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Sir Nigel

Arthur Conan Doyle · *1906 · original English text*

A small, brave young squire of Hampshire, Nigel Loring, wants to win the hand of Mary Maude, who bids him prove himself by three deeds. His quest takes him from the manor of Tilford to the court of Edward III, to the wars in France, and to the fields of Poitiers. Doyle wrote it as a prequel to The White Company, and it is a book of fights, jokes, and chivalry.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does it take to be a knight, and can courtesy and courage be held together?

Nigel is a model of the ideal. He is brave, polite, and a little absurd in his devotion to the rules. Doyle lets the reader laugh at the world of courtly vows and love them at the same time. The three deeds are tests of character, and Nigel meets them by being exactly who he is. Behind the fun is a view that honor is a daily habit and, in the 14th century of the book, a fight to keep.

KEY CHARACTERS

Nigel Loring
A small, shortsighted, and very brave Hampshire squire.

Lady Ermyntrude
His grandmother, who directs the family's affairs.

Mary Maude
The lady who sets him his three deeds.

Aylward
An English archer who joins Nigel's company.

Black Simon
A rough soldier who is among the comrades.

King Edward III
The king, who takes notice of Nigel.

Grades 8–12
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01

The House of Loring

CHAPTERS I–VI

Nigel lives with his grandmother, Lady Ermyntrude, in a poor and old manor. A strange summoner arrives, and Nigel is tried by the Abbot of Waverley. Mary Maude's condition is set.

- The family's poverty and pride are drawn with affection.
- The tale of how the devil came to Waverley sets up the abbey's fear.
- The iron coffer is the family's last resource.

02

Market and King

CHAPTERS VII–XII

Nigel goes to Guildford, holds the bridge at Tilford, and is noticed by the king. His courage and manners win him a place at court, and he meets his comrades.

- Nigel's trip to market is a comic episode.
- Holding the bridge is a first test of nerve.
- The king's esteem opens a new road.

03

The Journey and Calais

CHAPTERS XIII–XVI

Nigel and his comrades travel the old road and pursue the Red Ferret, a trick of fortune. The king's court feasts at Calais.

- The companions are the book's liveliest figures.
- Nigel's chase of the Red Ferret is a long way to a short answer.
- Calais gives Doyle space for pageantry.

04

At Sea and in Brittany

CHAPTERS XVII–XXIII

Nigel fights at sea against the Spanish ships, is caught up in a duel of squires, and watches the Combat of the Thirty.

- The sea fight is brisk and vivid.
- The squire-to-squire duel tests his French counterpart.
- The Combat of the Thirty is a historical event Doyle uses for color.

05

Poitiers and the Third Deed

CHAPTERS XXIV–XXVII

Nigel is called to the army and finds his third deed at the time of Poitiers. The last chapter sends the third messenger home to Cosford.

- The battle is the great test of the age.
- Nigel's third deed is a matter of risk and honor.
- The book ends with the messenger bringing news to his lady.

Chivalry · Courage · Love and Duty · War

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 8–12

1. Nigel is short-sighted, and Doyle makes light of it. Ask how the author turns a weakness into a trait.
2. Each of the three deeds tests a different quality. Name them as you go.
3. Look at how Doyle treats the Church and the nobles. Who is mocked?
4. This book is a prequel. Think about what it gives you if you read The White Company next.

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