



## The Knight, The Princess, and The Dragon

Fairy Tales are true to our hopes and dreams, but they often contain bad advice and false hope. Sometime in her lifetime, every woman wishes for a Knight in shining armor to ride in on a white horse to rescue her from whatever she feels has entrapped her.

The entrapment represents something indescribable that is destroying everything around her. There is a force behind the disturbance that may be responsible. As charming as he might be, it is unlikely that the Knight is capable of liberating our Princess and destroying the force. And, if he held the keys to the tower, he probably left them in his other pair of jeans at home.

The presumed humor in that last comment carries its own tragedy. Assuming our Knight will be unsupportive and irresponsible is self-fulfilling. It reinforces negative images on him and does not encourage dialogue, mentoring, or responsible decision-making, and potential support for the worth of the woman. Rather, it reinforces support for the Knight to choose isolation as a solution, which is never a good thing.

Meanwhile, the force behind all of the disturbances continues. It is very real. It is spreading. It is growing and growing. There is more of it every day if it's possible to speak of more of the absence of something – anything. And once it gets hold of you, something more is missing every day. Soon there won't be anything left of the Princess and the Knight.

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In a dark wooded area, the sound of loud crashing is heard as an indescribable unknown creature emerges from its cave – the Dragon. He comes face to face with the great warrior, the Knight in shining armor. The Knight reaches for a wooden shank and shouts that if he is to die,

he will do so fighting. He then tempts the Dragon to fight. The Dragon lunges.

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Something we all need to know before going forward is this: Dragons all look alike except for their size. They are green with scales, and they have four legs and a long tail, and great wings

like bat wings, only the wings are a pale, half-transparent yellow, like the gear-cases on most bicycles.



And they breathe fire, as all proper dragons must. While not inherently aggressive, the fires they breathe become hotter

and fiercer, exhaling plumes of thick clouds of smoke.

The dragon in our story is very real. He is not a person, nor a political movement, nor a criminal enterprise, nor anything comparable. It wouldn't be quite right to call him 'evil' or 'the enemy' because he isn't an object to which one

could ascribe the attribute. Our Dragon is quite literally a no-thing.

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Most people on earth simply cannot bear the thought that their accomplishments are without meaning, their plans without hope of permanent success, their lives ultimately about, well ... no-thing.

In our story, the dragon can be transformed into lies and delusions of oneself, and those who have succumbed to the Dragon are easier to control. It is like a despair, destroying this world. People who have no hopes are easy to control, and whoever or whatever your Dragon is has the control, and thus, the power.



Dragons go by a number of first names, but because they are all related, their last name is always Fear.

The biggest fear for our Princess and the Knight is that the Dragon will win, that they will be overcome by fear. In the life of our



Princess and Knight, and in ours if we are honest, the Fear is paralyzing.

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The large-size dragons are terrible certainly, but when once you know them by their first names and that the dragons always go to bed early because they are afraid of the chill night air, you have only to stay indoors all day to be safe, but who wants to do that?



There is the Dragon whose first name is Failure – Fear of Failure. He is as big as a dog. When he gets in the bath, and the fire and smoke inside him makes steam when the cold water tap is turned on, careless Knights and Princesses are often scalded quite severely. This fear of being burned by Failure is the reason neither are taking any risks or pursuing love unconditionally.

Because our Princess and Knight are afraid of Failure, it is time to acknowledge it. Let's

encourage our Knight to pick up the Fear of Failure and its excuses and justifications from his hiding place, walk through the Dragon's cloud of smoke, no longer willing to live with the shame that comes with it, or to be disappointing others and perhaps even himself by continuing to coexist with this fear.

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Then there's the Dragon that is as small as a pigeon and will get into the corner of a drawer and bite you when you are in a hurry to get a pair of socks. His name is Incompetent. He tells the Knight he does not have what it takes to be useful. Incompetent makes our Princess feel not needed. If either the Knight or the Princess doesn't have what it takes to accomplish a task, each is afraid to be all that the Lord has created them to be. Taking risks, however, earns the Knight and the Princess knowledge about each other, and takes them one step closer to knowing what they are each made to do.

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Of course there is shame that comes with playing with the Dragon whose first name is Weakness, Giving the appearance of Weakness keeps the Knight from truly being vulnerable,

which is where you will always find God and His strength.



Our Princess can turn the table on our poor Knight by feigning Weakness and acting out the persecuted, damsel-in-distress, pretending to be in a dire predicament. A stock character of fiction, if ever there was one. She practices her flirty smile in front of a mirror daily.

Neither are having a really good day when all along they both can go where they know God is: He is always with the vulnerable.

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The Fear of Irrelevancy is the easiest Dragon to avoid, because you can see him coming: The Knight and the Princess want their lives to mean something when all is said and done. If they love each other, and all within their realm of influence, more than they love themselves, they will always be relevant. To be relevant is significant. It is to be noble. It is epoch-making.

As uncommon as it is, it is ruled to be so by the King.

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It is always a shock when the Fear of Looking Foolish Dragon flies in at the window and curls



up under your feathered comforter, and you do not find him until you go to bed and discover your sheets have been scorched. To take on the fear of looking foolish, a Knight and a Princess must be willing to take risks. Risk always

involves uncertainty, unpredictability, instability, and insecurity.

Risk is the opposite of safety.

Risk is an active life lived out in the open. Therefore, risk is a dangerous thing: it can turn your heart black or it can create trust. It can be your everything in Christ or it can fill your soul with dust.

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Still, what makes this family of Dragons and all their cousins so effective and so terrifying is that they invite you to think of whatever is most important to you, especially your ability to imagine something that could be most important to you: and then to imagine that thing, and with it your very capacity to imagine that thing, falling into a bottomless abyss, never to emerge again.

And, more ultimately, the Dragon invites you to imagine yourself falling into that abyss – a loss of meaning so complete it culminates with the loss of existence itself.

You have to decide, for yourself, what the meaning and the point of your life shall be. Nobody, not even God, can decide this for you.



Just like all Fairy Tales, it is clear that the most important counter-force to any Dragon is unfettered childhood Imagination and Wonder. Children aren't necessarily better than other people. They are just apt to be better at telling the difference between a phony and the real thing.

Children "live with their hands open more than with their fists clenched. They are people who are so relatively unburdened by preconceptions that if somebody says there's a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, they are perfectly willing to go take a look for themselves." (Wishful Thinking. Fredrick Buechner)

So – is childhood Imagination really the best counter-force to the Dragons? You tell me.

When the disciples, over-earnest as ever, asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus pulled a child out of the crowd and said the greatest in the kingdom of heaven were people like this (Matthew 18:1-4).

Yet, it takes a grown-up to look at the mirror directly and not run away screaming. The very point of maturity is to have no illusions about yourself.

To stop the Dragons of Fear ultimately engages all that is required. It is the struggle to push back the Dragons of Fear and the loneliness,



hopelessness, and despair they bring. Our quest is the work of creating, by act of craving the Lord, a life that means something, and a world worth living in. All of us need to do this, every day, sometimes every moment of every day.

This Fairy Tale is real, with a real happy ending. Along the way illusions must be dispelled and truth stood upon, however humble it initially seems, it is actually fairly glorious. This requires more imagination than making things up does, not less.

