THE NAKED KNIGHT

Introduction

This tale was written as an alternative to John Grey’s fairy story in ‘Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus’. So first of all, please read it for yourself.....

‘Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus’, Ch. 8 ‘Discovering Our Different Emotional Needs’, section ‘The Knight In Shining Armour’, (p.147-8)

Imagine a knight in shining armour travelling through the countryside. Suddenly he hears a woman crying out in distress. In an instant he comes alive. Urging his horse to a gallop, he races to her castle, where she is trapped by a dragon. The noble knight pulls out his sword and slays the dragon. As a result, he is lovingly received by the princess.

As the gates open he is welcomed and celebrated by the family of the princess and the townspeople. He is invited to live in the town and is acknowledged as a hero. He and the princess fall in love.

A month later the noble knight goes off on another trip. On his way back, he hears his beloved princess crying out for help. Another dragon has attacked the castle. When the knight arrives he pulls out his sword to slay the dragon.

Before he swings, the princess cries out from the tower, “Don’t use your sword, use this noose. It will work better.”

She throws him the noose and motions to him instructions about how to use it. He hesitatingly follows her instructions. He wraps it around the dragon’s neck and then pulls hard. The dragon dies and everyone rejoices.

At the celebration dinner the knight feels he didn’t really do anything. Somehow, because he used her noose and didn’t use his sword, he doesn’t quite feel worthy of the town’s trust and admiration. After the event he is slightly depressed and forgets to shine his armour.

A month later he goes on yet another trip. As he leaves with his sword, the princess reminds him to be careful and tells him to take the noose. On his way home, he sees yet another dragon attacking the castle. This time he rushes forward with his sword but hesitates, thinking maybe he should use the noose. In that moment of hesitation the dragon breathes fire and burns his right arm. In confusion he looks up and sees the princes waving from the castle window.

“Use the poison,” she yells. “The noose doesn’t work.”

She throws him the poison, which he pours into the dragon’s mouth, and the dragon dies. Everyone rejoices and celebrates, but the knight feels ashamed.
A month later, he goes on another trip. As he leaves with his sword, the princess reminds him to be careful, and to bring the noose and the poison. He is annoyed by her suggestions but brings them just in case.

This time on his journey he hears another woman in distress. As he rushes to her call, his depression is lifted and he feels confident and alive. But as he draws his sword to slay the dragon, he again hesitates. He wonders, Should I use my sword, the nose or the poison? What would the princes say?

For a moment he is confused. But then he remembers how he had felt before he knew the princess, back in the days when he only carried a sword. With a burst of renewed confidence he throws off the nose and poison and charges the dragon with his trusted sword. He slays the dragon and the townspeople rejoice.

The knight in shining armour never returned to his princess. He stayed in this new village and lived happily ever after. He eventually married, but only after making sure his new partner knew nothing about nooses and poisons.

Remembering that within every man is a knight in shining armour is a powerful metaphor to help you remember a man’s primary needs. Although a man may appreciate caring and assistance sometimes, too much of it will lessen his confidence or turn him off.

Although I certainly respect John Grey, and the huge contribution he has made to our cultural conversation around sexuality and gender – I found myself extremely uncomfortable with this tale. Why? What was the message I heard within it?

I heard ‘for him’ ~ don’t listen to the wisdom of women - you’ll become disempowered. Don’t stay with a powerful woman, leave her - and find one who will betray her knowing, remain submissive, collude with your ego, and allow you to reign supreme!

And I heard ‘for her’ ~ don’t be too powerful, don’t offer any guidance to a childish and self-centred male ego, keep quiet, don’t express your deepest heart knowing – otherwise he’ll leave you for a woman who’s prepared to tickle his testes all day!

Although John Grey re-introduced the obviousness of the differences between men and women (or the masculine and the feminine) into popular culture, I felt that in this tale he also perpetuated the disempowerment of the feminine – and, therefore, also the disempowered top-dog masculine. In short: that it perpetuated the attitudes and mindsets of The Patriarchy which has brought us to the edge of individual, social, political and ecological insanity! And so I set about writing an alternative, another tale…
The Naked Knight

Once upon a time, clad in black armour and mounted upon a black stallion, through a land where most men’s days were long, and most women’s nights were short, there ambled a young knight.

Through devotion to the arts of conflict, to sword and spear and horsemanship, and after thorough examination of his character, this young man had been accepted into The Brotherhood of The Radiant Black Knights, and sent out upon this landscape of castles and princesses and dragons to prove his valour, nobility and grace – as was befitting for any young man in the early years of his knighthood.

This young man, our hero, whose knight’s name was Humble Strength, had sworn by the blades of his mentors to serve only the heartful and good, to protect the vulnerable, to set an example of generosity and dignity, and to increase the good fame of the brotherhood. For this, and this only, would this young man now live and die.

Humble Strength had heard tales of dragons – not from The Brotherhood, but in the villages of his childhood. They had made him tremble, but he’d never seen their flesh. However, now, over the hill, all in a terrible hurry, from the direction of the castle, there came hundreds of the king’s attendants (on fine steeds), castle merchants (heaving their barrows), and villagefuls of peasants with cloth bundles on their shoulders, and donkeys and geese and goats. “It’s entered the castle! Flee! Flee!” they screamed to Humble Strength who, of course, and as was befitting, set his black stallion to a gallop, rode over the meadowed hill, and entered forthrightly the unguarded, abandoned castle.

Its scarlet snake-like body was as thick as a five hundred year old oak, and five stories high, as high as the castle walls. It stood alone in the castle courtyard, perched on its curled talons, dripping slime, balancing itself, it seemed, by flapping its small red bat-like wings. Our young knight immediately realised the beast’s attention was set on the Princess, stretched out on her four poster bed on the roof of the castle tower. Its fiery eyes upon her – it had only to breath one breath, and she would be dead. The young knight stormed at the dragon, his bright armour clashing about him as he slashed at its talons with his sword, pulling its attention down and away from the Princess. With the speed of a wildcat, one after another, he severed the dragon’s claws, until it fell to the ground in agony – breathing fire desperately. As its head hit the cobblestones in the castle courtyard, the young knight seized the moment and ran his blade between its eyes. And so the dragon died.

At the festivities Humble Strength sat at the high table with the King and the many royal aunts and uncles (the Queen had died in childbirth), and was
acknowledged with praises and gold coins, and requested to stay and protect the castle. Only the Princess seemed unhappy. When our young hero enquired of her wellbeing she turned upon him sharply and snapped “you are a sincere soul. Were you not, I would have my soldiers chop off your toes!” The young knight was taken aback by her fury. If anything, he had expected sweet smiling. Yet the Princess had a radiance that could not be accounted for only by her emerald eyes or her full-swollen breasts – there was a mystery that shone from within her, and the young man could feel that only something impure would have disturbed such a being as she.

This set the young knight pondering, and when a second dragon came upon the castle and the Princess told him of coils of silk rope hidden in the castle courtyard, he trusted her and went forth to meet the dragon with rope and nothing more. Once again, the courtiers and tradespeople and villagers fled with their children and babes-in-arms and donkeys and goats and geese. The huge winged-snake slid through the castle gate, raised itself upon its talons and paced the castle forecourt ~ its slimed scarlet torso dazzling in the sunshine, its stench causing all those in hiding to vomit. Only when the beast beheld the Princess on her rooftop bed did it stop its pacing. At that instant Humble Strength leapt forth, spinning silk ropes tighter and tighter around those tree-trunk ankles – tighter and tighter until the dragon lost balance and fell. Casting off his armour to become yet more agile, the young knight bound the dragon’s ankles and wings and jaws and stood in triumph upon its watery body, their two hearts pulsing as one.

Again there were celebrations, and again our hero was acknowledged with pomposity and paraphernalia and gold. But Humble Strength was most interested in the mood of the Princess. Would she be furious, as before, or would she now smile upon him. “Come” she ordered, gently. And she took the young knight by the hand, down to the courtyard which had become the dragon’s cell. “Look” she ordered him, kindly. And she directed his gaze into the dragon’s enormous sad eyes. Humble Strength was shocked. Firstly, he knew immediately this was a she-dragon. It was not that he’d assumed it was male. It was that her eyes were as deep and feminine and beautiful as those of the Princess, and he cried his first tears of confusion. “You are still a fool, young knight” said the Princess, taking his hand to walk him back up to the celebrations. As they entered the banqueting halls, hand in hand, the assembly cheered, assuming they would soon be married.

The King, who in his youth had been refused entry into The Brotherhood of The Radiant Black Knights, wanted the dragon killed for meat, but the Princess pleaded for its release, which was agreed on condition that its fire be put out, and its wings and claws cut off ~ which was done. Everyone, from aristocrat to beggarboy, cheered as the crippled and defeated dragon slowly hobbled away over the meadows, everyone apart from the young knight and
the Princess who knew the creature’s nobility, and who grieved alongside each other, and were heart-stricken.

Humble Strength now mounted a continual vigil upon the watchtower, for he intended to prevent any other dragon entering the castle. Then one night, at full moon, he saw a dragon approaching. “Here, use this” whispered the Princess, and she enfolded a vial of poison in his palm. His trust in the Princess now complete, the young knight picked the cork from the vial and swallowed the poison and smiled. His smile became wider and wider, and whether from madness or bravery, our hero bounded down the stone spiral staircase inside the watchtower, jumped upon his black stallion, and galloped out to meet the dragon. There in the meadows beyond the castle gate, Humble Strength dismounted at twenty paces from the fire-mouth of the dragon. The black stallion, utterly faithful to its master, sat shyly to one side, its whole body trembling. Humble Strength looked into the dragon’s eyes, and once again he saw: it was a she-dragon with eyes as mysterious and beautiful and proud as the eyes of the Princess. Never before had a human looked into its eyes, and the dragon’s heart was touched. It blew flames, not at the young knight, but into the sky, towards the moon.

Whether from bravery or the intoxication of the Princess’s potion, Humble Strength now cast off his every garment, and danced a strange dance for the dragon to see, then he climbed the dragon’s slippery torso, until he came to rest upon the shoulder blades of her wings, and the dragon herself, also caught in the intoxication of this unlikely encounter, began to dance with him on her back. Only the Princess saw them. She felt her femininity opening for Humble Strength. Because of his trust of her, she was opening to trusting him.

For one year no dragons came. Then stories came in from the villages of a dragon in the neighbouring kingdom, close to the castle of our Princess’s uncle. As was befitting, Humble Strength, clad in black armour, mounted his black stallion, and set out, without sword or rope or poison, to meet this dragon. Now unlike our Princess’s father, this uncle was a member of The Brotherhood, and as was befitting, our young hero greeted this King with due ritual and respect. And indeed, the King reciprocated the young man’s respect. And that evening they dined together with the Queen and the Queen’s daughter, who was prettier than the sunshine, whose eyes widened when the young knight took his place at the table, and who seemed to agree with his every conversation.

But the very next day, the dragon came bounding across the King’s fields, and the castle guards scattered, and those who could not flee hid, and once again, somehow, uncannily, it found the King’s daughter, in her chambers, and stared in through her windows, wanting something, its nostrils smoking ominously. “Help, help” screamed the King’s daughter, “Humble Strength please come, please, please, please! Humble Strength where are you ~ please
come and kill this disgusting monster! Kill it and I will reward you with untold wealth and my love eternal ~ just kill it, kill it someone please!”

Humble Strength charged into the King’s daughter’s bedroom. “My hero!” she squealed. He opened the window, and then, once again, as if instantly taken to a place where time moved slower, he was looking into another she-dragon’s eyes. In her eyes he was touching eternity. And then he understood: the simplicity of it: her eyes were full of love. Oh. He took off all of his clothes, jumped out of the window onto the top of the dragon’s head, slid down her slimey back to her wing bones, and began to sing an odd, enchanted song. Off they went together, out of the castle, beyond the castle fields, the dragon shuffling slightly as our hero sung his song. The King’s daughter was speechless for days, unsure whether Humble Strength was a knight or a madman, and as afraid of him as she was of the dragon.

The naked knight rode the dragon back to his Princess, and said ‘thanks to your guidance I found the power to face the dragon without any intoxication. I faced her as myself. The power I once had, the power of the sword, was the power of a fearful child. By following your guidance I have found the power of a man. I know I have completed, as is befitting, my years of apprenticeship as a young knight. I know I am now a full member of The Brotherhood. “You are” said the Princess, and she took him to her bosom. And in his eyes she beheld the reflection of her own dragon-like eyes.

And Humble Strength and the Princess were married, amidst the most joyous celebrations ~ celebrations that extended, it is said, even to the dragon kingdoms. And on their wedding day, aged one hundred and one, as is befitting, the King died, the Princess was crowned Queen, Humble Strength was crowned King, and from then on in that land, most men’s days were long, but most women’s nights were long too.