



## Mab and Kennis

A long time ago, before my time, before your time, before your great grandfather's time, there were two twins, Mab and Kennis, who lived in a roundhouse at Danebury hill fort. Their parents were farmers and weavers and every day the children would help with all the jobs that had to be done. On winter evenings they would sit round the fire in the roundhouse and retell all the old stories of their tribe.

One day a raiding party came from the North early in the morning, broke open the great gate of Danebury, set fire to some of the granaries and drove off the cattle and horses. They took several prisoners with them for slaves, including Mab.

Kennis was very sad and lonely without his sister. One day he was chopping wood outside the ramparts and he felt thirsty. He saw a lake in the distance and decided to walk there to get a drink. But as he walked, the lake seemed to move further away and he had to keep on walking. He passed an apple tree covered with red apples, so he picked some and put them in his bag.

At last Kennis came to the edge of the lake and was able to have a drink. When he looked up he saw a very old, ramshackle roundhouse and he could hear someone moaning inside. Cautiously he looked in, and there was the thinnest man he had ever seen, chained to the wall. The man could not speak. Kennis fetched him some water and held an apple for him to eat. At last the man spoke, in a strange, thin, hissing voice.

'Please help me,' whispered the man. 'A druid disguised as a snake has imprisoned me here. The only way to set me free is to cut the chains.'

'How can I do that?' asked Kennis. 'I have nothing to cut such strong chains.'

'Look under those sticks,' said the Prisoner. 'See what you can find.'

Kennis did as he was told, and underneath the sticks was a wonderful sword, the finest he had ever seen. It was brighter and sharper than the sword that belonged to the Danebury chieftain.

'Slowly slice and slash the chains,' whispered the prisoner. But as Kennis lifted the sword, he saw the prisoner's face reflected in the polished blade; and the face he saw was the cunning face and flickering tongue of a snake.

Kennis took the sword and escaped from the roundhouse. He didn't stop running until he was right round the other side of the lake. By now it was dark, and he climbed up a great tree, wrapped himself in his cloak and tried to sleep.

Meanwhile, the snake was very angry. His plan to capture Kennis had failed. He slithered out of his skin, and escaped from the chains. He called his raven, and ordered the bird to find Kennis and deliver a message. The raven flew off across the treetops. He found Kennis asleep, wrapped up in his cloak. The raven croaked loudly, and told Kennis to look up. The moon was shining brightly. On the horizon he could see lights twinkling, and small fires burning.

‘Your sister Mab is in that hill fort,’ croaked the raven. ‘You must make a boat and sail across the lake to rescue her.’ Then the raven shook his wings and several feathers fell to the ground. ‘Use these feathers to make a sail,’ said the raven.

Kennis climbed down from the tree, quickly cut down a tree with the sword and made a boat. He used the raven’s feathers to make a black sail and climbed into the boat. It began to sail by itself and carried him right into the deepest part of the water. Just then, he heard beautiful music and to his amazement a golden harp, covered with sea shells rose up out of the waves. Kennis reached for the harp and brought it safely into the boat. As soon as he did so, a terrible storm sprang up. The waves quickly increased in size, great drops of rain filled the boat with water and lightning flashed around the mast. Kennis was thrown into the sea and the boat was wrecked. He clung tightly onto a plank of wood, hoping he could get to the shore. Above him the raven circled, croaking with glee.

Meanwhile, five miles away, in the raiders’ hill fort, Mab couldn’t sleep. Every day she was forced to do all the hardest and worst jobs in the camp and given bad food to eat. Every night she was thrown into a small roundhouse and the door was shut with a great wooden bar so that she couldn’t get out. At last she fell asleep and dreamt that she was in a magical underwater hill fort, where she could swim freely amongst beautiful seaweeds and corals, and brightly coloured fish swam beside her. On a rock was a golden harp, encrusted with sea shells. She reached out to touch it, but as soon as she stroked the strings, the sea grew rough and a tremendous storm came on. She was thrown up out of the water and then she woke up and began to cry. She heard a tapping sound, and there on the floor in front of her was a hare.

‘How did you get in?’ asked Mab.

'I dug a hole under the wall,' replied the hare. 'Your brother Kennis is in danger. You must come with me. Get on my back.'

Mab began to laugh. 'You're tiny,' she said. 'It's very kind of you, but you won't be able to carry me.'

'Just try,' said the hare. So Mab climbed onto the hare's back and straightaway she found that she was running down a hole and out into the night air. Then the hare began to grow bigger and bigger and she carried Mab in a wild ride out of the hill fort, around the moon and across the night sky towards the lake. She leapt over the waves and scooped Kennis out of the water and lifted him gently onto her back next to Mab. The hare didn't stop running until they reached the shore of the lake.

Mab and Kennis clung tightly to each other. They were so pleased to be together again. But then they saw the raven following them and after the raven came the snake, slithering along the ground, tongue flickering, yellow eyes gleaming, catching up with them.

'What can we do?' cried Kennis.

'Reach inside my ear,' said the hare. Mab felt inside the hare's great ear and took out a spindle.

'Pull hairs from my coat,' ordered the hare. 'Spin a strong net.'

Mab and Kennis did as they were told, as the snake came closer and closer.

'Stretch the net between those trees,' said the hare. Mab and Kennis did as they were told and the snake slithered into the net.

'Pull the strings tight,' called the hare and the snake was trapped. The net closed around the snake's body and it got smaller and smaller and smaller, until it disappeared. All that was left was a tiny snakeskin on the ground.

'Take that skin to remind you of everything that has happened,' said the hare. Then Mab and Kennis climbed onto his back, and the hare carried them through the night. As the sun began to rise, they could see the fires and great gates of Danebury in the distance.

'Thank you so much,' said Kennis. 'Won't you come in and meet our chief?' asked Mab.

The hare smiled. 'No,' she said. 'I live out here, in the fields. But I won't be far away. You'll see me from time to time. I'll always be watching out for you. And if you see me one morning on the ramparts, or at sunset in the long grass near the shrine, give me a wave'.

This story was produced by children from year 3 of Balksbury Junior School and storyteller Tim Laycock.