

The Blade of True

Once there was a King who lived in an ancient castle with his only son. The King, who cared for his kingdom very much, was very concerned about a beast terrorising the villages and towns. He wanted to defeat this beast and bring peace to the kingdom. He had only one problem. Not one of his soldiers had the courage to fight the ferocious monster.

So the King started sending people of all kinds, from guards to slaves, to defeat the beast. The King never heard from them again. There was an old sailor who could sail a boat to the island where the beast lived. The ancient man had sailed this boat for as long as anyone could remember, and no other sailor could reach the island except for him because he was the only person in existence who knew the way.

Years later, when the King was too old to fight, it just so happened to be his son's eighteenth birthday, which meant he was old enough to fight in the army. But the son didn't want to join the army, he wanted to slay the beast! So that very day the Prince packed up his armour and went with his loyal servant to the old man to board his boat. They set sail for the island at the crack of dawn the very next day. According to the sailor, the journey would take three days and three nights.

On the night of the the second day, while the Prince was sleeping, the sailor crept into the boat's dinette and poured a black liquid into the Prince's cheese and grapes. The liquid dissipated almost immediately.

The next morning, the Prince went in to the dinette and ate his cheese and his grapes. Then the day continued as normal, bird-spotting, fishing, sharing stories. Finally, when they arrived at the island, the Prince began to feel slightly queasy, but he thought nothing of it. He strapped on his armour and went to hunt for the beast. Only then did the poison take full effect. The Prince seemed to fall down dead, but he groggily pulled himself up and carried

on. "What's happening to me?" said the Prince fearfully. Meanwhile, the servant was waiting for the Prince on the boat. He waited there until day became night, and finally he said, "I haven't seen the Prince in a long time, I'm going to look for him."

The servant set off into the jungle of the island. In the distance he heard a pained scream. "That must be the Prince slaying the beast," the servant thought excitedly. He hurried on through the undergrowth and eventually arrived at a clearing with the remains of a stone temple in the centre. A dark shape passed overhead, and then all was silent. A torn cloak lay on one of the crumbling, cracked columns, laden with blood. The Prince was nowhere to be seen.

The distraught servant went back to the old man and they sailed home. He went straight to the King at the palace. He sorrowfully told the King the terrible news: the Prince was dead. When the King heard this, all the colour in his face drained out to leave a pale white colour. A single tear trickled down his face and he rose from the throne and staggered out of the room in distress.

From that day on, the King sent out up to ten people every day, and not one of them survived. The King panicked about the kingdom and the beast all the time until one day he panicked so hard he died. With no heir to take the throne the kingdom was in danger, and that meant arguments about the true King. War broke out, and the servant was lost in the middle of it. One day the servant was inside the castle and saw a fox in the gardens that was looking at him curiously. The devoted assistant hurried down to the gardens and spoke with the fox. "Why, a fox, what news do you bring?"

"The kingdom is at war with itself, and you are the one to stop that."

"But, if you'll excuse me, how?"

"You must defeat the beast that rests on the isle of Trials."

The servant had no idea what the fox was talking about, so he frowned and spoke, "Isle of Trials? I've no clue what you're talking about."

"You have been there before, you just haven't heard the isle's name."

"You mean that beast?! The one that killed my master?"

"That's the one."

"Hundreds of people have tried and were killed, how am I going to?" retorted the servant.

"The island has three trials, hence the name. The first trial is to make it there without being poisoned."

"Poisoned?!" exclaimed the servant.

"Yes, you see, the sailor is not a sailor at all, he is simply part of the beast himself. He poisons the cheese and grapes, which are enchanted so they tempt you into eating them. Only the humblest man can resist the temptation. The second trial is much harder as you must wield the silver blade, or, the sword in the stone. Only the truest man can wield it. The third trial is to summon the courage of heroes, using nothing but your heart. Only the bravest, truest, humblest man can do this. Once you've done this, the beast will no longer be a trouble to you."

The servant took this information and tried to process it. "I, me, how?"

The fox replied, "I told you I cannot help you, this is the least I can do."

"Thank you," said the servant gratefully, with a sparkle in his eye.

The next morning, the servant - with no armour or weapons - went to the old man with the boat and asked him to sail him to the island. The old man agreed immediately. And so began the long journey to the Isle of Trials, or, its true name, *Νήσος των δοκιμών*. On the second night, the sailor poured the poison onto

the cheese and grapes, and it dissipated almost immediately. But after the sailor had gone back to his cabin, the servant snuck down into the dinette and threw the cheese and the grapes into the ocean, and left the plate, to make it look like he had eaten them.

They arrived at the island, and as he rushed into the undergrowth, he seemed to fall down dead, and shakily pull himself up. He could see the old sailor smile slyly, though he was trying to hide it. The servant staggered through the jungle until the elderly man was out of sight, then broke into a pelt. Soon, he arrived at the stone temple, and there, in the centre was a large stone, carved with images of an eagle, but no ordinary eagle. Its feathers were made of all kinds of riches, from ruby to diamond to gold to silver to emerald and many more. Then there was the blade, the most beautiful thing the servant had ever seen, a leather hilt, encrusted with emeralds and diamonds, with a majestic silver blade in the full light of the sun, casting hope inside the young man standing before it.

A name was carved into the blade of the exalted sword, *Λεπίδα αληθινής*, or Blade of True. The brave servant stepped forward and clasped his hands over the hilt of the weapon and pulled. The sword came free at once. It balanced perfectly in his hands. Suddenly, a cry of steel scraping against steel cut through the air. The servant flinched and broke out of his trance. The huge eagle the servant had seen in the carvings came swooping out of the treetops and landed calmly, eyeing the servant suspiciously. The bird was even more striking in real life. Its tail plume was golden, its wings silver, its head bronze, its back emerald, its chest diamond and its eyes were rubies. The beast took a tentative step forward. It nuzzled his chest. The servant scrutinized the bird and noticed something: it was badly injured. It was underweight, wings badly broken, and head scratched and dented. Then the servant realized the King, the Prince and the fox were all wrong. This beast was no beast, he was a victim. The King had wanted it dead. He had wanted to kill it in cold blood. He was a liar. The bird nudged the sword.

The servant realized what the eagle wanted him to do, and was shocked. But he had to. So with the courage of heroes inside him, *Κάρολος* plunged the blade into the heroic bird's heart.

The sword melted away and the beast rose into the air, and exploded in white light. When it was all over, there was nothing, just a stone temple, no eagle, no blade, no blood, no torn rags. The servant looked closer. None of the columns were cracked, everything seemed to be new and freshly built. *Κάρολος* returned to the boat, where the old man lay dead, blood pouring out of a wound in his chest, exactly where *Κάρολος* had impaled the bird. "So *he* was the evil spirit," thought *Κάρολος*.

Three days and three nights later, the dejected servant returned to the castle, only to find the kingdom at peace. How it had happened, *Κάρολος* did not know, but he was glad that it had. The servant was, the closest person to an heir as he was the Prince's loyal servant, the new King and was satisfied with that. But *Κάρολος* was sad, as he had lost a friend, who he had only got to briefly meet.

Many years later, *Κάρολος* was an old King, and was close to death. He thought about the eagle he had met so many times before, when he heard a screeching coming from outside. He sat up and looked out. There, on one of the castle spires, was a majestic eagle, with a smooth bronze head, glimmering silver wings, and a gold plume. The King smiled and lay back in bed. Then he died.