MERLIN AND THE MAKING OF THE KING

RETOLD BY

MARGARET HODGES

ILLUSTRATED BY

TRINA SCHART HYMAN

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from Sir Thomas Malory's
Le Morte d'Arthur

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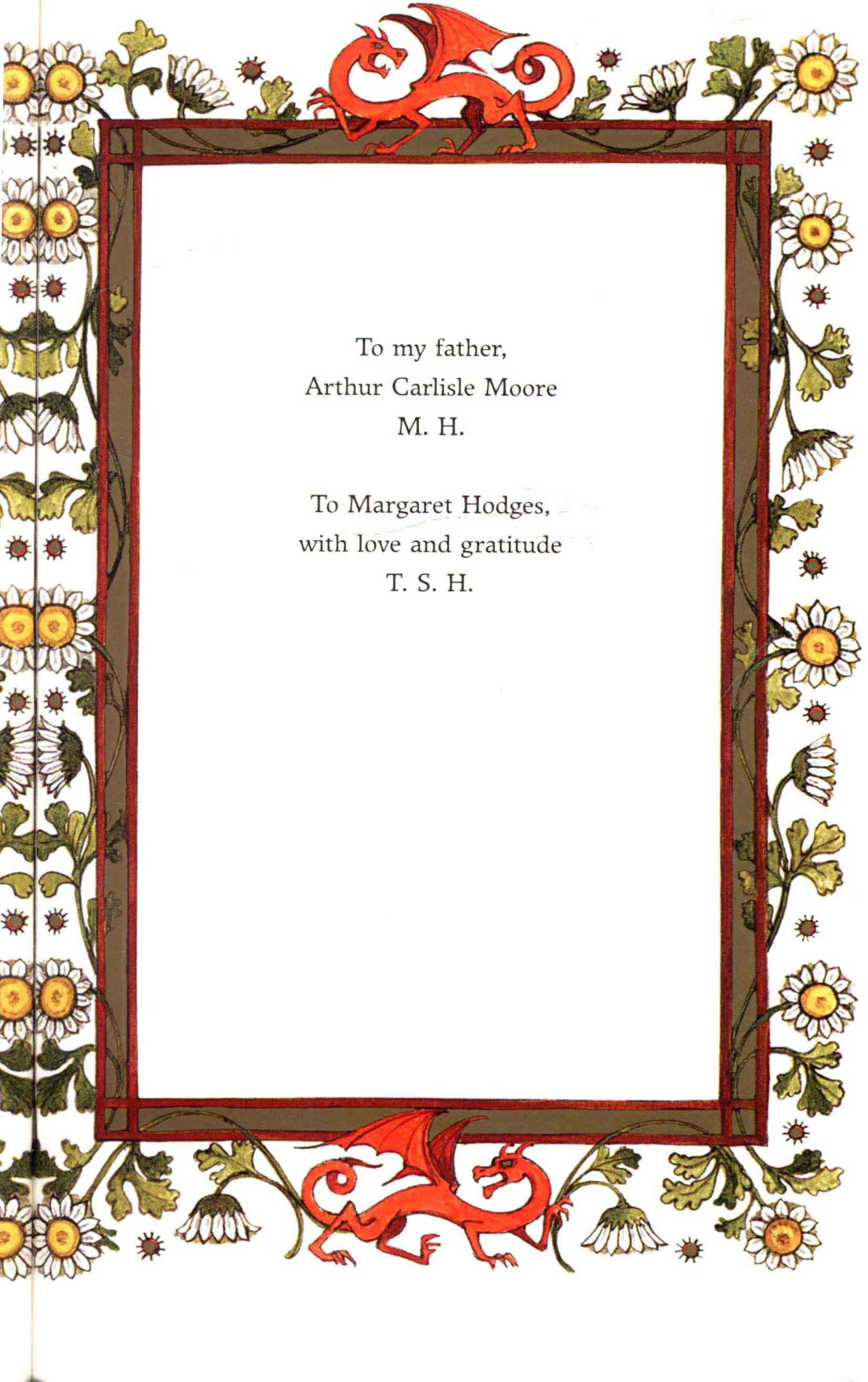

To my father,
Arthur Carlisle Moore
M. H.

To Margaret Hodges,
with love and gratitude
T. S. H.

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THE SWORD IN THE STONE

IN THE DAYS BEFORE Arthur was born, Merlin the magician hid himself in a cave that faced the western sea. No one ever saw Merlin if he did not wish to be seen, and no one knew that he was at work in his cave, making a great round table. Above the cave towered a castle called Tintagel, where the Duke of Cornwall lived with his beautiful wife, Igraine. All day long the duke's armed knights, soldiers, and servants were climbing up or down past the

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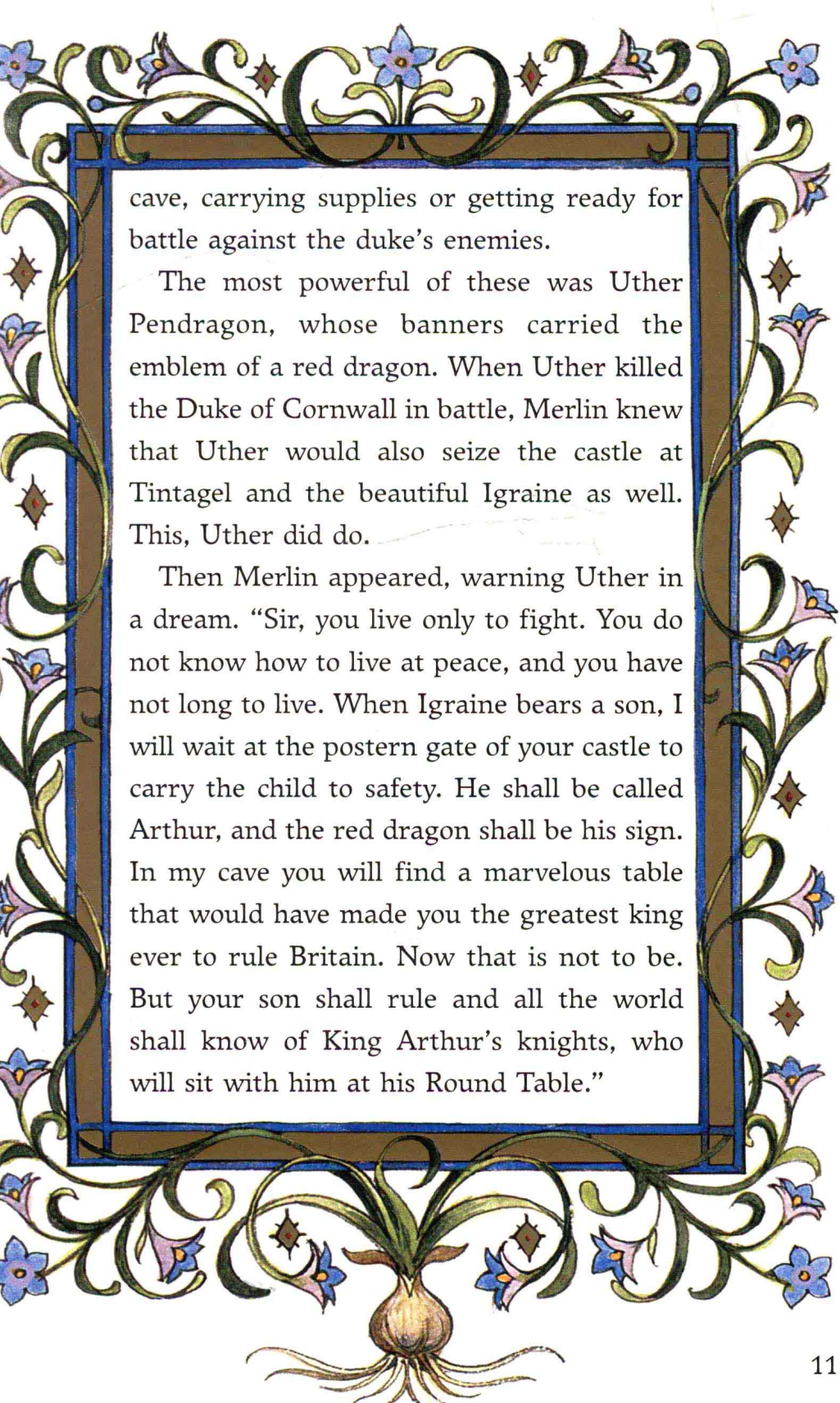


cave, carrying supplies or getting ready for battle against the duke's enemies.

The most powerful of these was Uther Pendragon, whose banners carried the emblem of a red dragon. When Uther killed the Duke of Cornwall in battle, Merlin knew that Uther would also seize the castle at Tintagel and the beautiful Igraine as well. This, Uther did do.

Then Merlin appeared, warning Uther in a dream. "Sir, you live only to fight. You do not know how to live at peace, and you have not long to live. When Igraine bears a son, I will wait at the postern gate of your castle to carry the child to safety. He shall be called Arthur, and the red dragon shall be his sign. In my cave you will find a marvelous table that would have made you the greatest king ever to rule Britain. Now that is not to be. But your son shall rule and all the world shall know of King Arthur's knights, who will sit with him at his Round Table."

Uther believed Merlin's words. When Igraine's baby was born, she wrapped him in cloth of gold and carried him by night to the postern gate. There with tears she gave him to Merlin, who covered him with his cloak and disappeared. Uther found the great table in Merlin's cave and gave it for safekeeping to a faithful friend and ally.

Not long afterward Uther died, as Merlin had foreseen. But Arthur was safe. Merlin had taken him to the house of a good man, Sir Ector, whose wife nursed the baby as if

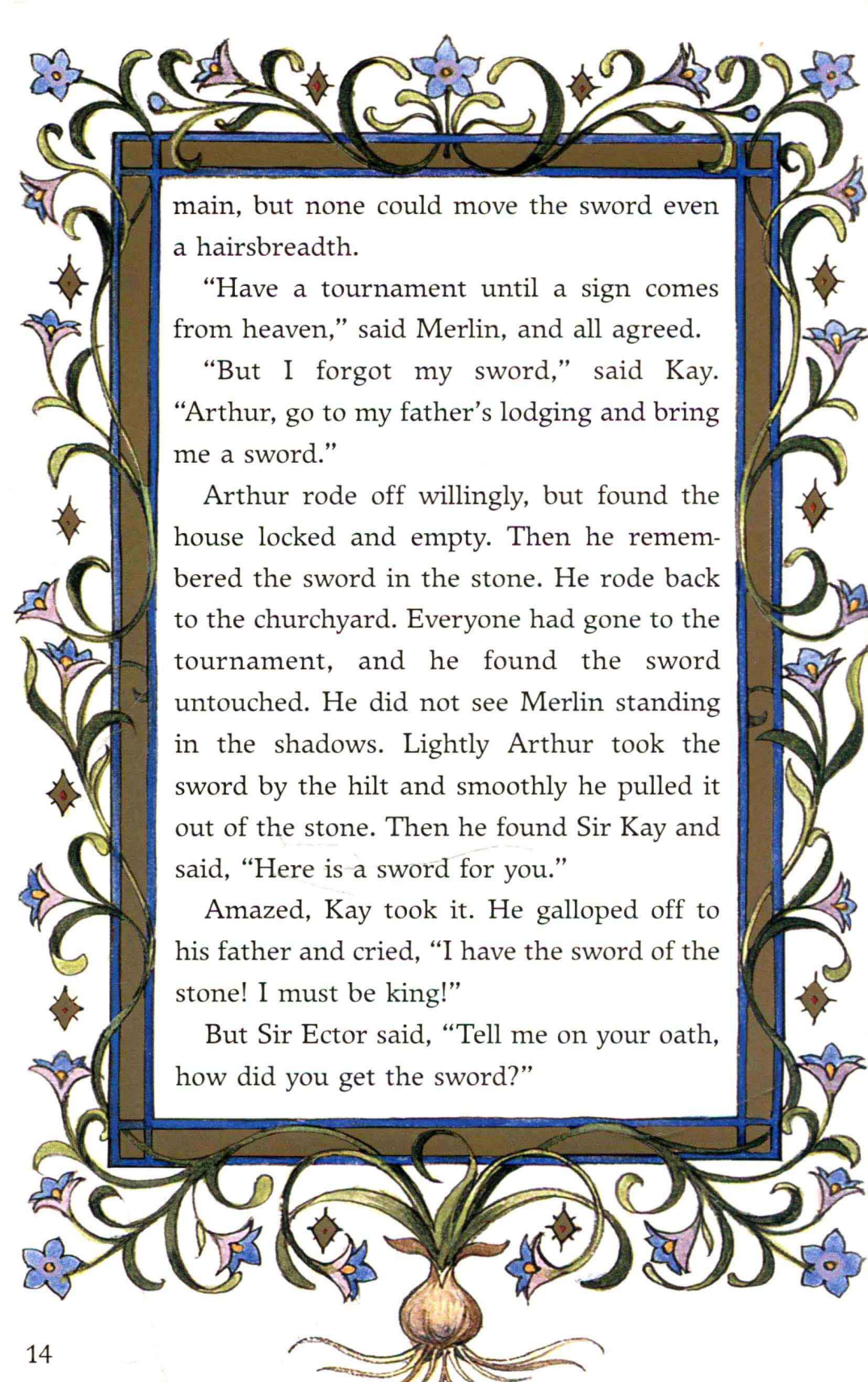
he had been her own child. He grew up learning all that a knight must do and be. Arthur loved Sir Ector and his wife and their son, Sir Kay, who had just been knighted. Kay was like a brother to Arthur, but secretly he wanted to be king.

When no leader could win enough battles to be named king, Merlin saw that Arthur's time had come. By magic, at Christmastime, he set a heavy square stone in front of London's greatest church. On this stone stood an iron anvil and into the anvil and stone a naked sword was thrust. On the blade of the sword were letters of gold:

WHOSO PULLETH OUT THIS SWORD OF THIS STONE AND ANVIL IS RIGHTWISE KING BORN OF ALL ENGLAND.

As nobles and knights stared at the strange sight, Merlin appeared and spoke to them: "Through this sword, God will work a miracle to show who shall be king."

One by one, they tried with might and



main, but none could move the sword even a hairsbreadth.

"Have a tournament until a sign comes from heaven," said Merlin, and all agreed.

"But I forgot my sword," said Kay. "Arthur, go to my father's lodging and bring me a sword."

Arthur rode off willingly, but found the house locked and empty. Then he remembered the sword in the stone. He rode back to the churchyard. Everyone had gone to the tournament, and he found the sword untouched. He did not see Merlin standing in the shadows. Lightly Arthur took the sword by the hilt and smoothly he pulled it out of the stone. Then he found Sir Kay and said, "Here is a sword for you."

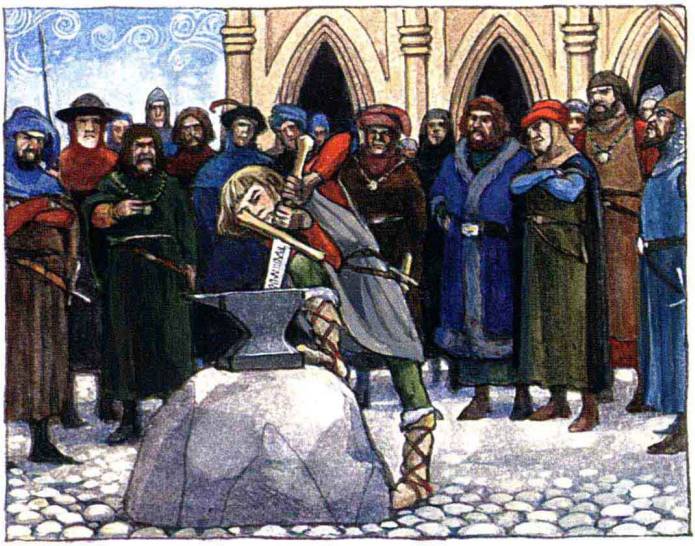
Amazed, Kay took it. He galloped off to his father and cried, "I have the sword of the stone! I must be king!"

But Sir Ector said, "Tell me on your oath, how did you get the sword?"

Kay was ashamed. "Arthur brought it to me," he said.

Sir Ector fell to his knees before Arthur, saying, "Now I know that Merlin spoke the truth when he brought you to my house as a baby. You are the son of Uther Pendragon, and you are the rightful king."

Then in the sight of all the great lords, Arthur thrust the sword into the stone and pulled it out easily. And though he alone could succeed in the marvelous feat, the lords



would not have him. "How can that unknown, beardless boy be king?" they muttered.

At last the common people came and saw for themselves the miracle of the sword pulled from the stone by Arthur's hands. "We will have Arthur for our king!" they shouted. "It is God's will!"

Then Arthur laid his sword on the church altar and knelt all night to pray that he might be worthy. He swore to live a pure life, to tell the truth, and to right wrongs wherever he saw them. To Arthur Merlin spoke a final word: "Never use your sword unless you must. Then draw it and do your best."

The next morning Sir Ector touched Arthur's shoulder with the sword and dubbed him knight. Soon afterward, Arthur was crowned king, and Merlin sent three queens from the world of spirits to stand behind the throne. "You will see them again when you leave this world," said Merlin's voice, but only Arthur heard it.

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