

Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Who Needs Boys? | 5 |
| 2. "I Cannot Put My Trust in Females!" | 15 |
| 3. Danger in the Forest | 23 |
| 4. Land of the Cloud People | 33 |
| 5. A Strange City | 43 |
| 6. Sarah Decides | 55 |
| 7. The Trail | 67 |
| 8. Sarah Gets Some Help | 77 |
| 9. The Priest's Decision | 85 |
| 10. Bad News | 95 |
| 11. The Miracle Shot | 105 |
| 12. Death to the Female | 117 |
| 13. Time of the New Moon | 125 |
| 14. A Prince Becomes a Man | 137 |
| 15. A Friend in the Darkness | 145 |
| 16. A New Way | 149 |



1

Who Needs Boys?

Sarah Collingwood was ordinarily a most mild-mannered girl. At fourteen she even seemed to have a special ability for peacemaking. Whenever any of the Seven Sleepers fell into arguments, it was Sarah who managed to step between and pour oil on the troubled waters.

But right now Sarah's eyes glinted with anger.

She was small and graceful, with large brown eyes and black hair drawn back into a ponytail. The sun had given her a nice tan. She wore a light blue shirt, a skirt of darker blue that came down below her knees, and half-boots made of soft leather.

But there was nothing soft about Sarah's voice as she yelled, "Josh, I've told you a thousand times to leave my things alone!"

Josh Adams, at fifteen, was tall and awkward and unsure of himself, especially where girls were concerned. He had known Sarah even back in OldWorld—before the earth had been practically destroyed by a nuclear war. Ever since their adventures in NuWorld had started, he'd felt that Sarah was the steadiest of all of the Sleepers.

So now, bewildered, he stared at her and stammered, "But . . . but . . . what are you talking about, Sarah?"

"I'm talking about what have you done with my bow."

"Your bow?" She had to see that he was puzzled. "I

don't know what you're talking about! I haven't touched your bow!"

"Don't tell me that! You borrowed it last week without asking permission! That means you took it again."

"I didn't think you'd mind my borrowing it last week!"

"Well, I did mind!" Sarah put her hands on her hips, and her voice rose in anger. "Haven't you ever thought that it might be more polite to ask before you take people's things?"

By now Josh was speechless. The previous week he *had* taken Sarah's bow without asking her, but she had not seemed to mind at the time. As he blinked at her in surprise, he found himself growing a little angry. He found his voice.

"Anyway, I didn't take your old bow! And that's all there is to it!" he said defiantly.

Always before, Sarah would have taken Josh at his word, but her nerves were likely tense. The Sleepers had been involved in a very difficult and dangerous assignment. It was for Goél, leader of the forces in Nu-World doing battle against the Dark Lord, who sought to enslave everyone. Josh realized that the strain of the mission had taken a toll on all of them.

She shoved her face close to his. "You have no more manners than a pig!" she said.

"A pig! You're calling me a pig?"

"That's what I said! No. You're worse than a pig. Pigs don't take people's things without asking."

"I didn't take your old bow!" Josh's nerves were also tight, and he suddenly found himself angrier than he had ever been at Sarah. "I don't have to take this! If you can't keep up with your things, don't blame me for it!"

Their voices rose as they shouted at each other.

They were interrupted by a newcomer. A tall boy about their age appeared. Bob Lee Jackson, always called Reb by his friends, had light blue eyes, tow-colored hair, and a heavy Southern accent. He wore a fawn colored shirt, blue pants, and boots, but the most striking of his clothing was his high-crowned Stetson hat with a feather in its red band. He had been a rodeo rider before coming to NuWorld and probably was the strongest and toughest of the Sleepers.

“What y’all fussing about?” he asked with puzzlement in his eyes. “I could hear you a mile away. What’s the shouting about?”

Sarah turned to him. “He stole my bow!”

“I didn’t do any such thing!” Josh snapped. “I haven’t even seen your old bow!”

Reb said, “Uh . . . isn’t that it right over there, leaning against the tree?”

Sarah whirled. Sure enough, there was the bow she had accused Josh of stealing. It was a beautifully constructed weapon made of yew, and she had made it herself. It was smoothly polished and had a sixty-pound pull. Sarah was the most expert in the use of the bow of all the Sleepers, and her bow was as precious to her as Reb’s cowboy hat was to him.

A moment’s silence reigned, and then Sarah muttered, “I didn’t see it!” She walked away without an apology, her back stiff. Picking up the bow, she disappeared into the woods that surrounded their small house.

“What’s biting her?” Reb marveled. “Never heard her carry on like that before.”

“She’s getting impossible to work with,” Josh murmured. “I don’t know what’s the matter with her.”

“Well, mostly she’s just a girl. And you know how girls are. Not nice and steady like us guys.”

Josh could not hold back a smile. Reb was always cheerful. He knew also that Reb did not mean that. “I guess you’re right,” he said. “Have to make allowances for girls.”

Dave Cooper walked into the house and went at once to the kitchen. A pot bubbled over the fire in the fireplace, and he lifted the lid and sniffed. “Smells good!” he said.

At sixteen, Dave was the oldest of the Sleepers and a good-looking boy with slightly curly brown hair and gray eyes. He reached for a spoon.

But the girl who was making bread hurried over and slapped his hand. Abbey Roberts was a pretty girl of fourteen with blue eyes and blonde hair.

“Leave that alone!”

“Hey! Don’t go beating on me!” Dave protested. “I’m just hungry!”

“You’ll have to wait until dinner!”

He was irritated by Abbey’s shortness. “You’re sure getting snippy,” he said. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Nothing’s wrong with me!” And she began complaining.

Dave listened for a while, shocked. Then he shook his head, picked up a spoon, lifted the pot lid, and tasted the stew.

“I told you to stay out of that stew! Didn’t you hear me? Have you gone deaf?”

Dave, like the other Sleepers, had not yet recovered from the trying time they had had on their recent adventure. He glared at Abbey and said, “That’s proba-

bly the worst stew I've ever eaten!" It was actually very good stew, but by now Dave's temper was out of order.

"You don't have to eat it if you don't like it!"

"Men always are the best cooks, anyway."

"What are you talking about?"

"I mean back in OldWorld. When you went to a fancy restaurant, all the chefs were men. You never saw a woman chef in a fancy restaurant, did you?"

"Then you can just go to your fancy restaurant!" Abbey said shrilly. Dave held a full spoon in his hand, and she reached out and slapped it. The stew flew onto his shirt. "You can just cook for yourself if you don't like the way I do it!"

Dave glared at her and then at the stain on his shirt. "You didn't have to do that."

"You didn't have to come in here and complain about the cooking! Now, get out of the kitchen!"

Dave left at once, biting on his lip to keep from retorting. He went across the open clearing to where Jake Garfield and Wash Jones sat with their backs against a big tree.

Gregory Randolph Washington Jones was the smallest of the Sleepers. He was also the best humored. He said, "What's wrong, Dave? You look like you've been stung by a bee."

"Worse than that," Dave growled. "I've been chewed up by Abbey. What's *wrong* with her?"

Jake Garfield, a year older than Wash, was short with red hair. He grinned. "She pull you up short, Dave?"

"Yes, she did. Again. And I'm getting tired of it!" He sat down by the two boys. They had just started to talk about their past adventure when Josh came by and joined them. He had a sour look on his face, and Dave asked, "What's wrong with you, Josh?"

“It’s Sarah. She accused me of stealing her old bow. I hadn’t even touched it. Really bawled me out for no reason at all!”

“You know what I think?” Wash said slowly. “I think those girls are just worn out. That last assignment we had was a stem-winder!”

“It was just as hard on us as it was on them!” Dave said stubbornly.

“Yes, it was,” Josh agreed. “Tell you what,” he said, as if a sudden thought had come to him. “I think they need some time to themselves, and I guess maybe we do, too.”

“What you got on your mind?” Jake asked.

Actually Josh had nothing on his mind. Sarah had hurt his feelings, and he thought it would teach her a lesson if she had to take care of her own things for a while. But he said, “Here’s what I’d like to do. You know that stretch of woods about twenty miles from here—the one that’s got the bayou on it?”

“Sure. Those are nice woods,” Wash said. “What about ’em?”

“I think we ought to go on a little hunting expedition over there. Just us guys.”

“You mean leave the girls behind?” Wash asked. “That might hurt their feelings.”

“It’s better than hurting *my* feelings all the time,” Josh said. “It’ll be good for them. Maybe they’ll appreciate us if they have to do without us for a while.”

“I think he’s right,” Dave promptly said.

“Well, it suits me,” Jake said. “Nothing to do around here while we wait for a new mission, anyhow.”

The four boys talked it over, and when Reb appeared, he too was eager. Reb was always ready to

go on hunting trips, but when Josh told him about leaving the girls behind, he grinned. "I don't think they'll like that. You're not in very good favor, anyhow, Josh. You'd better think it over."

But Josh's pride was severely bruised. "Nothing to think over," he said gruffly. "I'll go tell them. We can leave in the morning."

Sarah was helping Abbey get the noon meal ready when Josh came in.

"I've decided that the guys are going out on a hunt," he told them.

Sarah looked up at him. "A hunt? Where to?"

"Over where that bayou is. About twenty miles north of here."

Actually Sarah was sorry that she had lashed out at Josh, but something about the way he looked and spoke irritated her. "What time are we leaving?" she asked.

"This is just for us guys," he said importantly.

"What do you mean, just for guys?" Abbey asked, looking surprised.

"I mean there are some dangerous beasts over there. You girls don't need to be going. It's too dangerous."

Abbey flushed, and Sarah felt her own face redden. They had been through many adventures together with Josh and the other boys. And now suddenly some place was "too dangerous."

"Too dangerous"? Let me remind you, Josh Adams," Sarah flared up, "that I was the one who saved you from that wild boar! If I hadn't put an arrow into him, he would have killed you."

"No, he wouldn't have," Josh said.

He knows very well that I saved his life, Sarah thought.

“You two girls have gotten impossible to live with,” he said sternly. “We’re going to go away and give you some time to think. Maybe you can get into a better humor.”

As soon as Josh left, Sarah slammed down a pan of biscuits on the table, jarring it. “Too dangerous! I like that!”

“Who do they think they are?” Abbey asked. She didn’t care much about hunting, but likely the thought of being deliberately left out was irritating. “Boys—who needs them?”

The rest of the day was tense, for the girls would speak only in short sentences. All the boys could see that they were ruffled.

Once Wash whispered, “Why don’t you break down and be generous, Josh? The trip’ll be fun for them. They’ll be all right.”

But Josh Adams, who usually was quite amiable, was also stubborn. “No, they need time to get over whatever it is that’s eating them. We’ll give them a couple of days.”

At dawn the next morning, when the boys got up, they found no one to cook breakfast for them. Wash did the best he could, but as they sat down to eat, he admitted, “Afraid I’m not the cook Abbey is—or Sarah.”

“It’s all right, Wash,” Josh said. “It’s good enough.” Actually he was already regretting his decision. But he did not want to back down, so after breakfast he said, “All right. Let’s go.”

Both Sarah and Abbey heard the door slam, but it

was Sarah who said, “Well, they’re gone. And good riddance.” She snuggled back under the warm covers and muttered, “Boys—who needs them? We can get along without them very well.”



2

“I Cannot Put My Trust in Females!”

Well, I hope they’re enjoying themselves!” Sarah crossed the kitchen and poked a fork into a steak that was frying in the pan. There were two of them, tender and juicy, and the aroma of the cooking meat smelled good.

“I hope they’re eating half-cooked meat and getting indigestion,” she muttered.

Abbey entered and came to the stove. “What’d you say, Sarah? Ooh, that looks good!”

“Yes, they’re nice and tender. And we’re going to have baked potatoes with fresh butter. And I’ve made a chocolate pie—Josh’s favorite. But he won’t get any of it.”

“What is it you were saying when I came in?”

“I was saying I hope the boys eat half-cooked meat and get indigestion.”

Abbey laughed at that. “You’re really annoyed at Josh, aren’t you?”

“Shouldn’t I be?”

“Oh, *I* feel a little better this morning. I was cross enough yesterday. But I guess we were all upset and tired, and our nerves were a bit tight.”

Sarah removed the steaks and put them on individual plates. “These are done,” she said. “If you’ll get the potatoes, we can eat.”

The two sat down to a delicious meal.

Abbey asked at one point, “Do you miss being back in OldWorld, Sarah? You never talk much about those times anymore.”

Sarah chewed thoughtfully on a small bite of steak. Finally she nodded. “I guess I do. Of course I miss my folks.”

“I do, too,” Abbey said sadly. “Sometimes at night I wake up and just cry about it.”

“Do you do that? So do I!” Sarah exclaimed. “I wonder if any of the boys feel that way.”

“They’d never tell if they did.” Abbey nodded wisely. “You know how boys are. They think it’s a shame to shed a tear.”

It had been a beautiful day. The sun was almost down now, and its last rays came through the window as the girls talked. Sarah could hear the frogs croaking down in the small river close by. Then abruptly the noise stopped, and both girls sat a little straighter.

“Something scared those frogs,” Abbey said.

Both girls rose at once and picked up their swords. There were no guns in NuWorld, only swords, spears, and bows. Fortunately, the Sleepers had become fairly expert in all of them, for they were in a world of dangerous beasts never seen before on the earth. The nuclear war had done strange things to genetics. In NuWorld there were even creatures much like dragons.

Sarah opened the door and stepped outside. She saw two figures emerge from the woods, and she focused on them sharply. She was always suspicious of strangers, because there was special danger in this world for the followers of Goél.

“Who is it, Sarah?” Abbey asked from behind her.

Sarah did not answer for a moment, and then she cried out, “Goél!”

The two figures came forward at once. The taller was wearing a light gray robe with a hood over his head. Now he pushed it back. His features were strong, and most noticeable were the eyes. They seemed to glow, and their directness would have startled many people.

“Well, daughter, I’m glad to have found you.”

He took Sarah’s hands for a moment, and she felt the confidence that always came with meeting Goél.

Then he turned to greet Abbey. “Abigail, you’re looking very well indeed!”

Abbey blushed. Everyone, including Goél, was aware that she thought too much of her appearance. She’d had to learn that outward beauty was not as important as what lay in the heart. However, she was obviously glad to see him.

He took both her hands in one of his and squeezed them.

“I’m so glad to see you, sire,” she said brightly. “You came just in time to eat.”

Goél smiled, and this made him look much younger. He was deeply tanned, and his teeth were very white against the darkness of his skin. “I always manage to come at suppertime. But first, let me introduce my companion.” He turned to the young man who stood beside him. “This is Teanor. Teanor, you have heard of the Seven Sleepers. This is Sarah. And this is Abigail.”

Teanor was a slight young man, not a great deal taller than Sarah. He was very trim and fit, though, and his tan was even darker than that of Goél. He had light brown hair, cut short, and his eyes were deep-set and inquisitive. “I have heard of the Seven Sleepers,” he murmured.

“Come inside, sire,” Sarah said. “It won’t take long to grill steaks for you.”

The two men entered the little house, and as Sarah scurried about preparing food for their guests, she listened to Goél talk with Abbey, mostly about their last adventure. From time to time she turned to glance at the young man. He said nothing. He appeared worried, and she wondered about his relationship with Goél.

The steaks were cooked very quickly, and the two men ate hungrily. When they had finished, Sarah set out the remains of the chocolate pie, and Abbey served large cups of steaming tea.

Finally Goél leaned back and nodded. “That was as fine a meal as I can remember. You girls are both marvelous cooks.”

“It was good indeed,” Teanor said. “I thank you.”

Goél turned his eyes on Teanor and studied him a moment or two. Then he turned back to Sarah and Abbey. “Where are the boys?”

“Oh, they went out on a hunting trip,” Sarah said. “They may not be back for a time.”

“I wish they were here,” Goél said quietly. Then he said, “Teanor’s people are called the Cloud People.”

“What a wonderful name! Why are they called that, Teanor?” Sarah asked.

The young man smiled. “We live in high places.”

“The Cloud People,” Goél said, “were on good terms with their neighbors the Earth Dwellers until recent years. Some time ago, however, things began to change. Since I must go now, perhaps you could tell them about it, Teanor. The Dark Lord is at work, and I am needed in another place. I thank you again.”

When the farewells had been said and their leader was gone, the young man Teanor sat up straight in his

chair. "What Goél told you is true. As my father has told me, at one time our people and the Earth Dwellers were friendly. But a few years ago their chief, whose name is Maroni, fell under the influence of a high priest called Nomus. He is an evil man and demands human sacrifices for their god, Nimbo."

"Human sacrifices!" Sarah exclaimed. "How terrible!"

"It is evil indeed!" Teanor said. "They trap our young men and make slaves out of them. They trap women and children and sacrifice them to their god."

Sarah liked the young man. He seemed earnest and sincere. "So you came to Goél for help?"

"Yes. Our king, Celevorn, has sent me for help. We need fierce warriors to overcome the Earth Dwellers. And we had heard of Goél's servants the Seven Sleepers."

"It will be an honor to help your people."

Teanor said, "My own brother is a captive of the Earth Dwellers. I must save him. How long before the warriors return?"

"I'm not sure. Perhaps two or three days, but I hope not that long."

"Then, alas, I cannot wait for them. I must return in the morning and do what I can."

Sarah did not argue but showed Teanor a place to sleep in Dave's room.

All night long she tossed and turned. She was concerned with Teanor's plight and also for some reason was still angry with the boys for having left. Still, she knew that this was not their fault. They had no way of knowing this emergency would come.

Finally she drifted off to sleep, but she awoke early, still thinking of what to do.

She woke up Abbey. "Wake up, Abbey!" she said, standing over Abbey's cot and shaking her shoulder.

"What—what is it? What time is it?"

"Abbey, we've got to help Teanor."

"Well, of course we will. We've already agreed on that. Did you wake me up to tell me that?"

"Get up. We've got to talk."

Abbey arose reluctantly, and the two girls dressed. Dawn was beginning to break as they went into the kitchen and began to prepare a quick breakfast. When it was ready, Sarah went to Dave's room and knocked on the door. "Teanor, are you awake?"

"Yes." The door opened. The young man was fully dressed and seemed ready to leave. He even had his knapsack on his back.

"Come and have breakfast before you go."

"I am in a great hurry."

"You have time to eat, and, besides, I have something to tell you."

Teanor hesitated but then nodded. "Very well," he said.

Sarah led the young man to the table, where they set a good breakfast before him, and the three sat down to eat.

When Teanor was finished, he said, "I thank you for the meal, but I must hurry."

"But you came to get help, and you haven't yet received it."

"I know," he said sadly. "But I cannot even sleep for thinking about our poor people."

"Teanor, I have news for you. Abbey and I have decided to accompany you on your return home."

For a moment there was total silence, and then Teanor exclaimed, "What good would that do?"

“But didn’t you come to get help?”

“I came to get *warriors!* I cannot put my trust in females!”

Ordinarily such words as these would have caused an argument, but Sarah understood Teanor’s position.

“You don’t understand,” she said. “Josh and the others will join us as soon as they return.”

“They would never be able to find my home.”

“Yes, they would. I’ve thought it all out carefully. We’ll leave them a note and a map. The three of us can go on together, and as soon as they get back, they can follow.”

But Teanor shook his head firmly. “That is not why I came. I do not need females. I need men.”

This caused Sarah’s pride to rise up. “You may be surprised to find out what we can do.” She did not want to boast about her own accomplishments, but she felt that she was being challenged.

Teanor studied the two girls, then got up. “I thank you for the food, but I must return.”

“Give us half an hour, and we’ll be ready,” Sarah said quickly.

Teanor hesitated. “All right,” he said. “But I will not have time to wait longer for you. And if you cannot keep up, you must return.”

The two girls immediately got their backpacks and began to throw their gear together. They put on their best traveling boots and wore their swords at their sides. Sarah, of course, carried her bow and a quiver of excellent arrows. Then she wrote a note for the boys.

Finally, at her urging, Teanor drew a map leading to the home of the Cloud People.

“It is a difficult journey and full of danger. I still am not certain they can find their way.”

“They can find us.” Sarah nodded confidently.
“Now we’re ready.”

He gave a shrug. “Follow me if you wish,” he said.
“But I will never put my life in the hands of females.”

Sarah smiled. “We’ll see if we can’t change your mind.”