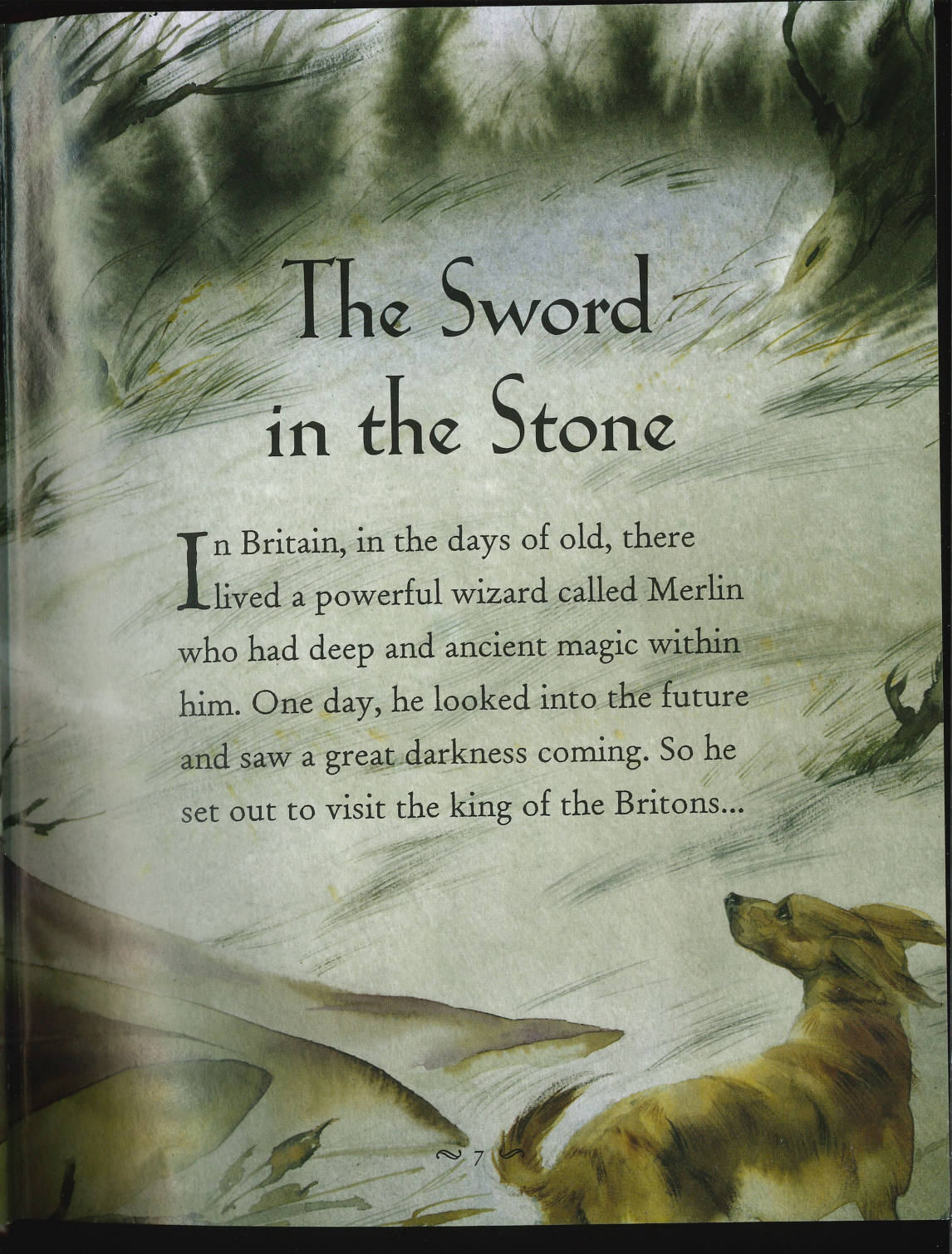




The Sword in the Stone

In Britain, in the days of old, there lived a powerful wizard called Merlin who had deep and ancient magic within him. One day, he looked into the future and saw a great darkness coming. So he set out to visit the king of the Britons...



The king's name was Uther Pendragon, and he ruled the southern parts of Britain. For the moment, the lands he ruled were at peace. But Merlin had dark tidings for the king.

He found Uther at Tintagel, an enchanted castle in Cornwall. There he told the surprised king, "Soon you will have a son, a son destined for greatness. But, before two years have passed, you will die. If anyone knows of his existence, the child will be killed in the struggle for power after your death. The very hour the baby is born, you must deliver him to me, and never speak of him again. I will make sure he is safe until his time comes."

Uther could not bear the thought that any child of his might come to harm, and so he agreed.

On the night the baby was born, Merlin carried him away under the cover of darkness. No one had any idea what became of him.

After this, everything happened just as Merlin had predicted. Within two years, Uther was dead and his knights were fighting one another over who would take the throne. Soon, unrest spread throughout the land. Outlaws roamed the countryside, and everywhere there was looting, squabbling and uncertainty.

All the while, Merlin waited. At last, when the time was right, he set out to see the archbishop in London. He told him if he called a great gathering of knights on Christmas Day, the true-born King of all Britain would be found.

That Christmas Day, the cathedral was packed with knights. The service had just begun,

when there was a tremendous thump outside the church. Everyone rushed outside. A giant slab of stone had appeared, as if it had fallen from the sky. Jutting out of the stone was a long, gleaming silver sword. Enscribed on the stone itself were the words:

WHOEVER PULLS THE SWORD
FROM THIS STONE
WILL BE THE RIGHTFUL KING
OF ALL BRITAIN

The archbishop sent the knights inside. But when the service was over, they hurried back out to the churchyard. One by one, they heaved at the hilt, but the sword was stuck fast.

“It seems the King of all Britain is not yet



‘A giant slab of stone had appeared, as if it had fallen from the sky.’

here,” the archbishop declared. “But he will come in time. Let messengers be sent throughout Britain, telling of this marvel. All knights who wish to try the sword should come to a grand tournament on New Year’s Day, here in London.”

New Year’s Day came, and the streets of London were thronging with knights on their way to the tournament. One of them was Sir Ector, who was riding with his son, Sir Kay, and Kay’s younger brother, Arthur.

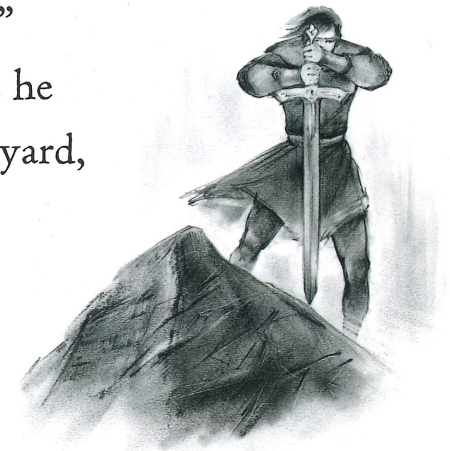
Kay was in a hurry. It was his first tournament and he was determined to make his father proud. He was just imagining how he was going to defeat all of the older knights, when he had a horrible thought...“Stop!” he shouted, pulling on his reins. “I’ve left my sword at the

inn! Arthur, fetch it! Go!”

“At once,” Arthur replied. He spurred his horse and galloped away. But when he got to the inn, the doors were locked. Every last person had gone to see the tournament. Suddenly, he remembered the sword he’d glimpsed earlier that day, jutting out of a stone slab in the cathedral churchyard.

“I’ll take that sword,” he thought, knowing nothing of its significance. “It’s not doing anyone any use in the churchyard. Kay will not be without a sword today!”

So he galloped as fast as he could to the empty churchyard, pulled the sword from the stone and raced off to the tournament.



When he arrived, he weaved through the crowds until he found Kay, and presented him with the sword.

“That’s not mine,” Kay said, and then his eyes widened as he recognized the sword. He had watched several knights try to pull it from the stone that very morning, while Arthur had been busy arranging lodgings. Kay seized the sword and rushed to find Sir Ector.

“Father – look!” he said excitedly.

“What is it?” said Sir Ector.

“I have the sword from the stone, Father! That must mean that I am the rightful King of all Britain!”

“Did you pull it out yourself?” Sir Ector asked, looking hard at his son.

“Yes,” Kay replied.

“You swear that is the truth?” Ector asked.

“I, I— Arthur brought it to me,” Kay confessed, his cheeks burning with shame. So Sir Ector called Arthur to him and made him explain exactly what had happened. When he heard Arthur’s tale, he took Kay and Arthur straight to the churchyard.

There, he thrust the sword back into the stone. He and Sir Kay tried to pull it out, but it was stuck fast as if it had been lodged there for a thousand years. “Try it again,” Sir Ector ordered Arthur. Arthur took hold of the hilt, and the blade slid out easily.

Sir Ector bowed his head and knelt down before Arthur in the snow. Sir Kay gaped at Arthur and then hurriedly did the same.

“What? What are you doing?” asked Arthur.

“I love you as if you were my own son,” Sir Ector said gently. “But it is time to tell you, Arthur: you are not of my blood. One night, when you were a baby, the wizard Merlin brought you to my house in secret. He made me promise to keep you safe and raise you as my own child. I have done so gladly.”

“So... you are not my father?” Arthur said, struggling to hold back his tears.

“Arthur,” Sir Ector said quietly, “whoever draws this sword is the rightful King of all Britain. Your destiny lies beyond our family.”

Arthur’s head was spinning. “If I am to be king, I hope I never fail you,” he managed to say.

“Sir Kay and I swear loyalty to you, our king, for all our days,” said Sir Ector.

Sir Ector went straight to the archbishop and

told him all that had happened. The archbishop made an official announcement to all the knights and noblemen who had come to the tournament.

The news was greeted with roars of laughter. Nobody believed that a boy who was not yet even a knight could possibly be the true king. They would not even let him try to prove it.

“If nobody else has been found, your boy can come back at Pentecost and try again,” the archbishop told Sir Ector. The sword was thrust back into the stone and word was sent out for more barons, lords, knights and kings to try their hand before Pentecost. Many tried, but not one of them could prise the sword from the stone.

At the feast of Pentecost, a huge crowd was watching when Arthur walked up to the sword once more and put his hand on its hilt. From the

shadows, Merlin was watching too. In front of everyone, Arthur drew the sword from the stone and lifted the shining blade into the air.

There was a hush, before people in the crowd started shouting: “The sword has spoken! Arthur! Arthur! Arthur is our king!”

Soon the whole crowd was chanting with one voice, and suddenly they all kneeled before Arthur. Then Arthur kneeled, and the Archbishop took the sword and knighted him.

That same day, Arthur was crowned in the cathedral. He looked out across the sea of expectant faces and felt his courage grow strong within him. “I vow to bring justice and



peace to this land. I will drive out invaders and right the wrongs of my people,” he declared.

When the service ended, Arthur walked out onto the steps of the cathedral to be greeted by a deafening cheer from the crowd. For a moment he reeled, gripped by a sudden fear of all that lay ahead, but then he became aware of a tall, cloaked figure standing beside him.

“Do not be afraid,” said the man. “I have seen your destiny, and it is as bright as the evening star. Greatness awaits you, Arthur, and I will be here to guide you.”

It was only then that Arthur realized the man beside him must be the wizard Merlin. And all his fear left him as they walked down the steps together into the brilliant sunshine.