

Gallantry Woes

by Alina Lundholm

Every kingdom needs its knights just like a witch needs her wand or a blacksmith needs his hammer. Without them, the whole system would collapse and crumble to dust. The king has his hardened, threatening cronies to keep the public in order, the ladies of the court have potential suitors to flirt and dance with at the royal balls, and of course, the realm has brave protectors to keep it from being taken over by another country. Every knight is handsome, courageous, strong, honorable, charming, and supremely talented with a sword. That is, all knights are *supposed* to possess these distinguishing traits. However, some of these fine gentlemen prefer to go against the grain. One knight in particular scorned the very rules of kingdom life itself. One very stubborn knight indeed.

Sir Dunstan of Kettleby was not known for gallantry. In fact, the general populace wondered how he ever became a knight in the first place. It wasn't for a lack of swordsmanship or courage, however, but a lack of knowledge in the ways of court itself. Throw him onto the battlefield and he was happier than could be sticking holes in goblins and dark elves but into a feast prepared in the king's honor? Nay, the young man knew nothing of the word *tact*, nor would he ever be inclined to find out. The matters of romance and politics annoyed him to no end and as a consequence, he left many befuddled and broken hearts in his wake.

"Sir Knight," inquired a besotted noblewoman. "I would be ever so pleased if you wore my token in the tourney on the morrow."

"Madam, what use would have I of a little rag?" asked the oblivious knight.

"Why, Sir Dunstan, to give you luck on the battlefield and show you have a lady's favor. That is, *my* favor," she said, a slight quaver in her voice.

"I have no need of luck. If a man has to rely on luck, he is a poor excuse for a warrior. I'm afraid I cannot take this. I haven't a practical use for it."

The noblewoman's face turned a bright red and eyes glimmering with tears, she turned tail and fled. The knight scratched his head and looked upwards, seeing past the ceiling. "What did I do wrong this time, Creator?"

I believe the correct response would be everything.

"I don't understand. Why am I the only bloody one with any common sense around

here? I mean, a handkerchief? A tourney, that I have been *forced* into, I might add? And all of these ruddy frivolous feasts and dances? It's enough to drive a man insane. I should be out on missions and quests with Sir Rodric and scouring the Copper Hills with Henning Craven. Those damn bandits still haven't been caught from the last raid on Torvist Rock. I'm useless here, playing court games and smiling politely at noblemen. It's utter bollocks."

I don't recall anything polite about your mannerisms as of late.

"All right, fine. I may have been acting a little irritable lately, but--"

Just a little? HA!

Dunstan glared at seemingly nothing, tapping his foot irately. "Well, that was uncalled for."

Was it? For the past week, you've avoided six out of seven tourney practices-

"Which are, as I told you, complete wastes of my time."

-fallen asleep during all of the king's testimonials-

"They've gone on and on for *hours*, every single one of them. Could you blame me for not wanting to hear about a farmer's lost livestock? Or about disputes concerning land borders and broken fences? I didn't become a knight in order to listen to prattling and bickering between peasants.

-turned down seven maidens and broken their sweet hearts-

"They weren't in love with me as a person. They were in love with the idea of me, of marrying a knight. It didn't matter who it was, just what I was. It's a status game these court folk play. And I won't have any part of it."

-and on top of all that, you LET Sir Day win the favor of the princess!

For once, Dunstan was rendered silent. Sir Day of the Sunset Isles was a famous name around court. This man was as popular as he was handsome, with a strong figure, golden hair, and eyes that shone as brightly as the smiles he gave out so willingly. He competed often in the abundant jousting tournaments thrown by the king, and he was a regular on the dance floor during festivals. The knight was also known for his excellent sword-fighting, a fact that the noblewomen appreciated greatly. And one that Sir Dunstan hated.

"Sir Day is not worthy of his knighthood. He prances around the castle, gorging himself on the simpering and flattering of others. He even has his own little group of women giggling and following him everywhere. He eats it up. But do you see him dashing out for field duty and

maintaining the other parts of the country? Nay. He sits on his arse and only performs his true knightly duties when the king requests it of him, which is never. Ser Day has him wrapped around his little finger. And it's not like there's any warring neighbors we have to deal with. We've been at peace for five years now. Unbelievable!"

You almost sound like you wish we were at war.

"Don't all of the other fantasy stories have conflict like that, or at the very least, the climax of a whole series ends up with a battle? Ridiculous. And you just *had* to put me into the one story without any fighting."

The lead up to a battle takes far too long. And I only have a limited space to work with. A battle scene would've seemed rushed and out of place.

"Says the amateur writer. I'll bet Chaucer could've worked it."

Oh sod off. I'd be careful. I do have the power to erase you completely.

"Au contraire, main characters rarely get killed off in a story. You need me."

I could always make Sir Day the main character.

"Yes, you'd be the funniest author ever. 'Oh hello. My main character's name is Sir Day, and he's a knight. Do you get the joke? Hahaha'-NO! And what kind of story is this where a knight, saddled with horrible character development, can be seen talking to an imaginary person in his head and not have any of the castle staff spot him? Are they all conveniently oblivious? Or is that a sub plot you wanted to spring on me later? Have the castle think Sir Dunstan is nuts, eh?"

*Well, aren't you? What if I'm just a figment of **your** imagination instead? This could be a way of dealing with reality for you.*

"Circular thinking, my dear. The knight thinks he's a made up story inside the mind of a girl in another reality. This tale has no ending. But you're running out of time. You definitely could've written a battle sequence in the time we've wasted just now."

*Don't be a whiner. You know I hate that. I could just end this mid-sentence you know. That's what John Green did for his fictional within-a-book, *The Imperial Affliction*. It worked rather well.*

"But that wasn't even in the fantasy genre. Wait, are you telling me I have cancer?" *What?! No, of course not-*"

"Okay good. And if you ended it here, that'd be totally cheating and out of place."

You can't cop out like that."

I could do it. I'm really tempted.

"You wouldn't."

I never said I was good at endings.

"Preposterous. There wasn't any climax, we didn't meet ANY other characters, this whole story is basically dialogue, and Merlin's beard, there wasn't any fighting! How can you become an author if you just end a story right at--"

The End.