

# Romantic Legends of King Arthur's Knights

## THE NINTH DIAMOND



**K**ING ARTHUR'S herald ran from the assembly hall to the marble steps that led to the palace gardens. There he blew a fanfare on his silver bugle to call the lords and ladies of the court.

"Prepare for the tournament!" he announced. "The knights of King Arthur's court will engage in friendly contests with all who come to the jousts. The last and largest of the nine diamonds goes to the victor."

Mounting his horse, he galloped away to spread the news throughout the realm. By inviting untried youths of noble birth to enter the lists in the annual tournament held at Camelot, King Arthur won recruits to his order of knighthood.

The knights yawned, and strolled away to idle game with the ladies. "What is the use of that contest of arms?" they said. "For eight years Sir Lancelot has been the victor, and won the prize. He will win the ninth diamond."

Now Sir Lancelot, sitting in her bower with Queen Guinevere, overheard this and reported it to the king.

"Sire," he said, "because I have held the championship for eight years, your other knights come to the jousts half-heartedly. Expecting to fail, they do not fight their best. Therefore, I will not enter the lists this year, but, feigning weariness of spirit, will ride away."

King Arthur agreed to this, but Queen Guinevere held private speech with him.

"Sir Lancelot, so long as you are undefeated you will remain the champion. So ride away, but return well disguised. Unnoticed among the many newcomers, you can enter the lists as the Stranger Knight. Put it to the test if your prowess be as high as your fame."

So Sir Lancelot rode away. He borrowed the horse and fittings of a simple country knight, and his son for a squire. Leaving his own well-known shield of the golden lions in the keeping of Elaine, "the lily maid of Astolat," he pulled the visor of his helmet down and rode to the tournament.

In a raised pavilion above the field, King Arthur sat with Queen Guinevere and the ladies, with the armoured and mounted knights of his court ranged below. At the other end of the field were ranged noble youths from every part of the realm, among them the Stranger Knight. When the trumpet sounded all put spurs to their steeds, poised their lances and galloped forward, each party to unhorse as many of the other as possible, without doing serious injury. The animals reared, spears rang on steel, swords crossed and shields clashed together, so close was the combat.

### Triumphs of the Stranger Knight

Many a proud knight was unhorsed and borne from the field. As the ranks thinned, it was seen that the powerful Stranger Knight was charging here and there, easily overcoming all with whom he contested. One after another he tumbled even champions of the Round Table from their saddles, and sent them rolling in the dust.

Alarmed and angry, they withdrew. "Oh that Lancelot were here!" they cried. "This impudent fellow will disgrace us all." At that, forgetting the knightly code of honour, they all bore down upon the Stranger Knight. His horse reeled from the shock. His shield was struck aside. A spearpoint pierced his breastplate. The Stranger Knight lay bleeding on the field, when King Arthur rose and cried:

"Foul play! It is an unknighly deed for so many at once to set upon a brave man."