



# Sunset

Short Story By J Bennett

## *The Sunset*

The sun dipped down in the vast expanse of sky, its light pluming shades of violet and sapphire across the rolling hills below. Shadowed beneath these colors, the land bloomed fragrant with magic and chivalry. Castles dotted the horizon with towering spires and crisp banners emblazoned with family names so old even the tallest trees could hardly remember their beginnings. This was an age woven of brave knights, innocent damsels, fearsome dragons and wizened wizards.

## *The Knight*

In this most gallant era lived a most gallant Knight. This particular sunset found him lying across a stone bench nestled deep within the gardens of his father's castle. The Knight took a deep breath and tasted lusty adventure in the air. He did not enjoy the

dark corridors of the castle or whatever serenity the garden could muster. True knights cared nothing for stone walls, golden coins or the talk of old men. They cared about the simple chord on a minstrel's lute that vibrated in awe of their great quests, just the right scale on a dragon to pierce with a sturdy lance, and the soft apple glow of a maiden's cheeks.

At the moment, the Knight longed to slip across the bare back of his steed and gallop around the world so fast the sun could never set on him. But, alas, the day's adventure was done, and sunset was a time for contemplating a knight's other great ambition – wooing beautiful maidens.

This particular Knight, having recently slain the kingdom's most fearful dragon, now languished in the dying minutes of sunlight pining away for the fairest maiden in the land - his truest and most pure love.

The good Knight's armor, softly glowing in sunset hues, moaned as he brushed away an errant lock of blonde hair from his eyes. He unrolled a thick piece of parchment across the bench and yearned to write his love the most gracious, tear-wrought love poem of this noble age. He looked to the sinking sun, like fire eating away the horizon, for inspiration. Closing large blue eyes, he pictured her in his mind, her soft laugh, her cascades of corn stalk hair, her long swan neck embraced by rubies that bloodied the soft curve of her throat. He dare not imagine further, for his was a heart dipped in the gold of chastity.

And because this maiden was so graciously and exceedingly fair, the gallant Knight let out a wrenching sigh filled with all the agony of true love. He felt weak at even the mere thought of her form.

## *The Dwarf*

At that moment, a terrible squeal of rusted hinges intruded on the Knight's noble pining as a door to the courtyard opened. Small bells chattered merrily as the household dwarf stepped into the gardens. The Dwarf was a pet of the Knight's household and a badge of the noble family's wealth and prestige. At night he danced while the men guffed between bites of meat. The women usually paid him little attention beyond the crinkle of their eyes above batting fans. After the master shooed him away for other amusements, the Dwarf was left to his own devices, which included much heavy reading and the occasional game of chess with the very learned but somewhat touched stable master. Today, the warm air called him to the gardens, which the family paid great sums to keep and rarely ever used.

The Dwarf understood his place, the necessity of the checkered ridiculousness of his clothing and annoying bells sewn into the fabric at his wrists and the tops of his pointy shoes. Yet, in the secret certainty of his mind, he did not consider himself a pet or the least bit amusing.

### *The Poem*

Skipping down the walkway, the Dwarf batted away drooping lilies and thorned roses from his path before spying the Knight who, for all his fair features, was now scowling in an unhandsome manner. Anything ungainly and ugly naturally caused the Knight indignation, especially when such creatures disrupted his most noble dictation.

"How do you Sir Knight?" the Dwarf called to the young man with due reverence. Peering up, he wondered why the Knight had chosen not to clean the dragon smoke still tarnished across his breastplate. .

"The beauty of the world pains me," the Knight sighed, laying his head back upon the bench. The last glints of sunset threw ruby highlights into his hair. "The dew glistens

on the flowers just so. It is unbearable!” And the Knight thrust an arm desperately over his eyes. His noble soul quaked.

The Dwarf frowned and peered into the garden. He did not see any dewdrops, and though the flowers were often in his way, he always found them to be quite bearable, especially compared to the Knight’s sleek hounds who eyed his shiny bells with such a wild look he was often forced to scurry behind the nearest set of legs. These thoughts the Dwarf did not air and instead patted The Knight’s hand.

“You’re so good of heart that you bleed of beauty.”

“Yes, yes, that’s it exactly,” the Knight moaned. “That is why I am troubled so by this poem that sings in my soul yet dares not grace the page in my hand. How does one spill such a love into mere words? How can I dip this quill into the very chambers of my heart to immortalize the beauty of my love for the greatest ballads? Ah,” he groaned in pain. “There is nothing to compare her to. She is infinitely more beautiful than the setting sun, than the blooming rose, and azure depths of the deepest ocean.”

The Dwarf briefly wondered why any maiden would want to be compared to a flower or the ocean. No maiden he knew looked like anything other than a maiden. Certainly it would be an insult to confuse her with a plant or large body of water. It was obvious to the Dwarf that the Knight was very confused, which, no doubt, caused his trouble with writing the poem.

In the spirit of true kindness the Dwarf did not voice his opinions – he was far too civilized to offend poor skill- and determined instead to help his writing-impaired friend.

## *The Battle*

“Perhaps you may write about your lady’s accomplishments,” the Dwarf suggested.

“What?”

“Her accomplishments. The things she does well.”

The Knight sat up with a deep bravado chuckle. He shook his head at the little dwarf who had never in his life slain a single dragon or rescued even one princess from impending doom. “The things she does well?”

“She must do something, mustn’t she? Everyone does something.” The Dwarf was thinking of his own favorite hobby, which was playing the lyre, a skill he taught himself in the deep hours of night and something that the family had not the least bit of interest in, though his skill outmatched their own highly paid musician.

The Knight creased his mighty brow for a moment, then his face relaxed. A smile tinged at his lips. “She radiates beauty, that’s what she does. Her throat is pale and long like a swan...”

“No, no no,” The Dwarf interrupted. It was his turn to sigh, and it came out in a short huff of breath. He tugged at his beard. “If she has hands and feet then she must do something.”

“She sings,” the Knight shrugged while adjusting several kerchiefs peeking from the joints of his armor. The tear-stained tokens were from lovelorn maidens whose desires he no intention on returning on account that said maidens were not the fairest in the land. “She sings like an angel in God’s chorus.”

“There there,” the Dwarf said excitedly, “now, write a poem about your favorite song that she has sung.”

“Well, I haven’t actually heard her sing.”

The Dwarf barely stifled another sigh and instead tugged harder on his beard. “I see.” He paced for a moment, the twinkle of bells shadowing his steps. “How do you know she sings like an angel if you’ve never heard her sing?”

“All beautiful maidens sing. Their voices are so pure that birds alight onto their fingers. This maiden is the most beautiful of all, therefore she must have the loveliest voice in the land.”

“I’m not sure that I follow your argument...”

“Flocks of animals must glide at the skirts of her gown,” the Knight snapped impatiently.

“She must step in a lot of...”

“Foul creature!” The Knight jumped up, a flush springing into his pale cheeks. “Dare you mock my truest love, a girl so fair that the wind sings for her and roses envy the red of her lips?”

“Roses can’t envy a thing!” The Dwarf shouted back. “Do you not know a single thing about this true love of yours?”

“She must sew, because all women sew, she must cry tears of utter sorrow into a pond weekly, she must feel gloom in her heart for the suffering of the world, she must be quiet and demure and infused with purity and innocence. What more can a maiden do?”

With utter control the Dwarf forced back the tart reply that bubbled in his mind. He could see that his words had no effect on the unfortunately confused knight. Instead, he merely shrugged his shoulders and said solemnly, “You’re in love with a reflection, not a girl.”

The good Knight, perceiving another attack upon his true love, pulled out his sword, which the last shafts of light painted deep ruby, and sent the blade through the Dwarf’s heart.

The Dwarf gurgled, looked up at the Knight with confused round eyes, and then tumbled to the ground. The small body landed with a tinkle of bells, and his blood ran into the flowerbeds.

The Knight flung himself to his knees, forehead leaned against the gem inlaid handle of his sword, and prayed “God, I have done what is just. I have protected the sacred honor of the fair maiden whom I love above all else in the world. If that creature possessed some form of a soul, may you shed mercy upon it. Amen.”

This done, the Knight sheathed his wet sword, a servant would clean it in the morning, and again contemplated the empty parchment lying curled on the stone bench. A spot of blood beaded in the corner.

Just as the Knight thought up a most splendid beginning to his poem, *to thou pure maiden of my heart*, he realized that the sunset had given way to twilight. The Knight could no longer see the parchment, and his noble heart wept with regret that so beautiful a poem as his was sure to be must wait for another such sunset.