

The Knight: Book One of The Wizard Knight

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A young man in his teens is transported from our world to a magical realm that contains seven levels of reality. Very quickly transformed by magic into a grown man of heroic proportions, he takes the name Able and sets out on a quest to find the sword that has been promised to him, a sword he will get from a dragon, the one very special blade that will help him fulfill his life ambition to become a knight and a true hero.

Inside, however, Able remains a boy, and he must grow in every sense to survive the dangers and delights that lie ahead in encounters with giants, elves, wizards, and dragons. His adventure will conclude next year in the second volume of The Wizard Knight, The Wizard.

Gene Wolfe is one of the most widely praised masters of SF and fantasy. He is the winner of the World Fantasy Award for Life Achievement, the Nebula Award, twice, the World Fantasy Award, twice, the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, the British Fantasy Award, and France's Prix Apollo. His popular successes include the four-volume classic *The Book of the New Sun*.

With this new series, Wolfe not only surpasses all the most popular genre writers of the last three decades, he takes on the legends of the past century, in a work that will be favorably compared with the best of J. R. R. Tolkien, E. R. Eddison, Mervyn Peake, and T. H. White. This is a book---and a series---for the ages, from perhaps the greatest living writer in (or outside) the fantasy genre.

Gene Wolfe has been called "the finest writer the science fiction world has yet produced" by The Washington Post. A former engineer, he has written numerous books and won a variety of awards for his SF writing. He and his wife, Rosemary, make their home in Barrington, IL.

The Knight

CHAPTER 1
DEAR BEN
You must have stopped wondering what happened to me a long time ago; I know it has been many years. I have the time to write here, and what looks like a good chance to get what I write to where you are, so I am going to try. If I just told everything on a couple of sheets, you would not believe most of it. Hardly any of it, because there are many things that I have trouble with myself. So what I am going to do instead is tell everything. When I have finished, you still may not believe me; but you will know all that I do. In some ways, that is a lot. In others, practically nothing. When I saw you sitting by our fire--my own brother--there on the battlefield ... Never mind. I will get to it. Only I think it may be why I am writing now. Remember the day we drove out to the cabin? Then Geri phoned. You had to go home and did not need a kid around So we said there was no reason for me to go too, I could stay out there and you would come back the next day. We said I would fish. That was it. Only I did not. It did not seem like it was going to be much fun with you gone, but the air was crisp and the leaves were turning, so I went on a hike. Maybe it was a mistake. I went a long way, but I was not lost. Pretty soon I picked up a stick and hiked with it, but it was crooked and not very strong. I did not like it much and decided I would cut a good one I could keep out at the cabin and use whenever we were there. I saw a tree that was different from all the others. It was not very big, and it had white bark and shiny leaves. It was a spiny orange tree, Ben, but I had never heard of them. Later Bold Berthold told me a lot. It was too big for me to cut the whole thing, but I found a branch that was almost straight. I cut off that and trimmed it and so forth. That may have been the main thing, my main mistake. They are not like other trees. The Mossmen care more

about them. I had gone off the path when I saw the spiny orange, and when I got to it I saw it was right at the edge of the woods, and past it were the downs. Some hills were pretty steep, but they were beautiful, smooth and covered with long grass. So I hiked out there with my new stick and climbed three or four hills. It was really nice. I found a little spring at the top of a hill. I had a drink, and sat down--I was pretty tired by then--and carved the stick some, making who-knows-what. Just whittling. After a while I lay down and looked at the clouds. Everybody has seen pictures in clouds, but I saw more that afternoon than I ever have before or since--an old man with a beard that the wind changed into a black dragon, a wonderful horse with a horn on its head, and a beautiful lady who smiled down at me. After that, a flying castle, all spiky like a star because there were towers and turrets coming out of all its sides. I kept telling myself it had to be a cloud, but it did not look like a cloud, Ben. It looked like stone. I got up and chased after it, waiting for the wind to blow it apart, but it never did. Night came. I could not see the castle any longer, and I knew I had to be a long way from our cabin. I started back across the downs, walking fast; but I got to walking down a slope that had no bottom. Somebody grabbed me in the dark, and somebody else caught my ankle when I slapped that hand away. Right then somebody said, "Who comes to Aelfrice!" I still remember that, and for a long, long time after that, that was all I could remember. That and being grabbed by a lot of people.

I woke up in a cave by the sea, where an old lady with too many teeth sat spinning; and when I had pulled myself together and found my stick, I asked where we were, trying to be as polite as I could. "Can you tell me what place this is, ma'am, and how to get to Griffinsford from here?" For some reason I thought Griffinsford was where we lived, Ben, and I still do not remember the real name. Maybe it really is Griffinsford. They are all mixed up. The old lady shook her head. "Do you know how I got here?" She laughed, and the wind and the sea were in it; she was the spray, and the waves that broke outside her cave. When I talked to her, I was talking to them. That was how I felt. Does it sound crazy? I had been crazy since I was born, and now I was sane and it felt wonderful. The wind and the waves were sitting in that cave with me twisting thread, and nature was not something outside anymore. She was a big part of it, and I was a little part of it, and I had been gone too long. Later Garsecg said the sea had healed me. I went to the mouth of the cave and waded out until the water came up to my waist; but the only things I could see were cliffs hanging over her cave, deep blue water farther out, gulls, and jagged black rocks like dragons' teeth. The old woman said, "You must wait for the slack of the tide." I came back, sea-wet to my armpits. "Will it be long?" "Long enough." After that I just leaned on my stick and watched her spin, trying to figure out what it was that she was turning into string and why it made the noises it did. Sometimes it seemed like there were faces in it and arms and legs coming out of it. "You are Able of the High Heart." That got my attention, and I told her my old name. Up to then, she had never looked away from her spinning. "What I say aright, do not you smite," she told me. I said I was sorry. "Some loss must be, so this I decree: the lower your lady the higher your love." She stopped spinning to smile at me. I knew she meant it to be friendly, but her teeth were terrible and looked as sharp as razors. She said, "There must be a forfeit for insolence, and since that's how it usually is, that one shouldn't do much harm." That was how I got my name changed. She went back to spinning, but it looked like she was reading her thread. "You shall sink before you rise, and rise before you sink." It scared me, and I asked if I could ask her a question. "It had best be, since you ask

one. What do you want to know, Able of the High Heart?" There was so much I could not get it out. I said, "Who are you?" instead. "Parka." "Are you a fortune-teller?" She smiled again. "Some say so." "How did I get here?" She pointed with the distaff, the thing that held the stuff she was spinning, pointing toward the back of the cave, where it was all black. "I don't remember being there," I told her. "The recollection has been taken from you." As soon as she said it, I knew it was right. I could remember certain things. I could remember you and the cabin and the clouds, but all that had been a long time ago, and after it there had been a lot I could not remember at all. "The Aelf carried you to me." "Who are the Aelf?" I felt I ought to know. "Don't you know, Able of the High Heart?" That was the last thing she said for a long while. I sat down to watch, but sometimes I looked at the back of the cave where she said I had come from. When I looked away from her, she got bigger and bigger, so I knew there was something huge behind me. When I turned and looked back at her again, she was not quite as big as I was. That was one thing. The other one was that I knew that when I was little I had known all about the Aelf, and it was all mixed up with somebody else, a little girl who had played with me; and there had been big, big trees, and ferns a lot bigger than we were, and clear springs. And moss. Lots of moss. Soft, green moss like velvet. "They have sent you with the tale of their wrongs," Parka said, "and their worship." "Worship?" I was not sure what she meant. "Of you." That brought back other things--not things, really, but feelings. I said, "I don't like them," and it was the truth. "Plant one seed," she told me. For a long time, I waited for her to say something else, waiting because I did not want to ask her questions. She never did, so I said, "Aren't you going to tell me all those things? The wrongs and the rest of it?" "No." I let out my breath. I had been afraid of what I might hear. "That's good." "It is. Some gain there must be, so this I decree: each time you gain your heart's desire, your heart shall reach for something higher." I had the feeling then that if I asked more questions I was not going to like the answers. The sun stretched out his hands into our cave and blessed us both, or that was the way it seemed; then he sank into the sea, and the sea tried to follow him. Pretty soon the place where I had stood when I had waded out was hardly wet at all. "Is this the slack of the tide?" I asked Parka. "Wait," she said, and bit her spinning through, wound a piece of it from her bobbin onto her hand, bit it off, and gave it to me, saying, "For your bow." "I don't have a bow." She pointed to my stick, Ben, and I saw it was trying to turn into a bow. There was a bend at the middle; except for that it was completely straight, and because I had whittled on the big end, both ends were smaller than the middle. I thanked her and ran out onto what had turned into a rough beach under the cliff. When I waved good-bye, it seemed like the whole cave was full of white birds, flying and fluttering. She waved back; she looked very small then, like the flame of a candle. South of the cave I found a steep path to the top of the cliffs. At the top there were ruined walls, and the stump of a tower. The stars were out by the time I got there, and it was cold. I hunted around for a sheltered spot and found one; after that, I climbed what was left of the tower. The tower had stood on a rocky island connected to the mainland by a spit of sand and rocks so low it was nearly under the water even at low tide. I must have stared at the waves breaking over it in the starlight for five minutes before I felt sure it was there. It was, and I knew I ought to get off the island while I still could, and find a place to sleep on shore. I knew it, but I did not do it. For one thing, I was tired already. Not hungry and not particularly thirsty, but so tired that all I really wanted was to lie down somewhere. The other was that I was afraid of what I might find on shore, and what might find me. Besides, I needed to think. There was so much I could not

remember, and what I could remember (you, Ben, and the cabin, and the house where we lived, and those pictures you have of Mom and Dad) was a long, long time ago. I wanted to try to remember more, and I wanted to think about what Parka had said and what it might mean. So I went back to the sheltered place I had found among the blue stones and lay down. I was barefoot, and it seemed to me while I lay there that I should have had hiking boots, and stockings. I could not remember what had become of them. I was wearing a gray wool shirt without buttons and gray wool pants with no pockets, and that did not seem right either. I had a belt, and a little leather pouch hanging from it by its strings; but the only things in it were Parka's bowstring, three hard black seeds, and a little knife with a wooden handle and a wooden scabbard. The knife fit my hand like it belonged there, but I did not remember it at all. Copyright © 2004 by Gene Wolfe

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