



The Sleeping Sword

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

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In children's fiction, writers have long been attracted to miracle cures as a way of taking characters from the dark night of the soul into the bright light of a happy ending and by far the most popular conditions to bring this about are paralysis, the inability to walk, and blindness, the inability to see. Those who think this convention has been replaced by a more realistic way to write about disability should read Morpurgo's otherwise excellent *The Sleeping Sword*. The story is set on Bryher in the Isles of Scilly where the sounds of the sea and the oyster catchers are beautifully evoked. The hero Bun has been blinded in a dividing accident and for the past two years he has been learning how to deal with this new life. He often feels lost and frightened but with the help of good friends and blind woman on the mainland who teaches him braille and a more positive way of looking at the world, he begins to move forward. With great skill, Morpurgo weaves this story of Bun's difficult, sometimes painful reality with mythical fantasy and dreams. In this dream world, Bun discovers King Arthur's sword and shield in an ancient tomb buried on his father's farm. Bedevere instructs him to return it to King Arthur where he is guided by six white swans which turn into six black queens. Arthur tells his story and instructs Bun to return the sword to the stone telling him that he must have faith. 'Believe it will happen and it will, I promise you.' When Bun wakes from this dream, he has been cured. 'I can see, I can see' he shouts, in much the same way that Heidi's friend Clara cried, 'look, look, I can walk' as she took her first steps on the Alps. Perhaps I'm alone in wishing that Morpurgo had found an alternative to the well worn convention which suggests that the only happy way to deal with being disabled is to be cured, because in every other way this is a ripping yarn.

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