

George and the Dragon

The town was in an uproar. A dragon had swept down from the clear blue skies and landed on the small hill opposite the town's main gate. The dragon was large and scaly with pointed ears and eyes as black as midnight. It folded its thick, leathery wings across its back, curled its long tail around its heavy body and then opened its jaws wide. A blast of brilliant red flame exploded from its mouth and set a nearby tree on fire.

The dragon watched the shattered tree burn and then nodded in satisfaction. It turned its head and gazed at the terrified citizens who were clustered on the walls of the town straining to see what the dragon would do next. Casually, the fearsome beast sent a stream of flame flying over their heads. Everybody ducked down behind the shelter of the battlements and shivered and quaked in their boots. Then they heard a bloodcurdling noise like two vast sheets of steel being clashed together. In some trepidation, the townsfolk peered over the top of the wall to see what on earth was causing such an unholy row. The explanation was simple. It was the sound of the dragon laughing.

For some moments, the dragon's huge belly heaved and shook as vast plumes of foul-smelling smoke poured from its nose and mouth, but then it calmed itself. Its convulsions subsided until only a few gusts of smoke still spurted out of its nostrils. Then the loathsome reptile spoke in a voice as harsh as rusty metal.

"I'm hungry," it said. "In fact, I'm famished. I have not eaten for days and now I demand food. I want flesh and I want blood and I want it now. If my appetite is not satisfied, I will soar up into the sky and destroy your town with fire and flame." With that, the creature let rip with another searing blast of its poisonous breath.

"Please stop," begged the people. "We will bring you everything you want if you'll only promise not to kill us."

"Do it then," snapped the dragon, "and be quick about it."

The townsfolk scrambled down from the walls. They crashed and bashed into one another in their desperation to find and fetch food for the dragon. Soon they had assembled a motley collection of ragged sheep, flea bitten goats and even a couple of elderly cows that were well past milking age. The people drove these poor unfortunate beasts out through the gates of the town and up to the hill.

The dragon observed the procession with cold, unblinking eyes. Then it opened its mouth and yawned. Everybody flinched but no fire, only a faint puff of smoke, escaped from the dragon's throat this time.

"Why are you bringing me this pathetic collection of farmyard relics?" it demanded.

"These fine beasts are for you to eat," stuttered the bravest of the people.

"Really?" replied the reptile.

Then it sighed and a choking cloud of smoke poured out of its mouth like a thick black fog. When the dreadful vapour had faded the dragon spoke again.

"Perhaps I didn't make myself clear," it said. "When I told you I wanted flesh and blood, I meant human flesh and human blood."

The people all gasped in horror. The dragon smiled a pitiless smile and then continued speaking.

"I believe that the beautiful princess Sabra lives in this town. Am I correct?"

The townsfolk nodded dumbly.

"Excellent!" continued the beast. "She is the one I want. Bring her to me now and I may spare your miserable little lives."

The people hesitated and started to protest so the dragon blew a jet of flame over their heads and then howled with laughter as they scrambled and tumbled back down the hill in their haste to escape from him.

The wretched people of the town rushed to the palace and broke down the front door. They raced down the long corridors, pushing aside the princess's servants as they ran. They hunted high and low until they found the princess and then they dragged her from her room. They tied her hands behind her back and marched her out into the palace courtyard.

"What is the meaning of this outrage," cried the princess. "Let me go at once."

"Sorry, princess," said the shamefaced people, "but if we don't give you to the dragon it will destroy the town and everybody in it."

In desperation, Sabra looked around for someone to help her, but the people were far too afraid of the dragon to disobey its command.

Then there was a clattering of hoofs on the cobblestones and an armoured horseman rode into the courtyard. On his left arm he carried a shield decorated with a red cross on a white background and in his right hand he held a steel lance. He was mounted on a large white war horse that snorted and stamped its metal shod hooves impatiently.

"Untie the princess and set her free," ordered the knight.

"But what about the dragon?" shouted the people.

"Leave the dragon to me," replied the knight sternly. "He and I are old enemies and now the time has come to settle our differences once and for all."

Then he galloped away out of the town towards the hill where the dragon was waiting.

When the mighty monster saw the knight, he roared in fury, "I want the princess not you my little metal man. Be gone before I tear you to pieces."

"I do not fear you, dragon," answered the knight. "And I shall never rest until I have rid the world of you and your evil ways so prepare to die!"

The armoured warrior continued his thunderous charge up the hill. A ball of fire shot out of the dragon's mouth, but the knight deflected it with his shield. Then the knight and his powerful warhorse crashed into the scaly reptile knocking it over on to its back. Before the monster could move the brave warrior thrust his lance deep into its soft underbelly. The dying dragon howled, and a gust of flame sizzled past the knight's head. The force of the blast knocked him from his horse. He fell heavily to the ground where he lay still.

When they were sure the dragon was dead the people of the town, led by the princess, crept up the hillside to where the knight lay motionless on the grass. The princess knelt beside him and held his hand. Then, to everyone's enormous relief, the warrior stirred and sat up.

"Are you badly hurt?" asked the princess.

The knight shook his head and replied that he had been stunned by his fall but now, apart from a headache and the fact that his beard was badly singed, he felt fine.

"What is your name sir knight?" said the princess who was eager to discover the identity of her rescuer.

"My name is George," replied the warrior. "And I will protect you and your people from evil until the end of the world."

When the princess and her people heard his words, they cheered him loudly. Then the townsfolk hoisted George onto their shoulders and carried him back into the town. George

was a hero and news of his exploits spread far and wide until everybody knew the story of George the dragon slayer.

Retold by Roger Hurn

