

Kingdom Tales

TALES OF THE KINGDOM
TALES OF THE RESISTANCE
TALES OF THE RESTORATION

David and Karen Mains

Discussion Questions by My Father's World

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Sample

The Enchanted City

NOTE: This chapter is more intense than the rest of the book. If you have young and/or sensitive children, pre-read this chapter yourself and consider retelling it in your own words to your children.

Once upon a time, not long ago and not far away, there was a boy, no longer a child and not yet a man, who lived in the Enchanted City. . . .

The boy, Scarboy, and his younger brother, Little Child, were not like the other children in the city. Yesterday, their mother had died, and they became orphans.

The thought of his mother choked the older boy. She had been so beautiful, as beautiful as the daughter of a king.

“There *is* a King,” his mother had always insisted. “A real King.” She believed the ancient tales even though signs were posted all over Enchanted City.

THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A KING.
DEATH TO PRETENDERS.

But his mother had become very ill, as so many did in the foul air of Enchanted City. In the last days before she died, she slipped in and out of the fever—often telling Scarboy the ancient tales from her childhood.

“Once a great King ruled our city,” she had said. “All the people thought him beautiful and served him willingly. But the Enchanter came and deceived the people. The King was exiled. Those who would find the King must hunt for him in the place where trees grow—.”

When their mother died, Scarboy and Little Child had immediately been taken into custody by the Enchanter’s men. Rumor said that the Enchanter kept orphans to stoke the huge fires that burned deep in the hold of Dagoda, the temple where the Enchanter lived and ruled.

A Burner, one of the secret police who carried out the Enchanter’s bidding, had brought the boys to the Burning Place, a vast square of ashes. There they would watch the funeral ceremonies for their mother, whose body rested on an ornate bier in the middle of the field.

Oo-mb-pha . . . oo-mb-pha . . . oo-mb-pha-din—the drums startled the boy. Now he heard the ceremonial bells sewed to the hems of the Fire Priests’ robes. He heard the mourner’s chants. Then a swish, an explosion! The funeral flames had been ignited.

As the swirling swords of fire leaped toward the sky, a long line of shining cars, low and shadowy and quiet, moved toward the field and parked on the edge of Burning Place. The boy’s heart pounded. The Enchanter had come to the funeral ceremony.

Scarboy watched the tall man step out into the field of ashes. The boy saw the amber hair that curled and caught the light of the blazing fire. A handsome man, most thought. But Scarboy’s mother had said that the look in his eyes was cruel. The boy took Little Child’s hand and held him close.

The Enchanter was wearing the robe of fire, a mastery of woven color: red and yellow patterns interwoven with orange and white and blue. Burners, each holding a glowing poker in his hands, climbed from the other cars. Soon the tall, proud man was surrounded by these guards.

The Enchanter ruled Enchanted City with fire. He loved fire, loved its power. Long ago he had decreed night to be day and day to be night, because he was so jealous of the light of the sun.

Now the people of Enchanted City rose from their beds to work and play and eat when the moon, a lesser light, came up. They went to sleep at dawn. Mothers tucked their children beneath the covers and said, “Morning-morning. See you in the night.”

The Enchanter turned and looked across the ash field at the two boys as the drums beat out his personal rhythm, *din . . . din . . . din*.

“Are these the orphans?” he called, pointing at them.

A Burner nodded.

With quick, long strides, the tall man covered the field between them. Burners marched behind the Enchanter in formation. Each held high a poker, which was now smoldering with hot power. Scarboy covered his cheek with his hand.

The Enchanter faced the boys. The man’s eyes widened, then narrowed. Suddenly, the Enchanter reached down and removed Scarboy’s hand from his cheek; then the ruler lifted the boy’s chin. “What is that on your face? Why were you not outcast from the city?”

The boy squirmed. He wanted to scream for fear. He wanted to kick and run. The man’s touch was hot. He struggled to keep calm. “It—it is not a disease, sire. Nor was I born with defect. An accident—an accident at branding.”

It was the truth. Long ago, as was the custom when a child was five, Burners had taken all the children of Enchanted City who were his age to brand their hands with a hot poker.

“You are signed with the mark of the Enchanter,” the men had cried. “Never forget you belong to the Keep of the Great Burner!”

The boy had screamed, bitten, and kicked. In the struggle, the cruel brand had fallen, either by accident or by purpose, on his cheek. He would bear the scar the rest of his life.

People always looked at him and gasped. They turned their eyes away. Children pointed and shouted, “Scarboy! Hey, you, Scarboy!” Soon he had learned to cover his face with his hand.

Now Scarboy remembered his mother’s final words: “Take Little Child and escape . . . escape before branding time, before Little Child turns five. Escape before the Enchanter comes.”

But it was too late; the Enchanter held the boy’s chin with a viselike grip. The man bent close and the boy shuddered at the waves of heat. “Your mother foolishly believed in kings,” the Enchanter whispered.

How did he know that? Scarboy wondered. He noticed that the Burners’ pokers flashed a sudden hot red at the words. The Enchanter’s lips smiled kindly, but his eyes were all malice. “And what does her son, her orphan son, believe?”

The boy pulled his chin out of the man’s clutch. He covered his cheek again with his hand. He cast his eyes to the ground. “I have never seen a king, sire. Only an enchanter.”

The cruel eyes narrowed even more. “Seeing is believing. See that you keep it so, orphan. Keep it so.”

With that, the Great Burner turned on his heel, the guard marched beside, and the drums paced: *din . . . din . . . din*.

Then they were gone. Scarboy’s lungs screamed for cool air. His heart timed: escape . . . escape . . . escape. He would rather die than be a slave of the Enchanter.

But it was too late for such thoughts. Scarboy felt a strong hand on his elbow. The butt end of an iron poker was shoved into his side by the Burner, whose eyes were hollows of darkness, empty even of the dancing light of reflected flames. “Come,” he said. “To the Orphan Keeper with you.”

The three moved away from the Burning Place, down little streets, past narrow buildings. Night-lights stood on poles and lit the way. Day was far off. When they came to the market, Scarboy could see the jumble of bins and awnings, could hear haggling and barter. The Burner had released his hold but it did not matter: his hard poker still jabbed Scarboy’s side, and the boy knew he could never outrun his captor. Little Child whimpered and Scarboy lifted him up.

Suddenly, the power failed. “Lights out! Lights out!” people cried.

Power-outs were frequent, but at this precise moment it seemed a miracle. The Enchanted City needed man-made power to live by and to light the night. Everything ran on energy from furnaces beneath the city, which were stoked with fuel. Buses and cars and buildings were attached to underground cables. But the fuel supply was always running low. The man-made power was always failing.

In power-outs, traffic stopped. Homes and places of business became dark. The clocks ran off time, on time, in-between time. Even play didn’t work. Sometimes the lights failed right in the middle of the ninth inning, just when they were needed most.

But Scarboy knew this power-out was his chance to escape. He bolted away from the Burner, carrying Little Child safely in his arms.

“Runaways! Runaways!” the Burner shouted.

But no one heard him in the confusion. Horns blared! Pushcarts banged against each other! Vendors yelled, “Hey! Get that thief! Hands off my stuff!” as vagrants took advantage of the power failure to acquire food. Everyone screamed, “Lights! Lights!” Amid all of this din, Scarboy made a successful getaway.

He ran with his little brother in his arms, ran until his heart felt like bursting.

When the power came back on, Scarboy stopped his frantic running. He had lost his way and he knew that soon the Burners would come looking for them. The Enchanter could not be cheated out of what he owned.

Fortunately, dawn was coming. All would obey the edict SLEEP IN THE LIGHT—except the Burners, who would keep hunting, even though the bright light hurt their eyes. If only Scarboy could stay awake and hide until he found the way out. But what was the way out? Could it be that there was a king, as his mother had said? Would it ever be possible to find the place where this king lived?

Scarboy crept into a hole beneath the porch steps of a nearby house so he could buy time to think. “It’s not dark in the place where trees grow,” his mother had said. But there were no trees in the city, because all had been chopped for fuel. Scarboy knew trees grew in forests. He had heard there was a forest somewhere outside the city. If only he knew the way.

A timeman walked by crying the hour. Two more hours before day. Suddenly, Scarboy heard the drums. They beat loud and angry. *M-bah-pah-pah-m . . . m-bah-pah-pah-m . . . m-bah-pah-pah-m*. The boy knew they were drumming about him. There was no safety now, no hiding place. Every shadow could hold a Burner.

The boy found a little money in his pocket. He had heard that taxi drivers could get you where you needed to go if anyone could. But would a taxi be safe? Surely taxi drivers knew

the message of the drumbeats. Scarboy had to take a chance. He grabbed his brother's hand, carefully looked up and down the street, then hailed a cab.

"Can you get us to the end of the city where the forest is?" he asked the driver as a cab pulled up to the curb.

The driver looked the two boys over with shrewd eyes. "Sure, sure," he said. "But hurry. Curfew's coming. Pay in advance. Refund only in case of power failure."

Scarboy took a deep breath, and the boys climbed in. The taxi driver set his meter and connected the power. Screeching through little-traveled streets, he made his way quickly to a huge garbage dump on the edge of the city. Scarboy had never been there.

"End of the line," the man said urgently. "Passengers out."

Scarboy felt hesitant. "Is this near where the trees grow?"

The driver leaned over the seat and opened the back door. "The line only goes this far. This here's the dump." Then he winked an eye and said, "If you look hard enough, you'll find where the trees grow."

The boys climbed out, and as the cab sped away Scarboy thought he heard the man shout, "To the King!"

To the King! The phrase echoed through Scarboy's mind. But he had little time to wonder about the cab driver's strange farewell, for the familiar sound of the drums—*m-bah-pah-pah-m . . . m-bah-pah-pah-m*—interrupted his thoughts and forced him to look around for a safe hiding place. Or better yet, the beginning of a forest.

Little Child began to cough and whine. "Hush," Scarboy whispered.

The two boys sat on the cinder road. A gray line of light split the sky above the world. Little Child fell asleep, but Scarboy waited for day to come. He listened to the distant drums.

Something is wrong here! Scarboy thought. Suddenly he realized that the shadows were moving! Scarboy was sure he had seen a distant gray form move toward him. That one there! And that one!

The gray in the sky spread. He could see by its light. Over the hills of garbage, men were creeping toward him. *Burners!* thought Scarboy. Without a word, they crept silently closer, one there, another there . . .

The boy bent and lifted his sleeping brother. His knees were weak with fear. He was surrounded on three sides by an advancing menace. He could see them more clearly as the sky began to brighten.

The message drums were sounding far off from within the city, but they were beating faster and faster and faster.

Quickly Scarboy stood erect and faced the shadows. He had not come this far to give up now. He balanced Little Child in one arm and waved the blade of his pocket knife defiantly with the other hand. "No!" he shouted. "I will not be your man! If there is a king, I will find him! If there is a way, I will hunt it out! I will fight you to the last!"

At that moment, day broke behind the boy. The sky flushed pale pink, then warmed to rose. The Burners paused. Their eyes could not bear the bright light.

Scarboy heard a strange and musical humming, which seemed to come from the other side of an old gate he had not noticed on the edge of the garbage dump. The Burners stopped, shielded their eyes, and looked up at the ever-brightening sun.

In that minute of advantage, Scarboy turned and ran. He raced with Little Child in his arms toward the old closed gate, away from the Enchanter's stunned henchmen.

Wild weeds grew around the stone gateposts. The wrought-iron latch was rusted. Breathless, the boy stopped and rattled the gate. Just then the sun blazed radiant above them, and the gate began to creak slowly open. Waiting impatiently for entrance, the boy glanced up at the arch. Words were chiseled in the old, moss-covered stones: WELCOME ALL WHO HUNT.

Scarboy squeezed himself and his brother into the ever-widening entrance. He was breathless. Little Child was heavy. How could he close the gate? And where could he hide next?

“You called?” asked a voice behind him.

The boy whirled to face the funniest-looking man he had ever seen. The creature was tall and wore a small tree on his head for a hat. His clothes were a color between green and brown and gray. A giant set of keys dangled from a vine, which circled his waist. He had long white hair and a long white beard and both of them were tucked into his belt. His coat had pockets and his vest had pockets and his pants had pockets—all filled with pruning shears and scissors and trowels.

The man was holding a hatchet, carved with strange markings, in front of his face. Slowly he lifted it with both hands above his head, and Scarboy noticed that the musical hum was coming from the hatchet. The gate slammed shut. The drums outside stopped beating.

All was quiet.

Scarboy was aware of only one sound: *chirp . . . chirp*. What was that? A bird singing? The sound fit his mother’s description. But he had never heard this melody before, since there were no wild things in Enchanted City. He looked down at his brother in his arms. Little Child was as quiet as if he were in a deep coma.

“Welcome, hunter,” the strange man said and chuckled. He hung the hatchet on his belt. Every move he made sounded with jingling, tools bumping against tools, bumping against still other tools.

“Are you the King?” Scarboy wondered.

“No,” said the man, laughing. He walked close and lifted the heavy child from Scarboy’s arms. “I am one of the King’s men. I am Caretaker. And you are Hero. Welcome to Great Park.”

“That is not my name,” the boy protested. His empty hand moved by habit to cover his scar.

The man chuckled again. “That is more your name than you know,” he said, then turned and walked down the path. Scarboy watched him. Every now and then, Caretaker took a little hop. When he did, every inch of him jingled and chimed. The boy was astonished at this silly creature. *A king’s man*, he thought. His wonder increased.

Caretaker stopped and looked back at him. “Come,” he called. “We will go to Mercie.”

Scarboy watched the man dance down the path. Then he noticed that full day had come. The boy looked around at the trees and bushes and glorious spreads of green grass—all growing things. He took a deep breath and filled his lungs with cool air.

Hero? . . . He would wait and see if such a name were his. *A king’s man?* . . . But where, then was the king? . . . He would keep watch for a king. After all, seeing is believing, as the Enchanter had said.

One thing he did know. His mother had been right: it was not dark in this place where trees grew. There was hardly any darkness at all. The boy hurried to follow after Caretaker, feeling in his heart as though he had discovered something he had been hunting after all of his life.

And so the boy escaped from the perilous Enchanted City because he was a hunter at heart and hunters always find more than they know.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some of the things wrong with Enchanted City?
The people sleep during the day and are awake at night.
The city is ruled by an evil enchanter.
Children are branded to show they belong to the Enchanter.
All the trees have been cut down for fuel.
There are no wild things.
2. How did Scarboy escape from Enchanted City?
The power went out, so he ran, hailed a cab, took it to the city dump, and found a gate that led out of the city into Great Park.
3. Who is Scarboy searching for?
the King
4. Who is our King?
Jesus, the King of kings (For younger children, explain the terms king and kingdom.)

Sample