

THE DARK KNIGHT

Or

A LOVE STORY*

By Richard Tornello © 2010
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DRAMATIS PERSONAE:

*A princess and her quest free her land from a dangerous curse and an idiotic promise.
An evil warlike wizard, a peasant, a dragon and a knight .*

Once upon a time, in a constantly gray overcast, mushy, musty, mustard painted land, there lived a diminutive darkly armored knight. For years and years the land he loved had been visited by repeated invisible destructions creating horrors that can't be described in polite company. These invisible, indefinable ethers may have caused the defects in the reasoning abilities among the population. That was the outstanding characteristic within this plot of socially cultivated earth. To a lesser degree than most of the population, the knight too, was a bit brain addled.

This land's distraught king had no clue what to do. The technology that may have ameliorated the situation was not available to him. Finally, in total frustration and without consultation, the king of this foul waste land made a proclamation: "I, the King of this land, I do hereby proclaim and promise and offer my daughter up in marriage", as if she was a piece of reclaimed property, "to any one who will rid our land of this curse, this plague on our house."

Like wanted posters and mushrooms in a swamp, pictures of her majesty sprang up all over the land. She was a beauty. She was known to many.

The knight, sheathed in a dark armor made of a metal never before seen, accepted the challenge. He was brave in heart and small of mind. He rode up to the castle. In the formal language of the time declared, "I hereby announce, pledge, and promise, giving my word and honor, as a knight, I will take the quest and not return until I am successful." All the while he was making his pledge he was looking at the princess. She smiled a small polite smile. Then she turned aside, and in an act unseen but to her pet dragon, rolled her eyes.

But the knight was greatly inspired. In his mind the future was bright. The danger was but a dim concern, brave of heart was he.

The knight withdrew from the castle, armed and provided for by the king and country. A poor copy of a painting of the lovely princess was pasted to his left arm on his dark armored suit. He sighed a lost lover's sigh every time he looked at it, which was most of

the time. The Knight inadvertently kept pulling harder on the left reins and wound up going in circles.

Eventually, realizing the origins of his repetitious situation, he pasted the picture to the horse's head. He reoriented himself and trotted off into the hinterland in search of the causes of the plagues upon his land.

The princess witnessed this, pointed it out to her dragon and said, "My future husband? May the gods help me." Dragon burped.

The Dark Knight assumed that a solution would become obvious. The direction he chose arbitrarily. To his horse and back at the castle and declared in a voice that belied his physical stature, "I will free our land from this curse and marry the beautiful princess. I'm sure the gods will direct me for I am true of heart and brave. I have been given this armor for just purposes. I will prevail."

The horse just wanted to go back home.

The princess rolled her eyes toward the heavens and got a drink. "Gott im Himmel," She said and had another one.

He died, as did countless other armored fools. Some months later, the horse returned to the castle riderless. It was hungry but otherwise unharmed.

The princess was unaffected by the curse for reasons that will be uncovered at a later point in the story. She was not a piece of meat and was disgusted at being put up for auction. She was tired of smiling at the daily increasing long line of idiots, male and female alike who thought they could accomplish what no one else had. The idea of her hand, a royal position and access to other parts of her beautiful body were causes enough to warrant an attempt.

As she was smiling to another bunch of losers, she recalled The Dark Knight. He was kind of cute and not quite as messed up in the mental processing capacity department as the others. She pitied him. *He might have been some fun, for a while.*

Finally after enough of this nonsense the Princess decided to do something. She spoke to her pet dragon, a supposed guardian of virgins, of which she most certainly was not. Her list of lovers was about as long as the list of dead suitors. Come to think about it, many of the names dovetailed.

The dragon, only it'sy bitsy slightly tipsy and affected by the curse, was not as mindless as the rest either. However, and this is a big however, he forgot his true purpose in life. The Princess appreciated that fact and never brought the subject up.

She said, "Dragon, honey, you big hunk of walking, talking, flying armor, we will go and seek the reason for our lands demise and discover an antidote, spell or some such solution. If we have dragons that speak," pointing to him, "why not witches or wizards that can help to brew antidotes and cure what ails us?"

"Sounds about right," he said. She generally made sense when all about them were losing their heads figuratively and sometimes literally. She's a piece of work he thought. I like working for her, no pretenses. But what an appetite. She's insatiable.

She prepared her travel arrangement, her baggage and informed the King of her plans.

"You'll die like the others, I will not have it," he declared. "You're my only daughter."

"Daddy!" she said in a certain tone she used when it was verbal combat time, all the while staring straight into his eyes.

"Don't look at me like that," he said backing up.

"Oh daddy, I have dragon to protect me. None of the others had a dragon. Pleeese, you know I can do it. Daddy, come on. You believe in me." She batted her lashes knowing she had her father wrapped around her finger.

"You have my blessing." The king said with tears in his eyes. Saying no was naught but impossible. It was if she cast a spell on him. Ask any father of a strong willed and smart daughter.

And off they flew. Well, not right away.

The dragon initially crashed a few times until he remembered how to fly straight. Off they went, again. This time things went right, if only for a while. They made a great distance even flying into the wind.

Flying in this direction, she assumed would bring her to the source of the problems. If the plague came from the wind then the source had to be up wind. They flew and flew and flew landing in different towns and villages. It was depressing and inspiring at the same time.

Each area was worse off than the next. She was excited. She was getting closer to the source. She knew it. The dragon just followed directions. It was easier than thinking. Because, if he thought about it in any depth, and occasionally the tiniest idea entered his brain, he would have known this princess was nuts and dumped her right then and there.

Why would he, a fine upstanding dragon, not be able to find employment with any good King and Queen with daughters to protect? And though he kept forgetting his true role as protector, why not dump this wacko chick he had on his back and get a decent day job. Or in the case of teenagers, a night job?

Why did he remain when others would have departed you may ask?

She was fun, she's cute and smart. And he was used to her ways. "I'll just see what happens," he thought to himself.

Eventually, they arrived a location where a primitive industrial complex was making war machines for a great wizard king of the known world. His land was upwind and therefore not affected from the toxic byproducts his greed and desires. The smoke and effluent poured out of the industrial complexes and infected everyone else.

All land immediately downwind of the locations were barren. The further away from this hell hole, the bit of environmental recovery that there was to be discovered, was warped and mutated.

Just beyond the castle walls were the rotting carcasses of knights and various opportunists who had attempted to save the lands, then by their proven success and valor, win her hand and a few other parts in marriage. She guessed their ultimate goals were not necessarily as high minded as many surely pretended.

She thought she recognized the battered remains of an armored corpse.

"Well, it appears as if some made it this far. Poor boys and girls," she said to her dragon shaking her head.

He looked down, as they circled around and viewed the remains that lay about and then up at her. "Do you really want to go on?" he inquired.

She nodded to the affirmative looking for something to wrap around her face.

"What a stench. It's like the New Jersey Turnpike by the refineries, living next to slaughter houses and chicken farms in the summer all rammed up my nose at once." She gagged.

"Gaaaagyesss," and puked.

She looked all over and wondered who and why anyone would commit such horror. Then she remembered she was on Earth. "Ah yes, people," she sighed and puked again.

"I have to find the shithead who is doing this and why," she declared to the dragon. "Let's land here."

Wings spread wide, the dragon glided in, flared, and landed with a gentle plop.

Dismounting, she saw a passer-by and called out to him, "You, you the one with all the sores, may I have a few words with you?"

The youth who had been in his own little world was scared witless. First, the sight of a dragon did not reduce the fear a normal human would have at such an encounter. And second, then this beauty, with a dragon no less, wanted to speak to him, a lowly peasant? “Are you a witch? Do you wish me harm?” he asked trembling, falling to the ground, burying his face in the dirt, and pissing in his pants.

“Get up, I wish you no harm. All I want to know is who is responsible for all this mess?” She spread her arms wide and pointed to the death and devastation.

“Please, My lady,” he said as he stared constantly from her to the dragon and back again. “Please do not speak ill of our all knowing Wizard King, his Greatness. He will know if I speak in such a manner and punish me.”

“All knowing Wizard King? I Never heard of such a being. He’s either a fraud or is able to manipulate a few controlling spells. Though he seems to have an engineering knowledge.”

“Yes he is great and his war machine conquers all that stand in his way. He allows us to live.” He speaks this with pride.

“It’s not funny, how the victims adopt the chauvinistic pride of their keeper,” she whispers to the dragon. He nods in agreement.

Turning back to face the peasant she points out the obvious, “Live? Just barely, look at you.”

“May I leave, please I have tasks and they must be completed or I will die,” he cried. “I should not be speaking to you. Oh please, I beg you.”

“Go, go, yes I mean you no harm,” she declared. “All a bunch of sheep,” she says to no one.

The dragon thought a few sheep might be a good idea for a bite to eat. “You mind if I get a few to munch on?”

”Yeah, go ahead. Just cook mine well. Make sure they’re upland from this disaster.”

The princess knew from human affairs, and she had quite a few of them, that no amount of reasoning would work on someone with so much pride as this Wizard King. Her subquest was to discover a way to stop this insanity.

The dragon returned with dinner prepared.

“How you do that I’ll never understand.” She decided long ago not to question. He was a good chef and hunter to boot. Don’t look a gift dragon in the mouth.

“Do what,” he inquired?

“Nothing, thanks for the dinner,” she said picking her teeth.

“But what to do? What to do?” She muttered pointing to the distressed environment.

The dragon looked at her and inquired, “Why do anything? What’s the point? Everyone is not right in the head and you want to fix it?”

“Yes I do, because I live here. If I do it, I won’t have to put up with any idiot for a husband that comes along and does what I can most certainly accomplish. That’s why.”

“Okay that makes sense to me. But no one else has been successful. So what’s *your* plan?”

The princess was a knock out beauty. That fact was not lost on her. She always packed for any affair. “I just happened to notice a proclamation about a ball being held at this Wizard King’s palace this evening.”

“Dragon I have to freshen up. There is a warm spring over here. I will bathe and dress for the ball. Maybe I can influence this wizard creep to stop making his war machine and quit poisoning my home land.”

“You and what army?” the dragon mumbled.

“I heard that,” she yelled back. “I have a backup plan. Would you bring me a towel?”

“I’ll bet you do,” he hollered back. “What a piece of work she is,” He mumbled. He thought about that for a while.

That evening she arrived at The Ball. She was a show stopper. The wizard left the women he was with. He was enchanted by this new unannounced beauty. She had charm, wit and a certain je ne sais quoi.

He knew he would score. Who could not be charmed by his power, his humor, Himself?

The princess went through her mental check list: “Got beauty, check; got brains, check; got a dragon parked just out of sight, check. A great, dangerous combination,” she thought. She turned to the wizard king smiling in and ever so ‘come hither’ look.

He propositioned her.

She hesitated, and stalled, for effect.

He turned the level of charm up with some magic incantations.

She accepted as was her wont. She *allowed* him to feel in charge.

That evening the bedroom games had been completed, though much too soon for her complete satisfaction. She didn't let on.

The wizard king, lying back relaxed, was smoking a cigar blowing smoke rings. He was proud of his performance, as was his wont.

She leaned forward toward him, her head cupped by her long slender fingers and purred, "Hey big boy. What's with the weapons and all that? There is no one in the world that is a threat to you. What's the big deal?"

"Don't know. Just wanted to, because I can. Why?"

"You're killing all my people with that stuff."

"Really? No one ever mentioned that to me. But why should even I care? Effluent flows down hill and I'm up wind and upland. You can move in with me forget that hole in the wall you came from." And he blew another smoke ring.

"Who cares about the poor anyway They're just fodder and funds for the machine. They reproduce like rabbits. I always have enough to accomplish," and he stressed, "my desires," while staring at her.

She smiled and said in a growling sexy voice, "Yes that's true. Come here and give me a kiss. I like them big I like them strong. And and most of all, *I like them politically powerful.*"

Pride and lust being what they are, he gave it no other thought. He rolled over into her waiting arms, kissed her and instantly turned into a warty frog.

Surprise!

The princess was also a very powerful sorceress. And *that* was something she *never ever* let on.

"Oh Dragon, honey, sweetie," she beckoned with an added whistle. Dragon was the only one who knew her secrets, all of them.

He flew into the bedroom looking around. "Yes, you called?"

"Here, a treat for you." She threw the frog at the dragon who swallowed it down.

"Nice appetizer. What's for dinner?"

“Any of the other guests.” She said. And in a regal voice he rarely ever heard, “Go at it,” she commanded.

He did much to his delight.

She washed up, got dressed, and waited for dragon to finish with his fun and games. She heard roaring and screams and crunching of all sorts and manner. She smiled.

She was bored while she was waiting for the machinery of that state to be shut down. The ruling elite had been dissolved in a manner of speaking. So to bide the time, she did her nails in a deep red. When she was finished she looked up and around. The relative silence was deafening. “Dragon must be finished with his little games. Good timing.”

The people throughout the land stopped in their tracks. Never before had this occurred. Work, work, work, scramble, scramble, eat, pay taxes and die. That was their lot in life.

There was no smoke billowing from factories, no activity coming from the castle, and no screams, nothing.

Well, not any more.

The princess looked around. “This is a big mess. I know some good people with the right skills I can enlist to straighten this chaos out. Not a problem. They owe me big time anyway.” she said to the Dragon.

He had a good idea what debts she was referring to but thought it wiser to remain silent. Besides he was rather content. He had not had so much fun in a long time. A slight burp erupted from his mouth and some smoke spiraled up from his nostrils. The combined scent had the faint aroma of seared flesh.

The princess attired in all her regal travel outfit stood on a balcony. Dragon was behind her occasionally burping. Below her were the former wizard-kings wage-slave workers. She informed the huddled masses below the castle, in a voice of strength yet in a caring tone, “Don’t cry for me.” He burped louder this time. She turned to the dragon and hissed, “stop that.” And back to the growing crowd below, “The dragon is my friend.

I have made a change in the governing authority. It once upon a time existed. Now it doesn’t. I assure you things will improve for all of you in a short while. I have taken care of that.”

They looked up never believing this would happen, ever. The fact that they were looking up instead of cowering was new. They were not sure how to behave.

Her like minded and skilled friends who had been summoned, arrived almost immediately. The situation was explained in detail. They got right to work setting up new a new fair government and industrial base.

Some time later when things had been put in some semblance of order, she addressed the now more relaxed citizens. “My associates are fixing the mess the former, the late, evil Wizard King royally created. Enjoy your new found freedoms. I will be leaving for my home where they are sure to be worried for my safety and health. I believe things are much better. I will return some day.” She blew them all a kiss.

Cheers were heard for miles and tears flowed like rivers as she left the land with her dragon.

As the sun shone through the clouds for the first time in ages, people all over began to breathe better and better. The crops grew and minds began to clear.

The princess had discovered the source of the problems, achieved her quest, and returned home. The king wanted her to marry but she said, “I achieved the goal of the quest. I can and will do as I please.”

“And, I’m not finished. Not... just...yet. And yes Daddy I will marry,” she said to the king.

“What mischief are you up to now?” he knew something was up. Something was always up with this girl.

“Oh, nothing too weird papa. Trust me,” she said coyly.

‘*Too weird*’ was all he heard. “Sweetheart...” he began.

The king was wrapped around her finger.

“Shhhhh,” she said putting her fingers to her mouth in the please be quiet sign we all know. “Daddy, now please.”

“Like I said, I like them big and strong. They don’t have to be all that smart.”

“I pick him.”

She looked at the dragon. She always liked what she saw. With a magical incantation she turned herself into a dragonette.

Off they flew. They lived happily ever after too.

The End

All characters are a total fabrication of my mind. Any resemblance to any country, political entity, any persons living, dead, or fabricated by other minds is a coincidence and unintended.

*Though I have to tip my hat to Babette Cole and her writing which in a very long drawn out way and through time, inspired this story. RT

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