

## Fearlessness

The nightmares came again. A dark grey wolf, standing alone amongst a clearing of old oak trees. Slowly the wolf came closer, the blood of its last prey still dripping from his mouth. Closer and closer, the boy knew he would be next. At last the wolf stood over him, the victor of their long fight. It ground its teeth once, twice and then on the third time the teeth came closer and closer until...

A cold sheen of sweat covered the little boy. He lay in bed, not moving. It was almost as if he had been frozen into shape. The pattering of footsteps brought the boy back to the present.

"I had the dream again, Papa," said the boy, his lips quivering as he spoke. "It was going to eat me, I-I know it." Slowly his Papa shut the door and came next to the bed.

"You should not be afraid." His father's deep voice filled the cabin room. "The evil that once lived in the forest is long gone." At that he paused and stared out of the window to where the forest lay.

"As you do not believe me I will tell you a story. Of the hero who once roamed those forests, who slayed the beast that inhabited them and restored the forest to its righteous place."

The day bloomed above the earth. Bright blue skies stretched as far as the eye could see. The long-awaited Spring had arrived and the people danced in the square. Yet one man was as unhappy as could be. He wandered the dim halls of the castle filled with anger and sorrow. For it had been another year gone, another list of the dead who had been killed by the beast. So while others rejoiced, the man could not.

The sun had gone down, yet the townspeople still danced and drank in celebration. Music filled the halls and happiness flourished within the town. Yet something was wrong, for while the people danced all nature had gone silent. It was then the screams began. The man rushed outside from the dim halls and into the square. Everything was alight. Flames covered the houses and trees. Above the square loomed a dragon, breathing fire onto the merry town. The man saw all this and more. For the dragon above the town was the beast from the forest.

"Take it down!" yelled the man. "Shoot the beast while it flies unprotected!" The dragon, as if sensing a threat, veered around and began to leave. A flash of something caught the man's eye, a raw piece of skin, unprotected. A chance, a chance for his people. A way to save them. Perhaps hope was not lost.

At dawn the next day, the man set off. The smoke from the fires still hung in the air, a thick blanket obscuring the town from view. The only sound was his heavy boots tramping along the ground. No people were out, only him.

At noon he came to a stream. The man stayed a moment to fill his flask and then made to leave.

"Will you face the dragon?" asked a voice. He turned around, startled, yet no one was there.

"Look in the river!" said another voice. The man found the faces of three women staring back. "We are the nymphs of the river," explained the first.

“We want to help you!” exclaimed the third. From the depths of the river they brought him a sword. A ruby glistened at the hilt of the weapon. It was beautiful, the blade balanced perfectly.

“Take it, it is our gift to you. Rid us of the beast and that will be the greatest reward in the world.”

At that they disappeared and left the man alone. He picked up the sword; it felt right. It was the blade to slay a dragon.

It was then his Papa paused.

“Why did you stop?” asked the little boy. “You can’t just leave it there, Papa. He hasn’t even fought the dragon!” the little boy shifted restlessly beneath his covers.

“It is getting late, too late for little boys,” replied his Papa. “However, since you seem so desperate to know I shall continue.” The little boy smiled and deep within him his heart began to beat with excitement.

Night had fallen. The tall fir trees loomed above him, as though watching his every step. He had lost his way many hours ago and fear beat in his breast. Suddenly he saw a gleam. He moved closer, careful not to cause a noise. Gold. Piles and piles of gold. The man hurried forward and found more. Jewels and precious items that had been long gone littered the cave floor. As he rounded a corner he saw the dragon. It was lying there, deep within its treasure trove.

“What have you come for?” asked the dragon. “Gold? Jewels? They are worth more than you could ever imagine.”

“I have come for you. For I am your death, your destruction and eternal regret,” replied the man.

“Is that so?” laughed the dragon. “You are not the first brave fool to try and kill me.”

“No. But I will be last.” At that he raised his sword high. The dragon moved. Light as a feather it escaped his blow. It swiped a claw towards the man. This time he dodged.

So the fight went on. Until both man and dragon were tired.

“You will die, mortal,” boomed the dragon. It then released a blast of fire. The man ran and jumped. He jumped high and landed on the beast!

“I am your death! I am your destruction! Your eternal regret!” he yelled as he plunged the sword deep into the dragon’s heart.

“What happened next, Papa?” asked the little boy.

“He brought back the gold and gave it to his people,” his father replied. “Now sleep, my son, for I have kept you up too late.”

“Papa? I’m not afraid anymore,” said the little boy. His father simply smiled and shut the door. No nightmares came again.

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