

Moonblade

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Nolan is a simple boy. He is a peasant. He has grown up with nothing special about him and had dreamed of becoming a knight. One day he gets his chance...

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Chapter 1 - The Peasant

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1 - The Peasant

Nolan woke with a start from a restless sleep. His blankets were twisted around his legs and his pillow was damp with sweat. He'd had a nightmare again, the same one that he'd had so often of late. The one where he dreamt of a battlefield, and every time he woke right as that axe came down on his head. He opened and closed his eyes several times, trying to rid himself of the image of the shining steel blade inches from his face, but it did not go away, it never did.

Nolan opened his eyes one final time to look around the moonlit room. It was dark, the dark of the early morning hours when nothing stirs. The full moon shone through the window and made deep shadows in the room. The room itself was almost empty. It held the bed that Nolan sat upon and a chest to store clothes. The only other thing was a stick sitting on the chest, one end sharpened and the other crossed with another stick a fraction of its size and tied in place. It was not much, but it was Nolan's most prized possession, it was his sword. With the sword he could learn to fight and with fighting skill he could become a knight. It was a big dream, for someone of Nolan's rank, but it was a dream that he strived for every day of his life.

Nolan turned and slid off his bed, his feet hitting the cold earthen floor and he shivered compulsively. It was fall, so the ground had not yet frozen, though the air became chill at night. Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, Nolan stood up and walked to his chest. He carefully picked up the homemade sword as though it was made of glass and set it carefully on the floor. Opening the chest he took out a woolen sweater and pulled it on over the clothes that he had gone to sleep in. He then went to the door and opened it to the cool night breeze. The full moon was blazing in the sky and it was light enough outside to see every little detail, though everything lay cloaked in shadow. It was late for a walk, but Nolan knew that he would not be able to sleep after such a nightmare. The only time that he had tried, he had woken only a little later in the night from the same nightmare. It was more restful just to rest his mind and wander around outside his house.

He stepped outside the little house, hardly more than a hut in size, and walked to the back of the house, scuffing his bare feet in the dry dirt. A dog came towards him as he rounded the corner of the house.

"Hello mutt." he said to it kindly, not knowing its name and never having bothered to ask. The dog walked to him and leaned its shoulder against his leg. He reached down a gentle hand and petted the dog behind its ears. Its tongue came lazily out of its mouth as it sat enjoying the scratching. When he stopped, it got up and started to walk away, then stopped half way across the yard and looked at the ground suspiciously.

"What is it dog?" He asked quietly, more for the sake of hearing his own voice in the silence than in question to the dog.

The dog looked back as Nolan spoke but then turned its head back at the ground as if something was there. Nolan walked across the yard to where the dog was, wondering why the dog would have stopped. Whimpering slightly, it began to paw at the ground, first gently then more insistently as if digging a hole. Nolan looked to where it dug and spied something in the dirt. Something that shined like silver he thought, and then as a flash of the axe came through his head he realized that it could be some sort of weapon. He fell to his knees and began digging where the dog was, pushing it aside without thought.

Sinking his fingers into the dry dirt he began to dig, first the dirt came away slowly, hard from lack of rain, then as he got further in to the dirt it began to come off a bit easier and he was soon shoveling away handfuls as he uncovered the strange silver object. After the first few handfuls were off the object, a rounded knob of some sort lay exposed. He touched it carefully, wishing with every fiber of his being that it was actually what it appeared to be. He began to dig more quickly, his eyes straining to see what he discovered with only the light of the moon.

Later he looked down at what was exposed from the ground. There was a hole, and sticking out of the ground in the hole was unmistakably the hilt of a sword. He reached down to grasp it, his small hands barely reaching around the handle as he pulled it from the ground. First it did not move, but then with his feet braced on either side of the hole, Nolan managed to get it to budge a couple of inches. Then as he pulled more it came more quickly until the entire thing was pulled clear of the dirt. The weight of it being too much for little Nolan, he lay it on the ground looking at it with wide amazed eyes. He was panting from the exertion of pulling something from the ground that was half the size he was. It was a long sword. A real steel long sword with a polished silver circle set into the hilt. It would be worth a fortune to sell, once he had cleaned it up a bit and polished the silver to show it was real. If he sold it, he knew that he would have enough money to support him and his mother for several years. Knowing what he must do, he picked up the sword as best he could, though the end still dragged on the ground and carried it to the front of the house, leaving a small trench where the point dragged in the ground. He had to set it down half way, and give his arms a rest from carrying the thing, enormous to him, but he made it to the front of the house. The forgotten dog followed behind silently, looking for another scratch from the boy.

Nolan looked around at the surrounding fields. There was no one around so it would be safe for him to leave it outside as he went to get his mother. He set it down hesitantly, as though sad to leave it alone, but he did, letting go of the hilt and letting it fall to the ground with a soft thud. He opened the door quickly, no longer being carefully quiet so as not to wake his mother.

"Mother?" he called out to the darkness of the room. "Mother I've found something for you."

"Nolan? Is that you?" came the sleepy reply from his mother's room.

"Yes mother, it's me. I've found something for you." He said again.

"Okay," she said with a loud groan, "I'm getting up." And he heard the rustling of her bed as she rolled to the side and got up.

"What is it?" she asked her eyes half closed as she looked at the silhouette of her son with the full moon shining through the door behind him.

"Come outside and I'll show you." He said, starting to get excited.

"Yes," she said tolerantly as she followed Nolan out the door.

"Look," he said, lifting the hilt of the sword as high as he could, though the point still did not leave the ground. "I found a sword mother. I can clean it and then we can sell it and you won't have to worry about feeding us again." He said, happy yet said at the same time.

His mother's eyes widened at the sight of the sword, nearly half the size of her son. She did not know where it had come from, but it was an amazing find. She didn't know quite what to say to Nolan though, she wanted the money that it would bring them, but she could not sell what could possibly bring the ten year old's dream come true.

"No." she said at last. "We cannot sell that."

"But why mother? Why can't we sell it?" he asked, confused that she was not happy when he was so sure that she would be.

"Because you should have it. After all, what is a knight without a sword?" She said smiling.

Nolan's eyes widened at the thought of getting to keep the sword and living out his dream, and this time he was the one left speechless. He wanted it that was true, he wanted it more than anything he had ever wanted before, but he did not think he could keep it knowing all of the money that it could bring them.

"But mother," he said, finding his voice at last.

"Don't 'but mother' me!" she said, pointing a finger at him, "You're keeping it, and that's final."

"Thank you mother!" Nolan said, dropping the sword and running to hug his mother as she patted his head in a motherly fashion.

"But you have to tell me the story of how you came upon such a thing," she said then her voice became suddenly stricter as she looked down at him, "and what you're doing out of bed this late. She said steering the boy inside the house and then going back to pick up the heavy sword. She could lift it, though barely. She only bothered to slide it inside the door before closing the door and going to sit down on Nolan's bed to tuck him in.

"I thought you wanted to hear my story?" he asked as she began tucking the blankets around his chin.

"Tomorrow is another day." She said gently, laying her hand on his shoulder. "You should sleep now." She said then sat with him as he slowly drifted off into a dreamless sleep.

As the morning sun shone through the window and the birds began to call to each other Nolan opened his eyes, his mind slowly returning to wakefulness. He sat up slowly and sleepily, reaching up to gently rub the sleep from his eyes. His eyelids felt heavy and his limbs felt sluggish from his deep sleep. He

had not slept well the night before and was plagued by strange dreams. He did not know what the dream was about because he could remember nothing of it, only a lingering sense of strangeness. He sat there in bed for a time, thinking before he got up and pulled on his day clothes. He walked across the room and into his mother's room, it was empty as she was already awake, and probably out checking for eggs for breakfast. He turned to walk out the door and faced the mirror that his mother had hung on the wall.

He looked, surprised as usual at the man looking back at him, he was looking more like his father every day, or so his mother said. He was seventeen, not still a boy, yet still not a man. His slightly long messy brown hair covered his ears and barely brushed the collar of his shirt in the back. He combed his fingers through it to make it lay down and surveyed himself in the mirror. His eyes were blue, a bright blue, that his mother said was such an unusual color. Only in the last several years had he grown taller than his mother, and was now at a respectable height, with the promise of more before he was fully grown. He wasn't a slim lad, for he had gained muscle along with his height. He reached up and rubbed his chin, the rough start of a beard yet to be shaved off, and looked at his strong face, resembling his father's, that had lost almost all touches of its childlike softness.

Turning from the mirror, Nolan opened the door and walked through it to the smells of early spring. The snow had melted only days ago, and the air was still chill with winter though the sun promised for a warm day. He heard the sounds of disturbed chickens and followed his ears to the source, where he found his mother gathering eggs for breakfast.

"Morning Mum," Nolan said, smiling at his mother, as she looked up from her basket.

"Good morning Nolan," she said, returning his smile, "how did you sleep?"

"Great," he lied, not wanting to spoil her morning with his troubles.

"That's good," she said, returning to her chore. "Are you going to milk Sam now? You usually do it when you wake, but you are awake rather early this morning."

"Yes I was just headed there." he said, "I will bring the milk so we can have it with breakfast."

"Careful not to spill any." she called over her shoulder to him as he turned from the chicken coup to walk quickly to the barn.

He took a clean bucket off a peg near the barn door and took the cow from its stall. "Morning Sam," he said to calm the cow as he set to milking her. Once finished he returned her to her stall and walked slowly back to the house, careful not to spill the spoils of his labor and earn a reprimand from his mother. From outside the door he could smell the eggs cooking and he hurried inside to the warm food.

Once breakfast was finished, Nolan returned to his room to get a coat before returning outdoors. As he entered the room, he paused, seeing the sword. It sat on a small table next to his bed with the rest of his meager possessions though it meant more to him than anything else he owned. It had no sheath; he had not found it with one and did not have the money to purchase one on his own, so it just laid there, the blade naked to the world.

Nolan did not know how to use it, or any other weapon for that matter, but he still cherished it because it

reminded him of his dream and of his mother's love. If they had sold the sword when he'd found it seven years ago they would never have had to sell most of their livestock. Sometimes Nolan felt guilty about what his mother had given up just to give him a chance at his dream, but when she noticed she told him that it was not his choice, she had chosen to keep the sword that day and to give it to him. Consider it seventeen years worth of birthing day gifts that I never had the money to buy you." she would say, making him feel better.

He walked over to the chest near his bed, never taking his eyes off the sword; it was if he was drawn to it. Opening the lid, his gaze left the table to pick up a brown jacket and to close the lid. Leaving the house, Nolan's thoughts still rested on what that sword could mean to his dream.

Shortly after that, Nolan left the house and his mother behind to go to the small nearby town to buy the supplies that they could not make themselves. They did a fair job of growing food to support themselves, and a little more to sell to the town, but there were some things such as materials for clothes that Nolan had to purchase from another.

Nolan rode down the bumpy road towards town, his butt leaving the seat with the force of the bumps that the rough made wagon hit. He held the reigns of the single horse that pulled the wagon steadily along towards town. The horse, raised from a colt by Nolan with his mother's guidance, looked to the wagon as a pearl to a rock. The horse was healthy and fit, with a glossy coat and mane and intelligent eyes. It placed its hooves daintily around the holes in the path.

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As the small wagon rolled into town, Nolan began to recognize the familiar faces of the townspeople that he had known for all of his life. The blacksmith, the baker, the cobbler, all people who had known his father, and in turn had come to know him.

"Good Afternoon Nolan," The miller called out as the wagon passed his house.

"Good afternoon old man," Nolan called back jokingly to the man, whose black hair was barely streaked with grey.

"Not so young yourself Kid," The miller said to Nolan as his wagon rolled past.

With a nod here and there, and more smiles than there were people, the trip to town was always enjoyable. Nolan learned news of the kingdom to carry back to his mother, and got to visit people that he rarely saw at the same time. Though Nolan had a few friends closer to home, where he lived the land was sparsely populated, and other than his best friend Povar and his cousin Kalem there were few young men his age.

Not that Nolan really needed any other people to get in trouble with. He and Povar had more "adventures" than he could possibly remember. One time they had snuck into old Killanany's land, and

went to his chicken coup, stealing all of his chickens. They had stealthily put them all into crates and hidden them just behind his barn, leaving stray feathers in strategic locations so it looked as though a predator had gotten all of the hens. Then they proceeded to go just far enough to be able to run if they had to, but close enough that they could hear his vehement reaction when he thought that all of his chickens were eaten. He had found the chickens... eventually...

Nolan saw the small store of the weaver just down the street and he steered the wagon into the narrow alley beside it. He called Blaze the horse to a halt next to the store and jumped lightly to the ground. He hitched Blaze to the post next to the building near a water trough that the horse immediately stuck his muzzle in to drink. Walking carefully to avoid the remnants left from the areas last horses, Nolan walked around the building to the door and without knocking swung it open to reveal a beautifully colored, well lit room.

"I'm back Nana," he announced smiling as he scanned the room containing its various looms and thick bolts of cloth.

"Not again!" came a mock ferocious reply as a grandmotherly figure stepped out from behind a loom of half finished dark blue fabric. Her wavy, shoulder length, silvery grey hair was tied back with a piece of string that looked to be from the fabric that sat in front of her, and her clothes looked new and bright with color as they were covered by little bits of string and cloth and had occasional pins stuck in the sleeves. She was not a tall woman, but she clearly radiated a friendly aura and was currently trying to scowl at him, and not grin as her dimpled cheeks implied.

"I haven't seen you in nearly three months you young rascal, you must be maturing and not wrecking all of the clothes that your mother works so hard to make every month."

"Yes and no," he said sitting down on the nearest empty chair, "now I just outgrow them."

"I see," she said, getting down to business. "What'll it be?"

"Mother said that I need.." he reached down and pulled a crumpled piece of paper out of his coat pocket, "brown for some good coats, some nice colors for shirts, and whatever is the least expensive and will hold up well enough for trousers," he said reading off both sides of the small piece of paper, "she said you would know what's best for sewing better than I would."

"Of course I do," she said, gesturing to the room filled with fabrics of every color, pattern, and texture, "I make it."

She got up quickly, grabbing a pair of shears and started hurrying around the little store. She cut off a length of blue fabric then looked up expectantly, "Well come take it," she said.

Nolan jumped to his feet and quickly took the material only to be thrust another every few seconds. He began to pile the fabric on the recently vacated chair when he could no longer hold it all in his arms. When they were finished and all of the fabrics were secured in the back of the wagon, covered with a waxed canvas tarp, Nolan returned to the shop to a small table in the corner next to an overflowing desk where Nana was pouring tea.

“Now dear, I’m sure you’re wanting to hear the news of the town now that business is settled,” she said as she saw him walk in.

“Yes Nana, tell me everything you know,” Nolan said, hugging the small woman around her shoulders before sitting down in the chair across from her.

Well, let’s see... Did you hear about McAleve’s heard being attacked?” she asked, Nolan nodded and she continued, “How about Kilema’s newborn?” Nolan shook his head; “It’s a lovely baby girl, she’s been named Jessabel and has the most beautiful little brown eyes. She was born--say about four weeks ago--and has caused Kilema no end of problems.” Nana said, settling down into her storytelling mode that could go on for hours. They went back and forth telling stories and asking questions, thus the conversation continued; Nana telling Nolan all of the town’s gossip such as who’s going to marry who and who’s son was caught out in the barn with someone else’s daughter. Nolan told her of how life in the country was and how his mother had been fairing of late.

“You’ve heard about the call to arms right?” she asked Nolan, surprising him with the sudden change of topic.

“Call to arms?” he asked in wonder.

“Yes, the king has called for an army to combat the raider attacks.” Nana said, having assumed that Nolan already knew. Nolan just stared at her with a shocked look on his face trying to register what a call to arms could mean for his dream. He had not heard anything about a call to arms and was amazed that she had actually said those words.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, I thought you would have already known about it, everyone has been talking about it for months.” Nana said in reply to the dazed look on Nolan’s face, “Let me explain more: because of the attacks on our southeastern border by unknown raiders, King Frayamel decided to form an army powerful enough to take on this unknown foe. He called for men over the age of fifteen to try out for the chance; he wants only the best of the best. There’s a deadline for people to sign up, I’m not sure when it is. Then they say that all of the men who sign up will be trained for six months and the best of each group chosen for this elite army of his.” She said, trying to remember all of the details in order to tell Nolan.

“When is the deadline?” Nolan asked, suddenly finding his voice and jumping to his feet.

“There’s a flyer here somewhere,” she said, standing and indicating the pile of papers on the desk behind her. She went to the desk, flipping through the papers as she searched for the right one.

“Ah, here it is. Looks as if the deadline is... one week from today.”

“One week from today! I have to get home and tell mother, and tell Povar he will be so excited, this could be our big chance, I could get into this army, I’m old enough, maybe Povar could as well, mother would be so proud.” Nolan said, talking quickly and rambling on slightly in his excitement. “I’ve got to go Nana,” he said hugging her with a smile that about split his face in two, “Thank you for everything!” he shouted on his way out the door.

“Wait, take this” Nana said, laughing herself at the boy’s happiness. She ran after him, and caught up with him at the door. She shoved the flyer into his hand and wished him good luck as he was gone in a flash. She sighed to herself, oh to be young again.

Nolan returned home later that evening still incredibly excited from the news. He had rushed in and told his mother all about it, and about how happy he was, and wasn’t she happy too? he’d asked when he saw the shadowed look in her eyes even though there was a smile plastered to her face. She’d reassured him that she was very happy for him, though the look in her eyes had not gone away. The more that Nolan thought the look that he had seen the night before, the less he understood why his mother would have that shadowed look in her eyes. After all, he was finally getting a chance at his dream to become a knight. Through out his life his mother had always told him that the first thing that he could do was to follow his dreams. It must have been my imagination he decided finally, though was still not happy with his own answer. Now that the excitement from the day before had started to wear off, Nolan had begun to realize that him going away for the minimum of six months was going to be very hard on his mother, let alone if he was somehow accepted into the elite army. She would have to do all of the chores around the house and also to run to town if there were any emergencies. He knew that she was capable of it, but it is not easy to live alone, especially when you are used to having someone around to help, and to do all of the difficult jobs that can be difficult when you lack the height of a man. But that was not what had caused the shadowed look in his mother’s eyes. She was never one to worry about work, she was completely capable of doing everything that needed done and if he even suggested that they ask someone for help she would get huffy and insist that they fix it themselves so even asking her to stay with someone else for the six months he would be gone was out of the question.

It would be hard for Nolan to leave his mother alone, but he knew that if he wanted to become a knight, he could not be held back by simple homesickness. He had the will for it, and he felt that if he could only go that everything would be perfect and he could be a knight, though something told him that it was a childish way to think, after all the flyer had said that only the best would be chosen. He would have to work hard for this.

Though his mother had encouraged him to return in the morning to town and sign up for the six month training camp, Nolan had decided to wait and see if Povar would be going with him, then they could go to town together. When Povar’s had come over first thing in the morning, Nolan had been happy to tell him about the call to arms. Povar had been equally excited as Nolan had and had taken off to go tell his own family. Nolan was really hoping that his family would want him to try out as well then he would have someone that he knew at the six month camp.

Nolan looked down at the sock that he was supposed to be darning and realized that he had barely even started. Lost in thought from the moment that he picked the needle, he realized that it was pointless to try to continue. He went to the small window and looked outside, waiting for Povar to return and give him the news. Then he could go to town and officiate everything. The road was empty, the mud

from last night's rainstorm bearing only the tracks of Povar's coming and going that morning. He let out a loud sigh and turned to find his mother watching him.

"He'll be here soon enough Nolan," she said calmly, smiling at his slightly childish impatience.

"I know mother, I'm just nervous. What if I get there and they won't let me even sign the papers? What if Povar can but I can't for some reason?"

"Everything's going to be fine." She said soothingly.

"I've just never been this nervous before."

"You have never had any reason to be this nervous Nolan, but don't worry, the worst that can happen is that you come home and life is as it has been." She looked to the chair where the sock lay with the bare needle stuck into it and smiled gently. "It's not so bad here is it?"

"No, I love it here. That's part of the reason why I am hesitant to leave," he said, looking again out the window. "Besides, how are we going to afford the equipment that I need?"

"You will not need much. I'm sure that the training camp will supply practice equipment, and you already have a sword. Everything's going to be fine," she repeated.

"He's here!" Nolan announced upon hearing the footfalls of Povar's horse. He quickly went to the door, and opened it, waiting for Povar.

Povar slowed his horse and dropped to the ground even before it had stopped moving, his excitement was apparent in his frame. His steps were light and his head held high as if he was about to burst from happiness. He walked into the house and pulled down his hood, his smile growing as he saw his friend.

"They said yes!" he said lunging forward to hug Nolan.

"Yuck, you're all wet," Nolan said laughing as he tried to avoid Povar's hug as usual.

“Of course I’m wet dimwit, it’s raining,” he said taking off the wet coat.

“So I take it you boys are going to head to town?” Nolan’s mother interrupted the two’s friendly bantering. “You had better wait until the rain lets up or you’ll catch something.”

“But mother, we have to go now, there’s a deadline.” Nolan tried to say.

“No buts about it, I don’t want you catching a cold and you know as well as I that that deadline is not for another week.”

“There could be a limited number of people accepted.” Povar added, trying to help Nolan win the argument so that they could get on their way to town.

“Well since no one else will be stupid enough to go out in this rain, I’m sure you will have no problems,” she said in a cheery voice.

“Uhhh” they groaned at the same time.

The rain let up in less than an hour and the two young men were on their way to town. By the time they arrived, the sun was out and the sky was blue and the world was awake with the hustle and bustle of daily life. It was a peaceful trip to town, Nolan and Povar were so excited and so happy to be signing up that they forgot about all of their worries and simply drove along talking about all of the good things that could happen and passing the flyer back and forth reading it aloud to each other the whole trip.

Before they knew it they were signed up with the King’s army and on their way back home. Because of their delayed departure, Nolan did not return home until after dark. When he climbed off his horse he looked up and found his mother waiting at the door. He walked blaze into the stable and gave him a good rubdown and handful of oats. He returned to the house to find his mother still waiting in the doorway. She smiled softly, not speaking and took his arm, leading him around the back of the house where the old shed was. They never used the shed and Nolan could not even remember what was in it, and when he started to ask his mother to explain, she let go of his arm and put a finger to her lips and made a small shushing sound. She lifted an old rusted lock that he had never even noticed on the door and lightly turned it over revealing a keyhole. She reached up to her neck and pulled on a string that he had never noticed before. She lifted the key that hung on the end of it and placed it in the keyhole, turning it slowly. He could hear the rustiness of the gears as it turned. It opened with a soft click and she slowly removed it from the door as if she was afraid that she would disturb something. She turned back to him and took his hand, placing it on the handle to the door and giving him a nod.

Realizing that this was very important to his mother, Nolan tightened his grip on the handle and slowly opened the door to reveal a room that looked as though it got very little use. He turned back to his mother with a questioning look and she raised an arm and pointed inside as though telling him that he could go in. He stepped up and into the room hesitantly, he was slightly afraid that he would do something wrong and upset his mother. He had to duck his head to get in the doorway but once inside he could stand up straight. He was not quite sure what lay on the shelves that lined the walls, for it was dark as night inside, the light of twilight not quite being able to shine in the door. His mother stepped in behind him, short enough not to have to duck, and reached to a place on the shelf where he could tell something lay. She lifted it and he realized it a candle. Taking a tinderbox from another shelf she lit the candle and the flickering candle light quickly bathed the room in a warm glow.

Nolan's eyes widened as he realized what lay on the shelves. There were knives and swords and several dangerous looking axes and other oddities that looked quite treacherous. There was a low table at one end of the room and he stepped forward to see a full suit of armor laid out in order. All of the room was blanketed in such a thick layer of dust that the steel weapons did not reflect much of the light from the candle, but the armor he noticed held almost no dust.

"What is all of this?" Nolan asked, his voice no more than a whisper.

"Your father's legacy," she said sadly, "and all I have left of him."

Nolan looked again at the armor that lay on the table then back to his mother. "You said that father worked as a page in the castle," he said, slightly hurt that his mother had not told him the truth.

"As he did, when he was a boy," she said walking to the table and sitting on the corner of it to lay a delicate hand on the armor, "I did not tell you that he became a knight because I was worried that I would lose you to the same fate. Now I realize that it is something in you, something that your father gave you that you cannot be a simple peasant. A knight fathered you and a knight you will be before your life is through," she said, and Nolan realized that there were tears in her eyes. "It's in your blood. Enough of your father's was spilled to prove that," she was almost crying now, her voice shaking with the effort of what she told him. Nolan went to her and hugged her tight as she wept. "I don't want to lose you too," she whispered through her sobs.

“You won’t lose me mother, I’m here. I will always be here for you,” he said, not quite sure what to do to make her feel better. He held her in his arms, slightly uncomfortable as he had been lately, with the fact that he was now bigger than her, and realized that it was not his arms that she needed to be held in. But his father was gone, and he would never get to meet him.

She eventually fell asleep in his arms, after telling him many stories of his father in between bouts of crying. It was not her fault. She had raised her son, the last thing that she had to remind herself of the love her and his father shared, and now he was going away. Nolan was slightly glad that his mother had waited until after he signed up to tell him. Had she told him before he would never have been able to make that trip to town, let alone in the spirits that he had.

Nolan reached down and carefully picked up his mother, surprised by the light feel of her delicate frame. She was in a deep sleep, brought more from remembered grief than from tiredness. He carried her through the door that she had left open with her preoccupied mind and to her bed. Carefully laying her down and removing her shoes, Nolan began tucking the covers around her and noticed the key on the string, now laying on the outside of her clothes instead of tucked secretly inside. He slowly untied the knot and pulled it from her neck then covered her well. He blew out the bedside candle and closed the door to her room before returning to the shed.

Ducking again to get in the door, Nolan’s mind kept running the things his mother had told him through his head. His father, a knight. Not just a knight but a famous one at that. He had never imagined such a thing before. As a young boy Nolan had been proud to say that his father had worked for the king in the castle before he had died. The other children had been impressed, being children of simple farmers but their amazement still did not make up for the hollowness that he felt every time they talked about the things that they had done with their fathers. Now he knew what his father had actually done and he felt awful to be leaving his mother. She must be heartbroken.

Going back to the table where the armor lay, Nolan picked up the empty sheath that his mother had given him. She had said that it was the only reason that she had brought him here. She wanted him to have something of his father to take away with him, for luck and for practicality. She had assured him that the sword fit perfectly, she had tried it. When he had asked what happened to his father’s sword she had begun crying again, and the question was left unanswered. He shoved it in his belt and left the shed, closing the door and locking it with the key he had removed from his mother’s neck. He tied the ends of the string and put the key around his own neck for safe keeping.

When he returned to the house and his room, Nolan picked up the sword that he had found so long ago. He turned it over in his hands, marveling at the make of it, and rubbing a finger on the silver circle in the hilt as he always felt an

impulse to do. He lifted it as though he was going to fight someone, smiling despite his sad mood and carefully turned the blade back towards himself and slid it into the sheath. His mother was right, it fit perfectly. He laid sword in sheath down on the table and crawled into his bed, blowing out the candle, though he did not fall asleep until nearly daybreak.