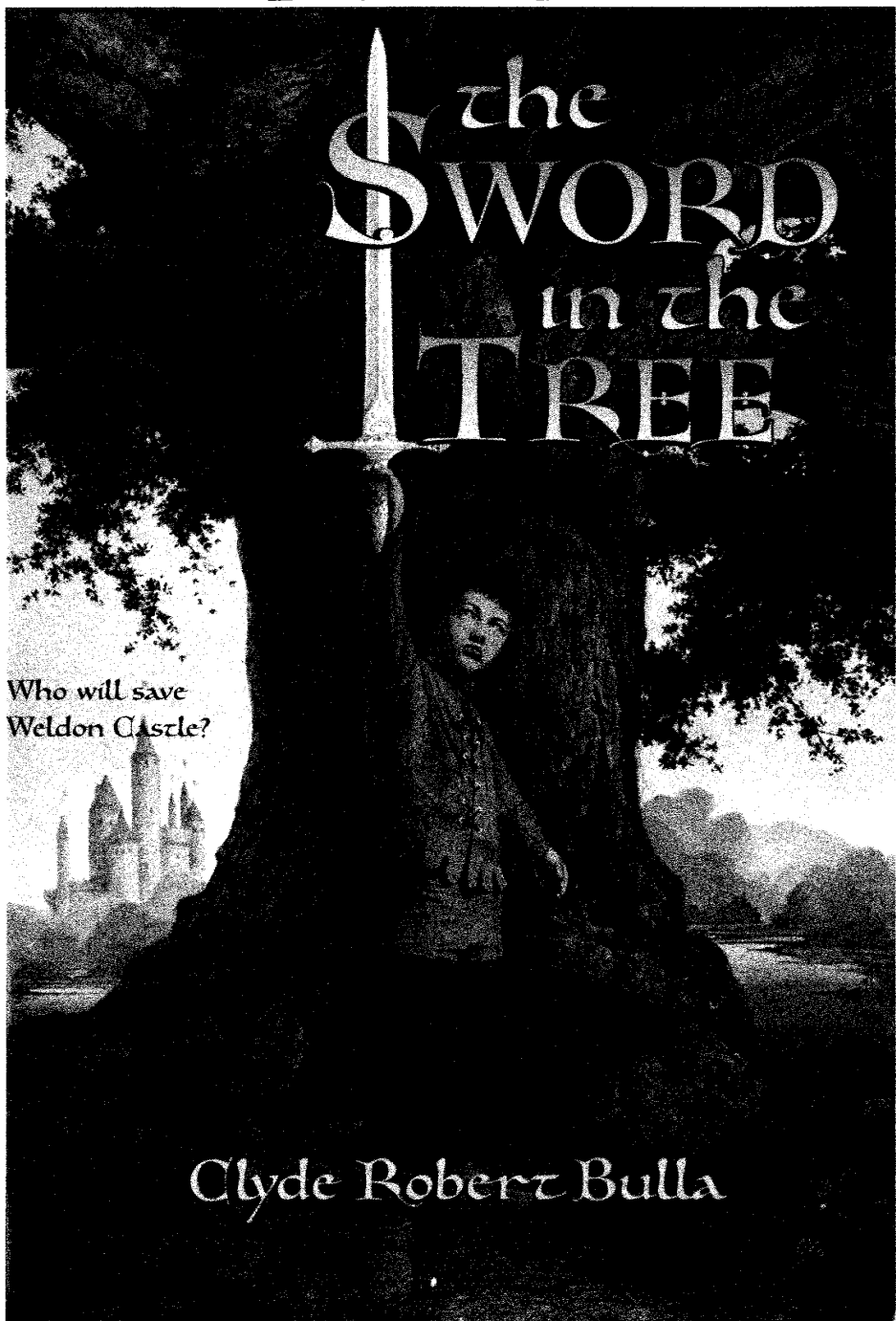




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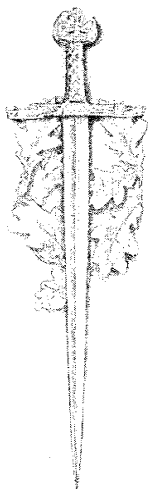


# the SWORD in the TREE

Who will save  
Weldon Castle?


Clyde Robert Bulla

# The SWORD in the TREE



by Clyde Robert Bulla

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL CASALE

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# Weldon Castle

## — I —

**T**he boy sat up in bed. A sound in the night had wakened him.

His room was so dark he could see nothing, but he could hear steps outside his door. He held his breath and listened.

“Shan!” said a voice.

He let his breath go. It was his mother, calling his name.

“Yes?” he said. “What is it?”

Lady Marian came into the room. She had a candle in her hand, and the light moved over the stone walls.

“Shan, I’m glad to find you here,” she

said. "I was afraid you had gone with your father."

"Where has my father gone?" asked Shan.

"One of the servants just wakened him and they went away together," she said. "I heard them speak of a wounded knight."

"A *wounded* knight?" said Shan.

"Yes," said Lady Marian. "Shan, what does it mean? Is someone making war on us? Are there enemy soldiers outside?"

"Don't be afraid, Mother," said Shan. "Our good King Arthur has beaten all our enemies. And even if there *were* enemies, we would be safe here. There is no stronger castle in England than ours."

He went to the window. A light was moving in the courtyard below.

"Mother, I'm going down there," he said.

"I don't think you should go," said Lady Marian.

"No one is fighting," he said. "There's

nothing to be afraid of.”

He put on his clothes. He ran down the stairs and into the courtyard. There was a light near the castle gate. He went toward it.

At the gate he found his father. Some of the servants were there, too. One of them had a lighted torch in his hand.

“Father—” Shan stopped. On the stones at his father’s feet lay a man. A long, black beard hid his face. Two of the servants were taking off his armor.

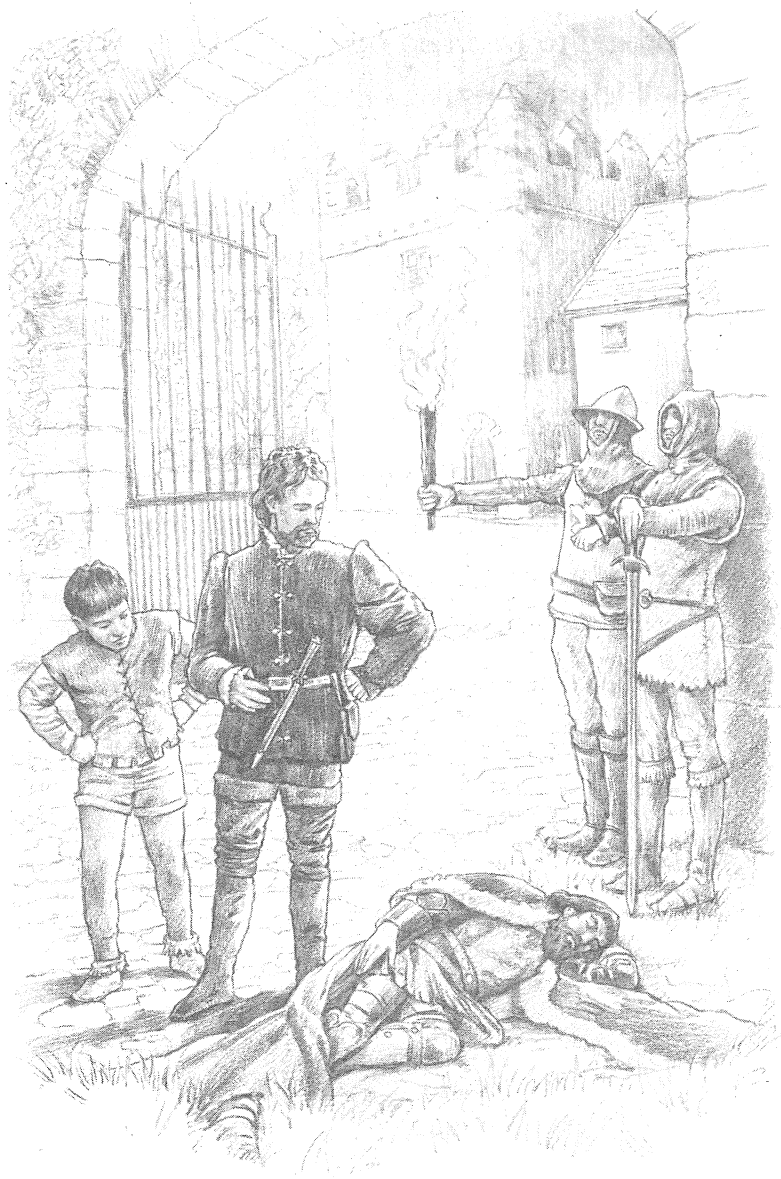
“Who is he?” asked Shan.

“No one knows,” said his father. “He beat on the gate. We let him in, and he fell in a faint.”

“My lord, I have found his wound,” said one of the servants.

Shan’s father looked at the wound in the man’s side. “Bring him into the castle at once,” he said.

The servants lifted the wounded man.



They carried him into a bedroom in the castle.

"Has he lost much blood?" asked Shan.

"I think so," said his father. "The wound is deep."

"Shall I bring Nappus?" asked Shan.

"Nappus?"

"Yes. Nappus is a man of magic. He can make the knight well."

"Poor Nappus." Shan's father shook his head. "He knows no magic. But he was once the best of doctors."

"He is still the best of doctors," said Shan. "Remember how he took the fishbone from your throat? Remember how he bound up my arm when it was broken?"

"Yes, yes," said his father. "Go and bring him if you wish."

Shan took a lighted torch from one of the servants and ran out across the courtyard. He opened a door in the castle wall. It was the



door to Nappus' room.

Nappus was sleeping, with his cloak over his head. Shan touched him. Nappus looked out from under the cloak.

He was a small man. His hair was white. He could neither hear nor speak, but his eyes were keen and bright.

"There is a wounded knight in the castle," said Shan. "Come and dress his wound."

Nappus watched Shan's lips, reading the words. He nodded to show that he understood. From a box in a corner he took some jars and bottles. He tied them up in a cloth.

Shan led the way to the castle. Nappus knelt by the wounded man. He washed the wound and dressed it. He opened the man's mouth and poured a little red wine down his throat.

The man moved. His eyes opened, and he looked at Nappus. "Lord Weldon!" he said in a whisper. "Where is Lord Weldon?"

Shan's father came forward. "I am Lord Weldon. You are safe in Weldon Castle."

The wounded man tried to lift himself. "Brother—!" he said. Then he fell back and was still.

Shan's father bent over the man and looked into his face. He cried out, "Lionel!" His voice shook with excitement. He said to Shan, "This knight is my brother. I am sure of it. Shan, this is your Uncle Lionel. After these many years, your Uncle Lionel has come home!"

## Uncle Lionel

### - II -

Shan had heard many tales of his uncle. Now he wanted to hear more. "Tell me about my Uncle Lionel," he said to his father.

"Wait until he is strong," said Lord Weldon, "and he will tell you himself."

Shan asked his mother, "Will *you* tell me about my uncle?"

"I never knew him well," she said. "He sailed from England long before you were born. He was wild when he was a boy. He was never a kind and gentle knight, and he was never as brave as your father."

“Did he live here at Weldon Castle?” asked Shan.

“No,” said Lady Marian. “He had a castle of his own, but he sold it and quickly spent the money. Then he went away to France and Spain and other far places.”

“Do you think he will tell me about those far places?” asked Shan.

“He may,” said his mother, “when he is strong again.”

Every day Shan sat for a while by Lionel’s bed. Most of the time his uncle slept. When he looked about him, his eyes were bright with fever and he knew no one.

But one morning, when he woke, the fever was gone from his eyes. He looked at Shan.

“Why do you sit there?” he asked.

Shan looked at him in surprise.

“Why do you sit and look at me?” cried Lionel. “Speak, you young dog!”



Shan jumped to his feet. "I am no dog. I am the son of Lord Weldon."

"You lie! My brother has no son."

"I do *not* lie, and you have no right to say so!" Shan turned and walked out of the room.

On the stairs he met his father.

"I'll sit with my uncle no more," he said.

"Why?" asked Lord Weldon. "What has he done?"

"He called me a dog," said Shan. "He said I was no son of yours."

"He said those things to you? Then my brother must be better," said Lord Weldon, and he ran upstairs.

Shan went outside. He was so angry he felt warm all over. No one had ever talked to him before as his uncle had talked to him just now.

He went to the stone trough near the castle gate. It was the trough where the horses were watered. He put his head down into it. The water cooled his face.

He saw Nappus sitting by the wall. He started across the courtyard to sit beside him,

but before he got there, someone called his name.

It was Lord Weldon calling from the window of Lionel's room. "Come, Shan!"

Shan did not want to go, but he knew he must obey his father. He walked slowly back toward the castle.

Inside he found his father and Lionel laughing and talking together.

"This is a great day for us all," said Lord Weldon. "Your uncle can sit up. He can talk and laugh again. See how much better he is?"

"Yes, Father," said Shan.

"You must not be angry at the things he said. That was only a joke."

"Yes," said Lionel. "It was only a joke. Take my hand."

Shan went to the bed and took his uncle's hand.

"We must be friends," said Lionel. "Here,

let me look at you. How old are you?"

"Eleven, sir," said Shan.

"And what do you wish to be when you are a man?"

"A knight," said Shan.

"Good!" said Lionel. "I can teach you all the things a knight should know. How to ride, how to use a lance and sword—"

"My father is teaching me those things," said Shan.

"I'll teach you even more," said Lionel. "We can start today."

Lord Weldon spoke up. "No, not today. Remember your wound."

"Ah, yes, my wound. I'd like to have my hands on the dog who gave it to me!" said Lionel.

He told them what had happened. "Late in the evening I was riding toward Weldon Castle. In the woods three robbers set upon



me. One of them wounded me with a knife. They stole my purse, my sword and shield, and my horse."

"There are many robbers in the land," said Lord Weldon. "It is not safe to ride in the woods alone."

"No gold, no horse, no sword or shield," said Lionel. "What a poor knight am I!"

"Not poor at all," said Lord Weldon. "You are with your own people again. You have a home with us."

"My good brother," said Lionel. "How can I ever thank you?" And he bowed his head over his brother's hand.

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# The Oak Tree

## — III —

**T**he next day Lionel asked to be taken outside.

“I want to sit in the shade of the great oak tree,” he said.

The oak tree stood in the castle garden. There were some who said it was the oldest tree in all England. Ever since Shan was a small boy, he had liked to climb it. High in its trunk he had found a hollow so large that he could nearly get inside it.

“I fear the oak will die, with such a large hollow in its trunk,” Lord Weldon had said.

But the tree was still strong and green, and

each spring it put out new leaves and branches.

Four servants carried Lionel, bed and all, into the garden. They put him down under the oak tree.

“Stay with him until I come back,” Lord Weldon told Shan.

“Where are you going, Father?” asked Shan.

“It is time for me to ride through my lands,” said Lord Weldon. “I want to talk with the farmers and see how the crops are growing.”

One of the things Shan liked best was riding with his father.

“I wish I could go,” he said.

“So do I,” said his father, “but your uncle doesn’t like being left alone.”

So Shan stayed with his uncle.

“Is your father gone much of the time?” asked Lionel.

“Only when he rides out through his lands,” said Shan.

“Doesn’t he ever go away to war?”

“There is no war in England. These are times of peace,” said Shan. “For many years we have had no prisoners in the dungeon under our castle.”

“No prisoners? Then what do you do with your dungeon?”

“Nothing. I wish my father would have it filled with earth and stones. It is such an ugly place, with no window for the sun to shine in.”

“You had better keep your dungeon. You may have need of it.” Lionel sat up straight. “Look. What is that old man doing here?” He shouted in a loud voice, “Go!”

The old man was bending over a rose bush. He did not look up.

Lionel turned red with anger. “Bring me a stone to throw. I’ll have him out in a hurry.”

“You must do him no harm,” said Shan. “That is Nappus.”

“Nappus? Who is Nappus?”

“He is the one who cared for you and dressed your wound. He has a right to come to this garden. He finds snails and herbs here for his medicines.”

“But why did he not speak when I spoke to him?”

“He could not hear you,” said Shan. “Years ago he was caught in the woods by a storm. He stood under a tree, and the tree was struck by lightning. After that day, Nappus could not hear or speak. But he is very wise. There are some who say he is a man of magic.”

“Then I would do him no harm,” said Lionel. “It is good luck to have such a man about the castle. Old man!” he called. “You may stay if you like . . . Oh, I forgot. He cannot hear me.”

Shan went to Nappus. He looked among the rose bushes and found two big brown

snails. He put them into Nappus' hand.

Nappus smiled and nodded. Then he saw Lionel and the smile left his face. He turned and went quickly away.

"He is a strange old man," said Lionel.

"He knows many things," said Shan. "He helped make my sword."

"Have you a sword of your own?" asked Lionel.

"Yes, I have," said Shan.

"Bring it here," said Lionel.

Shan went to the great hall of the castle. The armor was kept there in wooden chests. On the walls were lances, bows and arrows, swords, and shields. Shan climbed up on one of the chests and took down his sword and shield. They were smaller than those used by the men.

He put on his belt and scabbard. He slid the sword into the scabbard. He took up the shield and ran out into the garden.

"Do you practice with these?" asked Lionel.

"Every day," said Shan, "and with a cross-bow, too. And I practice climbing and riding and jumping."

"Draw your sword," said Lionel.

Shan drew his sword from the scabbard.

"Faster!" said Lionel.

Shan tried again. He drew the sword as quickly as he could.

"That is better," said Lionel. "Now I'll see you ride."

Shan went to the stables. He told a groom, "Bring me my horse."

The groom brought the horse to the garden.

Shan got into the saddle. The groom handed up his shield.

"Now," said Lionel, "ride to the end of the garden walk and back—and be quick."

Shan put his heels to the horse's sides, and





the horse was off. He rode to the end of the walk. He turned and rode back.

"You sit well enough in the saddle," said Lionel, "but your turn was too slow. Try again. Jerk the reins when you turn your horse. Jerk as hard as you can and bring his feet off the ground."

"I'll not do that," said Shan.

"What!" said Lionel.

"It isn't good to jerk a horse on a turn," said Shan. "A strong pull is better and faster."

"Are you telling *me* how to turn a horse?"

"I ride as my father taught me."

"It's time I taught you a real lesson!" Lionel tried to get to his feet.

"No!" said Shan. "You'll hurt yourself."

Lionel fell back on the bed. "Get out of my sight!" he shouted.

As Shan rode out of the garden, he heard his uncle still shouting, "Out of my sight! Out of my sight, you bold brat!"

## The Hunt

### — IV —

After that day, Lionel said no more about teaching Shan to ride or use a sword.

When his wound had healed, he took long rides beyond his brother's lands. Often he brought strange men back with him.

Some of them he had known in France or Spain, he said. Others he had met along the road. Night after night they came to the castle. They sat in the great hall, singing and eating and drinking.

"I do not like these strange, rough men," said Lady Marian.

"They are my brother's friends," said Lord Weldon.

"I wish you would send them away," said Lady Marian, "and send your brother with them."

"Send my brother away?" said Lord Weldon. "I could not do that."

"Will he always be here?" she asked. "Will he and his friends always be at our table, eating our food and drinking our wine?"

"My brother is well and strong now," said Lord Weldon. "He will soon ride away to look for new adventures."

But the weeks went by, and Lionel stayed.

One autumn morning he and some of his friends went fox hunting. Lord Weldon went with them.

From his window in the castle, Shan watched them ride away. Each had a hunting knife at his side, and some had spears and bows and arrows. Dogs were barking and

running in and out among the horses.

No one had asked Shan to go, but he did not mind. He liked to hunt with his father, but he had no wish to go with Lionel and his friends.

He went down to the great hall. From a shelf he took the long box in which his father's sword was kept.

Shan was sure it was the most beautiful sword in the world. The blade was of fine blue steel. The hilt was of gold, set with small red stones. When he took the sword from the box, the stones flashed in the light.

Long ago Shan had asked his father, "May I be the one to care for your sword?"

His father had told him, "Yes, my son, because some day it will be yours."

Shan rubbed the blade with oil so that the steel would not rust. He rubbed the hilt with a soft cloth until the gold was clean and bright.

While he worked, the great hall began to

grow dark. He put the sword away.

He went outside and looked at the sky. It was dark with clouds, and a few drops of rain were falling.

His mother called to him from the castle, "Come out of the rain, Shan."

He went inside. He climbed the stairs to his mother's room.

Lady Marian was sitting by the window. "Now are you glad you did not go on the hunt?"

"Yes, Mother," he said. "It is a poor day for hunting."

"Your father will come home wet and cold," she said. "We must have a good fire ready for him."

Shan was at the window. "I think I see the men coming now."

"Oh, no. It is too soon."

"But I see men on horseback."

They looked out into the rain.



“Yes,” she said. “Now I see them.”

They watched as the men came nearer.

“Where is my father?” asked Shan.

“I do not see him,” said his mother, “but I see your uncle.”

"There is one horse without a rider," said Shan.

"Yes," she said, "and your uncle is leading it."

"That is my father's horse!" said Shan.

"But your father—! Shan, he is not with the others!"

She ran down the stairs and into the courtyard. Shan ran after her.

They were waiting there in the rain when Lionel and his friends rode up to the castle.

"Where is my father?" asked Shan.

The men looked at one another. One by one they rode away until only Lionel was left.

Shan's mother spoke to him. "Where is my lord?"

"I bring sad news," he said.

"What news?" she asked.

"Do you know the quicksand on this side of the river?" said Lionel. "My brother rode into it. His horse saved himself, but my



brother was lost. We saw him go down in the quicksand. We were too late to save him."

Lady Marian's face was white. She started toward the castle, walking as if she could not see. Shan helped her across the courtyard and up the stairs to her room.

"Don't leave me," she said.

Lionel came up to the room. "Dear lady, what can I say? This is a terrible day for us all."

"Go away," she said. "Leave me alone with my son."

## The Sword

— V —

**F**or many days Lady Marian did not leave her room. She wanted no one near her except Shan.

Every day someone from the kitchen left food outside the door. Every night wood was brought to the room.

It was a time of fog and cold. Sometimes there was not enough wood to keep the room warm.

“I’ll go tell them to bring more,” Shan would say, and his mother would say, “Don’t leave me, Shan. Stay with me. You are all I have now.”

One night, as they sat by the fire, she said, "Hear the men singing and laughing below. They do not care how sad we are."

"Let me go speak to them," he said.

"No, don't leave me," she said.

"Mother, we cannot always stay in this room," said Shan. "Some day I must go out, and so must you."

She looked at him in surprise. "Yes, that is true," she said. "Go, then."

He went down the stairs. Lionel and his friends were at the table in the great hall. Servants were bringing food and wine. They were servants Shan had never seen before.

He stood in the doorway. "Look, you!" he said. "This is a sad time for my mother and me. If you must make your noise, make it somewhere else."

Lionel set down his wine cup. "These are my friends," he said, "so take care how you speak to them."

"Take care how you speak to me," said Shan.

He went back to his mother. "There are strange faces here," he said. "I do not know what it means."

In the morning he went to the kitchen and the garden and the stables. Everywhere he went, he saw new faces. Most of the old servants were gone. New ones had taken their places.

Shan saw his uncle riding across the courtyard. He spoke to him. "Who brought in new servants and sent the old ones away?"

"Some of my friends have come here to live," said Lionel. "They brought their own servants. We had no need of so many, and I sent some of the old ones away."

"Why did you not ask me first?"

"Why should I have asked you?"

"Now that my father is gone," said Shan, "*I* am Lord Weldon. *I* am master of the castle."

"You?" Lionel threw back his head and laughed. "You are a boy!"

He started to ride away. Shan saw that he wore a sword with a gold hilt. The hilt was set with red stones.

"Stop!" he cried. "Why do you wear that sword?"

"Why should I not wear it?" asked his uncle.

"It was my father's," said Shan. "Now it is mine."

"This is a sword for a man, not a boy. Out of my way!" Lionel rode off across the courtyard.

Shan looked after him. He said in a low voice, "The sword is not his. It is mine, and I'll have it back."

That night, when everyone else was in bed, he went down to the great hall. A fire still burned in the big fireplace. By its light he could see the room. On the wall behind his

uncle's chair was the sword.

He took it down and put it back into its box. He looked about for a place to hide it. There was no place in the great hall.

He went out into the garden. His first thought was to bury the box in the ground. Then he looked up at the oak tree and remembered the hollow in its trunk.

In the great hall he found a piece of rope and tied it to the box. With the rope about his shoulders and the box on his back, he climbed the oak tree. He found the hollow in the trunk.

There were sticks and leaves in the opening. He pulled them out and pushed the box inside. It fell softly into the hollow.

He climbed down. He felt his way through the quiet garden and into the castle.

In the morning he met his uncle in the courtyard.



"The sword!" cried Lionel, in a rage.  
"What have you done with the sword?"

"The sword is in a safe place," said Shan.

"Bring it to me. Bring it at once."

"The sword is mine," said Shan.

Lionel lifted a hand as if to strike him.  
Shan did not move. Lionel let his hand fall to his side.

"Listen to what I say, and listen well," he said. "If the sword is not back in its place by tomorrow, I'll have you in the dungeon!"

"You forget that I am master here," said Shan, "and now I am going out to find our old servants and friends and bring them back."

He went to the stables. A stableman opened a window and looked out at him.

"Saddle a horse and bring it here to me," said Shan.

"I cannot, sir," said the man.

"You cannot?"

"No, sir," said the stableman. "Not until



my master bids me to.”

“I bid you to,” said Shan. “I am your master.”

“No, sir. My master is Lord Lionel.” The man closed the window.

Shan was about to beat on the window and shout “Bring me a horse, or I’ll make you pay for this!” Then he looked up and saw Nappus by the castle wall. The old man looked at him and slowly shook his head.

Shan knew that the old man was trying to tell him something. He started over to the wall. Again Nappus shook his head, and he made a sign for Shan to go away.

Shan told his mother that night, as they sat by the fire, “Most of our old servants are gone, but Nappus is with us still.”

“I am glad of that,” she said.

“It may be that my uncle is afraid to send Nappus away,” said Shan. “He thinks Nappus is a man of magic.”

"Poor Nappus is no man of magic," said Lady Marian, "but he does know many things, and he is our friend. I wish we had more such friends—"

"Listen!" said Shan. "Did you hear someone on the stairs?"

"No," she said.

"It may be my uncle, looking for the sword," he said.

"What sword?"

"The sword that was my father's," said Shan. "I have it hidden. My uncle says if I do not give it up, he will have me in the dungeon."

"Give him the sword," she said.

"I *never* will!" said Shan.

"But what if he takes you to the dungeon?"

"Listen!" said Shan again.

There was a soft knock at the door.

“If it is your uncle, give him the sword,”  
she said in a whisper.

Shan opened the door. The man outside  
was not his uncle. It was Nappus.

## Words in the Ashes

### - VI -

**N**appus' cloak was wet from the fog. There were drops of water on his beard.

He looked quickly from Shan to Lady Marian. He knelt by the fire and raked some ashes out upon the hearth. With his finger he made some marks in the ashes.

Shan and his mother bent over the hearth.

Nappus rubbed out the marks and made some more.

"What is he doing?" asked Shan.

"He is writing words in the ashes," said Lady Marian.



“Can you read them?” asked Shan.

“Yes,” she whispered. “Oh, yes!”

She took up a candle and held it over the hearth. The candle shook in her hand.

It seemed a long time before Nappus was through writing in the ashes. When he stood up, he looked at Lady Marian.

She nodded. “Yes, I understand.”

He knelt and kissed the hem of her dress. He threw his cloak about him. Like a shadow he was gone.

Lady Marian sat down and put her hands over her face. "Oh, Shan, what shall we do now?"

"What were the words in the ashes?" he asked. "What did they say?"

"Shan, listen to me. Because Nappus cannot hear, most people think he cannot understand. But he can look at their faces and read their lips. Today he read your uncle's lips as he talked to one of his friends—"

Her voice broke.

Shan bent over her. "Mother, what is it?"

"Your father did not die in the quicksand," she said. "He fell into a trap that was laid by your uncle."

Shan looked at her. He could not speak.

"Now," she said, "you and I are in the same danger."

"But *why*? What did my father do?" he cried. "What have *we* done?"

"Softly, Shan. Do you not see? With you and your father and me out of the way, your uncle will be lord of Weldon Castle."

He started to the door. She caught his arm. "Where are you going?"

"To settle with my uncle," he said.

"How can you settle with him? You cannot fight him and all his friends and their servants. Shan, there is only one way for us to save ourselves."

"What is that?" he asked.

"We must leave here. We must leave quickly."

"And give up our castle to my uncle?"

"If we stay, we cannot save our castle. If we go, we may save our lives. Do you understand?"

"I understand," he said.

She opened a chest and took out a cloak

and a purse. "I have some money and my jewels," she said. "And here is the bread and cheese left from our supper."

"I have a little money," he said. He went to his room. From one of his chests he took a purse and a cloak. From another he took a knife, some string, and a tinderbox.

Back in his mother's room, he said, "I saw no one on the stairs. I think it is safe to go."

"The night watchmen are on the wall," she said.

"The fog is thick. The night watchmen cannot see us."

"Then let us go," she said.

They went down the stairs. She looked out into the night. "Can you see?" she asked.

"Only a little," he said.

They felt their way through the fog. They came to the castle gate. It was closed for the night.

Shan found the small door in the gate. He



opened it. He helped his mother through.

They found the road and began to run. When they stopped for breath, Shan turned for a last look at the castle, but he could not see it. He could see only the night and the fog.

## The Robbers

### — VII —

All night they walked. When morning came, they hid in the woods. They did not stop at any of the farms near the castle. They knew that Lionel might find them there.

All day they hid. They ate the food that Lady Marian had brought from home. There was only a small piece of bread and a smaller piece of cheese.

At night they started on again. Once they heard horsemen on the road behind them. They hid by the roadside until the men went by.

“Do you think that was my uncle and

his men?" asked Shan.

"I do not know," said his mother, "but I fear the roads are not safe for us, even at night. We had better take to the woods."

They walked through the woods. Slowly they made their way, until Lady Marian said, "I must rest."

They sat down on the roots of a tree. Shan felt the cold fog on his face. All about him he heard strange sounds. Some were the sounds of animals moving among the trees. He knew there were deer and foxes and rabbits in the woods. They would do no harm. But he knew there were wolves, too. A fire would keep them away, he thought.

He dug among the roots of the tree until he found dry leaves and sticks. From his purse he took his tinderbox. He struck a spark with the flint and steel. The spark fell into the tinder and caught fire. He lighted the dry leaves and sticks.

In a little while the fire was burning brightly. His mother held out her hands to it.

"It feels good," she said. "Now if only we had something to eat."

"I'll find something tomorrow." He sat down by her. "Mother, where are we going? What are we going to do?"

"The only plan I have is for us to go on—so far from Weldon Castle that your uncle can never find us," she said. "Then I hope we can find friends who will help us."

"I hope that will be soon," said Shan. "I am tired of hiding and running away."

He leaned back against the tree.

"Go to sleep, Shan," she said.

"You sleep if you can," he said. "I'll stay awake and keep watch."

She lay down by the fire and was soon asleep. Shan tried to keep watch, but he was very tired. He began to nod. Slowly his eyes went shut.

When he woke, three strange men stood in the light of the fire. They were looking down on him and his mother. Their swords were drawn.

One of the men came closer. He wore a fine velvet hat with a feather. The rest of his clothes were in rags.

“Who are you?” he asked in a rough voice. “Why do you come here?”

Lady Marian woke and cried out.

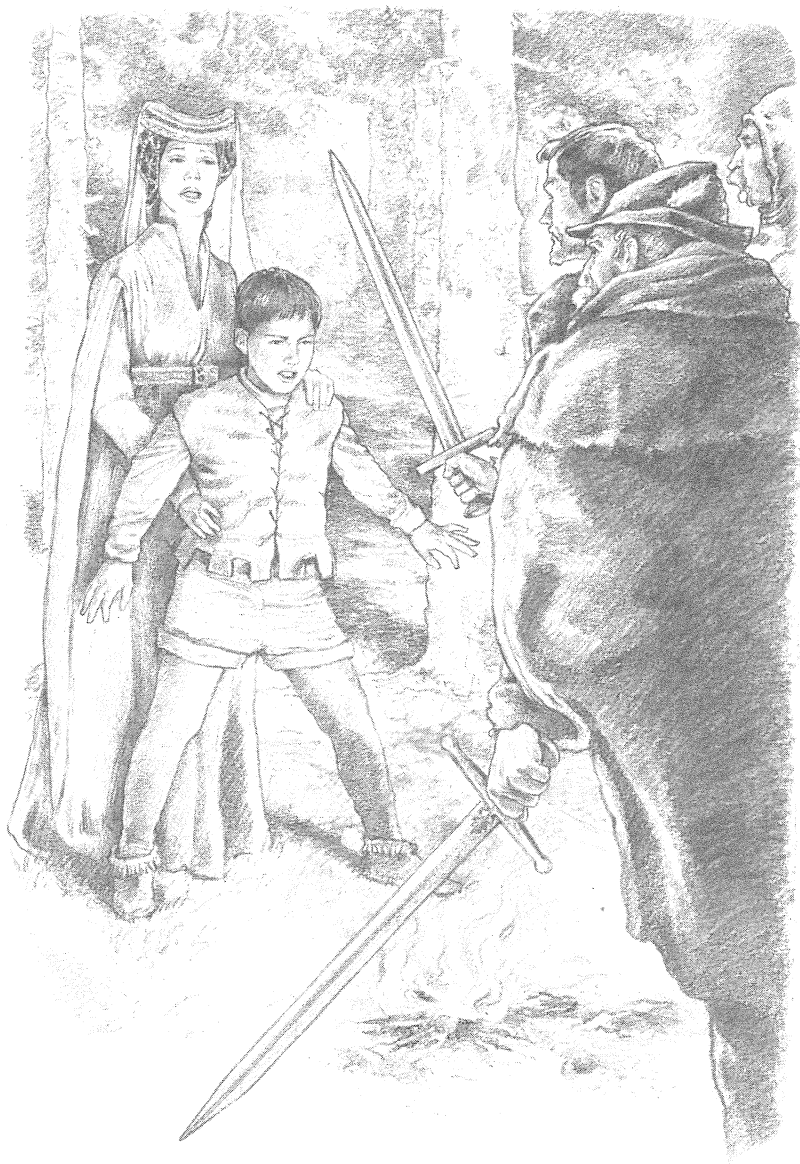
Shan got to his feet. “My mother and I are going to the next town,” he said. “We stopped here for rest and sleep.”

“Are you alone?” asked the man.

“You can see we are alone,” said Lady Marian.

“Stay and rest, then,” said the man, “but we’ll have your purses before we go.”

Lady Marian threw her purse at the man’s feet. “You are brave men,” she said, “to rob a woman and a boy.”



“Hold your tongue.” The robber said to Shan, “Quick, boy, your purse!”

Shan gave the robber his purse. “There is nothing much in it,” he said. “Only a tinderbox, some string, and a few coins. Will you take the coins and leave me the rest?”

The robber looked into the purse.

“We have not had food for a long time,” said Shan. “I need the string to make a trap to catch rabbits. I need the tinderbox so that we may have a fire.”

The robbers went back into the shadows. They talked in low voices.

Shan saw one of them put something down on a stone. Then they disappeared into the woods.

Shan went to see what they had left. “Mother,” he said, “here is my tinderbox and string!”

“The jewels and money are gone,” she said.

“But here is something else,” said Shan.  
“Look.”

It was a loaf of bread.

“I want no gift from a robber,” she said.

Shan broke the loaf in two and put half down beside her. He began to eat the other half.

“The bread is good,” he said.

She looked at the half loaf beside her. She picked it up and tasted it.

“The bread *is* good,” she said, “and I should not be so proud when I am hungry.”  
She began to eat.

When they had eaten the loaf, Shan found more dry wood to burn. Then they lay down by the fire and rested until morning.