

Long-long ago (but not as long ago as you think) in a far-far away land there dwelled an old couple. They had one son. No, not Jack. Not a fool. Actually, a pretty smart lad. He grew up and the time came for him to begin the search for his happiness. And of course, as any other young man in the kingdom, he embarked on a journey of great deeds.

For most people of the country, there were three main reasons to accomplish feats of valor. The first one was that the family lived in extreme poverty, so performing feats was the only chance to better that situation. The second one was that some kind of misfortune befell the family: for example, a sorcerer could kidnap your sister, so you had to go and free her from his claws, or a witch could put an evil curse on the crop out of malice, so you had to go and deal with her, or some evil spirits could even carry off your precious cattle, so you had to go and win an unequal fight. The third one was as old as the hills: to accomplish a great deed to win the heart of some local princess.

In that respect our hero was unlucky. Though his family wasn't rich or noble, they were far from poor. Mishaps also seemed to give them a wide berth and on top of that he was the only child: there was no one to kidnap (it is a well-known fact that evil sorcerers had their eye on young girls only). Also, he didn't want to get married just yet... And yet he wanted to do great deeds. So he started on his journey just because his soul demanded accomplishments. Why live a miserable life in four walls when you could do something valuable? His inner flames of ardor and passion demanded to be quenched with the ceaseless whirl of tumultuous life – with the vivid kaleidoscope of amazing events hitherto unseen.

Got parental blessings and set out towards hardships and adversities for the sake of great deeds! Why, the whole world lay before him! Something would definitely happen.

He knocked about the world for several years. As it turned out, even though evil sorcerers and witches did walk on the face of the earth in the past, they had all just vanished. All villains were dead and, if some of them happened to have children, their offspring were all respectable business people. Nobody needed heroes anymore. Even local princesses gradually lost all interest in feats of valor (to be an inspiration for great deeds is so bothersome, really). As a result, the young knight's confidence was shaken. He watched as one by one heroes just like him abandoned such a foolish undertaking: they buried their childishness and began to slowly settle in the cities overseas, enticed by offered perks.

Contrary to his expectations, the life outside his village was nothing like the ceaseless whirl: it was almost the same wherever he looked, only decorations were different. He was ashamed and didn't want to come back. In the end, he just wasted all his precious years. Fooled around. So there was no turning back for him. "Now is not the time to be dispirited", said he to himself and rode ahead.

And one day he stumbled upon a wooden road sign standing on the crossroads. The sign had it written as follows: "If you turn left, you'll find only misery, if you turn right, you'll spend the rest of your life as a beggar, and straight ahead only death awaits you".

And the young knight became very sad, as he realized that all was useless. And he got dispirited. And went nowhere. (If it's written that whatever you do has no meaning then it can't be wrong.) He sat near the rock in grief. He was sitting like that for three days and three nights.

As it turned out, it was such an ungrateful thing, to be a hero...

And on the fourth day the young knight decided that great deeds were over for him: the time had come to think about his future. And so he was thinking about his future for another three days and three nights and didn't even notice that under the sign had been sitting a young lady, gloomy just like him. Well, she was nothing like Snow White, but he also was far from Prince Charming. He offered his hand and heart and she accepted.

And they began to live and prosper. Built themselves a log hut. The sign was first to be disposed of and put to a better use. But our hero – already a family man – thought like this: “We have a good view over the roads from our window. So if I or my wife ever see a young knight, we will definitely warn him about the dangers waiting ahead, although I doubt that we ever will see one...”

And he was right. The only time they remembered about that sign was during the parting speech given to their only son: they strictly forbade him to ever use one of those roads.

And they lived together ever after. Although their happiness didn't last for too long. All because the initial passion by some unfathomable reason didn't grow into the kind of love that makes your partner not just a mere target for your desire and lust, but a foundation of your own existence as well as of your future life together. Perhaps, somewhere in those lands still lived an old evil witch that had put on them some dark curse... In which case they just needed to find a hero who would slay the sorceress... But at that time finding a hero was already next to impossible.

So for the rest of their life they lived together only from the force of habit. And also because it was better to stick together than to live one's allotted days alone, or at least it seemed that way.

But on the other hand, their son grew into a respectable man and married some local maiden. Now they live far-far away and say that they are OK.