

Prologue

"I ~~would reckon that we should~~ have ~~reckoned we'd seeseen~~ some sign of the battle, even from ~~out~~ this ~~far~~ distance, my lord."

Lancelot could only nod his head to the quartermaster in assent, ~~his hands tight against~~ ~~tightly gripping~~ the ~~gunnel's~~ ~~gunwale's~~ edge, ~~holding~~ ~~steadying~~ his body ~~steady~~ against the constant rocking of the vessel. -The white cliffs looked as imposing as they always ~~have had~~, but ~~of battle~~ there was little sign. ~~They of battle. While they~~ were still too far ~~out from shore~~ to have a clear view of the beach at the base, ~~but~~ Lancelot ~~thought was sure that~~ he could see the wreckage of boats, —the remains of Arthur's fleet, perhaps—? It was ~~hard impossible~~ to tell ~~and~~, his ~~mind's eye tried~~ ~~imagination presuming~~ to fill ~~in~~ the gaps ~~created by~~ ~~borne of~~ his ~~limited~~ vision ~~and in~~ the ~~failing~~ ~~pre-dawn~~ light. -

Stepping back from the rail, he looked again, ~~squinting~~, at the crumpled letter in his hand. He had kept it with him since receiving it ~~on the previous morning~~ from his castellan. ~~Gawain's letter~~ ~~It was a~~ ~~missive from Gawain~~, written on his deathbed. -*Oh, how* ~~planned fate laughs at us all in the end~~, he thought, as he ~~labored to~~ read it for the hundredth time ~~that since the day before~~.

"Sir Lancelot, for all the love ~~that~~ ever ~~there~~ was between us, make no tarrying, but come over the sea in all the goodly haste that ~~though~~ ~~thou~~ may have, with knights ~~and~~, ~~to~~ rescue that noble King who made thee knight, for he is full straitly ~~beset~~ ~~bestead~~ by a false traitor who is my half brother, Mordred."

"I never hated you, brother," Lancelot whispered. -*"Never."*

"Pardon, my lord?" came a voice over his shoulder.

Lancelot glanced up to see one of the ~~mate's~~ ~~ship's~~ ~~mates~~ looking at him expectantly. - The crew was in awe of ~~the~~ ~~this~~ legendary ~~knight~~ ~~Knight~~, ever eager to address his every ~~want or need~~ ~~or of~~ comfort. -Like so many ~~others~~, they saw only the shine, and never the tarnish, ~~of knighthood~~.

"Nothing, good man. -Please, carry on."

"Aye, my lord. -Captain says ~~that~~ we'll make land by dawn."

"My thanks, then. -Please, ~~don't do not~~ let me keep you from your duties," said the ~~knight~~ ~~Knight~~, but the man was already moving ~~on~~ ~~ahead with~~ his duties. -

Turning back to look again at the cliffs, Lancelot prayed ~~that~~ his fears were ~~wrong~~ ~~mistaken~~.

The water was ~~freezing~~ ~~frigid~~ as ~~he~~ ~~Lancelot~~ waded ~~ashore~~ ~~to shore~~. The small boats ~~couldn't land at~~ ~~among them were kept from~~ the beach ~~due to~~ ~~by~~ the wrecked fleet that barred its path. -Hundreds of ships ~~were~~ battered to little more than kindling; the stench from the dead ~~barely~~ ~~masked~~ ~~was only~~ ~~thinly veiled~~ by the constant, ~~salted~~ spray ~~of salt~~ water from the waves breaking ~~on~~ ~~against~~ the ~~battered~~ ~~crippled~~ hulks.

The fact that the dead ~~still~~ ~~tarried~~ ~~remained~~ here, ~~rotting~~ in their watery graves, was a poor sign. Regardless of ~~whom~~ ~~whom~~ the victor had been, these bodies would have been recovered. ~~The wrecks were~~ ~~by now, but the wreckage was~~ adorned with ~~the~~ livery ~~off~~ ~~from~~ both sides of the conflict. -Lancelot prayed this ~~meant to mean that~~ the battle was still being fought further inland. ~~When he saw~~ ~~However,~~ ~~upon sight of~~ Bedevere alone on the beach, staring out at the waves, he knew ~~that all was~~ ~~had been~~ lost.

But he had to know ~~for certain~~.

"Bedevere!" he called. -"Here, man! -It's Lancelot! -Where's Arthur? -How stands Camelot?"

Sir Bedevere, the Mighty ~~Marshall~~ ~~Marshal~~ of Camelot, ~~wielder~~ ~~Wielder~~ of the ~~magic~~ ~~lance~~ ~~Magic Lance~~ who fought the Giant ~~at of~~ Mont ~~Michael~~ ~~Saint Michel~~, sat still ~~and said, saying~~ nothing. -If he ~~had~~ even noticed Lancelot splashing ~~up~~ ~~on~~ ~~noisily~~ ~~onto~~ the beach, he gave no sign. -Face slack, he simply stared out at the open sea, his mind still seeing something long ~~gone~~ ~~since~~ ~~disappeared~~.

"Bedevere," said Lancelot softly, as he came ~~upon~~unto his old friend. -"What happened here, man? -Where is Arthur?"

At the mention of his liege, Bedevere finally acknowledged his former comrade. -He looked up at Lancelot. ~~His, his face was still~~ ashen and still encrusted, encrusted with sand and salt and blood. Gaunt with hungerstarving, his throat dry with thirst, he could only give a feeble~~small~~ moan as he pointed out towardstoward the sea.

"Is he drowned? -No, Bedevere, I don't believe that! -Arthur's fate was stronger than these tides. Where is he? -What happened here?"

Bedevere opened his mouth to speak, ~~his, His~~ voice, ~~—~~that which had once commanded the most powerful army in the world, ~~—~~was now barelyscarcely a whisper. -"The women came for him, took him away."

"The women?" questioned Lancelot, urgently. "What women? -Jenny? -Did Jenny come?"

As if burned, the wounded knightKnight pulled away with a hiss at the mention of Guenivere'sGuinevere's name. -His eyes hardened and a small strength returned to his voice. "No."

~~Lancelot, down on~~On his knees now, Lancelot held Bedevere by the shoulders and looked squarely into his emptyvacant eyes. -"It's me, brother ~~—~~ Lancelot. - Please, tell me what has happened. Did we take the field? -Did Arthur prevail?"

Slowly, like the dawndawn's light burningburns away a heavy fog, Lancelot saw his old friend slowly-return from the gentle worldrealm of dreamhis reverie to this hardharsh and unforgiving world of sand and salt. -"That's it, Bedevere, come back to me. -We're here at Dover, down by the beach. -You landed here, yes?"

"Yes," whispered Bedevere. -"We landed here, and battled that black bastard all the way up to the plain."

"So Arthur lived? -He prevailed?"

"No," said the broken knight-Knight. "He died. -He died, and then the ladies came and took him away."

It was then that ~~the real world—these fearsome realities~~ finally washed away that of dreamovertook the last vestiges of his dreaming, and Bedevere was racked by suddenly wracked with gigaantic sobs. -He cried for his brothers, his kingdom, and his kingKing, as Lancelot held him close. ~~For quite some time the two men held each other. —~~ the only survivors of Camelot's dark demise.

They stayed on the beach for another day, ~~allowings they waited~~ for Bedevere's strength to return. -Lancelot created a shelter to house the ~~big man and fed~~large Knight, offering to feed him ~~what~~ smallfrom whatever provisions he had brought. -After eatinghaving a small bit of ~~the~~ cheese and wine, Bedevere finally slept. -Lancelot then waivedwaved off the vessels, ordering them to return to France and ~~to pass~~send word along to his staff at ~~Joyeaux-Garde~~Joyous Gard that he would remain. ~~—~~ in Camelot for the time being.

Throughout that day, Bedevere would moan and flail in his sleep, fighting a battle in his dreams; and, Lancelot would rush to his side with a gentle hand and comforting words. ~~Lancelot would listen to the man relive the battle as~~ As he sat outside tending the fire, ~~Lancelot would hear Bedevere relive that battle.~~ The mutteringsmuttering and wailswhailing of his old friend only deepening his underscored Lancelot's growing discomfort. ~~He was afraid of~~ dreaded in advance what he would see when they climbed the cliffs into Camelot.

At ~~the~~ down on their second day on the beach, as the knightsKnights broke their fast on ~~the last of~~ Lancelot's visions, Bedevere looked across at his friend. -"He didn't hold you responsible. -At the end. -He didn't. -Neither of them."

"Thank you, my friend. -But their feelings matter not. —; I failed them. -I was created and placed onupon this Earth to preserve and protect Arthur and Camelot. -It was my purpose, and I failed."

Lancelot looked out at the shattered fleet, up at the white cliffs, and then back at his friend. -“I dared to try and carve out a piece of this world for myself, and in doing so, I destroyed it all. -How did it all get so out of hand? -I never wanted this. -Never...”

“~~That~~ ~~May~~ ~~be~~ ~~so~~, Lance, but things are rarely how we wish them.”

“No, they rarely are,” Lancelot said. -Coming to his feet, he looked towards the path up the cliffs. -“Are you ready?”

“No,” said Bedevere with a mirthless grin. -“But I'll come with you.”

The ~~way~~ ~~trek~~ up the cliffs was ~~a~~ ~~slow~~ ~~and~~ ~~laborious~~ ~~one~~, but the two men were in no hurry. -As Bedevere grew tired, Lancelot ~~helped~~ ~~would~~ ~~help~~ him ~~to~~ ~~carry~~ on. - Neither ~~man~~ thought to call a halt. While ~~hard~~ ~~grueling~~, the climb was less a physical journey than a spiritual ~~one~~, ~~one~~—as if that small stretch of beach ~~was~~ ~~served~~ ~~as~~ more than ~~merely~~ the transition between ~~the~~ stone and ~~the~~ sea, but ~~also~~ a resting point between the ~~world~~ ~~worlds~~ of fantasy and reality. -Down ~~there~~ ~~at~~ ~~that~~ ~~beach~~, the world ~~appeared~~ ~~to~~ ~~have~~ ~~has~~ stopped still. ~~and~~ ~~o~~ ~~Indeed~~, one could pretend that, just over the ridge, the walls of Camelot stood intact, ~~with~~ Arthur's colors flying on the post. -As they ~~gained~~ ~~on~~ ~~the~~ ~~ridge~~ ~~moved~~ ~~closer~~ ~~to~~ ~~Camelot~~, ~~however~~, the reality of war ~~erupt~~ ~~in~~ ~~encroached~~ to ~~foree~~ ~~the~~ ~~dispel~~ ~~any~~ ~~fantasy~~ ~~way~~. - The carrion birds cawed, and the smell of death began to win its own war with the brine of the sea. -By the time the two men reached the ~~peak~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~ridge~~, they were ready ~~to~~ ~~see~~ ~~what~~ ~~lay~~ ~~before~~ ~~them~~.

Lancelot was no stranger to battle, ~~but~~ —even so, he was shocked by the state of the field. Thousands dead, ~~with~~ the mud ~~as~~ their last ~~embrace~~ ~~embraces~~ and the carrion birds ~~as~~ their only attendants. -Horses and men ~~haphazardly~~ piled atop one another, ~~with~~ the stench of shit and rot ~~covering~~ ~~shrouding~~ it all like death's blanket. -The old warrior felt the sheer devastation in his ~~gut~~ ~~while~~ ~~guts~~ ~~as~~ his mind ~~still~~ struggled to ~~comprehend~~ ~~a~~ ~~log~~ the destruction. -Surely, this ~~was~~ ~~had~~ ~~been~~ the battle ~~the~~ ~~that~~ destroyed the shining jewel of civilization. -Nothing less could ~~have~~ ~~extinguished~~ Camelot's bright light. -

Turning away, Lancelot looked to Bedevere. -“Show me where he died.”

“Aye,” said the battered ~~knight~~ ~~as~~ ~~he~~ ~~stepped~~ ~~Knight~~, ~~stepping~~ over a young page's body on his way across the field.

Lancelot followed his friend across the wretched ~~plain~~ ~~field~~. -At first, he ~~would~~ ~~looked~~ ~~about~~ constantly ~~look~~ ~~about~~, —trying to see what had become of old friends. ~~Searching~~, ~~and~~ ~~searching~~ ~~in~~ vainly for someone still alive. ~~But~~ ~~soon~~, ~~Soon~~, ~~though~~—after seeing ~~Bor's~~ ~~the~~ body ~~of~~ ~~Bor~~, pierced by a spear and pinned by arrows, —he could bear it no longer. - He looked only at Bedevere's back as the two ~~traversed~~ ~~made~~ ~~their~~ ~~way~~ ~~across~~ the unkept graveyard.

Finally, Bedevere stopped and pointed down ~~at~~ ~~to~~ the ~~ground~~ ~~earth~~. - There was ~~was~~ ~~what~~ remained of Sir Lucan, whom Bedevere ~~claims~~ ~~said~~ had borne Arthur's colors at the end, ... but there was no Arthur. - “Where is Arthur, then?” Lancelot blurted out, his grief overcoming his breeding.

“I told you,” ~~Bedever!~~ ~~Bedevere~~ growled, “~~the~~ ~~The~~ ladies came and got Arthur and took him out to sea. - This is where he took his death fighting that damn bastard.”

Lancelot's eyes followed Bedevere's finger out to a patch of blackened grass where Mordred lay. Unlike the rest of the dead, Mordred was almost perfectly preserved. - Never looted, his armor remained intact, the spear that killed him still thrusting upward into the sky. -

“Not even the crows want a piece of that one.” -

Lancelot nodded, remembering the day ~~that~~ Mordred had first come to court. -Morgause's ~~whelp~~ ~~get~~, he was an arrogant little thing with a vicious streak. -From the first, Lancelot ~~had~~ disliked the boy, ~~and~~ ~~but~~ the more time spent ~~around~~ ~~each~~ ~~other~~, the ~~worse~~ ~~stronger~~ his ~~feelings~~ ~~disdain~~ toward him became. -To look at him now, surrounded by the destruction ~~that~~ he ~~so~~ craved, Lancelot was overcome by remorse for not killing the child when he first ~~came~~ ~~to~~ ~~appeared~~ ~~in~~ court. -The act would surely have sullied his honor, ~~and~~ possibly even banished him from Camelot, but —seeing all of the destruction he had caused, —it surely would have been worth it.

“I should have killed him,” said Bedevere. -“When you were out with that little French girl, he

arranged a charge against ~~our~~Our Queen's honor. -No one else would defend her, so I stood for the challenge.”

Lancelot looked to his old friend. -“Thank you, brother.”

“Don't thank me, Lance!” he exclaimed, extending his arms toward the ~~ruined~~ruinous field. “This is what that challenge brought! -For the King's sake, don't thank me!” -Angry now, Bedevere turned on his friend, his voice rising. -“I knew damn well that the Queen was guilty of the charges. -We all knew what the two of you were doing. -Hell, I think even Arthur knew!- But, as long as you were discreet and no one brought it to the fore, we all were willing to cover it up. -~~For~~for the good of the King and of Camelot.”

Bedevere turned away, no longer willing to look ~~on~~upon the man he had once called his brother. “I should have let her die, is what I should have done. -She was finally caught, and her betrayal was finally out in the open. -~~It, and it~~ could have ended there. -It would have been painful, sure. -~~Despite~~despite it all~~each, every~~ one of us loved Jenny, ~~—~~but that would have been the end. Instead...”

Bedevere knelt down to put his hand on Sir Lucan's helm and look into the dead ~~knight in his~~Knight's empty eyes. -“Instead, everything was destroyed.”

“I ~~don't do not~~ believe that,” Lancelot declared. -“Nothing would have ~~stopped~~satisfied Mordred's lust. -He needed to destroy like we need to breathe. -~~If~~Had it ~~wasn't not been~~ Jenny, it would have been something else. -He would never have stopped.”

“Maybe ~~sonot~~,” Bedevere agreed. -“But no one else gave him the opening he wanted. -You did. You and her. -Mordred was a right knave, there was no denying it. -But you were the 'Greatest Knight in the ~~World!~~ ~~What~~World! ~~—~~what was your excuse, Lance? -How could you let this happen?”

Surrounded by death, Lancelot could not bear to meet Bedevere's gaze. -~~His heart broken~~Heartbroken, he turned away. -“We tried to stop. -Many times. -When I ~~couldn't~~could bear it no more, I would beg Arthur for a quest. -~~But~~Still, it ~~no~~mattered not how long I was gone, for as soon as I returned, the fire was there. -In the end, we just couldn't fight it anymore. -We thought we were being so careful, but Mordred's petty little eyes saw.”

“One night! -One damn night with me, and you were all going to burn her at the stake! -Jenny! Our Jenny!” -~~And now~~Now, it was Lancelot's turn to anger. -“You would defend her honor, but still let her be burned for treason? -Treason! -Why was I the only one ~~who rode to ride~~ to her rescue? -Why did I have to ride at all? -She was ~~our~~Our Queen, not some village harlot! -She could have been put in a tower! -She could have been banished!- Why the stake?”

“Because...” Bedevere faltered.

“Because that black bastard of a shit over there pulled you all along on his string!” Lancelot cried, pointing ~~to~~at the pristine corpse on its bed of black grass.

Then, in his fury, Lancelot ran to Mordred's body and grabbed it by the chest piece. -~~Arms~~His arms, strengthened by a lifetime of war, easily yanked the corpse up into the air. -“~~You won't~~“You'll not come out of this so ~~damndamned~~ clean, you piece of Orkney ~~Trash!~~“~~And~~trash!” With that, he slammed the body down to the ground, its arms cracking from the impact. -“You brought this!” he screamed, kicking ~~the~~Mordred's remains with such ferocity that~~so hard the chestplate ripped that his breastplate was torn~~ off. -He landed another blow ~~as he yelled, yelling~~. “All this death!”- He kicked again, his boot tearing the flesh of the villain's face, “All this destruction!”

“Lance!” Bedevere cried, as he grabbed hold of his friend. -“He's dead, Lance!- This is not the way.”

~~Lance~~Lancelot turned to his friend, tears of rage and shame streaming down his cheeks. -“Damn it, brother. -Damn him, and damn me, and damn us all.” -Then, the great man sank to the bloodstained ground, and his grief finally ~~let loose~~burst forth.

They spent the next week ~~putting~~laying to rest their fellow ~~members~~Knights of the Round Table. -Once ~~that was done~~they were finished doing so, they went back ~~to the field~~ for their squires and pages. -It was grisly work, but neither man could ~~bear to~~ leave his fallen brothers in such a place. -

~~With~~For each ~~knight~~Knight, they held a small funeral, both men remembering how the fallen had come to court, ~~had~~been knighted, ~~had and~~ fared in this ~~tourney~~tournament or that battle. -They recalled teaching the squires and pages, remarking about one's arm or the other's speed. ~~It wasn't~~While ~~not~~ the honors ~~these men~~that the deceased deserved, ~~but it~~this was all ~~they that~~ Lancelot and Bedevere could give them. -In many ways, it was best, for these ~~two~~ last ~~two~~-old ~~knights~~Knights knew each man better than their families ever had. - They had fought and feasted together, they were close as brothers, and they were the only ~~knights~~Knights of the Round Table there would now ever be.

Neither man had the slightest concern of disrupting a family's wishes. -They knew ~~that~~ no family would be coming to claim any of the remains. -With the fall of Camelot, the nobility was destroyed, and the houses were fortifying their arms. -It would be war and strife for decades as every petty duke or baron ~~fought~~would fight for ~~the~~-scraps ~~off~~from Arthur's rich table. -There was no time to waste, as those who moved with the ~~most~~-greatest haste would have the greatest advantage. -There was more work to do tending ~~to~~ the living than ~~there was~~ providing for the dead.

When the last page was ~~laid to rest~~finally interred, Bedevere looked to Lancelot. -“What will you do now, brother? -Return to ~~Joyeaux Garde?~~ Joyous Gard? Find Jenny?”

Lancelot looked out across the Channel to France. -“No,” he said softly. -“I ~~don't~~dare not think so.”

“Should we wade into the ~~suecession~~-war Succession War?” asked Bedevere. - “We could influence the outcome, try and preserve as much of the Table's ideals as we can.”

Lancelot turned back to him. -“No. -I ~~don't~~ think ~~I that~~ neither can I do that, ~~either.~~” Looking down at the grave at their feet, he said, “I ~~just~~ don't think ~~that~~ I can make war again, brother. -The skill is there, ~~certainly~~, but the heart is no longer willing.”

“And Jenny?” Bedevere prompted.

“I love Jenny, Bedevere. ~~Always~~-I always have ~~done~~, and I always will- ~~do~~. But this-... is what our love has wrought-“,” Lancelot said ~~as~~, sweeping his arm ~~swept~~ across ~~their~~-the impromptu graveyard. -“I see now ~~that's~~that this is all ~~that~~ it was ever meant to do. -We were fate's instrument, Mordred's tool. -No, ~~I will~~ never ~~shall~~ I see Jenny again.”

“What then, Lance?” Bedevere asked again. -“You can't stay here.”

Lancelot looked over at his friend. -Together, they had created a ~~kingdom~~Kingdom for Arthur. Bedevere, the ~~Marshall~~Marshal of Arthur's armies; Lancelot, the invincible champion; They ~~had~~ civilized a land that had known only chaos ~~and~~ built, building a kingdom whose legend would span the ages. -

And here, in this place, ~~—~~on this land, standing over this lowly grave, ~~—~~he saw Bedevere anew. -Without his ~~king~~beloved King Arthur, Bedevere was lost. -He needed something to believe and someone to follow. -He ~~was hoping~~had hoped that Lancelot, the ~~greatest knight on life~~ ‘Greatest Knight in the World’, would fulfill that need. ~~That—that~~ the legend would have some plan to salvage their ~~life's~~lives’ purpose.

But Lancelot had no plan. -He had no vision, no path to glory; ~~—~~He was just another tired old man, covered in mud and standing over the graves of his friends.

“Listen to me, Bedevere,” he said. -“Our friends are dead, Camelot is destroyed, and our King ~~is~~ has been killed and taken- ~~from us~~. All ~~that~~ we have ~~fought for~~sought to defend is in ~~ruins~~-ruin. Others may look on this and say ~~that~~ we need to keep fighting, ~~that~~ we need to overcome our fate ~~and~~, to take it all back. -But I say ~~no~~-otherwise. Camelot is lost, and we ~~can not~~cannot bring it back. -The only thing ~~we can do is kill~~that it would accomplish is killing more good men and women. -Our villain was

cast out of Hell ~~and~~, with his body left to rot over there. ~~Who will~~ Whom would we fight? - We can't kill him again."

Lancelot looked again to the edge of the cliffs ~~-, and continued~~. "I think ~~HHI shall~~ go home. ~~I haven't~~ I've not been home since I first came to Arthur's court. -It was always peaceful there. -Yes," he said; his voice growing firm with the decision. -"I will go home, for now. -After that, ~~its~~ it's in God's hands."

Lancelot turned to his friend. -"And you, brother? -Will you return to the battlefield?"

Bedevere kicked an errant stone at his feet. -"Not I. -Like you, I am weary of combat. -After ~~30~~ thirty years of fighting, I think I have done enough for any man." -Grinning, he added, "I should have stopped ~~-with that Giant, truth be told. -Never fought anything since then that amounted to a challenge. -Maybe I peaked~~ too a bit early, eh?"

It ~~would was a~~ good time to smile ~~in that place~~, and Lancelot let the power of surrendering to it wash over him. -"Hell, Bedevere, you fought that thing when you were but twenty! -What would you have done all these years if you had stopped then?"

"I don't know, Lance, ~~started~~. Started a family, maybe? -Raised ~~a couplesome~~ giant killers of my own, eh? -Who knows?"

"You ~~with?~~ With children?" Lancelot laughed. -"Even in fantasy, I pity your wife!"

"Ha, ~~maybe!~~ Maybe you're right at that. -Never fancied myself a family man. -Looking back, that was probably a mistake. -I could be home with my children and grandchildren now, a warm fire and a horn of ale. -Instead, I'm in this ~~horrid wretched~~ place."

"I wish that things had been different with my own son." Lancelot whispered. -"Galahad was all I could ever have ~~ever~~-wished for, but he didn't know me. -Even worse, he hated me for my weakness. When I saw him take the Grail, no man was ever ~~more proud~~ prouder, or more ashamed ~~-, than I was~~. It was my sin that brought him to this world, ~~but~~ my sin also that also kept me apart from him. -If I could change anything in my life, ~~it~~ would change that. -I wish ~~I had to have~~ known him better."

At that, Bedevere picked up ~~the~~ their shovels and started walking to their small camp. -"Come on, Lance. -Standing out in these graves ~~isn't doing~~ does us any no favors. -The past is the past, ~~no use dwelling and there is not any sense to dwell~~ on it. ~~Its~~ It's the future that we need to have our eyes on."

"Agreed," said Lancelot ~~as he fell~~ falling in step behind his friend.

The next morning, the two ~~knights~~ Knights shared the last of ~~thea~~ rabbit that they'd recently caught, and broke their camp in silence. -While both men were used to field conditions, neither had slept well that night. -Whether from poor dreams, cold ground, or concern for the future, neither ~~gave reason-~~ said. They knew that ~~it~~ this would be the last time they would see each other, and they chose the comfort of ~~the~~ this simple task to process their farewell.

As Bedevere was harnessing his horse, ~~—~~ an old charger that they had found wandering the edge of the battlefield, whose owner was long dead, ~~and without looking up, —~~ he finally voiced his question ~~-, without looking up~~. "Have you decided which way ~~you'll~~ you will go, Lance?"

Lancelot, busy putting out the coals from their small fire with some handfuls of dirt, looked up at his friend and answered. ~~"I'll~~ I will be going back returning home."

Bedevere stopped his preparations to focus on his friend. -"I know that, Lance. -You said as much last night. -What I wanted to know was which direction you'd be heading and how you planned to get there. -As you can see, I have this nice horse here, but you have only your boots. -It's not like you to be so ill ~~-~~ prepared for a journey, so I'm asking you what you plan to do to get to your home. -And, while we're at it, since you're not returning to Joyeaux Gaurde Joyous Gard, where in the kingdom and beyond is your home exactly?"

"~~I'll~~ shall be traveling by sea, you nosy old bastard. -Other than that, my journey is my affair, ~~!"~~" snapped Lancelot.

"Suit yourself, then,"²¹ replied Bedevere. "God, but you always were a moody one, Lancelot. ~~Can't~~Can you not see that we are all that's left? I'd just like to know how you'll be getting on."

At this Lancelot stood up from the extinguished fire. "You're right, Bedevere, and I'm sorry. We *are* all that's left, and perhaps that's what has my back up. Never have I never-was-been good atwith farewells. My home is across the sea. I was planning to make my way up the coastline andto see what ships were-are available. If memory suits me, there's a small port not too far from here where I might be able to find passage across the channel. And, you? Where are you headed?"Channel.

And you? Where are you headed?

"Ah," said Bedevere as he turned back to resume securing his gear to the harness. "I think I'll go anand become a monk, try and find some peace. It -mMust be much like being a knight, Knight—the discipline, I mean—and. I always thought the monks seemed so content whenever I woul'd stop over at a monastery while on quest. Regardless, I thought I'd give it a go and see how I like it. Hopefully it'll be quiet, and none of them robed monks'll snore too loud. Hate to have to thump one, consideringseeing as how they're God's men and all."

"A monk, eh? Well, I hear they do brew good beer, so maybe you'll fit inperhaps you will take to it better than you expect," Lancelot remarked as he gathered what little of his equipment remained.

"Beer! Ha! I didn't think I'd not thought of that, Lance. "Maybe a monk's life is for me!" laughed Bedevere, tightening his last strap. "Are you sure you don't want me to travel with you, Lance? At least till you find that port?"

"No, my friend. I'll shall be fine, just My next-another quest will find me, I've no doubt. We do have to part sometime, Bedevere. I'd, and I would rather that it behappen here. Nothing I can imagine nothing worse than having your last-memory of our parting involve seeing me being knee deep, to my knees in mud, in some backwater fishing village. It's better this way."

"I suppose so," replied Bedevere, as he swung up into the saddle. "Peace be with you, Lance. May our Lord watch over you on your journey home."

Lancelot came over to his friend and held out his hand. "Same to you, Sir Bedevere of the Magic Lance, Marshal of the Army of Camelot, and killer of giants. Be kind to those poor monks, and may you finally find rest."

"Aye, brother," said Bedevere as he took the knight'sKnight's hand.

Lancelot stayed and stood in their camp as he watched Bedevere ride away North. WhenOnce he was gone from viewno longer in sight, he turned and grabbed his sword belt from his gear and strapped, strapping it on about his waist. Then, he reached for his scabbarded sword and slung it from the belt. Checking again to ensure that Bedevere was had gone from view, Lancelot headed South to the cliff's edge and the path back down to the small beach where he had come ashore, leaving the rest of his belongings where they lay.

As the climb-upascent had been a spiritual preparation for the horrific sights of thethat final battle, the return journey down was amounted to a cleansing of Lancelot's spirit. Each step was a wayallowed to him to forget this world and prepare himself for the next one. By the time that lay ahead. As he had reached the bottom, he was ready to return to the only true motherhome that he had ever known.

As he approached the water's edge, he grabbed hold of the hilt of his sword and took one last final look at the world. place from which he was forever departing. Then, he walked out into the waves.

The water was shockingly cold, but he marched on. The waves-sea battered him without mercy, threatening to throw him up against the wrecks. He leaned into themwooden carcasses of the destroyed fleet. Lancelot steeled himself and kept movingpressed forward, leaning into each rush of the waves trying, which appeared to try and push him back to the shore, as if the sea itself was strivingwere toiling to change his course. But Lancelot would not be deterred. He walkedtrudged out passedbeyond the last of the shattered-fleetwreckage and started to swim, his powerful arms pulling him farther out into the water. He knew that it wouldn'twould not be much farther. Soon,longer; he would seesoon be

at his motherhome  in.

He looked down into the water and saw thea comforting, faint light underneath his feet and he beneath him. He heard and felt the faint call of home.— Smiling, he ceased tohis resist~~ance~~ to the waves, stilled his arms, and sank beneath below the surface.