

The
Shining
Sword
Book I

Charles G. Coleman



Elyria, OH

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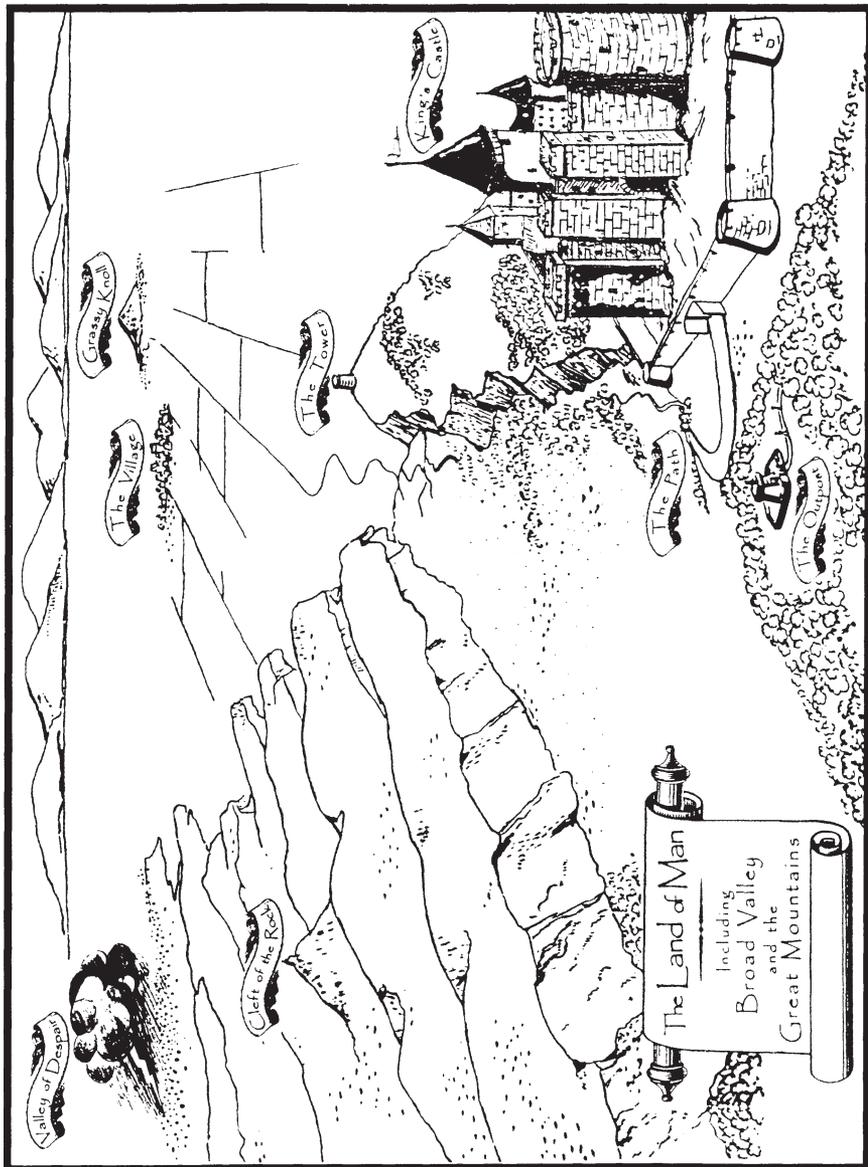
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Dedicated to

Kit,

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*whose help and inspiration
made this book possible.*



Contents

1.	The King's Messenger	7
2.	A Fight on the Path	17
3.	The Castle	25
4.	The Book	37
5.	Storm and Darkness	45
6.	The King's Armor	57
7.	Outpost Duty	66
8.	The Point of the Sword	75
9.	The Cleft of the Rock	83
10.	Valley of Despair	93
11.	The Battle of the Causeway	103
12.	Jamin's Story	113
13.	Wavor's Great Test.....	121
14.	Back to the Valley	129
15.	Call of the Silver Trumpet	139
16.	For the King!.....	145
	The Challenge	157



CHAPTER ONE



The King's Messenger

Below us the land lies bright and warm and peaceful. We are standing, you and I, on a high grassy knoll, with the spring sun warm on our backs and arms, and a pleasant breeze blowing against our cheeks. The knoll rises from about the center of a wide valley. From its foot the patterns of fields and villages and pasture land stretch away eastward and westward to great mountain ridges which rise against the sky.

The valley is called Broad Valley by its inhabitants and it lies in the land of man. Do not look for it on your map, for you will not find it there. We have come here because this valley and these mountains are the scenes of the story I am about to tell you, a story of some of the people who live in this land. You will find, I am sure, that they are much like people who live in your own country, and perhaps even in your own neighborhood.

Not far from us, in the soft grass on top of the knoll, lies

The Shining Sword

a young man of about eighteen years. He is sprawled at full length on his side, his head pillowed on his arm, looking lazily over the fields below. He is very comfortable. There is work to be done in those fields, but he is not worried about that. He would much rather spend the long afternoon lying in the sun.

I am sorry to say, this young man has few of the admirable qualities we like to find in our friends, but we must get acquainted with him, nevertheless, for interesting things are about to happen to him. His name is Lanus, and he is a principal figure in our story. Come with me to where he lies, for with his first move the story begins.



Lanus yawned, raised himself on one elbow, and cocked an eye at the sun. It was past midafternoon, he decided, and nearly time for him to leave the hilltop if he were to reach the village in time for the evening meal. He looked down at the valley, idly watching the movements of tiny black specks in the green fields below. Each of those specks, Lanus knew, was a man. What fools they were, he thought, to slave in the fields when the afternoons were so sunny and warm and the grass on the hilltop so soft!

As you have guessed, Lanus was lazy. He was a tall, strong young fellow, who was always ready for a wrestling bout or a swim, but who found the idea of work very disagreeable. Ever since his parents had died, he had lived a careless, shiftless life, working when he had to, sleeping in barns and haymows, and drifting from farm to farm in the

The King's Messenger

valley. He was not well thought of by the people of Broad Valley, but they were glad enough to hire him when he chose to work, for no one else would work for such small wages. And many of them were softhearted enough to give him a meal and a place in their barns to sleep when he needed it.

Suddenly Lanus's eye was caught by a new movement below. Someone was coming along the path near the foot of the knoll. Lanus grunted in surprise and sat up. Who beside himself would be coming to such an out-of-the-way place? As the stranger began climbing the slope toward him, Lanus saw that he was fair-haired, and that he wore a long traveling cloak buttoned tightly up the front. There was something about the figure that was familiar. Someone he had known walked in just that way—but who? Then suddenly he remembered. He jumped to his feet and went down the slope with long strides to meet the stranger.

“Robin!” he cried, seizing the other's hand, “where on earth did you come from?”

“Hello, Lanus.”

The fair-haired young man smiled and pumped Lanus's hand warmly. He was a stockily built youth, almost but not quite as tall as Lanus, with an open, pleasant face. When the first greetings were over Lanus said, “But, Robin, where have you been? You went from the village more than a year ago, just when everyone thought you were on your way to a farm of your own. Folks have been wondering about it ever since.”

Robin's face sobered. “I've had a wonderful year, Lanus, a very wonderful year,” he said. “I'd like to tell you about it. But there is something more important I must do first.” He put his hand on Lanus's shoulder. “I have a message to

The Shining Sword

deliver.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’ve come looking for you, Lanus. I have an invitation for you!”

“An invitation? From whom?”

“An invitation from the King!”

Bewildered, Lanus stared at his friend. “Are you crazy, Robin? You know we have no king here in the valley. We don’t believe in kings. We’re independent.” He said this last rather proudly, for it was one of the phrases which all of the valley folk were fond of repeating.

Robin smiled sadly and shook his head. “You are wrong, Lanus. There is a King—a great and good and wise King about whom the people of Broad Valley have forgotten. It is He who watches over and protects the valley, yet He is not acknowledged nor thanked.”

Lanus frowned, for what Robin was saying was new to him. “Do you know this King then, Robin?” he asked.

“I know Him,” said Robin, and his eyes flashed proudly. “I know Him and I wear His uniform!”

He unbuttoned his long traveling cloak and threw it back from his shoulders. Lanus’s eyes opened wide in amazement, for the sunlight glittered on the polished steel surface of a suit of armor. It was wonderfully made. Over Robin’s shoulders and chest was a shirt of flexible chain mail in which was set a steel breastplate. Steel plates guarded his hips and thighs. From one side of his belt hung a silver helmet; from the other was suspended a straight, silver-handled sword, while above his shoulder could be seen the top of a shield which was slung on his back.

The King's Messenger

Lanus whistled softly. "That is quite an outfit, Robin. But say, I've heard about armor like that. I've been told there is a strange sort of tribe in the mountains, the followers of some queer belief, who dress like that. Don't tell me," here a note of scorn crept into his voice, "don't tell me you've joined up with anything like that!"

Robin nodded. "Yes, that's where I've been for the past year. I know some of the folk in the valley make fun of us, but believe me, Lanus, it is the only life worthwhile."

Lanus looked at him doubtfully. "Well, you always have been a levelheaded fellow, Robin, and not one to be carried away with foolish ideas. Perhaps there is something in what you say. I'd like to hear more about it."

"Fine," said Robin, smiling happily. "Sit down and I'll tell you the whole story."

They dropped down on the grass, Robin sitting upright with his arms across his knees, Lanus sprawling characteristically on his back with a piece of grass in his mouth. And Robin told his story...



"A year ago," began Robin, "I worked for Farmer Hanna on the north side of the village. He was a good employer and paid good wages. I liked working in the fresh air and the sunny fields, and hoped someday to save enough to buy a farm of my own.

"But I was not entirely happy. I wondered why, for I could think of nothing I wanted more than to be a successful farmer here in the valley. But it bothered me that all about

The Shining Sword

me were such things as sickness and trouble and discontent. How could anyone be really happy? Even rich and successful people seemed to have troubles. And always, everywhere in the valley there were quarrels and fights. That was the year, you remember, when war broke out among several of the villages.”

“Some of them are still fighting,” put in Lanus, chewing his grass stem thoughtfully. Robin nodded, then went on.

“I wondered why it was that we couldn’t live peaceably together without selfishness, quarrels, or wars. None of us want such things but they come just the same. So I asked the wise men of my village what were the causes of these evils. Each of them had a different answer. Some said it was just human nature. Others said that mankind hadn’t advanced quite far enough yet to solve these problems. Still others said that all we needed was a different sort of government. None of them really knew.

“In the evening when my work was done, I used to walk out under the stars, trying in my mind to find answers to my questions. Where did evil come from? Who began it? And why did evil things happen in our valley? Sometimes as I walked, I would look up at the great mountains towering far above me on either side of the valley. If I were on the mountain top looking down, I wondered, would I be able to see things more clearly? Perhaps, up there where the air was clear and the whole valley spread out before me, I could begin to understand the real meaning of life.

“As I thought these things, evening after evening, a great desire grew in me to climb the mountain ridge and look over the valley from the top. I was ashamed to tell my friends of

The King's Messenger

my idea, for I felt they might laugh at me. No one from the valley ever climbed the great mountains.

“I decided to go alone and to tell no one. So when a day came on which I had no important duties, I got up early, asked Mrs. Hanna to pack a lunch for me, and set out for the mountains. I had no idea which part of the great mountains to climb, so I walked generally eastward from the village. But I soon felt my feet turning toward one particular point at the foot of the mountain slope, almost as though someone were leading me by the hand. When I reached the valley's edge, I was surprised to find, directly in front of me, a well-worn path leading up into the mountains. Something within told me that this was the way to go.

“The path drew me along like a magnet, and the pull grew stronger as I climbed. I found myself wondering breathlessly what lay around each new turn of the way. Finally, when I had gone nearly halfway up the mountainside, I saw that the path ahead plunged into a dark wood. As I wondered whether, after all, I should follow this mysterious pull into the dark shadows of the trees, I suddenly saw the figure of a man sitting on a fallen log at the forest's edge. At the same time the man seemed to see me, for he rose to his feet and came forward.

“He was dressed in armor, as I am now, and he smiled at me in a friendly way as he approached. ‘Hello, Robin,’ he said, ‘I've been waiting for you.’

“At the look of astonishment on my face, he smiled still more broadly. ‘I see you are wondering how I know your name, and how I knew you were coming when you had told no one.’ When I nodded, he went on, ‘It was not I, Robin,

The Shining Sword

but my Master who knew these things. He sent me here to meet you and bring you to His castle!’

“But who is your master, and how can he know me?” I asked.

““My Master is King of kings and Lord of lords. His eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good. Your ways are not hid from Him, Robin, and He has, for many months, been drawing you to Himself. Come, let us start for the castle, for we have still a long way to go.’

“As in a dream I followed him into the forest. A long way he led me, up steep slopes and past great rocks, until at last we reached a high stone wall on the mountain ridge. Here a gate was opened and I entered into the King’s castle.

“In that castle, Lanus, I had my questions answered for the first time. I learned the real meaning of good and evil. I learned why the valley is torn with wars, and why there is hatred and death. And I found the only life worth living. I stayed in the castle, Lanus, because I had no wish to return to the valley. I stayed and became a soldier of the King!”



Robin fell silent. After a moment, Lanus asked, “And did you see the King, Robin?”

“I have never seen Him, Lanus,” replied Robin softly, “for He is not seen with human eyes. But I know Him. I know Him through the Book which He has written, and through His sword that I bear. And I know Him because He guides and directs my way. And, Lanus, He wants you to know Him, too. He calls you, as He calls everyone in Broad Valley, to

The King's Messenger

come to Him and live.

“He has said, *‘I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.’* That, Lanus, is your invitation.”



For a few moments both lads sat in silence. The sun had just touched the edge of the western mountains, sending the first red streaks of sunset across the sky. Overhead a great hawk swept noiselessly toward his night roost on the mountain slopes. When Lanus finally spoke there was something like awe in his voice.

“Those are strange words, spoken by that King of yours,” he said, “yet there is power in them. Do you really believe these things you have told me?”

“With all my heart,” answered Robin simply.

“Well,” said Lanus thoughtfully, “perhaps I will accept your invitation. I would like to spend a day with you at this castle and see for myself what has changed you.”

“Good. Are you ready to start?”

“Now?” Lanus stared at his friend in amazement. Then he laughed. “Robin, you certainly don’t waste time. All right, there is nothing to keep me in the village tonight, and certainly no one to miss me if I go. I’m ready if you are!”