

## What to Look For:

*Le Morte d' Arthur* is a tale about the rise and fall of a mythical kingdom, King Arthur's court. However, it does hold some fierce realities. As you read, pay attention to the events that contribute to the death of King Arthur and, consequently, the downfall of his kingdom. What destructive effects do lust and jealousy have on the kingdom?

From: **LE MORTE d'ARTHUR**



### BOOK 20 CHAPTER 1



How Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred were busy upon Sir Gawaine for to disclose the love between Sir Lancelot and Queen Guenevere

IN May when every lusty heart flourisheth and bourgeoneth, for as the season is lusty to behold and comfortable, so man and woman rejoice and gladden of summer coming with his fresh flowers: for winter with his rough winds and blasts causeth a lusty man and woman to cower and sit fast by the fire. So in this season, as in the month of May, it befell a great anger and unhap that stunted not till the flower of chivalry of all the world was destroyed and slain; and all was long upon two unhappy knights the which were named Agravaire and Sir Mordred, that were brethren unto Sir Gawaine. For this Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred had ever a privy hate unto the queen Dame Guenevere and to Sir Lancelot, and daily and nightly they ever watched upon Sir Lancelot.

So it mishapped, Sir Gawaine and all his brethren were in King Arthur's chamber; and then Sir Agravaire said thus openly, and not in no counsel, that many knights might hear it: I marvel that we all be not ashamed both to see and to know how Sir Lancelot lieth daily and nightly by the queen, and all we know it so; and it is shamefully suffered of us all, that we all should suffer so noble a king as King Arthur is so to be shamed.

**S**ir Gawaine the Son of  
Lot, King of Orkney

Then spake Sir Gawaine, and said: Brother Sir Agravaire,

I pray you and charge you move no such matters no more afore me, for wit you well, said Sir Gawaine, I will not be of your counsel. So God me help, said Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, we will not be knowing, brother Agravaire, of your deeds. Then will I, said Sir Mordred. I lieve well that, said Sir Gawaine, for ever unto all unhappiness, brother Sir Mordred, thereto will ye grant; and I would that ye left all this, and made you not so busy, for I know, said Sir Gawaine, what will fall of it. Fall of it what fall may, said Sir Agravaire, I will disclose it to the king. Not by my counsel, said Sir Gawaine, for an there rise war and wrack betwixt Sir Lancelot and us, wit you well brother, there will many kings and great lords hold with Sir Lancelot. Also, brother Sir Agravaire, said Sir Gawaine, ye must remember how oftentimes Sir Lancelot hath rescued the king and the queen; and the best of us all had been full cold at the heart-root had not Sir Lancelot been better than we, and that hath he proved himself full oft. And as for my part, said Sir Gawaine, I will never be against Sir Lancelot for one day's deed, when he rescued me from King Carados of the Dolorous Tower, and slew him, and saved my life. Also, brother Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred, in like wise Sir Lancelot rescued you both, and threescore and two, from Sir Turquin. Methinketh brother, such kind deeds and kindness should be remembered. Do as ye list, said Sir Agravaire, for I will lain it no longer. With these words came to them King Arthur.



by Howard Pyle

Now brother, stint your noise, said Sir Gawaine. We will not, said Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred. Will ye so? said Sir Gawaine; then God speed you, for I will not hear your tales ne be of your counsel. No more will I, said Sir Gareth and Sir Gaheris, for we will never say evil by that man; for because, said Sir Gareth, Sir Lancelot made me knight, by no manner owe I to say ill of him: and therewithal they three departed, making great dole. Alas, said Sir Gawaine and Sir Gareth, now is this realm wholly mischieved, and the noble fellowship of the Round Table shall be disparted: so they departed.

### BOOK 20 CHAPTER 2

How Sir Agravaire disclosed their love to King Arthur, and how King Arthur gave them licence to take him

AND then Sir Arthur asked them what noise they made. My lord, said Agravaire, I shall tell you that I may keep no longer. Here is I, and my brother Sir Mordred, brake unto my brothers Sir Gawaine, Sir Gaheris, and to Sir Gareth, how this we know all, that Sir Lancelot holdeth your queen, and hath done long; and we be your sister's sons, and we may suffer it no longer, and all we wot that ye should be above Sir Lancelot; and ye are the king that made him knight, and therefore we will prove it, that he is a traitor to your person.

If it be so, said Sir Arthur, wit you well he is none other, but I would be loath to begin such a thing but I might have proofs upon it; for Sir Lancelot is an hardy knight, and all ye know he is the best knight among us all; and but if he be taken with the deed, he will fight with him that bringeth up the noise, and I know no knight that is able to match him. Therefore an it be sooth as ye say, I would he were taken with the deed. For as the French book saith, the king was full loath thereto, that any noise should be upon Sir Lancelot and his queen; for the king had a deeming, but he would not hear of it, for Sir Lancelot had done so much for him and the queen so many times, that wit ye well the king loved him passingly well. My lord, said Sir Agravaire, ye shall ride to-morn a-hunting, and doubt ye not Sir Lancelot will not go with you. Then when it draweth toward night, ye may send the queen word that ye will lie out all that night, and so may ye send for your cooks, and then upon pain of death we shall take him that night with the queen, and outhere we shall bring him to you dead or quick. I will well, said the king; then I counsel you, said the king, take with you sure fellowship. Sir, said Agravaire, my brother, Sir Mordred, and I, will take with us twelve knights of the Round Table. Beware, said King Arthur, for I warn you ye shall find him wight. Let us deal, said Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred.

So on the morn King Arthur rode a-hunting, and sent word to the queen that he would be out all that night. Then Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred gat to them twelve knights, and hid themselves in a chamber in the Castle of Carlisle, and these were their names: Sir Colgrevance, Sir Mador de la Porte, Sir Gingaline, Sir Meliot de Logris, Sir Petipase of Winchelsea, Sir Galleron of Galway, Sir Melion of the Mountain, Sir Astamore, Sir Gromore Somir Joure, Sir Curselaine, Sir Florence, Sir Lovel. So these twelve knights were with Sir Mordred and Sir Agravaire, and all they were of Scotland, outhere of Sir Gawaine's kin, either well-willers to his brethren.

So when the night came, Sir Lancelot told Sir Bors how he would go that night and speak with the queen. Sir, said Sir Bors, ye shall not go this night by my counsel. Why? said Sir Lancelot. Sir, said Sir Bors, I dread me ever of Sir Agravaire, that waiteth you daily to do you shame and us all; and never gave my heart against no going, that ever ye went to the queen, so much as now; for I mistrust that the king is out this night from the queen because peradventure he hath lain

some watch for you and the queen, and therefore I dread me sore of treason. Have ye no dread, said Sir Lancelot, for I shall go and come again, and make no tarrying. Sir, said Sir Bors, that me repenteth, for I dread me sore that your going out this night shall wrath us all. Fair nephew, said Sir Lancelot, I marvel much why ye say thus, sithen the queen hath sent for me; and wit ye well I will not be so much a coward, but she shall understand I will see her good grace. God speed you well, said Sir Bors, and send you sound and safe again.

BOOK 20  
CHAPTER 3

How Sir Lancelot was espied in the queen's chamber, and how Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred came with twelve knights to slay him

SO Sir Lancelot departed, and took his sword under his arm, and so in his mantle that noble knight put himself in great jeopardy; and so he passed till he came to the queen's chamber, and then Sir Lancelot was lightly put into the chamber. And then, as the French book saith, the queen and Lancelot were together. And whether they were abed or at other manner of disports, me list not hereof make no mention, for love that time was not as is now-a-days. But thus as they were together, there came Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred, with twelve knights with them of the Round Table, and they said with crying voice: Traitor-knight, Sir Lancelot du Lake, now art thou taken. And thus they cried with a loud voice, that all the court might hear it; and they all fourteen were armed at all points as they should fight in a battle. Alas said Queen Guenevere. Now are we mischieved both, Madam, said Sir Lancelot. Is there here any armour within your chamber, that I might cover my poor body withal? An if there be any give it me, and I shall soon stint their malice, by the grace of God. Truly, said the queen, I have none armour, shield, sword, nor spear; wherefore I dread me sore our long love is come to a mischievous end, for I hear by their noise there be many noble knights, and well I wot they be surely armed, and against them ye may make no resistance. Wherefore ye are likely to be slain, and then shall I be brent. For an ye might escape them, said the queen, I would not doubt but that ye would rescue me in what danger that ever I stood in. Alas, said Sir Lancelot, in all my life thus was I never bestead, that I should be thus shamefully slain for lack of mine armour.

But ever in one Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred cried: Traitor-knight, come out of the queen's chamber, for wit thou well thou art so beset that thou shalt not escape. O Jesu mercy, said Sir Lancelot, this shameful cry and noise I may not suffer, for better were death at once than thus to endure this pain. Then he took the queen in his arms, and kissed her, and said: Most noble Christian queen, I beseech you as ye have been ever my special good lady, and I at all times your true poor knight unto my power, and as I never failed you in right nor in wrong sithen the first day King Arthur made me knight, that ye will pray for my soul if that I here be slain; for well I am assured that Sir Bors, my nephew, and all the remnant of my kin, with Sir Lavaine and Sir Urre, that they will not fail you to rescue you from the fire; and therefore, mine own lady, recomfort yourself, whatsoever come of me, that ye go with Sir Bors, my nephew, and Sir Urre, and they all will do you all the pleasure that they can or may, that ye shall live like a queen upon my lands. Nay, Lancelot, said the queen, wit thou well I will never live after thy days, but an thou be slain I will take my death as meekly for Jesu Christ's sake as ever did any Christian queen. Well, madam, said Lancelot, sith it is so that the day is



come that our love must depart, wit you well I shall sell my life as dear as I may; and a thousandfold, said Sir Lancelot, I am more heavier for you than for myself. And now I had liefer than to be lord of all Christendom, that I had sure armour upon me, that men might speak of my deeds or ever I were slain. Truly, said the queen, I would an it might please God that they would take me and slay me, and suffer you to escape. That shall never be, said Sir Lancelot, God defend me from such a shame, but Jesu be Thou my shield and mine armour!

BOOK 20  
CHAPTER 4

How Sir Lancelot slew Sir Colgrevice, and armed him in his harness, and after slew Sir Agravaire, and twelve of his fellows

AND therewith Sir Lancelot wrapped his mantle about his arm well and surely; and by then they had gotten a great form out of the hall, and therewithal they rushed at the door. Fair lords, said Sir Lancelot, leave your noise and your rushing, and I shall set open this door, and then may ye do with me what it liketh you. Come off then, said they all, and do it, for it availeth thee not to strive against us all; and therefore let us into this chamber, and we shall save thy life until thou come to King Arthur. Then Lancelot unbarred the door, and with his left hand he held it open a little, so that but one man might come in at once; and so there came striding a good knight, a much man and large, and his name was Colgrevice of Gore, and he with a sword struck at Sir Lancelot mightily; and he put aside the stroke, and gave him such a buffet upon the helmet, that he fell grovelling dead within the chamber door. And then Sir Lancelot with great might drew that dead knight within the chamber door; and Sir Lancelot with help of the queen and her ladies was lightly armed in Sir Colgrevice's armour.

And ever stood Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred crying: Traitor-knight, come out of the queen's chamber. Leave your noise, said Sir Lancelot unto Sir Agravaire, for wit you well, Sir Agravaire, ye shall not prison me this night; and therefore an ye do by my counsel, go ye all from this chamber door, and make not such crying and such manner of slander as ye do; for I promise you by my knight-hood, an ye will depart and make no more noise, I shall as to-morn appear afore you all before the king, and then let it be seen which of you all, outhere else ye all, that will accuse me of treason; and there I shall answer you as a knight should, that hither I came to the queen for no manner of mal engin, and that will I prove and make it good upon you with my hands. Fie on thee, traitor, said Sir Agravaire and Sir Mordred, we will have thee maugre thy head, and slay thee if we list; for we let thee wit we have the choice of King Arthur to save thee or to slay thee. Ah sirs, said Sir Lancelot, is there none other grace with you? then keep yourself.

So then Sir Lancelot set all open the chamber door, and mightily and knightly he strode in amongst them; and anon at the first buffet he slew Sir Agravaire. And twelve of his fellows after, within a little while after, he laid them cold to the earth, for there was none of the twelve that might stand Sir Lancelot one buffet. Also Sir Lancelot wounded Sir Mordred, and he fled with all his might. And then Sir Lancelot returned again unto the queen, and said: Madam, now wit you well all our true love is brought to an end, for now will King Arthur ever be my foe; and therefore, madam, an it like you that I may have you with me, I shall save you from all manner adventures dangerous. That is not best, said the queen; meseemeth now ye have done so much harm, it will be best ye hold you still with this. And if ye see that as to-morn they will put me unto the death, then may ye rescue me as ye think best. I will well, said Sir Lancelot, for have ye no doubt, while I am living I shall rescue you. And then he kissed her, and either gave other a ring; and so there he left the queen, and went until his lodging.



**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 3.25 \_\_\_\_\_ Sir Agravaïn and Sir Mordred hated Queen Guenevere and Sir Lancelot.
- 3.26 \_\_\_\_\_ Sir Gawaine exposes Lancelot and Guenevere to the knights and suggests that the king be told of their adulterous love.
- 3.27 \_\_\_\_\_ King Arthur consents to Sir Aggravain's plan to trap Lancelot and Guenevere.
- 3.28 \_\_\_\_\_ Sir Bor warns Sir Lancelot not to see the Queen for he fears that there is a trap set for him.
- 3.29 \_\_\_\_\_ Sir Agravaïn and his knights trap Lancelot in the Queen's chamber.
- 3.30 \_\_\_\_\_ The Queen says that she would rather that Lancelot be slain so that she could escape.
- 3.31 \_\_\_\_\_ Sir Lancelot kills Sir Colgrevance and puts on Colgrevance's armor.
- 3.32 \_\_\_\_\_ After coming out of the Queen's chamber, Sir Lancelot is killed immediately by Sir Agravaïn's knights.

**BOOK 20**  
❧ CHAPTER 7 ❧

How Sir Mordred rode hastily to the king, to tell him of the affray and death of Sir Agravaïn and the other knights

NOW turn we again unto Sir Mordred, that when he was escaped from the noble knight, Sir Lancelot, he anon gat his horse and mounted upon him, and rode unto King Arthur, sore wounded and smitten, and all forbled; and there he told the king all how it was, and how they were all slain save himself all only. Jesu mercy, how may this be? said the king; took ye him in the queen's chamber? Yea, so God me help, said Sir Mordred, there we found him unarmed, and there he slew



Colgrevance, and armed him in his armour; and all this he told the king from the beginning to the ending. Jesu mercy, said the king, he is a marvellous knight of prowess. Alas, me sore repenteth, said the king, that ever Sir Lancelot should be against me. Now I am sure the noble fellowship of the Round Table is broken for ever, for with him will many a noble knight hold; and now it is fallen so, said the king, that I may not with my worship, but the queen must suffer the death. So then there was made great ordinance in this heat, that the queen must be judged to the death. And the law was such in those days that whatsoever they were, of what estate or degree, if they were found guilty of treason, there should be none other remedy but death; and outhere the men or the taking with the deed should be causer of their hasty judgment. And right so was it ordained for Queen Guenevere, because Sir Mordred was escaped sore wounded, and the death of thirteen knights of the Round Table. These proofs and experiences caused King Arthur to command the queen to the fire there to be brunt.

Then spake Sir Gawaine, and said: My lord Arthur, I would counsel you not to be over-hasty, but that ye would put it in respite, this judgment of my lady the queen, for many causes. One it is, though it were so that Sir Lancelot were found in the queen's chamber, yet it might be so that he came thither for none evil; for ye know my lord, said Sir Gawaine, that the queen is much beholden unto Sir Lancelot, more than unto any other knight, for oftentimes he hath saved her life, and done battle for her when all the court refused the queen; and peradventure she sent for him for goodness and for none evil, to reward him for his good deeds that

he had done to her in times past. And peradventure my lady, the queen, sent for him to that intent that Sir Lancelot should come to her good grace privily and secretly, weening to her that it was best so to do, in eschewing and dreading of slander; for oftentimes we do many things that we ween it be for the best, and yet peradventure it turneth to the worst. For I dare say, said Sir Gawaine, my lady, your queen, is to you both good and true; and as for Sir Lancelot, said Sir Gawaine, I dare say he will make it good upon any knight living that will put upon himself villainy or shame, and in like wise he will make good for my lady, Dame Guenevere.

That I believe well, said King Arthur, but I will not that way with Sir Lancelot, for he trusteth so much upon his hands and his might that he doubteth no man; and therefore for my queen he shall never fight more, for she shall have the law. And if I may get Sir Lancelot, wit you well he shall have a shameful death. Jesu defend, said Sir Gawaine, that I may never see it. Why say ye so? said King Arthur; forsooth ye have no cause to love Sir Lancelot, for this night last past he slew your brother, Sir Agravaïn, a full good knight, and almost he had slain your other brother, Sir Mordred, and also there he slew thirteen noble knights; and also, Sir Gawaine, remember you he slew two sons of yours, Sir Florence and Sir Lovel. My lord, said Sir Gawaine, of all this I have knowledge, of whose deaths I repent me sore; but insomuch I gave them warning, and told my brethren and my sons aforehand what would fall in the end, insomuch they would not do by my counsel, I will not meddle me thereof, nor revenge me nothing of their deaths; for I told them it was no boot to strive with Sir Lancelot. Howbeit I am sorry of the death of my brethren and of my sons, for they are the causers of their own death; for oftentimes I warned my brother Sir Agravaïn, and I told him the perils the which be now fallen.

**BOOK 20**  
❧ CHAPTER 8 ❧

How Sir Lancelot and his kinsmen rescued the queen from the fire, and how he slew many knights

THEN said the noble King Arthur to Sir Gawaine: Dear nephew, I pray you make you ready in your best armour, with your brethren, Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth, to bring my queen to the fire, there to have her judgment and receive the death. Nay, my most noble lord, said Sir Gawaine, that will I never do; for wit you well I will never be in that place where so noble a queen as is my lady, Dame Guenevere, shall take a shameful end. For wit you well, said Sir Gawaine, my heart will never serve me to see her die; and it shall never be said that ever I was of your counsel of her death.

Then said the king to Sir Gawaine: Suffer your brothers Sir Gaheris and Sir Gareth to be there. My lord, said Sir Gawaine, wit you well they will be loath to be there present, because of many adventures the which be like there to fall, but they are young and full unable to say you nay. Then spake Sir Gaheris, and the good knight Sir Gareth, unto Sir Arthur: Sir, ye may well command us to be there, but wit you well it shall be sore against our will; but an we be there by your strait commandment ye shall plainly hold us there excused: we will be there in peaceable wise, and bear none harness of war upon us. In the name of God, said the king, then make you ready, for she shall soon have her judgment anon. Alas, said Sir Gawaine, that ever I should endure to see this woful day. So Sir Gawaine turned him and wept heartily, and so he went into his chamber; and then the queen was led forth without Carlisle, and there she was despoiled into her smock. And so then her ghostly father was brought to her, to be

