
*Sarina
and the
Lost Book*

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RECLAIM

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Chapter 1

Do you remember the story of the "Girl Who Spoke Chicken"? This is the story of what happened after. After she cured the Queen and decided not to marry the Prince.

As I told you before, Sarina and Winona were herb women. They used plants, flowers, leaves and roots to make medicine. In those days, long, long ago, there were no hospitals. But people got sick, just like now, so herb women did the work of doctors.

Do you remember what happened after Sarina cured the Queen? The King said Sarina could marry the Prince. She would be Queen herself one day. All she had to do was look beautiful and wave at the people. Of course, she would have had to stop being a herb woman.

Sarina, who didn't like the Prince much, had said, "No, thank you." She had said it with great care. She didn't want to upset the King. When kings offer gifts it is wise not to insult them.

Sarina's house had been a gift from the King. It was very close to Winona's house. They worked together and were the best of friends.

Sarina's other friend, Emmer, the chicken, had died. She had lived to a ripe old age. Before she died she had laid two special eggs. One was for Sarina and one for Winona. Winona's egg had produced a nice white chicken, named Wheat. But Sarina had a surprise. What came out of her egg was a beautiful rooster. His name was Rye. Sarina had really hoped for a chicken like Emmer. But Rye was as wise as his mother had been. He was just much noisier. He crowed! Sarina had asked him not to be so loud. Rye had told her roosters crow. That's all there is to that. So there.

Winona was also a witch. She could look at things by witches light. That way she could see things other people couldn't see. She could do many other things, but she didn't like to show off. She had taught Sarina some of her more useful spells. Sarina had her own special talents: she could speak Chicken, Sheep and Dog. And a little Cow, but, as she always said, cows are dull. They have no conversation to speak of. Unless you like to talk about grass.

Chapter 2

The King had asked Sarina and Winona to drop in and talk. Whenever the women were near the palace, they visited. They always asked first if the King was busy. Sometimes people will say, "Drop in," but don't really mean it. But the King enjoyed talking to them. The women told him things he didn't know about his kingdom.

Sarina, Winona and the King grew to be friends. Sometimes the Queen was there too. She never had much to say. After time of looking beautiful and waving can do that to a person. The Queen tried, but talk of common people bored her.

The King trusted the two herb women and often asked their advice. One day, when they came to visit, the King looked sad.

"What's the matter, Sire?" asked Winona.

"I have a problem, herb woman. It's my son, Prince Peter. He does nothing all day. He doesn't want to learn anything. He likes having everything done for him. Oh, he's going to be a terrible king," said the King.

"Oh, Sire, really, it can't be that bad," said Winona, smiling.

The King wasn't smiling. "No, ladies, it's no joke. My son seems to think more of his clothes than of people. He is simply not interested in learning anything. He sits around with his friends. He does a little hunting. I don't know what to do with him. You've met him, you know what he's like," said the King. "He's rude and he's too full of himself. He's a horse's ass!"

"Can we help, Sire?" asked Sarina. She hadn't liked the Prince when she met him. But she didn't like to hear the King talk so of his son.

"Maybe you could turn him into a frog, Winona," said the King.

"And then what, Sire? He's going to sit and eat flies, waiting for a princess. A princess that has to kiss him. Have you noticed how few princesses just happen to walk by here?" asked Winona. "That will only teach him how to catch flies with his tongue. Not a really useful thing for a king to know. No, Sire, that won't help."

"Advise me, herb woman. You have good ideas. We've got to make a man out of him. He's never done anything for himself. And he doesn't care about anyone but himself. To become a good king he must learn to care about people."

"I think I have an idea, Sire," said Sarina. "Send him on a quest. Lots of princes go on quests. Send him out, alone, to bring back something."

"You know, Sarina, that's not a bad idea," said Winona. "But not alone, he'll just pay someone to do things for him. Send him without any money. On a secret quest. No one must know he's the Prince."

"Go on, Winona, this sounds interesting." The King smiled, he liked the idea.

"Sire, send him, in secret, with Sarina. She will keep him out of trouble. They must bring back the 'Lost Book of King Otto III'." "It's not really lost, you know. It's in a church, up north, near the forest," said the King.

"Yes, but to bring it back, they have to go there. On foot it'll take them weeks, maybe months. On the way he'll have time to learn about the kingdom. He'll have to do things for himself. He'll meet people, and he'll have to get along with them."

"I think it's a great idea," said the King.

"Sarina, I'll talk to him tonight. You two will leave tomorrow!"

Chapter 3

Sarina wasn't happy about it at all. The King and Winona didn't even ask if she wanted to go. A month or more with the Prince! A prince whose own father called him a horse's ass. No, this was not going to be fun. But, as once before, saying 'no' to the King was hard. And as a way to help the prince, it was a good idea. In fact, it had been her own idea. So she looked at the King and said she'd be ready.

"I'll be happy to help, Sire."

On the way home, she nearly cried. "Why did I say yes, Winona?" "I'll hate every moment of it. You'll have to do my work for me here. Months! Why didn't I keep my mouth shut? And why do I have to go with him?"

"You are about the same age as the prince. He'll find it easier to work together with you than with me," said Winona. "The way things are, he can't go by himself. He'd be dead in a week."

"I'm taking Rye with me," said Sarina. "On a trip like this, I will need a friend."

The next morning, the sun came up early. It was the beginning of summer.

At the first light, the King's men came to her house. They had the Prince with them.

"There is a horse here for you, herb woman," said the captain. "We have orders to ride with you for one day. Then we'll leave you."

The Prince said nothing. He just looked angry. During the ride he didn't say a word. In the afternoon the captain made everyone stop.

"This is where we say 'goodbye' and 'good' luck, Prince," said the captain. "Good luck to both of you!"

When Sarina and Prince Peter were alone, he turned to her.

"I didn't want to go on this quest. I'm going to sit right here till they come back," he said.

"What makes you think they're coming back?" asked Sarina. "Your father, the King, has sent us on this quest. He needs the Lost Book of King Otto. So I will do my best to find it. "If you want to sit here, by yourself, fine. Sit here. I'm going on."

"On foot?" asked the Prince.

"Do you see any horses? Yes, on foot," said Sarina. "First I'll find water. Then I'll make a fire and cook a meal. Then I'll sleep in my blanket. But not here. There's no water here. So if you want to sit here, goodbye!"

Together with Rye, she started walking. She walked for a long time before she found a stream. Still she didn't look back. Then she made a fire and started cooking. The food smelled very good. But she and Rye were still alone. Just as she was thinking about going back, she heard someone coming.

"I saw your fire and smelled food," she heard the prince say. "Give me something to eat."

"Look, Peter, it's just you and me here. If we are to travel together, we'll do everything together. Tonight I cooked, and you can eat with me. Tomorrow you'll cook, I'll teach you. I don't bring things to you. I won't do things for you. We do things together or not at all," said Sarina.

"I'm the prince," Peter yelled. "You'll do as I say, or else!"

"Or else what, Peter?" Sarina asked. "What will you do? I could just leave and then what will you do? We were told by your father to work together. If we do that things will be much easier. Can't we be friends? I know herbs and plants and how to find food. You know how to hunt. I'll teach you how to cook what you catch. Please, let's work together, find the Lost Book and go home!"

Peter sat down and looked at Sarina. He was thinking and suddenly he didn't look angry anymore. He said nothing all through the meal. When he finished eating, he put down his bowl.

"Sarina," he said, "I'll go along with you for now. You're right, it'll be easier if we work together. I don't like it, but you're right. Let's make the best of it. And," he said with a grin, "if we don't find food we can always eat your chicken."

"Don't even think of eating Rye. He's my friend. He will help us when he can. But he's not for eating!"

Peter and Sarina shook hands. Sarina put some herbs on the fire to keep away the bugs. Then they rolled themselves in their blankets near the fire and slept.

Chapter 4

The next few weeks were not easy. Peter found it hard to co-operate. He was learning a lot of things all at the same time.

Cooking was not one of them. He tried, but he wasn't very good. Sarina and Rye went without hot food more than once. Peter forgot to watch the food and burned it. The next morning he said he was sorry. And he promised to do better. He was as good as his word. He didn't burn the food again. But his meals didn't taste better. Peter just had no talent for cooking.

On the road they often met people. Some were travellers going far. And some were farmers going to market. They passed farms and stopped sometimes to work for fresh food. Peter chopped wood and got eggs and milk in return. Sarina often helped the sick with her herbs. At first Peter didn't know how to act with people. But he soon got the hang of it. People liked him.

When the weather was bad farmers let them sleep in their barns. Rye loved that. He liked talking to other chickens.

Sarina and Peter were almost enjoying the trip. Every day, Peter made a note on the map. That way they could see how far they had come.

Peter didn't look like a prince now. Sarina and he washed their clothes when they could. But washing clothes in a river was hard on the clothes. Both Peter and Sarina looked rather scruffy.

But Peter seemed taller. His brown hair had grown long on their quest. When he laughed, and he laughed often, his eyes were very blue. When he cooked the meal at night, he sang. He knew lots of songs. He was interested in the herbs and plants Sarina found. They worked well together. They were becoming friends.

Peter had first seen Sarina when she waited outside the palace. She and Winona wanted to see the Queen. Sarina was a pretty woman, but he hadn't really seen her. She was just a woman from the town. But he was seeing her now. He had found Sarina to be wise and helpful. She knew what she wanted. She had even told his father she didn't want to marry Peter. He hadn't really wanted to marry her either. But he would have, if his father had told him to. Peter had not expected that Sarina would say 'no'. At first he had felt happy not to have to marry her. Then he had been angry. Who did she think she was? He was the prince. People didn't say 'no' to him.

Looking at her now, he wasn't angry any more. Even scruffy, as she was, he found her quite beautiful. She was almost as tall as he. Her long hair was shiny and red. It was very curly. He liked the way her nose looked when she laughed. When she held Rye, her chicken, her strong hands looked soft. Sometimes Peter envied Rye.

Chapter 5

The weather turned bad. It was much colder suddenly and it started to rain. It never stopped. It rained for two days. There were no farms where they could ask for shelter. They kept going, but the quest was no fun now. Peter had started to cough and Sarina didn't feel well either. She tried to make some tea for Peter's cough. But the wood was wet and the fire would not catch. She had to use witch's fire to heat the water. And doing magic always made her tired.

"Peter," said Sarina, "tonight we'll sleep in an inn."

"I have no money, Sarina. And I don't think they'll let us stay for free," coughed Peter.

"It's all right, I have some money. We can't go on like this. You have a cold now, and I don't feel well either. It'll do us good to sleep in a bed tonight and to dry our clothes," said Sarina.

"I also wouldn't mind eating someone else's cooking," said Peter.

"Are you saying you don't like my cooking?" Sarina pretended to be hurt.

"No, I don't like my own cooking very much. And I'm sick and tired of rabbits," said Peter.

They soon found a path that led to a town and an inn.

The innkeeper told Peter that he had only one room left. It was market day and he had a lot of guests.

Sarina and Peter both had long hot baths. They felt much better. Then they dried their clothes in front of the fire. Wrapped in blankets they ate supper in their room. Peter was happy to eat lamb chops instead of rabbit. Sarina wasn't fond of lamb chops, she knew so many sheep. But the meal looked and smelled very good. So she ate.

"Do you remember when Winona and I cured your mother," she asked.

"Of course, I was so happy to see her well again."

"But you don't know where I got the medicine that cured her," said Sarina with a smile. "I remembered hearing of a sheep that had the same sickness. So I talked to one of our ewes. She told me what plant she had eaten to get better."

"Oh Sarina, that's so funny. I can just see my mother's face if you'd told her that. The Queen and a ewe taking the same medicine," laughed Peter.

Chapter 6

During the night the rain stopped. The next morning they woke to a sunny blue sky. On their way out of town they bought some fresh food.

Near the edge of town they saw a lot of people. They were yelling and waving their arms.

"You're taller than I am, Peter. Can you see what's going on?" asked Sarina.

"I'll try," said Peter. "There are some men near a tree. They have a rope hung on a branch. And they're holding a little old man."

Peter and Sarina pushed until they were in front.

"Why are you holding that old man?" asked Sarina.

"We're going to hang him," yelled one of the men. "He stole money from me. We hang thieves here."

"How do you know he stole your money?" asked Peter.

"My money is gone. And he doesn't belong here. He's a stranger," said the big man.

"We're strangers here too," said Peter. He pointed to Sarina and himself. Then he pointed to some of the guests from the inn. "How do you know we didn't steal your money. Don't you know that only the King's men can hang him? And only after a fair trial."

"But he's a thief," yelled the big man.

"Are you sure?" asked Peter. "Sure enough to bet your own life on it? Because if you're wrong the King's men can hang you for murder!"

The big man looked at his friends. He didn't seem so sure now.

"Why don't you hold him in jail for now. When the King's men come, they'll put him on trial," said Sarina.

She and Peter helped take the little man to jail.

"Oh, Peter, you were wonderful. That was just great!" said Sarina. She wanted to kiss him. "Yes, I did that rather well, didn't I?" said Peter. He was smiling. "But I couldn't let them hang that little man. Just because he was a stranger. My father's men are fair. They'll find out what really happened. A mob is not a good judge, don't you agree, Sarina?"

"I do, Peter, you're right. That was great!" Sarina gave Peter a big hug. Rye seemed to agree as he crowed in Peter's ear.

Chapter 7

At long last they were getting near the church near the woods. Peter showed Sarina the map.

"This is where we're going." It's not far now."

"I'm glad, Peter. I need a long bath. And I'd like to sleep in my own bed again."

"Me too," said Peter. "I'd like to shave. This beard of mine is hot and itchy. I'd love to get rid of it."

"Maybe you should keep the moustache," said Sarina. "I think it would look great."

"I'll think about it," said Peter. "But the beard goes!"

Suddenly Rye clucked. "Lookup, you two, there's the tower."

Sure enough, over the trees they could see a tower. They started walking a little faster.

"Oh no, look Peter. There's been a fire. The church is gone," cried Sarina.

It was true. The church was a ruin. There was a bit of wall left standing. And the tower. There was only rubble where the church had been.

"Peter, if the church was burned, the Lost Book is gone too." Sarina started to cry.

They had come so far, and now there was nothing to find. She sat down on a piece of stone, tears running down her face. Rye started pecking around the rubble.

"Sarina, please don't cry. If the Lost Book is really gone, that's sad. I'm sure there were things in there that we could use. But that was not the only reason my father sent us. This quest was for me. He wanted me to see the kingdom. To learn to do things for myself. To learn to get along with people. To be just Peter, not the Prince. Am I not right, Sarina?" asked Peter.

"Yes, you are. And you learned so much. But I had such hopes of finding the Book," cried Sarina. "Your father thought it would help you be a better King."

"I will be a better King, even without the book. I know things now that I never knew before. I know how to make life better for the people. I know we need more roads. I know we need more bridges. I didn't like swimming across rivers. And other people don't like that either. My father and I have a lot to talk about. But instead of crying, let's look around. Maybe we'll find out what happened here," said Peter.

At that moment they both heard the rooster crow. They didn't see Rye right away. But they heard his crowing. They both ran to find him.

Chapter 8

"There he is, on top of that big piece of wood," said Peter.

"I'm not strong enough, but you two are. Look behind the wood here," clucked Rye. "I smell something. There's a door here with a room underneath."

Peter and Sarina tried to move the wood. It was stuck under rubble. Moving it was a big job. They were both tired and dirty before they were done. Finally they cleared enough rubble to open the trapdoor. The door was heavy but together they lifted it. When they looked they saw steps going down. They were covered with a thick layer of dust. It was very dark at the bottom of the steps.

"Hold on, Peter. I have a candle in my pack," said Sarina.

By the light of the candle they went to look. There was quite a large space down there. They found some boxes and lots of spider webs. Everything was covered in dust.

"I don't think anyone has been here for many years," said Sarina. "I think people forgot that this room was here."

"Let's open the boxes and see what's inside." Peter went to a box and lifted the lid. "Bring the candle over here, Sarina, please."

"Look at that," Sarina whispered. The box was full of gold and silver cups. There was a big silver cross. There were plates covered with coloured gems.

"It's a treasure," said Peter. He ran over to the other boxes. One was full of cloths. The cloths were thick with gold and silver thread and lace.

"These were for the inside of the church," said Sarina. "They're beautiful and very old. I have never seen such work."

Then they found a box full of books. Some of the books were covered in gems and gold. Some were covered in leather. When they lifted out all the books, there was one thing left. It was big and wrapped in brown cloth.

"Do you think..." whispered Sarina.

"Let's see, shall we?" said Peter as he started to unwrap it. When the wrapping fell away they saw a big black book. On the cover, which was made of wood, they saw writing. It said: "Otto, the King."

"That's it, Sarina. We found it!" yelled Peter. "We've done it! We'll bring this back to my father."

"And the rest of it, the treasure? What are we going to do with that?" asked Sarina. "Sarina, the gold and silver is worth a lot of money. There's enough here to pay for rebuilding the church. The town nearby needs this church. I'm sure they didn't know all this was down here. But it will pay for a new church. This is great!" said Peter.

"Let's close this all up again. All except the; Lost Book," said Sarina.

They put everything else back and went up. Then they closed the heavy trapdoor. They even put some rubble back on top. With Rye they went back to where they'd left their packs.

"Hello you two, we've been waiting for you," they heard. There was the King, with a group of his men.

"We are happy to see you. The Queen, Winona and I were getting worried. So I thought I'd meet you here. Too bad about the church. I suppose the Lost Book will now be lost forever," said the King.

"Oh no, father, we have something to show you," smiled Peter.

Sarina sat down to rest. Rye came to sit in her lap. Together they watched the King and his son talking. She was rather tired, so it was nice to sit. Sarina fell asleep.

Chapter 9

When Sarina woke up, there was a nice fire going. She smelled food cooking. And there were tents set up. Tonight she'd have more than a blanket under a tree. She smiled.

The next morning, after a wash in the river, Sarina ate breakfast. She watched the King and Peter. They were laughing together. They seemed very happy. It was nice to see the King enjoying his son's company. I bet he doesn't think Peter is a horse's ass now, Sarina thought. The King came over to where Sarina was sitting.

"I don't know what magic you did, Sarina. But it worked. My son is quite a nice young man. He has some good ideas. I'm very happy I thought of this quest," said the King. Sarina was too wise to remind the King whose idea it was.

"I hope it wasn't too hard on you, this trip. I know you don't like my son very much."

"Oh no, Sire, Peter is really a very nice person. He's been a good companion and we got along fine," said Sarina.

"I'm happy to hear you say that," said the King. "I think Peter wants to ask you something." He waved for his son to come over.

"Good morning, Peter, did you sleep well?" asked Sarina.

"Fine, Sarina, fine. I want to... I'd like..." Peter took a deep breath and started again.

"Sarina, do you remember the first time we met? I was a...a horse's ass, my father calls it. He's right. But our quest together has taught me a lot. Sarina, I...,I..." He stopped.

"Are you all right, Peter?" Sarina was getting worried.

"Sarina, I love you. Please marry me," said Peter, very fast.

"I said no before, remember? I like you very much, but I have to say no again. I love the work I do. I don't want to give it up. I could never live like your mother, doing nothing all day," said Sarina, sadly.

"Sarina, I am not my father. You are nothing like my mother. Oh, she's nice and I love her very much. But she could never do what you do. Anymore than you can do what she does. My Queen will be a woman who is wise. A woman who helps people. Someone who will make a long, hard trip to help one man.

"Someone who speaks sheep and dog and has a rooster for a friend. Please marry me and someday be my Queen. Together we can make things better for the people. I need you by my side. Please say yes, Sarina," asked Peter. "Let me think about it on the trip back," said Sarina. "I'll give you my answer when we get home."

She smiled. She really could have given her answer now. But she liked to keep him guessing for a while. It was going to be a fun trip back!