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Knights of the Round Table



adapted by
Gwen Gross

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Knights of the **R**ound Table



adapted by
Gwen Gross

illustrated by
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A STEPPING STONE BOOK™

Random House  New York

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www.randomhouse.com/kids

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Gross, Gwen.

Knights of the Round-Table / adapted by Gwen Gross ; illustrated by Norman Green.
p. cm. — "A stepping stone book."

SUMMARY: Retells the exploits of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table.
ISBN 0-394-87579-6 (trade) — ISBN 0-394-97579-0 (lib. bdg.)

1. Arthurian romances—Adaptations. [1. Arthur, King—Legends. 2. Knights and knighthood—Folklore. 3. Folklore—England.] I. Green, Norman, 1934—, ill. II. Title. PZ8.L.G858Kn 2004 398.2'0942'02—dc22 2003023531

Printed in the United States of America : 50

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Preface

There are many tales of a wonderful king named Arthur. And of the brave knights of the Round Table.

Who told the first story of King Arthur? No one knows. The tales are very old. They have been told by many different storytellers in many different lands. And each told the stories in his own special way.

Was there a real King Arthur? People who study the past think there was. They know only a little about him. He ruled in England about fifteen hundred years ago. He won many battles. And he was a king no one could forget.



• 1 •

The Sword in the Stone

It was a cold, windy night. The moon shone on a huge stone castle built high on a hill. It was the castle of King Uther of England.

All at once a strange shining mist began to move and swirl near the castle gate. Then the mist was gone. In its place stood an old man. He wore a dark robe and a tall pointed hat. He had a long white beard. And strange silvery eyes.

The old man looked toward the castle. The gate opened and two women came out. One carried a tiny baby wrapped in a golden cloth.

The old man held out his arms. Without a word, the woman gave him the baby. The shining mist came again. When it cleared, the old man and the baby had vanished.

Where had they gone?

Deep in a forest many miles away stood a smaller castle. It belonged to a knight called Sir Ector. He was known for his goodness and honesty.

Sir Ector was climbing the stone steps to his room. But a golden mist surrounded him. And then a strange old man was there. He had a baby in his arms.

"Merlin!" Ector cried. Ector knew the old man well. He was Merlin. The master of magic. The most powerful wizard in the world. Ector feared Merlin. But he trusted him too. Merlin used his powers for good.

"Why do you come here?" Ector asked.

Merlin held out the baby. "I bring you this child. I ask you to raise him as your own son. I cannot tell you why. Name him Arthur. And tell no one how he came to you."

Gently Ector took the baby. "I will do all that you ask," he said.

In an instant Merlin had disappeared. But Ector could still hear him whisper, "*Tell no one.*"

Ector looked down at the baby. "All will be well, Arthur. I will love you just as I love my own son, Kay," he told him. Then he frowned. "But who are you? What is your secret?"

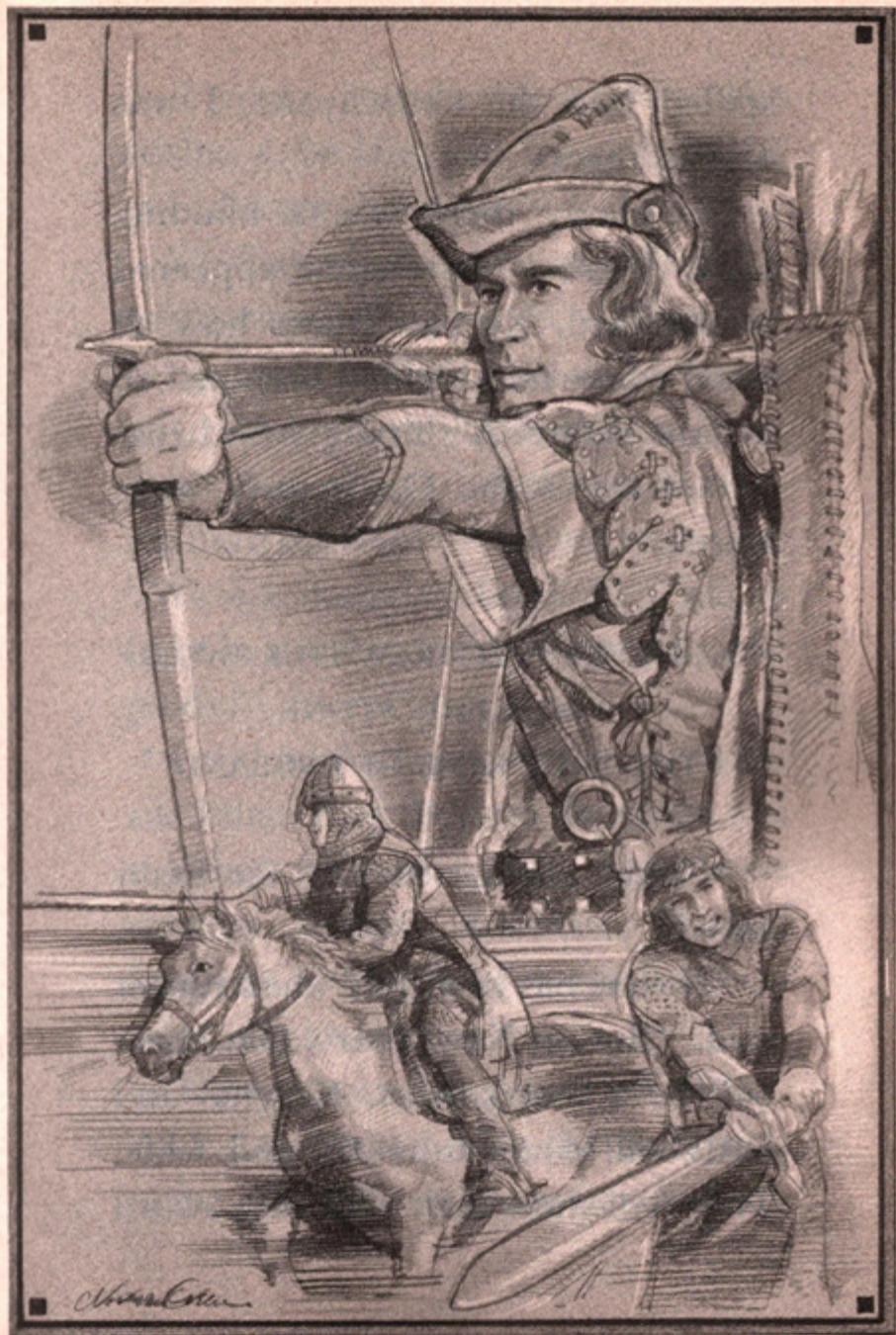
Sixteen years passed. Arthur became a strong, handsome boy. He was studying to be a knight like his older brother, Sir Kay.

Arthur had learned to ride. To shoot a bow and arrow. To fight with sword and spear and dagger. He knew too that a knight had to be brave and kind and honest. He felt ready for adventure. But nothing ever happened at the castle.

Then one winter day a stranger rode up to the castle. Arthur was out hunting. But Sir Ector and Sir Kay welcomed the stranger. The man came from London. He looked tired. But his face was full of excitement. He told a strange and wonderful tale.

"Since King Uther died, many knights and lords have fought to wear the crown," the stranger began.

"I feared the fighting would never end. But on Christmas Day a miracle happened! Rich and poor were crowded into the Great Church. They



spilled into the churchyard. I was among them.

“Suddenly there was a blinding light. A great white stone appeared in the yard. No one knows how. It stood where nothing had been just an instant before. A shining sword rose out of the stone. On it were these words:

“WHOEVER CAN DRAW THIS SWORD
FROM THIS STONE
IS THE TRUE KING OF ENGLAND.”

“Could anyone do it?” Sir Ector asked.

“No one has tried yet,” the stranger said. “But on New Year’s Day there will be a tournament. Knights and lords will come from far and wide. They will show their skill with sword

and spear. Afterward anyone who wishes to be king can try to draw the sword from the stone."

Sir Kay's eyes were sparkling. "A tournament! Can we go, Father?"

Sir Ector smiled. "We will leave at once for London. Find Arthur."

Sir Kay ran out. Arthur was coming from the stable. "Arthur!" he cried. "We are going to London! I am to fight in a tournament. We must make ready!"

London! Arthur was even more excited than Kay. Beyond the castle was the chance for adventure. There were strange beasts. Robbers. Wicked knights. Fairies and wizards. Anything might happen!

They set out. They traveled all day. And they slept under the stars that night. The next morning they had not

gone far when Arthur saw something in the distance. A great wall. Towers and more towers jutting into the sky. London!

Arthur rode into the city with Sir Ector and Sir Kay. There were so many buildings and shops and churches. And so many people. Rich ladies. Beggars in rags. Shopkeepers selling their goods. Lords on horseback. Arthur had never seen such sights. He wanted to look everywhere at once.

Finally they stopped at an inn. But only long enough to rest their horses. It was New Year's Day. The tournament was to begin soon. They did not want to be late.

The playing field was near the Great Church. Flags were flying. There were tents of bright-colored silk. Beautiful

horses prancing. Knights in gleaming armor. It was wonderful!

Then Kay cried, "Oh, no!"

"What is wrong?" Arthur asked.

Kay looked miserable. "The tournament is about to begin. And I left my sword at the inn."

Arthur was always quick to help. "Do not worry," he said. "I will go back and fetch it for you."

Arthur galloped away from the playing field. But when he reached the inn, it was closed. When he knocked, no one answered. Everyone was at the tournament.

Arthur did not want his brother to miss it. But what could he do? Arthur started back to the tournament. As he rode past the Great Church he noticed something in the churchyard. A sword stuck in a big white stone.

Perhaps that sword would do for Kay!

Arthur jumped from his horse. He ran to the stone. No one else was there. Arthur grasped the sword. He pulled it out easily.



Then he rode back to Kay. "I could not bring your sword," he told him. "But this one will do as well."

Kay frowned. "Where did you find it?" he asked.

"It was in a stone in the old churchyard," Arthur answered.

Kay turned pale. The sword in the stone!

"Wait here," Kay said to Arthur. Then he snatched the sword from Arthur and went to Sir Ector.

"Father, look!" Kay cried. "I must be the King of England! I have the magic sword!"

Sir Ector looked at his son. He didn't speak for a long moment. Then, very quietly, he said, "How do you come to have this sword?"

Kay blushed. He couldn't meet his father's eyes. Finally he said, "Arthur

brought the sword to me.”

Sir Ector stood. “We must get Arthur.”

Sir Ector, Sir Kay, and Arthur went quickly to the churchyard. They reached the stone.

“Arthur,” Sir Ector said, “how did you come to have this sword?”

Arthur was worried. He hadn’t meant to do anything wrong. “I wanted to help Kay,” he said. “He needed a sword. I took it from this stone.”

“Arthur,” Sir Ector said, “put the sword back into the stone.”

Arthur was puzzled. But he did as he was told.

“Now, Kay,” Sir Ector told his son, “pull it out.”

Kay held the sword. He pulled and pulled. Nothing happened.

Sir Ector grasped the sword himself. It did not move.

"Now you, Arthur," Ector said.

Arthur stepped up to the stone. He pulled out the sword. Just as he had before.

Sir Ector went down on his knees. "I bow to the true King of England," he said. Kay kneeled beside him.

"Father, what do you mean?" Arthur cried.

Sir Ector looked up at him. "I have loved you like my own child. But you are not my son. Merlin the wizard brought you to me. You were only a baby. I promised to raise you. And to keep the secret."

Arthur could not believe his ears. His father not his father? He was to be king? He felt afraid and excited and lonely all at once.

"Please rise, Father," Arthur told Sir Ector. "I must know what to do. I am afraid."

Sir Ector put his hand on Arthur's shoulder. "Let us go back to the tournament. Afterward we will come here with the others. You must draw out the sword again. Before them all."

Later that day the churchyard was crowded. The proud knights and lords who hoped to draw the sword from the stone were there. And people had come from miles around to watch them try. They all wished a great knight would become king that day.

Arthur was in the crowd too. He watched the knights. One by one they walked boldly to the stone and tried to pull out the sword. But no one could.

"Go, Arthur," Sir Ector whispered. "Go to the stone."

But Arthur would not. He felt afraid. What if he failed now?

Finally the last knight had had his turn. The people in the churchyard sighed with disappointment. Some began to turn and leave.

Arthur knew he must try. Slowly he moved through the crowd. He still wore his everyday clothes. He looked young and shy. People began to frown and stare. He heard their whispers.

"Who is that?" they asked. "He looks like an ordinary boy." And then there were louder voices. "Does he dare to touch the sword?"

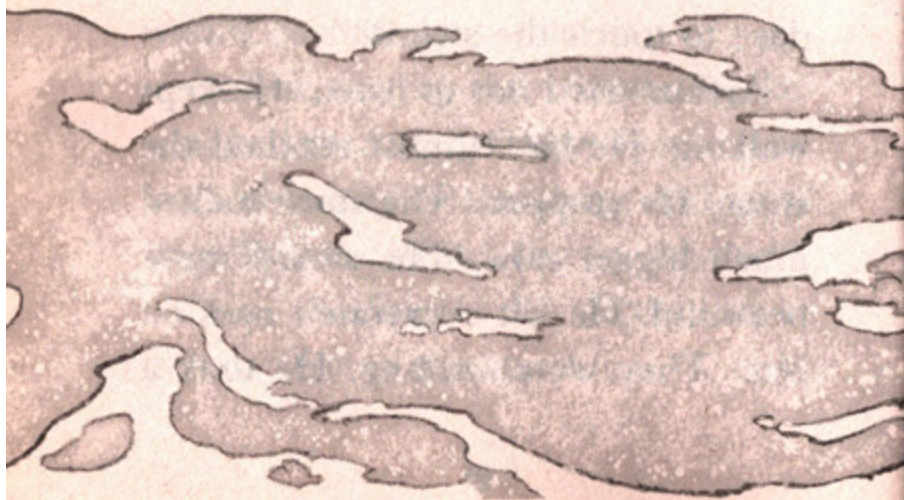
Arthur tried not to listen. He kept walking. He had almost reached the stone. He stopped. The stone looked much bigger now. The sword more beautiful. He felt everyone's eyes on him. They were waiting. He took a

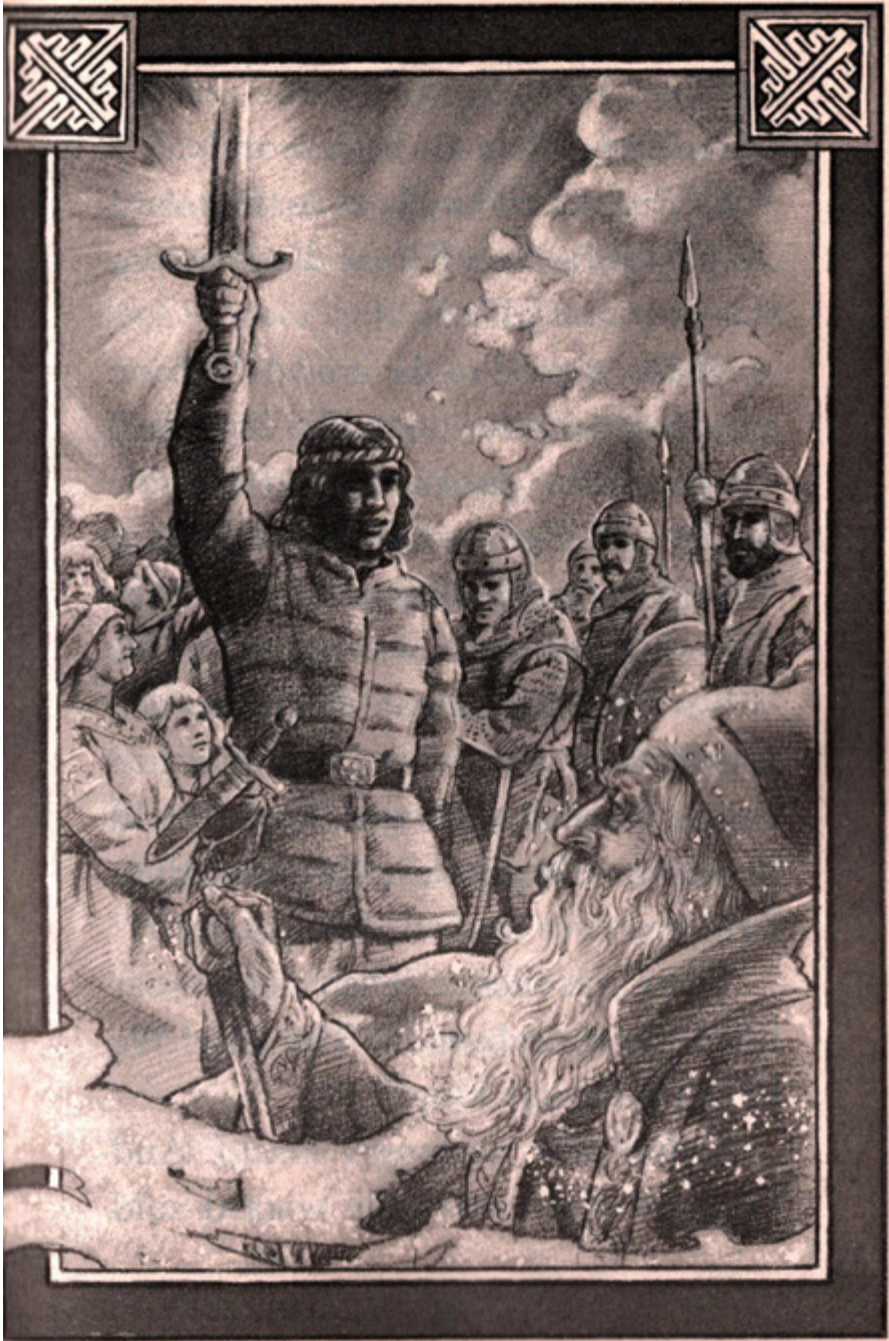
step forward. He grasped the sword. He took one great breath and pulled. The sword seemed to tremble in his hand. Then out it came!

For a moment no one made a sound. Then someone called, "That boy cannot be the king! It must be a trick. He is not even a knight!"

Arthur just stood there. He did not know what to do or say.

Suddenly a bright golden mist swirled through the churchyard. And a strange old man was there. It was Merlin!





"The great wizard!" the people whispered. Then they were quiet.

Merlin smiled kindly at Arthur. And somehow Arthur felt he had known this old man all his life.

Merlin turned to the crowd. "I have a tale of wonder to tell!" he cried. "For I know the past. And I know the future. Before King Uther died, he had a son. He named him Arthur. The king's enemies wanted to kill his baby. I hid him away where no one would harm him. Now his time has come. He will take the throne. And he will be the greatest king that England has ever known. King Arthur!"

There was silence. Then a great roar filled the churchyard. "The king! We have found our king!"

Arthur was no longer afraid. And he knew that what the wizard said

was true. He was meant to be king.

Arthur looked at the faces in the crowd. He saw people of all ages. Some wore jewels and fine clothes. Some looked poor and tired. They were all staring at him. Hope was shining in their eyes. He wanted to speak to them.

"I will be your king," he said. "I will fight the powers of evil. And I will try to bring peace and justice for all."

He kneeled. Merlin came forward. He placed the crown on Arthur's head. The crowd began to cheer again. "Long live King Arthur!"

Lancelot and the Round Table

Church bells were ringing! Crowds were cheering!

It was King Arthur's wedding day. He was coming to his castle in the city of Camelot. His beautiful new bride was with him.

"Look! Look!" someone cried. Down the street came a great parade of knights and ladies. All on fine horses and wearing their brightest jewels. Last of all came King Arthur with Queen Guinevere. The loveliest lady in all the wide world.

Inside the castle Merlin greeted everyone. Then he led King Arthur

and his knights to the Great Hall. He bowed to Arthur. "This is a great day of joy!" he said. "It will mark the beginning of our kingdom's greatest glory. Stand back!"

Merlin lifted his hand. Suddenly a huge round table stood in the Great Hall. It was made of stone and wood. Around it were many, many chairs. One hundred and fifty of them!

Merlin's voice rang out. "We are at a great dawning. At this Round Table will sit the bravest knights in the world. And they will be brothers. They will travel through the land. They will fight for what is right and good. Many will die. But the fame of the knights of the Round Table will live on. Forever."

Arthur stood. "My noble knights, let us promise together. We will fight

only for what is fair and good. Never for riches. Never for a selfish cause. We will help all those who ask for help. We will stand by one another. We will be gentle to the weak. But terrible to the wicked."

"We promise!" the knights said in one voice.

Merlin spoke again. "And here are your places." On every chair gold letters appeared. They spelled the name of the knight who was to sit there.

When all the knights were seated, only a few places were empty. Arthur looked around the table. He was proud of the men he saw. There was his brother, Sir Kay. And Sir Ector. There was Sir Gawain, who always tried to do right. No matter what it cost him. Sir Bedivere, Sir Lamorack, and so many more.

"What fine, fine men they are!" Arthur said to Merlin.

Merlin answered in a voice everyone could hear. "Indeed they are. But the greatest knight of all is still to come. He will be like the leopard and the lamb."

Then a golden mist appeared. And Merlin was gone.

Sir Kay joked, "Am *I* not the greatest?" And the knights laughed. Kay had little skill with the sword.

Just then a servant whispered to Arthur, "A stranger wishes to see you."

"Let him come," said Arthur.

Soon a young man stood before the Round Table. He was tall and strong. He was not handsome. Yet there was something about his face. It was hard to look away from him.

"My name is Lancelot," the young

man said. "I come from a land across the sea. I wish to become a knight. I will try in all ways to bring honor to you."

The young man waited for King Arthur's answer. He stood very, very still.

King Arthur looked closely at Lancelot. There was great power and courage in his face. But great kindness, too. His eyes were the gentlest that King Arthur had ever seen. He remembered Merlin's words—the leopard and the lamb. "Yes," he thought, "Lancelot looks as fierce as a leopard. And as gentle as a lamb. He must be the knight of whom Merlin spoke. The greatest knight of all."

King Arthur said, "Please kneel." He drew his sword and touched it to

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Long ago, mythic England was a kingdom of wizards and witches, fire-breathing dragons and dreadful giants. Who could rule this magical land? Who could overcome the powers of evil? It was the destiny of King Arthur and his noble knights to protect and serve the people of Camelot. Whether celebrating at the legendary Round Table or traveling far and wide to help the poor and the weak—danger, tests of honor, and adventure lay in wait for these fearless heroes!



“The reading level and large print puts these time-honored adventures within reach of children. . . . The simple vocabulary retains the spirit of the courtly heroics and the colorful pomp of the medieval circumstances.”
—*School Library Journal*

US \$4.99 / \$6.99 CAN

ISBN 978-0-394-87579-8



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RL: 2.4

006-009

Cover illustration © 2004 by Corey Wolfe



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