

In Days of Old

This is a story about two brothers who lived long, long ago in a far-away land that was ruled by a kind and wise Queen. It was a world in which there were brave knights and fierce dragons, many good people and a few very bad people.

The older brother was named Jason. His younger brother's name was--guess what--Jeremy, of course.

Ever since he was a small child, Jason had listened to stories of brave knights in armor who rode on horseback to do battle with dragons or any enemy that tried to conquer the country.

Jason wanted very much to become a knight. When he was 13 years old, he wrote a letter to the Queen telling her of his desire. You can imagine how happy Jason was when the Queen wrote back that he had been accepted to knight school.

During the next four years, Jason spent six months of every year at the castle, learning the skills that a knight must know. He learned to ride a horse, and how to care for it. He learned to use a sword and a

spear, and he became very good with a bow and arrow. He studied arithmetic and learned to tell directions from the positions of the stars and the sun. Jason was also taught that a knight must be polite to everyone and protect the people of the kingdom.

During the other six months of each year, Jason lived at home with his parents and his younger brother, Jeremy.

Jason and Jeremy helped their mother and father grow vegetables. They milked the cows every morning and evening, and collected the eggs the chickens had laid. Best of all, the two boys liked to go out on the family's small sailboat to catch fish for dinner. They lived near the ocean and their father taught them to be good sailors and their mother helped them become good swimmers.

Finally, the time came when Jason had completed knight school. He had studied hard and his teachers were very proud of him. But before he could become a knight, he had to perform some very difficult task to show that he was worthy to serve the Queen.

Jason knew that the Queen was sad because years ago an evil man had stolen the magic shield that had helped defend her kingdom against all enemies. A traveler had brought back word that the evil man, who now called himself King Cretin, was living on an island in the middle of the ocean. Protected by the magic shield, he had made slaves of the peaceful people who lived on the island and anyone who refused to obey him was thrown into a deep dungeon.

Except for a narrow entrance to the harbor, the island was surrounded by rocks that wrecked any ship trying to land.

Guarding the harbor was a sea-dragon that breathed out flames every time it opened its mouth. Ships were all made of wood in those days, and the flames would burn up any ship that tried to enter the harbor.

When Jason announced that he would prove his bravery by recovering the magic shield, his parents were very upset. They thought it would be impossible for one youth, no matter how brave, to sail across the ocean, overcome the dragon and capture the magic shield.

They protested when Jeremy told them that he wanted to go with Jason on the big adventure. "You're still just a boy," they told Jeremy.

But Jason said, "Mom and Dad, please allow Jeremy to come with me. He's a good sailor and I need him to help sail the ship. I promise to look after him and protect him from harm."

"Oh please," said Jeremy, "let me go with Jason."

Finally, their parents agreed. Their father got some of their neighbors to help build a boat that would be big enough to sail the ocean. Their mother fixed lots of food that they could take along and the boys filled water casks from the spring near the farm. They took their fishing poles and an extra sail for emergencies.

The sun was shining brightly and there was a gentle wind when they set sail, and their parents and the neighbors waved to them until

the ship was out of sight.

A map that a traveler had brought back showed the location of the island they were seeking. Jason remembered the navigation lessons he had learned in knight school and was able to use the stars and the sun to chart a course that would take them to the island.

They sailed along the coast for two days, within sight of the shore. But just as they were about to turn out into the open sea, the brothers heard the cries of a young whale that had been washed up on a sandy beach and couldn't get off. Its mother was swimming frantically as close to the beach as she could get, but there seemed to be no way she could help the little whale.

"Maybe we can help," Jeremy suggested to Jason as they brought their ship up close.

"I think we can," said Jason, and he told Jeremy his plan.

Jason tied one end of a rope to the ship and told Jeremy to swim to the beach and tie the other end around the little whale. Jason then tried to pull the little whale off the beach. But the whale was too heavy and the ship was too small.

What could he do now? Jason thought a while and then had an idea. He untied the end of the rope from the ship and made it into a harness. Then he told Jeremy to try to slip it over the mother whale's head.

The mother whale seemed to understand that the two brothers were trying to help. She floated on her back so that Jeremy could get the harness over her head.

The big whale tugged and tugged, and the little whale helped with its flippers until finally it reached deep water and could swim again. Jeremy untied the rope and the whales flapped their tails as if to say, "Thank you."

The two whales followed the boat as it sailed out into the ocean. During the long days at sea, the brothers learned to communicate with the whales by hand signals, almost as if they could talk to them.

Jason and Jeremy waited until nightfall before coming near the island ruled by the evil King Cretin. But they could see the harbor by the light of the flames that came from the dragon's mouth.

Jason then explained to Jeremy how they would use the whales to help them accomplish their mission.

The little whale was small enough to get around the rocks at the back of the island and it was just big enough to carry a boy the size of Jeremy. So Jeremy rode on the whale's back past the dangerous rocks until he was close enough to swim to the island.

Jeremy then ran to the castle, climbed through an open window, and found the magic shield. He quickly hid it where the wicked king

wouldn't be able to find it.

Meanwhile, at the entrance to the harbor, Jason used hand signals to tell the big mother whale what he wanted her to do. The mother whale then swam under water and came to the surface alongside the fire-breathing dragon. The big whale slammed its tail into the ocean so hard that waves of water washed over the dragon, putting out the fire that came from its mouth. The whale also sent up spouts of water just like a fireboat and the dragon was helpless.

After the big whale put out the dragon's fire, Jason brought the ship into shore and used his bow and arrow to kill the dragon when it tried to block his way.

Jeremy was waiting on shore and he showed Jason where he had hidden the shield. Jason picked up the magic shield and told Jeremy to go to the dungeon to release the prisoners.

Jason then prepared to battle King Cretin who had been awakened by the noise and was hunting frantically for the magic shield that wasn't where he had left it.

The king and Jason battled fiercely with swords. But although the king was much bigger, Jason was protected against harm by the magic shield. He forced King Cretin to retreat, pushed him down the castle stairs and forced him into the dungeon. Jeremy, who had let the prisoners loose, then quickly locked the dungeon gate and the evil king

was trapped.

The good people of the island, freed from the wicked king, cheered and thanked Jason and Jeremy.

The islanders loaded the ship with fresh food for the trip back and brought presents for Jason and Jeremy, their parents and the Queen. As the ship sailed out of the harbor, the two whales proudly swam alongside, like a guard of honor.

After two weeks at sea, the ship came within sight of the boys' home. The whales slapped their tails in a farewell salute and headed back out to sea.

Their parents were delighted to see the boys return safely with their mission accomplished. The whole family journeyed to the palace to watch as Jason presented the magic shield to the Queen.

The Queen hugged Jason and Jeremy. Then she told Jason to kneel. She tapped him on the shoulder with her sword and said:

"I dub thee Knight. Arise, Sir Jason."

Everyone cheered. With the magic shield back, their country was again safe and they could live in peace.

The End