

The King and His Castle

Once upon a time a king built a massive stone castle for his servants and soldiers. After it was completed, he gave it to them and said, "Take care and see that everything is run properly. Keep guard and protect and defend it. Let it be a refuge to all the poor and oppressed to come and live here. I must leave for awhile, but I will return." With those parting words, he mounted his white stallion and rode out through the gate to the cheers and praises of his people. There were a few tears shed at his leaving, for his people loved him deeply, but they knew he would return.

Years went by and his people continued to maintain the castle as he had intended. Then one day the guards on the battlements spotted the banners of an approaching army. Soon they could hear the sounds of the marching feet, the hoof beats of the horses, the rattle and clang of armor, and the shouts of the soldiers. The enemy of the king had come to capture his castle in his absence and to rule his people, making them slaves to do his bidding.

The guards on the turrets shouted and sounded the trumpet warning. The main gate was closed and the crossbar put in place. All other doors and windows opening to the outside were shut and barred. Those in the castle prepared to defend it. The weapons and armor were removed from the well-stocked armory and all were well equipped to fight.

The enemy was not numerous enough nor strong enough to succeed in a direct attack so he decided on a tactic of siege and sniper fire. He had his archers train their bows on the turrets and battlements and as soon as one of the king's men exposed himself, an arrow was loosed, often finding the mark. Periodically, the castle door would open and a small sortie would come out to engage the enemy. They would succeed in pushing them back, as the enemy was no match for them in hand-to-hand combat. However, they could not destroy them completely because they would flee before them and then regroup as soon as the King's men returned to the castle. They were, however, able to kill some and wound others of the enemy, although not without a few casualties of their own.

The siege went on day after day, month after month, year after year. The enemy was beginning to run out of supplies. "How could those in the castle hold out so long," he wondered. Daily, some of the arrows from the castle found their mark in his warriors, for those in the castle were marksmen, too. Both his men and supplies were dwindling. Finally, he decided he would have to risk a frontal attack. It was the only way. He began to make plans. He gathered his generals and told them, "Go cut down the trees. We must make machines of war, catapults and battering rams and ladders to scale the walls. We must take this castle!"

However, unbeknown to the enemy, the people inside the castle were faring quite well. They had a secret he was not aware of. There was a tunnel dug beneath the castle running for quite a distance, opening out by a lovely spring of fresh cool water. All around this spring had been planted gardens so each day as some of the people manned the walls, others would slip off to the spring to refresh themselves and bring back food and water for the others.

One day, as one of these groups emerged from the tunnel, they were surprised to find their king. "Sire," they cried in joy and excitement. "We're so glad to see you, but why didn't you come openly to lead us to victory over our enemy?"

"I will," he replied, "when the time is right. But if I would do that now, the enemy and many of his soldiers may escape and come back later to harass us. No, I have a better plan. The enemy is so intent on capturing the castle it has become an obsession with him. I will let him have it, but when he takes it, I will use it to totally destroy him once and for all. I will need all of your help." His servants huddled around him, eager to hear every word as he unfolded his plan.

"My enemy is getting ready to mount a massive attack on the castle and I am getting ready to mount

a massive attack on him. Leaving only enough people on the walls to fire an occasional arrow so he thinks you are still there, I want you to gradually, a few at a time, to leave the castle through the tunnel and go into the surrounding countries which have been held in the enemy's control. Gain support for me, enlist people in my army, and train them. The enemy has left very few troops in these lands, because he has gathered them all to take the castle, so your task should not be too difficult. Then on the date I will set, bring your armies back here."

And so, unsuspecting to the enemy, each day the garrison in the castle was fewer and fewer while in the countries around about, the armies grew. So intent was the enemy on the battle at hand, taking the castle, that he ignored rumors from the surrounding countries of armies being formed. "I can deal with those later after I take this castle," he reasoned.

Finally the day came. The King, waiting by the spring, told the servants who came to the spring that day to tell the others who were left in the castle. "Tomorrow the enemy will be ready to attack. I want you to douse the roofs with oil tonight under cover of darkness and then unbolt the main door and slip out through the tunnel--caving it in behind you. Then meet me here."

A few of the servants were disturbed. "But since it was your castle and we have lived in it so long, surely you don't want to turn it over to the enemy. Surely you don't want to destroy it."

"Yes, I must," the King replied sadly. "The castle is old now and the enemy has caused serious damage to it in several places already. I will use it as a trap to destroy him completely. Then we will build another castle, much larger, grander, and even more beautiful."

In the morning, the enemy ordered his army, "Forward march! Loose the catapults." Huge stones rained through the air. Walls crumbled. The banner over the castle was knocked down and the soldiers cheered. Encouraged by this, the hoard pressed in, now running full speed to the massive gate. In their excitement and confidence of victory, no one seemed to notice they were no longer being fired at from the walls. The battering ram was brought up to the gate, pulled back, and let fly. The gate flew open and the ram almost came off from its attachments as there was no resistance. Strange, a few soldiers thought. But before they could collect their thoughts, they were being pushed. "Inside, inside," cried the throngs behind them, and in they went, a living river of men as coming through a burst dam. Men were streaming over the walls as well, climbing up and over with ladders and grappling hooks. Soon the whole army was inside. But where were the King's soldiers? Not a person was around. They began to search from room to room, deserted all! Where were they? How had they escaped?

Just then, a soldier still on the wall cried out, "Look, look!" The enemy lord climbed to the top of the wall and looked out. There on the plain all around the castle as far as his eyes could see--a vast army, banners flying, all the banners of the King. The King's army had been advancing while the enemy lord was busy taking the castle. He hadn't even noticed. He was vastly outnumbered, his supplies were gone. There was no escape. He saw the war machines all around--catapults loaded with huge rocks, ready to be sent flying. He looked at the roofs. They were already drenched with oil. He saw the archers with flaming arrows poised. "Uh oh, we're in trouble," was all he could say.

The King on his white stallion with his golden crown glistening upon his head, sword held high overhead, reflecting the sun as a torch, gave the command, "Ready, Aim, Fire!" He dropped his sword with a swish. The trumpets sounded. The catapults twanged. The arrows whistled. The castle burned, and with it, the enemy and all his hosts, destroyed forever.

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