

The Tale of a Knight

Year 7.

I can remember the first time I saw a knight. He was out in a sand pit underneath a swath of spotlights shining down on his face. His tunic was checkered, black and white, and his hair flowed down onto his shoulders. I had a little paper crown of the same colors while I held a fat chicken leg in my right hand, ready to take a massive chomp out of it. There was a giant mug next to me too, probably full of sprite or coke or maybe root beer. The crowd around me and my family was roaring in excitement, and I sat there with a big old smile on my face ready to watch the black and white knight fight his opponent, who had just galloped out on his noble steed. The colors of the other knight are lost to my memory, but I want to say they were red and gold. Yes, red and gold, across his horses' armor, alongside the banners his squire held, and across the opposing side of the arena. My grandpa, or poppy as I've always called him, yelled out in a resounding, "BOOOOOO..."

And I booed too. It just felt right.

This foul knight thought he could just come out here and take all the glory from our champion, our hero, the black and white knight?! So, I booed, because I didn't wear his colors. Because my pops booed. And because the whole rest of the crowd booed.

What is the chivalric code? The tenets are many but seem simple enough. Some people have even condensed the code down to a single word per tenet. Some have full sentences. But, Overall, the code varies. It changes for different generations, different locations, and different cultures. However, there are key elements.

Love God, follow his commands and follow the commands of the Church. Protect the weak. Never back out of a challenge or give up a fight; always have strength and courage. Destroy those who go against the teachings of God and your country. Respect and honor women. Never Lie. Be gracious. Be honorable.

These are few aspects of the knightly code. I suppose when we hear the word “knight” we often think of King Arthur, or Lancelot, or Gawain, Percival, Tristen, Galahad, and others, but this code was not just a part of legends or tales. To many medieval Europeans, this code was law. This code defined their morality.

Year 13.

I always hated the mosquito laden world of these islands, just below tip of Southern Florida. Too wet, too hot, and too infested. I remember having to turn over festering buckets of rainwater in our backyard, they were full of little larvae squirming around in their dark depths. But there were somedays the little blood demons found it in their kind hearts to spare us for a while. On those days swift breezes and salty ocean air filled your lungs, giving back the blood that had been lost. And on occasion we'd use that wind to sail out into the sea, searching for the birds lower in the sky which signified something bigger lurked beneath the surface. We'd set out our fishing rods and let the bait trail behind us. I would often slip down into the underbelly of the ship, having never gotten used to riding roughly through the waves, and sleep, and on occasion, drink a coke.

And then there was a yell, a shout!

“Fish on!” my friends dad would say, and we poured out onto the deck of the boat, running straight for the line as it whined with the weight of whatever was on the other end.

We fought for hours on those waves. Pushing through, never giving up our fight. For to me this was a challenge set down by the creature. It picked up my gauntlet, it took up a challenge. On these waves I was a warrior battling a monster.

But finally, something budged in the fishes will, something gave up. It let its life up to the creatures above in their metal tub with their iron hooks. And we’d haul it aboard.

This fish was particularly beautiful. Green, blue, yellow scales, all bright and glorious, except the blue, it was deep and thoughtful just like the sea below us. Slowly I’d watch it fade out.

Slowly.

Slowly, as it faded into white and grey versions of those radiant colors and for a moment, I was sad to have this beast for supper.

What is a man?

An age-old question.

Some would say a bold warrior. Someone who fights till the end to protect his family, his woman. Someone who goes to war. To protect someone weaker than himself. He is someone who never fears the storm. He never lets his courage fade. He never brings others down with him. He is a beast, a monster. A being of great power. He is a pushover. He needs to be tamer. A man is not afraid. He has no insecurities. He has no anxieties. He knows exactly who he is. No

doubts. Nothing is in his mind. He only thinks in one way. He only seeks his own way. Linearly. Not complicated. Full of himself. Prideful. Selfish. Lustful. A failure.

What is a man?

Year 15.

It felt like total darkness. At least after a while. The first time I looked at porn was strange. I mean I had always wondered what someone's body looked like underneath all those clothes and yes, I had seen still pictures, sculptures, paintings, etc. and yeah, my parents had told me all about what sex was and how we change at a certain age, but now it was different. Seeing people actually "doing it", live, felt strange. Watching people moving and laying and standing in all these different positions, naked, fully in view of all, pushed a button in me.

And so, I watched.

For months. I faked what I was doing, lying to peoples faces. Going to church, acting like I was a perfect Christian boy, who never failed, who never messed up.

A year. I was falling apart. I couldn't hide what I was doing anymore. My parents would be disappointed. My family would hate me. My God would never love me again.

Every single day. I found the button it pressed wasn't a good one. Not the kind of button where you're "discovering yourself" and "getting to know your body". No. It started something I never knew would happen from just trying to please myself.

Curiosity led to Desire.

Desire led to Passion.

Passion led to Lust.

And Lust led me to losing people I loved. To breaking people's hearts. I was so consumed by this...thing, this creature in me that I couldn't face, that I couldn't challenge with a sword and armor. I couldn't ride into battle crushing this evil, alone. Because now I was alone. Alone and scared of what people would see if they found my worst secret. My worst scar and hurt.

When I first told my parents what I was watching, and why me and my best friend hadn't been talking for weeks, I was crying, weeping because I knew they could never love me again. Because it was too gross for people as perfect as them. My dad drew me close to his chest as my tears soaked his shirt, his strong arms holding my heart together. My mom cried with me. She left the room.

A few days later my mom gave me a ten-page letter. She still loved me, but I had hurt her and punched her in the gut with what I had done. She told me that she was deeply disappointed, but not just in me and what I had chosen to explore, but that she had failed me. She had left me alone for too long. She had let me go searching a vault of images in which the world's worst reside.

I can't put those images back.

The tale of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight begins with a feast during Christmas. The Knights were cheerful and celebratory having come to have and hold their realm and castle in Camelot. There are songs and verses being sung and brought forth for the King and his men, and Guinevere and all the ladies of the court looked radiant as always. Then all is hushed as a

massive, green man enters the hall brandishing an axe, taller than the nearest man. He issues a challenge to the knights who look on with fear. “One of you must deal a blow upon me and in a year’s time I shall deliver upon you, the same. Come forth! Are not thee the mighty men of Camelot? Where are thy men of might?!” Arthur springs forth with pride to face the man mocking him and his court, but Gawain stops him, saving his king from certain doom. He deals what should have been a killing blow, cleaving the green man’s head from his body. The man slowly rises taking his head, once more reminding him he must come to him in a years’ time to receive the same blow. Gawain trembles in fear, realizing the implications of this endeavor, but takes up the task and in a years’ time, finds his way to the green knight. There in the knights’ field, Gawain comes to face his doom. When the blow comes, he flinches and even uses a magical belt he acquired along his journey to protect himself from the death which was certain to come. The green knight mocks Gawain but sends him on his way. Sir Gawain returns to Camelot alive but bearing a scar from his encounter. A gash where the axe entered but a fraction of an inch. And so, Gawain survived, but is forever reminded of his failures.

Of his dishonor.

Of his sins.

Year 20.

June was just about to come to an end. School had been a raucous for me and all my friends and a gentle reprieve in the green hills and warm summer breeze was on all our minds. Some of my friends had gone south to California, as I recall, and I was left mostly alone during

that time. The rest of us, my best pal, Elijah, and another friend of ours, Alex, had gone out to the park to play the sport we all loved best, frisbee. I remember going toward the west hills of the park, where one of us would stand on the topmost hill and chuck the thing as far as the wind would carry it. Elijah offered his best, most scholarly way of throwing a frisbee. Trying to drill into mine and Alex's brains, how to toss a frisbee the best way. I recall us both looking at each other and laughing, just because our friend was really trying to make us into "professional frisbee tossers". The next day I had the feeling like I had thrown out my arm, but I had a smile on my face.

I remember so many geese in the park that night. Alex talked about how they looked evil and maybe it wasn't such a good idea to walk back through their midst on the way back to her car. So, we left Elijah in his car, and I braved the creatures just for her sake.

Thinking back to that moment, why did I act like that? Did she say she was afraid just so I would walk her back? I wanted to be a brave warrior for her, but I was just a little boy facing a bunch of birds.

At her car, we danced, without so much as a word. The music I remember using was Michael Bublé. I worried what some people might think seeing two grown college kids standing in a parking lot at eleven o'clock at night dancing with each other. Hand in hand; heart on heart.

I held her there with so much joy.

I was happy.

And for a moment I felt the world was ahead.

For a moment.

From the moment I saw a man in shining armor wielding his weapon, I knew I must become a knight! Someone who brandishes a sword and cuts his enemies down, and his monsters. In my seven-year-old mind it made perfect sense for a boy like me to be knight, to be this great warrior who never fears or falters in his stride.

But there is a darkness to a knight. There is a blackness deeper than that of the vast void above our planet. There is a danger to him with so much privilege. In this knight's heart is not a perfect a picture spun in the tales of old. No, there is depth and an evil amongst his kind glances and fair words. With his sword he runs down those weaker than him. With his status he beguiles and tricks and takes advantage. He preys on the weak. He forces women to kneel at his feet. He uses his God as an excuse. He is a creature of ferocity. He is a danger to behold.

I desired that. To be a knight, a warrior, a brandisher of holy flame. But, through time, through the broken hearts of my kin, through the plucking out my own eyes and learning to see from another's, I have seen. A true knight is not one who wears golden gilded plate which covers the abyss within. He does not have a magnificent weapon gracing his back to cut down any who stand in his way. Nor does he use the position which is given to him to force others to do what he will not.

The one thing a true knight does is care.

And give.

Year 21.

I'm looking into the eyes of the woman I love, Elisabeth, God is abundance, grey-blue eyes, that (and this may be cliché) sparkle when the light hits them just right. I tell a terrible joke and she laughs till her eyes run with water and her nose is covered in snot. There on her face is a subtle smile, almost as if there is always a happy little thought on the forefront of her mind, but it's never revealed. She tells me that if I ever see her staring out of the car window to just leave her alone, she's dreaming about something.

Sometimes I get jealous about that aspect of her. Her dreaming. I can't remember the last time I had a dream. I stay up far too late into the night, thinking, pondering, how I'll fail in the coming day, or what mistakes I'll make which will tear everything I've worked so hard to build down.

But she holds me when I tell her what I was thinking the night before. She holds me and kisses me in my tears. When I feel less of a man. And still in times when I don't.

I remember her telling me how she felt I was being distant and withdrawn, that something was holding me back from her. I told her the truth then. That I was afraid. I was full of anxiety and fear of failures. I was trying to be there for her and not be held back by other loves and past mistakes. People I couldn't stop thinking about or people I still wish I could see one last time to tell them I'm sorry for not being what I should have. For not giving of myself. For being too withdrawn and choked by myself and people around me telling me what a man shouldn't do and never telling me what a man should do.

I love her for that. The honesty of that moment and many others. She shows me there is still hope for a man like me. A man who strives to be honorable and caring.

And more than that. Someone who loves till the end.