

## The Friend

A long time ago, there was a young nobleman who lived in a castle. Whenever he got bored of being in the keep, he would walk through the slums with three beautiful women following behind him and throw gold coins at the feet of beggars just to watch them fight for it.

On one of these days he noticed one young beggar in particular who would fight for the coins and then spend every single one on medicine for his elderly neighbor. Curious as to why anyone would do this, he approached the young beggar.

"I am the wealthiest noble of this castle. I demand to know why you do not keep the gold coins for yourself," he said in a very regal voice.

"I must care for my neighbor for she is very sick, my lord" the young beggar explained. This intrigued the young nobleman.

"Come with me to the keep. If you do I will make sure your friend receives the medicine she needs."

The young beggar accepted the nobleman's offer and followed him to the castle keep. When they arrived, the nobleman showed the young beggar around the keep. The first room they walked into was full to the brim with gold coins and precious jewels and artifacts. The young beggar observed in awe. The second room they walked into was full of young, beautiful women. The young beggar continued to observe in awe. The third room they walked into was the biggest room yet. It was a massive and ornate stadium for a combat arena. The young beggar continued to observe in awe.

After the tour concluded, the young nobleman invited the young beggar to stay for as long as he wants. Much time went by while the nobleman spent gold on fine items, bedded whichever woman he pleased, and sparred in the combat arena. Three years passed.

One day, the nobleman's greed caught up to him. He bet all of his money on a fight with him and the rival nation's prince. If he won, the prince would have to give up his wife. Not wanting to be slighted, the prince agreed to the fight. So they fought. And the prince won, but the nobleman did not stay true to his word. This caused the rival king to launch an attack on the castle, and after a lengthy siege, the castle was captured.

Under the new crown, the young beggar was thrown to the streets once again. His friend was not as lucky and was beheaded. The young beggar returned to his neighbor who helped him come to terms with the nobleman's death.

## The Son

A long time ago, there existed a village with high walls and many warriors to protect it. The eldest child of the village's chieftain was a boy. One day, the boy explored beyond the high walls of the village. His young curiosity took him far away from his family and his neighbors. He explored the woods and the swamps and the fields and the mountains and the deserts and the rivers and the ocean.

When he returned to the village that night, he told his parents of everything he had seen and learned. He told them of the animals in the woods, and he told them how he waded through the murky waters of the swamp. He told them of the wild grass swaying in the meadow, and he told them of the view from the top of the mountain. He told them of the cacti in the desert and of the rainbow fish in the river. And he told them of the smell of the breeze from the ocean and how he thought about what was beyond it. He told them everything he could remember about his adventure.

After he was done telling his story, his father stood.

"Son, you are never allowed to leave the safety of the walls. The people of the village need to be able to trust you when you are chieftain. If you run away all the time your people will not respect you." His mother did not speak. He said, "Why can't the village respect me if I leave the protection of its walls?" His father said, "Because that is the way it is."

He stayed within the walls of the village for the next season. There was not a day that past when he was not thinking about what awaited beyond the walls. But as a young boy does, he succumbed to his curiosity once again. He escaped the confines of the village and explored as much as he possibly could. In the woods he saw a bloody struggle between two bears and in the swamp he saw lurking crocodiles. In the meadow he saw dead and wilting grass and the view from the top of the mountain was blocked by dark clouds. The cacti in the desert had dried up and the fish in the river were gone. The ocean smelled bitter that day. He returned that night but did not tell his parents about what he had seen.

Another season passed before he ventured out again. This time his adventure brought him through the woods and past the swamp. It took him by the meadow and around the mountain. He walked across the desert and swam through the river to the ocean. On the beach, he started thinking about what the horizon hid. He walked into the water until it covered his knees. And then until it covered his belt. And then until it covered his neck. And then until there was none of him left above water.

## The Pupil

Once there was a genius commander whose enemies all feared him. His calm demeanor and precise orders always gave his soldiers an advantage over their foes. In the midst of a long campaign, he fell gravely ill. He knew his time was coming so he called for his second in command who had studied under him since a young age.

“The only thing that would make you a better warrior than me is if your arrows were as true and precise as your mind.”

On the eve of great battle, the young commander could not sleep. In the morning, the clash began. Maneuvering his troops under immense pressure, the young commander was able to split and route the enemy army. His success with the campaign brought made him a hero to his people.