

Prologue

Many centuries ago in the country of England, there lived a princess. Her name was Guinevere. She loved being a princess because she didn't have duties. She just had adventures with her best friend Cedwyn. They would roam the plains surrounding castle looking for mythical creatures like unicorns or hoping to discover new lands. But their favorite adventure was hunting for rabbits in the forest.

Guinevere's father King Leodegrance ruled over a small part of southern England. After the death of her mother, he tried to give her an education to prepare her for the future. He even enlisted the help of his friend Merlyn, the wizard, to educate her in worldly matters because one day Guinevere would be a queen. Guinevere knew that, and it didn't bother her. A girl of twelve, she looked no further ahead than to what new adventure and fun each day would bring. She had no idea of the changes coming in her life.

Chapter 1

The Hunt

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 like her heart. 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!”

She stamped her boot on the ground, her displeasure clearly showing.

“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 shouldn't 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 begin grumbling. It started as a low vibration but grew louder as if it hadn't been fed in days. Cedwyn heard it and started giggling. He tried to smother the sound by covering his mouth with his small hand, but he was too late.

Trying to keep from laughing also, Guinevere shook her head. “How are we ever going to shoot a rabbit with all this noise?” She reached down and tousled his blond hair to let him know that she was not serious and to apologize 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.

She let her eyes move across the blue sky. The English summer sun had barely reached above the far hills when they had first arrived at 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!”

She 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 Day.”

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 the grass moving up ahead, and I don’t think it was the wind.” 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 he 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.”

He followed, a smile highlighting his chubby cheeks. He then smacked into 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 beneath the pine trees where the wild grasses grew- movement. He stared at the spot. Then the tall green stalks bent 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 and calm her heart, she let the arrow loose. She watched the spin of the feathers as the arrow sped to its target like a hawk diving after its prey.

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 scrub thickets. 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 ran first in one direction and then another in what appeared to be a crazed pattern. But Guinevere recognized the pattern: the wounded boar was searching for its hunters .

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

“Why?”

But then he had his answer. The boar roared in anger. The ground trembled under their feet as 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. Off to the right was a smaller pine tree that Cedwyn could climb to get up out of danger. He was the slower of them, although they were each running faster than ever. Guinevere reached for Cedwyn’s shoulder, heard a thud, and her hand found only air. He cried out as he hit the ground. The exposed tree root had claimed its first victim of the day.

She reached down to help him up, but his foot was stuck solid. Seeing the boar grow in size as it got closer, Guinevere’s brain frantically looked for a way to save Cedwyn and herself. If she made enough noise, she could get the boar to follow her into the forest. That would give Cedwyn time to get loose and up the tree.

“I’ll lead the boar away. 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 ‘til 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 ran. The pounding of its hooves told her the boar was following and, if possible, coming even faster. “Cedwyn! Now!” Guinevere shouted, and then she dashed for the safety of the trees.

Behind her, the boar charged, pain fueling its rage. 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 loose!”

“You have to! Try harder! Pull harder!”

Cedwyn dug and pulled some more until he felt his foot start to loosen. Finally pulling free, he stood up. He could see the boar charging after Guinevere. He ran for the pine tree. Grabbing branches, he pulled himself up until he was too high for the boar to reach.

“I’m in the tree!” he yelled. Guinevere waved and continued running.

Once in the forest, she stopped to let her eyes adjust to the darkness, and as she waited, the sounds of the boar grew louder. Finally, she could just make out a faint trail. She ran down the path, trying to find some place to hide so that the boar would run past her.

Then up ahead she saw a pine tree with low branches. Finding the last bit of speed inside of her, she reached the tree and jumped. Her hands grasped a low branch, and the pine needles pricked her skin. She pulled herself up, her arms aching from the effort.

Before she could get a good hold, the whole tree shook. Pine needles fell, sticking in her hair and on her clothes. Screaming, she struggled to hold on, ignoring the bark cutting into her skin. At least if the boar gets me, I won’t have my thirteenth Birth Day. She didn’t know which would be worse: the boar or turning thirteen.

The boar charged the tree again. Her grip loosened. She screamed louder, suddenly sure that turning thirteen wouldn’t be as bad as facing the angry boar.

“Guin’ver! I’m coming!” Cedwyn’s only answer was another scream from the forest. He loosened his arms and slid down the tree, unmindful of the scratches from the bark.

Guinevere's right arm flailed above her, blindly searching for a higher branch. Her fingertips brushed the bottom of one sliding through the sap. She stretched up, grasping the branch firmly with one hand. Trying not to think of what would happen if she fell, she let go with her other hand. For just a moment she felt herself slipping down, but her fingers found the branch, and she held on. The boar hit the tree again. It shook hard enough to nearly topple over, and Guinevere screamed once more.

Then she heard another more horrible scream. Its piercing sound traveled up the trunk into her body. Thinking it was Cedwyn, she looked down and saw a rock hit the boar's side with the arrow. Its angry cry filled the air one last time before the wounded animal ran off deep into the forest.

Guinevere leaned against the rough pine trying to breathe.

"Is it gone? Can you see it?" Cedwyn said as he peeked out from behind a bush.

Guinevere searched the path that the boar had taken. There was no sign of it, and she couldn't hear it anymore either.

"It's gone. We're safe. C'mon out."

As Cedwyn made his way to her, she climbed down the tree and sat on the ground, her legs too wobbly to hold her. Both of them were a mess. Guinevere proceeded to brush some of the dirt, pine needles, and small twigs off her clothing. Strands of hair had escaped from her braid, and she tried to tuck them back as she pulled out the pine needles. Cedwyn also brushed dirt off his clothes as Guinevere reached over and rubbed some dirt off his cheek. They looked at each other and then burst out laughing from relief at still being alive.

"I..thought..we..were...dead!" Cedwyn said between laughs.

"You should have felt that tree shake! I was sure I was the boar's next meal!" Then Guinevere added, somewhat subdued, "Thank you for coming to my rescue."

“You saved me too. That’s what friends are for.”

“Yes. I’m only glad that we’re still alive to be friends,” she said, smiling down at him. “Let’s go. We’re really late now, and we don’t even have a rabbit as a peace offering.”

He nodded. “We’re gonna be in trouble.” Then, as if someone had heard them, upon the wind came a faint but clear voice.

“Lady Guinevere! Cedwyn!”

Grabbing hands, the two ran, fearful of what awaited them at the castle.

Suddenly Cedwyn stopped and pulled Guinevere backwards, almost knocking her down. Grinning, he pointed under a bush at the side of the path. Laughter spilled out from her as she saw their trap in the thicket where they had set it earlier that morning. It was no longer empty. Inside crouched their peace offering: their rabbit! They released the rabbit and put it in a bag, their good humor restored. Then the wind carried the voice again, this time louder and angrier.

“Lady Guinevere! Cedwyn!”

GUINEVERE

On the

Eve of

Legend

Cheryl Carpinello

Outskirts Press, Inc.
Denver, Colorado

The opinions expressed in this manuscript are solely the opinions of the author and do not represent the opinions or thoughts of the publisher. The author represents and warrants that s/he either owns or has the legal right to publish all material in this book.

Guinevere

On the Eve of Legend

All Rights Reserved.

Copyright © 2009 Cheryl Carpinello

V2.0

Illustrated by Jodi Carpinello

Background Cover Photo © 2009 JupiterImages Corporation. All rights reserved - used with permission.

This book may not be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in whole or in part by any means, including graphic, electronic, or mechanical without the express written consent of the publisher except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Outskirts Press, Inc.

<http://www.outskirtspress.com>

ISBN: 978-1-4327-3704-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2008943725

Outskirts Press and the “OP” logo are trademarks belonging to Outskirts Press, Inc.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To Cameron Robert

May you grow up reading

*Special Thanks to
Louise Guillaudeu*

Table of Contents

Prologue	i
Chapter 1 The Hunt	1
Chapter 2 The Rabbit	9
Chapter 3 The Meeting	21
Chapter 4 Surprise	37
Chapter 5 Betrayal	47
Chapter 6 Runaway	57
Chapter 7 The Birth Day	69
Chapter 8 Forest Melee	79

Chapter 9	89
Lesson of the Red Deer	
Chapter 10	97
Eve of Legend	
Epilogue	101
Afterword	103
Glossary	105
The King Arthur Legend	107
Questions for Discussion/Enrichment	109
Additional Reading	111