayed us. They were devils and not women. If I escape this misfortune, I will destroy every lying lady that I find who uses enchantments."

Meanwhile a dwarf with a big mouth and a flat nose came and saluted Sir Accolon. He said that he had come from Queen Morgan le Fay. "She gives her warm greetings, and bids you to be brave, for tomorrow you shall fight with a knight at the first hour of the day. She has therefore sent you Excalibur, Arthur's sword, and the scabbard, and she bids you, as you love her, that you do your best in battle. Show no mercy, as you had promised her when you spoke together privately. The lady who brings her the head of the knight with whom you shall fight, she will make a queen."

"I shall keep what I have promised her now I have the sword," said Accolon. "When did you see my lady Queen Morgan le Fay?"

"Just recently," said the dwarf.

Then Accolon took him in his arms and said, "Commend me to my lady queen, and tell her all shall be done that I have promised her, or else I will die for it. Now I suppose," said Accolon, "she has made all these crafts and enchantments for this battle."

"You may well believe it," said the dwarf. Meanwhile there came a knight and a lady with six squires, who saluted Accolon, and asked him to arise, and come and rest him at his manor. Accolon then mounted a horse, and went with the knight to a fair manor by a priory, and there he was treated very hospitably.

Then Sir Damas sent a message to his brother Sir Ontzlake, bidding him to make himself ready by the next morning at the first hour of day, and to be in the field to fight with a good knight, for he had found one that was ready and in every way fit for the contest.

But when Sir Ontzlake received the news, he was very sad, as he had been wounded in both his thighs with a spear, and he mourned greatly, for he would have gone to battle except for this injury.

Thus it happened at that time, by the means of Morgan le Fay, Accolon was lodging with Sir Ontzlake. When he heard of the contest, and that Ontzlake was wounded, he said that he would fight for him. (The reason he agreed to the

contest was that Morgan le Fay had sent him Excalibur and the sheath to fight with the knight in the morning.)

Sir Ontzlake was very glad to hear of this, and heartily thanked Sir Accolon that he would do so much for him. Thereupon Sir Ontzlake sent word to his brother Sir Damas, that he had a knight that would be ready to fight in the field by the first hour of the day.

On the morning of the battle Sir Arthur was armed and provided with a good horse. A squire then came on a great horse, and asked Sir Damas if his knight were ready, for their knight was ready in the field. All the knights and commons of that country came to watch and twelve good men of the country were chosen to wait on the two knights.

Sir Arthur mounted his horse, and as soon as he did, there came a lady from Morgan le Fay, and brought to Sir Arthur a sword like Excalibur, and the scabbard, and said to Arthur, "In her great love for you, Morgan le Fay sends you this sword."

Supposing that she had told the truth, he thanked her, but indeed she had lied, as the sword and the scabbard were counterfeit, and brittle, and unfit for battle.

Then they dressed Arthur and Accolon on opposite sides of the field, and the two charged their horses so fast that when either **smote** the other in the middle of the shield with their spearheads, both horse and man fell down on the ground. Then both started up and pulled out their swords.

While they were thus engaged in battle, the Lady of the Lake entered the field, the one who had put Merlin under the stone. Her love of King Arthur had drawn her there that morning to save his life, for she knew how Morgan le Fay had so arranged it that King Arthur would be slain that day.

The two men fought furiously in the battle, and gave each other many strong blows with their swords. Arthur's sword failed him, but almost every stroke that Accolon gave Arthur wounded him greatly. Blood poured from him and it was a wonder that he remained standing.

When Arthur beheld the ground covered with his own blood, he became dismayed, and it was then that he suspected that his sword had been treacherously changed, for the sword did not cut steel as it had before. Arthur prepared to die, for he believed that the sword in Accolon's hand was Excalibur, as its every stroke drew blood from him.

"Now, knight," said Accolon to Arthur, "keep yourself well from me." Arthur made no reply, but gave him such a blow on his helmet that it made him stoop, nearly falling down to the earth.

Sir Accolon withdrew himself a little, and with Excalibur in hand, gave Sir Arthur such a blow, that he almost fell to the earth. Then they were both wroth, and gave each other many heavy strokes, and although Arthur continued to lose much blood, he was valiant, and like a true knight, withstood the pain.

Sir Accolon did not lose a great deal of blood, and therefore he grew in courage while Sir Arthur grew feeble and was near death. But despite that, he made it appear as though he could endure, and held off Accolon as much as he could. But Accolon grew very brave because of Excalibur. All men that beheld Arthur said that they never saw a knight fight so well as he did, considering the blood that was let. All the people were sorry for him, but neither of the two brethren would yield or declare a truce.

Then as the fierce knights continued the contest, Sir Arthur withdrew himself a little to rest, but Sir Accolon called Arthur to the contest and said, "The contest has not ended," and he began to assail him violently. But made wroth by the blood he had lost, Sir Arthur raised his sword and came down upon Accolon's helmet so mightily that he made him nearly fall to the earth. With the terrible blow, Arthur's sword broke at the hilt, and the blade fell in the grass spattered with his own blood, but he still held the handle in his hands. When Sir Arthur saw what had happened, he feared that he would die, but he continued to hold up his shield and lost no ground or courage.

Then Sir Accolon began with words of treason, and said, "Knight, you are defeated, and it's hopeless for you to continue. You are weaponless, and have lost much blood, and I am loath to slay you; so yield to me as the weaker.

"No," said Sir Arthur, "I cannot do so, for I have promised to fight to the last bit of my strength, while I still breathe, and therefore I had rather die with honour than to live with shame. If it were possible for me to die a hundred times, I had rather die as often than yield myself to you; for though I lack weapon, I shall not lack honor, and if you slay me weaponless that shall be your shame.

"Well, as for the shame," said Accolon, "I will not refrain from the battle. Now keep yourself from me, for you are but a dead man."

And with that, Accolon gave him such a heavy blow that he almost fell down. He told Arthur to beg for mercy, but he held on to his shield against Accolon, and with the handle in his hand gave him such a blow that he went three strides back.

The Lady of the Lake watched on as Arthur skillfully fought with his shield and bladeless sword. And when she considered how it was treasonously connived for him to be slain she felt sorry that such a good knight and such an honorable man should be destroyed this way.

Then Sir Accolon struck him such a blow that by the lady's enchantment the sword Excalibur fell out of his hand and onto the ground. Sir Arthur lightly leapt to it, and took it, and when he held it in his hands, he knew that it was his sword Excalibur, and said to it, "You have been from me all too long, and have greatly injured me."

"O knight," said Arthur, "you have wounded me greatly with this sword today, but now have you come to your death, for I will not spare your life. You

shall be rewarded with this sword before we depart, as you have rewarded me. You caused me much pain, and made me lose much blood.”

Sir Arthur then rushed on him with all his might and pulled him to the earth, and then rushed off his helmet, and gave him such a blow on the head that the blood came out at his ears, his nose, and his mouth.

“Now will I slay you,” said Arthur.

“You may well slay me,” said Accolon, “if it pleases you, for you are the best knight that I have ever encountered, and I clearly see that you are well favored. But because I have promised to do my best in this contest,” continued the knight, “and fight to the last, I will not yield.”

Then Sir Arthur recognized the knight bleeding before him, and said, “Now answer me this or I will slay you: what country are you from, and what court?”

“Sir Knight,” said Sir Accolon, “I am of the court of King Arthur, and my name is Accolon of Gaul.”

Then was Arthur more dismayed than he was beforehand; for then he remembered his sister Morgan le Fay, and of the enchantment of the ship.

“O sir knight,” said he, “tell me who gave you this sword and how you got it.”

Then Sir Accolon cursed the sword, for, he said, “by it have I got my death.”

“It may well be that you die,” said the king.

“Now, sir,” said Accolon, “I will tell you. This sword has been in my keeping most of the year. Morgan le Fay sent it to me yesterday by a dwarf, with this purpose, that I should slay King Arthur, her brother. For King Arthur, you should know, is the man that she hates most in the world, because he is the most honorable and skillful of any of her kin. She planned to make me king in this land, and reign in his stead, with herself as my queen. But that now cannot be,” said Accolon, “for I am sure of my death.”

“It would have been a great injury to have destroyed your lord,” said Arthur.

“That is true,” said Accolon. “But now that I have told you the truth about me, I ask you to tell me who you are. Where do you come from, and of what court?”

“O Accolon,” said King Arthur, “I am King Arthur. It is against your king that you have done this great injury.”

When Accolon heard that, he cried aloud, “Fair, sweet lord, have mercy on me, for I did not know it was you.”

“O Sir Accolon,” said King Arthur, “you shall have mercy, because by what you have said, I believe that you did not know who I was. But you have told me yourself that you agreed to the death of my person, and therefore you are a traitor. But I blame you the less, for by her sly deceptions my sister Morgan le Fay made you consent to her ambition. But I will avenge her treachery, if I live,

that all Christendom shall speak of it. I have honored and revered her more than all my kin, and I have trusted her more than my own wife and all my kin after.”

Then Sir Arthur called the keepers of the field, and said, “Sirs, come here, for here are two knights that have fought to the great harm of us both, and would have slain each other, if it had chanced so. But had we known each other, there would have been neither battle nor blows.”

Accolon cried aloud to all the knights and men that were gathered: “O lords, this noble knight that I have fought, which I mourn that I ever did, is the greatest man of skill, courage, and honor in the world, for it is King Arthur himself, liege lord of us all. Great misfortune has fallen upon me that I have agreed to this contest with the king whom I serve as my lord.”

Then all the people fell down on their knees and cried, “King Arthur, mercy.”

“Mercy you shall have,” said Arthur. “By this may you see what adventures often befall errant knights: I have fought with my own knight to both my great injury and his.

“But, sirs, because I am badly hurt, and he too, and I need rest, let me tell you my decision concerning you two brethren: As for you, Sir Damas, you will be punished. Though I have fought and won the field for you, you are an arrogant, villainous knight. Therefore, it is my will that you give to your brother the whole manor. Sir Ontzlake will hold the manor for you, and every year provide a lady’s horse for you to ride on, for that will fit you better to ride on than on a warhorse.

“Also I order you, Sir Damas, upon pain of death, that you never molest any errant knights that ride on their adventure. And also that you restore all the armor of these twenty knights that you have long kept prisoners. And if any of them come to my court and complain of you, by my head you shall die.

“As for you, Sir Ontzlake, because you are a good knight, skillful, true and gentle in all your deeds, this is my will concerning you. Quickly come to me and my court, and you shall be my knight. And if you prove yourself in gallant deeds, you shall live honorably.”

“I thank you,” said Sir Ontzlake, “for your generosity and goodness. I am now forever at your service. I would have done this battle with you, but I had been injured by an adventurous knight.”

Arthur said, “If you had fought with me, I would not have been injured as I have been. It was with my own sword, stolen by treason and given to Accolon, that gave me my wounds. The contest had been arranged beforehand to have me slain, and so it was brought to the purpose by treason, deceit and enchantment.”

“Alas!” said Sir Ontzlake, “What a great pity it is that any man or woman could find in their hearts to work treason against such a noble man as you are in your deeds and skill.”

“I shall reward them in short time,” said Arthur. “Now, tell me, how far am I from Camelot?”

“Sir, you are two days’ journey.”

“I wish to be at some place of worship,” said Sir Arthur, “that I might get rest.”

“Sir,” said Sir Ontzlake, “Nearby, three miles away, there is a rich abbey of nuns.”

So the king took his leave of all the people, mounted his horse, and Sir Accolon with him. And when they came to the abbey, they were cared for with leaches. Sir Accolon, however, died from his many wounds, but King Arthur recovered.

Arthur had the body of Accolon sent on a horse bier with six knights to Camelot. He said to the carriers, “Bear him to my sister Morgan le Fay, and say that I send him to her as a present, and tell her I have my sword Excalibur and the scabbard.” So they departed with the body.

## Gareth and Lynette<sup>2</sup>

By Alfred Tennyson

Old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent had three sons. Gawain and Modred were Knights of the Round Table at Arthur's court, and young Gareth, who was the youngest and tallest of the three, sighed to think he had to stay home and be fondled like a baby boy instead of riding off like a venturesome knight fighting gloriously for the king and winning a great name.

"There!" he cried, one chilly spring day as he stood by a waterfall and saw a bit of a pine tree caught from the bank and whirled madly away. "That's the way the king's enemies would fall before my spear—if I had a spear to use! And you are just a senseless waterfall doing the Maker's will. Your veins are swollen with cold snows, while through mine courses living blood. I have strength and wit to do great deeds, but am imprisoned in my good mother's hall. Why, when Gawain came home last summer and asked me to tilt with him and Modred was the judge, didn't I shake him so in his saddle that he said I had half overcome him?"

Gareth went home to his mother and hovered around her chair for some time; then, finally he asked, "Mother, you still think that I am a child, but do you love this child?"

She laughed and said, "You are a wild goose to doubt it."

"Then, mother, if you love the child," he said, "hear the child's story."

"Yes, my dear child, even if it were only a story of the goose that laid the golden eggs."

Gareth's eyes kindled and he answered, "No, no, good mother. This egg of mine was finer gold than any goose can lay. This Eagle—a royal Eagle—laid it almost beyond eye-reach on a tree. And there was a poor young man who always went near the tree and saw the splendor sparkling from the height, and thought, 'If I could climb and lay my hand on it, I would be wealthier than a leash of kings.' But every time he reached a hand to climb, his mother caught and stopped him, saying, "Don't climb the tree! You'll break your neck. By my love, I command you not to climb it." And so the boy, sweet mother, did not climb, nor did he break his neck, but broke his very heart in pining for it, and passed away."

Gareth's mother then said, "True love, sweet son, would have risked himself and climbed, and handed down the golden treasure to him."

And Gareth's eyes kindled again, and he said excitedly, "Gold? Did I say gold? No, it was made of that true steel that they forged the brand Excalibur out of. And lightnings played about it in the storm, and all the little birds were

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<sup>2</sup> "Gareth and Lynette" is a prose rendition of Alfred Tennyson's poem found in *Tales from Tennyson* by Molly K. Bellow (1902). The original poem by the same name is contained in *Idylls of the King*. This rendition was revised and edited by William Walter.

flurried at it, and there were cries and clashings in the nest that sent him from his senses. Mother, please let me go.”

Bellicent sighed and said, “Take pity on my loneliness, my child. Look at your father Lot. He lies beside the hearth like a log, and all but smoldered out! Ever since he fought against the king in the barons’ war, and Arthur gave him back his territory, he’s grown suddenly old, and now lies there like a still-warm corpse, and yet unburiable. And both your brothers are in Arthur’s hall. And you’ve never known what it is to feel the pain of a broken limb. I can’t bear to think of what will happen to you in those brain-stunning shocks and falls at the tourney.<sup>3</sup> Stay, I say. Follow the deer by these tall firs, and so become more a man day by day. I’ll look for a pretty bride for you to grace your climbing life and cherish my declining years, until I fall into your father’s forgetfulness when I won’t know you, myself, or anything. Stay, my best son! You are still more a boy than a man.”

Then Gareth said, ‘If you consider me still a child, mother, hear once more the story of the child. There was once a King, like ours. The prince his heir, when tall and marriageable, asked for a bride. And so the King set two before him. One was beautiful, strong, armed—but had to be won by force—and many men desired her. But the other, unfortunately, no man desired. And these were the conditions of the King. Unless the prince won the first by force, he would have to wed the other that no one wanted. Yes, some she cleaved to, but they died of her. And one—they called her Fame. And the other—O Mother, how can ye keep me tethered to you—Shame. I have become a man, and a man’s work must I do. Follow the deer? No. I will follow the Christ, the King. I will live pure, speak true, right wrong, and follow the King. Why else was I born?’

“But some of the barons say he isn’t the true king.”

“Hasn’t he conquered the Romans and driven off the heathen and made all the people free? Who has a right to be king if not the man who has done that? He is the true king.”

When Bellicent found that she could not turn Gareth from his purpose, she said that if he was determined, he must do one thing before he asked the king to make him a knight.

“Anything,” cried Gareth. “Give me a hundred proofs. Only be quick.”

The queen looked at him very slowly and said, “You are a prince, Gareth, but before you are fit to serve the king you must go into Arthur’s court disguised and hire yourself to serve his meats and drink among the kitchen servants. And you must not tell your name to anyone and you must serve that way for a year and a day.”

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<sup>3</sup> *tourney* competition involving jousting in which men on horseback attempt to dismount their opponents using long spears, called lances. *Tourney* is related to the word *tournament*.

—The queen made this condition, thinking that Gareth would be too proud to act the servant. But he thought a moment, and said, “A slave may be free in his soul, and I can see the jousts there. You are my mother so I must obey you and I will be a servant in King Arthur’s kitchen and keep my name a secret from everyone, even the king.”

So Bellicent grieved and watched Gareth every moment wherever he went, dreading the time when he would leave. And he waited until one windy night when she slept, then called two servants and slipped away with them, all three dressed like poor peasants of the field.

They walked away towards the south and as they came to the plain stretching to the mountain of Camelot, they saw the royal city upon its brow. Sometimes its spires and towers flashed in the sunlight; sometimes only the great gate shone out before their eyes, or again the whole fair town vanished away. Then the servants said, “Let us go no further. It’s an enchanted city, and all a vision. The people say anyway, that Arthur isn’t the true king, but only a changeling from fairyland, and that Merlin won his battles for him with magic.”

Gareth laughed and replied that he had magic enough in his blood and hopes to plunge old Merlin into the Arabian sea. And he pushed them on to the gate. There was no other gate like it under heaven. The Lady of the Lake stood barefooted on the keystone and held up the cornice. Drops of water fell from either hand and above were the three queens who were Arthur’s friends, and on each side Arthur’s wars were pictured in weird figures with dragons and elves so intertwined that they made men dizzy to look at them. The servants cried out, “Lord, the gateway is alive!” Then a blast of music pealed out of the city, and the three queens stepped aside while an old man with a long beard came out and asked, “Who are you, my sons?”

“We are peasants,” Gareth answered, “who have come to see the glories of your king, but the city looked so strange through the morning mist that my men are wondering whether it is not a fairy city or perhaps no city at all. So tell us the truth about it.”

“Oh, it’s a fairy city,” the old man answered, “and a fairy king and queen came out of the mountain cleft at sunrise with harps in their hands and built it to music, which means it never was built at all, and therefore built forever.”

“Why do you mock me so?” Gareth cried angrily.

“I am not mocking you so much as you are mocking me and everyone who looks at you. Though you are not what you seem, I know who you are.”

Then the old man turned away and Gareth said to his men, “Our poor little white lie stands like a ghost at the very beginning of our enterprise. Blame my mother’s love for it and not her nor me.”

So they all laughed and came into the city of Camelot with its shadowy and stately palaces. Here and there a knight passed in or out, his arms clashing and the sound was good to Gareth’s ears. Or out of a casement window glanced the

~~pure eyes of lovely women. But Gareth made at once for the hall of the king~~ where his heart fairly hammered into his ears as he wondered whether Arthur would turn him aside because of the half shadow of a lie he had told the old man by the gate about being a peasant. There were many suitors coming before the king to tell him of some hurt done to them by marauders or the wild beasts, and each one was given a knight by the king to help them.

When Gareth's turn came, he rested his arms, one on each servant, and stepped forward saying, "A boon, Sir King! Do you see how weak and hungry I seem, leaning on these men? Let me go into your kitchen and serve there for a year and a day, and do not ask me my name. After that I will fight for you."

"You are a handsome youth," said the king, "and worth something better from the king, but if that is what you wish, go and serve under the seneschal,<sup>4</sup> Sir Kay, Master of the Meats and Drinks."

Sir Kay thought the boy had probably run away from the farm belonging to some Abbey where he had not had enough to eat, and he promised that if Gareth would work well he would feed him until he was as plump as a pigeon.

But Lancelot, the king's favorite, said to Kay, "You don't understand boys as well as dogs and cattle. Can't you see by this lad's broad fair forehead and fine hands that he is nobly born? Treat him well or he may shame you."

"Fair and fine—really!" cried Kay. "If he had been a gentleman he would have asked for a horse and armor."

So he hustled and harried Garreth, set him to draw water, hew wood and labor harder than any of the grimy and smudgy kitchen servants. Gareth did all with a noble sort of ease and graced the lowliest act, and when the servants all gathered together in the evenings to tell stories about Arthur on the battlefields or of Lancelot in the tournament, Gareth listened delightedly or made them all, with gaping mouths, listen charmed, to some big tale of his own about wonderful knights cutting their scarlet way through twenty folds of twisted dragons. When there was a joust and Sir Kay let him attend it, he went half beside himself in an ecstasy watching the warriors clash their springing spears, and the sniffing chargers<sup>5</sup> reel.

At the end of the first month, lonely Queen Bellicent felt sorry for her poor, dear son, toiling and moiling<sup>6</sup> among pots and pans, so she sent a servant to Camelot with the beaming armor of a knight and freed him from his vow. Gareth colored redder than any young girl and went alone to the king and told him all.

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<sup>4</sup> *seneschal* chief steward or household servant

<sup>5</sup> *chargers* battle horses

<sup>6</sup> *moiling* working hard. When put together, the words *toiling* (also meaning working hard) and *moiling* form a *hendiadys*, which literally means "one through two." In this instance of hendiadys, two words meaning the same thing are used together when just one is needed.

—“Make me your knight in secret,” he begged Arthur, “and give me the very next quest from your court!”

“Son,” answered the king, “my knights are sworn to vows of utter hardihood, of utter gentleness, of utter faithfulness in love and of utter obedience to the king.”

Gareth sprang lightly from his knees, “My king, I can vouch for my hardihood. As far as my obedience, ask Sir Kay. And as for love, I have not loved yet, but God willing some day I will, and faithfully.”

The reply so pleased the great king, he laid his hand on Gareth’s arm and smiled and knighted him.

A few days later a noble maiden with a brow like a May-blossom and a saucy nose passed into the king’s hall with her page and told Arthur that her name was Lynette, and that her beautiful sister, the Lady Lyonors lived in the Castle Perilous which was beset with bandit knights.

“A river runs about the castle in three loops,” she said. “Each loop has a bridge and every bridge is guarded by a wicked outlaw warrior, Sir Morning Star, Sir Noon-sun and Sir Evening Star, while a fourth called Death, a huge man-beast of boundless savageries, is besieging my sister in her own castle so as to break her will and make her wed with him. They are four fools,” the maiden cried disdainfully, “but they are mighty men, so I have come to ask for Lancelot to ride away with me to help us.”

Gareth was up in a twinkling with kindled eyes. “A boon, Sir King, this quest,” he cried. “I am only a servant from your kitchen, but I can topple over a hundred such fellows. Your promise, king.”

“You are rough and sudden and worthy to be a knight. Therefore go,” said Arthur to the great amazement of the court.

“Fie on you, King!” exclaimed Lynette in a fury. “I asked you for your best knight, Lancelot, and you give me a servant from your kitchen,” and she scampered down the aisle, leaped to her horse and flitted out of the weird white gate. “A kitchen servant!” she sputtered as she flew. “Why didn’t the king send me a knight that fights for love and glory?”

Gareth in the meantime had strode to the side doorway of the royal hall where he saw a warhorse awaiting him, the gift of Arthur and worth half the price of a town. His two servants stood by with his shield and helmet and spear. Dropping his coarse kitchen cloak to the floor, he instantly harnessed himself in his armor, leaped to the back of his beautiful steed and flashed out of the gateway while all his kitchen mates threw up their caps and cried, “God bless the king and all his fellowship!”

“Maiden, the quest is mine,” he said to Lynette as he overtook her, “Lead and I follow.”

“Away with you!” she cried, nipping her slender nose. “You smell of kitchen grease. See there, your master is coming!”

—Indeed she told the truth, for Sir Kay, infuriated with Gareth's boldness in the king's hall was hounding after them. "Don't you know me?" he shouted.

"Yes, too well," returned Gareth. "I know you to be the most ungentle<sup>7</sup> knight in Arthur's court."

"Have at me, then," cried Kay. Gareth pounced on him with his gleaming lance and struck him instantly to the earth, then turned for Lynette and said again, "Lead and I follow."

But Lynette had hurried her galloping palfrey<sup>8</sup> away and would not stop the beast until his heart had nearly burst with its violent throbbing. Then she turned and eyed Gareth as scornfully as ever. As he pranced to her side she observed, "Do you suppose, servant, that I think any more of you now that by some good luck you have overthrown your master. You dishwasher and water carrier, you smell of the kitchen quite as much as before."

"Maiden," Gareth rejoined gently, "Say what you will, but whatever you say, I will not leave this quest until it is ended or I have died for it."

"O, my, how the servant talks! But you'll soon meet with another servant whom in spite of all the kitchen concoctions ever brewed, you'll not dare look in the face."

"I'll try him," answered Gareth with a smile that maddened Lynette. And away she darted again far into the strange avenues of the limitless woods.

Gareth plunged on through the pine trees after her and a serving man came breaking through the black forest crying out, "They've bound my master and are throwing him into the lake!"

"Lead and I follow," Gareth cried to Lynette, and she led, plunging into the pine trees until they came upon a hollow sinking away into a lake, where six tall men up to their thighs in reeds and bulrushes<sup>9</sup> were dragging a seventh man with a stone about his neck toward the water to drown him.

Gareth sprang upon three and stilled them with his doughty blows, but three scurried away through the trees. Then, Gareth loosened the stone from the gentleman and set him on his feet. He proved to be a baron and a friend of Arthur and asked Gareth what he could do to show his gratitude for the saving of his life. Gareth said he would like a night's shelter for the lady who was with him. So they rode over toward the graceful manor house where the baron lived, and as they rode he said to Gareth, "I believe you are of the Table," meaning that Gareth was a Knight of the Round Table.

"Yes, he is of the table after his own fashion," Lynette laughed, "for he serves in Arthur's kitchen." And turning toward Gareth she added, "Do not imagine that I admire you the more for having routed these miserable cowardly foresters. Any thresher with his flail could have done that."

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<sup>7</sup> *ungentle* not noble, or not genteel

<sup>8</sup> *palfrey* smaller horse on which women often rode in the Middle Ages

<sup>9</sup> *reeds and bulrushes* plants that grow submerged by water

—And when they were seated at the baron's table, Gareth by Lynette's side, she cried out to their host, "It seems dreadfully rude in you, Lord Baron, to place this servant beside me. Listen to me. I went to King Arthur's court to ask for Sir Lancelot to come to help my sister, and as I ended my plea, up bawls this kitchen boy, 'Mine's the quest.' And Arthur goes mad and sends me this fellow who was made to kill pigs and not redress the wrongs of women."

So Gareth was seated at another table and the baron came to him and asked him whether it might not be better for him to relinquish his quest, but the lad replied that the king had given it to him and he would carry it through. The next morning he said again to proud Lynette, "Lead and I follow."

But the maiden responded, "We are almost at the place where one of the servants is stationed. Don't you want to go home? He will slay you and then I'll go back to Arthur and shame him for giving me a knight from his kitchen cinders."

"Just let me fight," cried Gareth, "and I'll have as good luck as little Cinderella who married the prince."

So they came to the first coil of the river and on the other side saw a rich white pavilion with a purple dome and a slender crimson flag fluttering above. The lawless Sir Morning Star paced up and down outside.

"Damsel, is this the knight you've brought me?" he shouted.

"Not a knight, but a servant. The king scorned you, so he sent someone from his kitchen."

"Come, Daughters of the Dawn, and arm me!" cried Sir Morning Star, and three bare-footed, bare-headed maidens in pink and gold dresses brought him a blue coat of mail and a blue shield.

"A kitchen servant in scorn of me!" roared the blue knight. "I won't fight him. Go home, servant! It isn't proper for you to be riding abroad with a lady."

"Dog, you lie! I'm sprung from nobler lineage than you," and saying this, Gareth sprang fiercely at his adversary who met him in the middle of the bridge. The two spears were hurled so harshly that both knights were thrown from their horses like two stones but up they leaped instantly. Gareth drew forth his sword and drove his enemy back down the bridge and laid him at his feet.

"I yield," Sir Morning Star cried, "don't kill me."

"Your life is in the hands of this lady," Gareth replied. "If she asks me to spare you, I will."

"Servant!" Lynette cried, reddening with shame. "Do you suppose I will ask a favor of you?"

"Then he dies," and Gareth was about to slay the wounded knight when Lynette screamed and told him he ought not to think of killing a man of nobler birth than himself. So Gareth said, "Knight, your life is spared at this lady's command. Go to King Arthur's court and tell him that his kitchen servant sent you, and crave his pardon for breaking his laws."

—“I thought the smells of the odors of the kitchen grew fainter while you were fighting on the bridge,” Lynette remarked to Gareth as he took his place behind her and told her to lead, “but now they are as strong as ever.”

So they rode on until they arrived at the second loop of the river where the knight of the Noonday-Sun flared with his burning shield that blazed so violently that Gareth saw scarlet blots before his eyes as he turned away from it.

“Here’s a kitchen servant from Arthur’s hall who has overthrown your brother,” Lynette called across the river to him.

“Ugh!” returned Sir Noonday Sun, raising his visor to reveal his round foolish face like a cipher,<sup>10</sup> and with that he pushed his horse into the foaming stream.

Gareth met him midway and struck him four blows of his sword. As he was about to deal the fifth stroke, the horse of the Noonday Sun slipped and the stream washed his dazzling master away. Gareth plucked him out of the water and sent him back to King Arthur.

“Lead and I follow,” he said to Lynette.

“Do not fancy,<sup>11</sup>” she rejoined, as she guided him toward the third passing of the river, “that I thought you bold or brave when you overcame Sir Noonday Sun. He just slipped on the river bed. Here we are at the third fool in the allegory, Sir Evening Star. You see he looks naked, but he is only wrapped in hardened skins that fit him like his own. They will turn the blade of your sword.”

“Never mind,” Gareth said, “the wind may turn again and the kitchen odors grow faint.”

Then Lynette called to the Evening Star, “Both of your brothers have gone down before this youth and so will you. Aren’t you old?”

“Old with the strength of twenty boys,” said Sir Evening Star.

“Old in boasting,” Gareth cried, “but the same strength that slew your brothers can slay you.”

Then the Evening Star blew a deadly note upon his horn and a storm-beaten, russet, grizzly old woman came out and armed him in a quantity of dingy weapons. The two knights clashed together on the bridge and Gareth brought the Evening Star groveling in a minute to his feet on his knees. But the other vaulted up again so quickly that Gareth panted and half despaired of winning the victory.

Then Lynette cried, “Well done, servant. You are as noble as any knight. Now do not shame me. I said you would win. Strike! strike! and the wind will change again.”

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<sup>10</sup> *cipher* the number zero

<sup>11</sup> *fancy* imagine

—Gareth struck harder, he hewed great pieces of armor from the old knight, but clashed in vain with his sword against the hard skin, until at last he lashed the Evening Star's sword and broke it at the hilt. "I have you now!" he shouted, but the cowardly knight of the Evening Star writhed his arms about the lad till Gareth was almost strangled. Yet straining himself to the uttermost he finally tossed his foe headlong over the side of the bridge to sink or to swim as the waves allowed.

"Lead and I follow," Gareth said to Lynette.

"No, it is lead no longer," the maiden replied. "Ride beside me the knightliest of all kitchen servants. Sir, I am ashamed that I have treated you so. Pardon me. I do wonder who you are, you servant."

"You are not to blame for anything," Gareth said, "except for your mistrusting of the king when he sent you someone to defend you. You said what you thought and I answered by my actions."

At that moment he heard the hoofs of a horse clattering in the road behind him. "Stop!" cried a knight with a veiled shield, "I have come to avenge my friend, Sir Kay."

Gareth turned, and in a trice<sup>12</sup> had closed in on the stranger, but when he felt the touch of the stranger knight's magical spear, which was the wonder of the world, he fell to the earth. As he felt the grass in his hands he burst into laughter.

"Why do you laugh?" asked Lynette.

"Because here am I, the son of old King Lot and good Queen Bellicent, the victor of the three bridges, and a knight of Arthur's thrown by no one knows whom."

"I have come to help you and not harm you," said the strange knight, revealing himself. It was Lancelot, whom King Arthur had sent to keep a guardian eye upon young Gareth in his first quest, to prevent him from being killed or taken away.

"And why did you refuse to come when I wanted you, and now come just in time to shame my poor defender just when I was beginning to feel proud of him?" asked Lynette.

"But he isn't shamed," Lancelot answered. "What knight is not overthrown sometimes? By being defeated we learn to overcome, so hail, Prince and Knight of our Round Table!" "You did well, Gareth—only you and your horse were a little weary."

Lynette led them into a glen<sup>13</sup> and a cave where they found pleasant drinks and meat, and where Gareth fell asleep.

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<sup>12</sup> *in a trice* instantly

<sup>13</sup> *glen* valley

—“You have good reason to feel sleepy,” cried Lynette. “Sleep soundly and wake strong.” And she tended him as gently as a mother, and watched over him carefully as he slept.

When Gareth woke, Lancelot gave him his own horse and shield to use in fighting the last awful outlaw, but as they drew near Lynette clutched at the shield and pleaded with him, “Give it back to Lancelot,” said she. “O curse my tongue that was **reviling** you so today. He must do the fighting now. You have done wonders, but you cannot do miracles. You have thrown three men today and that is glory enough. You will get all maimed and mangled if you go on now when you are tired. There, I vow you must not try the fourth.”

But Gareth told her that her sharp words during the day had just spurred him on to do his best and he said he must not now leave his quest until he had finished. So Lancelot advised him how best to manage his horse and his lance, his sword and his shield when meeting a foe that was stouter than himself, winning with fineness and skill where he lacked in strength.

But Gareth replied that he knew but one rule in fighting and that was to dash against his foe and overcome him.

Lynette made her palfrey halt and all three faced the camp of the Knight of Death.

There was a huge black pavilion, a black banner and a black horn. Gareth blew the horn and heard hollow trampling to and fro and muffled voices. Then on a night-black horse, in night-black arms rode forth the dread warrior. A white breastbone showed in front. He spoke not a word and his silence made him the more fearful.

“Fool!” shouted Gareth sturdily. “People say that you have the strength of ten men. Can’t you trust to it without depending on these toggeries<sup>14</sup> and tricks?”

But the Knight of Death said nothing. Lady Lyonors at her castle window wept, and one of her maids fainted away, and Gareth felt his head prickling beneath his helmet and Lancelot felt his blood turning cold. Every one stood aghast.

Then the chargers bounded forward and Gareth struck Death to the ground. Drawing out his sword he split apart the vast skull; one half of it fell to the right and one half to the left. Then he was about to strike at the helmet when out of it peeped the face of a blooming young boy, as fresh as a flower.

“O Knight!” the boy cried. “Don’t kill me. My three brothers made me do it to make a horror all about the castle. They never dreamed that anyone could pass the bridges.”

Gareth then said to the boy, who was not much younger than he was, “My child, what madness overtook you to challenge the best knight of Arthur’s Hall?”

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<sup>14</sup> *toggery* garments or a shop that sells them

—“Fair Sir, they told me to do it. They hate the King—and Lancelot, the King’s friend. They hoped to kill him somewhere on the stream. They never dreamed the passes could be passed.”

Then Lady Lyonors with all her house had a great party of dancing and revelry and song and making merry because the hideous Knight of Death that had terrified them so was only a pretty little boy. And there was mirth over Gareth’s victorious quest.

And some people say that Gareth married Lynette, but others who tell the story later say he wedded Lyonors.

**Boadicea: An Ode**  
**By William Cowper**

1  
When the British warrior queen<sup>15</sup>,  
Bleeding from the Roman rods,  
Sought, with an indignant mien,  
Counsel of her country's gods;

2  
Sage beneath the spreading oak  
Sat the Druid, hoary chief;  
Every burning word he spoke  
Full of rage, and full of grief.

3  
Princess! if our aged eyes  
Weep upon thy matchless wrongs,  
'Tis because resentment ties  
All the terrors of our tongues.

4  
Rome shall perish—write that word  
In the blood that she has spilt;  
Perish, hopeless and abhorred,  
Deep in ruin as in guilt.

5  
Rome, for empire far renowned,  
Tramples on a thousand states,  
Soon her pride shall kiss the ground—  
Hark! the Gaul is at her gates!

6  
Other Romans shall arise,  
Heedless of a soldier's name;  
Sounds, not arms, shall win the prize,  
Harmony the path to fame.

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<sup>15</sup> *British warrior queen* The queen spoken of in the poem is Boadicea, or Boudicea, who died in A.D. 62. According to the Roman historian Tacitus (Book XIV of his *Annals*), King Prautagus submitted himself to the authority of the Roman Emperor and made him the heir of his lands, with his daughters, at his death. With his death, however, his wife Boadicea was scourged and their two daughters abused. The lands of the Iceni people, over whom Prautagus had ruled, were taken, and the king's relatives were made slaves. With her people, Boadicea revolted against the Romans for their cruelty.

7

Then the progeny that springs  
From the forests of our land,  
Armed with thunder, clad with wings,  
Shall a wider world command.

8

Regions Caesar never knew  
Thy posterity shall sway;  
Where his eagles<sup>16</sup> never flew,  
None invincible as they.

9

Such the bard's prophetic words,  
Pregnant with<sup>17</sup> celestial fire,  
Bending as he swept the chords  
Of his sweet but awful lyre.

10

She with all a monarch's pride,  
Felt them in her bosom glow:  
Rushed to battle, fought and died;  
Dying hurled them at the foe.

11

Ruffians, pitiless as proud,  
Heaven awards the vengeance due;  
Empire is on us bestowed,  
Shame and ruin wait for you.

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<sup>16</sup> *eagles* The eagle was an emblem of the Roman Empire.

<sup>17</sup> *pregnant with* full of