

The prize after the grail.

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Well this is just a simple little story of what happens to the grail knights who don't build a chapel and hang out in the woods. The story of what they were really fighting for.

Reuna rode onwards, steering Excalibur's forced trot with his knees as his hands dealt with the long tree that he had recently cut down. He had already trimmed the branches off and was less than happy with how it had ended up. It was no lance but it would have to do. He glanced behind him to his many traveling items, the familiar clanking of his great sword and baggage that had stayed behind him for all these years, no longer brought comfort and in fact seemed almost alien now.

He glanced back at the whittled wood in his hands, it had no point, no sharp edge to skewer the Lady's foes and as such it was useless. He needed it to represent his new sense of duty since he had laid aside the greatsword and no longer needed to search for the lady, she was now forever with him, a fact that the almost subtle glowing beneath his gauntlets would never let him forget.

Reaching behind him towards the packs he sought something to tip his erstwhile lance with. Running his fingers across his trophies and items. Each one was a reminder of a lesson learned a choice made and a path resolved. There was the shattered remains of the orc shamans staff, a section of elvish chain mail, a shoulder pad from a chaos warrior, an arrow that had saved his life... perhaps that could work. The arrow had been shot by a bowman and it had lodged itself into the eye of a minotaur that was about to kill him. That peasant had saved his life with such an ignoble weapon and shown him that every person that was a servant of the lady aided her cause in their own way.

He wrapped a few strands of rope around the arrow attaching to the front. A poor substitute for an actual lance but he felt that the gesture was important. He was also certain that the peasant would be truly grateful and suitably honored that his arrow, however temporary, was tipping the lance of a grail knight. It was kind of ironic, before his quest he hadn't truly appreciated the common peasant and constantly either ignored them or took them for granted.

Looking up he noticed that Excalibur's slow trot had brought him to the edge of a small town. The thatched roofs, the humble clay walls, and the poorly maintained roads, all of these things told him that he was still in Bretonnia. He hadn't been sure, the mists of the Lady

had obscured his vision and left him in an unknown place though at least he knew that night was fast approaching from the sun. He rode through the streets, watching the peasants cower from his horse and trying to hide from his vision, afraid that they might incur his wrath. Yes, this was Bretonnia all right. He gestured to a young boy that had not managed to hide quickly enough. "You there, boy. Come here." Shocked the disheveled boy cautiously approached the fear showing quite clearly in his eyes.

Reuna dismounted.

Removing his immense traveling cloak from the pack and donned it. In that moment he hide all signs of his armor and his knighthood beneath the long blanket of his cloak. Pleased that it was still so easy to hide and to eventually go around unnoticed, he reached into his pouch and produced one of his copper coins. Holding it in front of the boys eyes he could see both desire for the money and a hint of rebellious streak in case he wanted him to do something against his fellow peons. A good lad. "This is yours if you guide me to the nearest inn and make sure it is one that I can carefully put my friend here," He patted the chestnut flank of the massive horse who snorted in reply "Carefully put him in the stables. Also make sure this does not fall off." As he spoke he removed a blanket from the pack and covered all but the head of his stead. Again giving him a sort of camouflage to the common eye. He was slightly worried that his guide might have second thoughts about taking him due to this minor deception but the boy had already started walking down the road, gesturing for him to follow.

After a short ways he could make out the distant castle of the Lord of these lands. He could have simply ridden there and asked for a room, after all he WAS a grail knight, he thought to himself with a smile. No knight would refuse a grail knight for the night. Still he had his own reasons for not seeing what the Lord was up too. To check the purity of the land you should start from the bottom up. They arrived with no incident at the inn and after making sure Excalibur was happily crunching on some carrots and the last sugar cube, he gave the boy his copper coin and proceeded to enter the inn. He got a few suspicious looks from others due to the concealing nature of his attire, but after sitting at the bar and ordering some simple food they seemed to calm down a bit.

After the sun finally set and more farmers entered to have a drink at the end of the day he could hear the talk grow louder wondering who he was. The side effects of a few good drinks. People got bolder of course. This was getting him nowhere. He wanted to hear what was going on in the town and they wouldn't begin to even talk normally until he was no longer the topic of conversation. He kept a mental tally of the number of people in his head and after a small bit of calculation gestured the tavern keeper over. When he arrived instead of addressing him he turned towards the patrons and declared in a loud voice: "Are you all true and good servants of Bretonnia?" This got a few chuckles from the, almost, drunk peasants though they did all agree that they were servants of the Lord and Land. "Well in celebration of me finally being home amongst my own people again the next round is on me!" Amongst the huzzahs and hurrahs he placed several coins on the bar in front of the barkeep. He knew that what he had placed there was probably more than the tavern would see in a year of good business. The barkeep was skeptical but they were valid coins and were certainly in the range of what a trader might have.

After the cheering died down a bit and the people got drunker he finally started to pick up on the juicy gossip. The biggest news around town is that tomorrow the reading of the vows would be held in the town square. For the most part they all thought it was a waste of time. The biggest tidbit of information for him was that the Lord of the lands had left for the quest several years back and that his stand in was doing a lousy job and draining the peasants dry. There was even rumors of him trying to start a war against a nearby lord. The cheerful conversation was cut short by the arrival of two people wearing chainmail and carrying clubs. Walking straight over to the bar they leaned over it in a threatening manner "Lissen youse. Its Tax time! We heard youse got big money today."

Interesting thought Reuna.

It got more interesting as the proprietor continued to argue that he had already paid taxes earlier that week. It became increasingly clear to him that these thugs were the "official" tax collectors but they simply pocketed most of the taxes they collected. He decided to intervene, he would investigate this further later. Standing slowly he addressed the club wielding tax collectors: "Enough. Leave this place." Laughing they turned towards him: "Ho! Whose you think youse are? I'll learn youse to mess with the Lord servants." Brandishing the club over his head he approached the disguised grail knight. He never had a chance to test his skills. In a single movement Reuna had drawn his long sword and sliced the club in twain.

A gasp had gone up from the crowd at the sight of his sword, after all it was a nobles weapon or maybe it was the now visible fey glow from under his armor. Mentally cursing himself for letting his disguise slip, he decided to go all out and simply intimidate the poor fools. "Only a fool, a coward or a dead man crosses weapons with a grail knight of Bretonnia. Which are you." It wasn't a question. It was addressed to the rapidly retreating backside of the man who had decided, coward was the right response. Turning to the accomplice he lifted him off the ground one handed by the collar of his shirt. Tapping the blade gently on the shivering mans shoulder he locked eyes. The fear in the peasant was easy to see to the glowing eyes of the grail knight. He fully intended to have some answers about how deep this tax corruption ran. He would purge this corruption from this kingdom.

After a short interrogation he threw the man out into the streets and sighed. Now he had the more difficult proposition of getting the adoring peasants away from him. Most had dropped to a knee and hadn't raised their eyes off of the floor. Readjusting his cloak to make the disguise again he commented "Stand up all of you. Do not speak of what I have done until after tomorrow. Do you understand?" He watched the slowly rising peasants nod their heads in understanding. It didn't take long before he called it a night and retired to his room. Unable to sleep he spent the time fixing and shining things up.

The next day the town center was crowded by Lords decree as they all listened to the re-reading of the vows. Knights on one side while peasants were on the other. It started with the introduction, of the ruling class as a woman stepped onto a dais with the announcer. "Since the Lord Reuna is on the quest the Lady Lauren is overseeing the reading." Though she was simply a figurehead she was required to attend as the yeoman read them all.

The peasants vow was first.
Reminding all of them serve their lord. The last words echoed around the
center "Rejoice! For a knight of
Bretonnia provides your
shield." There was a little bit of
applause.

The knights vow was read to the assembled knights. As the
last words echoed "Honour is all. Chivalry
is all." As soon as it was spoken another voice that wasn't
the yeoman started to echo around the square.

"That which is
sacrosanct I shall preserve.

That which is sublime I will protect.

That which threatens I will destroy.

For my holy wrath will know no bounds!"

A knight rode from an alleyway. His horse towered above the crowd. The sword on his heraldry shone, the full
glow of the grail was visible under his armor.
The silent crowd parted to make way for the mighty horse. He easily reached the yeoman and the Damsel
on the dais. He hopped off of the horse and
onto the dias. Announcing to the assembled
kingdom of his subjects. "I am the Lord
Reuna de Thanauf. Grail Knight of
Bretonnia! I have returned!"

Amongst the surprised silence Reuna moved to
greet the Lady Lauren, his wife. He
wasn't surprised to see shock and tears flowing down her cheeks once she
recognized him. His own eyes were watery
as well. Oblivious to the crowd, he
embraced her, the first time after many long years. She whispered in his ear "I knew you
would come back. I just knew. But... do you serve another Lady
now?" The touch of concern in her
voice that she may have lost him to the diety of Bretonnia caught him off guard
but the grail knight smiled as he whispered back "The Lady of the Lake may
have my service, but another lady forever has my heart. Thankfully it is the same one that is in my
arms right now."

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