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Frearfire

Frearfire

by

Ryder W. Miller

Once upon a time there was a village in the shade of a mountain where the dragon Frearfire lived. Nobody knew why Frearfire needed the riches, but the villagers every new generation brought the dragon gold, jewels, and other things. Frearfire protected the area from other dragons and the Seven Kings in the nearby provinces. The village, every new generation, would send a new representative with an offering, and a new arrangement with the dragon would be agreed upon.

Seitan volunteered at a council meeting to talk with the dragon. He was a man at arms, a paladin with the mission to protect the common people. Seitan was tall with long dark hair and sharp features. He had served in the battles of the nearby kings and was reputed to be the most noble and ablest knight from the village. He rode a dark brown steed and was also able with the bow. It had been twenty years, a generation, since Frearfire had been talked with again formally. Frearfire had been seen away from his cave recently, flying in the sky, but he agreed to never visit the village if the generational gift was given. Frearfire would have new demands that this new generation would have to satisfy. There were not many soldiers in this new generation, but the few were fierce. This generation of soldiers had advanced metal work, armor and long swords.

The village was secluded in a valley and of no consequence, so the surrounding kings had further reasons not to bother with it. Every once in a long while the Seven Kings

would request soldiers from the village to help in the nearby wars, but they were also fearful to tread upon the property of Frearfire. Frearfire had burned down villages and forests in the past. When he moved the mountain, he was young and voracious. He had destroyed nearly all the surrounding villages. The Seven Kings learned to fear him, and he moved to the mountain to retire. Here on the mountain he would catch the occasional goat and ram. He would bask in the sun and enjoy the cold breeze. Frearfire enjoyed thinking and observing human society, but he didn't converse very often with others. There were dark birds that would visit him and give him tidings of far off places. He would spend much of his time thinking. On his occasional flights he would watch the human settlements grow and develop, but he was not often hungry. He also was retired.

The council was not sure if Seitan was the right one to send. He was headstrong and valiant. The dragon might consider him a threat and there had been talk of putting up a resistance against the dragon.

"We considered doing that many years ago, but his fires are so hot that he could burn down the village. He can melt iron with his breath. Those who challenged him could be boiled alive in his fires," said one of the elders.

"Dragons have been killed before," argued Seitan.

"It would take an army and the Seven Kings will not help us," said another elder.

"It would only take a few men. Maybe

only one,” said Seitan.

“What if you fail? You will kill us all if you try,” said another elder.

The council decided to maintain the old arrangement with the dragon, but Seitan was annoyed. They would satisfy the demands of Frearfire. Frearfire had been reasonable in the past, but might grow angry if he felt that he could be challenged or disrespected. The village did not keep record of the distant past, but many recent generations would sacrifice a virgin to the dragon. There would also be gifts of gold and jewels. Seitan decided he would go talk with the dragon. He was convinced to respect the wishes of the elders.

“I will wear armor. Frearfire need know that there are now armed men among us,” Seitan said.

The elders were afraid that he would go and ruin things with Frearfire, but he was the only one who volunteered for the mission. The elders tried to delay the pilgrimage, and they were successful for a time, but Seitan was anxious to see what would transpire. He wanted to know how their lives would be for his generation. As a child he did not hear much about the dragon, but Frearfire might play a more important role in their lives if the new generation spoiled the traditional arrangement.

The other young men in the village knew that they were not a match for Seitan, and when he decided to go only the elders had a chance to dissuade him. They were unsuccessful. Frearfire would notice the change, but hopefully a peace could be reached. Peace had been reached with Frearfire in the past. The elders told Seitan that Frearfire just wanted to be respected and left alone.

The night before he was to make the journey up into the mountains, Seitan conversed with his ladylove Astral.

“I will not do as you wish until you return,” she said.

“But what if I never return?” said Seitan.

“Then I would have chosen wisely to wait.”

“What if the elders demand that we sacrifice you because you are a virgin?”

“I will run away. We will run away.”

“If you are carrying my child you do not need fear that you will be selected.”

“I am liked, I am not likely to be sacrificed. They will send Gerra, that shrew.”

“The council would prefer that another go speak with Frearfire.”

“You are the bravest. You must finish this task before I am willing.”

“I will be successful. Our children will know peace.”

“If you heed the advice of the elders that will be so.”

“But look how we must live?”

“There are forces beyond our control. We could be at war with the Seven Kings.”

“We live like cowards.”

“We live in peace and Frearfire does not bother us. You are not smarter than the elders.”

“I cannot stomach it!”

“We must stomach it!”

“Okay, and I will continue to wait for you Astral.”

“So have I.”

Seitan left a few days later. The elders were there to send him off.

“The Dragon is older than the oldest in the village. He must be appeased or we will all be doomed. Understand his need for privacy,” said one of the elders.

Seitan was annoyed, but he only nodded approvingly.

They filled Seitan’s horse bags with gold and jewels. Taking pity on the horse, Seitan would get off and walk without it up the trail. It would take him three days to walk out of the valley into the lair of the

dragon. The path was smooth at first, but then it grew rocky and treacherous as he made his way further into the mountains. He used his bow to catch animals to eat along the way. In a cave off the side of the mountain path he rested and made a fire his first night out. For dinner he ate a crow. Villagers regularly traveled this far out of the valley, and he noticed the signs of habitation, but they would not be there to help further along the trail.

Dragons exuded poisons and Seitan, the next day, noticed a change in the vegetation he could find along the trail. Gone were the large trees, instead there were scraggly bushes. The life seemed more guarded. He would not choose to eat berries from these plants because they were more likely to be poisonous because of the presence of the dragon. He also had food in the bag that would last him until he returned to the village.

The next night he could see Frearfire's cave above. He would leave early in the morning hoping to reach him for the conversation in the early afternoon. Even though he was high in the mountain it would be warm because of the sun. That night he watched the sunset from his campsite; it was strange and wild in the presence of the exhalations of the dragon. He had not seen such colors in the sky before. The horse also seemed skittish that evening, but Seitan reassured him. On their way up the mountain, crows stopped to observe them and then flew onward.

The next day Frearfire was waiting for him when he walked up the trail. Seitan had seen drawings of dragons, but he was not prepared for Frearfire's menacing size. He was larger than a house with glittering scales, which changed colors as he moved. Frearfire was standing between Seitan and the cave enjoying the sunlight.

"Seitan is it? I have my spies," the dragon spoke in a deep voice.

"Yes, it is Seitan. I am here to pay tribute. To negotiate."

"You do not wish to negotiate. You wish to see me gone."

"I wish to renew the arrangement between you and the village. I am following the orders of the elders."

"You think you can best me in a duel."

"I am not here to duel."

"Why are you in armor?"

"I did not know what to expect."

"Armor will not protect you from my fires. I can cook you alive."

"I did not know what to expect walking up the trail," Seitan said trying to sound convincing.

"What have you brought with you? More gold and jewels?"

"Yes."

"I can also tell from the smell of you that you have been a soldier."

"Yes."

"The village has not sent soldiers before."

"I volunteered."

Frearfire stood up on his back legs and he was as tall as a tree. His belly glittered in the sunlight, and there was an expression of anger on his face.

Seitan stepped backwards, and the horse shuffled a few yards further behind him.

"There are many of you are there not?"

"I have come alone."

"I mean your kind has spread all over the valley and over the mountains. There is more of your kind than there are numbers of stars in the night sky. The land is not big enough for all of your kind."

Frearfire stood back on all four legs.

"You would be rid of me, of all of my kind," Frearfire accused.

"I would, but it is not my decision. I am following the will of the elders."

"We have worked out an arrangement for generations."

"Were their once more of you?"

“Yes. But we do not breed like pigs. We do not plan to overrun the whole planet,” said Frearfire annoyed.

“Why do you insult us?”

“I can. I have watched what you did to that gentle valley. I have noticed the dams and the declining fish. I have seen the trees cut down. Crows have been eaten. Just the other day you ate a friend of mine. I have noticed the fields that were cleared for sheep. The only thing your kind will give back to the land is your refuse.”

“We have done what was necessary.”

“You breed amongst yourselves like pigs and then you go and kill each other off. Who are you to call me a monster?”

“You threaten to kill us if necessary.”

“If necessary. I defend my kind. I defend my way of life.”

“Why do you not spend time among your kind.”

“We dragons choose to be alone. We have to keep watch over the world.”

“Do you communicate with each other?”

“You ask a lot of questions.”

“Better to understand.”

“What have you brought me? What does your generation wish?”

“I have brought you bags of gold and gems. We wish to maintain the old arrangement.”

“Bring them over here.”

Seitan was angry and he grew hot, but he took the bags from the horse and walked to the cave entrance and dropped the gold and gems on the pile that was already there.

“Is this enough for you?”

“No. I am saving.”

“What for?”

“That is not your concern.”

Seitan figured that it might have something to do with the Seven Kings.

“Are you here to negotiate?”

“We are allowed to negotiate?” asked Seitan surprised.

“What kind of monster do you take me for? There are others of my kind who are less charitable.”

“We live in fear of you.”

“You should. I am more powerful than you. I am also more beautiful. I should cook you alive.”

Frearfire stood on his back legs and Seitan again noticed the colors on his belly like shining gems.

“Does your kind reproduce?”

“You ask too many questions. What is it you want?”

“We want to be free. We do not want to be in debt.”

“I have protected your village. You are in my debt. You are free, but free of me you would be in danger of your own kind and others of mine.”

“They leave us alone.”

“They leave you alone because of me, because of Frearfire.”

“What is it that you ask in return for your protection?”

“I wish not to be bothered. I also wish for more gold.”

“What good does it serve you?”

“That is my concern. Tell the elders that I will respect the old arrangement. I just expect you to return with more gold and gems. Twice as much as you have already brought. Times have changed. It is a cost of living expense.”

Seitan was angry, but he did not show it.

“As you wish.”

“Do not wear armor when you return.”

“Why?”

“You ask too many questions. Do not wear armor when you return with the payment.”

The villagers were happy when Seitan returned with his story. The elders were happy with the new arrangement and there was a big party in the village.

“Bravo Seitan, Bravo,” some cheered.

Astral was smiling at Seitan at the party.

“You are our hero. I have something special for you when you return. You have to wait but not much longer,” she said.

“Yes, we will have peace again. I have waited for you since we were children, Astral. I can wait for you some more,” said Seitan trying not to sound annoyed.

That night there were fireworks and music in The Village. Frearfire would know that the village was celebrating because of the continuance of the old relationship. All that was needed was more gold and gems and the villagers had enough to spare. They sold supplies to the Seven Kings, and considered charging them a fee to keep Frearfire out of their affairs. Seitan did not drink that evening, knowing that he would grow surly. Instead he tried to talk with the elders about the past, but they were too busy celebrating.

“Some other time we will talk in depth about the past.”

“Did you really sacrifice virgins to Frearfire?” asked Seitan.

“Aren’t you the curious one. Yes. Lucky he did not ask for such things. You have saved our future. You will be remembered as a hero.”

Seitan was not sure what to say.

“Thank you,” he muttered.

“You’re welcome, Seitan.”

A few days after the party, Seitan saddled his horse with the bags of gold and gems. He did not wear any armor, but there was a sword at his side.

Astral was there to say goodbye.

“Don’t take too long with the Dragon. Do not ask too many questions. We will celebrate when you return,” she said. She was smiling, but there were tears in her eyes.

“I will wait, as I have always,” he said.

Seitan was smirking when he began walking the horse up the mountain trail. For another generation there was peace with Frearfire. For another generation the village lived happily ever after. Seitan was never seen again.

THE END