The Sword in the Clearing

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Chapter 1

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"That's what the messenger said." Sir Bors smiled at his sons. "So, I thought, why not have a little competition? Let's see which of my sons can return it to me first." Percival looked over at his brother Tristan, who smiled confidently. Even with Percy, as he liked to call him, being two years older, he stood a head taller than him and far stronger. He usually won these things and today would be no exception. "For the sake of fairness, however, let us start with a test of your knowledge."

"Ugh. You want Percy to win."
"Percival." Percival muttered.

"Now, Tristan. It is important that you two have an understanding of our kingdom's history"
"So we can be well-rounded knights, I know, father." Tristan rolled his eyes. Percival beside him grinned. Tristan was right. He always did better than his little brother on these things. Chances are, dad would ask them something about King Albert the Pious. He always did.
"So, let's see. Under whose reign was the Assumption"

"Ooh!" Percival's hand flew into the air. Sure, his enthusiasm was a bit childish for a knight, but the answer was actually King Albert's son, King Albert the Wise. Leave it to Father to try to trick them.

Percival strode confidently out into the morning sunlight. Thanks to Tristan throwing a tantrum about Percival cheating, he was given a head start until Tristan got an answer right. Father could keep him there all morning! Which meant...

"I'm going to find that sword!" He told a lazy cloud in the sky. He charged out into the forest, remembering exactly where the messenger had said the sword had been seen. Would Tristan remember? Probably not. He smirked. At last, he would prove himself in a way Tristan never could.

As Percival soon learned, finding the sword was the easy part. The sun shone down upon it in one of Percival's favorite clearings, stuck deep into a boulder that he could have sworn had not been here when last he had ridden through it. After the last ten minutes, he hated that boulder more than anything in the world. He gave the sword another determined, albeit fruitless tug, grunting with the effort. He had to hurry! If Tristan got here and he still hadn't pulled the sword out, he might shove him aside and do it first!

"Ok, Sir Percival." He muttered under his breath. "You can't be the greatest knight in the kingdom if you can't even pull one enchanted sword out of a rock." He grabbed the sword's hilt, adjusting his grip a few times and gave it an all-mighty tug! The sword shifted and he stumbled backwards. That was it! He had almost had it that time! He was so excited and no one was around other than the birds in the trees that he allowed himself a giddy little bounce and even a clap of his hands as he beamed. He marched confidently back over to the sword, but before his hand could even touch it, he felt a strange tingle go through him. More than a tingle, this was

the undeniable sensation of magic!
Percy looked down at himself and gasped as he watched his hose and his tunic transform. His head itched mercilessly as his hair grew down his shoulders, his fingers grew more slender, and his clothes? His clothes! He watched in horror as his tunic stretched down his legs, glowing with what seemed to be fairy fire as it became a beautiful gown. His hands took hold of his skirt of their own accord, holding it out to the sides as it continued to blossom. In no time at all, the magic faded and he was left without a sword and dressed as a princess!

"What am I going to do?" He muttered, looking down at his ridiculous gown. He could not go back home like this! Could... could he take it off and tell Father he was attacked? There were occasionally reports of bandits, maybe they... "maybe they stole my clothes?" He groaned. It did not sound convincing at all. "Well, Sir Percival the Clever," he said mockingly to himself. "You gotta think of something."
Before he even had a chance, the sound of a horse pushed all thoughts from his mind. He stood there, staring ahead as dumbly as the deer he had killed last hunt, as his brother rode into the clearing atop a horse. Clearly Tristan had come up with a way to make up for his late start and that was his horse Liard. Tristan stared down at Percival and he braced himself for a merciless teasing. The smile he saw bloom on his brother's face however was not the usual one he wore when he called him 'prissy Percy' or a dozen other names. After a moment, however, he simply slid grandly down from his horse and strode over. Percival almost laughed at how

pompous he looked.

"My father told me there was a great treasure to be found in these woods." Percival nearly gagged. Why was Tristan talking like that? Didn't he recognize his own brother? And what was going on with his voice? Oh, was he trying to be suave? He sounded ridiculous making his voice all deep like that. "But I never dreamed you would be so fair." Tristan bowed and Percival tried to pull his hand away as his younger brother kissed it. "Speak, that I might know your name." Percival shook his head. "Perhaps you are enchanted? You cannot speak." Uh, sure? Percival thought. He nodded in a manner he hoped was meek. How did girls move? "I see." Tristan tapped his chin and Percival nearly snorted before remembering he was supposed to be enchanted into silence. "Well, no matter. I shall bring you back to my father's magicians."

What? Percival tried to shake his head, but only ended up frustrated by his now luxuriously long hair as Tristan came over and picked him up in his arms. He cried out in surprise as his brother carried him to Liard, but Tristan did not seem to realize that meant this alleged princess was not enchanted into silence. He nearly gagged again as his brother slid into the saddle, leaving him sitting side saddle between Liard's head and his brother's chest.

"Fear not, milady." Tristan said grandly. He probably thinks this is one of those stories Mother always told us when we were little. "We shall cure whatever cruel curse has befallen you!" He nudged Liard into a walk back toward their father's

estate. "But" Tristan said. "I suppose you'll need a name, won't you?" Percival rolled his eyes. "No, I know you can't speak, milady, but gaze into my eyes and I will know your name." That confirmed it, Percival thought. He absolutely thinks this is some story. All the same, he stared defiantly into his brother's eyes. "Hmmm... Princess Penelope. Princess Primrose. Princess Pomegranate." Percival rolled his eyes. "Well, if you don't like my ideas, maybe come up with one of your own, Percy."