

The Rusty Sword

By Antonia Milani

Once upon a time, there was a king named Edward who was very happy, for that day his wife, Queen Eleanor, had given birth to a beautiful little girl whom they named Elaine. A year later he received a message from King Andrew, who had always been a good friend, asking if Elaine could be betrothed to his two-year-old son, Philip. King Edward was very pleased and said yes.

A neighboring king, King Norman, a long-time rival of King Andrew, heard of this arrangement and was very jealous. Although King Andrew had asked first, Norman thought his son should marry the princess, for his castle was so much closer to King Edward's castle than King Andrew's was. He put on his black armor with the red crest of a dragon on it, mounted his horse, and rode off in the direction of King Andrew's castle, intent to take revenge.

King Andrew had just returned home from business and was walking his horse slowly toward the castle. He looked down at his magnificent sword that had belonged to his great-grandfather, King Alfred, and was passed down to him. The sword had a strong, silver-gilded scabbard with blue designs and sapphires on the handle and the tip of the scabbard. The blade, when taken from its scabbard was pure metal, sharp, beautiful, but deadly. This sword had a spell put on it that it would always be the strongest, mightiest, most beautiful sword while in the hand or possession of King Alfred or any of his descendants, but if taken from him, or if being used for or by an evil hand, it would become rusty, ugly, and useless. He looked gratefully down at his sword, sighed, but then was suddenly wrested from his reverie by the pounding of hooves and turned just in time to see a dark clad rider charging towards him.

When King Norman saw King Andrew turn, his jealousy and anger grew. He thought of how proud King Andrew had always been of his sword, how he had always acted more important and better than him, how he asked first. He gave a huge yell, jumped off his horse, and rushed madly toward his lifetime rival. King Andrew was not prepared for this onslaught, but in a second's time he was on his feet, with his trusted sword, ready to defend himself. The battle was short—Norman's mad anger drove him on. He drove on mercilessly and soon Andrew lay on the ground, unconscious, with his sword laying a few feet from him. Norman ripped Andrew's scabbard off the injured king, flung the sword into it

away laughing crazily. Then King Norman rode toward King Edward's castle on another 'errand' of his.

That night, after returning from his evil errand at King Edward's castle, King Norman was sitting on his horse, in the middle of a forest, planning what to do next. He was holding the sword which he had stolen from King Andrew and a small girl whom he was trying to keep quiet. Just then, a large, black bear broke through the bushes behind him and roared loudly. King Norman, in his fear and surprise, dropped both sword and child, and fled, galloping away on his horse, caring only to save his own skin.

About fifteen years later, in a small cottage on the outskirts of a forest, at a table, sat a middle-aged shepherd, named James, his wife, Isabelle, and a girl he called his daughter. It was her sixteenth birthday and they were celebrating with a special dinner. He started to tell her about when she was younger. Many years before, he had been following a stray lamb when he came upon a small child, about one or two years old, sitting on the forest grass crying. Wrapped around her was a blanket with the name Elaine embroidered on it. He picked her up and brought her home where he and his wife raised her as their own.

Elaine, for that was her name, got up quickly and asked him why he had not told her before. He looked into her eyes, with tears in his, and told her softly that because of her strong disposition, he knew that once he told her she would want to leave at once to find out where she came from. Unfortunately, he was right and when she was ready the next day she left but not without tears of thankfulness and sadness.

She rode away on a pony she had been given in search of her real parents. As she rode, far ahead she could see people on the path. When they got closer, she could see they were three peasants carrying a bundle wrapped in a clean cloth. She asked what it was and they unwrapped the seemingly heavy object. It was a beautiful scabbard, silver-gilded, and with blue designs masterfully painted on it. Beautifully clear, blue sapphires studded the handle. She gasped, for it was the finest scabbard, though she had not seen many and even if she had, it would surely have been the most beautiful, scabbard she had ever seen.

The peasant smiled at her and said that it was indeed lovely, but then he frowned and told one of his companions to show her the sword. The peasant slowly pulled the sword out to show her. She was expecting a magnificent sword

but instead of her expectation there was an old-looking, rusty sword, useless for anything but stirring the ashes in a fire. She then asked what they were going to do with it and they said they were just going to go around and find out whose it was. They had found it the day before in a forest. They were amazed at how it was all miraculously preserved, all but the sword itself. She did not know why but she felt that she must have the sword and she begged them to exchange it for most of her food so that she herself could inquire of its owner in town. She fastened the scabbard around her waist and set off.

The fair maiden rode for days. Her horse and she were exhausted. When she had finished the rest of her food, she still rode on. soon afterward, to her great relief, she saw a village far off in the distance. She began to have hope when suddenly from behind a tree a knight in dark armor appeared. His armor was black as night with a red dragon crest on it and his sword was of the same design. He drew his sword and demanded hers, but she refused. He started to advance and she turned to run, but coming towards her was a huge, black bear. She screamed and fainted.

When she awakened, she found herself in the arms of a handsome young prince. He brought her before his father, the king, and she was asked to tell her story. The king noticed a sack she was carrying which had the word "Elaine" embroidered on it. The sword she wore also caught the king's eye and he asked why such a fair damsel was wearing such a dangerous weapon. Elaine told them all that she knew and asked if anyone could tell her about her family or the rusty sword. When she finished, the king said that he was King Andrew, his son was Prince Philip, and he told all about that battle long ago and how he had lost his sword. He asked for the sword which, when she took out of its scabbard, was still the rusty sword the peasants had given her, but when the king's hand touched it, it was transformed into the beautiful, majestic sword he loved. King Andrew also explained that the bear was the magician that had put the spell on the sword so many years ago and now the magician decided to retire in the woods in the form of a bear to do good there. He also told her the cause of it all—her hand in marriage. He told her of his dear friends, her parents, and where they lived.

Then after beseeching to be excused, she left immediately to meet her newfound parents. It was a very joyful and happy reunion and according to King Edward's promise, long ago, Philip and Elaine were married not long afterward.

Elaine did not forget the shepherd and his wife who had raised her and soon invited them to stay with her in the castle.

After they were married and moved to a castle of their own, King Andrew presented his sword to his son and together they all lived happily ever after.