

THE BRAVE YOUNG KNIGHT

There was once an old knight who was very proud of his three brave sons, because he knew that he could expect great things of them when they were older. When the eldest son was eighteen, he went out into the world to prove himself. After a while, when he was riding through a deep dark forest, a great and terrible dragon came upon him. Without hesitation, he raised his lance and ran the creature through. Then he cut out its tongue, and quickly returned home with proof of his bravery.

His father was very happy to see his eldest son return safely, and very proud of his brave deeds. They held a great feast in the castle, where old knight showed off the dragon's tongue and tirelessly recounted its killing by his son.

When the second son turned eighteen, he also went out into the world to prove himself. After a while, when he was riding through a different deep dark forest, another great and terrible dragon came upon him. Without hesitation, he raised his lance and ran the creature through. Then he cut out its tongue, and quickly returned home. His father was even more pleased to see his second son return safely, with the dragon's tongue as proof of his bravery. He held another great feast, which even more magnificent than for his first son, where he again tirelessly recounted his sons' brave deeds.

Not to be outdone, his youngest son didn't wait until he was eighteen. At seventeen years old, he took himself out into the world to brave its dangers. After a while, in another deep and dark forest, a third, even more monstrous dragon came upon him. Like his brothers before him, he raised his lance and ran the creature through. But, unlike his brothers, he didn't cut out its tongue and return quickly home. Instead, he continued on his way.

It wasn't long before he ran into further trouble. The woods, being very dark and near impenetrable, were home to many bands of robbers and brigands. One such band of outlaws suddenly came out of the thicket and attacked him, all at once. The young knight didn't pause to ask "who?", "what?", or "why?". Before the first had robber reached him, he loosed an arrow directly into his heart. The second, and fourth, he ran through with his lance. Between times, he cut down the third with his sword, and then finished off a fifth in the same way. There were then no more villains to be found — the rest had already disappeared back into the forest.

The young knight still didn't think about returning home. Instead, he continued on his way, as if nothing had befallen him, until he came to the mouth of a cave. Inside, were three giants, sitting around a fire, eating. Each had a huge roast in his hands, and was biting noisily into it. Not impressed with their table manners, the young man fitted an arrow into his bow, aimed, and let loose. The arrow hit its target squarely, and one of the giant's meals flew straight out of his hands and mouth. The giant quickly jumped up, and

furiously shouted “Who just shot my dinner out of my hands?” into the silent forest. The young knight stepped forward.

“That would have been me.” he said.

“Who told you that you could do that?” shouted the angry giant.

“Again, that would be me.” answered the brave young knight.

The giant wasn’t happy with these answers, and set about the young man, held his own, and wasn’t to be beaten easily. But, they soon reached a truce, after one of the other giants whispered in the first’s ear “it’s not going to be easy in a fair fight with this one.”

As the four sat together, the cleverer of the three giants said to the young man. “Maybe it’s providence that we met you. Perhaps, you would like to do us a little favour, in return for your meal?”

“Perhaps.” replied the young knight, cautiously.

“Over there,” continued the giant, “at the far side of the forest, there’s a great palace. In it, lives a beautiful princess who we want to bring here. But every time we get near, the palace dog barks so loud, that it wakes the whole palace, and we have to creep away.”

“So,” asked the knight, “you would like me to silence the dog? It shouldn’t be difficult.”

“Not so fast — ” answered the giant, “it won’t be as easy as shooting a roast out of my friend’s mouth. You have to get near it first, without it raising the alarm.”

“One little dog is not difficult,” replied the young man “I’ve already dealt with a horrible dragon. You can rest assured that tomorrow night the palace dog won’t bother you.”

And, so it was. The following night the palace dog didn’t stir when the three giants approached the palace with their heavy footsteps. Keeping up with their long strides by running as fast as he could, was the young knight, carrying his sword. When they reached the palace, they searched the wall for a way in, and found a, not too small, hole near the ground. Being the smallest, the young knight slipped in first.

When he was inside, he called to his three companions to follow him. The first giant crawled into the hole head first. As he appeared at the other side, the knight brought down his sword on his neck, cutting off his head with a single blow. He then dragged the giant’s body through the hole, and called for the second, and then the third. Leaving the three bodies neatly lined up in the courtyard, the young knight made his way into the palace proper.

He crept silently through all the dark passages, searching every room, until he came to the princess's chamber. Here, if it had been full daylight, he would have had to cover his eyes with his hand. Even in the moonlight, every table and chest shone with the gold, and glittered with the jewels, which were scattered upon them. As payment for dispatching the giants, he pocketed as many fine pieces and jewels as he could, before making his way back to the courtyard. There, he collected the heads of the three giants in a sack, saying to himself "Now, I have done enough to prove myself. I can return home with honour."

When he returned home, there was great rejoicing that the youngest son had returned safely with proof of his bravery, but his father was not there to welcome him. His brothers led him to the family crypt, and even before seeing the tomb, he understood what had happened while he was away. His joyful homecoming was mingled with great sadness, so that not even his pride for his deeds could stop the tears flowing.

In the palace, the headless bodies of the three giants were found the next morning, neatly lined up in the courtyard, but nobody knew how they had got there. Nevertheless, it was decided that whoever killed them must be a great prince, and that he should receive the princess's hand in marriage. All they had to do was find him, but how. Fortunately, the clever princess had an idea.

She had an inn built in the forest where the three giants had lived. On its door, she placed a sign advertising "Everything free for the first time" She herself would work in the inn, everyday, as its barmaid, and would ask each new visitor to tell her the story of his life.

Not long afterwards, the three young knights and their widowed mother were travelling through the forest, when they came across the inn with its unusual sign. The young men would have ridden by, but their mother was curious, and had them stop. Together, they went into the inn, and while their mother ate, they drank in the quantity appropriate for your knights. Each time that the girl served them, she asked one of the brothers to tell his story.

In turn, the two elder brothers told her of how they had killed a ferocious dragon, as well as of many other minor deeds which they held to be heroic. She smiled politely as she served their drinks, but when she turned to the youngest brother, his story was more interesting. He told her of how he had also ran through a terrible dragon, and then how he had killed five bandits and chased of the rest. But, he didn't stop there. He went on to tell of how he had met three giants, led them into the palace, and then killed them leaving their bodies neatly lined up in the courtyard. Then he told her, how he had crept through the palace until he found the princess's chamber, and had taken some of her jewels — which he then took out of his jacket to show as proof of his story.

When she saw the jewels, the serving girl withdrew from the bar, and didn't return for at least a quarter of an hour. But when she did return, her appearance had completely changed. Gone was her simple cap, replaced by a

glittering diamond tiara, which shone as brightly as her eyes. Gone was the plain dress, replaced by a beautiful blue gown, richly decorated with gold and jewels, which sparkled like the stars in the night sky. She approached the brave young knight, and, fondly looking him in the eye, asked “Do you know that I am the princess who you saved from those three terrible giants? If you so wish, instead of my jewels, your reward shall be my hand in marriage.”

The young man didn't know how to reply, but when his mother and brothers congratulated him, he took the princess's hand in his. From there, they all returned to the royal palace, where a short time later, the princess and her brave young knight celebrated their marriage, and then afterwards lived happily ever after.