



THE SWORD IN THE STONE

ADAPTED FROM *THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING* BY T.H. WHITE

CAST

WART	<i>Orphaned Boy</i>
MERLYN	<i>Tutor to the Wart</i>
ECTOR	<i>Foster-Father of the Wart</i>
KAY	<i>Foster-Brother of the Wart</i>
PELLINORE	<i>Knight, Friend of Ector</i>

NARRATOR: Six years passed at Sir Ector's castle. The Wart had been changed into a countless number of animals and learned countless lessons. His tutor, the wizard Merlyn, looked younger every year—which was only natural because he was. Archimedes the owl was married and brought up several handsome families of quilly youngsters in the tower room.

Yet Kay, the Wart's older foster-brother, had become more difficult as he neared the age of knighthood. He lost his temper and challenged nearly everybody to have a

fight. And in those cases where he did actually have the fight he was almost always beaten. Also he became sarcastic and went at the Wart when Sir Ector was not around.

KAY: Soon I will be old enough to be a knight. And you shall be my squire.

WART: I will like that. I will learn how to be a knight someday...when I'm old enough, that is.

KAY: They do not make commoners knights—no matter how old you are. With no father and mother you are hopeless.

NARRATOR: Although Kay was rude, it did not seem that he wanted to be. It was if he disliked it but could not help it. The Wart continued to be fond of Kay in spite of it all.

One day the Wart was sitting in the courtyard while his favorite dog licked his nose—and vice versa—when Merlyn found him there.

MERLYN: You know, someday they will say that is a most unsanitary habit. But I cannot see why. God made that dog's nose just as well as he made your tongue—or even better.

NARRATOR: The Wart looked up at Merlyn thoughtfully.

WART: I'm just trying to forget.

MERLYN: I'm always trying to remember. What are you trying to forget?

WART: Kay is going to become a knight, and I never will—just because I am an orphan. I think that is unfair.

MERLYN: You're right. That *is* unfair. Sometimes life seems unfair. Do you know the story of Elijah and the Rabbi?

WART: No. Will it make me feel better?

MERLYN: If you listen, it will. The prophet Elijah and a Rabbi, a wise teacher, were walking along when they came to the cottage of a poor man, whose only treasure was a cow.

WART: His only treasure was a cow?

MERLYN: Yes. Now don't interrupt! The poor man came out of his home and offered Elijah and the Rabbi a place to stay for the night. He treated them with utmost kindness and fed them a dinner well beyond his means. But in the morning the poor man's cow lay dead. It had died in the night.

WART: What a horrible thing to happen to that kind man! He loved that cow!

MERLYN: Listen! Elijah and the Rabbi departed that poor man's home and continued on. The next home they came to was the home of a wealthy, powerful man. When Elijah asked him for lodging, all he would give them was permission to stay in the cowshed, and he fed them bread and water. However, in the morning Elijah thanked him very much and paid for a mason to repair one of his walls, which was falling down, in return for his kindness.

WART: But that's not fair. The kind man was punished, and the rich man was rewarded.

MERLYN: Here you go with that fairness again. Listen to the end of the story. The Rabbi, like you, could not see how this was fair, and he asked Elijah why these things had happened. Elijah said it was simple. The poor man's wife was supposed to have died that night, but in return for the kindness, God took the cow instead. As for the rich man, there was a chest full of treasure hidden under that broken wall. If the rich man had fixed it himself, he would have found it. So do not say to the Lord, "What are you doing?" Just say, "Doesn't the Lord always do what is right?"

WART: Hmm. It is a nice story. What does it mean?

MERLYN: (*sigh*) Perhaps you will see in time.

WART: But I still want to be a knight.

MERLYN: Confound it, boy! Haven't you learned anything from these six years of education?

WART: Yes, but becoming a knight would be my *real* education.

NARRATOR: Merlyn yanked off his spectacles, dashed them on the floor, and jumped on them with both feet.

MERLYN: Castor and Pollux, blow me to Bermuda!

(*sound of a rocket taking off*)

NARRATOR: Merlyn immediately rocketed up high into the air until he disappeared. The Wart was still staring in shock at the spot where his tutor had been

standing, when the old man reappeared. He had lost his hat, and his hair and beard looked like they had been through a hurricane. He sat down again, straightening his gown with trembling fingers.

WART: (*in shock*) Why did you do that?

MERLYN: I didn't do it on purpose! Castor and Pollux *did* blow me to Bermuda. That will teach me not to swear. Go along now. I think it is time for nap. Or did I already take my nap? Who knows! Who knows!

NARRATOR: As the day neared for Kay's initiation as a full-blown knight, he and the Wart drifted further and further apart.

WART: Kay, maybe we could take Cully out and go hawking?

KAY: (*laugh*) No, Wart. I will have to act more dignified as a knight. I can't have my squire on intimate terms with me any longer.

NARRATOR: It was a cold and wet evening toward the end of August. To the Wart it seemed even colder and wetter.

WART: Well, aren't I just a Cinderella now? I'm a second-rate squire, and the point of my life is to hold Kay's extra spears for him.

NARRATOR: Wart dragged himself up to Merlyn's tower, where the old wizard was knitting himself a woolen nightcap for winter.

WART: (*sigh*)

MERLYN: Still sighing?

WART: (*absentmindedly*) Oh no. I mean, oh yes.

MERLYN: Still moping about being Kay's squire? Only fools want to be great. You should learn knitting. It will make you feel better.

WART: Kay won't tell me what happens when you are made a knight. He says it is too sacred. What does happen?

MERLYN: Only a lot of fuss. A ceremonial bath, an all-night prayer vigil. Sir Ector will buckle a sword on him and kiss him and smack him on the shoulder and say, "Be thou a good knight."

WART: Is that all?

MERLYN: Yes, except for the banquet that follows.

WART: (*sigh*) He even gets his own banquet.

NARRATOR: The Wart stared at Merlyn thoughtfully.

WART: Merlyn, can I tell you something?

MERLYN: Of course, boy.

WART: You have been knitting your beard into your nightcap for the last three rows now.

MERLYN: Blast it all! Why didn't you tell me?

WART: I wanted to see what would happen.

MERLYN: You run a grave risk, boy! I ought to turn you into a piece of bread and toast you!

NARRATOR: Merlyn tugged furiously at his beard, trying to separate it from his knitting.

WART: I think you will have to cut it out. Should I fetch some scissors?

MERLYN: No. No. There it comes. I guess I was not paying attention. I was thinking too much of the past—or the future—or whatever it is.

NARRATOR: The Wart stared dreamily into the fire.

WART: If I were made a knight, I should pray to God to let me encounter all the evils in the world. That way, if I conquered them, there would be none left. And if I were defeated, I would be the one to suffer for it.

MERLYN: You don't know what you ask. If you met all the evils of the world, you *would* be conquered—and you *would* suffer for it.

WART: I wouldn't mind.

MERLYN: Wouldn't you? Wait till it happens and see!

NARRATOR: Merlyn thrust the end of his beard into his mouth and, staring tragically at the fire, began to munch it fiercely.

WART: What changes when you grow up? Why do grown-ups not think like I do now? Will I change like that, too?

MERLYN: Oh dear. You're making me feel confused. Why don't you wait till you are grown up and just *know* the reason?

WART: (*dissatisfied*) I don't think that's an answer at all.

MERLYN: Look here! It's like I always say, when life gets you down, learn something! That is the only thing that never fails.

WART: Maybe if you changed me into something—maybe a snake. We haven't done a snake before.

NARRATOR: A sad look passed over Merlyn's face.

MERLYN: All the magic for that sort of thing has been used up. We are near the end of your education. When Kay is knighted, my labors will be over. You will have to go away—to be his squire in the wide world, far away from Sir Ector's castle.

NARRATOR: This news sank in.

MERLYN: Do you think you have learned anything?

WART: I have learned. And I have been very happy.

MERLYN: Good. Try to remember what you have learned...when I am gone.

NARRATOR: The day for Kay's knighting ceremony drew near, the invitations were sent out, and the Wart withdrew himself more and more into the kitchen, where he would sit by himself and mope.

ECTOR: Come on, Wart, old boy. It doesn't become you to do this sulkin'. I didn't know you would take Kay's knightin' so hard!

WART: (*sadly*) I'm not sulking. I don't mind a bit, and I'm very glad that Kay is going to be a knight. Please don't think I'm sulking.

ECTOR: You are a good boy. And Kay isn't such a bad chap, you know, in his own way.

WART: Kay is a splendid chap. He just doesn't want to go hawking or anything with me anymore.

ECTOR: It will all clear up.

NARRATOR: A few days later Sir Pellinore, one of Sir Ector's old friends, arrived at the castle to assist in Kay's knighting. He arrived with exciting news.

PELLINORE: I say! Have you heard? About the King?

ECTOR: What's the matter with the King? He's not comin' down to hunt, is he? I hate it when he does that!

PELLINORE: He can't hunt anymore. He's dead—the poor fellow.

NARRATOR: Sir Ector stood respectfully and took off his cap. Kay quickly followed suit. Everybody else thought they ought to stand up, too.

ECTOR: (*grandly*) The King is dead. Long live the King.

PELLINORE: What do you mean, Ector? Who is this king you mention that is to live so long?

ECTOR: Well, the old king's heir.

PELLINORE: Our blessed monarch never had no hair. I saw a picture of him once.

ECTOR: Good gracious! But he must have had a next-of-kin?

PELLINORE: That's the exciting part of it! He had no hair and no next of skin! Who's to succeed the throne? Nobody knows!

ECTOR: (*gasp*) Do you mean to tell me—there ain't no King of England?

PELLINORE: Not a scrap of one! But there have been signs and wonders! Miracles! There has appeared a sword in a stone in front of a church.

ECTOR: A sword in a church?

PELLINORE: No. It's in an anvil.

ECTOR: The church is an anvil? That's inconvenient.

PELLINORE: No, the sword is in the anvil.

ECTOR: But I thought you said the sword was in the stone?

PELLINORE: No! The stone is outside the church. The sword goes right through the anvil on the stone into the stone. Whew. Give me some mead. I'm parched from this discussion.

ECTOR: Hmph. You call a stone in front of a church a miracle?

PELLINORE: My dear fellow! It's not where the stone is! It's what is written on the sword!

NARRATOR: Pellinore closed his eyes tight, extended his arms in both directions, and announced in capital letters:

PELLINORE: WHOSO PULLETH OUT THIS SWORD OF THIS STONE AND ANVIL IS RIGHTWISE KING BORN OF ALL ENGLAND.

ECTOR: Who said that?

PELLINORE: The sword said it!

ECTOR: Hmmm. Talkative weapon. How much of that mead have you had, old fellow?

PELLINORE: (*angrily*) It was written on it! Written in letters of gold!

ECTOR: Why didn't *you* pull it out then?

PELLINORE: I tell you I wasn't there!

KAY: Has this sword with this inscription been pulled out?

PELLINORE: No. That's where the whole excitement comes in. They can't pull this sword out at all—although they've been trying. So they have had to proclaim a tournament all over England for New Year's Day, so that the man who comes to the tournament and pulls out the sword can be King of England forever!

KAY: Oh, Father. The man who pulls that sword out of the stone will be the King of England. Can't we go to the tournament and have a shot?

ECTOR: Couldn't think of it. Long way to London.

KAY: Surely we could go. When I am knighted, I'll have to go to a tournament somewhere, and this one happens at just the right date. All the best people will be there, and we'd see the famous knights and great kings.

PELLINORE: Lots of people in London—so they say. And shops!

ECTOR: Shops, you say? Hmmm. Let's all go to London then—and see the new king!

NARRATOR: They rose up as one man.

ALL: Huzzah! Huzzah!

NARRATOR: At this moment the Wart came in with Merlyn, but everyone was too excited to notice. Then Kay saw the Wart standing there, and he forgot for a moment that he was too important to speak to his squire on friendly terms.

KAY: Wart, guess what? We are all going to London for a great tournament on New Year's Day!

WART: Are we?

KAY: Yes, and you will carry my shield and spears for the jousts.

WART: (*sadly*) Well, I am glad we are going. But I just found out that Merlyn is leaving us.

KAY: Oh, we won't need Merlyn.

WART: (*forcefully*) He is leaving us. He is going back to the forest.

ECTOR: Come now, Merlyn, what's all this about?

MERLYN: I have come to say goodbye, Sir Ector. Tomorrow my pupil Kay will be knighted, and the next week my other pupil will go away as his squire. I have outlived my usefulness here, and it is time to go.

ECTOR: Now, now. Don't say that. I think you're a jolly useful chap! You can just stay and teach me—or be the librarian or something.

MERLYN: We shall meet again. There is no cause to be sad. We have had a good time while we were young, but it is in the nature of time to fly. There are many things in other parts of the kingdom which I ought to be attending to just now. It is an especially busy time for me.

NARRATOR: The Wart did not look up at all.

ECTOR: Well, I say you can't go—not without a month's notice.

MERLYN: Can't I?

NARRATOR: Merlyn took the posture of one who intends to dematerialize. He stood on his toes, while Archimedes held tight to his shoulder. He began to spin like a top

faster and faster till he was only a blur of grayish light, and in a few seconds there as no one there at all.

MERLYN: (*distantly*) Goodbye, Wart.

WART: Goodbye.

NARRATOR: Two weeks later, Kay (fully knighted), Ector, and the Wart (fully squired) rode into London. The town was full to the brim. They were lucky to find an inn.

KAY: Wart, the tournament is tomorrow. I don't think I will be able to sleep tonight. I will beat the best barons in England and become the king.

WART: Yes, Kay. Good night.

NARRATOR: Kay roused them awake at the break of dawn, could not eat his breakfast, and got them to the tournament at least an hour before the jousts could possibly begin. They arrived at the marvelous jousting field and saw the crowds all around like a waving sea of colorful banners and coats of arms. It was then that Kay realized he had made a mistake.

KAY: (*crying*) Good heavens! I have left my sword at home!

ECTOR: Can't joust without a sword! Better go and fetch it. You have time!

KAY: I can't leave the tournament, but my squire can.

NARRATOR: Kay turned imperiously to the Wart.

KAY: Squire, ride hard back to the inn and fetch my sword. You shall have a shilling if you fetch it in time.

NARRATOR: The Wart went pale and looked as if he were going to strike his foster-brother.

WART: (*coldly*) It shall be done, master.

NARRATOR: He turned his ambling palfrey against the stream of newcomers and began to push his way toward their inn as best he could.

WART: He offered me money! Right in front of everybody! And called me squire! Oh, Merlyn, give me patience with the brute! I should have thrown the shilling back in his face.

NARRATOR: But then the Wart's anger softened.

WART: Poor Kay. He only did that because he is so scared and miserable. He knew he had made a mistake.

NARRATOR: When he got to the inn, it was closed. Everybody had thronged to see the famous tournament, and the entire household had followed after the mob. The wooden shutters bolted over the downstairs windows were two inches thick, and the doors were double-barred.

WART: (*sarcastically*) Now what do I do to earn my shilling? Where shall I get him a sword?

NARRATOR: He turned his mount and cantered off along the street. There was a quiet churchyard at the end of it with a kind

of square in front of the church door. In the middle of the square there was a heavy stone with an anvil on it, and a fine new sword was stuck through the anvil.

WART: Well, I suppose it's some sort of war memorial, but it will have to do. I am sure nobody would grudge Kay a war memorial—if they knew how desperate he was.

NARRATOR: The Wart tied his palfrey's reins around a post of the gate, strode up the gravel path, and took hold of the sword.

WART: Come, sword. I must take you for a better cause.

NARRATOR: He paused. As soon as he had touched the sword, he had noticed everything around him so much more clearly—the silent gargoyles of the church, the colorful banners waving from the nearby buildings, and the pure, cleanness of the snow.

WART: Do I hear music?

(*angelic singing*)

NARRATOR: There was music. And people, too, standing just on the edge of his vision as if they might not really be there at all.

WART: Who are you? What do you want?

NARRATOR: Nobody answered him, but the music was loud, and the light was beautiful.

WART: (*crying out*) People! I must take this sword! It is not for me, though. It's for Kay. I will bring it back.

NARRATOR: There was still no answer, and Wart turned back to the anvil. He saw the golden letters, which he did not read, and the jewels on the pommel, flashing in the lovely light.

WART: Come on, sword.

NARRATOR: He took hold of the handle with both hands and strained against the stone. (*louder angelic singing*) There was a melodious blast of music, but nothing moved. The handle was beginning to cut into his hands, so he released it.

WART: Oh, Merlyn. Help me get this weapon.

NARRATOR: Then it was as if figures appeared all around the courtyard—the animals he had learned from for so many years. There were birds and fish and badgers and hares and wild geese and the thousand other animals he had met. They were the helpers of the Wart, and they had come out of love. He heard all the lessons he had learned from them in his head—lessons about bravery, perseverance, and strength—and Wart felt his power grow.

WART: Merlyn was right! My education didn't leave me!

NARRATOR: The Wart walked up to the great sword for the third time. He put out his right hand softly and drew the sword out as gently as from a scabbard. He heard the sound of a thousand animals cheering

and a thousand angels singing. (*animals cheering and angels singing*)

WART: I must get back to Kay!

NARRATOR: When the Wart returned to the tournament, he handed the newly-drawn sword to Kay.

KAY: Finally! It is almost my turn. (*pause*) But this is not my sword.

WART: It was the only one I could get. The inn was locked.

KAY: Where did you get this one then?

WART: I found it stuck in a stone, outside a church.

KAY: (*absentmindedly*) That is a funny place to find one.

WART: Yes, it was stuck through an anvil.

NARRATOR: Kay suddenly rounded upon him.

KAY: What? Did you just say this sword was stuck in a stone?

WART: It was. It was some sort of war memorial.

NARRATOR: Sir Kay stared at him for several seconds in amazement, opened his mouth, shut it again, licked his lips, then turned his back and plunged through the crowd. The Wart followed after him.

KAY: Father, come here a moment!

ECTOR: Yes, my boy. What's the matter, Kay? You look as white as a sheet!

KAY: Do you remember that sword which the King of England would pull out?

ECTOR: (*confused*) Yes...

KAY: Well, here it is. I have it. It is in my hand. I pulled it out.

NARRATOR: Sir Ector looked at Kay, and he looked at the Wart. Then he stared at Kay again, long and lovingly.

ECTOR: We will go back to the church.

NARRATOR: When they were at the church door, Sir Ector turned to his firstborn kindly.

ECTOR: Now then, Kay. Here is the stone, and you have the sword. It will make you the King of England. You are my son that I am proud of and always will be, whatever you do. Will you promise me that you took it out by your own might?

NARRATOR: Kay looked at his father. He also looked at the Wart and at the sword. Then he handed the sword to the Wart quite quietly.

KAY: I am a liar. Wart pulled it out.

NARRATOR: What happened next was such a blur for the Wart. Sir Ector told the Wart to put the sword back into the stone—which he did—and then Sir Ector and Kay then vainly tried to take it out. The Wart took it out for them and stuck it back again once or twice.

ECTOR: This has proved it.

NARRATOR: Sir Ector knelt down with great difficulty on his gouty knee, looking old and powerless.

ECTOR: Sire.

NARRATOR: The sight of this caused the Wart so much pain that he knelt down beside Sir Ector.

WART: Please, do not do this. Let me help you up, Father!

ECTOR: Nay. Nay, my lord. I was never your father nor of your blood. But I know well now that you are of a higher blood than I ever dreamed.

WART: Plenty of people have told me you aren't my father—but it doesn't matter a bit.

ECTOR: Sire, will you be my good and gracious lord when you are King?

WART: Don't!

ECTOR: Sire, I will ask no more of you but that you make my son, your foster-brother, Sir Kay, overseer of all your lands.

NARRATOR: Kay was kneeling down, too, and it was more than the Wart could bear.

WART: Oh, do stop. Of course he can oversee—if I have got to be the king. I wish I had never seen that filthy sword at all.

NARRATOR: And the Wart burst into tears.

Perhaps there ought to be a mention about the coronation. The barons naturally

kicked up a fuss. But the Wart was prepared to go on putting the sword into the stone and pulling it out again till Doomsday, and there was nobody else who could do the thing at all, so in the end they had to give in.

The coronation was a splendid ceremony. Everybody sent presents to the Wart for his prowess at pulling swords out of stones. Several rich men of London asked him to help them in taking stoppers out of unruly bottles, unscrewing caps which had got stuck, and other household emergencies which had gotten beyond their control.

Yet the nicest present the Wart received was a dunce's cap that looked rather like a firework. It did not come with any note.

WART: I guess I am supposed to light it at the end.

NARRATOR: The Wart lit the end, and it erupted into an enormous flame. (*booming of a firework*) When the flame had quite gone out, Merlyn was standing before him in his magic hat.

MERLYN: Well, Wart. Here we are again. How nice you look in your crown!

WART: Merlyn! I am angry at you! Why didn't you tell me all of this would happen?

MERLYN: I wasn't allowed to tell you before now—or since then—but your father was—or will be—King Uther Pendragon. It was I myself, disguised as a beggar, who first carried you to Sir Ector's castle in your golden swaddling bands. I know all about your birth and parentage, and it was I who gave you your real name.

WART: You kept the secret well enough.

MERLYN: Long enough to educate you for what lies ahead. I know the sorrows before you...and the joys. I know how there will never again be anybody who dares to call you by the name of Wart again. So now, may I have the privilege of being the very first of your subjects to address you as King Arthur?

WART: Of course. But, as usual, I don't understand much of this. (*pause*) Will you stay with me now—for a long time?

MERLYN: Yes, Wart. Or rather...yes, King Arthur.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Foreshadowing:** What lesson does Merlyn's story about Elijah and the Rabbi teach? How does it foreshadow what will happen to Kay and Arthur?
2. **Theme:** What important lesson does the Wart learn about education?
3. **Analyze:** How did the Wart use his education to succeed?
4. **Characterization:** Why is it noble that the Wart wishes he could face all the evils in the world?
5. **Characterization:** What details about Kay make him sympathetic? Which make him unsympathetic?
6. **Indirect Characterization:** Has Sir Ector been a good guardian for the Wart? Explain.
7. **Opinion:** Who is your favorite character from the story? Explain.
8. **Predict:** Based on his education, what improvements do you think Arthur will make to his kingdom?