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The Purple Crusade

The Purple Crusade

by
Ryder W. Miller

Robyn looked at his arm, but it was now gone. Robyn could still sometimes feel it. "What a waste it has been for me," Robyn thought.

Robyn had volunteered for the war in The Middle East, the one that had never seemed to be over for at least the last fifty years, but things had not worked out well for him.

Here he was, an injured vet with nothing to show for it, and no prospects. He was willing to give everything, even his life. Why did he chose this? He was so high on pain killers that he was no longer really able to remember. There were special things about America that were worth defending, he thought, but they did not seem so important now. Was he some big hero now? Would people appreciate his sacrifice?

All he could remember now was the pain. He had wanted to be a hero. Some of his family members and friends thought he was a hero, but he wished things were different.

What a strange way to get injured, he thought. His airplane was shot down and his right arm was lost in the process. He was flying the plane low and it malfunctioned. The speed dropped enough for him to be hit by an enemy ground missile. It was not like in the old days where men would face each other in battle. Now it was all about technology, not brawn. War had become far shrewder. There was something corrupt about it. Friends of his thought the war was just about oil. We needed to protect our oil interests, it was argued. That is why he would never play the piano again.

Robyn decided he would try to watch some TV that evening from his hospital bed. There was a movie on about some conflict

during the Middle Ages. He would be on pain killers and would need something to occupy him if he could stay awake. He would be in rehab for some time now. It was not like he needed the time to think. He was just a victim of a unfair universe. Through a malfunction he was now a cripple.

Hell, he thought, he should be glad to be alive. Though the war would probably not end in his lifetime, it was likely that the USA would never be attacked in the foreseeable future. But as for himself, he did not know what he could do. He could just lie around now and try to take his mind off his injury. Later in the evening there would be food and TV Entertainment. Though his body was a mess, it would still be functional in the future and he still had one good arm. Maybe Nurse Teresa could cheer him up. She appreciated his sacrifice, but she was likely to tough love him. She would try to keep him strong. Not a lot of milk and sweetness from her was going to come his way.

He would have his meal late. He would watch television first. Maybe the movie would have those old fashioned medieval battles.

Robyn was about to turn on the TV and Teresa showed up. She was not smiling. "How are you doing," she said wearily, slightly annoyed, but not too tired.

Robyn looked at her and was sad that he was not getting more affection, but then again she had a lot of patients she was responsible for and probably already had a man, or now it could be a woman, that she was in something long term with. "I am okay. Will the TV be working tonight?"

"Yes. Can you still feel pain?"

"Sometimes. The pain killers are kind of fun though."

Teresa looked annoyed. "What would you like for dinner?"

"Why, I would like meatballs and noodles and maybe some carrots and peas."

"Is that one of the selections for tonight?"

"If it wasn't, would I have asked for it?"

"I take care of a lot of people, Robyn. I think we should be able to do that. Happy to see that you are in higher spirits."

"I'm okay, just confused and annoyed, that's all."

"Dinner tonight will be at 7 pm."

"Okay."

"The TV will be working tonight."

"Thank you. Is that movie on? What's it called? 'The Purple Crusade'?"

"I don't know. Do I look like the TV Guide?"

"Sorry, Teresa. Thanks for coming around and looking after me."

"It's a job. Don't get the wrong idea."

Teresa left the room and Robyn lay back to rest. He closed his eyes and thought he would take a nap before dinner and the evening show.

The pain was still with him, but the pain killers made him feel numb and drowsy. Everything seemed so meaningless now, but if he could sleep he could escape it and start fresh.

Counting deer would give him an appetite when he woke.

Robyn awoke in a field. He was startled to find the grass wet. A horse which he guessed was his was near. He looked down at his arm and it was there. In his fist he held a silver sword with a purplish tint.

He did not know where he was, but at the moment he did not care. He squeezed his hand on the hilt of the sword and shook it around in the air. He found that he now had

a smile on his face. The gray horse took a few steps away and gave him a strange look.

"Where am I?" he asked the mare.

The horse did not reply.

Robyn was not surprised that the horse didn't talk, but he was kind of disappointed. Here he was, a knight of sorts, and in such stories there sometimes were horses that knew how to speak. But one could not have everything, he thought.

He looked now over his body and he was in chain mail. It was not heavy enough that he could not walk or swing a sword. There was also a shield on the ground. The horse had bags which he figured would contain food. They were of a lilac color like the clothes he wore. He decided to forage.

But where was he?

He looked around and saw that he was in a field which was bordered by a river on one side and forest on the other. There were some yellow flowers on the field, probably dandelions.

He looked over his body and found that he was not injured. Besides some soil on his chain mail he was clean. The air was still cold so he stretched and shook himself to warm up.

He wasn't sure, but he figured that he probably knew how to ride a horse. He gathered his things off the ground and decided to follow the river South East. There was only one sun in the sky, thankfully. He looked on his personage to see if there was any indication of any rank or name, but there was none. He probably was a nobody.

He lifted himself into the saddle with a smoothness that he did not anticipate. He was happy to feel comfortable in the saddle. He egged the horse to walk south, which she did after taking a drink from the river.

It was a long day riding the horse, but he was surprised that he was not used to riding. Every few hours he needed to get off to stretch. There also was not a lot of food. He was not sure he would know how to find

some food. There was a slingshot of sorts in the bag. He did see a lot of wildlife. There was the occasional deer, and some fish in the stream. There was also some gophers, and squirrels.

He was not sure he would be able to start a fire, but there were plenty of brush and sticks he could use.

The first night he decided he would sleep by the river instead of under the trees. There would likely be less wildlife to bother him. The horse would probably scare most of it away.

Though uncomfortable, what a beautiful land it was. It must be Spring, as suggested by the many flowers he had seen that day. The weather, he figured, was somewhere in the mid 60s. But being outdoors so long was growing uncomfortable. Plus, he still yet did not have any idea of where he was going. He would need to meet some people to get a sense of who he was and where he was going.

But Robyn smiled. It seemed like his wish had come true. He also had his arm back. On his way he would be early next morning. He would wash in the river and on his way he would be.

He was surprised by how empty the land was. He saw the occasional wildlife, even took down a deer for food, but he was usually just on his own. He had found fish in abundance in the stream and birds in the trees, but there were no signs of people for a week so far.

He figured he had landed in a no man's land. Maybe there was some wild beast nearby that had scared all the people off, but he had not seen any signs of them either.

He enjoyed being alone out in nature, but he was irked by the situation. He figured he must be in some Medieval time, by his trapping, but he wanted to know more. Then again maybe he should just remain where he

was to avoid trouble. For some reason he figured trouble would find him anyway.

He took out his sword and swung it, realizing somehow he knew how to use it. His muscles were properly conditioned. He also did not have a problem with the bow when he took down the deer. It may have been someone else's deer though.

After a few more days of traveling south, Robyn found a house along the river. It was made of wood and not painted. The roof looked like it needed work. The owner apparently did not keep it up to standards, but then again he probably was some farmer who was just happy to have a roof over his head. It had been more than a week now along the river and Robyn thought it would be nice to spend an evening indoors, but the owner might not be obliging.

Robyn decided to stay on his horse so the owner would not think about taking advantage of him right away. He aimed his horse to the front door of the house and called out.

Nobody answered, and Robyn decided to investigate. He made his way to the door which was unlocked. There was some light in the inside room, but the house was abandoned. It looked as if someone has just left it without a lot of preparation. There was rotting food in what must have been the storage areas of the pantry. The bed was not made. Most of the clothing was still left in drawers.

Robyn decided not to touch anything if he could avoid it. There was no food that he could use here either.

It seemed as if the house had been abandoned some time ago. He sure would have liked to spend the night on the bed, but this was not his place and he needed to leave it alone. If the owner showed up today Robyn would just explain his situation and say that he was looking for the persons who lived there. This was The Middle Ages or something and he figured they could

understand something of what happened to him. These were the kind of things that happened during these times if he remembered right. When he was from they would not be considered open minded though.

Farmer "Maggot" appeared to have left his small farm. He did not seem to care that it would now be at the mercy of the elements. Stepping out the door he turned around to look at the building to think if there was anything he should do. There was something curious about the door though. He noticed that there was a nail on the door. He looked at it closely and there was a bit of leather nailed into the door. Maybe someone had left him a message at the front door? Maybe he had to go do something?

Down the river he and his horse would go again. The weather was not that bad, and the early morning sun would warm him up despite the morning dew. The horse seemed to be fine, if she was welcome to stop and eat the grass anytime she wanted to.

During this time Robyn felt elated. Here he was alone in a wilderness of sorts. He had the time to enjoy looking at the birds and wondering about the clouds. The rocks that jutted out of the ground gave him a sense of history. But all good things must come to an end, he figured.

A day later he saw another farm house, but this one was not empty. He could see the smoke from a fire. He decided to take the horse to the front door like last time, but this time someone stepped out of the house.

It was an old lady in rags, but she held a stick in her hand.

"Who might you be?" she demanded.

Robyn decided to answer.

"Why I am Robyn, a traveling, er... knight."

"None of those left in these parts."

"I don't understand."

"Why, there is a crusade. Have you not heard? All the warriors have had to go south."

"What happened to the farmer from the north?"

"He had to go as well."

"Are you here alone?"

"What is it to you? You have to go south with the rest of them. If you don't, they may put an end to you."

"For what reason?"

"They will tell you. You look kind of important with the purple color of yours. You could probably get away with saying that you are someone important. You just need to clean up."

"What of the men folk here?"

"They have had to go also. Just me here and my daughter. Don't be too friendly or we will poke you," she said brandishing a knife.

"Don't worry."

"Who are you anyway?"

"You wouldn't understand."

"I have heard all sorts of things."

"I am named Robyn."

"You're needed Robyn, down south. Over the great waters they will take you."

"What am I needed for?"

"Do you expect me to know? You will find the land empty. All but the woman and children have gone."

"What if I don't go?"

"You will be arrested. All must go?"

"What for?"

"You will find out in the south. There are five kings around here who don't all agree, but when one says something we all have to listen or else!"

Robyn was taken aback. He had gotten what he wanted or so it seemed: the chance to shine in personal combat. This did seem better than being a cripple. He decided to go south and see what he could find out.

"Thank you for answering my questions," he said.

"I only answered what I could. Stay for a meal."

"Thank you but I am not hungry."

"Take something with you?"

"Okay."

The lady gave Robyn some food, mostly fruit and vegetables, but also some dried meat. [G4] He put in his bag. The horse seemed happy having decided to take a rest on the lawn after eating some grass. Robyn figured he should go and meet his destiny. Apparently they needed soldiers.

On his way south over the next few days he saw a few more abandoned farms. The spiffier than many who had left before him. In town, not in the village, he would find out what had transpired.

After a while there were men. Most looked at him with anger: in most areas he was out numbered. They did appear to be working in collusion. Some of them had shields and armor.

"Who might you be?" one asked him when he reached the center of the village.

"Why I am Robyn the Purple," he said trying to add to his mystique. He knew he would be different in a lot of ways and he sought to distinguish himself.

"You are late in the arriving," another man returned.

"What do you mean?"

"There is a war going on, you idiot. Every available man is needed."

"So why haven't you gone?" Robyn asked.

"I have gone already. We have gone already. It is your turn."

"What is this about?"

"How could you not know what this is about? It is about protection. It is about honor. If we do not go there, they will come here."

"Who will come here?"

"Why, one of the other kings. This is the land of King Parod. Those kings, they don't

whole country side seemed abandoned excepted for the occasional woman or child. Most were not friendly. One even said that he did not belong here.

"How far is the nearest town?" he had asked one.

"A few days south," he heard someone yell.

After a few days there were more farms and houses. He apparently had walked out of the wilderness to civilization. Women and children and the occasional old man looked as he walked by. He imagined that he looked a bit

all agree, but when one says something you have to listen or else."

"Or else what?"

The group of men grew annoyed now. A boy that was among the half dozen of them decided to run away.

"You want trouble? What are you, an idiot? We don't have a choice. Nobody has survived here."

Robyn knew now that he was trapped. Two of the men were pointing their bows at him.

The boy had apparently gone to get reinforcements. A few more had arrived. Some on horseback and others in thick armor. He would soon be surrounded.

"Tell me what this is about?"

"Why, Parod is annoyed with somebody about something. You will find out when the boat lands."

"Happy you are here to joins us. With a fine steed as well. Why, you are welcome bring the horse with you if you like."

Robyn was surprised by the change in tone. They were acting like he came willingly. In a way he had. He realized that he would need to put up a fight to get out of this, a fight where he would be dishonored and likely killed. They obviously were able to do this to many others. This was the war he had "volunteered" for?

“Why, we will escort you down to the boat. There is one leaving this afternoon. Why, we will feed you first and send you on your merry way. Purple outfit. Nice. You may be remembered. You may become a hero.”

On they went now. Though the mood was courteous, Robyn realized that he was caught. Glory might be his. Surprisingly his body was used to using the weapons he had, and he had gotten used to riding the horse.

After a meal of mutton and chops and ale, he and a few dozen others went on the boat to take them over the water.

Most on the boat gave him strange looks, but he was better armed than most. Maybe he could do the right thing where they were going now? Why was he dressed in purple? He did not really know, but astrologers and New Age people liked that color. It could be a color for a peaceful people, maybe for the magical, but things were not likely to be under his control. Was this Medieval time really better? He would have to wait to find out, and it might not be better for him. He now remembered the old expression, be careful what you wish for.

ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

The Mythic Circle is a small annual literary magazine published by *The Mythopoeic Society*, which celebrates the work of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams, and other writers in the mythic tradition. (For more information about the Mythopoeic Society, contact Edith L. Crowe, Corresponding Secretary, The Mythopoeic Society, PO Box 6707, Altadena, CA 91003. E-mail: correspondence@mythsoc.org)

Copies of the next issue, *Mythic Circle*, #34, scheduled to appear in the summer of 2012, can be pre-ordered for \$8.00 through the Mythopoeic Society's website, <<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythic-circle/preorder/>>. Back issues are available at <<http://www.mythsoc.org/mythic-circle/history/>>.

Submissions and letters of comment should be sent to: Gwenth Hood, English Department, Marshall University, Huntington WV 25701, or e-mailed to <mythiccircle@mythsoc.org>. Paper submissions should be double-spaced and should include a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The Mythic Circle exists primarily for the benefit of writers trying to develop their craft in the Mythopoeic tradition and publishes short fiction, poetry, and artwork (mostly illustrations of stories and poems.) By editorial policy we favor our subscribers. As a small literary magazine, we can only reward our authors with one complimentary copy of the issue in which the accepted

work appears. We do not pay any money. We have, as yet, no hard and fast length limits, but we as a small publication, we must think very well of a story more than 5000 words long to publish it. Shorter works have a better chance.

Editorial and Commentary

In this issue, we welcome back some previous authors, namely Dag Rossman, with a continuation on the adventures of Faragrim the Draug, and Ryder Miller, with his modern warrior-errant. October Williams and David Sparenberg also return with more variations on their poetic themes. Again, Tim and Bonnie Callahan offer their superb talents for the cover and illustrations, adding texture and imaginative depth to the issue.

With us for the first time are storytellers Eric Kregel, Erin Avery, Fred Hilary, and Joe Krauss, as well as poets Joshua Drake, Roger Echo-Hawk, and D. S. Martin. Their themes range through time and space, in contemporary and jurisdictions, and in the links between them. (What are dreams and visions for?)

And because your editor believes that debate and discussion can take place in fiction and poetry as easily as in essay form, I present, with Ryder Miller's kind permission, an exploratory sequel to his story, "The Purple Crusade," with its questions about the nature of honor in modern as opposed to medieval warfare. Perhaps we will have more commentary on such issues, or more stories on these themes.

Robyn's Further Adventures

or

The Red, the Purple and the Green

Robyn opened his eyes and found a man sitting beside his bed. The hospital bed. He wondered a moment what had happened to his horse and his ship, reality asserted itself all too soon. His restored left arm, phantom of a fleeting dream, was gone again. How long had he slept?

"Did I miss the movie? *The Purple Crusade*?" he asked.

"I doubt it," said his visitor, dark eyes gleaming. The frames of his eyeglasses, almost translucent, cast a purple glow on his white coat. "I came to tell you that the tests came out fine. We can start the fitting

tomorrow—unless you back out."

"Back out? Why would I?"

"Why indeed? You're a good candidate, and you've given your informed consent. Unless you withdraw it."

He remembered the videos they'd made him watch, the forms he had signed. "It won't make things the way they were before," he said.

"No, never. But that doesn't mean things won't be good. In their way. You'll have sensation of a kind—but not your old sensations. Digits of a kind, but not like your old fingers. You won't be able to do

everything you did before. But some things you'll do fine. And you'll learn to do things you couldn't do before, things that others can't. It will be an adventure."

"You'll be famous, Dr. Old, if this works out," said Robyn. "What about me? Will I win honor?"

"Why not? What sort of honor do you want, Robyn?"

##

Robyn rode his mare down the gangway onto the broad beach. He was glad the former dream had returned, since he enjoyed it. However, he sensed that his equipment was different. And suddenly he saw, bearing down on him, a tall man dressed from head to foot in bright red armor. The horse, a third again as large as Robyn's, came to a halt twenty paces away, and pawed the ground, snorting.

"So!" exclaimed the Red Knight. "King Parod sends a purple champion this time! And what sorcerous weapon is that in your left hand? Not very knightly?"

Until that moment, Robyn had not thought about his left arm, but now he realized that it was multi-jointed thing, perhaps resembling a tenacle from a distance, and it culminated in a hand of changeable size, now swollen to three times its natural size and still swelling. *Dr. Old's prosthetic*, he thought. *I wonder how it works?* "Just how knightly is this quarrel?" he demanded, to gain time. Suddenly he knew that he could control the size of the hand, and made it double once again.

The Red Knight looked frightened, rather silly of him, Robyn thought, since he was the one with the sword and lance. But his voice was definitely quavering as he warned, "Your king will win no glory if your victory comes by unchivalrous means!"

"So what will your king do with his honor if you win? What will mine do, if I

win?" Robyn asked.

"Of course, you arrogant fool, the winner will expect everyone to listen when he talks and do exactly what he says. And rather than expose Parod's entire kingdom to peril, the two of them agreed to settle the question through single combat. Ours."

"Single combat might not be a bad idea," Robyn said. "I can't say I think much of the rest of it, though. People should have the right to mind their own business and do whatever is best for them, except when there's real trouble. That's how it is in my country, or it should be.

"But if your king really is such a swaggering ass that he wants everyone to flatter him whether they need to or not, at least it's halfway decent of him to arrange a combat between people who want to fight, instead of just riding out and mowing down everyone in sight. That is what the evil ones did it in my world. They killed thousands of people who never did anything to them, just to prove how angry they were and how no one else mattered. That's why I went to war and lost my natural arm, and why I have this sorcerous thing instead."

The Red Knight looked unimpressed. "That's not much to be proud of."

"And what are *you* so proud of?" Robyn suddenly realized that his prosthetic arm could be a missile-throwing weapon. In his mind's eye, he saw a store-room of shootable things: arrows, axes, laser beams, ball bearings, soccer balls, footballs, beach balls.

"For what you've said, a pie in the face is about right," he told the Red Knight. And then in his mind's eye, he saw a row of luscious pies. Apple pie, cream pie, blueberry pie, peach pie. But cherry pie, surely, fit the Red Knight best. Whoosh! The missile thrower sucked in the pie and out it flew. As his challenger swung his lance, the pie struck his face with a satisfying *thwack*. The Red Knight lost his

balance, and, following his lance's momentum, fell over his horse's shoulder and hit the ground with a clatter and an undignified screech.

Robyn shrank his limb-weapon to normal size and signaled his mare to ride on. *I suppose he'll gather reinforcements and pursue,* he thought. *That could be exciting.*

##

But no one followed as he explored the new land. Sand gave way to lush meadow, and he let the mare graze as she pleased. Presently, however, he saw a delegation of pedestrians advancing. They did not seem hostile, so he waited for them.

"Hail, Sir Robyn," said their leader, when they had come to within ten paces. "Please dismount and accept a change of clothes." They laid a parcel of green garments before him.

"Thanks for the offer," said Robyn, "but why would I change my clothes?"

"Why do you wear purple? It is the color of princely arrogance. Green is the color of nature, of honest men, the true color of honor. Get off your mare, let her graze as she pleases. Here no one tries to be greater than anyone else. We eat what the land produces, and when we must, after the manner of a legendary Robyn for whom you must be named, we take from those who

have too much and give it to those who have too little."

Robyn considered. "That sounds fine, but someone took me from my world and put me in this purple outfit. I won't give it up until I find out who and why. It's my quest."

The men in green stood shoulder to shoulder, scowling. "Do you know that wearing purple, you're claiming to be a king or prince? That you're making yourself the enemy of honest men, and of nature?"

"No, I don't know that," said Robyn. "No one told me so. Maybe I'm wearing purple because I've earned a purple heart. Or maybe it's because in my country, we all vote to choose the president, who has powers like a king, so in a way, we are all princes, although we all give up our power to the one we all have chosen. As for you, if you try to change what people wear against their will, and if you take things from people and give them to others because you want to, you have the arrogance of princes, even though you wear green."

Robyn had had enough of this conversation, and he signaled his mare, who sprang into a gallop. Soon they left green delegation staring and grumbling.

What new sights awaited Robyn in this strange land? Honor, he decided, is what you make of it, and he would take adventures as they came.