

# A Squire's Tale

Author: Atreyo Ghosh

Grade: 8

Teacher: Paula Donoho

School: Jefferson Junior High School, Columbia, MO

"Now, twist yourself into this position and strike at the training dummy."

The young squire did as he was told, but before he could strike, he fell to the ground from keeping the pose. His knight fell to the ground, rolling with laughter. The squire joined in, laughing at his own mistake. Wiping tears from his eyes, his knight, Sir William, spoke. "Now, remember, we *aren't* doing yoga, my young pupil. Honestly, who fixes themselves into those crazy forms, just for 'spiritual enlightenment'? Bah! I suspect witchcraft at work."

"Yes Sir William, and..."

The squire, Lance, was cut off at the sight of a messenger on a horse, riding towards them. *What be this?*

"Sorry to interrupt Sir William, but the King has declared war! He asks that all of his knights prepare to ride into battle!"

"Hm... indeed. Now, did he say anything about my squire?"

"Your squire? Why, it would be absurd for him to say anything about it!"

"Excellent! Lance, prepare for war, we ride today!"

While the messenger rode off, Sir William began putting on his armor and gestured for Lance to put on the armor that Sir William had crafted for him. Lance picked up his sword and shield while Sir William did the same. "Now, with this war upon us, I believe it is time to prepare you for knighthood. I want you to fight me with all of your might, not even restraining for a kill. I will do the same, but will move to *not* kill you. This exercise is meant to help both of us, as it will get us both into fine shape for the war. And now, begin!"

With those words, Sir William dashed forward, his sword outstretched. Lance dodged the blow, jumping to the side and aiming a blow on Sir William's breastplate. Sir William raised his shield and pressed on, landing a blow on Lance's helmet. Staggering back, Sir William continued with a volley of strikes, which Lance barely dodged with use of his shield. Seeing a chance, Lance ran forward as to stab Sir William in the chest. Sir William raised his sword and struck a powerful counterstrike, thrusting Lance's sword away from him.

"An excellent battle! I truly believe that you are ready now; you will ride into battle alongside me and fight alongside the knights of our good king."

The two embarked on a journey to the battlefield, a good day's ride away. Upon approaching, the scene of utter carnage met their eyes. Severed humans lay on the field, stained eternally with dark red blood. A small wind swept through the area, heralding the possibility of a storm later, as a tall knight limped towards them. "So, you'd be the reinforcements? Excellent! We need as much help as we can get. The King of the Western Plains is sending scores of knights towards us; it's a miracle we've survived so far, albeit barely.... HERE THEY COME!"

What seemed like a black cloud roared towards them; as Lance looked closer, he noticed knights in black armor riding on black horses. Sir William roughly pulled Lance to his own horse. "You remember how to ride horses? Good. I'll be close by if you need me."

With a battle cry, the White King's knights charged forward ready to defend the land. Lance, perched atop his horse, used his free hand to land blows on nearby knights, but to no avail. Thinking, Lance took his sword and, this time, struck a nearby knight's horse. The effect was immediate; the horse gave a loud whinny and bucked off its rider. What happened next chilled Lance; as the knight attempted to get up, a score of knights ran towards him, both friend and foe, trampling him to death. As Lance looked on with shocked eyes, a clap of thunder reached his ears. His horse, frightened, threw him off. As Lance picked himself up, he looked around and saw that no one had managed to stay on his horse. He ran towards another enemy knight and struck against him. Within moments, Lance's strength proved superior, and he felled the enemy. His next sight burned into his memory. In front of him, Sir William fought with a knight. As Sir William raised his sword to strike the knight, his foe quickly whipped around and struck his side. The knight's strength followed through, and Sir William was cleaved in half.

Lance turned around, not wishing to see more of the scene. Hot tears poured down his face, as the closest thing to a father faded into death. Lance knelt beside his mentor's severed side, still crying, his tears disguised by the storm now in its earnest.

"Hey crybaby, return to your mommy. The field here ain't for tears, unless you wish a quick death, like your dead friend here."

# Loyalty

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John ran down the city slum, his heart pounding. The King had spared his life for stealing a loaf of bread but on an impossible condition; John was tasked to annihilate the Rebellion Leader, who was known by no other name. John had tracked him down here, but, now, his heart got the best of him. *What if I can't do it? What'll happen to me?*

A silent thought answered him. *You have no option. You took on the mission, and, if you don't complete it, you're as good as dead.* John took a deep breath. *Way to think positive...*

The sound of a door creaking sent all other thoughts out of John's mind. As he hid behind some barrels of rotten garbage, the leaders of the Rebellion came out. John caught his breath as he saw the Rebellion Leader. He was tall and lean, with a sheathed sword hanging off his belt. A long angry scar ran down the side of his cheek, marking his grave expression. John felt an odd sense of déjà vu. Had he seen this man before?

"You are sure of what you heard?" the Rebellion Leader spoke.

"Entirely, my lord. The King has sent a beggar down on his luck to kill you; we must find and enlighten him before he gets the chance."

"Too late!" John yelled. He took the dagger and jumped from behind the barrel and quickly disarmed the Rebellion Leader; when he prepared to stab him, John felt his strength leave him, as if he had been doused in ice water. He dropped his dagger and hung his head. "I can't do it; I'm not a killer.... When you kill me... please make it as painless as possible."

The Rebellion Leader arched his eyebrows. "Now why would we do that? Why would we want to skewer possible recruits?"

"Why would I want to join? You oppose the King! You've tried to kill him countless times!"

The Rebellion Leader's face was thrown into relief revealing his facial features. He had countless long white scars across his face. "You think you know the King? He is not who you think. He is a ruthless conqueror. Many nations have fallen under his sword, and the prisoners were not better off. He kills them brutally, the ones who cannot be enslaved or have their wills broken. Your King kills the children, women, and men of the tribe who oppose him; he is incapable of mercy."

"How... how do you... how do you know all this?" John was shocked. Their King, do all of that?

"I am his brother. I was next in line for the throne, and I had so many plans for helping our people and the people of the surrounding communities. I offered him to be King alongside me; two brothers working together for a greater good. He agreed, until the eve of our coronation. He had me bound and gagged and struck me with his sword many times. I formed this rebellion to end his reign, once and for all. He will not harm any others!"

John felt something rise in his chest. Anger. Wrath. Sorrow. He felt something else rise as well, deep in his heart: the urge to kill, the urge to put things right. "I want to join you. I want to put things right."

The Rebellion Leader responded. "I sense a change in you; you no longer are afraid of killing. You want to help; you may join."

John felt one question pushing at the back of his throat. "What exactly is your name?"

The Rebellion Leader laughed. "I realize that most people call me 'Rebellion Leader.' My true name, however, is Matthew."

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John sat on the tree, armed with a bow and scores of arrow. He scanned the English countryside, looking for signs of his enemy. A voice cried out, "There!" John looked closely and saw the King's soldiers approaching. *Not today, scum.* John pulled back on the bow, and fired an arrow. The arrow flew true, killing one of the soldiers easily. *That's 30 I've killed so far... and I don't regret it. They are blindly loyal to him; I have no other option to restore justice. No one ever said that what was right wouldn't result in death.* At that moment, something whizzed by John's air. He pulled it out of the tree bark. *No... it can't be! Our sources told us that they exhausted their supply!* Another arrow narrowly missed him. *Well, clearly, our sources were misinformed.*

"We've got poison arrows! We need to end the battle... now! Use the fire arrows!" Following their captain's commands, the other archers, along with their captain, John, fired arrows with blazing arrowheads at the ground on which the enemy horses trotted. *Perfect!* "Desist! We've done enough now. Matthew's forces are expecting us in the

city soon, march on!"

By the time the archers reached the city, Matthew had already commenced the siege. "You're late. No problem though, we have them on the run. They're being forced, gradually, towards the King's tower. I'm leading a small task force to infiltrate the castle and assassinate my brother. Would you like to join us?"

"Me? Of course!" John then appointed the temporary captain and took his horse's reins. *The King will die today!*

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John dodged the silver of a sharp sword. Leaping to the left, he unsheathed his own sword and charged at his opponent. Metal clashed upon metal, and, after a swipe, John's opponent fell to the ground. John wiped the sweat off his forehead. "Matthew, more of the King's men are charging towards us!"

"Then we'll fight them! Onward, my army!" Matthew shouted. He unsheathed his own sword, embroidered with golden dragons, to meet the men. Within moments, all of the King's soldiers had fallen victim to his sword. "Go, fast! Storm the castle!"

The grand rebellion ran through the castle, securing key posts. At last, while the two armies fought, John, Matthew, and two other rebels made their way to the King's courtroom. "Are you ready John?"

John looked down at himself. His body was armored by hard steel, and he held a silver sword in his hand. He took a deep breath and spoke to Matthew, "Let's overthrow this tyrant."

With those simple words, the four men battered down the door.

"You have taken far too long, Matthew. I expected you much earlier. Had I not wished to kill you personally, I would have already fled the castle," the King informed them.

"Luckily, you haven't. You will die with your legacy today. Not another citizen shall fall victim to your harsh laws."

"What harsh laws? The streets of my kingdom are devoid of beggars and poverty does not even exist. In what way are those conditions 'harsh'?"

"Ha! You pose such high taxes on them that they die within months. Why do you think there aren't any beggars? They have all been killed off by your soldiers and laws."

The King had enough; he ordered his knights forward into battle. John ran forward and struck his sword against the knight's. Matthew had already run forward, prepared to kill his dark brother. The King drew a death-black sword and met Matthew's jab. After moments of fierce fighting, Matthew let out a yell and fell, pierced by the black sword. John, seeing this, sliced the knight's head off and ran forward to Matthew's side. "Sir!"

Matthew breathed heavily. "No... My time... has come.... John, carry on the battle... you are the only one, now... who could possibly kill him." Tears clung to John's eyes as Matthew continued. "Now... go my friend. After you kill Draco... take the throne. Rule our country into a new age." With those last words, Matthew faded away.

"So, do you truly intend to kill me, boy? Remember, it is I that gave you the chance to live again! You dare betray me?"

John clenched his fists. "Yeah, I do. You killed your own brother in your mad attempt to power; that's the lowest anyone can go. You gave me another chance? Bah! It would have been impossible for me to kill Matthew."

"Perhaps, but, now, I have a proposition for you. Forsake your rebel friends. I give you a chance of a lifetime; train under me as a grand knight. Your skill will be unmatched."

"When hell freezes over, *Draco*."

With those words, John unsheathed his sword and ran forward. In a clash of steel, the King struck John's sword. The two continued checking blows for what felt ages to John. Growing tired, the King found an opening and slashed John's chest. Falling back, John collapsed onto the ground.

"Prepare to die, John."

Images swam before John's eyes. He remembered Matthew's faith in him. *I let him down...As the King prepared to slam his sword in John's body, John rolled out of the way. No! Matthew had faith in me and I will NOT let him down!* As the King's sword embedded itself into the ground, John leaped at the King. In a second's space, John slashed through Draco's chest, and followed up with a stab. The King's eyes widened as he looked down at his blood-spurting wounds. He collapsed to the ground, blood still flowing, dead.

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John was then crowned the ruler of England. His rule was just and fair, the opposite of King Draco's. He eventually married a beautiful woman, and, in time, his wife gave birth to a baby. He held up his first son, and spoke. "My son, this land is yours to rule in time. I know that you'll have a better reign than I." In response to his father's grand words, the baby merely sneezed.

"What shall we name him?" his wife, Queen Vivian, asked.

John looked at his son with great pride. "We shall name him... Uther. Let us behold Uther Pendragon, the future king of England."

Anger bubbled inside Lance. As he turned to see the knight's face, he saw nothing but a void. Feeling intense hatred, and an urge to avenge his mentor, he unsheathed his sword, and struck at the knight who met the blow, smiling, and pushed Lance onto his back. Lance got up and continued the fight.

In the ferocity of the fight, Lance managed to clip his opponent's thigh, while he took a blow to his shield arm himself. Now fighting without a shield, Lance found himself outmatched. The knight sensed this and struck him a blow, forcing him to the ground. Hitting the ground hard, Lance's head hurt awfully. As the dark knight twirled his sword to stab him, something flared up inside Lance. *No! He may have killed Sir William, but he won't kill me! I MUST AVENGE HIM!* Lance jumped up and slashed the knight's chest, striking through the armor. The knight fell, slain.

The battle had been won by the good king who took it upon himself to visit the battlefield days later. He made pains to call upon Lance. "Sir William always spoke highly of you. I am sorry for your loss..." he began. Lost for words for a moment, he spoke again, "I would like to honor you as a knight. Your bravery is unparalleled; your honor, unbelievable. I know you will rise to the occasion, as Sir William did years ago."

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