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## *The Simple Prince*

Mark Spradley

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### *The Simple Prince*

#### Abstract

The first piece of fiction to appear in the pages of Mythlore.

#### Additional Keywords

The Simple Prince; Fairy tale; Myth; Fantasy; Mythlore

## *The Simple Prince*

by MARK SPRADLEY

Once upon a time deep in the heart of a fair and pleasant wood there was a small but very happy kingdom with a very wise king. All the people in the kingdom loved their king, for before his reign they had not always been so happy. Every day the king would come down from his castle and walk through his kingdom to the fair and pleasant wood, where he would wander alone in thought for hours, smoking his pipe.

One day as he passed through the kingdom, all the people he met on the way could see that he was especially happy, and not long after it was announced that the queen was going to have a baby. For months before the baby was to arrive couriers were sent far and wide buying spices and delicacies for the royal birthday party. Finally, when all had arrived, the baby was born. As all had hoped, it was a boy. The party, enjoyed by everyone, lasted many days and was not forgotten for a long, long time afterwards--at least not nearly so soon as was the prince.

The prince was a very strange boy from the first. As a baby he would lie for hours staring at one thing before his attention wandered to something else. The queen worried about this constantly, but the king never seemed bothered. When the child was very slow in learning words, still the king was unmoved, but the queen's worry spread to others. When the boy grew older he would speak very slowly, thinking about each word so long before he said the next that only his father had the patience to speak with him. Though the prince could make very clever things with his hands, no one could decide what they were, and though he would write for hours, he wrote very little and none of it seemed to make any sense at all, so that even the queen finally gave him up as being a simpleton. However, the king was still unaffected and would only reply "nonsense" when confronted about this by his wife, or any unthinking but well meaning subjects. From the time the prince could walk he would come with the king each day and together they would spend hours in the woods. So, for many years the kingdom continued to be happy and the wood continued to become fairer and more pleasant.

Then one day, when the prince was no longer a boy and the king was getting on in years, an assembly of the kingdom was called. The people gathered in the castle courtyard and soon the king and prince appeared before them. The king began to speak.

"Loyal subjects, I have called you together for several reasons. First, to announce the death of my wife, the queen."

No one said a thing, but all bowed their heads and many cried. The queen had been loved as dearly as the king.

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"Second, to present to you your new king, my son. Serve him well, observe his requests and ordinances, love him as you have loved me. Do not listen to rumors. His wisdom may in time far surpass mine."

Whispers were now heard among the people.

"And thirdly, I have called you to say good-by. Today I will take my leave of you and journey through the fair and pleasant wood for the last time. I go to die alone in the place I was ordained to die, where I came from in my youth."

With this speaking made his way through the crowd and out of the castle gates, never to be seen again, leaving his son, the new king, standing calm, smiling and silent before his doubtful subjects. There he stood not saying a thing, and as if he never would, and there stood his subjects, fidgeting with uneasiness. Then slowly, one by one, they slipped out of the courtyard and returned to their homes. Their king was left standing all alone in the castle courtyard. No one dared approach him from that day on, and he never approached anyone.

For quite awhile after the old king departed, the kingdom remained very happy, and everything went on just as before. Every day the new king would pass through the kingdom as had his father before him, to the fair and pleasant wood where he would wander at will, thinking and smoking his pipe till evening when he would return to the castle where he lived by himself. But after awhile certain of his subjects began to worry that their new king was after all a simpleton. These subjects worried enough that they were soon to form a secret group and send spies to follow the king into the wood. These spies' reports were not encouraging at all. The first spy said the king would sit staring at one thing seemingly half asleep for hours, and then shake himself and fall into an insane fit of laughter. The second spy said the king would talk to himself, saying things which made no sense at all, but which could captivate one as if in a spell, though very often the king would get lost in the middle and forget what he was saying. The third spy said he had actually met the king, and that the king had begun to tell him in a very excited and, indeed, insane manner of some idea which made no sense whatever, and that the king lost track of what he was saying so often and took so long to formulate each word that the spy himself had become so bored he actually forgot for a moment why he had come into the woods and wandered off himself almost insane. It was by this evidence that the loyal subjects one day decided they would be better off with another king, and when the rightful king returned from his day in the woods he found the gated to his kingdom barred.

Inside the kingdom the change was very little at first. So few people had taken notice of the king when he ruled that there were few people that noticed, not to mention missed, him when he was gone. In fact, there was only one person who actually missed the king at all. Unknown to anyone, the king had one friend. It was a little girl who lived on the very edge of the kingdom, right next to the great walls that surrounded it. She at times had wandered in the wood with the king, listening and talking to him. Now for the first month after the king was locked out the kingdom's gates remained locked. Few people ever came in or went out besides the king, and by doing this it was hoped that the king in his simpleness would completely forget about his



kingdom. This, in fact, almost happened. By the time the gates were unlocked again and the little girl went out through them looking for him, his thoughts had wandered to such depth and so far astray that she was the only thing about the kingdom he could recall without quite some effort, and it was beginning to become more and more difficult to remember her. But she had not forgotten him, and so it was that she found him once again and several times a week would come out and visit him. Because she was from one of the poorest families in the kingdom no one ever noticed or paid any attention to her coming and going.

One day when she was visiting the king she decided to ask him a question she had always wondered about but never dared to ask.

"King," she said, "Why is it that you and your father before you have always spent so much time in the fair and pleasant wood that surrounds the kingdom?"

The king stood perfectly still, closed his eyes, but went on smiling as he always did. Finally, after a long silence, he began to speak. "Before you were born," he said ever so slowly, "and before any of the people that are now alive in the kingdom were born, the kingdom was ruled by a very weak king who was completely controlled by an evil witch that used to live in these very woods!" Although by no facial expression, the little girl could see he was exerting a great effort to tell her this. Now the king was beginning to speak much more quickly, though it was still very slow compared to normal speech. "This witch raised dragons as her pets, and these pets she would send into the kingdom to bring to her little boys and little girls like you, and also fair princesses and handsome knights. These she would use in her evil brews and spells by which she could control the minds of kings and rulers. In those days, and perhaps still, far to the west there was a land whose people were very wise, and their minds could be controlled by no one. My father came out of that land in his youth, having heard of the evil witch. He came to this very wood, which was then a dreadful place. None of the witch's spells could conquer his mind, and with his sword he slew all her dragons and banished her far to the north, where most people supposed she froze to death. Yet she is still very much alive and much of her spell still remains in this wood. That is why it has been a constant job for my father and I to wander about here giving the freedom our minds have been blessed with. So it has become the fair and pleasant wood and the kingdom has been blessed with happiness. But the evil witch has not given up. In fact, I think she feels her hour is approaching, and with it, my test."

"Is your being locked out of the kingdom some work of hers?" the little girl broke in. Again there was a long pause. Finally the king began once more very slowly.

"Indeed, much concerning myself has been work of hers. In her exile she realized she could never hope to overcome the freedom of my father's mind, but she realized she might use this freedom itself to regain her power once more. Certain spells she cast upon my birth and the freedom of my mind has been greater than any other of my race. In fact, it has been so great that I myself have only a very small amount of control over it. With my mind I have traveled in thoughts to the bounds of the heavens and to the center of the earth, yet I have no

control over it. Great wisdom to a little mind appears as nonsense, and so I have been rejected as a simpleton by my subjects. The only times I've neared mastering my thoughts have been with my father and with you--the influence of love." His exertion broke through to his face, and he fell to the ground dizzy and exhausted. Neither said anything more that day.

It was not long after that that the people began to notice dark clouds far to the north. No one was particularly interested in them, however, and so few people bothered mentioning them to anyone else until some days later a whole segment of the northern sky was blacked out. Some said they were merely rain clouds, but others thought there must be a huge fire in the north. Every day the dark clouds grew bigger and every day they got closer. Soon the whole northern horizon was full of huge black clouds. It was at this point that the people of the kingdom realized what it was. A whole army of fire breathing dragons was descending upon them from the north. The kingdom no longer had knights because none had been needed for so long; now it seemed hopeless. The kingdom's gates were barred and everyone locked themselves in their homes and waited.

The king on this particular day happened to be in the far northern part of the fair and pleasant wood, sitting on a log half asleep and lost in thought as usual. At least that was how he was when the evil witch upon the back of her most prized dragon approached him leading her flaming and smoking army of dragons behind her. "Ha!" she thought, and chuckled to herself, "Here is my wise king's son, the lunatic of the kingdom. I'll stop and speak with him to have a laugh and scare him to death at the same time before I begin the reconquest of my dreadful wood with its soon-to-be-rotten heart."

"Bad day!" she greeted the king with an evil grin, but not loud enough to rouse him. "Bad day, isn't it?" she said a little louder. This time the king opened one eye, but his thoughts were much too far away to keep it open long, so he closed it. Then the evil witch said with not a little impatience in her voice, "It's going to be a very great bad day if the sun doesn't come out, wouldn't you say?"

"Uh-huh," said the king sleepily, without even opening one eye.

"You're not listening to a word I'm saying, are you?" said the witch.

"Oh... pardon... par... par... pardon... me," said the king, at last remembering how the expression went. His thoughts were just beginning to come around to where he was, though in no great hurry.

"I'm the evil witch come out of the north with an army of dragons to conquer your wood and kingdom!" said the witch, putting on her most terrifying expression and leaning into the king's face so that he would smell her evil breath.

"Oh," said the king, who had just been lighting up his pipe and hadn't even gotten a whiff of the witch's breath. "Who did you say... par... par... pardon me... what did I start to ask you?" The king had gotten off the subject before he had ever gotten on it, and then could





not recall the expression 'pardon me' again for the life of him, which doubly confused the witch, but after a second she answered, "I think you were starting to ask me who I was." But the king was nearly asleep again and only answered, "What?" in a very half awake manner, so that the witch had to say again a little louder, "I think you were starting to ask me who I was."

"Ch," replied the king, waking again, "So who are you, then?"

The witch repeated who she was, and the king asked her to say it again a little slower, which she did, as if she were terribly bored. But the king had gotten off the subject on the very first word and was busy wondering about how the words "I" and "am" first were put together into "I'm", which led him to wonder what the words "I" and "am" really meant anyway, and then if anything really "is", or ever "was", and if there is any difference between asking that and asking if any things really are or ever were which immediately led him to speculations on the general and specific sides of existence so that when the witch shouted, "Are you listening?" he replied, "Existence is such that I myself, to me, am a specific subject, and you, to me, are an object in

the general, while at the same time you, to you, are a specific subject and I am an object in the general, while still at the same time to someone else we are both objects in the general and someone else to himself is the specific subject. Each of us, therefore, is only interested intimately in his own specific world, and interested in the general, of which at the same time he is a part, only insofar as it interacts with his specific. So you see, I am listening generally to what you are saying, but only insofar as it interacts with my specific."

Now had the witch been able to comprehend what the king was saying she might have become very mad, but because she couldn't it had a very curious effect on her. For several minutes after the king stopped talking the witch sat perfectly still. Then she spoke again.

"Do you yet know who I am?"

The king was again far off in his thoughts and took several more minutes and several more inquiries to bring him back again.

"Par... par... pardon..."

"Pardon me," put in the witch.

"Yes, yes, pardon me, but I don't."

"I'm the evil..." but before she could say "witch" she saw she had lost him again. "Are you with me?" she asked, knowing perfectly well he wasn't. By now the king was deep in speculation about the word "evil".

"Some sort of an evening ill was the origin of this word, that is my hypothesis," said the king.

"Yes, yes," said the witch, "I do believe you're on to it, go on."

"And the evening is when dark things appear. Now dark things have no ill about them except by superstition, for I have lived in the wood a long time now and know all the dark things that live in it and none are ill whatsoever. People's aversion to darkness is solely superstition derived from lack of knowledge. I know it is so, for my mind wanders in the night as much as in the day, so you see, the word is based on complete fallacy. What is truth, this is indeed the question, and what is the true meaning behind the word "evil". Perhaps it lies in the fact that evil is the word "live" spelt backwards. In that case anything which exists but does not live, does not grow, does not change is evil. Therefore, to be evil someone must put faith in a power that does not really exist, and therefore evil's only possible power would be a result of people putting faith in it, which brings us back to our first conclusion, that evil is based on complete fallacy, does it not?"

"But who, then, am I?" asked the witch.

"I don't know, it was you who were telling me."



"Why so it was," said the witch, "and now I've completely forgotten."

"Well, then, what did you come here for?" asked the king with a yawn.

"Par... par... pardon... me," said the witch, "But I do believe I've forgotten that also." And so she and all her dragons wandered off, never to be seen again. However, rumors came out of the west some years later that a good witch with a company of friendly dragons had offered her services to a wise king if only he could tell her who she was and where she was trying to get to.

The people in the kingdom were very surprised, and though they could not decide how, they realized that the king had saved them, and so they gave him back his throne. Again everyone was very happy and each day the king and the little girl would wander through the kingdom to the fair and pleasant wood where they would talk and think as the king smoked his pipe. Years later, when he was very old, the king left to die as his father, and because he never married nor had any children of his own, he left the little girl, who had now quite grown up, to be queen of the happy kingdom deep in the heart of the fair and pleasant wood.

