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Opening extract from

The Sleeping Sword

Written by

Michael Morpurgo

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Please print off and read at your leisure.


The Isles of Scilly
St. Martins
Tresco
Bryher
St Mary's
St Agnes
Scilly sand bar
Little Arthur
Arthur Head
Eastern Isles
N
W
E
S
Bishop Rock
Light

BEFORE I WROTE MY STORY

Before it happened, before the world went black about me, I used to read a lot. I've tried Braille, and I am getting better at it all the time, but reading is so slow that way. So now I listen to my audio tapes instead. I've got dozens of them on my shelf. The trouble is I can't tell which is which, so I've put my three favourite ones side by side on my bedside table. That way I can find them more easily.

Left to right, it's *The Sword in the Stone*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, and *Arthur, High King of Britain*. I've listened to those three so often I can say bits of them by heart. But it's *Arthur, High King of Britain* I've listened to most often, not because it's the best – *The Sword in the Stone* is probably the best – but because *Arthur, High King of Britain* begins and ends on Bryher, on the Scilly Isles, where I live. I can picture all the places so well inside my head and that helps me to feel part of the story, free to roam inside it somehow, to be whoever I want to be, do whatever I want to do.

And that's my trouble at the moment. There's so

much I can't do now that I used to do without even thinking about it – you know, ordinary things like going down to the shop, hurdling over mooring ropes, playing football on the green, watching telly, seeing my friends whenever I felt like it, messing about in boats, diving off the quay with them in the summertime. I can still go swimming, but someone always has to be with me. That's the worst of it, really. I can never go free like I used to.

It's not so bad at home. I've got a sort of memory-and-touch map of the house inside my head, every room, every doorway, every chair. And, provided my father doesn't leave his slippers in the middle of the kitchen floor – which he often does – and provided no one shifts the furniture or moves my toothbrush, I can manage just about all right. I really hate it if I trip or fumble about or fall over. No one laughs, of course they don't. In a kind of way I wish they would. Instead they go all silent and feel sorry for me, and that just makes me angry again inside.

And there's so much I miss – all the colours of the sky and the sea, the blue and the green and the grey, the black and white of the oystercatchers. I can't picture colours in my head any more, and I can't picture people's faces either, not like I could. So, like

the oystercatchers, everyone's a voice now, just a voice. I'm getting used to it, or that's what I keep telling myself, anyway. I should be after two years. But it still makes me angry when I think about it, the bad luck of it, I mean. I try not to think about it, but that's a lot easier said than done.

That's what's so good about 'reading' stories, and 'writing' them, too. I've made up lots and lots of short stories. I love doing it because I can be whoever I like inside my stories. I can make my dreams really happen. I'm the maker of new worlds. Inside my dreams, inside my stories I can run free again. I can see again. I can be me again.

I don't actually write my stories, not like other people do. I find the Braille machine slows me down, like it does with my reading. Instead, I tell them out loud into a recorder. That's how I'm doing this now, and it's brilliant, because it lets the story flow. I get things wrong of course, and often too, but I just record over my mistakes and on I go. Easy.

A few days ago, I finished my very first long story and this is it. It took me the whole of the summer to write it. It's dedicated to Anna – you'll see why soon enough – and I've called it . . .



THE SLEEPING SWORD

BY BUN BENDLE

For Anna

CHAPTER 1

THE DIVE OF MY LIFE

IT WAS NO ONE'S FAULT EXCEPT MINE. I WAS showing off. True, I didn't exactly want to go in the first place, but then I shouldn't have allowed Liam and Dan to persuade me. On the way back on the school boat from Tresco it had been cold and blustery. All I wanted to do was to get back home and finish reading my book about King Arthur.

Mum was out somewhere on the farm when I got in. We grow organic vegetables (onions, courgettes, tomatoes, lettuces – all sorts) to sell to the visitors – we get a lot of tourists on Bryher, especially in the summer. As usual, she had left my tea on the table. Dad was out checking his lobster pots. I was deep in my

book, munching away at my peanut butter sandwich, when Liam and Dan banged on the window. They were in their wetsuits and breathless with running.

'Bun, we're going down the quay,' Liam shouted. 'You coming?' It wasn't really a question at all.

'I'm reading,' I replied, 'and, anyway, it's cold.' Liam ignored me.

'See you down there,' he said, and they were gone.

On Bryher we were the only boys of about the same age (there's only eighty people living here on the island anyway; one shop, one church, no school). We grew up together, went over to Tresco school every day together, we went fishing together, did just about everything together. 'The Three Musketeers' they call us. If we had a leader it was Liam, most of the time, anyway. He was the smallest of the three of us, and was by far and away the cleverest, too. He had a real gift of the gab, and was a fantastic mimic, as well. Anyone from Mrs Gee ('BF' Gee we called her) in the shop – 'Get your mucky hands off my ice-creams' – to 'Barking' Barker our head teacher – 'Look at my voice, Liam, I'm speaking to you!'

Dan was like a big friendly puppy, full of energy and bouncy. He always made us laugh a lot. Of the three of us I was the quietest, happy enough usually to go

along with whatever the other two dreamed up. I just liked being with them. But I had my own very private reason, too, for going along with them. Anna.

Anna was Dan's big sister, and I loved her. Simple as that. I loved her. I couldn't tell her of course, because I was ten and she was fourteen. I didn't love her just because she was beautiful, which she was (just the opposite in every way to big, lumpy Dan), but also because we talked - and I mean *really* talked - about things that really mattered, like books, like feelings, like oystercatchers. Liam and Dan were my mates, best mates, but Anna was my best friend and had been as long as I could remember.



I was finding it difficult to concentrate on my book. I kept regretting I hadn't gone with them down to the quay. It was the sudden thought that it was Friday and that Anna might possibly be there, back for the weekend from secondary school on St Mary's, that finally decided me. I would finish the book later.

I pulled on my wetsuit and ran down the sandy track through the farm to the quay. As I rounded the corner by the shed, I saw them all larking about on the quay. Anna *was* there. She'd already been in swimming, I could see that, but the other two hadn't. They were standing on the edge, looking down into the water and hesitating.

The sea was murky and choppy and uninviting. I didn't want to go in, not one bit, but Anna had seen me. I saw an opportunity to impress her, and just went for it. I charged down the quay going full pelt, screaming like a mad thing. Anna tried to wave me down but I ignored her.

I dodged past Dan, who was shouting at me to stop, sprang off and launched myself into the most spectacular swallow dive I could, the best dive of my life, just for her. I remember thinking that it seemed to be taking longer than it should to reach the water. After that I remember nothing.

