

Aboard the Orphan Train

It was 1917. Eli Porter gripped his small satchel and followed the other children onto what he'd heard called the "Orphan Train."

He'd been told that the ride would be long. The train would leave New York City filled with orphans, looking for a new home. At stops along the way, men and women from the towns would gather. Some would be eager to welcome a child into their family. Others sought a child who could help on the farm or with housework.

When Eli's own parents had died, he'd been sent to Saint John's Orphanage. Heartbroken, he'd run away more than once. Each time, he was found and sent back.

"That boy's a runner, isn't he?" the gardener said to Sister Maria.

"Eli misses his parents. He needs time to adjust to life without them," Sister Maria said.

A few months later, Sister Maria told the children about the Orphan Train. The children were excited about the opportunity to meet new parents. Eli however, was wary.

"What if they're cruel? What if all they want me for is work?" he worried.

As the train rolled through the countryside, Eli fidgeted, his stomach in knots. "I'm not taking chances," he decided. "When this train stops, I'm running away."

A few days later, the Orphan Train slowed to a halt. Eli saw a crowd waiting at the station. He grabbed the satchel from under his seat, and waited for the train doors to open. "With this crowd, it'll be easy to escape," he thought to himself.

Just then, Eli glanced out the train window and noticed a man and woman looking at him. The man tipped his hat and the woman waved. Both smiled at him, and their eyes were kind. Eli swallowed, shuffling his worn boots.

The train door opened, and the youngest children were ushered out. Eli hung back, last in line. He scanned the fields and woods where he could hide out, but then he saw the man and woman walking toward him. In their hands they held a small Roosevelt teddy bear with a red ribbon around its neck.

When Eli saw the stuffed animal he knew in his heart that everything would be okay. Eli, still holding his satchel, started walking down the aisle of the train towards his new family.

Sir Belvidere

Fog had blanketed the kingdom for weeks. It was a fog so thick, it seeped in every open window. It was a fog so heavy, movement was dangerous. Village life ground to a halt. No horse would budge. No bread was baked. No cows were milked.

Making matters worse, a dragon was on its way.

"He will steal our princesses, burn our crops, and hoard our treasures as all dragons do," Sir Belvidere, the dragon-slayer, told the king.

"Then slay him!" ordered the king.

But the next morning, Sir Belvidere couldn't see his sword in front of his face.

"I cannot slay what I cannot see. This fog must go!"

Sir Belvidere summoned the wizard. "

Surely you must have a potion or spell for the fog," he said. The wizard mixed potions and cast spells, one after another, but the fog grew thicker.

Sir Belvidere passed out paper fans to every villager. "We must fan this fog away!"

The villagers fanned with all their might, but the fog stayed put.

Finally, Sir Belvidere tried moving the villagers to other parts of the kingdom, but the fog followed them, making each step more treacherous than the last.

In the distance, Sir Belvidere heard the sound of the dragon's massive flapping wings. A shiver ran up his spine. What could he do?

Just then, Sir Belvidere felt a tug on his armor. He peered through the fog and saw a young boy.

"Follow me," said the boy.

Sir Belvidere followed the boy partway up the mountain.

Suddenly, through the fog, they faced the shadowy form of the dragon.

"The dragon?" Sir Belvidere hissed. "But dragons steal princesses, burn crops, and hoard treasures!"

"Do you know that about this one?" asked the boy, taking three steps forward until he was nose to nose with the dragon. Then he whispered something in the dragon's ear.

With that, the dragon's eyes glowed red, and his nostrils flared as he inhaled deeply. Sir Belvidere drew his sword, as the dragon blew a barrel of roaring fire, not at them but across the fog. With each fiery blast, more fog disappeared. As the air cleared, cheers from the valley below erupted.

After thanking the dragon, Sir Belvidere and the boy hurried off to tell the king that Sir Belvidere's dragon-slaying days were over, but his dragon-protecting days had just begun!