

Father's Feast

By K. M. Shea

On a wet morning early in the summer season, Britt mulishly moved the heavens (Read: Merlin) and Earth (Read: Kay) as well as a number of pests (Lancelot being first and foremost) to schedule off a few hours to spend time with Sir Ector of Bonmaison—her foster-father.

She was highly pleased that her venture had come together successfully, but now that the appointed hour had arrived, Britt almost wished she hadn't followed through with her plan.

"Bless me, lass, you look splendid in that new armor," Sir Ector said, brushing raindrops from his fierce beard.

"Merlin ordered it," Britt said, looking down at her golden armor. "I think I own more suits of armor than any other man alive."

"It's only right, with you being the King 'n all," Sir Ector said, propping an arm up on a stall door. "I'm sorry to say, but it looks like we'll have to cancel our ride. I don't mind getting wet, but it's raining so hard the courtyard will soon be a lake."

"Yes," Britt said, shifting uncomfortably.

"Would you rather go inside and get a bite to eat? Merlin said we'll dine late tonight as you've called for a feast."

"Could we wait a bit?" Britt asked, hurrying to the stall that housed Roen—one of her two beloved horses.

"Certainly," Sir Ector boomed, his beard parting to reveal a toothy smile. "Something upsetting you?" he asked, joining her at Roen's stall. "You seem unsettled."

"No, I'm not mad. It's just—" Britt forcibly silenced herself to keep from saying anything stupid. *Get it together! I'm out of practice, but this isn't a big deal. Seriously.* She scolded, desperately trying to con herself into minimizing the effort she had gone through for today.

"Arthur?" Sir Ector asked, tilting his head like a puzzled dog. "Britt?" he dared to venture when she didn't respond.

"Happy Father's Day," Britt blurted out. She snatched up an elaborate sword belt that hung from a hook on Roen's stall door, presenting it to Sir Ector.

Sir Ector looked from the belt to Britt. "I beg yer pardon?"

"In America—in the time where I come from—we have a...custom," she said, forcing the words from her lips. "There's a special day every year when fathers—or men who inspired you—are celebrated. Kids thank their fathers for everything they've done, and recognize their hard work. I don't know exactly what the date was—I usually took pains to ignore it—but I'm sure it was sometime in early summer, and you've done a lot for me, and I wanted to thank you," Britt said, spitting out the last few sentences in a mad rush.

Since the day Britt's dad had left her family, Britt had been more than a little caustic about fathers. When she first met Sir Ector she brushed him off, and it had taken months for him to win her over.

And now, Britt couldn't imagine a future without the cheerful, sincere man backing her and gently leading her forward. Forget foster-father, Sir Ector had become the dad she always secretly hoped to have.

Unable to look the cheerful man in the face, Britt valiantly continued. "I know I was a brat when I first arrived, and you and Kay were still torn up about Arthur—the real one—but

you've been incredibly kind to me, and I wouldn't be the king I am today if it weren't for you. You stood by me in the fight against King Lot and his cronies, and you've supported me when I've pushed back against Merlin. I'm thankful you're a part of my life. It's a little presumptuous of me, but thank you for being a father-figure." She dug her fingers into the leather of the sword belt, which she still held. "So...I got you this sword belt," she lamely finished.

Well, that couldn't have been more embarrassing, she thought, disgusted with herself. She rallied her courage enough to lift her head, and was shocked to see that Sir Ector had tears in his eyes. His face was blotchy and red, and he sniffed—his cheeks puffed in a joyful smile. "I would be proud, Britt, to call you my daughter," he said before drawing her into a bone-crushing hug.

Britt clung to her foster-father, unable to speak in the warmth of their hug. Words clogged her throat—the thanks she wanted to say, the things she admired about Sir Ector, and how much she cared about him—but she couldn't get them unstuck. Thankfully, Sir Ector seemed to sense what she was thinking, and he patted her on the head. "Me too, lass," he said, squeezing her one last time before letting her go. "Now, what's this business with the sword belt?"

"Oh, well usually kids give their dads—their fathers—gifts on Father's Day, and there's almost always a special meal involved. I wanted to get you something practical, so...the sword belt. Also, tonight's feast is in your honor."

"All that trouble, for me?"

Britt mutely nodded.

Sir Ector laughed and slapped his jingling belly. "I'm the proudest father in Britain, with the best daughter and son any man could ask for. Thank you, lass. You've made an old man happy," he said, taking the belt and lifting it up so he could inspect it in the light with an admiring eye. "Ohhh, it's a pretty piece of work."

"I think I'm ready for some food now. We'll have to be quick about it, though. The kitchens are in an uproar, preparing for tonight."

Sir Ector shook his head as he made his way down the stable aisle. "You did too much."

"Not hardly. I didn't do enough!" Britt said, glee bubbling in the pit of her stomach.

She had lost many things when she was pulled into ancient Britain, but at least she had gained a father.