

The Queen of Nevers

by

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EXT. WOODS DAYTIME

A woman, bleeding and in pain, stumbles through the wood flanked by a squire and a knight. She clutches a sword in one hand, and a terrible wound in the other. She is the queen of NEVERS, ARTEMESIA. The squire at her side is THOMAS, dressed for his station and trying to help the Queen travel despite her wound. Following behind is the Queen's general, MACKIVALE, in torn fighting gear.

SQUIRE THOMAS

(Trying to support the queen's weight)

Mistress, please stop. The battle is won. There is no need to do anything else. Let me call for aid to have your wounds dressed.

GENERAL MACKIVALE

Thomas is right Queen, we should return to army, the field is ours. The enemy we have fought all these years is vanquished. You have saved Nevers!

QUEEN ARTEMESIA

Do not hinder me, I have to reach the river, I must!

GENERAL MACKIVALE gets in front of the queen, impeding her progress. THOMAS looks at him angry and the QUEEN slumps to the ground.

GENERAL MACKIVALE

Send someone to the river my Queen, Thomas can run any errand you have. We must return to the army so they can see we are there in our hour of triumph!

QUEEN ARTEMESIA

(Looking determined, yet obviously unable to continue)

I am dying General, and I must return the sword to the river.

GENERAL MACKIVALE

Mistress! Even if you were dying, you cannot surrender the sword of destiny. Our nation has rallied around that sword. (THOMAS tries to get in the way of the GENERAL, but the soldier merely pushes him aside). We must have the sword to repair the nation!

QUEEN ARTEMESIA

General, when the spirit of the river gave me the Sword of Destiny, he told me that I could only wield it during war, and must give it back on my dying day. I know the time General, and the clock strikes soon on my last breaths. (she settles further, falling to the ground as her strength leaving her). Yet I fail in my last task. The mind has its faculties, the spirit the drive, and the soul the desire, but the body - the weakest of the four sources of a woman's power, it fails me now in the last.

GENERAL MACKIVALE

(The GENERAL falls to his knees, seemingly overcome with emotion) I am sorry my queen to have questioned you. I am sorry to have not slain the villain who laid sword against your side, and I am sad if, as you say, your life is indeed at the end of its course. Yet, you name the four aspects of humanity passed to us by the gods, but fail to mention the one which you are now blessed!

QUEEN ARTEMESIA

What do you speak of? Quickly, my sight dims, and I fear my mind will follow.

GENERAL MACKIVALE

Your loyal followers, you forget us queen. Hand me the sword of destiny, and I will gladly carry it to the old man of the river. I will place it in his hands myself. Your body fails, but mine is pledged to you as if I was a digit in your fingers. Flex your hand and I will comply.

QUEEN ARTEMESIA

(The QUEEN smiles a wan smile and she holds forth the sword of destiny with an unsteady hand. The GENERAL reaches for the sword and takes it in his hand.) You do yourself honor General. I was told when I received the sword all those years ago that I would die surrounded by those who hated me. The old man of the river said that the hands who stood by my side during my last moments would be hands seeking to destroy the legacy of peace this horrible war will allow us to build. Indeed I thought that prophecy was fulfilled when the enemy's blade found my side, but yet I lived for long enough to see the words of the Riverman turn out false. Take the sword. The very place I received the blade is over the next rise, the old man will have you toss it into the cold waters of his kingdom. To honor me, swaddle it in my banner, so the ages can know in whose hands the great blade was last used.

GENERAL MACKIVALE looks down at the sword in his hand. As he does so a small smile crosses his face. He looks right at the QUEEN, his smile widening. The QUEEN sees it and a look of terror crosses her own. She dies with a look of terror and sadness on her face. THOMAS, who had been standing politely in the distance where MACKIVALE had pushed him, stands up, shakes off his tears and comes forward.

SQUIRE THOMAS

General, we must hurry. The place in the river she speaks of is only a short distance away. I will show you where it is. The Riverman is said to haunt these very woods, and may know we are here now!

GENERAL MACKIVALE

(The GENERAL turns away from the Queen and Thomas, a look of triumph in his eyes, and walks a few steps away, looking out at the woods in a reverie.)

General you name me, squire of the former queen, but your vision is cloudy, and your honors insufficient. You see before you neither soldier nor general, but the newest king of Nevers, anointed by the queen in her last seconds of life, this sword the symbol of that trust!

SQUIRE THOMAS

But General! She said no such thing. She intended no king for the lands, you were with her at the dawn of battles when she said the finish of the wars would also be the end of martial glories!

GENERAL MACKIVALE

(ignoring Thomas as he implored from behind)

Thomas, you were always the sneak, standing so stupidly by the side of Artemesia. Even when men of honor and standing came to her banner, men such as myself, she still clung to your half-witted simplicity as a token of the days when she lead a hunted band of misfits through these very woods. In some ways I see you as the furtive remnant of her innocent youth. You listen

at counsels that you are not smart enough to understand. Like a slippery rock you wait ignorantly in the stream, ready to fell a great man with your banal stupidity. But where as you are a slippery rock that luck made a companion of the queen when none would follow her, I am the clarion that called forth the people of this nation when the time was right. And now I reap my reward, the crown of a new dynasty.

MACKIVALE suddenly stiffens, his face taking on a rictus of surprise and pain. THOMAS appears over his shoulder, a look of humor showing that he felt this all was a joke. From behind one hand reaches up and strokes the cheek of the GENERAL.

SQUIRE THOMAS

Oh General, how your mind must now be racing over your hubris, how your spirit must quail before the potential you have lost in the blink of they eye.

GENERAL MACKIVALE

How? How did...

SQUIRE THOMAS

You yourself named me slippery rock, even as your voiced boomed as clarion over this quiet dell, place where our queen breathed her last. But a slippery rock is quiet, cunning, and is never detected before it is too late. (The dying GENERAL collapses, leaving THOMAS holding a bloody dagger and the SWORD OF DESTINY) How many brash men have slipped on a rock and gone tumbling down. Here, let me lower you down by your queen as I doubt your legs and arms still work as they did when you thought you were royal.

SQUIRE THOMAS

The story you told of the great general who was chosen as the reluctant king by the dying queen is a very good story, but I feel it lacks something subtle, something to make it a true epic. Perhaps a change of characters. The faithful, low-born squire who served his queen with honor through the war. The common villagers will revel that one of their rank is now ruling the lands. After winning a war, building a kingdom should be easy.