Lovereading4kids.co.uk

Opening extract from

Seeker

Written by

William Nicholson

Published by

Egmont

All text is copyright of the author and illustrator

Please print off and read at your leisure.

PRELUDE

THE LEGEND OF THE NOBLE WARRIORS

After many wanderings, on the longest day of the year, the Brother came to the island where the world began, which was called Anacrea, because it was the place of first creation. He made a house there, and he lived quietly by himself.

In that winter, when the days were short and the nights were bitter, the Brother was woken from sleep by a crying in the darkness. He rose and lit a lantern and went to the door. 'Who's there?' he said. 'Why do you cry?' A voice answered, 'I am the Lost Child.' So the Brother opened the door and saw by the light of his lantern a little child shivering with cold. He brought the child into his house and put fuel on the fire. He wrapped the child in a blanket and made broth for the child to eat, and put the child to sleep in his own bed.

That night the Brother had a dream. In his dream the child spoke to him again, saying, 'I am the All and Only. I am the Reason and the Goal.' Then in his dream the child changed form, and became a gentle lady. 'I am the Loving Mother,' she said. 'I will comfort you.' Then the form changed again, and became a warrior in bloodstained armour. 'I am the Wounded Warrior,' he said. 'I will make you strong.' Then the form changed again, and became a

blind man. ‘I am the Wise Father,’ he said. ‘I will guide you, until the day of the coming of the Assassin, who must find me at last.’

The next day the Brother said to the child, ‘Stay with me. I will build you a Garden where you can live in peace.’

So the child stayed.

Others came to live on the island, and they pledged themselves to protect the Lost Child, whom they knew to be the one true god.

One day there came a great warlord called Noman, who was feared by all. He wanted to see the child god for himself. He entered the Garden, and stayed there for a day and a night. When he came out he knelt humbly before the brothers and sisters, and offered them his warrior strength, so that they could protect the Lost Child.

Noman built a great fortress round the Garden, and called it the Nom. He learned the secret of true strength, and passed it on to the brothers and sisters, and they became powerful. They made Noman their leader, and called themselves Nomana. But Noman never forgot the warning revealed in the First Brother’s dream.

‘One day the Assassin will surely come. On that day, our god will die.’

Before he left them for the last time, Noman addressed the brothers and sisters.

‘Do not seek power. Our power is not given us for

ourselves, but for others. Fight the cruelty and injustice of the world. This struggle will never end: but the little we can do, that we must do, so that others will know good men too can be strong.'

So began the missions of the Nomana, in which the brothers and sisters travelled far and wide, asking nothing for themselves, bringing justice to the oppressed and freedom to the enslaved. For this they were loved, and became known as the Noble Warriors.

PART ONE

ANACREA

My brothers:
We face a grave and imminent danger.
Those who fear us seek to destroy us.
We do not know when the attack will come,
or from what quarter, or what powers will be raised
against us. We know only that a new weapon is being
prepared for our destruction.
How are we to defend ourselves
against unknown danger?
With vigilance. With wisdom. With sacrifice.



CHAPTER ONE

SUNRISE

SEEKER woke earlier than usual, long before dawn, and lay in the darkness thinking about the day ahead. It was high summer, with less than a week to go before the longest day of the year. In school, it was the day of the monthly test. And it was his sixteenth birthday.

Unable to sleep, he rose and dressed quietly so as not to wake his parents, and went out into the silent street. By the light of the stars he made his way to the steps that zigzagged up the steep hillside, and began to climb. As he did so he watched the eastern sky, and saw there the first pale silver gleams on the horizon that heralded the coming dawn.

He had decided to watch the sun rise.

At the top of the steps the path flattened out and led into the stone-flagged Nom square. To his right rose the great dark mass of the Nom, the fortress-monastery that dominated the island. To his left, the avenue of old storm-blasted pine trees that led to the overlook. He knew these trees well, they were his friends. He came to this place often, to be alone, and to look out over the boundless ocean to the very furthest edges of the world.

There was a wooden railing at the far end of the avenue, to warn those who walked here to go no further.

Beyond the railing the land fell away, at first in a steep slope, and then in a sheer vertical cliff. Hundreds of feet below, past nesting falcons and the circling flight of gulls, the waves broke against dark rocks. This was the most southerly face of the island. From here, there was nothing but sea and sky.

Seeker stood by the railing and watched the light trickle into the sky, and shivered. The band of gold now glowing on the horizon seemed to promise change: a future in which everything would be different. With this dawn he was sixteen years old, a child no longer. His real life, the life for which he had been waiting so long, was about to begin.

The gold light was now turning red. All across the eastern sky the stars were fading into the light, and the feathery bands of cloud were rimmed with scarlet. Any moment now the sun itself would break the line of the horizon.

How can a new day begin like this, he thought, and nothing change?

Then there it was, a blazing crimson ball bursting the band of sea and sky, hurling beams of brilliance across the water. He looked away, dazzled, and saw the red light on the trunks of the pine trees, and on the high stone walls of the Nom. His own hand too, held up before him, was bathed in the rays of the rising sun, familiar but transformed. Moving slowly, he raised both his arms above his head, and pointed his forefingers skyward, and touched them together. This was the Nomana salute.

Those who wished to become Noble Warriors entered the Nom at the age of sixteen.

He heard a soft sound behind him, and turning, startled, saw a figure standing in the avenue. He flushed, and lowered his arms. Then he gave a respectful bow of his head, because the watcher was a Noma.

'You're up early.'

A woman. Her voice sounded warm and friendly.

'I wanted to see the dawn.'

Seeker was embarrassed that she had seen him making the salute to which he was not entitled; but she did not reprimand him. He bowed again, and headed down the avenue, now flooded by the brilliant light of the rising sun. As he passed the Noma, she said, 'It's not necessary to be unhappy.'

He stopped dead, and turned back to look at her. Like all the Nomana, she wore a badan over her head which shadowed her face. But he sensed that she was half-smiling as she met his gaze.

'I am unhappy.'

The Noma went on gazing at him with her gentle smile.

'Who are you?'

He gave his full name, the name his father had chosen for him, the name he hated.

'Seeker after Truth.'

'Ah, yes. The schoolteacher's son.'

His father was the headmaster of the island's only school. He was raising Seeker to be a teacher like him.

‘Your life is your own,’ said the Noma. ‘If it’s not the life you want, only you can change it.’

Seeker made his way slowly back to the steps, and down the steps home, his mind filled by the Noma’s words. All his life he had done what his father had asked of him. He had always been top of his class, and was now top of the school. He knew his father was proud of him. But he did not want to live his father’s life.

Seeker wanted to be a Noble Warrior.