

# A Day For a Knight



In a time of knights, kings, queens, and great battles, there was a boy. He was an ordinary boy and had nothing to do with knights, kings, queens, or great battles except in his dreams — which were nearly constant.

He was supposed to be a great help on his father's farm, but it took a little extra time to feed the pigs because he had to pretend they were enemies on horseback. That one big boar got downright mad the day Joshua (that was the boy's name) hit him with the fence pole while trying to rescue a princess who was being held hostage in the barn. He was sure she was there, and he would be richly rewarded for orchestrating her escape. What he found after knocking the boar out of the way was a goat who thought being fed on time would be much better than being rescued. The only witnesses to his heroism were the chickens on the roost and they were frankly unimpressed.

## Jesse Hulse

There was the day he was gathering chestnuts under the big tree by the creek when he saw the invasion coming. He knew the future of the land depended on his courage, and he knew he was ready to face the certain death that would most assuredly come when he, a mere boy (brave as he was), faced a huge army. He gathered rocks and climbed the tree, and as the enemy came nearer, he held his breath. As the army began to pass beneath him, he pelted them with stones. It was fortunate that he, being a small boy, had not been able to carry large stones up the tree. As it was, the stones he threw were a bother to the shepherds as their sheep scattered; however, no animals were injured, and there were no damages to pay. That night, he got by with only a small beating.

From the farm, Joshua could see the king's castle, and that didn't make it any easier to keep his mind on his work. He would sit and stare in that direction and just imagine the brave knights talking to their honored king. He, of course, had no idea what they might be talking about, but he just knew it was something wonderful.

There was a festival at the castle, and Joshua had not been able to sleep for days. As he and his father approached the outer walls with flags and banners streaming from them in the wind, he nearly forgot to breathe. He had never been within the walls of the castle before, and he didn't know quite what to expect. There

were guards at the gate; would they question him and his father, or even worse not let them through? The very thought filled him with a mixture of rage and fear. They had to let them in. He had waited for weeks to see the festival. His father and he were honest, hard-working men. Who did the guards think they were? He was nearly ready to challenge them to combat even before they spoke, but to his relief (and maybe his disappointment in a way) no challenge was needed. In fact, rather than detaining them, they seemed to stand a little straighter as he and his father walked by.

Once inside the castle walls, Joshua saw another world. One of knights, kings, queens, and great battles. Of course, that world wasn't really there, but it was in the eyes of the boy. He did see the knights preparing for a tournament. They were so spectacular in their armor that he could not help but stare. He imagined them in mortal combat and could almost see them riding into battle caring little of the danger, minding only their honor.

Then, he saw a sight that made his heart stop. A wicked knight had somehow made his way into the very center of the crowd and was now challenging the king's men to mortal combat. Other people saw the sight somewhat differently. They thought it was only a tradesman's donkey that had been frightened and knocked over a stack of vegetables, but Joshua thought they

must be deceived or maybe even bewitched not to see it as it truly was. Realizing that he must act swiftly to save the day, he ran to one of the king's knights and tried to take his sword. This didn't please the knight, who caught Joshua by the arm and lifted him into the air. The knight gave the boy a look that nearly froze his blood and then started walking with him toward the gate.

With each step, Joshua wondered what would happen. Was the knight taking him outside the gate so nobody would see when he ran his sword through the boy's heart, or would he spend the rest of his life in a dungeon? He tried to prepare himself for whatever came; he would be brave; he would be ready for anything. But he wasn't ready for what happened next. He heard a calm but commanding voice; the voice of his father in a tone reserved for those times when you knew better than to question him. But his father wasn't speaking to him; he was looking the knight in the eye. "Sir James, the boy is my son." Joshua forgot for a moment his fear for his own safety. What was this huge knight going to do to his father, a simple farmer? The knight gently put the boy down and raised his right hand. Joshua cringed and listened for the clang of a sword being drawn. He didn't want to see his father die, and he longed to run forward a cry out that it was his fault. But instead of drawing the sword, the knight saluted, and the farmer returned the gesture.

The fright the small boy had been given made the rest of the day a bit of a blur. He watched the events and saw the sights he had longed to see for so long, but his mind wasn't on them. At the end of the day, Joshua was exhausted and ready to go home. He was unusually quiet as they made their way out the gate and back to their farm. He began to realize that the excitement he had craved might have cost him his life. He also began to realize that there was a great deal more to his father than he knew. How did his father find the courage to stand before an armed knight and speak to him as an equal?

Several weeks later, things had returned to normal, but Joshua wasn't seeing invasions or attacking enemies disguised as farm animals. He seemed to have lost some of his lust for adventure as he had gained respect for his father, his simple life, and his unwavering values. He hadn't imagined anything out of the ordinary since the festival, and so he was all the more astonished when he saw three knights riding up to his cottage. One of them dismounted and walked up to his father who was standing near the road. It was this knight, the very one who had saluted his father at the festival, who now spoke. "My old friend, I need your help."

While Joshua stood by in a daze, his father simply bade the others dismount and all to come into the house. The four men sat around the table and began to speak in low tones. Joshua was

sure he wasn't imagining this and listened closely. Sir James saw Joshua standing in the shadows and motioned him closer. He took the boy by the hand and said, "I am sorry for the way I handled you at the festival. I had not seen you since you were a baby, and I didn't know who you were." The knight saw the puzzlement in the boy's eyes and turned to his father. "Does he not know who you are?"

His father replied only through silence.

"Your father was never one to speak of himself," Sir James continued, "and I'm sure he has good reason for silence now, but the need of the king is great and we can have no secrets. Your father and I were friends, and I trust we are still. I have been called the greatest swordsman in the land, but it is not true. Your father taught me and I have never been his equal. As one of the king's knights, he was unique. We all lived to do deeds of valor and prove our worthiness; we looked for ways to increase our fame. Your father performed deeds of valor but did not need to prove his worthiness; he seemed to care little for fame. He had the clearest claim to pride and yet had the deepest humility of any man I have ever known.

Joshua was in shock, everything seemed unreal. He wanted to believe what he was hearing, but his father was a humble farmer. Sir James puts a hand on Joshua's shoulder. "Shortly after your

birth, your mother died of a fever. Your father did not believe he could be the father his son needed if he served the king; the life of a knight is not a domestic one. He asked the king to release him from service and allow him to live as a simple farmer. We might have laughed at anyone else; we might have thought a lesser man had become a coward, but your father's honor was above reproach and his courage was beyond question."

Joshua looked at his father and saw him in an entirely new light. His eyes had a depth previously unseen, his face was stern, and he seemed to have put on a cloak of nobility. He looked at his son saying nothing but gave a slight nod.

Sir James continued, "The king gave him this farm because he would accept no more, asking only that he return to his service if there were great need." Sir James turned to Joshua's father. "Sir Kelman, the need has come."

Joshua's father said nothing, but his face became grave and the muscles of his jaw tightened.

"The king has been abducted and is held in the castle of his nephew." Sir James went on. "We do not know the demands, but we can not wait; our king is in danger. We ride to rescue him. Are you with us?"

Sir Kelman said nothing, but there was no question of his decision as he climbed a ladder to the loft and took his sword from under some straw. Sir Kelman spoke to his comrades of old, "You can not enter the castle; you are known. A knight would have no chance, but a simple farmer might. Especially if he had a young boy with him. Who would suspect a farmer and his son selling vegetables?"

"You would be in great danger, and so would the boy," Sir James said, a look of deep concern etched on his face.

Sir Kelman was a very courageous man, but he looked deep into his son's eyes to know if the boy was willing to face real danger. Once sure of his son's heart he spoke. "Life is far too precious to be bought at the price of honor. If we saved our lives by refusing our duties, what would we have gained?"

Joshua had always longed for adventure, but now that it was becoming real. He was afraid, but he would do his duty. His father and the other men made plans. Sir Kelman and Joshua would find a way into the castle carrying weapons in a vegetable cart. They would find the king and get him out of the castle. They would do all of this without drawing a sword, if possible, but they would be ready to fight if they were found out.

The very next morning, Sir Kelman and Joshua began walking toward a distant castle belonging to the king's nephew.



Vegetables were covering his father's sword and a smaller knife that he would use only in great need.

It was easier than they had expected to get through the gates. They hid the cart in a corner and removed their weapons. It would be harder to escape detection now, carrying the weapons made them easier to identify. Moving quickly through the castle they found a locked chamber. Joshua's father used his son's knife to pry the pins out of the hinges and remove the door. The king was unharmed and no alarm had been raised. They made their way to the front gate without detection, but the guard stationed there did not fail to notice the king. Sir Kelman's sword silenced him before his warning could be heard. Before his body was discovered, the three were far from the castle and nearly to safety.

The next day, while the knights rode against the king's nephew, Joshua and his father returned to their farm. Joshua wanted to tell people all about his adventure, but he thought of his father's example and decided that if he sang his own praises, he would sing alone.

The day after the knight's return, Joshua and his father saw a noble procession approach the farm. The king himself requested their presence and sent an escort to bring them to his castle. Inside the castle, they were shown rooms in which to bathe and

were given fresh courtly clothes. When ready, they were escorted into the presence of the king, no longer a prisoner but the lord of his realm. They walked nearer and knelt before him.

“Sir Kelman,” the king began, “when I released you from my service, I thought I had lost my greatest weapon. Instead, by releasing you from your post, I gained your service as a friend as well as a soldier. I owe you my life.” The king turned and looked long at the boy before him. “Young man, you have great courage, but do you have a sword?”

Joshua looked at the king, not quite understanding.

“I thought not,” the king said. “Take this one with my blessing.” With that, the king held out the most beautiful sword Joshua had ever seen or imagined. “Your father will teach you to use it, and then we will speak again.”