

Guinevere stared into the shadows along the edge of the forest. She could hear Cedwyn shifting from foot to foot beside her, unable to stand still. She sighed, the bow made of sturdy pine in her hand growing heavier. Her thirteenth Birth Day was in a few days, but she wasn't excited. Birth Days were supposed to be fun, but not this year. Not for her, not for a princess.

She frowned as Cedwyn adjusted the leather quiver of arrows on his back again. Sometimes, like today, her patience with the seven-year-old was short.

"Guin'ver?"

"Hush!"

"But ..."

"Hush!"

Guinevere stamped her boot on the ground. Her displeasure clearly showing on her lightly tanned face, she turned to him.

"Cedwyn," she snapped. "What is so important that you can't be quiet?"

"I'm hungry, and the bottoms of my trousers are wet. Can't we go back to the castle?" His face showed his confusion at her tone.

Guinevere realized that she should not have directed her anger at Cedwyn. It wasn't his fault. Glancing down at her own clothes, she saw the bottom of her green ankle-length tunic wet with the morning dew. Her stomach chose that moment to issue forth with a small rumbling, but one that Cedwyn heard. He started giggling and then clamped his small hand over his mouth. But he was too late.

"How are we ever going to shoot a rabbit with all this noise?" Guinevere asked. Then she reached down and tousled his blond hair to let him know that she was not serious and as an apology for her crossness. "Let's try for just ten minutes longer. Then if we find nothing, we'll go back. Is that all right?"

Cedwyn shook his head, not wanting to make any further noise.

The English summer sun had barely reached above the far hills when they had first arrived at the edge of the forest. Now, it was well on its way in its climb toward the dinner hour, and they hadn't even had a proper breakfast yet. Cedwyn's mum was sure to be upset that they had been gone so long.

"Come on," he whispered. "The only creatures we've seen moving have been badgers and Cornish hens. We could of had five bloody hens by now."

"I told you, it's good luck to bag a rabbit on the eve of your thirteenth Birth Day," Guinevere informed him.

Cedwyn studied her face, unsure if she was telling the truth or not. Then his blue eyes widened, and he grabbed her arm as she turned to continue hunting. "Wait a minute! You promised to help me bag a rabbit on the eve of my tenth Birth Day. You said that was lucky!"

Guinevere turned to him, her balled fists on her slim hips. "You need to listen closer when I talk to you. I explained the difference between boys and girls. Boys have to seek luck on the eve of their tenth and fifteenth Birth Days. Since girls are naturally luckier than boys, they only have to seek luck once, on the eve of their thirteenth Birth Days."

Cedwyn eyed her suspiciously, and then his eyes lit up.

"But I thought that the eve was the night before. Your Birth Day isn't until the day after tomorrow."

"That's true, but the eve of something can also be anytime close to the day."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I am! Otherwise, what would happen if the day before I didn't get a rabbit? This way there are more chances to get one. Now, let's go. I'm sure I saw movement at the edge of the forest earlier." She didn't mention to him that she needed lots of luck.

Cedwyn obediently followed her, mumbling to himself. "We're still running out of time."

They hadn't gone far when Cedwyn thought of something else.

"Guin'?"

She turned suddenly, her long brown braid whipping about. "Shh! You will scare the rabbits away!"

"But you also promised to teach me how to hunt with a bow and arrow once you are thirteen."

"Yes, but if you don't stop your chatter, I won't. Do you understand?" Cedwyn nodded. "Then let's go."

Cedwyn followed, a smile highlighting his chubby cheeks. He then promptly ran into the back of Guinevere who had abruptly stopped.

"Wha..." A hand clamped down over his mouth followed by an angry "Shh!"

Cedwyn moved quietly up to her side, his seven-year old frame about half the size of Guinevere. She looked down at him, excitement making her brown eyes sparkle in the midmorning light. Her lips formed the word "Look." His blue eyes followed her outstretched arm.

There, just past the edge of the forest where the wild grasses grew-- movement. He concentrated on the spot. Then the tall green stalks moved again, betraying the presence of something beneath.

"How can you tell if it's really a rabbit?" he asked softly.

"See how the stalks move forward a bit and then part?" Cedwyn nodded. "Well, the forward movement of the stalks is the rabbit testing out the goodness of the food. And then where the grasses part---that is---when the rabbit stops and starts feeding," Guinevere said, her pride in her knowledge showing. "Hand me an arrow." She held out her hand as Cedwyn pulled an arrow from the small leather quiver on his back.

Very carefully, her heart pounding, Guinevere nocked the arrow and steadily drew the bow string back. Taking a deep breath to steady her arms, she let the arrow loose. She watched the spin of the feathers as the arrow sped to its target.

Suddenly a horrendous cry filled the air. Guinevere and Cedwyn jumped into each other's arms. Then they knelt down on the ground and covered their ears as the shrill cry continued to make their ears ring.

"Wh...what is that?" Cedwyn whispered.

Guinevere shook her head in reply.

Then they heard a different sound. Something was crashing through the grasses and thickets. Slowly they inched their way up to peek above the grass. There, crashing and charging around the thickets, was the biggest wild boar they had ever seen.

Cedwyn looked at Guinevere. "Ain't that your arrow sticking in its side?"

She nodded, almost appearing disinterested, but really in shock that she had hit anything. For a few moments, they watched as the boar first ran in one direction and then another in what appeared to be a crazed pattern. But Guinevere recognized the pattern: the boar was searching for its hunters.

"Come on," she said, grabbing his hand. "We have to get out of here now!"

"Why?"

But then Cedwyn had his answer. The boar roared in anger. The ground trembled under their feet. Both he and Guinevere turned in the direction of the noise. The boar spotted them and barreled straight for them. It had found the culprits responsible for the arrow in its side.

"Run!" Guinevere said, no longer quiet.

Cedwyn needed no further urging. He took off with Guinevere close behind him. The thunderous crashing of the boar through the grasses and scrub brush vibrated through every part of their bodies.

Guinevere chanced a look behind her and realized that the boar was gaining on them. She glanced around. There off to the right was a tree that Cedwyn could climb to get up out of danger. He was the slower of them although they were each running faster than they ever had before. At the same time that Guinevere reached for Cedwyn's shoulder, she heard a thud, and her hand

closed around nothing. Cedwyn cried out as he hit the ground after tripping over a root.

She reached down to help him up, but his foot was stuck solid. Seeing the boar thunder closer, Guinevere looked around. If she made enough noise, she could get the boar to follow her into the edge of the forest. That would give Cedwyn time to get loose and up the tree.

"I'll lead the boar into the forest. Get yourself free and then head for that tree." Cedwyn looked in the direction Guinevere pointed. "Get up in it as far as you can go and hang on until I let you know it's safe to come down. All right?"

Cedwyn nodded, his blue eyes wide with fear.

"Stay down and be still until you hear from me. Then be quick!"

He nodded again.

Guinevere jumped up and shouted, "Halloo boar! Here I am. Come and get me!" She waved her arms, diverting the boar's attention to her. Once spotted, she turned and ran, stopping only to see if the boar was following. One look told her it was, and, if possible, it was coming faster. "Cedwyn! Now!" Guinevere shouted, and then she ran for the safety of the trees.

Behind her, the boar charged blindly toward her. Thundering through the grasses and scrub brush, it focused only on reaching the creature responsible for its pain. Behind them, Cedwyn frantically dug and pulled on the root to free his foot.

"Guin'ver! I can't get my foot loose!"

"You have to! Try harder! Pull harder!"

Cedwyn dug and pulled some more until he felt his foot start to loosen. When he finally pulled free, he stood up and looked around. He spotted the boar in the distance still charging after Guinevere. With the boar heading toward the forest, Cedwyn ran for the tree. Grabbing branches, he pulled himself up until he was too high for the boar to reach.

"I'm in the tree!" Cedwyn yelled. Guinevere waved her hand and continued running.

Once inside the trees, she had to stop to let her eyes adjust to the darkness. She waited, the sounds of the boar growing louder. Finally, she could just make out a faint trail running parallel to the forest edge. Off she ran down the path, her eyes looking for some place to hide so that the boar would run past her.

Up ahead she saw a pine tree. Finding the last bit of speed inside of her, she reached the tree and jumped. Her hands grasped a low branch, and she started to pull herself up.

Before she could get a good hold, the whole tree shook. Guinevere screamed and struggled to hold on. As she grabbed tighter, she realized that if the boar succeeded in shaking her down, she wouldn't have her thirteenth Birth Day. She didn't know which would be worse: the boar or turning thirteen.