

A scroll with a blue border and a light brown background. The text is centered and reads: ERIC G. MEEKS
MIRTH
the DRAGON
VS
THE
BOOK DEALER
KNIGHT

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MIRTH

the DRAGON

VS

THE

BOOK DEALER

KNIGHT

Mirth the Dragon
vs.
the Book Dealer Knight

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ERIC'S SWORD THRUST through the soft under scales of the dragon's sea green breast, slaying the beast and ending the two hundred year reign of Draco Geoffrey.

Killing the ancient dragon had been a long and arduous task when compared to the hours in a day, or the days in a week, or the weeks in the months, but short when placed alongside the decades and lifetimes and centuries of Geoffrey.

The end of his life had begun when a young princess, named Lydia, exerted her influence in the Kingdom of Diaz and sought ways to end the evil reign of the wyrm with his burnings of the forests and farmlands and killing of the townsfolk.

Hence, at the King's decree, two courses of action were set upon: One was for the wisest of and most mystical of men to create a sword capable of striking Geoffrey without shattering or melting, because Dragons are so very hot and hard.

The second was to find the man most able wield it and defeat the dragon.

Many applied. Though not as many as you might think given the amount of people living in the affected countryside. And there were many who boasted of how they would do it, but somehow none of the braggarts sought application from the castle.

But Eric the Meek, who was actually Eric the Bookseller - son of Darrell the Bookseller and thereby one himself - answered the call and gained approval.

It had not been an easy approval to get. For Eric was just an average man, lacking the muscles of most of the other applicants who did step forth, and although his age was thirty, he had boyish blonde features with a face once upon a time freckled, but now more strawberry tanned, and he would never be able to grow a beard. But, that was alright because Eric didn't really like to shave anyway.

He gained his approval by impressing the Princess with his research and she in turn had nudged her father, the King, into accepting his proposal.

For a long time, Eric had read books on swordplay; practicing when he could and when the call sounded to seek a man to slay the Dragon, he went to the library and studied all the more. And this time not just about swordplay.

First, he studied historical church records kept by early priests searching and mapping the caverns in the mountainside where the Dragon slept.

Then, he studied newspaper accounts of witnesses describing how the dragon moved and flew.

Finally, he studied boring old dusty administrative reports kept by wizards on the magical abilities and effects from the dragons past.

But, it wasn't until he went to talk to the lowly hunchback, who hadn't bathed possibly ever, and had the extremely dangerous and sad job of delivering the human sacrifices up to the chain post at the mouth of the Dragons lair that his plan became apparent and he filed his application.

Eric's plan was thus: He determined the attack would have to take place on a cold morning. For, over the years, the Dragon had shown himself to the disfigured Cave Master to move slower on a cold day and faster on hot ones. Just as any lizard or snake is affected by summer or winter.

And so, with the Princess's encouragement, Eric's plan was accepted and the mystical sword placed in his palm and men were put at his command.

The priest's maps of the caves showed a spot where the rock was weak and an avalanche could cause a cave-in; the wizards reports told how scales could be used to make shields and portable walls for archers to hide behind; and Eric found a strategic hiding spot to prey upon the back of the frostily grogged beast.

Barely two months since the call for Dragon slayers had been cast, Eric the Meek found himself, on the first cold morning to come, after much rock-slamming and exposure to massive amounts of hot breath, standing on the chest of a very battered, very old, slightly pin cushioned, very confused and very tired Dragon, chipping away at the tough outer scales, swinging his sword much like a woodsman swings an axe, and hurriedly thrusting his enchanted sword into the Dragons heart.

His studying and research paid off.

What he didn't study for, and had no way of knowing, was a not too young little Dragon was hiding in a crevasse in the ceiling of the cavern over the body of its father, who Eric had just killed.

The not too young little Dragon, who was likely in his early teens when compared to humans - for he was actually older than Eric, but Dragons live a very long time - was shivering in fright, in fear of losing its life.

For the moment though, Eric was safe.

* * *

Later that night, after Draco Geoffrey was killed and the veterinarians had confirmed it and the priests had holied it and the accountants had tallied its treasure, Eric crept back into the cavern and climbed again on top of the beast he'd slew. Although, this time he climbed to its head and pulled out his Kirpan dagger, which is very sharp, and carefully cut out the Dragons eyes.

For in his research, Eric had secretly learned much about the magical properties of Dragons and their far-seeing eyes.

Now, Eric meant to make a gift of one of them to the woman he had grown to love and propose marriage to the beautiful Princess Lydia.

Eric had seen Lydia around the castle much, she running it in King Ross's absence while he attended sporting events. Lydia's mother, the Queen, had died several years earlier, forcing Lydia to grow up fast and learn about things like balance sheets, taxes and legal interpretations.

Lydia was not old, being slightly younger than Eric, a little shorter than he so she always looked up into his eyes, with the appearance of one who was cut from the same blonde-haired red-tanned strawberry stone.

Eric found her exceedingly beautiful from the first moment he saw her and when one time she found a minute to play him in a game of Crossing-Words, he knew he was in love. Eric fancied himself a good Words player and lost by only three points.

Also, when she was very happy, Lydia would sing to him, and she was happy with him often. Eric liked this very much; so much in fact that he would sing back to her. He wasn't as good as she, but she mostly kept her laughs inside.

After Eric cut the eyes out and carried them home, he placed them next to the hearth of the fire at the bookstore so they might dry and glaze by the morning.

Yet, because he had never done this before - having only read about it - Eric placed one of the eyes too close to the flame and in the morning it was cracked: brown, and useless.

No matter, thought Eric, I still have another, which he bundled up and brought to his reward ceremony in the plaza.

The ceremony itself was grand with lots of color and pageantry. But the reward was not. Plus, it was a very hot day after such a cold yester and nobody was dressed right.

Eric did not get the title of Lord as he thought he would. Instead, he got the title of Knight, which he thought he had already gotten when he had first gotten the Dragon killing job but had somehow missed by not reading the fine print in the contract.

Nor did he get any rewarding sums of money or permanent work. But, he did get a nice proclamation which read, 'Henceforth this day shall be called Eric the Meek Day' and it was majestically scrawled on a fine scroll of parchment and put into a hand-made rosewood box and filed in the Hall of Scrolls and henceforth forgotten until Darrell the Bookseller would go the annual Hall of Scrolls Book Sale and purchase it for a quarter this winter.

Eric did however get the chance to see Lydia again that day, and asked her to meet him later in the garden.

And when later they met, for she was in truth smitten in love with Eric and his ability to study and research his victory with the Dragon, they kissed much and he presented the eye to her, which now resembled a large blue Amethyst after its cleaning and curing. Eric did propose and Lydia did say: Yes. They kissed some more and their kisses were like the songs they sang to each other.

After, Eric gave Lydia his gift and told her of the magical far-seeing properties of Dragons eyes and how by looking through it she could see anywhere in the world.

Lydia loved the gift.

Plans were laid for the wedding and it was decided to be soon. No need to delay the marriage of a Princess to a Dragon slayer.

Then, just before the wedding, something awful happened, King Ross died.

It was said that King Ross was anxious to return to his Queen, that he had missed her deeply since she passed away and that now he felt the time was right to pass.

Eric did his best to understand. He thought about how he would feel if both his parents were gone and gave Lydia much support, consolation, and love. But, Eric never really got to know King Ross and he always wished he had had more of a chance. Luckily, Eric's family was well liked by Lydia and quickly cemented a bond.

So Princess Lydia and Eric the Meek were wed, became King and Queen, and moved into the castle.

Only, it was more like Queen and King.

Lydia was the one who had run the Kingdom for several years. All the administrators; the Legal Advisor, the Treasurer, the Accountant, plus all the others, were used to taking orders from Lydia.

What's more, King Eric was untried in these matters (having recently only been Eric the Bookseller) and was therefore overlooked and treated as inconsequential.

The determining factor was that Lydia liked things this way.

Now a marriage is in itself a very difficult thing. Not too long after a wedding, all the guests go home, the presents are unwrapped, the Thank You's sent, and the two young people live in a state of blissful mush until the day comes when the real work of making things go right come into play.

* * *

If there had been books he could have read or research he could have studied, Eric would have done it. But, there really aren't any guidebooks on marriage designed for royalty. So, he did the best he could, making decisions along the way. He progressed through trial and error finding that his errors were each a trial all their own.

For instance, early on Eric wanted to hang his Dragon Slayer sword over the fireplace in the living room. But upon hearing it, Lydia said, "Oh, my father would never have wanted that. You'll just have to find somewhere else for it."

Unfortunately for Eric, nowhere else was appropriate for it either. So eventually, he just boxed it up and put it out in the garage and centered his thoughts on the more positive parts of the marriage.

* * *

In the meantime, Lydia played with the eye of the Dragon a lot. She liked to look through it and see all the wonderful scenic places in the world. She saw the Great Northern Valleys where the Snow Lilies grow all year long. She saw the forested jungle waterfalls of Shangri-La cast rainbows across a warm morning sky. And she saw the crumbling ancient Pyramids in the painted deserts of the Old World.

Then, while gazing expectantly at the eye for inspiration, she thought of something she really wished to see. She had never seen a living Dragon before – having been confined to the castle at Draco Geoffrey's reckoning - and so she lifted the blue Amethyst eye to her own, thought real hard, and looked.

She saw a not too young little Green Dragon, probably early teenage if compared to a human, hiding in a dark crevasse over a dark cavern - which Eric would have recognized, yet Lydia could not - crying. Still feeling sad for herself, the crying Dragon appealed to Lydia. It was cute in a scaly sort of way and it did look a little undernourished.

OH MY GOSH! It turned and looked back at her. For a second, Lydia froze and the Dragon continued to stare. Then she frantically pulled the eye away from herself, hid it in the closet and that night had great difficulty sleeping; because, as she pulled the eye away, she got a feeling; no, a word in her head. The word was Mirth.

* * *

Also in that moment, the not too young Dragon learned something. For Dragons are magical creatures and although Eric had learned much about them, like: they could fly, breathe fire, stay underwater for up to thirty minutes, were monogamous and had eyes that could see farther than possible; he didn't know they were telepathic.

In that moment, the not too young Dragon had seen the beautiful Queen Lydia, it saw the lover of his father's killer and all her wildest dreams (because young women have very big eyes and very open hearts). It also saw its way out of hiding in the dark crevasse and fearing for its life.

* * *

When later that same day, Eric found Lydia in her room, he asked about the eye hoping to enliven his life of doldrums and inconsequentiality only to have her say, "It's out being cleaned so the whole world does not appear as if in a fog."

Eric, for a brief instant wished the second eye hadn't cracked, but he couldn't do anything about it so he took the answer she gave as simple enough and went about the Kingdom to find something to do.

* * *

As I said earlier, Queen Lydia had a difficult time sleeping that night, but not entirely because sleeping was difficult.

She had a visitor.

At almost the moment she set her lamp down, after retiring to her room, there was a scratching at her window and outside it what sounded like a washing machine.

This was very strange, because her chambers were on the fifth floor. So, she cautiously went over and peered out the glass.

Flapping its wings very quietly so as not to disturb the rest of the castle, was a not too young Dragon, doing its best to smile without baring its fangs, holding a bouquet of Snow Lilies in its hand.

It said, "Hello Lydia. These are for you." At least she thought it had said it. Its lips hadn't moved nor its smile lost and it would be difficult to easily talk over the rumble-tumble noise of its wings through

the closed window. Though, she definitely heard it. She didn't feel afraid though. So she opened the window and took the bouquet.

"Thank you," she said. "But who are you?"

To which it replied. "I'm Mirth. There is much more to my name. But, seeing as it is indecipherable and unpronounceable to any being without three stomachs and two sets of windpipes, lest they eat their own tongues while mimicking a braying donkey and playing a flute, Mirth will have to do.

That night Mirth and Lydia talked on and on. Because they did have much in common, each having recently lost their father, they were quickly friends and began spending much time together when Lydia wasn't busy being Queen.

* * *

Meanwhile, Eric, not wanting to resign his life to a life of inconsequentiality, was finding new adventures to fill his days. He was after all, a proven Dragon Slayer, a Book dealer and a researcher.

So, he unboxed his enchanted sword, journeyed to the edge of the Kingdom nearest the sea and did battle against a giant sea turtle. This was not nearly as difficult as killing a dragon, but still a valiant victory in its own right.

Eric dragged the huge turtle shell home and tried to suggest to Lydia that it would, when polished and flattened, make a uniquely excellent floor for the Royal Ballroom.

But Lydia was still preserving the memories of her parents and she resented the fact that Eric had gone to the beach without her, so she replied, "I don't want that silly thing in here. It will make the whole palace smell of fish."

Eric was dejected, but did not complain and put the turtle shell in storage.

While turning to leave, he noticed all the exotic flowers in her room and asked, "Where did all these come from?"

Lydia, quite coolly and calmly responded, "A citizen of the kingdom sent their regards in light of past circumstances." And Lydia did not think this misleading because, after all, the dragon was a citizen of the kingdom and he was sending his regards in light of past circumstances.

Eric thought about this for a second and finding it reasonable asked no further questions and left.

But things were generally not smooth between Lydia and Eric and without even thinking about it Lydia began avoiding Eric, as did the castle staff.

* * *

Eric's next quest was closer to home but very hectic. He attempted to clean out a nest of giant snakes that had been illegally dumped into the kingdom's sewer system. In doing so, he discovered other problems too: Overcrowding in the merchants quarters and royal regulators who wouldn't listen or help.

After a long hunt which included getting extremely dirty in the sewer tunnels and afterwards getting very nasty with a few administrators - who would not hesitate to remind Eric he wasn't Queen - he killed all the snakes and somewhat resolved the problems of the merchants. Then, he went home to his wife to show her his trophies.

For reasons unbeknownst to Eric, Lydia was angry with him. She said, "Don't shake those old snake skins at me. I don't want shoes or purses from them." And, "Why are you so anti-establishment? Don't you know the headaches you've caused me?" Then she added, "You look a mess. Can't you wear something decent? You'd hardly think you were King! I don't know why we're married."

This time when Eric started to leave, he noticed a new mideastern necklace next to a photograph of Lydia atop a tropical jungle waterfall.

"Where did these come from?" Eric turned and yelled accusingly.

"While you were out spending time away from me, I made a new friend," she returned evenly.

"What's his name?" Eric growled.

"It's Mirth," she responded coyly.

"I work hard to do what's right and you do this?" raged Eric. "Well, if all my efforts can't make you happy, maybe I should go," and he stormed out of the castle with only a blanket and two pillows.

* * *

Now, I have to say here, that as mad as Eric was, he did try to understand Lydia's feelings.

He felt deeply for her losses and extra forced responsibilities. He also wished he could have been more help around the castle.

But, the forces at the time had seemed too great, too ingrained and he had done what he'd done because, not having a guidebook to research, he thought he'd done his best and now he felt it was being used against him very harshly.

Eric was very upset and very grumpy about his new mobile living conditions. He also missed Princess Lydia very much and was looking for a guy named Mirth.

* * *

What Eric didn't know was that Mirth, being a magical dragon, had seemed incredibly special to Lydia and that, coupled with the young woman's charms had mixed into a potent relationship.

Eric searched, but couldn't find a guy named Mirth anywhere in the Kingdom. No one had ever seen or heard of him. For twelve days Eric looked to no avail and this drove him into a state of deep sadness. He began to think Lydia had made the whole thing up just to be rid of him.

So, in his frustration, Eric went to Lydia, who was now at her summer ocean estate, and he not being invited or expected stumbled upon his wife in the garden talking (or thinking as it were) to her new

friend.

He was big. He was scaly, kind of cute, and he looked a lot like Geoffrey.

This made Eric cry. He went up to Lydia and interrupted Mirth to plead his case and ask for his wife's love back.

"You're the one who left me," she said. "I'm free to do whatever I want."

Eric pleaded again and again but each time it was no use.

Finally, Eric gave up and left again. This time he sought psychological help because he was very distraught.

Only before Eric left, Mirth took a long look at him and being telepathic couldn't help but sense Eric's sadness. It made Mirth feel very bad. It made him feel sorry for Eric because a dragon's heart is very large.

Mirth began to think, 'Other dragons have been friends with men' and 'This wouldn't be the first time.'

After a little while, when Mirth could excuse himself from Lydia without being rude, Mirth began to look for Eric. But, Eric wasn't easy to find.

Mirth looked in bars. Eric had been there briefly but wasn't much of a drinker and hadn't stayed long.

Mirth looked at the bookstore. But, without Lydia, books didn't mean as much to Eric. So, he wasn't there.

Finally, after much looking, Mirth found Eric three towns over from the capitol of the Kingdom of Diaz, seeking help upstairs in a little two story building, at a place called Village Counseling.

Mirth waited until Eric was done and then caught him outside the building and confronted him.

Mirth told Eric a plan that should make everyone happy.

Lydia was hesitant at first. She didn't know how if her love for Eric could revive. She had grown happy with Mirth to herself. Truth be known, it took Eric dressing up in a comical delivery outfit and singing at the appointed time and place to get her to go. After a while, Lydia consented to try.

She went down to Village Counseling with Eric - Mirth sitting between them - and although it wasn't easy, it did help because they were able to discuss their differences in ways they never could before.

Yet still, it wasn't quite enough for Lydia, who kept saying, "I don't know."

But Mirth knew what it was, he being a dragon and telepathic.

Lydia had gotten so wrapped up in being Queen, in controlling the Kingdom and enjoying Mirth

on her own, she had forgotten how to be just Princess Lydia. She had forgotten how much fun it was to sing songs in the garden with Eric and kiss.

And, Eric was so distraught, he couldn't think of how to help her remember.

So, Mirth took matters into his own hands and tail and the next time the two misguided lovers were discussing their difficulties, he gave each of them a push.

Lydia fell forward into Eric's arms, yet he missed her because he was being pushed himself. Their faces came very close together and instead of kissing, they bumped their heads into each other and fell backwards to the ground with a 'whump.' They weren't hearing songs. They weren't kissing. Instead, they were rubbing their bumps and bruises.

Back at Counseling, discussing their differences took several more sessions to iron out. They found they were not interested in living with each other anymore. Eric could keep the sword and the turtle shell and the snake skin, but had to give up the title of King (although he would remain a Knight) and Lydia would remain Queen and keep the castle.

They found they could share Mirth's friendship. He was good at showing up at either of their places at different times and never again played referee between the two.

And the Kingdom lived happily ever after.



Biography

Eric G. Meeks is a second generation rare book dealer and a former Barnes & Noble book seller. He's had several careers in his life, Chart House Cook, Car Salesman, Book Dealer, Marriott Executive, Real Estate Salesperson and Author. In 1976 he moved to Palm Springs, where he still lives with his wife Tracey and their six of their children. The oldest one has already married and moved out.

He is a proficient reader. His most recent top reads were:

On the Oceans of Eternity by S. M. Stirling

The Pirate Hunter: The True Story of Captain Kidd by Richard Zacks

The Stand by Stephen King

Other Works by Eric G. Meeks

Fiction

The Author Murders
The Witch of Tahquitz
Six Stories

Non-Fiction

Palm Springs True Crime
P.S. I Love Lucy: Lucille Ball's Palm Springs
The Best Guide Ever to Palm Springs Celebrity Homes
Lawrence Welk's First Television Champagne Lady: Roberta Linn
Tribal Casino Origins, The Octopus, and Indian Head Nichols
Not Now Lord, I've Got Too Much to Do
The History of Copyright Law
Reversing Discrimination

Short Stories

Apollo Thorn: Moons of Jupiter: Corporate Wars
Mirth the Dragon vs the Book Dealer Knight
Vampire Nightmare
Selling Space Share

Edited by Eric G. Meeks

1853 Cavalry Quest for a Southwest Railroad Route