The Lost Tales of
Galahad
THE LOST TALES OF

GALAHAD

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Afterword?
Artist's Statement
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NOW, AFTER SIR GALAHAD had smitten down Sir Launcelot, as aforetold of, he rode for a long while in a wild forest and had many adventures of divers sorts, of which no account hath been given, though mention is made of them in the ancient histories of those things which I have read.

And so begins Chapter Seventh of The Story of the Grail and the Passing of Arthur, as recorded by Howard Pyle—reports of other stories featuring Sir Galahad, but none of those histories were to be found. Yet in recent years there have been a number of amazing discoveries. Many of the unaccounted for “adventures of divers sorts” mentioned in the excerpt above have begun to be pieced together from the holdings of various collections, including The Bodleian Libraries and the Old Library at Trinity College. Granted, much has been lost to water damage, hungry vermin, and deplorable filing skills during the Wars of the Roses, but we now know much more about the activites of Sir Galahad in the Deórhám Fyrhþe—that is, the Wild Forest—and this collection, The Lost Tales of Galahad, is fruit of this new research and scholarship.
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD
CHAPTER ONE

Sir Galahad and
the Jabberwocky

IT WAS EVENING as Galahad crested yet another nameless hill as he wandered, lost, in the Wild Forest on his quest for the Holy Grail. Nearby, a large, weather-beaten sundial could be seen sinking into the ground, a sign that people had once lived in this region. A badger could be seen scratching and boring a hole in the wet side of the hill, while miserable borogoves\(^2\) could be seen fluttering in and out of their nests, while the somber squeaking of turtles could be heard in the distance.

Not caring particularly where they went, Galahad allowed his horse to lead the way as they sought their deliverance from the Wild Forest. The stalwart beast had chosen a path earlier in the day that seemed to have been recently cleared, and the two had slowly followed it.

Suddenly, the knight grabbed tight the reins, as his coal-black charger reared up in fear. There, before them in the path was a Jubjub bird! These scarlet-crested creatures grow to the size of

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1 *Jabber* means to “talk excitedly” and *wocor* is the Anglo-Saxon word for “fruit,” therefore, the name of the beast in this tale could be translated literally as “the result of much excited and voluble discussion.”

2 A now-extinct breed of parrot
a large vulture, and Jubjubs are known to terrorize animals even twice their size. Yet, in this case, there was no immediate cause for fear, for (thankfully) the fearsome bird was dead—its blue tongue hanging listless out of its long yellow beak and its black feathers covered in fresh blood. “Beware the Jubjub bird, I was oft’ told in my youth,” the knight spake soothingly to his steed as he patted it in hopes of calming the beast. And then, continuing more to himself than to the horse, Galahad whispered, “Aye, and it is wise to beware if there is a creature so nearby that can fell a dread Jubjub bird in this way.”

He rode on, but eyes now alert and ears open for sounds that might signal danger. And within one hundred yards his horse reared again, as they found laying across the path yet another fearsome beast. It was a frumious Bandersnatch! Ferocious and extraordinarily fast, the dangerous animal is well known for its long neck and snapping jaws (boasting multiple rows of sharp teeth). They immediately backed up the path, Galahad turning his horse to and fro as he considered how e should engage with the terrifying animal.

The Bandersnatch made no movement in response to the knight and his steed. Indeed he seemed to take no notice of them at all. As Galahad sat there, he eventually realized that he had been holding his breath, and—seeing that the bandersnatch, too, was not breathing—gaspèd as he realeased it. Then Galahad noticed the pooling blood extended down the path and he realized this beast, too, had been freshly killed.
“I would have thought the Jubjub killed by the Bandersnatch,” reflected Galahad. “But if that be true or not, there is certainly in this region something more minacious and more frightening.” Galahad dismounted, allowing his nervous horse to calm itself by munching some grass, took his vorpal sword in hand and slowly walked around the Bandersnatch. An inspection of the far side of the beast lead to the discovering of huge claw marks in the side and head, doubtless the cause of its demise. “Its body is still warm,” observed the knight. “I will set forth along this path and see what sort of monster can injure so severely both a Jubjub and Bandersnatch.”

Long time the manxome foe he sought, till eventually Galahad rested by a tumtum tree, and stood awhile in thought: “Darkness falls and soon I will be in danger from gnarled root or errant stone in my path as much as by this mysterious monster I stalk. I will return to my good horse and make my lodgings there for the night.”

Yet before he could even take action on his uffish thought, suddenly a huge monster came whiffling through the tulgey wood. With eyes of flame, it burbled as it came. “The Jabberwock!” exclaimed Sir Galahad. And it was most certainly a jabberwocky. Often mistaken for a dragon, the rabbit-like teeth, useless wings, and twitching antennae immediately identified his advisary to Galahad. Immediately the creature’s slithy neck shot out at the knight—and nearly found its mark! Only a quick leap off the past

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3 An honest mistake: the bat-like wings, scaley skin, and serpentine neck are certainly akin to your ordinary dragon. Clarifications are rarely recorded, for by the time the error is caught, the person is usually dead.
saved Galahad from an instant death.

One, two! One, two! And through and through the air the jabberwocky’s razor-sharp claws cut the air mercilessly, yet failing to find a home in the flesh of Galahad. Not that the knight faired any better. Again and again, with dull clanging the scaley skin of the creature resisted the attacks of the gallant knight. Round and round, in and out, the macbre dance continued. Each contenstant grew in their admiration for their opponent, and each knew that only one would live to see the morning.

And then, without warning, the fatal mistake was made: the jabberwocky went in to bite the knight with his nasty, big, pointy teeth, but Galahad ducked out the way. A patch of the neck behind the antennae was exposed, revealing a spot not protected by scales. His vorpal blade went snicker-snack, and the monster was beheaded. Like a chicken unaware of its sudden expiration, the body of the jabberwocky continued to writhe and flail. Not interested in watching the death spasms of the monster, Galahad left it for dead, and with its head went galumphing back.

When he had finally reached his loyal horse, Galahad called out rhetorically, “And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?” Tossing the severed head of the jabberwock by the bandersnatch, he grabbed his horse around the neck and rejoicingly said, “Come to my arms, my beamish boy! O frabjous day!”

The horse replied in what sounded like, “Callooh! Callay!” as Galahad chortled in his joy.
CHAPTER FIVE

sir galahad and
the sisters of the grail

THE NIGHT HOWLED and the fog was thick. A thunderstorm had not long ago lifted, leaving Sir Galahad soaked to the bone. As a noble knight of King Arthur’s Round Table, he knew his duty as a knight to face as much peril as he could, so such hardship as being drenched and traversing in foul weather would have not even been given a second thought, save it came on the heels of a near-fatal encounter with a troll (recounted in the famous story Sir Galahad and the Very Foul and Terrible Troll)\(^1\) that had drained him of near all his strength.

The knight was weary, and longed for a soft bed and a warm fire. Such warm hospitality was more than could be imagined in the strange woods in which he found himself lost. But then, without prelude or precedent, through the air lilted the lovely sounds of women singing. Looking up in the direction from which the angelic sounds were floating, Galahad was dumbfounded with wonder. Could it be? Wiping the rain water from his eyes, he looked again and confirmed that, yes, a glorious glowing

\(^1\) Sadly, Sir Galahad and the Very Foul and Terrible Troll is one of the many lost tales of Galahad that are still lost.
shape of a chalice was suspended in the air above the dark outline of what appeared to be a stone abbey.

Quoth the knight, “A blessing! Certes this must be a vision of the blessed Holy Grail. When at Pentecost I drew my sword from the cube of red marble and writ on the blade was the inscription: This sword is for the greatest knight in the world and for him who shall win the Holy Grail, it was confirmed that I would be the fortunate soul to attain the holy cup. But never did I imagine it would be found while I was lost in this Wild Forest.” And with new strength and zeal springing from the sight, Galahad leapt with vigor over and around the briers and weeds, pushing past the brambles and branches to make his way with haste to the stone structure.

Banging on the heavy wooden door of the abbey, Galahad cried out, “Open the doors! In the name of King Arthur, open the doors! I am Sir Galahad, a knight of the Round Table on a quest for the Holy Grail. Please grant me shelter!” Scraping noises from inside sounded like huge bolts being drawn, and as the light poured out, Galahad fell through the doorway onto the floor of the abbey.
“Hello!” came a chorus of sweet voices. Galahad looked up to see five beautiful young maidens each clad in a long, straight robe of white, girdled about secured around the waist with a crimson belt. On their heads they wore finely embroidered veils covered in complex interwoven serpentine patterns, each sewn with a different colored metallic thread.

Galahad found himself in a welcoming entrance hall. Not large, but well lit, with cheery candles and the walls hung with finely crafted tapestries. Massive wooden beams could be just seen high above and a large pot bubbled merrily in the corner. The eldest of the sisters was holding a torch and she came forward and spake soothingly, “Welcome, gentle sir knight. My name is Lilith, and I am the abbess here. It is unfortunate that you should come to us on such a nasty eve. Oh, but we are nice, and shall attend to your every need.”

“Forsooth, you are all comely and captivating ladies, and this place glows warm and is cozy on a night like tonight,” began Galahad, but then—being too weary to continue with civil pleasantries—hastily inquired: “You must allow me to speak plainly: are you the keepers of the Holy Grail?”

“You are tired… you must rest awhile,” replied the abbess. Turning to the other sisters she gave directions for preparations of hospitality: “Sister Delilah, Sister Salome, please prepare a bed for our guest.” The two young women enthusiastically expressed their thanks to be able to serve in such a way and left the room as instructed. Returning her attention to the knight, Sister Lilith reassured Galahad,
The beds here are warm and soft—and very, very big. You will find that they are perfumed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon. Yet pray, tell me, what is your name, handsome knight?”

“I am Sir Galahad, son of Sir Lancelot and Lady Elaine the Fair. But please, make haste to show me the Grail! I have seen it! It is here, in the—”

“Oh, you have suffered much,” interrupted the abbess. “We understand, for we have suffered much as well. I am imagine our life must seem very dull and quiet compared to yours. We were once eight score, but most of our convent was cut off in the prime of their youth—all between sixteen and nineteen and a half—by a troll in this region. We sought to care for those in need (those whom the troll had harmed), but there was no one to protect us! Now there are but five of our fellowship, and oh, it is a lonely life. . . . ahh, but forgive me for prattling on. We are just not used to handsome knights.

“I believe I know the monster of which you speak,” said Galahad. “And to lose sisters of your order in such a way is a tragedy. Yet, good abbess, I beg you to take me to see the Grail.”

“Oh, but you are wounded!” Sister Lilith observed with alarm. Galahad brushed off his wounded leg as nothing, but the abbess would not be swayed. “You must see the doctors immediately!” Speaking to the remaining two sisters in the chamber she said, “Sister Jezebel, Sister Jinx, practice your art.”
“They’re doctors?” queried the knight.

“They’ve had a basic medical training, yes,” replied Sister Lilith dismissively as she and the other two maidens ushered Sir Galahad into a side chamber and onto a low couch. Strange candles filled the room, burning with a thick and sweet scent.

“Drink this, it will revive you,” urged Sister Jezebel as she lifted an elixir up to the lips of Galahad. Quoth she sweetly: “Upon my word, you look like you’ve run all the way from Beersheba, then walked another whole day into the desert.” The draught the knight was made to drink was thick and tickled the back of his throat like spiced wine.

“Try to relax,” whispered Sister Jinx. “We must examine you.” Lifting away the Shield of Balyn revealed the full extent of his injuries: a bleeding gash in the knight’s left leg. The maiden gasped, but then, regaining composure, simply remarked, “Well, it looks like you have had a quite an unlucky day.”

“I seek the Grail!” repeated the weary knight.

Quoth the abbess, “You are delirious. I pray thee, let us remove your armor. Mayhaps you are injured elsewhere? A poisonous bite may be muddling your mind.”

“’Tis prudent, Sister Abbess. We must find if there are any fiery marks in the skin, inflicted by wicked, darting serpents” agreed
Jezebel. “As it is written in Saint Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: ‘Wherefore take off the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.’”

“Nay, sisters, touch not my armor,” protested Sir Galahad.” And verily, you muddle the sacred Scriptures. I was raised in a nunnery by blessed sisters who read to me each day from the Holy Writ. Those words you speak are not the words of the apostle.”

Quoth Sister Jinx, “Ah, good knight, we do not allow any books copied by men in this place. Instead, we trust on oral tradition and have set to memory all of the words we’ve deemed most useful.”

“But what you recite is not the truth,” rejoined the knight.

“The truth?” interjected Sister Lilith. “As it says in the Gospel of John: ‘What is truth?’ Come, Sir Galahad, you would not be so ungalant as to refuse our hospitality? And your wounds are dire. The truth is that we know best, and you must obey us. ‘Hear; for I will speak of excellent things; and the opening of my lips shall be right things.’”

Sister Delilah and Sister Salome returned from their preparations of a bedroom as Galahad was seeking to rise to his feet, saying, “Torment me no longer! I have seen the Grail!” A scuffle ensued with a number of the maidens forcing the knight to resume his place on the couch.

“Our guest seems vexed and burdened, Abbess,” observed Sister Salome. “Shall I dance for him to ease his mind?”
“His belt and scabbard come free as new ropes that never were used,” said Sister Delilah with a haughty giggle. Holding up the prize she had won during the scuffle, Delilah drew Galahad’s sword from the scabbard, to show it off to the other women. She lifted the blade by the handle, up towards the smoke-filled ceiling. The hilt was studded with precious stone of divers sizes and colors, very rich and glorious to behold. And the blade of the sword shone like lightning for brightness. As the light of the candles was caught along the edge and glittered on the hilt, Sir Galahad’s eyes were cleared and he exclaimed, “There is no Grail here!”


“Aye,” agreed the knight as he rose to his feet. “And in the Gospel of the Beloved Disciple Jesus declares that ‘ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’ Away from me foul hussy! I know now that neither are you fair nuns nor is this a holy nunnery. I am blinded no more by your witchcraft. I can clearly see that you are but five hags and this is a ruined corner of a broken down castle.”

“Oh, zoot!” swore Lilith, setting all pretense aside. “Delilah, you are a stupid wench . . . you held up his blade oriented as a crucifix. Did you forget that our spells dissolve around all such holy symbols of the Truth? Oh wicked, bad, naughty, evil Delilah—you will punished for this for certain.”

As Lilith yelled at Delilah, Galahad sprang forward and took back
his sword and leveled it at the witches, saying, “Silence, foul temptresses! Make no mistake, I can tackle you lot single-handed. Yet know ye that I am inclined to show you mercy and take not your lives. But tell me, how is it that you called up a vision of the Holy Grail?”

“Oh, yes—wasn’t that a lovely little hex?” Jinx proudly piped. “I flatter myself, but I am quite good at wrangling will-o’-the-wisps into any shape I please—even a big ol’ chalice. And Delilah has a cage of sprites that she can force to sing like a choir of angels,” at which point Delilah took a bow grander than any opera diva, “and Jezebel is a whizz at using the flames from her special lavender, rosemary, and bat-wing candles to conjure the look of the coziest of chambers!”

“Indeed, we are all great sorceresses,” added Lilith, finally gathering herself back together and speaking with a condescending smile. “We have used our dark arts to tempt and kill many foolish men. As it is written in your precious Bible, ‘she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her. Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death.'”

13 A Will-o’-the-wisp (or Ignis Fatuus in the Latin) is a ghostly light seen by travelers near swamps or marshes. They are called aleya in Asia, boi-tatá in Brazil, and the min min light in Australia. Scientists have tried to explain them away, claiming that will-o’-the-wisps are simply bioluminescence caused by the oxidation of phosphine, diphosphane, and methane rising up from organic decay. But what do they really know about anything?

14 Proverbs 7:26-27

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Then like a shiver of sharks the five witches began to slowly circle the bleeding knight. The candlelight raged, and took the shapes of strange demons. A conspiracy of ravens squawked loudly as they gathered and perched on the castle’s ruined walls and rotted timbers. Five black cats slinked out of the dark corners, their eyes glowing. Galahad could hear some of the witches muttering evil words under their breath and saw them sprinkling strange glittering powders into the air.

“Do your worst, your frumpish trollops!” called out the knight defiantly. “My good blade carves the casques of men and my strength is as the strength of ten—because my heart is pure.”

Salome began the attack, dancing and spinning like a whirling dervish. A cyclone of strange, exotic colors wend its way up to the knight. Gyrating madly, the witch sang out, “You must succumb to me, Galahad, or I will have your head on a silver platter!” In response the knight stretched out his left hand and the dancing temptress spun right into it, slapping herself in the face and falling to the ground.

Quoth Jezebel, “I swer by the dread Lady Asherah, I will see your corpse eaten by dogs!” Stepping toward the knight, she began waving her arms like a crazed concert conductor, and the flames from the candles responded by burning towards Galahad. Yet her attack was spoiled by the unexpected flailing body of Jinx, who had sprang towards the knight at the same moment, tripping over the Shield of Balyn.

15 Many scholars believe that this tale was the source material which inspired the opening lines of Tennyson’s famous poem, Sir Galahad.
Delilah, wielding a pair of dangerous-looking shears, cut open a curious cage she carried and screeched, “Scamper over to that scallywag my shilly-shally sprites and slit his throat!” The sprites burst out violently and flew towards the knight, only to stop halfway there, fluttering a bit as they evaluated the situation, and then suddenly shot away into the night.

Lilith took the direct approach, slashing at Galahad with a long, cruel, claw-hilted stone knife. Galahad almost laughed to see the sight, and parrying easily with his blade. Then the knight grabbed Lilith’s attacking wrist and squeezed it until she cried out in pain, dropping her weapon.

“What do I have to fear from you harridans? You work in deception and artifice and slight of hand. There is no substance to your sorcery. I have seen behind the curtain, and you are old hags in padded corsets with painted faces. Begone—I will not sink so low as to allow my blade to become soiled with your blood.”

The five witches screamed and spat such filthy words at the knight as would make a sailor blush, but then, one by one, they spun around on their left heel and leaped into a big, black, bubbling cauldron on a nearby smoldering fire. The vessel was not large enough for even one of them to sit in it completely, but they each immediately sank below the rancid surface of the fluid it contained. Sir Galahad was too shocked to move, and was horrified to watch (but could not look away) as not the murky liquid, but the metal surface of the vile pot itself began to simmer and boil.

Slowly, ten bulbulous tentacles grew out of the bottom of the pot,
giving the metal vessel the appearance as that of a metal octopus. Then they each expanded and solidified into the form of a woman’s leg. Each leg flailed about to find its footing, then as one they crouched down and sprang up, lighting upon the wall and sticking to it like a spider, before quickly scurrying up and over the ruined walls of the castle, a nightmarish metal insect.

With eyes transfixed at the place where beastly cauldron of witches had scurried off, Sir Galahad reflected, “Certes, it’s my duty as a knight to face as much peril as I can, but I am quite glad to be delivered of it as well. And blessed be the Lord! For as it is written, God is faithful, He ‘will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.’”16

16 I Corinthians 13:13
URULOKI,¹ or fire-drakes, are very dangerous sorts of dragon. They are the oldest of the species and have the appearance of giant scaled serpents with massive legs, ending in cruelly-sharp talons. As with other species of dragons, fire-drakes come in various colors, and some are winged. This one was not.

The fire-drake Sir Galahad found himself standing in front of was red as a cherry and spitting fire. And, curiously, the head of the serpent was wedged between several large rocks. Sir Galahad, being an experienced knight, was familiar with the challenges of fighting dragons. He therefore was quite grateful for this happy advantage. He rounded the beast and lifted his sword to deal the drake a deathly blow, when—

“STOP!” came a young woman’s desparate scream from the nearby trees. “Drop your sword, sir, or all is lost!”

¹ Pronounced “oo-roo-low-kee,” fire-drakes are bigger than cold-drakes, foul tempered, and usually live in hills, mountains, or caves. Glaurung was the name of the very first of these beasts and another was the infamous winged Smaug that hoarded the Lonely Mountain’s treasures 171 years to himself, staying within the mountain, until being slain by Bard the Bowman of Lake Town.
In Galahad’s experience slaying serpents, damsels screaming near dragons was quite common. But never had he heard one crying out in defense of one of these brutes. In fact, it had been a woman’s cry of distress that had initially drawn him to this place. He turned to see a figure approach across the rocky landscape, curiously attired. She was wrapped in blackened leather from head to toe, and had an apron of sorts tied around her from which dragon scales hung. And in her hand she carried a small pot, the top covered over with a piece of skin or fragment of cloth.

Quoth the maiden, “I pray thee, good knight, make haste to leave this place and the uruloki unharmed, or my sweet sister will be lost to me forever.” And thus speaking, the young woman ran forward with all haste into the fiery belching of the dragon.

Paralyzed by the shock of the insane action made by the young maiden, Sir Galahad nearly dropped his sword. The senseless madness of the deed grieved him to the core. Gathering himself in rage at the dragon, Galahad raised his blade to avenge the death of the girl by cutting off its head, only to catch himself at the last moment when, as the flames from the beast subsided, he saw that the maiden was yet alive, and had crammed the pot into the open jaws of the fire drake. The dragon was unable to move its head due to the rocks around it and it was unable close its mouth in order to belch fire again, due to the pot.

“The venom milking will not take long,” said the maiden, as if this were explanation enough for what had just transpired. “Thank you for not killing this vile creature,” she added as she patted down
residual flames that still clung to her garments. “It is most pleasant to make your acquaintance, I am the Princess Láidre,² third daughter of Sir Edwyn the Great.”

Quoth the knight, “And I am Sir Galahad, a knight of King Arthur’s Round Table, son of Sir Lancelot and Elaine of Corbenic, and the chosen one to sit at the Siege Perilous. I am on a holy quest, for it has been prophesied that I am to find the Grail, but of late, I am lost in this Wild Forest. I assume that you know the way through this region?”

“Alas, no. We found our way here by following a cerulean fox. But pray thee, come stay with us for a time and refresh yourself before you continue on your quest. Myself, my sister, and our loyal servants have been living here alone for quite some time and would welcome a visitor.”

The knight agreed, and the two began to pick their way slowly back to the young woman’s home. The way was circuitous and difficult to navigate, so little more conversation was to be made on the way, and Galahad gallantly offered to carry the venom pot, so he literally had his hands full for their entire journey. Eventually their way cleared, and a low, wide, white-washed stone hut with a thatched roof was to be seen. A strange cry of both joy and relief was lifted as a young woman rushed to crush the princess in a mad embrace. “M’Dear, I find myself getting more anxious with each successive trip you make! I fear so . . . I worry that the uruloki will elude your traps and then you will be lost to me forever.” With a start, the young maiden suddenly realized Galahad was with them,
and broke away, wiping tears from her face and attempting to straighten the slender gold chaplet on her head and smooth her surcote—with only one hand—the other secured in a sling. “Welcome, handsome . . . err, good knight, I am Princess Máiréad,\(^2\) second daughter of Sir Edwyn the Great, and we are most glad of your company. Come, it is almost midday, join us for refreshment.”

Galahad accepted most courteously, and they sat down to a simple table, spread with fruits and sweet meats. After taking a long drink, Láidre excused herself (in order to change out of her scorched clothing) and Máiréad began to share how it was that they were found in this Wild Forest.

Quoth Máiréad: “You mark, I am sure, my arm in a sling, and it is for the healing of that infirmity that we are isolated in this quiet place. . . . Our eldest sister, Princess Ciardha,\(^2\) wished to be with us on this bizarre adventure as well, but she of need remained at home to aide our sweet mother in the ruling of our lands. This was due to the untimely death\(^3\) of our good father Sir Edwyn the Great.

My strange illness was the result of an unfortunate accident. My family and our friends and attendants were with me for the announcement of my engagement. It was during the festivities surrounding the blessed event that I was strolling along the top of the outer wall of the keep when I saw a curious thing, the likeness of a gargoyle sitting

\(^2\) pronounced “ma-raid”
\(^2\) pronounced “kia-rd-ha”
\(^3\) Other manuscripts that speak of the Three Princesses and Sir Edwyn indicate that the cause of death was from tripping over a laundry basket left at the top of a stairwell.
and reading a book on the edge of the structure. I approached it
and commented to my betrothed that I was unaware that they had
sculpted figures adorning their castle, when the beast sprang to life
and hissed, taking a clawed swipe at my person before flying off in
a huff. The great stone creature had caught my arm and its sliced
into my flesh. I staggered under the blow and fell off of the keep.
Certes I would’ve died from the fall, except our priest, the good
Father Luke was standing below in the courtyard and stopped my
rapid decent with his person. A most godly man, Father Luke is
resistant to all the deadly sins, save gluttony. And a good thing he
has the vice of food, for his corpulent frame made it so that I was
no more injured than if I had fallen off of a pony.

Lifting me from the ground, he immediately applied a fine cloth
to my bleeding arm. In explanation of his preparation for such an
unexpected event he said, “Princess, I was taking a turn about the
courtyard at this moment with that fine cloth in hand, for I had a
troubling vision last night. My sleep was disturbed by a dream so
real and clear that it was as if it had already happened. I saw you injured by a gargoyle and
fall from the heights of this great fortress.”

Our holy elder then prescribed in detail
what was my plight and what could be done.
‘You are in grave danger, Princess. As you know,
the bite of a gargoyle will turn you instantly
into stone, but the wound of a gargoyle is also
quite fearful. Left untreated, it will fester and

3 The Nine Ladies of
Stanton Moor, to the west
of the River Derwent,
is an example of the
work of gargoyles that
can be seen to this day.
Some folklore says that
the women were turned
to stone for dancing on
the Sabbath, but this was
just a euphemistic way to
speak of a gargoyle attack.
spread until you would be left samewise as solid and dead as the wife of Lot herself.’

My family and my betrothed had by this point surrounded us and were rent with worry and begged to know the cure. Father Luke said that it was to drink wine mixed with dragon venom every day for a year. He is of family of learned physicians, and is both a man of prayer and of herbal wisdom. Said he: ‘I have a vial of venom in my stores that could be used for the next few days, but more would need to be found for the full treatment.’ And truth, none of the Table Round are more brave than my Love, and he declared at once he would set forth to slay a hundred dragons if needed. It was then that my fair sister, Láidre, wisely and with discerning speech reminded my betrothed that he was not at liberty to set forth on any quest, as his place was to lead and shepherd those who had sworn him fealty. Then with great courage and zeal my sister declared that she would be my care giver and source my dire dragon medicines.”

“And did your fiance protest?” inquired Galahad.

“As you might imagine, and with passion,” replied Máiréad. “Yet Father Luke interjected that in his vision, lo, it was my younger sister who would be my strong ally in this dark time. Said he, ‘Even as our mother Eve was made to be a helper for Adam, and the Holy Writ so speaks of the Lord being a helper and defender to His chosen people,’ Láidre would work for my good and the good of our
two peoples, so that I would yet be able to marry, uniting our families and our tracts of lands.

The very next day, our good servants had a wagon packed for us and Father Luke had given us what he could make for me of my medicinal draught, as well as a box of dragon scales he had collected since his youth (funny how the Almighty both gives us curious obsessions and prepares us to serve), and sent us on our way. We went forth with fear and a mystery before us, for all our priest could reveal of the remainder of his vision was that a cerulean fox would lead us.

We all assumed these final instructions were poetry and the trickery of slumber. But before the sun began to set we reached the edge of this Wild Forest and what should cross our path, but a blue fox! We followed with all speed, and as is the habit with such creatures, were forced to traverse a convoluted path impossible to retrace. All through the evening and through the night the fey critter guided us, until as the moring light broke, he slipped into this cottage and disappeared.

We concluded that this was meant as our destination by the Giver of Dreams, and made this our home. Who lived in this place before us was a mystery with no clues, and we accepted it as manna from on high. Láidre set to work at once sewing a smock of the dragon scales and fashioning the strange garb you found her in that saves her from the brunt of the fire drake’s incendiary breath.”

“And by Good Providence,” added Láidre upon returning to the room, “I discovered the nearby lair of the uruloki within the week.
Father Luke had told me of several ways he had tricked fire drakes in the past to give up their potent venom, and in the past months I have developed several of my own devious ploys.”

Quoth Sir Galahad, “Many strange and amazing adventures I have heard told, but this is a most wonderous circumstance that ne’er would I have believed it save that I witnessed it with my own eyes. Princess Láidre, you are like no woman I have ever met.”

“You give me too high of praise, sir knight,” blushed the young princess. “I do naught but what any other would do. We are all ‘created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.’5 All women were designed to be strong allies for the people and places into which they are placed. We must simply live as we were crafted by our Maker to live. Did you not testify to this very reality when we met today and you spake palpably that it is your calling to find the Blessed Cup of our Lord?”

“Truth, milady, but I will not be swayed from my admiration,” protested the knight.

Sir Galahad tarried with the princesses and their servants for some months afterwards. There are many other tales recorded from this time, such as Sir Galahad and the Wedding of the Gnomes, Sir Galahad and the Unicorn, as well as Sir Galahad and the Three Nixies, just to name a few.6 The most famous of these stories is, of course, that which describes how they were finally separated—the tragic tale of Sir Galahad and the Stray Sod.

5 Ephesians 2:10

6 Most of these stories have been lost to us over time—only fragments remain.
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

sir galahad and the monstrous men

THE DAY WAS BRIGHT and Sir Galahad was exploring the dappled woods with the princess Láidre. On days when Galahad was not helping the princess contend with the local fire drake, the princess was helping him search for a way out of the Wild Forest, to such ends that the knight might continue on his quest for the Holy Grail.

Galahad was dressed in armor and carrying the Shield of Balyn and the sword drawn from the cube of red marble, while Láidre carried her bow and was garbed in the outfit she had crafted for protection against the breath of dragons. The two friends were merry and their conversation lively as they foraged through the woods, when forthwith the princess gasped: “Sir Galahad, pray thee pause!” And then, adding in an urgent whisper, spake: “Note, ahead, along our way, there appears to be a giant scorpion!” The knight and the lady froze in their tracks, not daring to draw blade or notch arrow. With dread they watched as the monster turned around to reveal that it was not simply a huge arachnid, but a

Footnote:
1 Following the events described in Sir Galahad and the Uruloki, there was a time when the knight tarried with the princesses Láidre and Máiréad.
terrifying creature that was half scorpion and half man.² To be
sure, a giant poisonous foe is to be feared, but
a giant poisonous foe with the wits and pas-
sions of a man is even worse.

Unable to sneak away unseen, Galahad
called out directly, “A good day to you. I am Sir Galahad, a knight
of the Round Table passing through this Wild Forest on a quest
for the Holy Grail. And my fair companion is the princess Láidre.”

“And you may call me Gyrtah,” said the scorpion-man. “That is,
for as long as you remain yet alive.”

“Peace, Master Gyrtah,” said Galahad. “We had no wish to dis-
turb you, and will, by your leave, pass by and trouble you no more.
Indeed, it would not be right for us to come to blows.”

The scorpion-man laughed derisively and
said, “As the historian Thucydides so wisely
observed, ‘Right is only in question between
equals in power—the strong do what they can and the weak suffer
what they must.’”³ And to underscore his point, the monstrous
man began opening and closing his massive pincers.

Countered the knight: “And St. Augustine said, ‘The purpose
of all wars is peace.’” And drawing his sword, continued, “As you
wish, Gyrtah. We shall contend one with the other, and there will
be peace and pieces.” Then turning to the princess Galahad added,
“Láidre, make haste to save yourself. And when you rejoin your
sister, will you please testify to her that my warring today was
just?⁴ It being a last resort, and I possessing right intention.”

² Known as aqrabuamelu
(or girtablilu), in the
Epic of Gilgamesh
monsters like these guard the
gates of the sun.

³ In the classic work
The History of the
Peloponnesian War
“Unquestionably I would so testify,” affirmed the princess. “But I will not leave you in such dire circumstances when I might be your strong ally,” Láidre added as she nocked an arrow against the string of her bow.

“Nay, milady,” protested Galahad. “Your arrows will not dent the armor of—” but said no more, as at that moment the scorpion-man had grabbed hold of the knight’s shield. Locked in a deadly embrace, Galahad and Gyrtah only had eyes for each other, the knight seeking to find a home for his blade in the unprotected neck of his foe and the scorpion-man seeking to crush the head of Galahad. Bitterly they battered each other, neither gaining or giving ground. The melee seemed as if it would go on forever when suddenly the monster threw his head up in a blood-curdling scream, and Galahad lost not a moment, but drove his blade up through the jaw and into the skull of his adversary.

The scorpion-man violently flailed and writhed about on the ground, but the mortal stroke had been struck. Galahad stepped clear of the monster’s contortions and knelt down, trying to catch his breath. After a few moments he looked up to see the princess standing above him, smiling but with her face splattered in blood.

“Are you injured,” cried out the knight. “Did that beast hurt you?”

Quoth the lady, “Fret not, the blood you see is that of the expired Master Gyrtah. I am not even scratched. The truth in your admonition to not use my bow against the beast was well marked, but that does not mean I was without recourse. I have, strapped under

4 Thomas Aquinas wrote that a Just War must be waged by a legitimate authority, have a just cause, and have the right intentions.
my dragon-scale smock, two daggers with which I severed the tail of that monstrous man.”

“Ahh, so that was the cause of his distress,” Galahad said in a wave of understanding. “My thanks, dear lady. You have been the salvation of us both!”

“I am most pleased to be a help,” Láidre said courteously, and gave a half curtsy in jest. Anon the knight and the princess retrieved their blades and cleaned them well before setting off again, deeper into the wood.

They had not walked for very long when a voice from above their heads called out to them with a jovial salutation, “Hulloo! I’m Akidía⁵—and who might you fine travelers be?”

Looking up into the trees they spied a young man’s head poking out from the leaves and Galahad returned his greetings, saying, “A good day to you. I am Sir Galahad, a knight of the Round Table passing through this Wild Forest on a quest for the Holy Grail. And my fair companion is the princess Láidre.”

“Oh yes, quite fair! A princess, you say? I must say she is a beautiful princess—the loveliest I have ever seen in my life,” said Akidía. “Do come near this tree, kind knight of the Round Table, and help me down. I have been up here for quite some time.”

“Were you in flight from the scorpion-man?” asked Láidre as Galahad walked under the tree to offer his assistance. “For we have just now left him dead. He shall be of no more trouble to you or

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⁵ Akidía (pronounced “uh-kee-dee-uh”) is the Greek form of the word acedia, a term that has been defined as a state of listlessness or restlessness. It is associated with sloth, laziness, boredom, and apathy.
anyone else in this region."

And while the princess was speaking, a golden serpentine tail dropped down from out of the tree behind Sir Galahad. In the blink of an eye it was wrapped around the waist of the knight. About the size of a man’s neck, the reptilian body squeezed tightly and began striking Galahad against the tree trunk.

“Sir Galahad!” Láidre cried out in alarm. And while rushing over to try and help, called up, “Akidía, take care—there is a great serpent in the tree with you!”

“That is kind of you to say, princess,” replied Akidía. “But I think great serpent may be a bit overstated, but certainly exceptional or impressive would not be far off the mark.”

The serpentine tail had twisted back up into the tree by the time Láidre reached Galahad. The knight was laying unconscious on the ground and the princess was kneeling by his side seeking to revive him when Akidía said, “I’ll come down and take a look, but I imagine the wind is just knocked out of Sir Galahad.”

Coming up behind the princess, Akidía continued, “Oh yes, look, he will be fine. He is coming around even now. As we wait on his recovery, why not you and I get to know each other better?” And suddenly Akidía kissed Láidre on the cheek.

Startled, the princess exclaimed “Who do you think you are?” Turning quickly around she then cried out in shock, “What do you think you are?” For behind her was a giant, golden serpent with a man’s head—Akidía’s head.

6 In Mirror of Nature the friar Vincent of Beauvais wrote that “serpents, with faces very like those of [humans] and necks ending in serpent bodies” are called draconopes.
“What do I think I am? Well, that is hard to say. Over the years I have been a poet, predator, and even a prince,” said Akidía. “What will I be is a much more interesting question. It is early in our relationship, but I hope that, with time, you will come to love me and maybe a day will come that I will answer your question by saying that I am your husband.”

“You’re a snake!” protested the princess in disgust.

“Forgive me, the kiss was presumptuous, I see that now,” Akidía said apologetically. “But there is no reason to say demeaning things like that. I am so much more than a mere snake. Come, let us sit quietly under this tree together and really get to know each other.” And with a wide smile, wrapped the far end of his body around the princess’s legs like a huge boa constrictor and pulled her over towards him.

“Let her go, you treacherous serpent,” commanded Sir Galahad. The knight was on his feet and his sword was drawn.

Releasing the princess, the man-headed serpent coiled and coiled its body up and up forming what had almost the appearance of being a scaled turret. As the knight advanced, coil after coil spun out at random from the monstrous tower at Galahad, buffeting the knight up and down his body. But as quickly as the attack began it ended, and the monster’s attention diverted by a thought and whispered to himself, “I cannot waste my time with this metal-clad buffoon when there is a princess to woo.” He slithered back towards Láidre, calling out to her, “My precious, the cold blood in my veins burns for you like boiling lava. I love you so
much I could just eat you up . . .!"

But he spoke not another word as his head rolled up to the feet of Láidre, having been chopped off from his serpentine body by one mighty slice of the bejeweled blade of Galahad.

Láidre rushed to Galahad’s side and embraced him with relief. And when they had both caught their breath, they set off again into the woods. Galahad eventually breaking the silence by reflecting, “As the great scholar St. Jack of the Kilns once wrote: ‘when you meet anything that is going to be Human and isn’t yet, or used to be Human once and isn’t now, or ought to be Human and isn’t, you keep your eyes on it and feel for your hatchet.’ Or, in this case, your sword.”

It was just past noon and the two friends found themselves yet again in another dire circumstance. The woods had opened up to a grassy clearing, and there, sunning himself in the very middle of the glade, was a massive manticore—a man-headed lion—thumping a dangerous looking tail, the tip of which was festooned with long spines, like that of a huge porcupine.8

“I am Arrogantis” growled the manticore, emphasizing the R’s, apparently to better display his triple row of razor-sharp teeth.

Quoth Galahad: “A good day to you. I am Sir Galahad, a knight of the Round Table passing through this Wild Forest on a quest for the Holy Grail. And my fair companion is the princess Láidre.”

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7 C.S. Lewis in The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe.

8 Some depictions of manticores show them with wings—likely a mistake made by conflating a manticore with a lamassu (the man-headed bull with wings from Mesopotamia).
“You will not be passing through this Wild Forest,” replied the manticore. “You will be staying for lunch.”

“I am sure we are both honored by your invitation to stay for lunch, but we really must keep on our way,” said Galahad.

“You misunderstand me,” chuckled the manticore. “You two have the honor to be my lunch. And truly, it is an honor for you—albeit, a short-lived one. But take heart! Your meaningless lives will now have a noble purpose: you will have died that I might be fed and strengthened. It is a gift to you, to be (in a way) a part of me. For where will you find a stronger, shrewder, or more stunning creature to be eaten by than the majestic Arrogantis?”

“You are to be pitied,” replied Sir Galahad. “Your pride reveals that, in spite of your muscle and cunning, you are an empty shell of a beast bereft of anything of lasting consequence.”

“You miserable, insignificant creatures pale in the glory of my presence,” snarled Arrogantis.

“Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues,” said the knight, “Hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance.”

“I will eat the girl first,” said Arrogantis. “That way you can have more time to regret your foolish words, you witless fustilarian.”

“Over my dead body,” rejoined Galahad.

“Well, yes, all in due time,” said the
manticore as he rose from the ground. Galahad then ran towards the monster, only to be batted aside like a cat swipes at a mouse. Undaunted, Galahad got right back up and launched himself at Arrogantis, swinging his great sword at the man-headed lion. This time, the knight had more success, and sliced deeply into the right paw of the beast. Arrogantis skipped back and gave him a very feline hiss. “Very well, the girl can be dessert.”

Now with the great cat’s full attention, Galahad was more cautious and the two opponents circled each other, giving consideration to the best course of attack. The princess let arrow after arrow fly, and though they hit their mark, the manticore gave them as much notice as one would give a mosquito bite.

The manticore clawed at the shield of Balyn and the knight swung his blade earnestly, but neither could best the other. They dashed together with great violence, but none would give ground. Finally Arrogantis pounced at Galahad but the knight sidestepped the great cat and was ready to strike a deadly blow when the tail of the beast whipped round and smote Galahad full in the face, lodging at least a half dozen barbs in his cheek and forehead as he passed by. The manticore turned about and was about to tear into the knight with his vicious claws and teeth when, forthwith, a sweet voice rang out: “Hail thou, Handsome!” And, instinctively turning his head, Arrogantis was surprised to have the shaft of an arrow drive deeply into his eye. The roar of rage and pain that came in response (to both the arrow and the feigned flattery of the princess—who can imagine which wounded the beast more?)
shook the trees all around the glade. It was immediately followed by a second, greater roar as the sword of Galahad entered the heart of the monster.

Sweat and blood flow mingled down the face of the knight, and he did not resist the offer of Láidre to remove his sword from the manticore or her aid in cleaning the blade. The great carcass of the monster soon attracted the attention of carrion and the princess entreated her friend, “Come, Sir Galahad, let us return now to my home. This day has had more than its share of adventure, and my sister has herbs that we can use to ease out those spines from your face and give you some comfort as you heal.”

“Aye, thither let us go,” agreed the knight. “Truth, my friend, you have proven yourself over and over again. Never have I known a woman so resourceful, loyal, and courageous.” And they slowly wended their way along the route they had traveled earlier. Leaving the manticore behind without a second glance, the continued past the massive serpent corpse (the head was nowhere to be seen), and skirted the place where the day’s contests had begun.

As they cleared the woods and their cottage came in sight, Galahad reflected, “There are monsters in this world that sport the appearance of a man, yet are not. And sadly, I have also encountered men in this world that, in spite of their appearances, behave like monsters.”

“Truth, good knight,” replied Láidre. “I have found this as well. Yet, thankfully, there are also noble and honorable men like you who are willing to stand up and sacrifice their very lives for the sake of others, and live lives of peace, industry, and humility.”
PRINCESS LÁIDRE and Sir Galahad had finished their task of harvesting fire drake venom\(^1\) much more quickly than usual, and had set forth (as was their habit) to try and uncover a path out of the Wild Forest, to such ends that Galahad could continue on his quest for the Holy Grail.

The two friends explored a new stretch of the forest for quite some time with no troubles and no success. They were discussing the merits of turning around sooner rather than later in hopes of perhaps enjoying a late meal with princess Máiréad when they came across a strange object in their path.

The trees were large and growing close together, so in spite of it being a clear, sunny day, their surroundings had the otherworldly feeling of twilight. The object they discovered appeared to be a large marble standing stone, but when they got closer they found it was a great whitewashed wooden box with subtle carvings along the top and bottom edge. It was slightly taller than Galahad and

\(^1\) As described in *Sir Galahad and the Uruloki*, Láidre’s sister, princess Máiréad was being treated for a gargoyle infection with an elixir that included the venom of uruloki.
twice his width. Walking around the side they found it was about two hands width in depth, and the front (which they had thought to be the back) was recessed and fitted with seven shelves.

“Why, it is a bookcase,” exclaimed the princess. And so it was. On the seven shelves were a wide assortment of beautiful, leather-bound books with fine gold lettering identifying each volume.

“A curious spot to place such a thing,” remarked the knight. “And it appears to have suffered no damage from exposure to the elements.” Galahad circled again around the back to further inspect the strange monolith. A slight creaking came from the object like that of an old door turning on its hinges and Láidre gave a sharp cry of surprise.

Drawing his sword, the knight rushed back around to help the princess, only to find her standing unharmed but staring with a look of great puzzlement on her face. The frame of the bookcase remained as it had been, but the shelves had disappeared. Or rather, they had swung in to what appeared to be a large room. The mysterious bookcase remained in the same spot and had not changed in size, yet looking inside revealed a library full of at least a score of identical bookshelves, standing side by side, similar to the one that stood in the wood, yet taller. The bookcases were all linked by a track near the ceiling and hanging from the track there was a ladder on wheels—presumably to be able to reach the books at the tops of the cases. Books were piled in stacks on the floor, and there were a number of overstuffed chairs and couches and canapés, as well as ottomans and divans scattered around the
center. These were all surrounded by piles of books as well, and were littered with books that appeared to be in various states of completion.

“It’s bigger on the inside,”2 whispered Láidre in amazment.

“This is strange magic,” warned the knight, placing the bright sheild of Balyn in front of the princess to protect her. “Mark my words, we will not remain unchanged should we cross that threshold.”

“Stay right where you are!” commanded a voice from inside the bookcase. “If you pass through that archway there is no telling if you will ever be able to escape from this prison.”

A disheveled young man then appeared in the doorway holding an open book in each hand, blinking slowly like a mole breaking through the surface of the ground trying to accustom itself to the daylight. He seemed eager to escape the book-lined room, but hesitated. Looking furtively from side to side he asked, “So who rules now over Britannia Maxima? That is, who is the Roman governor?”

“The Roman . . . what?” Galahad replied quizzically. “Our ruler is the noble King Arthur of the Round Table, and I am one of that company, hight Sir Galahad. This land is called England now. It has not been called Britannia Maxima for hundreds of years.”

“How can that be?” replied the young man. Then to himself he seemed to take counsel, conversing outloud. “Certes these good

2 This phenomenon has been noted in other objects throughout time: a doghouse owned by Charles Brown, a carpet bag carried by a nanny named Mary Poppins, a wardrobe belonging to a professor Digory Kirke, and an unusual police call box frequented by a gentleman called “The Doctor.”

3 Descartes
people have honest faces and peculiar clothing. But hundreds of years? It cannot be. But of course, “The reading of all good books is like conversation with the finest men of the past centuries.” And it is common knowledge that a lively debate with a quick wit can make a long evening pass quickly. Now, upon reflection, I have read a number of books during my imprisonment here—"

“Then let me be your Beatrice,” suggested Láidre warmly, offering her hand to him. “I can lead your out of this purgatory.”

“Ah, milady has read the *Divine Comedy*?” the man replied with a smile. “I have returned to it multiple times since I was trapped in here. Yes, I see now that I lost track of time. And Time has lost track of me! For look at me—I have not aged and I have not suffered hunger or fatigue. It appears now to me that it must be true that ‘Books are the food of youth; the delight of old age;’ as Cicero said, they are a ‘refuge and comfort’ that ‘no wise man ought ever to be found apart from’.”

“Cicero also said ‘If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need,’” added Sir Galahad.

“It seems that even wise Cicero can be wrong about somethings,” laughed the man, “for all I have had is a library and it seems I have all I needed! Forgive me, trapped so long in this prison of words and pages I have lost my manners. Allow me to introduce myself—long ago now it seems, the good people of Stratford-upon-Avon called me William.”

“And I am Láidre,” replied the princess. “Come with Sir Galahad
and me back to our cottage. It is not far. You can meet my sister and our servants. We have plenty of food and a place where you can sleep, free from this mysterious bookcase.”

“What a relief it will be to be free from this place,” exclaimed William. “Doesn’t the preacher warn: ‘of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh’? Even now I feel the weariness in my body.” But then a cloud seemed to pass over his face and he added again, as if to himself, “Yet I must not be too hasty. Did not the lady Jane of Hampshire wisely write: ‘I declare after all there is no enjoyment like reading! How much sooner one tires of any thing than of a book! When I have a house of my own, I shall be miserable if I have not an excellent library’?” Then, returning his attention to the princess and the knight remarked, “You both seem to me to be goodly people and I am of a mind to set out with you and avail myself of your hospitality, but this cottage you speak of—does it have a well stocked library?”

Conceded the knight, “Well, it does not have the riches to which you have been accustomed, but their library is in no way modest. Their collection includes Boethius’ *Consolation of Philosophy*, Athanasius’ *On the Incarnation*, and others. Of late, I have been enjoying comparing their copies of Saint Augustine’s *Confessions*, with Saint Patrick’s *Confessio*.”

“Oh, yes, most impressive,” William said courteously. But they could see his heart was not quite in it.

“Master William, in the case of good books,” the princess said
while trying to coax the genetleman out into the forest, “the point is not to see how many of them you can get through, but rather how many can get through to you.” Wouldn’t you agree?”

7 Mortimer J. Adler

“Without a doubt,” the young man admitted. “If one cannot enjoy reading a book over and over again, there is no use in reading it at all.” But then shrinking back he added again, as if to himself, “But the world is not a safe place. How can I go out unprotected as I am?”

Sir Galahad joined in with the cajolling and added encouragingly: Did not a famous Gallifreyan once said, “You want weapons? We’re in a library. Books are the best weapon in the world.” Arm yourself!

This seemed to gladden the young man and he dashed back into the room, calling out, “Quite right, sir knight! Why should I not take a book or two with me? Was it not Robert Galbraith who said “If you don’t like to read, you haven’t found the right book.”

“To be sure,” said Láidre. “No man can be called friendless who has God and the companionship of good books.”

William returned to the princess and the knight heavy laden with eight—possiblly a dozen—books of various sizes. Quothe Galahad: “My friend, you seem to be laboring under an unbearable load. Mayhaps you should put some of those back.”

“I always say, ‘Employ your time in improving yourself by other men’s writings so that you shall come easily by what others have labored hard for.’” replied the scholar and lost
his grip on the voluminous stack of volumes, promptly dropping them all. Looking down at the jumble of bent bindings and torn pages, William leaned against the frame of the bookcase and began to shake.

Reaching out his hand, Galahad laid it on William’s shoulder with care and said, “A wise man once said, ‘Everywhere I have sought peace and not found it, except in a corner with a book.’” Perhaps today is not the day for you to come with us. The cottage we are living in, as the princess said, is not far off. We could always return for you anon.”

“Yes, I see the wisdom in what you suggest,” William said. The color began to return to his face and he observed: “Certes, I have found peace in these books. It never ceases to amaze me that when I open a new book it welcomes me in and I float in the wonder of it all. A strange magic it is, that I step into a book as one steps into a bath, knowing the size and color of its binding, the shape and limits of the pages, only to find myself within moments not sitting in a bath, but blissfully adrift in an ocean with no land in sight and no shore desired.” William returned from his reverie and seemed to see the princess and the knight as if they had been gone and just returned. He hugged them both and said, “I don’t think I mentioned it earlier, but I was in the middle of reading an epic poem about the twelve labours of Heracles. I’m up to the point where he has to steal three of the golden apples from the garden of the Hesperides and I really want to see how it turns out. Come back tomorrow, or maybe the following day. I’ll be ready to go then.”

13 Thomas à Kempis

14 Written by Peisander—or (some say) plagiarized by him, from the work of Pisinus of Lindus.
As the bookcase closed, Láidre pulled a lovely gilded book from the shelf and said, “I will take this home for my sister. As she recovers from her illness I think she would welcome the timelessness of being swept up in a book.”

“It is a good thing you do for her, and I will likewise select a book for me,” said Galahad as he selected the largest book from the bookcase. “As St Jack of the Kilns once said, ‘You can never get a cup of tea large enough or a book long enough to suit me.’”

15 C.S. Lewis
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD
CHAPTER NINE

sir galahad and
the fenodyrees

PRINCESS LÁIDRE and brave Sir Galahad were searching to uncover a path out of the Wild Forest, to such ends that Galahad could continue on his quest for the Holy Grail. They had many remarkable adventures together as they explored the forest, known to those familiar with Arthurian lore as Sir Galahad and the Monstrous Men, Sir Galahad and the Harping Harpy, as well as Sir Galahad and the Faerie Ring—just to name a few.²

On this day the jovial companions were finding their way more arduous than usual. There was no clear path, and where they could make their way through, they often had to step over common debris that seemed out of place in the middle of the Wild Forest: broken brooms, cast-off coats, burnt pots and blackened kettles, seatless chairs, leaky buckets, drawers with mismatched socks, and all manner of cracked pottery. After a while they began to come across odd assemblages of household items. These would be combined in seemingling intentional ways but for no apparent use, such as a

1 ususally pronounced “FEN-uh-DYE-reez”

2 Of course, many of these adventures Galahad and Láidre shared are not known to us, having been lost over time.
wheel mounted to a stool, a mandolin of metal but with no strings, and even a cup, saucer, and spoon lined with fur.

Galahad was about to remark on the strange items they had passed when they began to hear voices in the branches above their heads. The voices were naught more than whispers, and were as smooth as gravel. “A tragedy of distress he has, yet with a touch of inevitabile failure,” spoke one. “Oh no, I see him as an icon of power, illuminating the unreality of the human condition,” countered yet another voice. Then was interjected: “Ahh, but I am moved by the girlie one.” “Most beauuteous,” agreed the first one, and “transcendent earthiness,” spake another. “Oh yes, she offers new insights of both simple and complex layers,” added a voice farther off. “Then we are agreed?” asked a voice that squeeked like an old door. “Aye, take ’em to the boss,” the creaky chorus assented from all around the princess and the knight.

It will come as no surprise that at this point Galahad had his sword drawn and Láidre had an arrow notched. They could not see their foes, but the danger was clear. Alas, such preparation was of no avail. From the trees above them rained a bakers’ dozen of small creatures. They ranged in height from two to three feet tall, hairy, with spindly arms and legs, and oversized heads. Four landed on Galahad’s shoulders, spinning his bucket helm around (rendering him functionally blind for battle) and three fell upon the princess’ hair, with one landing on her arrow, snapping it in half. The remainder of the band of assailants grabbed for weapons and kicked at shins. In half the time it takes to describe it, the
princess and the knight were on the ground, helpless before their diminutive attackers. Moments later they were bound and being carried along like felled evergreen trees towards an unknown destination, deeper in the Wild Forest.

“Princess,” called out Galahad, “Can you see who it is who has taken us?”

“You aren’t going to believe me,” replied Láidre. “They appear to be a band of hobs.”

“Oy! Watch your language, little lady,” barked one of their captors and poked her with a broomstick. “We are a band of fenodyrees.”

“Do you mean house elves?” asked Galahad.

“We are fenodyrees,” yelled their leader, banging Galahad’s helmet with his broomstick. “I’ll ask you keep in mind who has who tied up, and expect you to show some respect.”

The rest of the journey the wee captors debated amongst themselves the merits of line versus color. Some in the company maintained that drawing based on observation could lead to absolute, perfect beauty; while others asserted that color underlines and enhances our instincts so that we might respond to the art with our hearts, not our heads. The one with stick eventually yelled at them, calling into question what might be filling their heads instead of brains, and insisted that they all “put a sock in it” until they “got to the boss.” Upon arriving at their destination, Galahad and Láidre were set up with their backs against a tree trunk and

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3 The fenodyrees are also known as hobs, brúnaidh, brownies, bwbach, or house elves. Care is to be given when encountering one of these creatures, as it has been reported that if a fenodyree is angered, he may turn malicious, like a boggart.
tied against it. A particularly hairy hob took off Galahad’s helmet so that he could see, gave it a quick polish with the rag that was wrapped around him as a tunic of sorts, set it by the knight’s feet, and bowed.

Looking around, Galahad saw that they were in a clearing in the woods. The ground had been well-trodden, leaving it brown and dead where any vegetation still held on. The trees all around were half obscured by walls of white-washed wooden planks that had the appearance of having served decades on docks by the sea, and when their usefulness there had been spent, had been brought here and nailed together. Attached every few feet along these walls were garish sights—square or rectangular bits of wood, paper, or cloth about the size of an average fenodyree that had been covered with random marks and brash swashes of color. Within the walls, randomly spaced, were piles of various things from rocks to dishpans to broken farming equipment. Some of these had been dressed in humans’ clothes. And in the middle stood an obese, hairy brownie wearing nothing but a floppy beret who belched out: “Clarksie, yer as useful as a shelfless pantry! What is it you’ve brought in to our display space today?”

“Ahh, Master Bedmug, you is wisest amongst us and see with the inner eye” quothe the fenodyree with the big stick. Then, bowing most respectfully, he added, “If it please the master, we have brought you some Beauty.”

“As you all know, I am a sooper-genius,” replied Bedmug. “And I know best what Beauty looks like. And what you have there is not
Beauty, but rather a rusty old big person what’s called a knight.”

“You are ever peering through the detris to cleave to the subtext of a work,” replied Clarksie. “But we woulds direct your attention to the other side of the tree, to the lass clothed in leather and dragon scales.”

Unflustered by his error, the beret-sporting fenodyree named Master Bedmug waddled around for a look, caught sight of the princess and gasped loudly, throwing his hands up into the air and exclaiming: “My muse has finally appeared!” Following the declaration, the other fenodyrees hooted, hollered, clapped, jumped up and down, hugged each other, and farted dramatically.

Quothe Láidre: “Muse I may be, but I am not amused to have my person bound to a tree.”

Ignoring the princess, or being hard of hearing, the hob continued, “I have long sought to capture Beauty, to fashion and shape the world around me to direct one and all to be as enraptured

“Let me tell you about my glorious vision, Sir Galahad,” Bedmug began with great condescension. “I am going to create the most beautiful precision cast\textsuperscript{12} sculpture the world has ever seen. It will be an everlasting testimony to my refined vision of Beauty.”

“So you wish to have the princess pose for you so that you can carve the wax model and then you will free us?” asked the knight.

“How refreshing to find a warring brute like yourself that knows about the artmaking processes,” replied Bedmug. “Yes, that would be the normal process: craft a wax form, then dip it many times in a fine ceramic fluid to make a mold, then the wax is melted out
from the ceramic mold that is ready to receive the melted bronze.” This overview of the process was explained quickly and in a very supercilious fashion. But then Bedmug became animated and said, “But you see the problem don’t you? The wax model is a step away from Beauty. It is my brilliant idea to remove that separation true Beauty and make the mold around the muse herself, then pour in the molten metal to then yeild an everlasting work of art that bears testimony to my genius.”

“But that would kill the princess!” gasped Galahad ingredioulsy.

“Obviously,” replied Bedmug, waving off the objection his hand as one waves away a fly. “Great art requires that we all make sacrifices. And I am brilliant enough to realize it. As da Vinci once said, ‘A beautiful body perishes, but a work of art dies not.’”

Galahad struggled to free himself from his bindings, but, as Láidre was bound with the same ropes on the opposite side of the tree, the knight’s attempts to break free had the unexpected effect of robbing the princess of the air in her lungs. Therefore, the knight gave up his struggling, took care to compose himself, and engaged the maniacal fenodyree again in coversation: “Certes this is a courageous and brave approach to making art that you have embraces, but I wonder if you are limiting yourself to merely the base physical for the representaion of Beauty. For did not Aristotle say, ‘The aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance’?”

“So true,” agreed Bedmug. “And this is just one more reason my sculpture will be so fantabulous. It will have both the inward
and outward bits of this lovely lass included.” the bonkers brownie laughed and did a little jig, then began to call out orders: “Sootbin, Kyrah, Sitstill, and Nipper! Go fire up the fire—we need to get the bronze melting.” The hobs jumped up and scurried away, grabbing and tripping each other to reach their task first. “Clarksie, grab a crew to help you start mixing the slurry for the mold,” and Clarksie made a quick salute before pointing to several of the original band who had helped kidnap the knight and the princess. The chosen fenodyrees exclaimed with joy (one randomly shouted out, “Drawing is Magic!”) and followed their leader off in another direction. Then turning and waking off, Bedmug called out behind him, “Breezy, Neslie, and Crotts—bring my muse to the studio.”

The final three rejoiced at their assignment with shrieks, squeaks, and squeals. One jumped up to stand on the princess’ shoulders, grabbing large clumps of hair on either side of her head to pull for giving directions while the other two diligently untied knots. As one might imagine in light of their famous skills as house elves recorded in countless tales, fenodyrees are quite handy when it comes to being handy, and the bindings were off in a snap. One fenodyree then gave Láidre a kick behind the shins to get her moving and the other found a branch to use to prod her along.

The princess struggled to resist her captors, but her hands were still tied behind her back and her hair was being tugged so harshly that her eyes were soon blinded with tears.

Suddenly Sir Galahad bellowed, “Unhand her, you foul creatures!” And quite soon a caterwaul ensued as three fenodyrees went
flying—each having received a swat from the flat of side of the knight’s mighty blade. Láidre spun around and Galahad answered the question in her eyes. “The brownies were overly efficient when they untied you—they untied me as well!”

The clamor drew the attention of the other fenodyrees, and the sight of a knight lofting his sword and a fearsome lady swinging her daggers viciously lead to a great outcry of angst and outrage from the hobs. Galahad roared in response and then he and the princess rushed after their kidnappers.

Around and around they chased them, but with no success. This failure was a disappointment of course, but not unjustifiable. Fenodyrees are some of the fastest runners in the faerie realm, and during the pursuit Galahad fell over an artfully arranged pile of fish painted in shades of red with a small plaque set up by them with the words “Rubrum Clupea Harengus” scrawled upon it. The band of fenodyrees used this distraction to escape through a door in the back of the gallery. Galahad and Láidre pursued them through the door, only to find it led only to an empty broom closet.

“Certes, in light of the stories of the fenodyrees’ skill with kettles and dudtbins,” said Láidre. “I suppose we shouldn’t be shocked to learn that broom closets serve for them as magic portals.”

“Aye, but I must admit to being unprepared to find a band of hobs in the woods so committed to Beauty,” replied Galahad.
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD
THE SOUND OF WATER drew Sir Galahad forward. Spurring his way through a leafy glade, the young knight found himself riding alongside a stream. He was charmed by the music of the current as it cut past the rocky banks, so vivid was it in his ears that he could almost have whistling the tune. Though famished, his body weary under the gleaming armor after many an adventure, Sir Galahad found that the joy of his surroundings erased all thought of struggles both past and future. His gaiety was soon interrupted by a cry of pain.

Standing in the stirrups, he spied the form of a man in the distance, not beside the water but actually in it, not flailing as one who drowns but actually standing waist-deep in the current, though hunched somewhat. As the knight raced forward, he discovered the cause of the man’s cry: a grievous wound across his bare chest, which he was now washing in the silver waves. A tail of blood wended its way from the place where the man stood to the shore where the knight reined in his steed.

Sir Galahad greeted the man, offering his aid.
“There is no need, sir,” the man replied, binding up the wound. He winced as he pulled the bandage tight, but then, as he surveyed the shining armor of the youth before him, his grimace of pain transformed into a most hospitable smile. He stroked his trim white beard in a thoughtful manner. “I perceive you are a knight, and I am delighted to make your acquaintance. Had you arrived a moment sooner, I could have introduced you to the brigands who did this, and that would have delighted me even more.”

The man climbed out of the water and began to pick through a pile of garments left on the bank. He was lithe and able, despite his injury, and not as aged as Sir Galahad at first assumed. Up close, his clear eyes and unlined face suggested a man in his prime, as if the color of his beard was nothing more than a disguise. When the man stood, fully dressed, Sir Galahad noted his moth-eaten cassock with astonishment.

“A holy friar!” quoth he.

“You seem surprised. Surely you have encountered a friar before.”

“Indeed I have,” Sir Galahad answered, “but the holy friars of my acquaintance have tended toward less vigor and more girth. Even so, I feel the glow of outrage in my breast that any friar, even a lean one, should be so maliciously used. Yet surely a man such as yourself carries little of interest to thieves.”

“That is true enough,” the friar conceded, cinching his habit with a belt of rough twine. “Twas not what I carried, my son, but what I rode that interested the villains.” He spread his arms wide. “As you can see, the fellows robbed me of both purse and mount.”
“They stripped you, and then struck you?” Galahad asked, pointing to the friar’s unblemished tunic, which bore no signs of the violence that marked his body.

The friar glanced down at the fabric. “Aye, sir, that was the way of it.”

Sir Galahad, determined to defend this holy man against further danger, hoisted him up behind the saddle. “We will scout the nearby forest in search of malefactors.”

But just as quickly the friar jumped down, intending no such thing. “The fact is, my road takes me in the opposite direction.”

“And if you should meet these brigands again?”

“As a man of God, I have no wish to punish them. They stole my mare, my purse, and my good cloak—yet my only regret is that they would not accept the shirt off my back.”

“That is nobly said,” Galahad replied. “Nevertheless, you shall accompany me for now. We will find a physician to treat your wound, food and drink to restore your strength.”

“I have meat you know not of,” the friar replied piously.

“In your weakened state, I would not have you travel alone. By my troth,” Sir Galahad added, gripping the hilt of his splendid sword, “you shall come to no harm while I am near.”

And so the holy friar yielded and allowed himself to be hoisted once more behind the young knight’s saddle. As they rode, he clung to the knight’s strong shoulder to steady himself. The farther they went, the more troubled Sir Galahad became.

“Holy friar, I thought this stream so beautiful before our
meeting, yet now I find I cannot look at it without remembering the blood of the weak intermingled with its flow. The audacity of any thief who would lift hand to even the humblest of God’s servants!"

The young knight’s sincerity drew an unexpected laugh from the holy friar. “Why, I have known great strength in my time,” said he, “and great innocence, too. Yet never before, methinks, have I witnessed them both in the same person! Tis a rare pleasure, indeed, to make your acquaintance, Sir Galahad, almost worth the pain it cost me.”

For a moment, the knight wondered whether the holy friar mocked him. But he dismissed the thought at once as impossible. The friar’s way of speaking, however, reminded him of another inscrutable wise man, the subtle wizard of King Arthur’s court, a man hight Merlin. That man’s learning often sounded like mockery to the ear of those unschooled in the ways of wizardry. Sir Galahad wondered whether the holy friar was familiar with magic.

The whinny of a horse nearby drew the knight’s attention. There, across the stream, he spied a great beast collapsed onto its side. Despite a blow that had half cleaved head from shoulders, the stallion steamed with breath, its watery eyes imploring them for aid from the opposite bank. At once, the knight spurred through the stream and up the bank. Before he could dismount, alas, the gallant animal made a bleating cry and dropped his raised head heavily to the ground.

“Such cruelty to beasts is an abomination to the Lord,” the holy
friar remarked.

“Is this the horse that was taken from you?”

“Faith, no,” the friar replied. “Perhaps in Camelot the holy men are so equipped, but I assure you it is not so in these parts.”

“Then where has it come from?” Sir Galahad asked. He dismounted, crouching low to inspect the horse’s hooves, then began to creep up the bank in search of tracks.

“Perhaps we should carry on,” the friar suggested, but Sir Galahad’s steed followed its master unbidden, carrying the holy man along in pursuit. The tracks took them a little way into the forest until Galahad stopped suddenly and cried out. He took something off the ground and returned to his horse.

“See this,” he said, holding up a vambrace of exceptional manufacture for inspection. The steel had been creased at the forearm by a mighty sword stroke and was slick with blood.

They soon found another vambrace, and then a helm, and eventually a pair of sabatons flecked with scarlet. Some wounded knight had fled this way, stripping his armor piece by piece to lighten the burden. Given time to search the surrounding woods, the rest of his harness might have turned up, but Sir Galahad was eager to follow the path and find the owner of the armor before it was too late.

“We may be traveling in the wrong direction,” the friar remarked. “He may have abandoned his armor before losing his horse. I fear that the same fellows who accosted me must have done for this good man-at-arms.”
“That I doubt,” Sir Galahad answered. “A mighty blow slew that horse—and perhaps the man who rode it—a blow requiring greater skill than any common brigand may boast. And a stouter blade, too. We must be on our guard.”

Before the friar could reply, a party of hunters overtook them. The footmen came first, dogs barking, a group of grim-faced woodsmen who stopped in their tracks when they sighted the knight. A trio of horsemen soon followed, rough-hewn riders dressed in green woolen cloaks, each armed with a stout bow. What these weapons lacked in ornamentation was made up for by signs of habitual use. One of the three rode up to Sir Galahad, revealing himself as their leader. Beneath his homespun cloak, this man wore a coat of serviceable mail. His skin was sun-browned, his jaw covered in stubble, and each of his eyes was marked by wrinkles that resembled hawks’ feet, the result of too much squinting at whatever crossed his path.

Sir Galahad announced himself and revealed that he was a knight of the Round Table. This caused the man immediately to demonstrate the squint.

“The Round Table,” he repeated in a skeptical tone. “The one the King made? In Camelot? That’s the table you’re referring to?”

“There is none other like it,” Sir Galahad replied.

Then the holy friar peered out from behind the knight’s shoulder for a better look, and the squint melted away in recognition.

“Do you know these men?” Galahad asked the friar, suspecting at once that they must be the brigands who had robbed him.
But the friar shook his head. “No, indeed.”

“Where exactly have you come from?” the hunter asked. “After Camelot, I mean.”

Ignoring this, Sir Galahad told of the slaughtered horse and the discarded armor, explaining that somewhere in the woods must lie the body of an injured knight.

“Or perhaps something worse,” the man replied.

He spurred his horse alongside Galahad’s for a better look at the friar. The young knight observed an impudence in the man’s gaze which would have displeased him in any circumstance, but struck him as particularly odious when directed at a holy man.

“What’s your name, then, friar?” the man asked. “Where are you traveling?”

These questions had a noticeable effect on the man’s companions. They, too, sensed a current under the words and grew alert. One of the mounted men notched a lazy arrow, light glinting on its sharpened head. This was enough for Sir Galahad.

All at once, the knight rose in the stirrups, flashing his great sword overhead in a blinding circuit. He circling his horse around the bowmen at the same time, moving in such a way that, as he flanked them, his armored body served as a shield to the startled friar—who belatedly clutched at the knight’s pauldrons lest he fly from the saddle.

“I’ve sworn to protect this holy friar!” the knight declared in a thundering voice.

But the lead hunter did not stir, except to turn halfway in the
saddle so that he could watch from over his shoulder. The notched arrow rested in the horseman’s lap. Even the woodsmen remained still, though not as men frozen in surprise. Rather, they beheld the whirling knight with great curiosity, like men accustomed to sudden developments who only reacted when they were good and ready.

Sir Galahad found this strange, and perhaps a shade dishonorable, but considered that it was hardly fair to judge these rustics of the forest by the lofty standards of chivalry.

“Let’s be on our way,” the friar suggested, and Sir Galahad eventually obliged.

After ten minutes or so of hard riding, Sir Galahad finally slowed the pace, satisfied that the men had been too prudent to follow.

“Those hunters were none too civil,” the knight remarked in exasperation.

“They were no hunters, my son. They were the warden’s men. And their leader was Master Godwin himself, the warden of the forest. I fear that, to the extent the king’s writ reaches this forest, it must be men like him who carry it.”

“I can hardly credit such a thing! How could the law of a King so noble be left to such ignoble hands to administer?”

The friar chuckled in his peculiar way. “Yet strange as it seems, it must be so. The nobler sort have their own preoccupations, as you must know. Life at court, all the feasting, the demands of leisure—”

Sir Galahad noted coldly that the knights of the Round Table
were not preoccupied in such affairs.

The friar heartily agreed. “No, indeed! They have their quests to undertake, their great adventures to pursue. If I am not mistaken, you yourself are committed to the greatest quest of all. And you are foreordained to succeed, is that not so?”

Reluctantly, Sir Galahad conceded the truth of this, though he felt no desire to speak at this moment of the Grail.

“So you see,” the friar concluded, “if the laws are to be enforced, the task must fall to the humbler sort, unsuitable as they may be.”

The young knight pondered these words as they followed the bank. Eventually the stream began to widen. The trees on the far shore grew increasingly distant. The friar suggested fording before such a crossing became impossible, and Sir Galahad was minded to agree until he spied a clearing ahead. Between the branches, he perceived the white spires of an ancient church whose outline reminded him of childhood days. Filled with sudden joy, the knight galloped into the clearing only to meet with disappointment. He reined to a stop just yards from the tree line.

The church had been great once, but all that remained was a blanched ruin. Only its ribs still stood upright, the rest of the stone scattered in heaps all around. Only the outline of the basilica survived, and yet the spine of the vaulted ceilings, now hung with verdant vines, possessed a melancholy beauty. Like the stream which had sung to him earlier, this site began to speak. As he studied the ruin, Sir Galahad began to wonder whether it would be right to rebuild such a place. Perhaps the hands of the forest had
only completed what the hands of man had begun.

“Go back into the trees,” the friar whispered, “before those men see us.”

Awakened from his reverie, Sir Galahad noticed a small party of men just inside the ruins of the church. Two stood upright, dressed in the same green woolen as the warden’s men, while a third seemed to be crawling around at their feet.

“What are they doing?” the knight wondered aloud.

“Best leave these agents of the law to do their business, whatever it be, and not interfere. Are you listening?” The friar eased himself down and hastened toward the concealment of the forest. “I can see you’re determined, so I’ll wait here.”

“Perhaps it’s best,” the knight said, resting a hand on his sword.

Leaving the friar, he galloped across the meadow in haste, not wanting to give the party time to retreat when startled. But once again the warden’s men surprised him. They did not flee at his approach; they barely glanced up. Instead, the two sentinels leaned on their bows until he reached them, and then they eased back to make room for the knight.

The third man rose from the ground slowly, revealing the subject of his crouched inquiries: a slain knight, half-armored, clutching a bloody sword in his dead right hand. He wore a fine helm but no cuirass. From his bare back protruded a white splinter of lance. The fatal blow had not passed through him, however. The reason the lance was in his back was that it had entered from behind. This knight had been taken unawares.
“Well, if it isn’t young Sir Galahad. How goes thy quest?”

To his surprise, Galahad heard the voice of Merlin,¹ and realized that it was none other than the magician himself who had been examining the body.

“Why, I never thought to find you here, Lord Merlin,” the young knight exclaimed.

The wizard smiled at this polite form of address, no doubt relieved to find noble company after his sojourn among the warden’s men. “The King in his wisdom dispatches me hither and yon whenever there’s a mystery to gaze upon, whenever there’s an enigma to pry apart.”

“Then, there is a mystery here?”

“Not a great mystery, no. But there is a sort of lesson, I suppose, which is this: a knight without armor must learn to choose his fights.”

“I know where his missing armor is to be found,” Galahad said, and then he told Merlin about the scattered pieces and the slain steed.

But the wizard dismissed this news with a conjurer’s wave. “That armor you saw,” he said, “belonged to the man who murdered this knight. This one’s armor is not lying in the road; it’s with the money changers.”

“I do not understand.”

“This is—or rather, was—Sir Malinex. Don’t pretend you’ve heard the name. He was before your time, and besides, old Malinex

¹ Merlin (also called Merlinus Ambrosius or Myrddin Emrys) is an enchanter who serves as advisor and mentor to King Arthur until he is bewitched by a young woman and imprisoned in a crystal cave in the enchanted forest of Brocéliande.
was never in the first rank of chivalry, never Round Table material—" The warden’s men seemed to stiffen at these words, and the subtle wizard grew defensive. “I never heard of any quests he undertook, only wandering. And then he got a strange idea in his head and started selling off his armor.”

“Twas not considered a strange idea in these parts,” a voice declared.

Sir Galahad knew the warden’s voice without turning, and would have known it—even had never heard the warden before—by the way the chests of his men seemed to expand at the sound of his words. The remarkable thing was that Master Godwin had ridden up in complete silence, wholly undetected. Now he approached the wizard, apparently devoid of the awe which Merlin had inspired in the young knight, and gazed at him with the same impudence the man had shown to the holy friar.

“Sir Malinex,” he said, in a hushed tone, “sold off his armor bit by bit for bread to feed the hungry. All his wandering through these famished forests led to him noticing something that not every man does.”

The wizard sniffed. “He was kind-hearted, certainly. But it seems his kind-heartedness has gotten him killed.”

“Maybe,” Master Godwin said, “but that doesn’t make him a fool.”

Merlin turned to Galahad with a crooked smile. “This fellow is Godwin, the warden of the forest—the third one the King’s appointed in as many years, that’s how long they seem to last. So best not get too attached to this one.”
Godwin acknowledged the young knight with a nod. “The gentleman and myself have met already, and taken the measure of each other. Young Sir, you had a clerical companion last time we met who now seems to have alighted.”

“The holy friar was injured by robbers,” Galahad explained, for the benefit of the wizard, “and I have promised him safe passage.”

This news made Merlin frowned. “Well, there is no religious house in this part of the forest, apart from, well, this one—” He gestured to the bare arches overhead. “This friar of yours must have journeyed from afar.”

Master Godwin said that he was more interested in knowing where the holy friar had journeyed to, so Galahad pointed toward the trees. “He was reluctant to encounter more trouble, so he waits for my return.”

“That’s splendid. Shall we fetch him?”

Galahad led the wizard and the warden on foot toward the place where the holy friar waited. Along the way, the three men talked about the death of Sir Malinex.

“That lance pierced him from behind,” Galahad observed.

“Which is why I call the man who did it a murderer,” Merlin said. “This was not a chivalric fight, not at all.” He grew thoughtful and added: “The remarkable thing is, even run through the body with a lance, Sir Malinex managed to draw his sword and deal that villain a terrible blow.”

“He was a great knight after all,” Godwin observed.

Merlin bristled. “I never said he wasn’t good and true. Just a bit
soft—or rather, good-hearted.”

Strangely, Galahad found himself moved by the warden’s loyalty to the fallen knight. He sought to mediate between the two: “Perhaps it was short-sighted of Sir Malinex to part with his armor, yet his goodness—his innocence—does him credit. And after all, strength and innocence are rarely combined in one person. Twas this poor knight’s innocence that cost him his strength, and that is no bad thing.”

This seemed to surprise Godwin. “You think so? I would say just the opposite. It’s strength that preserves innocence. The weak are in no position to remain innocent; only the strong are.” While Galahad pondered these words, the warden added: “You’re quite wrong, I’m afraid. Sir Malinex never lost his strength. He gave it.”

The wizard cleared his throat and said: “Regardless, old Sir Malinex was well-loved by the poor in this forest, and for that someone determined to kill him. And—it seems to me that your holy friar has vanished into the woods.”

Sure enough, there was no sign of the man.

Sir Galahad called out to no avail. They searched awhile, but found nothing. Godwin opined that the holy friar had run away, while Sir Galahad worried that he had been accosted once more by robbers—or perhaps, by the murderer of Sir Malinex. The wizard replied to this speculation with what sounded like a prolonged clearing of the throat, but might also have been a mystical language known only to the adept. Eventually Merlin and Master Godwin returned to the church, where the rest of the warden’s men were
gathering, leaving Galahad to search awhile longer. But dark was falling and the wind grew cold and the glowing fire beneath the hollow spires called to the young knight.

Sir Galahad found the warden and his men washing and winding the body of poor Sir Malinex, their rough hands handling him as gently as a priest handles relics. Merlin watched over their work from a distance, lost in thought, but Galahad remained with them until the task was done, and when they kneeled to pray, the knight knelt with them.

As he slept by the fire that night under the wizard’s watchful eye, Galahad dreamed that he was staring into a great blinding light. He perceived the arches of a vast church whose vaulted ribs were filled with stars. He felt himself drawn by unseen hands toward the place where the altar should be, though he could not see it any more than he could have stared into the sun. Nor could he see what was in his hands, though he could tell by touch that it was a breastplate of old, its surface rippled like the contours of a man’s chest. And under his fingers he could feel a gouge in the metal, as if its side had been pierced.

From the altar a voice spoke in a cadence of thunder too deafening for his ears. But somehow Galahad knew what he was meant to do. Straining forward, holding the breastplate out toward the light, he felt its weight lift from his fingers. In its place, something weightless as air came to rest, a thing so soft and warm that it filled him with joy. He felt the sting of tears as he took this gift, whatever it was, holding it to his lips. And his nostrils began to fill
with the aroma of bread.

Sir Galahad woke to find the ashes of the fire and the ruins of the church overhead. But Merlin had gone, and Master Godwin’s men stirred in the dawn. They shared their breakfast and spoke of the journey they would take through the Wild Forest to lay the body of poor Sir Malinex to rest at an abbey where many orphans dwelled and none went hungry thanks to the generosity of that fallen knight.

“These are good men,” Sir Galahad said to the warden as they prepared to depart.

“I thank you for that. I am missing one, who did not join us in the night. No doubt we will find him along the way. Perhaps you, too, will join us?”

“It would do my heart good to see this gentle knight laid to rest, but I am bound to my quest and must continue.”

The warden squinted, but not with skepticism. “I understand,” he confided, “for in my own way, I also have a quest. I do not compare it to yours, understand. It is more complicated, perhaps—certainly harder to explain.”

“What is it you seek?”

“I cannot tell you,” the warden said. “I know not how to name it. And I have no prophecy, sadly, to tell whether it will be found. But still.”

“I think I can name it,” said Sir Galahad. “What you seek is Justice, is it not?”

“Justice,” Godwin said, as if pronouncing it for the first time. “It
may be that. But sometimes I think it is simply the truth. Just that.
It might be enough.”

Sir Galahad bid the warden farewell and continued down the
banks of the river once more. By midday he reached a kind of delta
where the waters branched out in many directions. Here the wind
blew colder and the land seemed to have plunged too soon into
winter. The branches of every tree sparkled like glass, the canopy
of leaves replaced by an impenetrable fog overhead. The rush of
the water became a funeral dirge, and for a time he considered
turning back. But Sir Galahad continued.

Late in the afternoon, he spied a form on horseback up ahead,
a hooded man in green who rode at a snail’s pace, easily overtaken.
He sat a fine sorrel like the ones the warden’s men rode, but Sir
Galahad knew that he was not the missing bowman. He spurred
ahead to come alongside the man, and was not surprised to find
beneath the woolen hood the face of his holy friar. The man
stroked his white beard and smiled at the young knight.

“Where have you been, sir?” Sir Galahad asked.

The friar considered the question, then said: “I must be about
my father’s business.”

The young knight liked this answer not. Still, they rode together
in silence. At last, Sir Galahad turned in his saddle to face the
friar: “Who would kill a good man like Sir Malinex? And who
would do it in such a despicable way?”

The friar chuckled, and it struck the knight that this man
was not at all like the wizard Merlin. His mockery was always in
earnest. “You really can’t think of the reason, can you?”

“This forest is full of questing knights, and surely there is more glory in facing one of them—and doing it head on.” Sir Galahad tapped a gauntlet against his chest to signal his own willingness to accept such a challenge.

But this only made the friar laugh. “Those men you speak of do the darkness no harm. Best leave them to their business, I always say.” Then he grew grave. “But you tell me there’s a man who would lay down his armor—who would trade it to fill the mouths of some beggar’s children? Good Sir, imagine if such a story were to spread. Imagine if such an example were to take hold. Armor for bread!”

“What harm is it to you?”

The friar seemed not to hear the question, lost in musing. “A realm whose knights possessed such strength could never be overcome.”

As he spoke, they approached a bridge of ice which spanned the river. On the other side, the land was so thick with fog that only the front rank of trees stood out from the gloom, their trunks so close together that they almost formed a wall. The bridge itself was of a mystical construction the likes of which Sir Galahad had never beheld, a malevolent lacework of translucent arches that seemed in the twilight to be fashioned after the likeness of the straining arms of the damned, reaching up out of the netherworld in mute appeal.

The friar spurred forward and paused at the foot of the terrible bridge, wheeling about in triumph. “Here we must part ways,” he said. “I had hoped to be out in the world much longer, frankly. You
can at least congratulate yourself on that. You convinced me to turn back—I was curious to take your measure—but now we’ve come to where I started, and I must go.”

Sir Galahad began to draw his blade, but found it frozen fast in the scabbard.

“One day,” the friar laughed, “this quest of yours might summon me across the bridge once more. Grasp the riddle of the poor knight’s death, and then perhaps I shall have to come and find you.”

“Nothing you can do shall stop me.”

“Perhaps. But first you must try something I would need to stop.”

He would have crossed the river then if not for Master Godwin, who did once more a thing it seemed he had mastered; he appeared without a sound. The warden rode out of the trees just ahead of them and dashed up beside the friar, who turned in surprise. Godwin put his hand on the reins of the stolen horse and studied his prey a moment with that hawkish squint. Then he declared: “In the King’s name, I arrest thee for murder.”

“You have no jurisdiction here—” the friar roared, reaching out from beneath his cloak with a shining blade in hand.

But now Sir Galahad heaved his ice-bound sword from its sheath. In a flash, the steel passed through the friar’s wrist bone, sending both the dagger and the hand that wielded it somersaulting through the crystalline air. The hand landed in the snow. At once, the friar spurred across the bridge of ice to safety, clutching the mangled stump against this chest.

As he galloped, though, the bridge began to shatter beneath the
horse’s hooves. A pillar of fire came down through the fog, causing the friar’s horse to rear. When the flame struck the bridge, the whole structure broke apart, plunging rider and mount into the freezing current.

The sorrel mare thrashed in the wash until Master Godwin rode into the shallows to rescue her. He seized the reins once more and urged the beast forward until it gained the shore. For the friar, however, there was no hope. His dark form slipped down to oblivion as the river carried him away.

Sir Galahad could only wonder at the fire from above ... until the wizard Merlin rode out of the trees to join him. Merlin’s right hand still flickered, but when the knight noted this, he hid the flame beneath his cloak. Then he withdrew the hand and it appeared perfectly normal, apart from some redness at the fingertips.

“Twas the holy friar that slew Sir Malinex,” Sir Galahad said. “Is this the riddle of the poor knight’s death?”

“Well,” Merlin replied, “twas that thing that slew the true friar. A lovely man, the friar, not very pious—good company, in other words, yet he left the court, sold his estate, gave it all to the poor. Quite the fool, I said, yet Arthur loved him—and so did poor Sir Malinex, who rode out without his armor to avenge the holy friar’s death.”

Sir Galahad did not grasp the riddle. He gazed at the river where the friar—or, it seemed, his murderer—had disappeared in the roiling water. He could see no trace of the man—or, as Merlin had said, that thing.

“Who—or what—was this thing?” the young knight asked.
But when he turned, of course, the wizard had already vanished. He was alone with Master Godwin, who professed to be as ignorant on the matter as himself.

“I know no more than the wizard tells me,” Godwin said, “which is nothing at all. He confided in the last warden but one, and said it was a waste of time in the end. Maybe he’ll enlighten my replacement, whoever that may be.”

The two men traveled together as far as the delta, then parted ways with many assurances of goodwill. The warden crossed to the far side in hopes of catching up to his men, while Sir Galahad rode back in the direction of the ruined church, wanting to see it one more time. He found a meadow very much like the one where the church was, but there was no sign of the structure, so he continued a while before circling back. The empty meadow was the right one, yet he could find no trace of the basilica, not even a stray stone in the grass.

Sir Galahad began to contemplate his dream from the night before, but dreams are elusive, especially in their particulars. What was it that he had handed over at the altar, and what had he received in return? It had felt, it had smelled like … something.

Trying to remember made Sir Galahad conscious of his hunger. He spurred away from the empty meadow and continued on his path.
DARK CLOUDS HUNG LOW while Sir Galahad wandered lost in the Wild Forest, and he soon found himself caught in a heavy storm, forcing him to seek the protection of a nearby cluster of large trees. Their canopy provided Galahad a shelter carpeted with a thick blanket of pine needles. Sitting against one of the great trunks, his hand toyed lazily with the underbrush, and he was surprised when his fingers felt cold metal. As he brushed the needles away, he discovered an old silver dagger.

The edge of the dagger was no longer keen, and even if it were to be sharpened, it would not have been worth replacing any of Galahad’s other armaments. Yet as the knight turned it over and over in his hand, he decided to keep it, for it brought back memories of a grand adventure from years past. Certainly, Galahad had found—and was yet to find—many strange and wonderful experiences in this Wild Forest, yet none quite as significant as that of his initial adventure into the weald, a trial that would orient his bearings over the glorious span of his good life.

While the rain roared around his refuge, the knight’s reverie
turned to the summer of his fifteenth year. In the month of August when men shear the corn full low, Galahad’s noble face had yet been smooth and soft with an easy flush that rose as gently as fair Aurora rising from the bed of Tithonus.¹ His golden hair curled like the fleece of a lamb, and his eyes shone bright with ready joy.

As a child, he had been dearly loved by all the Sisters of the Abbey of the Nova Creatura, among whom he had grown from a tiny babe. Yet his great aunt, Sister Epiphania, had a particular fondness for him, as she had served him like a mother for as long as he could remember.

Though life at the abbey was ordered and sober, it was also sincere—for these nuns were overseen by the old Matron Mercy, under the watchful care of Dame Caelia of the House of Holiness. From his first days, young Galahad had been surrounded by gentle affection, the ward of women who neither indulged his worst impulses nor forbade his best ones. They instructed young souls in truth like one feeding spoonsful of honey, for the sisters felt it God’s holy work to train up a child in the way he should go. Caelia’s word was clear on the matter: every boy was framed by the hand of His maker, born for unique and wondrous tasks. Their work as guardians was simply to help the child find his destined path.

Galahad had grown up sharing the daily labors of the abbey, but now that he was fifteen and had proven trustworthy, he was advanced to the job of runner—traveling on behalf of the sisters to collect and deliver letters and packages. The nuns had woven a beautiful, thick

¹ In Greek myth the son of King Laomedon and the naiad Strymo.
woolen cloak to protect him from the elements, provided him with a leather bag to carry goods, and offered him a silver dagger that had once belonged to a dear and deceased gardener, a weapon to protect Galahad from wild beasts along his way.

And so the day arrived in which young Galahad was asked to travel just to the east of Mount Passara, sent on a journey to collect a stack of books from the estate of an old hermit who had recently died and left the contents of his entire library to the abbey. The sisters packed Galahad’s bag with food for the three-day trip, urged him stay alert to dangers along the way, and sent him off.

The first two days passed with naught to note, though upon arriving at the strange little hermitage, he found the library’s collection too large to deliver all at once. So, he gathered enough books to fill his bag and began heading homeward.

Toward noon on the third day, however, the sky was suddenly overcast, and a great storm arose. It was if Jove² himself were unleashing a fierce deluge. The downpour was so intense, Galahad felt the need for shelter, so noting a little grove of trees nearby, he rushed to take cover. Upon entering, the young man found that space much vaster than he had first imagined—full of grand trees dressed in summer’s pride. Their branches were full and heavy, so thick with leaves the light of the stars could not pass through them in the thick of night.

As he walked along a well-worn path, he noticed the trees were full of birds singing sweetly, praising the beauty of their shelter.

² that is, Jupiter, the god of the sky and thunder and king of the gods—called Zeus by the Greeks
They sang the glories of the pine, the cedar, the elm, the poplar, the oak, the cypress, the laurel, the fir, the willow, the yew, and the birch. They sang of the sallow, the myrrh, the beech, the ash, the olive, the plantain, the holm-oak, and the maple. For every tree there was a melody, and for every melody, there was a harmony, leading Galahad deeper and deeper in delight along his way.

Yet, the path he was traveling suddenly drew to an end at a pool of water, round and clear. Its edges seemed to be formed from ice, though each block was warm to the touch. Along the top of this border, these words were engraved: TEMPUS, AEVUM, DIES, MOMENTUM.

The water within pulsed slowly, in concentric rings, folding toward the center. With this motion, the waves seemed to hum along with the birdsong, and as the young man leaned closer and closer to better hear these reverberations, Galahad could not tell if the waters were moving to match the feathered choir or whether the waters led the sweet music of the birds.

Bent close over the pool, Galahad noticed something gleaming at the very center of the bottom—a luminous object he could nearly reach if he stretched out his hand—but no. It sat a bit too far. And so, he stepped into the pool to solve the mystery, thinking it couldn’t be deeper than a few inches.

However, as soon as his second foot touched the water, Galahad found the substance of this pool wasn’t wet at all—formed instead from waves of light and sound, lapping and tugging at him, pulling him deeper and deeper toward the center.
Upon reaching the middle, a rising mist seemed to surround him, and Galahad found himself falling through the pool, down, down, down and then projected back up inside it, thrown as if from a geyser—at last, cast off on the side of its bank.

Galahad was shaken, unsure of what had just taken place—but he dusted himself off and looked around so that he might retrace his same path. This was certainly the same wood, though it was also different. Instead of a single trail leading from the pool, there were seven. Galahad stood confused.

As he hesitated, he heard soft laughter behind him, and he turned to find the most lovely young woman he had ever seen. Her hair was white and fell in loose in curls about her shoulders, and she wore a gown that seemed to be woven from thousands of clear crystal drops, causing her glorious form to shimmer through the garment, just barely disguised.

In all of his fifteen years, the only women Galahad had ever known were sisters of the abbey—women of modesty and restraint. Now he stood alone in the woods, beholding this heavenly creature who blushed winsomely while motioning for him to come nearer. Galahad took three steps toward her, though as he got approached, he noticed something unnatural about her eyes—a consuming vacancy that seemed ill-fitted to such radiant beauty.

A strange feeling woke within him, driving Galahad to both advance and retreat. Even as the lady’s pretty pink fingertips extended toward him, even as his own hand rose to meet them, the young man felt at once that he must turn and flee.
As he did so, the girl threw herself forward, grabbing for his cloak, seizing it with strength far beyond her frail form, and pulling it from his body. Galahad would have turned to chase her down and retrieve his garment—but at the very same moment the clasp snapped, he found himself face-to-face with a terrifically old man, who had (unbeknownst to him) approached in silence to stand just behind him.

The old man’s claw-like hands were reaching outward, quite nearly touching Galahad’s throat, though as the young man jumped backward in shock, the elder made a sudden shift, extending his arms graciously into a bow.

The man’s head was bald except for a few stray hairs that rose like hoary stalks of dying grass on a high plain, and his back was bent over, as if he had been sitting at a low desk in poor light for a thousand years. He supported himself with a cane that was carved full of curious and terrifying creatures, a work of wonder and worth—though he was dressed in the tattered robes of a poor scholar.

As he looked at Galahad, he squinted, ignoring the young woman who darted off between a pair of aspens, carrying the cloak in her arms.

Unclenching his yellowed teeth, he spoke, “I see you carry books.” Lifting the flap of Galahad’s leather bag, he peered inside and continued, “Books full of great secrets. Books of mystery, and power. Pages such as these contain charms able to direct the winds, the spirits, and the seas. Oh, wise and fortunate soul—surely the gods have chosen you, entrusting you with mastery. Yes, my son.
They have chosen well, for I see a rare intelligence in your eyes. Few your age could do with these what you will. The entire world stands at your command.”

Though the nuns had never forbidden Galahad from reading any tome contained in their vast library, and though he had read widely from their store, it had never crossed the young man’s mind to search the books he carried before delivering them, for he had been focused on his given duty. Now, however, the old man reached deep into the leather bag and handed the boy a single volume, embossed with the ancient form of a hydra.4

Vermillion lettering had been pressed along the spine, strange symbols that seemed to move even as he looked upon them, and Galahad found himself tracing their edges with his finger, then moving along the ridges of the cover to run his thumbs along the edges of the pages.

Again, he felt divided—torn between dark curiosity and foreboding, and his heart pounded with the conflict. Galahad looked the old man in the eyes and spoke firmly, “These are not yet mine.” He tried to place the closed book back in his bag, but even as he began, fury washed over the old man’s countenance. Flushing three shades of purple, he pounded his strange staff twice into the earth, mumbling words dark and horrid.

The next moment, the boy found himself unable to move, for the spell had rendered him utterly helpless. The old man grabbed the book from the boy’s hand, seizing also the bag he carried with

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4 A multi-headed serpentine monster in Greek and Roman myths that had poisonous breath, and for every head chopped off it would regrow two more.
the remaining volumes. Then, off he darted into the black of the woods.

Stripped of his cloak and his books, slowly regaining control of his limbs, Galahad realized there was nothing else to do but return home and relay his failure to the nuns. Yet, as he searched for a way out, he heard a fierce, cat-like scream and saw a raging wild man leap down from a branch before him.

This man was worn down to skin and bones, and every rib was visible through his bare chest. The nails on his toes were grown out thick and brown, and they curled like an eagle’s claws. His black hair grew in untamed patches across his scalp, and he wore tattered and filthy garments, torn by his own hands in moments of anger. The tips of his teeth were sharpened to points. The skin around his face ran in deep wrinkles, and thick, grey veins protruded from every limb. Still, he was not a large man—in truth, he was no bigger than a child.

“A pretty little boy. So pretty, pretty” the creature mocked, hissing at Galahad. “He grew up with the ladies. Coddle and dote, they did. They gave him cheeses and meats for supper.”

The creature advanced, sniffing at Galahad and making a sick gurgling noise deep in his throat. Galahad reached for his little dagger and found that it remained at his side. Slowly, he wrapped his fingers around the handle.

Old as he was, the wild man moved like a leopard advancing.

Step by step, he creeped while the hairs on Galahad’s arms stood straight up on end.
“They gave the pretty boy a pretty dagger, didn’t they? Gave him a dagger to bite and protect his soft little princely body. Royalty, are we? I bow before you. I bow before the soft, pretty little highness.” At that last syllable, the creature leaned near, and a spew of spittle flew from the wild man’s mouth, hitting Galahad in the face.

For the first time in his life, Galahad felt pure hatred attempt to rise in his chest.

“Would you kill me, boy? Would you put your dagger in my belly? Or are you too—delicate? Are you too fancy and fine to do the nasty work of killing?”

A stranger to the fierce rage growing inside him, Galahad wanted to strike the man. He was stronger, he was armed, and he knew he had the advantage. Yet even as he began to pull the dagger from its sheath, something in his heart held him—and he stepped back from the wild man once—then twice—then a third time.

At his third step, the ground gave way, and he found himself falling through loam, through crumbling rock, through cold air, and at last to the bottom of a deep cave. Disoriented, Galahad rubbed his face and brushed off his clothes, trying to stand. Though as his eyes adjusted to the dark, he saw a huge form undulate along the back wall.

Half of it looked like a serpent, spread out vast and coiled. The other half was shaped like a woman—in fact, the very woman from the side of the pool. Yet, now in her true serpentine form, the hollowness of her eyes had taken over the body beneath her crystal dress, and the titillating drops which had embellished her soft, alluring form
were now shining scales, hard and vile. Her massive tail spread out from her body wide and twisted, tipped with poisonous points that Galahad recognized as the very teeth and toenails of the wild man who had attempted to provoke him to murder. A thousand tiny creatures, the beast’s offspring, were latched onto her poisonous teats suckling, each horrifically different from the other, each distinctively ugly, but all bearing the face of the old man who had stolen Galahad’s books. In fact, these very books were scattered about the creature’s den, many pages torn out and devoured. As soon as the little beasts realized they were no longer alone, the horrid, hellish spawn rushed toward their mother (whose name is Error)\(^5\) and crept into her mouth for safety, disappearing.

The great beast turned to Galahad and said in a saccharine but evil voice, “Oh, guilty boy. Naughty boy. Wicked, damned boy. You thought you could escape, but escape is not for those who are born of guilt—those doomed to suffer the consequences of the sins of their fathers. For your grandfather was an evil man. And your mother was an evil woman. And your father was shameful, unfaithful, and proud. Their shame runs in your veins, boy. It is your inheritance. Do you know why you were abandoned—you bastard?”\(^6\)

\(^5\) This half-serpent, half-woman also appears many years after this manuscript was written in Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene.* In Book I of that epic poem the Red Cross knight literally wanders into Error.

\(^6\) An unkind and crass (but certainly accurate) description of Galahad’s lineage. Elaine, the daughter of King Pelles, was saved from the evil sorceress Morgan le Fay by Sir Lancelot and fell in love with the knight. One knight she tricked Lancelot with wine and a magic ring into thinking that she was Queen Guinevere, and the result of their tryst was the illegitimate conception of Galahad.
At this, the creature did something so horrid, my gentle heart cannot bear to record it in exact detail. For she used words pointed, dark, and dastardly to declare every error the boy had made since his free will had first quickened. Every sweet he had snitched. Every truth he had stretched. Every dark thought. Every deep doubt. She named his errors over and again by the worst of his impulses and the worst of his deeds, speaking names full of guilt, dread, and destruction over his shaken soul.

The creature advanced, whipping her poisonous, stinging tails, and staggering backward. Galahad fell to the ground. He felt for his little dagger, but it was gone. He had no shield, no sword, no armor—only the belt wrapped round his waist. Thinking he would lash it against her like a whip, he began to remove it when his fingers fell upon old, familiar words pressed along its latch. “Nova Creatura,” the name of his home. In that thick, condemning darkness—as Error raised herself up on her haunches and prepared to finish off her victim, Galahad repeated the words softly, almost mindlessly, in the cold shock of one prepared to die. Even at a whisper, the beast flinched at the sound, just as if she had been pierced with a sword.

“Nova Creatura” the boy repeated, seeing this reaction, and the creature screamed in pain. “Nova Creatura!” the boy shouted a third time, rising to his feet. At this moment, Error let out such a cry that rocks began to fall from the roof of the cave. Blinded with fear, Galahad took off running, looking behind him as he fled. In his haste, he didn’t notice a blood-red pool, standing in the darkest corner of that cavern. His foot caught on its edge, casting him into its depths.
Down he tumbled, plummeting deeper through that thick, warm liquid, until he realized it had turned to a mist. “Tempus, aevum, dies, momentum,” he heard soft human voices singing slowly as he tumbled, passing now through waves of light and sound—he felt an emergence, a rising, a surfacing—that lifted the weary young man and cast him off gently to a patch of reticulated woodland shade.

Empty handed and bare-backed, Galahad stood and looked round, seeing no pool, no cave, only the path he had first followed into the forest—which he now retraced, soon finding himself emerging from the wood, and walking toward the abbey.

As he approached the gates, the old porter ushered Galahad into the front courtyard, where his great aunt stood, waiting to welcome him home.

“I’m so sorry.” Galahad said, “I lost everything. The books, the cloak, the dagger.”

But even as he made his confession, the sisters entered the yard and made a circle around the young man.

“He has completed the task,” said his great aunt to others.

Softly, they smiled and nodded, looking at one another and repeating, “Completed the task. He has completed the task.”

“Dear boy,” said his great aunt, “You have done well. You lost nothing that was intended for keeping, and you kept all that was not meant to be lost. For Nova Creatura is the beginning of your journey, and it is the end as well. You have found the way meant for you. Well done, my son. Well done.”
GIANTS, come in various shapes and sizes. In appearance, they generally look like humans, but will range in size from ten to forty feet in height. Although Norse legends speak of much, much larger giants, these are obviously just mythological exaggerations. There are also stories that speak of trolls and ogres that are so large they were mistaken for giants, but upon closer inspection, their skin color, horns, tusks, and habitats clearly set them off as different species entirely. The giant facing Sir Galahad was of the smaller kind. Yet, even a small giant is still a giant. And when that giant is clad in armor, over twice Galahad’s height, and swinging an axe around (that was as long as Galahad was tall), a knight must keep his wits about him.

Sir Galahad had been seeking to find his way through the Wild Forest in order that he might continue his quest for the Holy Grail, when he had reached a river spanned by an ancient stone
bridge. Knowing such locations are nearly always the homes of trolls, he dismounted his noble steed and examined the underside of the structure carefully. As he turned to mount the bridge, he heard heavy, clanking footsteps on the stone and confronted by a great figure standing at the apex of the bridge, hands resting on a large battle axe, who spake thusly: “I am the giant Khuzd the Red. This is my bridge, and none shall pass o’er it while I stand.”

“I have no quarrel with you,” Galahad replied most courteously, “but I must cross this bridge.”

“Then you shall die,” replied Khuzd.

“No blood needs be shed this day by you or I,” countered Galahad. “I am long lost in this Wild Forest and am earnest to be sped on my way without delay.”

“I move for no man,” replied Khuzd.3

“Now stand aside, worthy adversary,” said Galahad. “I have been chosen to find the Holy Grail. You may do me grave injury if we should come to blows this day, but I will not die before I have completed the good works which God hath ordained that I should walk in. Therefore, I am confident that I will one day be past you and free of these woods. As to your good health and destiny, I cannot speak with such surety. But I imagine it will not bode well for you if you continue to stand in my way.”

One would have imagined that Galahad’s foe had turned to

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3 Some might recognize similarities between the exchanges of Galahad with Khuzd and those King Arthur had with the Black Knight in *Monty Python and The Holy Grail*. Repetitions of this kind are to be expected, since the Arthurian tales were originally shared by traveling minstrels who had to commit all these tales to memory.
stone, for the knight received as much a response from him as from the bridge itself. On and on Galahad entreated and implored but without any movement. Finally, Sir Galahad said with a sigh, “Very well then—have at you!” and drawing his sword, advanced upon the bridge.

The arch of the bridge and the height of his enemy put Galahad at an obvious disadvantage. The great battle axe smote the knight with mighty force, and it seemed that the Shield of Balyn would almost give way. But by God’s grace it held. When the axe was raised to strike a second blow, Galahad saw a means of escape and tumbled between the legs of his opponent. His way was free, but, alas, Galahad’s horse remained on the wrong side of the bridge. So adjusted his shield and braced himself for the next blow as Khuzd the Red turned around with labored, heavy, clanky movements.

“I have never been defeated,” roared Khuzd and swung his awe at the head of the knight. Galahad ducked swiftly, then leapt up onto the stone rail of the bridge and was able to slice at the right shoulder of his foe. A great din that had the sound of scraping metal and snapping ropes ensued, and—whether it was the fell blow of Galahad or the weight and momentum of the great axe swinging—the result was that both arm and axe went flying into the river passing under the bridge.

Sir Galahad was shocked at such a fortuitous blow, and stepped back to avoid the fountain of blood that would come from such a wound. But no shower (or even a trickle) of blood issued. Khuzd turned his head and stared at the spot where his arm had been
with as much surprise as the knight. The two warriors stood frozen for a moment then Khuzd bellowed, “It’s just a flesh wound!” and swung his left gauntlet at the knight, boxing him soundly on the ear. The force of the blow caused Galahad to see stars and nearly drop his blade.

“You are indeed brave, sir knight, but the fight is mine,” the giant said with a great laugh. He raised his arm high above his head, making a great fist to bring down upon Galahad like hammer, but Galahad was able to rouse himself and stabbed madly at the heart of Khuzd. Due to the muddled vision from the last blow, Galahad’s aim was off and, though he pierced his foe, it was to the left of the heart. Again, there was the sound of scraping metal and snapping ropes and no blood. Galahad staggered back, leaving his sword stuck in the giant. Strangly, the great armored fist came not down on the knight, but kept going, swinging round in a circle back behind the giant, and then oscillate back and forth a bit until it finally hung limp by his side. Khuzd looked quizzically from his arm to the sword sticking out of his chest, but made no attempt to remove it.

“I am the giant Khuzd the Red,” yelled the adversary of Galahad. “This is my bridge, and none shall pass o’er it while I stand.” And then with eyes blazing and a wordless roar, he began to try to kick the knight. The great metal boots were spangled with spikes and if only one stroke had found its home Galahad would have been sorely wounded. But Galahad danced back and forth, easily keeping clear of the fearsome feet. Round and round the knight circled
the one-armed defender of the bridge, both trying to stay clear of the metal boots and trying to reclaim his sword. Eventually Galahad caught hold of the hilt, but instead of wrestling it free, caused the giant to topple over.

“Shall we call it a draw?” asked Sir Galahad as he climbed up on the chest of his foe to wrestle free his blade. And as he pulled out his sword, the cloth of his fallen foe’s jerkin came along with a great tearing. “What is this curious sight,” gasped Galahad. “Where a metal breastplate should be there is a wooden door?” Reaching down and clearing away more of the garment, Galahad lifted the latch and opened the door.

“Away from me, you foul little man” cried out Khuzd. “I am the giant Khuzd the Red. This is my bridge, and none shall pass o’er it while I stand.”

“Yes, but you don’t stand,” chuckled Galahad. “And you aren’t a giant, either. You are a dwarf. But you are a crafty dwarf. Did you build all this yourself? Dwarves are known for their marvelous smithery, ‘tis true, but it doth appear that with nothing but ropes and levers, weights and counterweights, you have built a wooden giant and clothed him with armor.”

“I am not a dwarf,” protested the dwarf. “I am the giant Khuzd the Red.”

“No, you are a dwarf who has built an amazing contraption and have been operating it all with gears and pulleys,” countered the knight. “But I have severed the ropes to your arms and you are as helpless now as a turtle on its back. Come, let me help you out of
this broken mess and let us be friends.”

“You may help me up,” conceded Khuzd. “But you must cease in
calling me a dwarf. I am as much a giant as my hair is red.”

“Red? My dear little friend, your hair is black,” observed Galahad.
“I had assumed that you were called ‘Khuzd the Red’ due to all
those you killed while they were trying to cross this bridge. Now,
as our good Lord saith, ‘thou canst not make
one hair white or black,’” so also you are unable
to make oneself a giant simply by saying it is so. Therefore, I urge
thee hereafter: worry naught of your height, but consider the work
of your hands, for they are glorious to behold. To craft such a won-
derous clockwork giant stretches well past skill and enters into the
realm of remarkable talent.”

“I am a giant if I say that I am a giant,”
growled the dwarf. “And my hair is red if I say
it is red!” Then, after giving a quick kick to
the shins of the knight, Khuzd^5 added, “Now
get out of my way, or I’ll bite your legs off!” and he ran down the
bridge and past Galahad’s horse, disappearing into the woods.

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^4 Matthew 5:36b

^5 According to philologist J.R.R. Tolkien, the word khuzd means “dwarf” in the secret language of the Dwarves.
CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

the ballad of
Galahad and
the naiad

I

Young Galahad went riding by
Through forests waste and wild,
Courageous as a golden lion
And tender as a child.¹

His jet-black steed would tread so fine
It scarcely pressed the ground;
Its harness lay so sleek and soft
It scarcely made a sound.

And as he rode the forest tracks
By sun or moonlight pale,
He searched the wild wood all around
For glimpses of the Grail.

¹ This poem is written in the traditional ballad form, with alternate 4 and 3 stress lines rhymed ABCB, and includes some traditional embellishments, such as chiming internal rhymes on some of the unrhymed lines for emphasis, and also the strong incantatory repetition of certain lines, all features of the oral tradition in which these ballads flourished before they came to be written time. This early form was consciously imitated by the later Romantic poets, as for example, Coleridge’s The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere.
He saw the white hart’s silhouette
Against the brightening east
And hoped to find some word or sign
Some clue from bird or beast;

Some word or sign, some clue divine,
Some glimmer beckoning;
Some token of the Holy Grail
To make his heart take wing.

He saw the white hart’s silhouette
Against the golden west,
But still no sight, no earthly light
To lead him on his quest.

And then he heard the lovely sound
Of ripples running clear;
He was as glad to find a stream
As any running deer.²

He left his weary steed to graze,
Laid down his shield and sword,³
And stooped to drink from out the brook
That babbled o’er the ford.

² The poet here may be recalling Psalm 42:
“like as the hart desireth the water-brooks: so longeth my soul after thee, O God.”

³ According to the Geoffrey of Monmouth (author of The History of the Kings of Britain),
the sword of Galahad was named “Caliburn,” and was made on the Isle of Avalon.
But even as he touched the stream
He heard a maiden sing;
Her melody was half divine,
Her words all sorrowing.

Her melody was half divine,
Her song was all too brief;
Young Galahad had never heard
Such loveliness in grief!

He raised his head and saw the maid,
As in some living dream,
All clothed in flowing green and blue:
The Spirit of the stream! ¹⁴

All clothed in flowing blue and green,
And lovely as the dawn;
As though the living stream itself
Had taken human form.

II

‘Alas’, she sang, ‘and who will hear
The sorrows that I sing?
And who will know the hurt and woe
That blights my withered spring?

¹⁴ In Greek mythology,
a naiad is a nymph who
personifies or presides
over bodies of fresh water
such as fountains, wells,
and streams.
For my sweet brook that ran so clear
Is fouled and choked with filth;
The good earth weeps and poison seeps
Through bank and turf and tilth.

The poison seeps, the good earth weeps
Dark shadows blight my streams
Whilst that dread Necromancer dares
Pursue his evil schemes!

In vain I tend the water beds,
I tend this vale in vain;
A damnèd soul has dammed my stream
’Twill not run clear again.’

Sir Galahad gazed in the stream
And drew back from the brink:
For now he saw the water fouled
And all unfit to drink.

For now he saw the water fouled,
And poisoned at the source;
And fish and birds and beasts lay dead
Along its deadly course.
So Galahad raised up his head
And called out to the maid:
‘Take comfort! I have heard your song,
And I’ll come to your aid.

Take comfort! I have heard your song,
Your cries are not in vain,
And I will take your part until
Your brook runs clear again.

Show me the one who did this deed,
Who fouled the waters here,
And I will purge him from this place
Until your brook runs clear.’

‘Sir Knight’, the Naiad soon replied,
‘You know not what you say;
The very sight of that dark knight
Would fill you with dismay.

For he was once a knight like you,
A man of goodly parts,
Until he turned his heart awry
And practiced evil arts.
For he was once a knight like you
And won my heart and hand,
But he proved cruel, and soon despoiled
His lady and his land.

He fettered me in manacles,
He bridged my stream with steel,
And made my waters churn, and turn
A cruel iron wheel.

He draws his power from my stream
To serve his greed and lust
His engines churn the limpid burn
And turn life back to dust.

My life is in the living stream;
The stream he can control,
And if you slay him where he stands
I fear to lose my soul!

For he has bound my life to his
Fast with an iron key,
Which he has hidden, who knows where,
in deepest secrecy.
And though I fled his darksome house
To weep beside my stream,
I fear his power holds me still
As in some evil dream.

And even if we brave his gates
And find him in his lair,
Unless we find the hidden key
My ending is despair.

III

'Take heart fair maid,' cried Galahad
Take heart and ride with me,
For we will face the tyrant down
And we will find the key!

He may have sought to dam the source
And triumph for a while,
But there's a Source behind the source
Which no man can defile.

The iron key may close and lock,
The iron chains seem strong,
But there is yet a golden key
That loosens every bond!'
And she has dared to hope again,
And mounted on his steed,
And they have ridden swift and free,
To dare and do the deed;

Up to the gloomy castle gate,
All wreathed in acrid smoke,
For deadly fumes assailed them there
And made them retch and choke.

But Galahad has blown his horn
And, at the magic sound,
The iron gate of pride and state
Fell crumbling to the ground.

And then there came a grinding sound,
A weird and sickening screech,
And from a towering figure came
A strange metallic speech:

‘And who disturbs my alchemy?
Who breaks my solemn seal?
Who trespasses? Who dares to breach
My tower of glass and steel?’
He swaggered out in arrogance,  
All clad in tempered mail,  
Expecting, as it always did,  
The world to cower and quail,

But Galahad stood firm and still,  
And gave no ground at all,  
But only said 'Your writ is read,  
And pride precedes a fall!' 6

And then he laid his lance in rest  
And set the lady down;  
The light was on his silver helm,  
His black steed pawed the ground.

The light was on his silver helm,  
His face was stern and set;  
The fair maid turned and held her breath,  
As light and darkness met!

When light and darkness met and clashed  
The hills rang with the sound;  
The Naiad raised her eyes to see  
Her tyrant on the ground!

6 Proverbs 16:18
IV

Sir Galahad stooped down and said
‘Now let him be revealed!
For we must know the truth, before
This evil can be healed.’

So he unlaced the dark knight’s helm
And stood back all amazed:
It was no more a human face,
The sight on which they gazed!

Beneath the mask of hardened steel
No human face remained;
Just springs and bolts and cogs and wheels,
All rusty, worn and stained.

And from his fallen form there came
A sad mechanic sound:
The sound of dark machinery
All slowly winding down.

‘How can this be?’ the Naiad cried,
He once was flesh and blood,
And I once thought a maiden’s love
Might do the poor man good!
‘I see’, sighed good sir Galahad,
‘The trap he set himself:
He set his mind on turning cogs,\(^7\)
He set his heart on wealth,

And where he set his mind and heart,
His soul flowed in their wake,
For sometimes we ourselves become
The idols that we make!\(^8\)

He spurned your love. Alas, that love
Was all that kept him whole,
And soon a mechanistic will
Became a clockwork soul.

But leave him to the fate he chose,
For we must find the key:
The iron key that closes first,
And then the golden key.\(^9\)

They sought throughout the castle grim,
They opened many a door,
And freed from chains and drudgery
The helpless and the poor.

\(^7\) It has been suggested that this line—indeed this whole episode—be a source for Treebeard’s comment about Saruman in Tolkien’s *Lord of the Ring* “he has a mind of metal and wheels.”

\(^8\) The poet is here paraphrasing Psalm 115:8 in its comment on idols: “They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them.”

\(^9\) Many scholars have argued that George Macdonald was inspired by this story when he wrote his famous fairy tale, *The Golden Key* in the late 1800s
‘I fear this place’, the Naiad said,
The place where I was bound;
I fear what might become of me,
Before the key is found’

‘Fear not, fear not’, said Galahad,
Your tyrant is no more,
And you will find the courage
To unlock the dreadful door

For only you can find the key
That once held you so fast,
And only you can heal this place
And make that healing last

Draw up from deep within yourself
The hidden flow and force;
The wellspring of your inner life;
The Source behind the source’!

V

It seemed the maiden paused, and quailed,
But then she found her voice:
‘I am no longer thrall’, she said
I know I have a choice!
I choose to flow in freedom now,
I choose to flow in love,
To draw up wisdom from the depth
And blessing from above’!

And lo! There suddenly appeared
Between him and the maid
An ancient door, all glowing pale,
With mystic signs inlaid.

And written on the door these words:
Who dares to open me?
And who will stay and dare to lay
Her pure hand on the key?

And then the maiden came up close
To know this mystery,
And, glancing down, at once she found
That each hand held a key!

Her left hand held an iron key,
Heavy as she could hold,
But in her right, all glistening bright,
She held the key of gold!
‘Step forth! Step forth!’ cried Galahad,  
‘This quest is in your hands;  
I slew the foe but you must heal  
The blight upon these lands.’

And forth she stepped, and seemed to grow  
In beauty and in grace,  
She turned the key, stepped through the door,  
And vanished from that place!

VI

She found herself within a vale  
Where freshest waters flowed,  
That cleansed her feet of stain and filth  
And showed the forward road.

‘Upstream! Upstream!’ She heard a voice:  
‘Come swiftly, swim upstream,  
To find the Source behind the source,  
The dream within the dream.

‘Upstream! Upstream!’ the voice still called:  
‘Follow the hidden way  
Upstream towards the only Source,  
The Dayspring and the Day.’

10 Some scholars have suggested that C.S. Lewis was inspired by this story when he wrote about Narnians swimming up the Great Waterfall in *The Last Battle*. 
The way itself became a stream:
A river made of light;¹¹
Before her was the rising sun,
Behind her was the night.

And at the river’s very source
She found a holy well,
And heard melodious murmurings
Of some long, lovely spell:

¹¹ In Paradiso Dante wrote: “I saw light in the form of a river”

¹² It is possible that this line might have been the inspiration for “A Spell for the Refreshment of the Spirit” in Chapter 10 of C.S. Lewis’ famous maritime tale The Voyage of the Dawn Treader.
A spell to bring refreshment,¹²
A spell to bring release,
A spell to heal all wounds and hurts,
And bring the gift of peace.

And now the voice was in her heart,
And free and clear it said:
Flow back into your valley now,
And do not be afraid,

But sing this spell to all who hear,
To all who find your stream,
And run to bless that lonely knight
who heard you in a dream’.

VII

And all around sir Galahad
There streamed a golden light,
And that dark castle vanished
Like a phantom of the night.

And lovely through the valley flowed
The clear life-giving stream,
And overhead he heard a song,
He’d once heard in a dream.
No more a song of bitterness,
No more a song of woe,
The Naiad’s song of joy flowed on
As sparkling waters flow:

‘Ride on! Ride on Sir Galahad!
Our time has come to part.’
Her voice, like many waters,\(^\text{13}\) rose
And sang within his heart:

‘I thank you for your courtesy,
Your courage and your grace,
And all you did to set me free
That I might bless this place.
Ride on! Ride on Sir Galahad!
Be blessed by me and mine;
You will not fail to find that grail
Where water turns to wine.’

\(^{13}\) Revelation 1:15c
IT HAPPENED upon a certain day that as Galahad was riding through the Wild Forest and the light was failing towards evening, he began to be hungry and to long for holy company. He lifted his eyes up in prayer, and suddenly, as he crested a rise, he saw before him a humble cottage, and next to it a small chapel. Smoke rose from the chimney of the cottage, along with the delicious smell of bread. An old man, clad in a simple, rough garment, came out of the front door, a simple wooden cross hanging round his neck. His hands were rough and his skin browned from much work in the sun, but he had a kindly face. Galahad at once spurred his horse forward and saluted him.

“Sir,” said Galahad, “I guess by your dress and demeanor that you are a holy man of God, come hither to this forest to retreat from the world of men and pursue your prayers free from distraction.”

“Sir knight, it is even so,” the man replied. “And though I know not your name nor your reason for coming here, you are welcome to my home. I have no soft bed nor comfortable garment, and my food is simple, but if you like your bed free of vice and your food seasoned
with spiritual conversation, then you will find ease here tonight.”

“Sir, it was even these things for which I was just now longing. I lifted my heart in prayer, and have been brought to your doorstep. Know that I am Sir Galahad, lately of King Arthur’s table, and that I am engaged in the Quest of the Holy Grail I have sworn a vow, and nothing shall turn me aside until I have found it. These are the things that brought me your way this eve.”

“Then enter, Sir Galahad, for we have much to speak of. It was revealed to me some time ago in prayer that he who was to find the Grail would come under my humble roof, and that I was to be sure not to let him depart until he had come to understand the nature of his quest. It is therefore of these things that we must speak tonight.”

“Sir, with a good will,” Galahad replied.

Galahad followed the goodly man to the chapel, where the hermit sang mass. After this service had been done, they returned to the cottage, which consisted of a single room, furnished only with a pallet of straw and a small hearth. There they sat upon the floor and ate bread and spoke of many matters of the holy scriptures. But the whole time Galahad was longing for the hermit to speak of the Grail. At last the holy man leaned forward with a bright look in his eye, and addressed the topic Galahad had been waiting for.

“Sir knight,” he began, “I can see well that you are he who has been chosen to achieve the Grail and bring its adventures to completion, for you are wondrously armed: not just with sword and shield, but with the virtues and that whole armor of God that
makes a man fit for spiritual service. Indeed, well may it be said of you in coming years that you are a second Christ, for only such as he was, to wit, humble in spirit and brave in deeds, can lay hold of the most holy Grail. And yet, all of this notwithstanding, you are not yet fit for the holy vessel, and there is something you lack without which you will never grasp the cup of the Lord.”

“Holy father, I have striven all my life in this calling of knighthood, which I hold as twin-born with discipleship to our Lord, that nothing that befits a Christian knight should be lacking from my soul. In this way I have prepared my body with both skill at arms and abstinence from sin, and have nourished it as oft with fasting as with the simple fare required to maintain its strength. My mind I have fortified with knowledge of the ways of chivalry, or at least such knowledge as does not run contrary to the doctrines and practices of our holy religion, and also with all manner of heraldry, history, and husbandry, that I might be of service to those in need whom the Lord brings across my path, and with constant reflection on the holy scriptures. Besides all these I have prepared my soul with humility and charity, always considering my neighbor above myself, and my duty to God above my neighbor; for which reason, though I have often been sought to turn aside on this quest for the sake of others, while I have done such service to them as I could, I have always

1 Eph 6:10–17. The author will use the armor of God referenced in Ephesians later, in a more literal sense. Apparently it was one of his favorite scripture passages.

2 Shakespeare borrows from our manuscript here: “O hard condition, / twin-born with greatness...” (Henry V, IV.1.233–4).
been careful that pity should not piety undo, and that I should not be found to prefer the love of my neighbor to the love of God. All things I have ever heard of that a knight and a Christian must do I have been diligent to do. I pray you, then, in the name of God, to tell me what else I lack.”

“All that you have done, you have done well, and in good measure,” the holy man replied, “but what you lack could not be attained in preparation for your quest, but could only come to you on the quest itself. Just as you had no sword or shield until you set out upon the quest, and then found yourself well supplied, so what you lack now had to wait its proper time. And now that you are here, I can put you on the path to it.”

“But say what it is, good father, if it be permitted to do so.”

The old man leaned forward and smiled conspiratorially. “Wisdom,” he said gently. “Knowledge and wisdom. You have learned much of the world, of yourself, and of the society you have joined (I mean the knights of Camelot); likewise, you have learned all the history of the Grail, and everything pertaining thereto that men may know. But you are so far from having understood the nature and reason for this quest you have entered upon that you have not yet even recognized the contradiction that lies at its very heart. Without an understanding of this riddle, and the vision to see its solution, you may not attain the holy Grail.”

“Father, I am astounded, and yet your words ring true. For I see...”
neither contradiction nor riddle in this quest, and if it indeed be true that there is such, this is a great failing, for which I reproach myself. If you would point me the way to this understanding, I would be much in your debt.”

The hermit nodded. “Let me then catechize you, and we shall see if the riddle does not appear in time. Let us begin with the lord of this quest: I mean, of course, its earthly lord, for though you entered into the service of a man and swore under your fealty to him to achieve this quest, this quest belongs to no man, but to God alone. And yet you were guided to the court of the high king, who is destined to have his name forever associated with this greatest of all quests; and so let us begin with the king Arthur. It is said that he has a custom never to sit down for his meal upon some holy festival day until some marvel should reveal itself, whether by strange occurrence, or by the arrival of some challenger to his court, or such like. Is this true?”

“Certes, sir, it is so.”

“And why do you think he observes this custom?”

“Sir, it is well known that my lord Arthur has a great love of adventures. Indeed, fame of his own exploits, both before winning the crown and since he has established his kingdom, has so filled the land that he is held by all to be one of the greatest knights of the world. It is for this reason, I believe, that so many knights willingly follow him, and that he counts among his knights not only those of high birth but even other kings. Though he is now burdened with the duties of managing this land, his love of adventure has
never left him, and his soul still longs for its native food. Unable to indulge in the seeking of adventures himself, he must content himself with the tales that reach him of the adventures of others, or with the ones that come to his doorstep, such as the Seat of Danger or this sword I here carry.”

“But think you,” the old hermit countered, “is it not strange, nay, passing strange, that a king should refuse his dinner until some marvel should have presented itself? For indeed, if you should count up all the miracles recounted in the Old Testament, and then compare them to the length of years chronicled therein, you would find that all the miracles amount to very little, that they are the rarest of occurrences, and that entire generations go by between miracles. Is it not folly to stay dinner upon something so unwonted?”

“Nay, father, for in the scriptures the miracles tended to cluster around individuals and times. And so, while many widows mourned the loss of many sons, one widow received her son back from Elijah, and by this same man was the Jordan parted, and fire was thrice called down from heaven. And Logres in these days is such a place and time, in which so many wondrous things happen, and so often angels and demons visit men, that as we knights set out on our wanderings, it is rather rare that we do not encounter adventures, than that we do.”

“That,” said the hermit, “is a point that must be examined. Why is this realm of Logres so full of wonders, think you?”

“Sir, it is well known that it is the presence of the Grail in these
lands that is the cause of so many wonders. For this reason, the king has taken of late to referring to these wonders as the ‘adventures of the Grail.”

“You are very right to say so,” replied the hermit. “And now, one question more: why is all of Camelot out looking for the Grail?”

“For most, I believe no other reason was necessary than that the king so greatly desired that the Grail be found and the adventures of the Grail brought to their conclusion.”

“Why in the world should he want that?”

“Sir,” said Galahad, growing agitated, “surely you must know! The Grail is the greatest relic of our Lord: even its presence causes our land to flow with strange things and persons and wonders. The recovering of it must be the greatest quest that ever knight set hand to!”

“And you think King Arthur wants it recovered?”

“Faith, sir, I do.”

“And what is to happen to the Grail once it is recovered?”

“Sir, everyone knows that the Grail must be taken out of England and returned to that kingdom whence it lately came to our lands. Only then will the adventures of the Grail be concluded.”

“And you really believe the king wishes this?”

“How could he not, sir?”

“Nay, how can he, when it will mean an end to all the adventures on which his soul thrives? Should the Grail be achieved, henceforth he shall have to sit him down to meat as other men, for he can no longer attend upon some wonder to come his way.
The removal of the Grail runs directly contrary to his greatest desire, which is to see the marvelous deeds surrounding his court grow without number and without ceasing. In desiring that the adventures of the Grail be concluded, he is desiring that adventures become as rare in Logres as they are in other lands. As an ardent lover of adventure, he is cutting off the branch he sits on.”

“Sir,” Galahad began, “I find this most disturbing. For if you are right, it seems Arthur should not have sent us on this quest. And yet, this quest must be undertaken, for it is willed in heaven. Is this the contradiction you spoke of?”

“It is,” replied the holy man.

“Then, while it is of great import, it is no difficulty to the quest. For while Arthur may find himself heartbroken, yet the will of heaven is not to be opposed.”

“This is the contradiction, sir knight, but not the riddle,” the hermit replied. “The riddle is this: should the adventures of the Grail be achieved? You have said that should it be found, it must go out of this kingdom. The riddle is whether it should be found.”

“Sir, either I do not well understand you or you do not well understand what ‘riddle’ means.”

“The one is as likely as the other. What I do understand is this: on the morning, you must take the road from here deeper into the forest. As you go, you will encounter three adventures. When you have resolved them to your satisfaction, you must return here to me and deliver your solution to the riddle. Then we shall know if you are ready to find the Grail, and if you are willing.”
“I confess that I do not fully understand, but the path laid out for me by heaven is clear, and I shall walk it as well as I may.”

And so they each retired for the evening, and enjoyed the deep sleep reserved for those who live simply and well.

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When the morning came they did not break their fast, for the hermit said that Galahad must not eat before he came into his trials. Galahad pressed the holy man for this reason to this, to which the hermit replied:

“Noble Galahad, it is not permitted to me to prepare you for what lies ahead any further than to give you these instructions. Take this road to the east, and you will presently come upon a priest by the road. When you see him, greet him in the name of the Lord and ask him for bread. After that, take the adventure that befalls you.”

“Sir, I render you gramercy for your aid, and for your direction. When I have completed these adventures, I will return here that we may speak of them further.”

And so Galahad rode off as the hermit had instructed. Presently, after many twists in the road, but before the sun had grown very hot, he saw a priest by the side of the road, sitting as if in prayer. And he was marvelous to behold, for his face was exceedingly beautiful, approaching even that of Sir Lancelot. From his holy posture and the stillness of his frame, he might have been merely a
statue of man praying. Galahad slowed his horse in order not to 
startle the holy man.

“Holy father, I pray you excuse me for 
interrupting your prayers. I greet you in the 
name of the Lord, and pray you to offer me 
a little bread that my journey may not be too 
much for me.” 7

The priest, looking up and seeing the knight before him, roused 
himself and went to a small sack that lay close to hand. “I welcome 
you in the name of my lord,” he replied, and, reaching into the sack, 
pulled out a large stone, which he then offered to Galahad. “Take 
and eat, 8 and be filled with my lord’s bounty.” 9

But Galahad made no move to take the stone, rather pulling his 
horse back somewhat from the man. “I think you misunderstood 
me, father; for I what I have need of is bread, not a stone.”

“Yes, but if you had but faith the size of a 
mustard seed, 10 you could ask and this stone 
would become bread for you. So, be ruled by 
me, and follow my advice. Take this stone with you as you go forth 
from here. Pray as you go that it be converted into bread for you. 
If your prayer is diligent, and your faith pure, and you guard the 
stone in such wise that you never put it from your person nor set it 
down, whatever may come, you will soon find it transformed into 
the most wondrous bread of life. In such marvelous ways does my 
lord reward those who serve him.”

“Far be it from me to pray that prayer, or to do as you have
asked. For I remember that when our Lord was in this life, he was in like wise requested to pray that prayer by the great tempter. But our Lord refused, reminding the evil one that man does not live by bread alone.\footnote{11} If then our Lord refused to pray for this miracle, then I myself would rather continue in hunger than depart from his most holy example. Further, I can now plainly see that you are no priest, for a priest is a true spiritual father, and yet our Lord has said that no father would give his son a stone when asked for bread.\footnote{12} Therefore in the name of Christ, I order you to begone from this place and never return.”

Galahad’s words had a marvelous effect on the priest. For as he spoke, the man’s face began to twist in a cruel sneer, so that his beauty was transformed from something lovely to something tyrannical. But at the name of Christ, that face quite contorted in terror and hatred, such that all its beauty was gone and there was left only the most hideous visage. The priest let out a single, long wail of despair, and then vanished from sight with a plume of flames, leaving behind smoke and the smell of sulphur.

While Galahad was yet trembling with the memory of that horrid sight, there came towards him out of the woods a beautiful maiden, dressed in white and stepping with sure step among the roots of the trees. She progressed as far as the head of Galahad’s horse, then stopped and saluted him.

“Hail to thee, Sir Galahad, and congratulations and thanks. You have done great good today. This wicked demon has been plying this trick here for a long time, and many knights have come to
grief through his efforts. Some, trusting his deceitful words, have fallen upon the stone as they carried it on the way, receiving grievous injuries. One was drowned trying to carry it across the river. Another, remembering that it is written: ‘cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it again after many days,’\textsuperscript{13} cast it into a pool, where it disturbed a large serpent, which rose up and ate him straight away. All these good men came to grief because they trusted the demon, who called out to them not in the name of the Lord, but in the name of his lord, who is the evil one. So you have done much good in removing this menace.”

“Lady, I thank you, for I am much edified by this knowledge. But how comes it that you know my name?”

The lady smiled but made no straight reply. “Continue on this road, son of Lancelot, and you will find your next adventure.” With that she turned and returned to the forest.

Galahad spurred his horse on, and followed the road through an increasingly hot day. Shortly after midday, he came upon the most curious sight: a knight of such small stature that he seemed rather a child than a man. Yet he had around his waist a most remarkable belt, and the breastplate on his chest shone like the sun, and his feet were well fitted with trim and proper boots. On his head he wore a helm with the beauty of the dawn. On his arm he carried a thick wooden shield, and in his hand was what looked to be the sharpest sword Galahad had ever seen. Most strangely of all, he had the true cross tattooed upon his forehead, and on his

\textsuperscript{13} Ecc. 11:1
hands were the stigmata. He stood in the midst of the road, such that one might not easily pass by him, and the look on his face was stern, which would have looked comical on one of such small size, where it not for the fearsomeness of his armament.

“In the name of God, stand where you are, for it is decreed that no one may pass this way except they receive from me a blow. This blow I will deliver, upon my duty as a knight, whether it be willingly or unwillingly. But be warned: if my blow be resisted, it is sore grievous, touching upon your very life.”

“Are we then to trade blows, sir?” asked Galahad.

“That is as you see fit: you may attempt to strike me, but I must on all accounts strike you. But by your striking you risk my unwilling blow, which, as I say, may touch upon your very life.”

Galahad once again took in the details of the diminutive knight, and dismounted from his horse. Leaving his sword sheathed, he went down on one knee, resting his arms upon the other, and bowed his head. “Sir,” he said, “I submit willingly to your blow. Do you duty.”

The knight lifted his sword forthwith, and dealt such a ringing blow upon the crest of Galahad that the holy knight was cast to the ground, stunned. Galahad thought he had never felt anything so painful in his life; but, when he had regained his senses, he saw that no injury had been done, and not a drop of blood had been shed. He slowly rose to his feet, shaking his head to clear it, and it seemed to him that the day shone brighter and clearer. The tiny knight was now smiling at him.
“You have done well, Galahad, son of Elaine the Fair. Now sit with me and break your fast.” Galahad followed the knight, who led him out of the road and to a small clearing nearby. There Galahad turned his horse loose to feed and sat down at a small table with the small knight.

“Tell me, Sir Galahad, why you allowed me to strike my blow.”

“Sir,” said Galahad, “I could see plainly that you were armored in the full armor of God, with the belt of truth around your waist, and the breastplate of righteousness about your chest, your feet shod for readiness in the Gospel of peace, your head covered with the helm of salvation. Besides these, you carry the shield of faith, whose thick wooden construction is well suited to extinguish the arrows of the evil one, and you carry the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.\textsuperscript{14} Moreover, I saw you marked with the chrism of the true cross, and so conformed to Christ as to bear his marks in his flesh. Having seen all of this, I reasoned that a blow from such a one as you was not to be resisted, for you can only, I think, strike in righteousness. And while I knew of nothing that should make me deserve a blow from you, a man’s faults are often hidden from him.”

The knight then drew forth bread and wine, and when he had given thanks, he gave some to Galahad to eat. While Galahad ate, the littlest knight urged him on in his quest with many exhortations and holy words from the Scriptures. At last, he said:

“What, good Sir Galahad, do you think is the meaning of my blow?”

“Sir,” said Galahad, “I can see plainly now that the blow you

\textsuperscript{14} Eph. 6:10–17
strike is the sting of compunction, which hurts worse than all the injuries in the world, but which the true knight longs for because by this pain he saves his immortal soul. And this is confirmed in that you have now served me the Lord’s Supper, the meal of reconciliation that follows true repentance, and have filled me with many good exhortations besides.”

“You are quite right, and you are the first to see it. I have faced many knights who, thinking little of my stature, would not yield to my blow, and instead raised arms against me, though I warned them as I warned you. I have in this manner slain several knights and greatly wounded many others; for you must know that just as the sting of compunction, humbly received, brings life, so when it is resisted, it brings mortal injury. Indeed, but a few days ago I struck a knight of your company, one Sir Lionel, who received a wound so grievous that he is still recovering from it nearby.”

“Sir, I entreat you at once to discover unto me whither this place lies where he is laid, for Sir Lionel is known to me, having been one of two knights who were present when my father knighted me. If he is in distress and so near at hand, I must go and see him, and see if by my presence I can bring him any succor. That is, so long as it does not interfere with the path I am embarked upon.”

“Nay, brave Sir Galahad; in fact, it is in that very direction that your final appointment lies. In fact, discourse with your relative is all your third task. Go you therefore back to the path, and follow it until it forks. Take the right hand path, and you will soon come to a small monastery, tended by only a few monks, and there you
will find Lionel recovering from his injuries.”

“Gramercy,” Galahad replied. “Before I go, will you answer me this: how did you know my name?”

“It was told me when I was given this office that one day the best knight in the land, the world’s chosen, could come, and that he would relieve me of my duty; his name, I was told, would be called Galahad. And so, though I did not know you when you rode up, when you submitted to my blow, I knew that you were he.”

“Are you then relieved of your duty?”

“I am: my office is now complete, and I will no more be seen in these regions. Fare you well, Sir Galahad! Grace and peace go with you.” And in that moment, the mini-knight and all the accoutrements of their meal vanished with a soft white light and a sound as of many instruments playing harmoniously together. Galahad fell upon his face and offered a prayer of thanksgiving for this grace, then mounted his charger and continued on his way.

As it drew on towards evening, Galahad came upon the monastery described by the vanished knight. When he had discovered himself to them, the monks brought him in and led his charger away to be tended to. They offered him a meal and a bath, but Galahad refused both, saying that he must see Sir Lionel at once. The monks obliged him, leading him into a dim room provided only with a cot, a small table, and a stool. Upon the table stood Sir

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15 This seems to be a reference to the Norse Volsung saga, where the epithet “the world’s chosen” is attached to Sigurd Dragonslayer. This Germanic intrusion on what is otherwise a fine French romance is truly regrettable.
Lionel’s armor, which Galahad marveled to see muddy and greatly worn, as if its wearer had undergone some great ordeal. Lionel himself was very pale, and weak, though his wound was freshly dressed, and the color did seem to be coming back into his cheeks. It was clear that the danger of death had passed.

“Sir Lionel,” Galahad began, sitting himself upon the stool, “how goes it with you?”

“Is it really you, Galahad? How much I regret the day we found you and conferred upon you knighthood! For you have led us into a quest in which I have received the most grievous harms; and I fear with a prophetic soul that worse still awaits me.”

“Sir, speak not so against the quest, for it is a holy quest, and has God as its Lord, and we must not call unclean that which God has made clean.”

“Then rather damned be the day that I was born, or that the Lady of the Lake ever took me under her care, for I have had nothing but injury on this holy quest.”

Galahad was greatly disturbed at the knight’s words, but could see that Lionel was not yet right for instruction. So he asked instead: “Tell me of your recent adventures, and how your armor came to be in such a state.”

“Frankly I tell you, sir, that not a knight in all the land has had such a hard time of it as I have had. This wound you see that I suffer from was delivered to me by a child-knight so small that you wouldn’t have thought him capable of wounding a rabbit, much

16 Acts 10:15
17 Job 3:1-10
less a full-grown knight of the Round Table. Yet he struck me so sore that it left me insensible for the better part of an hour, and when I came to I didn’t know if I was dead or alive. The pain thereof still distresses me greatly, especially when my mind turns upon my misfortune and how unlucky I have been.”

“It is the pain of compunction, brother, and is given thee for the amending of your life.”

“It was rather given for the ending of my life, the which it would have done had I not been quick enough to turn aside at the last second. I’ve a mind to find my brother, Bors, and return to challenge that dwarf a second time.”

“Nay, you shall not find him there, for I have retired him from his post this very day. But say, how did your armor come into this condition? Not, I think, with being struck down by that knight.”

“I am grateful to you that you have avenged my honor and upheld that glory of the Round Table: truly it was a good day that saw you knighted. As for my armor, that comes of the adventure I had before I ever came to the imp knight. I had been travelling for many days without adventure, when at last I came to a high place where two roads met, beside a gate leading into a city. There an exceedingly beautiful maiden stood, crying out: ‘Listen, because I am trustworthy, and my lips never speak but the truth. I love those who love me, and I endow them with riches and honor! Come to me now and make me yours!’ 18 When she turned this entreaty upon me, I refused it, scorning her.”

Galahad was so shocked that he stood 18 Prv 8:2-21
upright. “Surely you could see that it was lady wisdom herself speaking to you!” he exclaimed.

“I saw no such thing,” said Lionel. “But I remembered how many have been led astray by the temptations of women, and how we were solemnly enjoined to take no women with us on this quest, contrary to our usual custom, and so I dared not trust the sweet lips of beauty. Indeed, I rather thought she was an enemy, set there to tempt me from the way and turn me aside from the path of the Grail. So I mocked her and spurned her.”

“What happened next?” asked Galahad, struggling to control his distress.

“She turned upon me a look of extreme sorrow and pity, and in that moment I doubted whether I had done right. My doubt did not last long, for immediately a great storm broke over my head, drenching me with rain and battering me with howling winds. I cried out in distress, but the lady only laughed and mocked. A great cloud rose around me, and I looked for her but could not find her.19 The wind gathered into a great whirlwind that drove me from the city and turned me every which way, till I was covered in mud and bruised. When it finally stopped, I rose to look for water to clean myself, and it was then that I came upon the tiny knight.”

After Sir Lionel had finished his story, Galahad sat with him for a brief time, but found he had nothing much to say to him. His heart was heavy within his chest, and his spirit was greatly troubled. Presently, he excused himself, then took a late meal. The
monks offered to lead him to a place to rest, but he asked instead to be conducted to the chapel, where he spent all night in prayer.

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The next day he set out betimes, after exchanging a brief farewell with Sir Lionel, and returned to the hermit. Arriving at midday, he found the old man at the fire, preparing the meal.

“Hail Sir Galahad, son of God,” the hermit called out. “Sit you here and eat, and when we have eaten, you will tell me of what you have learned.”

Galahad did as he was bid, and when they had consumed the simple stew, the hermit turned an expectant eye upon his guest. Thus Galahad began:

“Holy father, as you indicated, upon leaving you yesterday morn I met with three adventures, the details of which I do not think I need to discover unto you. From these I have learned this: the Grail is the most dangerous thing in all the land. For it causes adventures which the knights of Camelot use but ill, and which therefore lead them to grievous injury and even death. Well might Arthur wish to be rid of its influence.”

“You speak rightly, but you must penetrate further. Come, let me again catechize you, and we will see if you have not the ability to turn your knowledge into wisdom. Think on this: why does the Grail cause these strange happenings?”

“Faith, sir, who can search out the mind of God?”
“Those to whom the Lord gives the means,” the hermit replied promptly. “Ask yourself but this: what is the nature of the adventures of the Grail?”

“Why, father, it seems to me, both from those I have encountered myself and from those that my fellow knights have encountered, that the Grail takes spiritual truths and lessons and presents them to us in bodily form. To consider but my adventures of late, there are many deceivers in the Church who pretend to holiness, and would draw many after them if they could. So the Grail summoned up a demon from Hell to wear the guise of a priest, in order to tempt the knights with a test of discernment. Or again, the knight I met upon the road, whom many took to be of no account because of his size, was in fact a figure of compunction. One sees in body what happens in spirit if one submits or resists the sting of conscience.”

“Well spoken, sir knight. The Grail does indeed present spiritual things physically, and so, to borrow an ancient figure of speaking, it presents allegories bodily. Why do the other knights do so badly at them, and why do you do so well?”

“It is because they have become so carnal that they are blinded to spiritual things. In their love of tournaments and the favors of maidens, they have forgotten how to reason spiritually, how to look beyond the surface of things to the sense that lies underneath. And so they interpret literally where they should interpret spiritually.”

“So then,” the hermit continued, “why does the Grail show forth
these things?"

"Why," said Galahad, "I see now that it is testing us, trying us, to know our spiritual mettle. But more, it is teaching us. As we successfully pass the trials of the Grail, our spiritual understanding grows stronger, and we progress in holiness."

"Very good. And now, Sir Galahad, you may tell me what is the matter with the king's desires."

"It is so clear now," Galahad responded. "The king desires the means rather than the end. He wants the adventures, not for the holiness they bring, but for their strangeness. In this way he is like a man who drinks a medicine, not because it is healthful, but because he likes the taste. Such a man will soon drink the medicine even when he has no need of it, and, thus taken out of proper measure, what was once healthful to him might become noxious."

"This is why he should wish it to stay. Why does he wish it to go?"

"Because he and his men do not seek holiness, but worldly honor and glory. The Grail stands against them and judges them. As long as it is in England, his court and its many deeds are parts of the story of the Grail. But if he can claim it and send it away, then the Grail becomes part of his story, and he is free to ascend in the estimation of future ages."

"So, wise Sir Galahad, the time has come for you to make a choice. For you have been chosen by heaven to find the Grail. You will not find it alone: two of your company have been set aside to find it with you; but you are the chief of that company, and so it falls to you to say what is to be done with it. So, what must be
done with the Grail?”

“In the name of God, it must be removed from Logres,” Galahad said passionately. “For the Grail belongs to the Lord’s table; and he who approaches even the representation of that table, what we call the Eucharist, unworthily eats and drinks to his peril; how much more so is it true with the true cup that twice held the earthly blood of the Lord. The knights of the Round Table are dying because they are seeking the Grail unprepared, and they do so out of pride rather than humility. This realm is not ready for the lessons the Grail would teach, or the blessing it would bring, and so it must be removed from this realm until such time as they become more spiritually mature.”

“What then of your claim that to do so, to grant Arthur’s wish, would subject the Grail to Arthur’s legend? Are you not afraid of making the most holy Grail but one of several episodes in Arthur’s reign?”

“That may well be how the world comes to view it, but the things of God do not suffer loss from the loss of reputation among men. It matters not how future generations view the Grail; it only matters that spiritual harm is coming to Christian men who are approaching unprepared. Just as you would deny the body of Christ to an unrepentant sinner, so the Grail must go forth from Logres.”

The hermit smiled, and the warmth of that smile filled Galahad with contentment. “You have done well, Galahad, knight of destiny.
Go forth and fulfill your quest, and your name will be spoken wherever the Grail is spoken of until the end of the age.”

A light began to shine from the hermit’s chest. It spread, growing in intensity, until it was all Galahad could see. In a moment it was gone, and when his vision returned to him, the hermit, the cottage, and the chapel all were gone. Galahad fell to his knees in wonder and worshipped God.
MOUNTED ASTRIDE in shining armor, bearing a shield of shimmering white-silver emblazoned with a red cross, Sir Galahad peered out of his helm. The sides of his coal-black charger heaved from the chase. A pale and sparkling coverlet of unbroken snow lay upon the Wild Forest, for it was winter and Twelfth Night, the eve of Holy Epiphany. Under a midnight sky illumined by countless stars and a pale-yellow moon, he gazed across the rolling forest floor, where naught tracks of man nor beast sullied the surface.

“Mayhap I have outrun the hoard,” he thought. Galahad’s memory echoed with the sound of a hundred or more footfalls, at once hissing and pounding the ground in pursuit. His heart was quickened.

1 Twelfth Night and Epiphany, being 5 and 6 January, celebrated in the middle ages as Christian feast days remembering the arrival of the three Magi to greet the Christ child. Traditionally, gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh were given, although Galahad received more than he bargained for on this night.
What lay ahead in the dark and enchanted wood? A legion of men, clad black and armed, astride their war horses? Certes, they would follow his tracks and be upon him in moments, but there was no sound outside of the measured breathing of horse and rider. Securing hold on the grip of his sword, he urged the steed on, continuing watch of the deep and quiet dark.

He heard them again, the rhythmic steps of feet marching in formation and lo! a soft scuffing, as if weighty satchels dragged beside. Galahad sensed that his pursuers ran at his left—no, ahead of him—in the dark. There was naught to do than become the hunter rather than the hunted.

Readying shield and drawing sword, Galahad rode ahead at a brisk canter. Anon, he looked to his left and right and noted shallow rows of tracks between ash and elm, casting shadows in the snow and continuing in ordered files into the bleakness. What devilry lay ahead, he could not guess. He paused to consider his choices: whether to leave this dark and foreboding place and seek safety and solace, or go on to challenge whatever menace lay ahead.

At once, soft wings fluttered and dove about him. Lifting off his helm, he beheld three fay creatures, no larger than dragonflies, earnestly seeking his attention.² They were too delicate to be brushed away and he believed help

² These double-winged, smallish fairies always flew in groups and spoke in melodic chorus fashion. Nimble and quick as dragonflies
arrives in Trinity, so he said, “Pray, I am Sir Galahad, Knight of the Round Table of good King Arthur. I command thee, upon thy fealty to the King, what matter brings you to me?”

The wee creatures whispered, each in turn, “Messire, we know you seek the Holy Chalice, the Grail. Listen and heed! This night, Epiphany Eve, you must search out the Aphynipe, a foul dragon-beast with one hundred legs and vile-venomous fangs. The beast guards a token relic that will assist your journey as you seek your treasure. But take heed! If its fang should slice your flesh, you will not live beyond the next rise of the moon!”

Sir Galahad said, “I thank you for this grammarcy, the blessing of forewarning. For I have followed the tracks to this point and believed them to be the mark of a brigade. That all of the footfalls come from the same beast is curious and alarming.”

The fairies continued, “The Aphynipe was chosen by the White Friars to guard the relic, for they knew that it would be shielded until the chosen knight, pure of heart, came to claim it. You must dismount your steed and come to

3 Dragonfly fairies are supernatural messengers sent to aid noblemen and noblewomen. These tiny creatures have human bodies and the transparent double wings of dragonflies. They travel in groups of three and offer protection, encouragement, and good counsel, thusly ‘trinity’ in number and purpose.

4 An aphynipe is a creature at the root of darkest nightmares. Pronounced “a-fin-eyep,” it embodies foul aspects of a creeping, slippery things one would rather crush than see live—centipede, spider, and sea lamprey. Heed the name given by the White Friars. Deadly (but can be helpful to those with a holy purpose), the aphynipe was given its name in accordance with the holy day to which it was called. That is a clue, the unweaving of the mystery is left to the reader.
the cave. Carry sword, shield, and misericordia, for thou art meeting a creature many-armed and twice your size.” Then in a swirl of whispers of, “Godspeed, fair knight!” the dragonfly fairies vanished into the dark night.

Guided along by the foot-trodden snow, Galahad arrived at a rocky crest in which yawned the mouth of a cave. He dismounted and beheld the rows of tracks marking a path to enter the cave itself. The arched entry allowed a man through without bowing low.

As he approached, a low growl came upon his ears. He counted one, two, five, ten thin limbs grasping the edge of the cave mouth. Galahad grasped more tightly his sword and shield.

The knight called out, “I meet you well-armed! Prithee, show thyself if thou understandest my call!”

The grotesque head of the Aphynipe peered around the cold-rock edge. Rows of sharp teeth lined the maw of the beast and met to form pincers. Gore-crimson eyes glowed in the dim as its gaze fell upon shining armor and shield which bore a blood-red cross. Betraying the fearsome countenance, its legs began to tremble.

In a hoarse tone, the creature growled, “Valiant Knight, upon my honor, I beseech thee to do me no harm this night and I shall not harm a hair on thy fair head. I was told by the White Friars of thy eventual visitation. But pray tell me what manner of adventure calls you into the Wild Forest?”

Galahad did not sheathe his sword as he judged the creature
friend or foe. “I come seeking the token of the Grail. A trinity of fay creatures told me that you are guardian of such, but I am ill at ease given their warning to me of your venomed fangs and many legs. I have heard tales, contes of your loyal guardianship of the token entrusted to you by the Friars. But you give no guarantee of safe passage to secure it.”

“I vow on my honor and fealty to you, noble one, and to the King. You may pass,” growled the Aphynipe.

Galahad bowed, “Me thinks you are a noble beast, beyond the measure of your appearance.”

At this, the Aphynipe replied, “I see by your lightning-bright sword and the shield of Balan that you are Sir Galahad, of whom legends speak. The relic is yours if you will only enter my lair and answer correctly the ancient riddle.” Bending its frontmost legs, the fearsome creature bowed its head and bade him come.

Sir Galahad past o’er the threshold and tried in vain attempt to not reveal his horror at seeing the Aphynipe in full. He covered his countenance with the Sign of the Cross, fair head to breast to shoulder. The fell creature revealed its segmented, scaled body, supported by dozens of paired and jointed legs as it wended its way closer. A fanged head sat atop a thick, bristled neck, swaying to and fro. As the Aphynipe stepped through the dim cave, its feet cracked upon layers of bones and skulls strewn upon the cold stone floor.

7 The Sign of the Cross is used often in prayer. Tracing back to the 3rd century, it is part of church tradition, holy days, and to call God’s blessing upon oneself and others. It is an acknowledgement of the Trinity and used as a visible sign of belief and hope in God.
The knight was loath to take another step; therefore he asked, “I beseech thee, ask me the riddle.”

The Aphynipe rasped, “Answer this riddle correctly as the final test proving you are the pure and noble Galahad, the true searcher of the Grail.”

Thus, he spake:

Two wanderers of common illumine
roam a dark aether field and look to each other.
Slow in revolution, centuries to prepare.
The first being melancholy and motives ill-birthed.
The second most regal, magnanimous and full of cheer.
An unlikely pairing for such good purpose.
Infortuna and Fortuna together complete.
Both kindly inclining toward a mutual sphere.
Divided by years and their Master’s law,
Together to lead commoners and kings.9

Galahad paused, then said, “The wanderers are two planets, Jupiter and Saturn, who travel in the heavenly spheres. In days of old, they met at Christmastide and shew their light to earth to guide the journey of kings in their quest for a great and eternal Treasure. The answer is the King’s Star.”

The Aphynipe bowed again. “Indeed, you

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9 For centuries, riddles were shared as entertainments amongst commoners and royalty. The Exeter Riddles were included in the 11th century Exeter Book (an Anglo-Saxon book of poetry presented to Exeter Cathedral by Loefric, First Bishop of Exeter), as unrhymed poems that elicit a sense of mystery and wonder. The answer to each riddle is a commonly known object, natural occurrence, or a Biblical reference.
are the knight who was foretold to monks and men, the noble and chivalrous one who will find the Holy Grail.” The beast crawled to an alcove in the back of the cave and brought out a small wooden chest, which was securely padlocked. “Only I may gift it and only you, Sir Galahad, may unlock it. Use thy sword tip as a key.”

Galahad drew his sword and did so. At once, the lock crumbled to the floor. He lifted the lid to see naught more than a scrap of white linen. Drawing it out of the box and holding it up to candlelight, Galahad beheld that the linen was a finely woven chalice cloth set with tiny pearls and a finely embroidered cross.

“What is this that I hold?” exclaimed the knight. “The very pall that covered the holy cup?”

“Indeed,” said the Aphynipe. “And you must take it with great haste to the feast that is being prepared by the Monk of the Forest this very night. You will know him as he is clothed in white. Enter the grounds through the narrow gate, for the wide will lead to your destruction. In the chapel, cross thyself with the holy water, then dip the pall into the basin. Guidance that you seek will be revealed, wondrous to behold. Go! Moonlight wanes and dawn hastens!”

Galahad slipped the cloth into his left gauntlet and next to his palm. As he remounted his black charger, he shouted, “I pray thee, mystic creature, I require a guide to directly set me on the right way! The way is still dark and paths are snowbound.”

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10 The pall is a small, square cloth woven from white linen. It is laid across the top of the chalice to protect the Eucharist wine from insects and debris.

11 Matthew 7:13-14
The Aphynipe roared out, “Whistle three times! Your guide will ascend, clothed in snow-white.”

Galahad did as he was told and anon, a pure-white caladrius alighted on a nearby branch and gazed upon the knight.

“The bird has seen your heart and you have been approved. Godspeed, good Sir!” was the final growling call from the beast. As the bird took flight, Galahad goaded his horse. They swiftly followed through briar and bramble, chasing bird and the setting moon.

The caladrius dove and darted through the primordial forest afore the charger and rider. The moon slipped ever lower, and a distant glimmer marked Galahad’s journey near complete as the white-feathered guide brought them thither. Stone gates, seven in number and glorious to behold, came into view. His caladrius guide hesitated not and flew through the narrowest of arches as the knight pulled back the reins to halt the chase.

Sir Galahad dismounted to lead his coal-black charger to the seventh gate, but the animal balked at the challenge, turning instead to the next stone arch. Certes, this arch was wider and fairer to pass through, but he

The caladrius, as eventually recorded in The Book of Beasts, is a pure white bird found in royal halls. Its peculiar gift is foretelling if a patient will live or die. When set upon the sick bed, it will face the patient who will live, but turn its face from one who will die. The bird will take the whole infirmity upon itself and fly into the sky to eliminate the affliction. Comparisons are sometimes made to the Lord, but this is a mortal and imperfect beast, but a loyal companion. It has been thought of as a parrot or gull, but is actually related to the Irish Bustards.

13 The number seven is symbolic in Scripture. emblematic of perfection and completion. In this particular instance, it symbolizes the fulfillment of a promise or oath.
hesitated. The Aphynipe’s warning echoed in his mind. “Take the narrow gate, the wide gate will lead to your destruction.”\textsuperscript{14} Upon a closer look, Galahad noted small divots in the earth.

He said, “Fair steed, had I left you to your whims and desire, you would have snapped your leg in yon holes! I will cover thine eyes with this band of silk and guide you through the narrowest gate.” In this manner, both passed through the seventh arch. Galahad then removed the silk and set the horse to graze upon the fair lawn of the small, greystone chapel.

Three candles were lit in the window and there was movement and clattering within. Galahad approached the wooden doors, then rapped the door with the pommel of his sword. “Pray thee, is this the chapel of the Monk of the Wild Forest?”

A soft shuffle was heard, then the coarse grind of bolt on lock and one wooden door swung in. “Messire, I am he of whom you ask. What errand brings you to God’s house at this hour?”

The knight could see that a side board was set with a simple feast of apples, cheese, a steaming pottage held in an iron kettle, a chalice of wine, and a small loaf of bread. It had been eventide last since Galahad tasted food. “Good brother, I am here of a matter most urgent. I humbly ask for permission to cross over this holy threshold.”

“Fair knight, I grant thee enter. A humble Twelfth Night meal has been set in honor of dawning holy Epiphany. It would be an honor to share this night with someone so fair and pure of heart.
Your charger may graze and rest in the safe haven of the chapel grounds."

Galahad bowed and removed his helm. “Before I enter, tell me where may I find the basin of holy water?”

The monk pointed to the alcove adjacent to the door. “There you will find the holy water to call blessing upon thyself. Then join me at table to feast and pray.”

The knight walked to the basin, removing gauntlet and glove and taking care to hold the linen pall. He lifted his hand, holding thumb to his first two fingers and the pall under the last two, and dipped fingers to water to make the Sign of the Cross. Then he placed the pearl-bedecked pall into the copper basin. As he lifted it to the candlelight, he beheld a most wonderous sight! A golden thread wended o’er the linen, as fine as flaxen fairy hair, the fine thread linking pearl-to-pearl. And lo, Galahad beheld one peculiar thread marking a line from the final pearl to the tiny embroidered cross. The blessed icon appeared at fabric edge with a blue-green thread woven ’round it.

“Pray, good monk, I bid you come close and assist! I know not what to make of this mystical pall. ‘Twas naught but pearl and cross! What tale tells it?

And verily, the good brother said, “My very soul sings this night! Are you not the fair Sir Galahad, a knight of King Arthur’s Round Table, son of Sir Lancelot and Lady Elaine

15 Noted in Howard Pyle’s account—Galahad was led to the Seat Perilous and “he took his seat, and lo! no harm of any sort befell him.” His name had been written in gold on the seat back, signifying that Sir Galahad was due the honor of placement at the Round Table.
of Corbenic? Forsooth, you be the very knight, nobly chosen and approved by the Seat Perilous\textsuperscript{15} to dwell in safe repose. ‘Twas foretold to me that your visage would bless this humble chapel this very night. Yea, I held out hope and praise the Father that by the heavens you have come.”

Galahad’s countenance warmed and peace entered on. “Now blessed brother, if it please thee, I am on a quest for the Holy Grail, prophesied to me, but I have been lost and alone in these wild woods!”

The monk said, “The unchanging map in the heavens guides sailor and king. Verily, as the stars aided three kings in finding their holy treasure in ages past, this pall will guide only the purest in heart, the noble who embodies goodness and honor. You be that great noble.”

The monk held the token aloft and said, “These are pearls of great price\textsuperscript{16} marking the constellations that will lead you to two worthy companions and the chalice. You shall not adventure alone on this perilous journey. Follow the map. The blue thread reveals the sea, the cross marks the Grail.”

Sir Galahad said, “You have restored my resolve and given much-needed hope to my soul.”

“‘Tis a journey long,” said the monk. “Pray, allow me to bless your pilgrimage with food and drink.” He pulled a leather bag from an aged trunk and filled it with the loaf, cheese, and apples, then blessed it. “This will keep you well to your journey’s end.”

The knight touched his hands upon the aged shoulders of the holy man and commended him to God. “I must depart in haste, for
I know not whither I go or where to find the Grail, but the weight of the mission is mine to carry. God bless thee for thy grammery to this lost servant. Remember me in thy orisons.”

Galahad crossed the threshold into the night and summoned his steed.

At his parting, the kind monk called to Sir Galahad, “Fare thee well, good Knight! Forsooth, there is no other I would so dearly and devotedly put my faith to. God save thee!”

Then Sir Galahad answered, “And God save thee and keep thee, good monk.”

Epiphany morn brought a golden glimmer to the virgin snow. A lily-white bird called out and alighted upon a nearby ash tree. The Caladrius looked to the monk then to the swiftly fading shadow of the knight. “I beseech thee, fair bird. Follow this fair knight and if he should encounter danger, carry his infirmities as your breed hath before. He shall certe achieve the Holy Grail.”

Now history hath recorded the journey of Galahad and his encounters with beast and bird who aided him in his pursuit of the blessed Holy Chalice.
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD
CHAPTER THIRTY

Sir Galahad and the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity

MIDSUMMER was nigh in the Wild Forest. As Sir Galahad rode his coal-black steed along the forest path, the sun beat down on the top of his bucket helm. He wished, not for the first time, for a helmet with a hinged visor he could raise on hot days, or when he needed a better view of his surroundings, or when he had eaten leeks.

So deep was Galahad in these ruminations that he did not notice the man in armor who stood astride the path; he almost almost his coal-black steed into the man. As Galahad reined up, he noticed the red-pawed lion on the knight’s shield. It was the sign of his friend and boon companion, Sir Tristan.1

“Tristan!” said Galahad. “Forsooth, I came nigh unto trampling you!”

The man in armor did not move. “Tristan,” he said. “Was that his name?”

“Pardon?” said Sir Galahad.

“Was Tristan the name of the man I slew, whose armor I now wear?”

1 The nephew and champion of King Mark of Cornwall and the son of Meliodas, King of Lyoness. Tristan is famous for his amourous attachment to an Irish princess named Iseult.
Sir Galahad bethought himself. “Tristan, you jest” he said. “It is unbecoming of a knight, indeed, it is unchivalrous, to jest about such a thing, and especially with a friend who loves you as I have loved you from my youth.”

At this the strange knight raised his visor (for, unlike Sir Galahad, he had a hinged visor on his helmet). Behind the visor was a well-formed face. It was not the face of Sir Tristan.

Sir Galahad started. Even his coal-black steed took a step back and snorted his astonishment.

“You need not be surprised,” said the strange knight. “Every morning I eat men like Tristan for my breakfast—two such men when I am hungry. I eat men like you for my luncheon.” He looked up to the sun, which was near its zenith. “And the luncheon hour approaches. Let me pass, and I may let you live.”

“I shall not let you pass,” said Sir Galahad, “for I mean to avenge the death of my friend and boon companion.” He leaned forward in his saddle. “Should I fail, you may, of course, eat me for your luncheon.”

“As you wish,” said the strange knight. “We can work it that way too.”

“Before we begin,” said Galahad, “Would you be so kind as to tell me your name and your parentage?”

The strange knight put his mailed fists on his hips, widened his stance, and stood a little straighter. “I am The Knight of Unmitigated Calamity,” he vaunted. “My father was an earthquake. My mother was a hurricane. I’m a brother to pestilence,
and preemptive war is my older sister. Food poisoning is my uncle, and crop failure is my first cousin. In short,” he concluded, “I am a very dangerous man.”

“I am pleased to make your acquaintance, thou Knight of Unmitigated Calamity,” said Sir Galahad. “But allow me to ask: If you are such a wrecker of havoc, why have I never heard of you before?”

“I am new to this country,” said the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity. “I come from a land where we keep she-bears for milk-cows and timberwolves for lap-dogs. Folk in my country jump higher, run faster, scream louder, punch harder, and fight dirtier than any soul in Britain. The baby boys all have whiskers, and the baby girls all have beards. Our sparrows sing basso profundo. Yea, a louse on my head could eat a British bunny rabbit in a single gulp and still have room in his louse-belly for sweetmeats.”

“Your native land seems a truly remarkable place,” said Galahad. “Why ever did you leave it?”

The Knight of Unmitigated Calamity fetched a deep sigh as if in sorrow. “I would have never left such a fair land of my own will, but my neighbors and countrymen sent me away. They said I was far too rough and dangerous to live among them.”

“So they saddled you up and sent you away,” said Sir Galahad. But then he gestured toward the strange knight’s legs, which were not astride a horse. “Or perhaps they did not saddle you up. Why do you walk on the ground like a serf or a villein? It is strange indeed to see a knight without a horse.”
The Knight of Unmitigated Calamity snorted. “What need have I of a horse? For indeed, I am half horse myself, and the other half fire-drake. When I tip-toe, I shatter rocks to pebbles. When I stomp, I crack the very earth into canyons. With my right hand I smash whole armies—though, forsooth, I am not even right-handed. So if you still wish to avenge your friend, you have had your warning. But if you wish to surrender like a good and reasonable fellow, there would be no shame in that, my good Sir... Sir...”

“Galahad,” said Sir Galahad. “My name is Sir Galahad. And still I mean to vanquish you in mortal combat.”

“You may be Sir Gala-had,” said the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity, “but soon you shall be Sir Gala-hadn’t. You may be Sir Gala-has, but soon you shall be Gala-has-been. You may be Sir Gala-can. But I shall prove you to be Sir Gala-cannot.”

The ire rose in Sir Galahad. “I have never borne such insolence,” he said, “does the name ‘Sir Galahad’ mean nothing to you?”

“Now Sir Gala-is,” continued the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity. “An hour hence, Sir Gala-isn’t.”

“Sir Galahad,” said Sir Galahad. “Of the Round Table.”

“In my country, the tables are mostly square,” said the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity. “Or rectangular.”

“That is true in this country too,” said Galahad, “but that is hardly the point. It is not the point at all. Know you not of the Knights of the Round Table?”

“I am sorry,” said the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity. “There are many cliques and coteries of knights in Britain. How can I
keep up with them all, as busy as I have been with the vanquishing of my enemies and the drinking of their widows’ tears?”

“Even so, I hardly credit that you know not of Sir Galahad of the Round Table, occupier of the Siege Perilous.”

The Knight of Unmitigated Calamity scoffed. “Occupier of the Powerless Seat? That is hardly a thing to boast of.”

“PERILOUS,” said Sir Galahad. “I occupy the Siege PERILOUS.”

“Ah, the Siege Perilous,” said the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity. “Is it my fault that your speech is garbled? It is difficult indeed to understand your speech when you have a bucket on your head. Have you considered getting a helmet with a visor?”

Galahad drew his sword from his scabbard, and it glinted in the midsummer sun. “If the name Galahad means nothing to you, perhaps this will mean something.” He read the engraving along the blade: This sword is for the greatest knight in the world and for him who shall win the Holy Grail.

The Knight of Unmitigated Calamity smiled at Sir Galahad. “You have taught me something I did not know, good Sir Knight.”

“What is that?” asked Galahad.

“You have taught me that this is a country where the engravers determine a knight’s greatness. I have gone about this the hard way, destroying the doughtiest knights of Britain with my sword and fist in order to prove my greatness. I see now that I should

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2 The Siege Perilous was a seat at the Round Table reserved by Merlin for the knight who would one day be successful in the quest for the Holy Grail. The English word “siege” originally meant “seat” or “throne.”
have just hired a sword-engraver.”

“Now look here,” said Galahad, “I got this sword by pulling it out of a great block of red marble—cubical in shape, and polished until it was smooth as glass. ³ Of all the knights of the Round Table, I alone was able to pull it from the stone.”

The Knight of Unmitigated Calamity put his hand on the hilt of his own sword. “That is an interesting story indeed,” he said. “I got this sword, as I mentioned before, when I took it from your friend Sir Tristan. If you wish to avoid his fate, let me pass without further molestation.”

Sir Galahad turned his coal-black steed across the path to show the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity that he would not, indeed, allow him to pass unmolested. But the two knights’ parley was interrupted by the sound of hooves thundering down the forest path from the direction whence the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity had come.

When the horse came into view, Sir Galahad was astonished to see that it was ridden by his friend and boon companion Sir Tristan, unarmed and in his undergarments.⁴

“Tristan!” shouted Sir Galahad. “You live!”

“Of course I live,” growled Sir Tristan. “Why should I not live?” He cast a baleful eye at the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity, who looked as surprised as Sir Galahad.

³ See Howard Pyle’s The Story of the Grail, Part II: The Story of Sir Galahad, Chapter First.

⁴ Medieval men’s undergarments included braies (loose trousers cinched at the waist with a drawstring) and undertunics—T-shaped, long sleeved linen garments that fell below the waist.
“Why, indeed,” said Sir Galahad. “But if I may be so bold, why are you wearing only your undergarments, and why are you unarmed? The Wild Forest is a place of many dangers, and it is hardly safe for a knight to go about unarmed.”

“I am wearing my undergarments,” said Sir Tristan, “and I am unarmed because somebody took my arms and armor while I took my morning bath.” He glared at the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity.

“Is this, forsooth, your armor? Your sword?” asked the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity. “When I found them on the riverbank, methought some knight had gotten new arms and armor and, wanting these no more, left them for the taking.”

“You are a blackguard and a thief,” said Sir Tristan. He reached his right hand to his left hip as if to draw his sword. But his sword, of course, was not there. The Knight of Unmitigated Calamity had it. Tristan growled once more. “Sir Galahad, may I borrow your sword? I wish to run this blackguard through.”

“You may not borrow my sword,” said Galahad. “For my friend and boon companion was dead, and now he lives. So great is my joy that I cannot wish harm to anyone, even a braggart, blackguard, and thief. Moreover, I think this all a merry jest.”

Galahad turned to the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity and asked, “You are not forsooth the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity?”

The Knight of Unmitigated Calamity bowed his head and
shook it slowly.

“What, then is your name and station?” asked Galahad.

“I am Clarence, the Traveling Bard. I was passing through the Wild Forest when, as I said, I found Sir Tristan’s arms and armor. I thought it might be my chance to get into a new line of work.”

“You shall return to Tristan his arms and armor,” said Galahad. Clarence nodded and started unbuckling his armor.

Galahad turned to Tristan. “And Tristan, for my sake I ask you to spare this man. He is the best talker I have ever known. To still his tongue would be to rob Britain of one of its great treasures.”

“For your sake, dear Galahad, and for the sake of our many adventures I shall let this coward live,” said Tristan, but his joy was not overflowing. As the Bard formerly known as the Knight of Unmitigated Calamity handed over the arms and armor, Sir Tristan would not even look at him. Nor did Tristan watch as the Bard ran away down the forest path the way he had come.
FAMISHED AND PARCHED, it had been several days since Galahad had partaken of either food or drink. He could not remember how long he had been lost in Wild Forest, and had no idea that today would be the last he would tarry there.

It was nigh on to midday, and the trees parted to reveal a sunny clearing. A great wooden table was in the center and smoke was rising from a roughly built stone oven. Near the oven a round, elderly fellow in an apron was roasting some meat on a spit over a merry fire and singing to himself.

The sound of an armored knight riding a great steed soon caught the attention of the singing cook and he called out to Galahad, “Good sir knight, I am so glad you are finally here! Come, sit down. The first course is ready. I hope you like this potage—it is a recipe of my own: thickened almond milk with mashed flowers and pears.”

Galahad was so very exhausted and weak that he followed the orders which had been given to him without question, and almost

1 A potage is a simple stew or soup. Most medieval feasts would begin with a course of one or two potages.
fell into the chair set for him at the table. His portly host continued: “Ah, but first, an apéritif of hypocras. Everyone knows that before a meal, the stomach should always be opened with an apéritif to allow for good digestion. And even if that turns out to be only an old wives’ tale, you do look quite faint . . . and a spicy drink will doubtless refresh you.”

A few tapestries (or perhaps an ornate tent of some sort) stood a few feet off, running the length of the table. The cook ducked back behind it as Galahad drank and then ate the potage.

After a reasonable amount of time was given for the potage to be enjoyed, the cook returned declaring: “For the Second Course, peacock stuffed with lardoons, cloves, and piglet stuffing.” The bird was redressed in its brilliant feathers and supported in a hidden way underneath to make it stand so as to seem to be alive. The peacock stood astride an enormous pie filled with rabbit, minced dates, currants, and ground walnuts.

“Noble cook, I have never seen this bird prepared with such skill and cleverness—even at the court of King Arthur,” exclaimed Sir Galahad. And then he continued, “Pray thee, tell me your name, and how it is you have come to set up such a marvelous meal in the middle of this Wild Forest?”

“Of late, folks simply called me ‘the old cook,’ but when I was a young man just starting out in Donegal, I was hailed ‘Nevyn.’ But now is not the time for stories, now is the time to enjoy this lovely fowl.” Once the bird was on the table and Galahad’s plate was full, the cook then filled a flagon with sunny white wine.
“Ahh, so you hail from the western lands in Éire,” deduced the knight. “You are far from home. I too, am long missed by goodly great aunt, the abbess who with the sister at the nunnery raised me. I am Sir Galahad, son of Sir Lancelot.”

“Aye, I have been far from home for many decades, and this place is only the last in a long line of halls where I have served. Though, to be sure, all my previous kitchens at least had roofs!” And with that, the cook scurried over to turn the spit by the fire. Items were pulled from the oven, inspected and returned to cook with other stone platters covered with small pies.

“Yes, tell me Master Nevyn about this curious hall you are feasting me in,” said Galahad. “My chair seems to be built of parts of a wagon wheel, your oven appears to have been constructed this week, and your kitchens are a curious combination of tents and baskets and crates.”

“Ahh, I must say, I may be most proud of my friend who helped me with all this that you see. For many years a fine wood worker and I would design and craft various solutions for how I was to transport all of the supplies I would need for this meal by myself. In the end, he fashioned a curious wagon that I could pull fully loaded and then take apart once I reached this spot, and then reattach all the pieces in such a way as to have a table and chair for you to eat at and a kitchen where I could cook.”

Galahad was only about a third of the way through the roasted peacock when the cook returned and carted off the remains behind the curtain. “I’m going to wrap this up for you to enjoy further on
your quest.” He soon returned with a bowl of roasted carrots, parsnips, and burdock in a sauce made from ground herbs and vinegar in one hand and in the other a platter filled with roasted wild boar. “The Third Course is boar,” he announced “Cooked with a mustard and honey glaze, garnished with dried cherries and dates.”

“It smells marvelous,” the knight said courteously. “But I fear that I will not be able to keep eating at this pace.”

“Ahh, you jest, sir knight!” replied the cook as he poured a generous serving of red wine and set it before Galahad. “He who seeks the Grail should not fear this simple meal. And as you eat I am sure your courage will grow, for as they say, ‘a man who eats heartily will never prove to be a coward.’”

“Stay, my friend,” said Galahad in a steely tone that had no trace of friendliness to it. “I spake naught to you of my quest for the Holy Grail. Is there some sorcery here or foul scheming? I was a fool to blindly accept your hospitality this day. Certes, I was too weak from lack of food and water when I came upon you today or my wits would have not failed me thusly.”

“Nay, good knight,” protested Nevyn. “I am here only to serve and bless you. Forgive me, I have been preparing for this meal for so long that I have forgotten that you know me not and could not guess my holy calling. But first, I must bring out a lovely bowl of hard boiled eggs covered with saffron, flavored with cloves for you to eat with the boar.”

3 All the food in this tale is accurate for the time period, as is the number of courses. And if you think the menu is far-fetched, try researching the feast served in 1455 by the Count of Anjou, third son of King Louis II of Sicily!
While the cook was away Galahad poked suspiciously at the roasted meat with his knife. The cook returned with the bowl of eggs and a bowl of roasted vegetables Balanced on a small basket of breads.

“I used to love helping with making the bread when I was a young boy. But I didn’t really learn to cook until I lived in Iona. When I was a young man I sailed off to join St. Columba’s community to pledge my life to God by taking the habit. I was a novice there at the Abbey and longed to work on the Gospels copied in the Scriptorium, but instead was directed to spend my days in the kitchen. Yet one day, when I was alone tending the cooking fire and stirring the great pot of the stew for that day, all my desires were taken from me and replaced with a glorious calling for my whole life.

Without warning the fire in the hearth sprang up, filling the space and coming out to nearly consume me. I fell back to the floor and from out of the fire walked a figure who appeared to be wrought of lightning—so bright that the fire looked dark.

Quoth the angel: ‘Nevyn, you have been called by the Almighty to help the Chosen on his quest to find the Holy Grail.’ And then I was given more instructions, such as what day I should meet you, and the location of this spot in the Wild Forest, and that you
would be in need of food and drink, and directions to get through the woods so that you would be able to fulfill the prophecy of the sword. What *that* prophecy was, I could never deduce. But I knew what must be done to fulfill my calling. I quit the monastery and began my culinary pilgrimage. First I went to Alsace to learn how to cook various dishes consisting of batter or dough cooked in fat, like crêpes, fritters, and doughnuts. Then I traveled to the lands of the Anglo-Normans to perfect potages and broths. I wandered south to Italy to learn about spices (the culinary treasures of Africa and Asia are shipped as you know to the powerful city-states of Genoa, Venice and Florence) but then returned to Britain to refine my skills and practiced them at several great houses and castles. But enough about me. Let me take away these dishes and I’ll pack what you did not eat in the bag with what was leftover of the peacock. Now it is time for the Fourth course—the royal fish 7 cooked in parsley and vinegar and covered with powdered ginger, along with a stuffed capon sprinkled with spices, and a small pie consisting primarily of crab, crayfish, and oysters.”

“I commend your cooking—everything is prepared to perfection,” said Galahad. “But I also must say that I am amazed at the variety and quality of the many spices you have used, and even

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6 In obedience to King Arthur, Sir Gawaine tried to pull from a block of red marble a sword, on which was written: “Whoso... shall endeavor to draw it forth and shall not be able to do so, shall fall a wound from the blade thereof.” According to *The Passing of the Grail*, Part II, *The Story of Sir Galahad*, Chapter First, this same sword was later drawn by Galahad.

7 that is, whale meat
those you have here on the table in small vessels for me to add.

“I am delighted you approve,” said the old man courteously. Then warming to the topic added, “Certes, it has been a challenge to obtain many of them, as our isles dangle helplessly at the far end of the spice routes. And even those we can get are not cheap. For example, a half pound of nutmeg cost me three fattened oxen—oh, but forgive me, this is crass kitchen-fire talk, not proper conversation between a host and his guest.”

But Galahad continued, “You do bring up a point over which I am puzzled. How is it that you, a cook, could afford to prepare this astounding meal for me, here in the midst of the Wild Forest? A duke would be hard pressed to offer such a fine feast to a guest—even if he saved a year.”

Blushing slightly, the Nevyn answered quietly, “Remember good sir, I was called by the angel when I was not yet two decades old. And you must see from my gray hairs that since that encounter I have had many, many years to save up for this feast.”

“Oh, you honor me too highly,” gasped the knight. Then raising his goblet of wine, toasted him saying, “To the best of cooks this world has ever seen—I am deeply humbled by your sacrifice to create such a meal.”

Brightening, the old man said, “And speaking of the meal, it is now time for the Fifth course! I learned not your name from my angelic visitor, but was told I would recognize you by your shield of white, emblazoned with a red cross. So I will hope you notice that, with the wafers, I have prepared a jelly, part white and part
red in your honor, as well as cream-covered strawberries with
cheese in slices, and pears in red wine.”

“Our good Lord is sovereign over all things, and has well-crafted our life stories since before Time began,” observed Galahad. “Did you know that this was not always my shield?8

“Let me refill your goblet with wine,” was the cooks response—which Galahad took as an invitation to begin his tale:

“It was after I had gained my sword and was given the Siege Perilous9 that I rode off from Camelot that I came to a very strange, luminous place. It was a wide and open plain covered in lilies, and in the center was a lake of water as still and smooth as a mirror, with a pavilion of green silk by its edge. I tarried there four days, enjoying the company of several ladies and lords who were the attendants of the Lady of the Lake.10 Together we feasted and sang and danced and enjoyed all kinds of goodly entertainments.

Upon the morning of the fourth day, the Lady appeared clad in green samite from head to foot, her black hair long and soft, her face like ivory, and upon her neck and around her arms were chains and bracelets of gold inset with emerald stones. Quoth the Lady, ‘Where is thy shield?’ and said I to her, ‘Lady, I have no shield.’ Said she to me, ‘Let us go and find thee a shield.’

8 A longer, more detailed version of the story Galahad tells of how he obtained his shield can be found in The Passing of the Grail, Part II, The Story of Sir Galahad, Chapter Second

9 the seat at the Round Table set apart by Merlin for the knight who would attain the Holy Grail

10 The Lady of the Lake is a fairy-like enchantresses who, among other things, provides Arthur with the sword Excalibur and helps to take the dying Arthur to Avalon.
So straightway she led me to the monastery of White Friars, and to this the lady pointed and said, ‘Thither thou wilt find a shield.’ As the monastery bell began ringing the Lady disappeared and I entered that holy house. I asked the brothers about how I might get a shield and the Abbot of that place replied, ‘Aye, sir, there is here a strange and miraculous shield, that hangeth behind the altar, and it hath hung there for God knoweth how long.’ And he led me to the chapel and hanging behind the altar was a shield shining as it were of brightly polished silver. And upon the shield was a red cross, very strong and bold in its marking. The Abbot then told me the story of the shield:

‘In the old days, during the rule of King Arthur’s father, Uther Pendragon, there was a fortified city which held for safe keeping both the Holy Spear$^{12}$ and the Holy Grail$^{13}$ And in that city were stationed many knights for its defense, including Sir Belyn. One night there was an attack and Sir Belyn found himself unarmed. He escaped into the chapel of the castle where those two holy relics were kept. Hither his enemies followed him, and would have slain him, only Belyn seized upon the holy spear and ran them through. And by that act Belyn was thus saved, yet while the spear was still wet with the blood of the would-be assassins, a messenger from heaven appeared before him and said: ‘Belyn! Belyn! What hast thou

$^{12}$ Or, The Spear of Destiny, or Lance of Longinus—the spear with which Christ was wounded at the end of his Crucifixion, as recored in John 19:34.

$^{13}$ the chalice used at the Last Supper to institute the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and the cup used by Joseph of Arimathea used to catch Christ’s blood at the crucifixion.
done?’ For to use the sacred lance in such a way was thing not to be done. And at once there was an earthquake, and the castle fell into ruins. Sir Balyn survived, but both the spear and the chalice disappeared. The knight wandered far and wide, lost and despairing. Finally he came to where was the monastery of White Friars. Ere he died, Sir Balyn took his shield and drew upon it a great cross in his own blood. And he told our holy brothers to keep that shield until one would come who was to achieve the Holy Grail.”

“It is amazing how the Almighty can even make use of our mistakes, and reforge them into instruments for His glory,” said Nevyn as he cleared the table.

“That it is,” agreed the knight. “Accordingly, the friars gave that shield to me, for it has been prophesied that I will recover the Grail. And when they bestowed the shield upon me, they also said that Sir Balyn had predicted that it would never be pierced by the point of any weapon forged by the hand of man. Now, if that be true or not, I cannot say for sure. But I can report that, to this day, it has not yet been breached.”

“Such a great story deserves a great dessert,”14 said the cook as he scuttled behind the tapestry.

“As I rumminate now on how the Holy Grail was lost, and when,” reflected Sir Galahad, “I realize that the heavenly messenger who conscripted you to prepare refreshments for me on my quest for the Blessed Cup did so before the Grail was even lost! The mystery of the Divine Plan is too marvelous for His creatures to grasp.”

14 The term “dessert” comes from the Old French desservir, literally “to un-serve.”
The knight was lost in reverie, watching the light reflect across the rippling surface of his wine as Nevyn brought out the final course, a platter bearing four small bowls holding fruit preserves, several pomegranates four small piles of assorted kinds of nuts, and in the center, a golden chalice.

Galahad gasped, “Nevyn, can it be—?”

“Nay,” chuckled the cook, “It is not the Holy Grail. If you look closely, it is a large pastry I have made of very buttery bread, embedded with candied fruits for the jewels. And in the bowl of this faux Grail are candied cherries.” As the grand pastry was placed on the table before the knight, the cook swooned and caught himself on Galahad’s chair.

“My good man, are you feeling ill?” exclaimed Galahad. “Oh, for shame—I am thoughtless, selfish, and rude! You have been toiling all this day (and for how many other days before this?) to prepare this feast, and have worked yourself past exhaustion. Come, please, take my chair and refresh yourself.”

“Do not trouble yourself, sir knight” said the cook as he waived away the offer for help. Yet he swooned again, and resignedly did accept the seat. “I will be fine,” the old man said as he and mopped his brow. “All is going as expected.”

“Do you need something to eat or drink?” asked Galahad, as he knelt down beside his host and tried to force a goblet of wine into the cook’s hand.

Quoth Nevyn: “Sir Galahad, you are overly vexed. I will eat and drink again, but today is not that day.” The cook paused, breathing
in a shallow fashion and mopping his brow. “When the angelic messenger gave me this calling, I was told that this would be the greatest achievement of life . . . but also my last.”

“Fie!” protested the knight. “You will rise on the morrow with me and we will leave these woods together.

Smiling weakly, the cook sighed, “I am at peace. And rest assured: when we next meet, we will feast together in such a fashion that this meal you ate today will seem to us to have been not much better than pigs’ slop. On that day you and I will join a great multitude to sit down to eat together, and be ‘arrayed in fine linen, clean and white.’

15 Revelation 19:5–8
16 Isaiah 25:6

On the holy mountain, in the new city at the marriage supper of the Lamb, we will delight in ‘a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.’”

Then, closing his eyes and laying his hand on Sir Galahad’s shoulder as if in a holy blessing, the cook whispered these final words to the knight:

“Don’t forget to take the leftovers.”
THE LOST TALES OF GALAHAD
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