



## HIGH PRIORITIES

By

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**It was on the road to Glastonbury that things went awry for the two knights. When they crested a steep hill and gazed out across the sun-splashed meadow below, the scene before them caused both men to rein in their horses and stare in astonishment.**

**Sir Reginald lifted a bushy eyebrow. “Aren’t dragons scarce in this kingdom?”**

**“I heard they’d all been killed.” Sir Simeon shook his head. “Rotten luck. I suppose we’ll have to DO something about this before we continue on?”**

**“It is our duty, I’m afraid.”**

**They sighed in unison, watching as the dragon tramped across the field of daisies towards a golden-haired maiden. The young lady struggled in vain to free herself from the ropes that bound her to a tall post, situated right at the edge of a forest.**

**She screamed, and the knights drew their swords, urging their impatient steeds forward. At the bottom of the hill, they jumped a crumbling stone wall into the sweet-smelling meadow and then pulled up to assess the situation more thoroughly.**

**The dragon lumbered into the center of the field.**

**Sir Reginald spoke up. “The beast does not seem fierce at all. I daresay that one of us could dispatch it without much effort.”**

**“It does seem rather ponderous. However, it could still fly. There’s no sense in us both risking the loss of our finest swords and armor just to rescue a maiden that, from this distance, does not even appear to be beautiful.”**

**“Agreed. I shall wait here for you, then.”**

**“Beg pardon?” Sir Simeon looked offended. “Surely you realize that I have the superior weapon, therefore, you should be the one to take this risk.”**

**Sir Reginald brandished his sword in the air. “I think not. This blade was tempered with the blood of twelve royal virgins.”**

**“Weak, simpering females, more like.” Sir Simeon held up his own sword for inspection. “A weapon forged with sweat and urine from the ten bravest dragonslayers who ever lived.”**

**The maiden’s screams intensified.**

**“Dash it all, we’ve no time to argue.” Sir Reginald pointed to the ruined wall that surrounded the meadow. “I say we stone the creature and frighten it away. It seems almost timid.”**

**“Yes, it hasn’t even breathed fire at us yet.”**

**The dragon paced back and forth in front of the frantic maiden, making odd sounds in the back of its throat.**

**The knights charged across the meadow. Sir Reginald dismounted near the wall while Sir Simeon freed the struggling prisoner with one expert slash of his sword. The maiden picked up her green velvet skirts and sprinted into the dark woods without uttering a word of thanks.**

**“Ungrateful wench.” Sir Simeon dismounted and joined his friend, who was now lugging stones at the beast from behind a heavy shield. The rocks bounced harmlessly off the dragon’s bluish-green scales.**

**“Shoooo! Go away, you annoying, incompetent creature!”**

**The dragon had ceased its pacing. It just stood there quietly, batting its long eyelashes and looking confused.**

**“Buttercup! Come along now, Buttercup, there’s a good girl.”**

**The gruff, male voice emanated from the forest. The dragon perked up and obediently trotted off towards the sound, disappearing behind some dense foliage.**

The knights soon found themselves surrounded by scores of men, women and children, all carrying weapons. Some possessed crudely made spears, others held pitchforks or hatchets, and many carried hunting knives.

Sir Reginald addressed the motley gathering. "Good citizens, we have just rescued a fair maiden in distress. Please explain your hostility."

Hearty laughter filled the air and then died down as the crowd parted to make way for a finely dressed, blue-eyed youth with golden hair.

"The maiden was in no danger, kind sirs." The young man smiled. "And neither was the dragon, it seems."

The knights were assaulted with riotous laughter.

"My name is Prince Thaddeus," the youth said, stepping aside to reveal the golden-haired maiden. "And this is my sister, Princess Honoria."

"Sweet, harmless Buttercup," said the princess. "She thinks she's a cow."

Sir Reginald flushed crimson. "We demand an explanation for this duplicitous act."

"It is very simple," Princess Honoria stated. "We used the dragon to lure you into our midst."

"For what purpose?" Sir Simeon asked indignantly. "To rob us?"

"To insist on a charitable donation," Prince Thaddeus replied. He pointed past the knights to a hill in the distance. "See yonder castle? It belonged to our father, King Cedric, before the invaders destroyed it. Honoria and I must repay these loyal villagers for their efforts in rebuilding it. Our home will soon be completely restored."

The princess smiled. "We've collected many fine donations this week, thanks to the festivities in Glastonbury. But we are not greedy."

The crowd murmured its agreement.

"Quite so," Prince Thaddeus said, nodding. "We require that both of you give up only one of your prized possessions for our cause."

Sir Reginald and Sir Simeon exchanged incredulous glances.

"Our horses or our swords?" Sir Reginald asked. "Ridiculous."

**“We can’t possibly give you either,” Sir Simeon added. “My friend and I are on our way to take part in King Adrian’s weeklong celebration.”**

**Sir Reginald brightened. “Perhaps we could come to another arrangement. I’d be willing to delay my journey and help these kind villagers by laboring beside them for a day.”**

**“Well, I suppose that would be acceptable.” Prince Thaddeus turned to the other knight. “What say you?”**

**Sir Simeon squirmed. “I’m afraid I cannot be delayed. My part in the ceremony is too important. We’ll have to think of a different solution.”**

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**“I say,” said Sir Finnegan, reining in his white steed, “I didn’t think any dragons still existed in this country.”**

**“Just our luck, isn’t it?” Sir Harry muttered. “I suppose we’ll have to rescue the lady before we travel on?”**

**“It IS our duty.”**

**The damsel in distress let out an unladylike screech.**

**Sir Harry shook his head. “I must say that is the UGLIEST maiden I have ever laid eyes on.”**

**THE END**