

battle. And then he did something that was criticized at first, but for which he was subsequently praised; it had never been seen before but would henceforth be a thing to be done: he made a banner showing his coat of arms and said he wanted it carried where a banner could not go, and he felt his horse was so good that he wanted all those broken under attack to rally to him. The banner was very fine, for the field was white with broad red stripes and was made of cordovan and the stripes were made of scarlet cloth from England. And whatever people wore at that time, the horse-blankets were only of leather or of cloth—the stories bear witness to this—so that they would last longer.

The king's companions acquitted themselves very well that day, following the exhortation of Sir Yvain, for such a fine battle had never been fought without the presence of King Arthur, and there was not a single knight who did not perform many feats of arms. But whatever they did, it was nothing compared to the prowess of King Yder: he outdid everyone, on both sides, and because he had said that all were to rally to his troop, he endured so much that day that he was maimed for the rest of his life; from the moment he entered the fray he never removed his helmet from his head or retreated or fled from where he set his feet. And his horse was as fine as could be: it endured so much under him that it was wounded three times and its blanket was all cut to bits; it was so covered in blood, its own and that of others, that horse and rider were all crimson. On all sides men were crying that King Yder had carried the day. Mounted upon his horse, he prayed that God might sustain him in his undertaking without breaking faith or giving ground, and to let him die at the end, for he would never again have a day so fine or fair.

King Yder endured so much that day and performed so many feats of arms, he and the companions of King Arthur, that the Saxons were routed and turned their backs. Then began a great pursuit; their losses were heavy, and King Arthur's men pursued them furiously. Everyone marveled at King Yder's horse, for no beast that had run all day long ever ran as fast or as freely as that horse did in the pursuit. It lasted a long time, and many fell on each side. But it happened that King Yder rode over a fallen Saxon who was holding a naked sword, and he struck King Yder's horse and completely split open its belly. It ran on quite some way, but then collapsed under the king; Yder had lost much blood, and he remained unconscious on the ground. Queen Guenevere and the other ladies came running, and they themselves bore King Yder from the field. Everyone believed he was irretrievably lost. He was borne to the queen's chamber, and the world's noblest ladies wept and mourned for him.

The king's forces had pursued their enemy all the way to Malaguine, a mighty Saxon fortress, and they came back with many prisoners and had killed many of their foes. Then the army camped nearer the Rock than they had before, yet not very close, for the Rock was lofty, and they could not endure the arrows and bolts that rained down from above, nor could one besiege

it from any side, for on the other side the marsh was so vast that nothing could enter it.

The army long remained camped before the Rock, and for a very long time the Saxons never dared attack the king's forces, but endeavored to send for troops throughout their domain. And the king's men came from every direction, for people everywhere knew that the king had been captured. So the army camped before the Rock and was on watch night and day: every day and every night, beneath the gate on the side toward the water, two hundred armed knights watched to see that they did not take away the king or his companions.

12. Lancelot's Madness and Cure; Defeat of the Saxons and Irish; Lancelot, Galehaut, and Hector Become Companions of the Round Table.

Now the story tells that Lancelot, in the Saxons' prison, was in such a state that no one could encourage him to eat or drink, and all day long he grieved so bitterly that no one could comfort him. His head was empty of thought, and a rage and a madness arose so violently in his head that no one could withstand him, and he had inflicted two or three wounds on every one of his companions. So the jailer took him and put him in a room by himself; he could see clearly that Lancelot was genuinely mad, and he felt great pity for his prisoner. Galehaut begged the jailer to put the two of them together, but he was unwilling to do so, saying that the madman would kill him.

"Don't let that concern you, my friend," he said, "for it would be better for him to kill me than to leave me." But the jailer was wicked, and he refused to cooperate.

Word spread until the lady of the Rock heard of this and went to see for herself; she asked the jailer who he was, and he replied that the others said he had not a penny's worth of land. "Oh, dear," she said, "then it would be a mortal sin if we didn't let him go. Open the lower gate for him."

That was the gate on the side toward King Arthur's men, in the slope of the Rock, just above the water. But there was another gate that was closed by enchantment, for there was nothing to close it except the air; all those who saw it thought one could enter there unhindered, but no one could enter except the people of the castle: they went in and out as often as they liked, by the power of the enchantment. Through this postern the people of the castle sallied forth to attack the army many times in rapid succession, and as soon as they could set foot back inside, they had nothing to fear from the whole army.

Galehaut heard the news that Lancelot had been freed, and his grief was so great that he was nearly out of his mind, and in such a state that he could neither eat nor drink. Lancelot returned to the camp, but everyone feared him and fled before him because of the wonders he had performed. At length he came before the queen's lodgings, and she was watching from the windows.

When she saw him, she fainted, for everyone was following him, as they do a man who is out of his mind. When she recovered from her faint, she told the lady of Malehaut, who was holding her in her arms, that she was about to die.

"My lady," she exclaimed, "what has happened to you?" And the queen told her. "Ah, my lady, for God's sake, we must hide him, for it may be that he is feigning madness in order to see us, and if he is really out of his mind, we will hold him until he is cured."

The queen sent her to him and then rushed into a room, for she feared she would faint because of him. But when she was there, she could not stay, but came back out in order to see him. The lady of Malehaut went to him and was about to take him by the hand, but he ran to get some stones to throw at her, and she began to scream. The queen cried out to him, and as soon as he heard her he sat down and put both hands before his eyes like one ashamed; he was unwilling to get up for anyone, and the lady of Malehaut dared not go forward. Then Queen Guenevere came out, took him by the hand, and ordered him to rise. He rose at once and she led him to an upper room. The ladies-in-waiting asked who he was, and some said he was one of the best knights in the world, but none could make him be calm except the queen. As soon as she ordered him to be calm, he no longer moved, and everyone marveled at her power over him. Then she sent for Lionel and he came, but he could do nothing: whenever he touched him, Lancelot attacked him, and so the queen did not leave his side.

So Lancelot stayed in that room and lay before the queen. Every night she had all candles and torches extinguished, because the light, she said, caused him great harm; then she shared her bed with him, and grieved so bitterly all night that it was a wonder how she could go on. And everyone believed it was actually for the king.

In this way the queen's grief and Lancelot's madness went on for a long time, until one day the Saxons attacked the camp and there was great fighting between the two sides. Lancelot, who had not slept for nine nights, was sleeping at last, and the queen was overjoyed. She rose as quietly as she could and saw the two armies joining in battle. She immediately fainted, and the lady of Malehaut again took her in her arms. When she had recovered from her faint, her friend blamed her severely, saying, "My lady, why do you torment yourself?"

"God help me," she replied, "I am right to do so, for I see everyone dead, and I must surely die afterward."

Then she grieved so bitterly that no one could comfort her or calm her down; she came back to Lancelot and fainted as soon as she saw him. When she had recovered, she said, "O flower of the world's knighthood, what a great pity that you're not as well as you were just a short while ago! How quickly this mortal combat would now be brought to an end!"

When he heard her lamenting his feats of arms, his jousting, and his

swordsmanship, he leapt up and saw, hanging at the other end of the room, the shield that the maiden from the Lake had brought to the queen. He thrust out his hands and grabbed it, slung the guige round his neck and shoved his arm through the straps. In a bracket there was also a lance, old and sooty; he ran to it and grabbed it, then turned to a round stone pillar and struck it so violently with the lance that the head was completely shattered. When he had done this, he was so weak he could no longer stand, but fell down and lost consciousness. And when he recovered, he asked where he was, and they told him he was in the house of King Arthur and Queen Guenevere. When he heard this, he fainted again. And when he recovered, the queen asked him how he had felt that day; he replied by asking her where his lord and Sir Gawain were, and they told him they were imprisoned in the Rock.

"Oh God," he cried, "why am I not there too? It would be much better for me to die with them than here, since my lady is not here!"

Then the queen saw that he had regained his senses; she took him gently in her arms and said, "Dear friend, here I am."

He immediately opened his eyes, recognized her, and said, "My lady, now let her come whenever she likes, since you are here!" All the ladies wondered whom he was speaking of, and he said it was Death.

Then the queen said to him, "Dear friend, do you know me?"

"Yes, my lady."

"And do you know," she asked, "how you were imprisoned in the Rock?"

"My lady, the prison of the Rock was fatal to me, for I never ate or drank for as long as I was there."

And the ladies all began to weep.

"Dear friend," said the lady of Malehaut, "do you know me?"

"My lady, I know you very well, for you did me great harm and treated me with great honor."

Then all knew for certain that he was cured. They asked him how he felt and what pain he had had; he answered that he did not know, but that he could not stand up again, try as he might. Then he looked and saw the shield he bore and said, "Oh God, who put this shield on me? Take it off, for it torments me!"

They took it off, but as soon as they had done so, he jumped up and was as mad as before, and he ran off down the hall. When the queen saw this, she fainted and lay unconscious so long that all her ladies were badly frightened.

While the queen lay in her faint, a very tall and very beautiful lady arrived. She was dressed in silk as white as snow, and she was followed by other ladies, three knights, and some ten squires. The lady and her attendants went up to the queen's chambers. The queen had recovered from her faint and heard the noise of people saying "Welcome, my lady." She dried her eyes and went to meet her visitor, embraced her, and told her she was welcome. They sat down on a couch and began to converse together.

The doors to the great chamber were closed on Lancelot, and his attacks of madness resumed and he began to tear down the doors. No one was bold enough to open them to him. The visitor asked what was happening, and the queen sighed and was unable to keep the tears from welling in her eyes. She replied that this was a knight who deserved great pity, for he was one of the best knights in the world, but he had now fallen into such a great madness that no one could stand against him.

"Oh, my lady," she said, "open the door and let me see him."

"Oh, my lady," replied the queen, "he is now more violent than he ever was," and she told her how he had regained his senses not long before, and how he had gone mad again as soon as the shield had been removed from him.

"My lady," said the visitor, "have the door opened, for I would very much like to see him."

Then the queen had the door opened, and Lancelot was about to rush out but the lady took him by the hand and spoke to him, using the name she had used when she raised him in the lake, for this was she who had raised him in the lake, and she had called him "Fair Foundling." As soon as she had spoken this name, he stopped and was deeply ashamed. Then she asked for the shield, and it was brought to her. "Ah," she said, "dear friend, you have so distressed me that I have come from far away to deliver you." Then she placed the shield upon him; he accepted whatever she did, and as soon as she had placed the shield upon him, he regained his senses. Then she took him and made him lie down upon a couch; he recognized her and began to weep most bitterly, and the queen was sorely puzzled as to who she could be.

When he had regained his senses, he saw the shield upon him and he said, "Oh, my lady, remove this shield, for it torments me!"

"No, I won't," she replied, "nor will it be removed as long as I wish it to remain." Then she called one of her attendants and had her get a very precious ointment from one of her jewel cases. She took it and anointed him on both arms, both temples, his forehead, and on top of the skull. As soon as she had done that, he fell asleep.

The lady returned to the queen and told her, "My lady, I'll now be on my way and commend you to God. Take care that this knight is not awakened; let him sleep as long as he wishes. When he awakens by himself, let a bath be prepared and have him get into it; then he'll be completely cured. And see that he carries no other shield than this one, for as long as he can hold out in battle."

"Oh, my lady," said the queen, "tell me who you are, for I have the impression you're well acquainted with this knight, since you came from distant lands by long days' journeys in order to cure him."

"Indeed, my lady, I should be well acquainted with him, since I raised him in his great poverty, when he had lost his father and his mother. With God's help I raised him until he became a tall, handsome young man; then I brought him to court and persuaded King Arthur to make him a knight."

When the queen heard this, she ran to embrace her, saying, "Oh, my lady,

welcome! Now I believe I know who you are: you are the Lady of the Lake." And she replied that this was true. "Dear friend," said the queen, "I beg you to remain here awhile, to please me and in order to cure our knight, for I owe you my love, and you are the lady I must most honor in all the world. Be assured that my love for you could be no greater, for you have rendered me the greatest service possible by sending me that shield. I have tested it so thoroughly that I know that everything you said concerning it is true."

"My lady," said the Lady of the Lake, "be assured that you will see still greater wonders concerning that shield than you have seen thus far, for I knew in advance what has happened, and for that reason I sent it to you, knowing full well that I could send it to no one else who would hold it so dear. And I must tell you that because of the great prowess that was to manifest itself in this knight, I raised him until he became a knight, tall and handsome as you saw him at court. And he never knew who he was; rather I concealed his identity because of a knight whom I loved more than any man alive,¹⁴ fearing that, if he found out, he would get the wrong idea, and so I spread the word that the young man was my nephew. And now when I have returned, I'll say that I came to free King Arthur from prison; he *will* be freed within a week, and I can tell you that this is the one who will free him. But see that he carries no other shield than this one, for you'll find in it everything my maiden told you when she brought it to you at Quimper-Corentin.¹⁵

"But I sent you one message through her that I later regretted and that gave me great sorrow, and I feared it would distress you, for I said that I was the lady who knew more about your thoughts and shared them most fully, for I loved the same person you did.¹⁶ But be assured that my love for him is only that of a mother for her child, and I love you for his sake. Now I will be on my way, but I'll tell you one thing, because my love for you is great. I beg you to keep, to hold fast, and to love above all others him who loves you above all others, and cast off all pride toward him, for he neither desires nor esteems anything except you. The sins of the world cannot be pursued without folly, but one defeats his folly who finds right and honor in it. And if you can find folly in your loves, this folly is to be honored above all others, for you love the lord and the flower of the whole world. You can boast that no woman was ever able to do what you can do, for you are the companion of the worthiest gentleman and the lady of the best knight in the world, and in your newfound power you have gained much, for first you have won him, the flower of all knights, and then you have won me, whatever I might be able to do.

"But now I must depart, for I can delay no longer. Be assured that the

¹⁴This knight was not mentioned when the Lady of the Lake took Lancelot to her "aquatic" abode, but he was mentioned elsewhere, and once it will be said that she had married this knight.

¹⁵See Chapter 8.

¹⁶This is a near echo of the maiden's speech in Chapter 8.

greatest power in the world draws me away, the power of love, for I love a knight who doesn't know where I am, though his brother came here with me. Yet I'm not afraid of his becoming angry with me as long as that is what I wish. But one must take great care not to distress the person one loves as much as oneself, for one is not truly loved who is not loved above all earthly things. And a person who is in love can have no joy except from the one he loves, and therefore one must love the person from whom all joy comes."

They spoke together at great length until vespers drew near, becoming well acquainted and offering each other their service, but at length the queen could no longer detain the lady. When she saw that such was the situation, the queen dared not further beseech her to stay; they commended each other to God, and the Lady of the Lake and her retinue mounted and departed. The queen was now happier than she had been for a long time; she returned to Lancelot and did not stir from his side until he awoke.

When he awoke he complained bitterly. She asked him how he felt, and he replied, "I am well, but I'm extremely weak and I don't know why." Until he was fully restored to health, she did not wish to tell him how he had been ill. The bath was prepared, and they placed him in it and did everything ladies can do for the comfort of a sick knight, until he recovered fully and regained his beauty and his strength.

Then they told him how he had been out of his mind and how no one but the queen could stand against him. "And the lady who raised you, the Lady of the Lake," said the queen, "was here, and had she not been, you would never have been cured."

He replied that he thought as much and that he had seen her, "but I thought I had dreamt it."

Then the queen began to smile broadly, and he was greatly taken aback and embarrassed, for he was now certain they had seen his disgraceful behavior, and he feared the person he most loved in all the world would love him less as a result. But there was no need, for she had no power to do so. When he lamented to her, she comforted and reassured him, saying, "Don't be concerned, dear friend, for—may God truly help me—you are more my master and more certain of me than I am of you, and so you should be, for I haven't taken this upon myself for the present alone, but for all the days that my soul remains within my body."

Now Lancelot was restored to health and had whatever he requested; he had his share of every joy a lover may have, and that is all the story reveals to you. He spent a week and a day in this fashion, and by then he was so handsome that it was a wonder to behold. And the queen was so in love with him that she did not see how she could ever live without seeing him. It grieved her to see him so impetuous and so courageous, for she did not see how she could go on living without him, if he ever left court: she would have preferred there to be a little less boldness and less prowess in him.

[The Irish and Saxons again attacked, and Lancelot, distinguishing himself in battle, repelled the enemy. Then he freed Arthur, Gawain, Hector, and Galehaut.]

So the Rock was captured, and the king and a great number of his men were inside. And Sir Gawain came forth from the tower and said to the king, "My lord, you will lose Lancelot, if you don't take care, for Galehaut will take him away as soon as he can; he is more jealous of him than any knight is of a young lady. But I'll tell you what to do: order the gate to be closed, so that no one can go out except with my permission, and make me swear to this, and Kay the Seneschal and Sir Yvain and my brother Guerrehet, and we will have such a company that no one will be able to get in or out."

Then the king came to Galehaut and took him by one hand and Lancelot by the other, led them to the great tower, and had them disarm; then they sat down upon a couch. The king then summoned Sir Gawain and had him swear the oath, and then Sir Yvain, Kay, and Guerrehet. When Galehaut heard this, he knew precisely why it was being done, and he gave a sigh of anguish from his heart. Then he said to Lancelot, "My dear companion, we have reached the point where I will lose you, for I know for certain that the king will ask you to remain in his household. And what shall I do, who have completely devoted my heart and soul to you?"

"Truly, my lord," said Lancelot, "I must love you more than any man in the world, and so I do, and, God willing, I'll never be a member of the king's household, if I'm not forced to do so. But how can I refuse anything my lady may command?"

"I would not force you to go that far," replied Galehaut, "for if she wills it, then so it must be without any opposition."

So the two of them spoke together. And the king resumed conversation with them, and they put on a show of greater joy than they felt in their hearts. The king sent for the queen, and she came most joyfully. When she entered the tower, each one jumped up to greet her, but she left all the others and threw her arms around Lancelot's neck and kissed him in front of all those present, because she wanted to deceive them all, that no one might suspect the truth of what was between them. No one saw this who did not the more esteem her, but Lancelot was deeply embarrassed. She said to him, "Sir knight, I don't know who you are; this grieves me, and I don't know what to offer you. For the love of my lord the king, and for my honor which you have today upheld, I grant you my love and myself, as a loyal lady must reward a loyal knight."

When the king heard her speak in this manner, he esteemed her highly because she had done so without specific instructions. Then in turn she rejoiced over Sir Gawain, Galehaut, and all the companions of the quest, for all had come except Sagremor. Many questions were asked about him, and Sir Gawain related how he had left him with a maiden with whom he was in love.