

# The Cobbler and the Dragon Slayer

Once, in the land that almost never exists, but sometimes does, lived two brothers, Andrew and Marcus. Each had an extraordinary heart for adventure. Each day the brothers challenged each other in greater tests of manhood. Each day the brothers grew to meet the challenge that was greater than the day before. It was reported to the King of the land that almost never exists, but sometimes does, that these two boys could meet any challenge. The King too enjoyed a great challenge when he was a young prince, so he decided to offer a challenge to the young brothers. This would take much thought for in meeting the challenge, the King had decided to give his Kingdom.

The King went to his chamber and began to think the thoughts only Kings can think. All in the Kingdom knew never to disturb the King while thinking thoughts of Kings. So, the King went for days, then weeks, and now years without seeing or speaking to anyone else in the Kingdom. His thoughts were deep for even a King, but finally after only ten years in his chamber, thinking the thoughts of a King, the King had a thought. I will challenge these young brothers, for they have now grown to full size, to win the hearts and hands of my two daughters. Of course the King had two lovely daughters named Sarah and Andrea. They too had now also grown to full size.

Everyone in the Kingdom was in a tizzy. Each shop owner and merchant offered the latest news of the King's challenge. Each person passing by the shops would stop to listen. Now there was one small but quite significant obstacle to the ability of Andrew to meet any challenge. He had been injured in the first year of the King's thoughts and unknown to the King had not been challenged by anyone since. For all knew any challenge would be too much for poor Andrew. The King stood by his challenge knowing his daughter's hearts and hands would be hard to win. He also knew that really only one brother should inherit the Kingdom anyway.

Now Marcus had made quite a name for himself as a dragon slayer. Each day he would dress in his armor and take up his lance. Each day he would slay another dragon and the Kingdom would be safe again. Andrew on the other hand had become a cobbler so as to feed himself and drive away starvation. His shoes were not the best in the Kingdom but they were usable and for a small pittance he sold his shoes to common and less than common people.

Now the day came when each brother was to meet their Princes. Marcus the Dragon Slayer, as he was now called went to the castle first. His Princess was in her tower above the other towers. Her beauty flowed from the window as her hair wafted in the pleasant breeze. Andrea's beauty had won the dragon slayer's heart and now he would do anything to win her heart to his. What must I do to win your heart and hand he called? "You are a dragon slayer are you not?" she said as she blushed behind her beautiful smile. Proudly Marcus responded "yes, I have seen many battles with dragons. Many times the battle was fierce but I have not failed to slay a single dragon." Andrea smiled with great admiration for Marcus's ability. "Your task will be easy then", she said. "Slay the three giant dragons that live on the edge of our Kingdom and bring them to me." Marcus smiled with great joy. He had already made plans to slay these three dragons. The battle would be fierce but he knew of his ability to be victorious. The Kingdom and Andrea's heart and hand were easily within his grasp. "I will return with each dragon in its time, he proclaimed. In the spring of each year I will present you with one of the dragon's you've requested."

Andrew dressed himself in his best attire and made haste to the castle for it was his turn to meet his Princess. Passing many Knights in shining armor he became very aware of his lack of fine clothes. But still, a noble heart beat in the chest of this poor cobbler. Too, the days of his ability to meet any challenge still held a place in that noble heart.

Sarah looked out the window of her tower that was not quite above all the other towers and saw Andrew making his way to the castle. Something inside her heart caused her to leave the tower and meet Andrew by a bridge instead. Many times armies of opposition had stood on either side of this bridge and would come to peaceful agreements. So many times had the armies left in peace, that they named the bridge the "Bridge of Understanding." It was here that Sarah wanted to meet Andrew, for she hoped at this bridge he would understand her needs.

As Sarah and Andrew met, their eyes sparkled like crowned jewels. Then she looked at his rough sewn shoes and worn cloak. He looked at her regal gown and diamond studded slippers. Blue Birds stopped their singing and foxes stopped their frolicking to hear their words of conversation. Andrew spoke first. All I have to offer you is my heart and the promise you will not go without shoes, he said. He reached into his parcel and took out a needle, some leather and a little sewing thread and held it in his palm. She looked past the thread and needle and leather and saw hands that were worn to hard work. She knew his promise was true but it was in his eyes she saw what she really needed. She saw love and devotion. She also saw the heart of a wounded warrior. She saw too a warrior wounded but not defeated.

What shall I do to win your heart and hand? Andrew asked. Sarah held out her hand and said I give my heart and hand to you Andrew. They are yours. He looked at her tender delicate hand and asked, but what must I do to win them? They are yours, she said. No strings or thread attached. Andrew placed the articles of shoe making back in the parcel and took Sarah by the hand. Together they would make a home and life.

Foul cried the King! You have conspired to gain my Kingdom by trickery. You took my challenge to win my daughters heart and hand and disguised it with sincerity only to win over your brother. I declare your efforts void and will not pay my Kingdom to a simple cobbler. Andrew did not mind for he had truly won what he desired. The heart and hand of the one he loved.

When the news came to Marcus of Andrew's failure to win the Kingdom he was overjoyed. Dragons were being tracked and would soon be slain. When spring came he delivered the first dragon into the hands of Andrea. She was delighted and encouraged her dragon slayer to go out to battle again. Marcus left with a feeling of joy and satisfaction. Not only would he soon hold the woman he loved he would hold the Kingdom firmly in his hand.

Andrew was true to his promise. Each day he tried new designs and news styles of shoes. Each night he came home to a warm fire and a warm and loving heart and hands. It felt good to hold the hand that was given so freely. Sarah was also comforted by the good things Andrew brought into the home. His shoes were now being worn by many people of the Kingdom and even a few nobles. But his work would continue and his love for Sarah grew daily, as did her love for him.

Spring arrived again in the Kingdom. Another dragon that lived near the edge of the Kingdom had fallen to the lance of the dragon slayer. He was worn and tired from the long battle. Yet, Andrea's response to the sight of the prize gave all worth to the struggle of capturing and killing this hard fought dragon. Tired and sore he desired a season of rest. Come down from your tower he cried, and allow me the comfort of your love. Knowing Marcus's need to be refreshed she hurried from the tower and quickly promised her heart and hand to him again. "But first the battle must continue" she said, "For there is but one dragon left." With great courage and a renewed spirit, Marcus went back to the battle.

Shoes, purses, leather bags. All were now in the inventory that Andrew created and sold. People from every Kingdom came to see and purchase the best shoes from the best shoemaker. Each purchaser of shoes or leather goods received a smile and a warm greeting. Andrew's heart was light and full of joy. Each night he hurried from the shop to the large home and warm fires he had built for Sarah. Each day he left her arms to courageously attack another day knowing at the end of the day her unconditional love was waiting. His heart for success was ten times the size of an ordinary man's heart, for his heart was filled beyond its capacity with Sarah's love.

Spring came again in the Kingdom and Marcus's return was greatly anticipated. As expected, on the day set for his arrival, the town's people gathered at the base of the tower where Andrea patiently watched for her hero. Marcus, true to his word returned but with a smaller dragon. The people gasped. Had he failed in his battle and only brought a small dragon to his lovely Andrea? The dragon was great and my battle wearisome, he said. I have brought a great prize not the less. Reaching into his bag he brought forth the tip of the giant dragon's tail. He is not dead but he is wounded and I will return for battle another day. Until then I will present you with this dragon of lesser size as a promise of my ability to slay the dragon you have chosen. Disappointment filled the crowd as they went to their homes. "Maybe this dragon is too much for him" was on each of their minds and whispers.

Come down Andrea and refresh me from my battle. Once again she descended the tower and met the embattled dragon slayer. She again encouraged him. "You can beat this dragon if you will try harder. I know you have it in you to

encouraged by your belief in me. I will return to battle again.” Leaving Andrea once more the dragon slayer felt a hollow strength in his step but still was determined to advance the battle.

Thousands of shops in hundreds of Kingdoms now held an honored spot in their display for Andrew’s shoes and leather goods. His name and reputation continued to grow but never faster than his love for Sarah. His wealth made many people happy for he was a generous man. Everyone wore Andrew’s shoes and no one was turned away for want of pay. Hungry were fed and love was now overflowing in the land. Andrew looked upon Sarah with a new freshness every day. She was a flower in constant bloom in his eyes. Andrew never missed an opportunity to tell someone about the day he met Sarah at the “Bridge of Understanding.” He told them of the day she gave him her unconditional love. And how she gave that love when all he had to offer was a piece of leather a needle and some thread.

Spring came and went and Marcus did not return. Two more springs passed and still the last dragon raged in his battle with the dragon slayer. Finally, Marcus’s lance struck the final blow and the dragon fell at his feet. A great cry of victory filled the land and all came to see the dragon that fought so hard. As men and women stood in line to see the dragon many made the comment that it didn’t seem that big now. Marcus too looked at the dragon with different eyes. It really wasn’t any bigger than dragons he had slain in former years. Why had this one been so difficult?

The crowd separated as Andrea came near the dragon and Marcus. You’ve done it she exclaimed! You’ve killed the dragon! For a long time she danced around the dragon and all the people danced and sang with her. Hurray for the dragon killer. He proved he would slay any dragon I asked. He has won my hand and my heart. He has won the Kingdom from my father! All became silent. All moved deftly away. The King moved forward through the crowd. A sad and lost look filled the King’s eyes. “A King must have the love of his subjects to be King,” he said. “Whoever has their love will always be their King. Your brother Andrew has won the hearts of this Kingdom and many others. He is the King of this Kingdom and his queen is Sarah.”

Andrea moved closer to Marcus. She held out her hand as an offering to Marcus. You have still won my hand in marriage, she said. Marcus knew from that day forward the joy of slaying dragons was gone forever. He would always be known as the dragon slayer but they would be slain from duty and not from desire. He turned a left the Kingdom that day. He was never seen nor heard from again. Every once in a great while someone will remember the dragon slayer and ask “what happened?” Someone with wisdom will respond saying, “in trying to win her heart he lost his own.”

In a castle in a Kingdom in a land that almost never exists, but sometimes does, a King sat quietly in his chamber thinking the thoughts that only a King can think. Next to him sat his queen in a quiet place that only a queen can sit. The thought the King thought was about love and the queen that gave it without condition or strings or threads. He smiled as only a King can smile and touched the tender and graceful hand of the queen he loved.

Only love given without condition or string or thread is true love. Only a love given without string or thread or condition can make a cobbler a King. All else is vanity and quickly fleeting.