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Opening extract from

Tom Trueheart and the Land of Myths and Legends

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Chapter 1

A BRIGHT SUMMER MORNING

7.22 A.M.

Once upon a time . . .

Tom Trueheart opened his bedroom window. It was early on a summer morning and he had no wish to disturb the rest of his family. He hoped, in fact, that they were all still fast asleep. He climbed outside, then paused and balanced for a moment on the windowsill. He looked across at the surrounding forest. The sky had an almost golden glow in the east, and he could see a flock of distant circling birds.

'I hope you're coming this time, Jollity,' Tom said under his breath, and then he shimmied all the way down the drainpipe.

He cheerfully scuffed his leather breeches on the wall as he jumped lightly down into the garden. He went to the place under the old tree root where he had hidden all his adventurer's things the night before. He retrieved his packstaff, which he had already packed tight with useful things to eat, plus some candles and tinderbox, a compass, a little metal opener, and some money.

He picked up his quiver of arrows and his bow, and, of course, his special birthday sword too. The blade sparked and flared just a little, and reflected a flash of gold from the sky as he slipped the sword into the scabbard on his belt. He checked that he had his Story Bureau maps and the letter which Cicero, the wise old forest sprite who controlled sprite magic and made things happen in the Land of Stories, had left to encourage him on his journey. He was excited at the possibility of seeing his old friend Jollity again, but just a little worried too, about them sharing yet another, and possibly even more dangerous, adventure than their last. He also felt just a slight twinge of guilt at the thought of deliberately missing his brothers Jack, Jackson, Jake, Jacques, Jackie, and Jacquot's weddings. The big wedding was finally to happen (again) today.

He had at least been there for their first try at the big occasion, which had been so cruelly interrupted, and look at all that had happened after that. Well, he had done his best to be a pageboy for them. He had pleased his mother. He had suffered wearing the awful white velvet pageboy suit just that once. Now it was time for a big new secret adventure to begin. Time to be brave, to play the hero, to go on the really important quest: to find his father, Big Jack the Giant Killer, rescue him, and bring him home.



Tom stood in the middle of the bright garden and breathed in deeply. The air was cool with the scent of flowers, and there was a gentle breeze. A sudden sense of freedom and happiness swept over him. It was a fine golden summer morning, and he was about to begin a new adventure. He looked up at the weathervane. A big glossy black crow perched there looking down at him.

'Is that really you, Jollity?' Tom said.

The bird looked back at him, tilted its head on one side, and said, 'Caw.'

Tom looked at the bird, and the bird looked back at Tom with its beady eyes.

'Only teasing,' said the bird after a moment. 'Of *course* it's me, Tom.'

'About time too,' said Tom, in a mock angry voice.

The bird fluttered down and settled on his shoulder.

'Right,' said Tom. 'Now that's better, feels just right. Jollity sitting on my shoulder, instead of me sitting on Jollity's shoulder. Come on, we've got an important secret mission to carry out. We have to go to the harbour first, I think,' said Tom.

'Aye aye, captain,' said Jollity.



Tom's mother, the kindly Mrs Nell Trueheart, had been awake since first light. She nodded and smiled to herself as she tucked the kitchen curtain back into place after watching Tom and Jollity walk away. 'That's my good boy,' she said proudly to herself. Then she had a sudden thought: it was an image of Tom walking back up that same path with his father, Big Jack, and both had their packstaffs jauntily over one shoulder. She shook her head and went and called up the stairs, 'Come on, now then, you lot, shake a leg, it's breakfast time, and it's your wedding day, all over *again*, in case you didn't know it, so look lively.'