

## The Hero and the Dragon

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In the deepest pit of the ocean, in the realm of permanent darkness, lived an old dragon in a castle made of black marble. This dragon was the king of all the animals of the seas. When he would get angry his eyes, which were brighter than two spotlights, would blaze such that the oceans water would boil. His tail so long and strong that when it struck the water the ocean would seem to split in two and waves the size of mountains would wash the villages from the shores and drag them to the depths. His shoulders were covered with blades of steel and his stomach with scales of silver metal. His claws were so fierce that they would break the grandest stones, his snout so wide it seemed as if a cave.

In all of its life the old dragon had done nothing but graze on the moss and water plants beneath the ocean and play with the whales and sharks for amusement. Sometimes he would devour sand to decrease his insatiable hunger. Until one day he saw a school of silver fish that were splashing their tails and swimming along together. I must tell you these silver fish were very, very curious creatures.

The dragon's mouth was open from amazement seeing the strange little fishes clamoring by when the leader of the fishes said to him respectfully, "Your sharp teeth are like sculpted ivory, would you kindly give us permission to come close and look at them?"

"You have permission!" roared the dragon.

The dragon opened his mouth wider and, as soon as the last of the fish was inside, he closed his eyes, slammed his jaws shut and swallowed them. "How tasty!" the dragon thought. And from that moment on, the dragon showed no restraint towards anything in his realm and he ate everything he could find: fish, sea-horses, sharks, octopuses and dolphins, and even the great whales.

Day after day he would hunt and devour until his stomach was like a mountain and then he would crawl back to his marble castle and when plants or moss would fall next to him on the undersea pastures, he would snort and giant waves would come and pull all the boats and ships to the deep.

Once the ocean had become empty of all life, the dragon devoured a few broken down sea vessels but it was not enough to satisfy his churning stomach. And it was because of this that he suddenly came out of the water to the seashore. He

glanced around until his sight fell upon a village of poor fishermen spread out behind a large field.

Restless and hungry he said to himself, "Without doubt that place will satisfy my hunger!" and the dogs started to bark as the dragon crept towards the town.

It was the village headman that first noticed the presence of the dragon. With his body shaking from head to foot he yelled in his direction, "Ay! What do you want here?!"

The dragon roared, "I am hungry! The expanse of the oceans has dried up for me. My stomach is hurting badly! Give me food!"

"What do we have to give you? We ourselves are crying! The oceans have dried up. There are no fish!" replied the village headman.

"Give me whatever you have that is of no use! Old women and men that are powerless, bring them to me!" screamed the dragon.

"What!? Those are our mothers and fathers! How could we possibly give them up?"

The hungry dragon struck his tail so hard on the water that it seemed to split in two. He screamed, "Then everyone prepare to die!!"

All the fishermen looked down. "So this is how the fate of our elders has been marked! Oh that our sins could be overlooked! The rescue of our sinless parents is outside of our power and command!"

By the time the sun had set, the dragon had 70 crippled men and 30 toothless women in its stomach.

The next day he yelled, "Ay! Be quick!"

And the fishermen brought forth the older children. Then younger boys and girls were sent to him and they too were devoured in a motion. Then he went after the men and women and afterwards, he devoured the entire village with all its shops, barns, and warehouses without any sense of satisfaction.

"I shall devour the world!!" roared the dragon.

On the third day, the old dragon started to crawl inland. A wave of warning could be heard, "A dragon is near! A dragon is near!" and villages were brought to tremble and towns to obliteration with fear. Defenders took aim and volleyed

the largest guns and mortars in his direction but the dragon, dizzy from laughter, grabbed the bullets and shells in the air and chewed them up like candy.

On the fourth day, he devoured a factory with all of its workers. His stomach swelled bigger and his flame throwing eyes become blood red.

On the fifth day, after he had eaten 4 cities and 9 towns, he emptied 2 rivers of water. Finally satisfied, he slept soundly for 3 days and 3 nights. As soon as he awoke, he crawled to the top of a mountain and looked at the fields and deserts. He saw some roads crowded with fleeing people.

They were escaping with all the color gone from their faces. By foot and by train, with boat and by plane they were escaping. They were seeking refuge in the far-away lands, in the land where the Wise One lived.

The dragon roared a fearful wail: "I shall devour the world all at once!" The land was brought to tremble and shake. The forest stooped and the birds cowered in their nest. Struck numb with fear, people covered their faces with their palms. As soon as they gathered their senses, they rushed forward in the direction where hope of their rescue was.

The Wise One was thousands of years old and was the wisest of all. He had been blessed with the skill that when he put his ear to the ground, he would be able to report on all things passing under the dome of the blue sky. His heart overflowed with kindness for all those who suffered and worked hard, and for those who respected freedom, the honor of humanity.

As soon as he realized that hordes upon hordes of people from everywhere were hurrying to his home, he yelled, "Hey people! What are you running from?"

And the masses of people brought their voice up at once to answer, "The dragon, we are running from the dragon! Our only hope is with you!! Ay, Wise of the Wisest, the dragon has devoured our families, our relatives, our children! Our homes and cottages! Our factories, fields, and farms! He has thrown our lands to ruin! You are our only hope!"

"Very well." said the Wise One.

The Wise One went to the workshop, a wondrous forge! He built all sorts of things there. Wonderful things.

As soon as the people had gathered around the workshop door, the Wise One faced them and said, "Select me a group of brave men from among you and bring

them to me! Send with them a group of horses with manes of fire and give to each a mountain splitting sword of steel!"

The Wise One's words had not yet finished when a group of worthy young men with swords in hand had lined up at the workshop door and one by one they stepped inside. The dragon had come closer and had a hold of nearby villages of in his teeth.

As soon as all the riders had lined up with swords in hand, the Wise One began the magical work. From that group of bodies, a unique being was empowered. A champion hero without fear or heed the like of which had never before been seen. His horse transformed to an iron vesseled steed in which beat the blood of a thousand horses. His mountain splitting sword made from the power of a thousand mountain splitting swords.

The hero, with such power, with such a sword in hand, mounted on such a fine beast, placed a kiss on the hand of the Wise One and mounted up to battle the dragon. A blessing was said and then bread was brought from oven and the Wise One sat together and shared bread with the hungry refugees.

As soon as the hero arrived near the dragon, the dragon jumped out with glee and shouted, "In this world I have experienced all things in my restless stomach; from the waters, the lands, and the sky! Even trees and homes and stones! The only flavor I have not tasted is that of a hero such as you! What great fortune! I believe that after I eat you I will be able to fall asleep most peacefully for two entire years!"

The dragon roared such that the ground split in an effort to distract the hero, but the hero wasn't in the least affected. He pulled the Sword of a Thousand Strikes from its scabbard and it shined so much like the sun that the world went black in the eyes of the dragon. Without delay the hero mounted the dragon and brought down such a powerful strike upon its neck that the head separated from its body and for 3 days and 3 nights it rolled and rolled through the fields and plains.

With another blow he tore out the dragon's stomach and the thousands upon thousands of people that had come to be stuck in the darkness and stench along with innumerable cities and towns, factories, fields, and farms all spilled out.

The people screamed in joy. They thanked the Wise One and went on their way. Everyone and everything as before. Each piece and person arriving at the same place as before the appearance of the dragon.

And a new day began....