

ShadowGrimm Tales

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Do Unto Others

(Loosely based on Charles Perrault's Toads & Diamonds)

A broken home is rarely anything other than a trial for all those who have to live within its walls. Apart from the trauma caused by the breaking up of a previously coherent family unit, subsequent actions and hardships often make life extremely difficult and taxing for each and every one of the unhappy participants in these events. The time when and the place where lives are squeezed and wrung out under such circumstances is, in the great scheme of things, immaterial, but for one such family, living in a small village in one of England's elm-folded western valleys, the struggle for a good life was particularly hard.

Mrs. Milligan and her two daughters, Estelle and Hazel, lived in a small redbrick cottage that stood in a forlorn and lonely spot at the far end of a shabby and dusty village high street. Where there had once been rows of vegetables growing in the front garden and a pretty orchard of neatly pruned and espaliered fruit trees in the back garden, there was now nothing more than a choking of weeds and ivy smothered, skeleton branches. Ever since the departure of her husband some years previously, the family had scraped a living by taking in washing and ironing, and doing cleaning jobs for some of the village's more prosperous families. The two girls could remember little other than traipsing around after their mother, visiting house after well-appointed house, in a desperate quest to earn money amid fineries and fripperies that they could never hope to afford for themselves.

Of the two daughters, Estelle was the spitting image of her mother, although blessed, thankfully, with the softness of youth, while Hazel, two years the younger, was the very picture of her

father. The similarities between mother and eldest daughter did not end in looks. They were both of a similar personality and disposition, being proud and disagreeable to an extreme, convinced as they were that they were the victims of a cruel and heartless man. Because of this undoubted sin perpetrated against them by the ogre, they both believed the world owed them big time for all of their suffering and undoubted grace under poverty's iron heel. It was no surprise to anyone in the village that Mrs. Milligan had remained single for so many years.

Hazel, on the other hand, was one the sweetest, kindest and most courteous little girls in the whole county. She had a radiant smile that lit her face up with a pure and natural beauty, a beauty that brightened the gloom well beyond the physical limits of light. No matter what the hardship or the provocation, she always tried to see the best in any situation and so, despite the tragic circumstances of her family's life in the closeted world of Upper Risington, she remained a shining beacon of happiness when all around was shadowed in darkness and despondency.

Life in the Milligan household was a bleak affair at the best of times and Mrs. Milligan suffered unaccountably from her nerves due to the continual reminder of her bastard husband that blazed out from her youngest daughter's face every minute of the day. She would have been quite content for the girl to spend her days out of sight and her nights locked in her bedroom had it not been for the fact that Hazel never complained about chapped hands or ironing elbow. Hazel was quite unlike Estelle, who preferred to spend her time, when not pretending to dust someone's knick-knacks, watching day time television soap operas and reality shows about other people's lives. Mother and eldest daughter doted on each other and regularly shared the little luxuries that came their way when there was a purse full of cash left over from the benefits payments and the hourly wages earned from charring.

Poor Hazel, meanwhile, worked her fingers to the bone in a never-ending cycle of drudgery and domestic slavery, washing other people's clothes and ironing them, cleaning the house, cooking meals and fetching thick, black coal from the back yard bunker. She was never allowed, now that she was blossoming into a beautiful young woman, to leave the house and accompany her

mother and sister on their daily errands and cleaning jobs. Her only respite from the drab surroundings of the little redbrick cottage was a weekly trip to visit an aged, one time neighbour, a certain Miss Huddlestone, who had been kind enough to baby sit for the girls in happier times before the family had split asunder.

Miss Huddlestone now lived in a sheltered retirement bungalow in the next village, Lower Risington, and every Wednesday afternoon Hazel popped into the village shop, and, out of the bus fare given to her by her begrudging mother, she bought a large Bakewell tart and a bag of lemon sherbets, and walked, come rain or shine, the two miles to her friend's neat little home.

One Wednesday afternoon, with the sound of her sister's harsh voice still grating in her ears, Hazel put the usual cakes and sweets into a plastic bag and walked all the way to Lower Risington bathed in bright spring sunlight. She was particularly fond of spring, heralding as it did the lengthening of days and the chance to hang the washing outside to dry in good, clean, fresh air. On this particular Wednesday the world was particularly bright and full of goodness, with the hedgerows sparkling in their blossom coats and the birds busy with their nest building songs. Hazel was in a fine mood when she knocked on her friend's door and together they enjoyed quite the happiest afternoon tea they had ever had together.

As Miss Huddlestone drained the last dregs of her Earl Gray and wiped Bakewell tart crumbs from the lightly sprouting beard that covered her withered old chin, she turned to young Hazel, took her hand and whispered, "You are such a lovely girl, my dear, so pretty and kind, and you've never forgotten to come and see me. I want to give you a gift".

Hazel smiled sweetly and protested that visiting her friend was enough of a gift and that she wouldn't think of accepting anything else, but the old woman paid no attention to her whatsoever.

"I think you'll like the gift", continued the old girl, smiling broadly. "You see, I'm not just any dear old bat, dear, I'm a dear old witch, dear!"

Hazel tried very hard not to laugh because she didn't want to appear rude, but she couldn't help smirking slightly behind her hand.

“I know, I know”, said the old woman, “it’s all very hard to fathom, especially when you’re so young and inexperienced. Anyway, I’ve decided to reward you for all of your kindness and for taking the time and trouble to come all this way every week. From now on, whenever you smile a real smile, a smile that breaks like sunrise on a clear blue summer morning, you’ll find a little pearl or diamond in your pocket!”

Hazel laughed out loud and beamed at the old woman. “Oh go on, Mary, you’re so funny”, and as she grinned at the old woman with every ounce of her happy, joking little soul, she put her hand into her jeans pocket.

No one in this fair land’s long history could ever have been as surprised or delighted as little Hazel. Between her fingers she could feel something small and hard and round, and she was sure that there had been nothing in her pocket just a moment ago. She pulled out her tightly bunched fist and opened her fingers out slowly and nervously. Right there in the palm of her hand was a perfectly round, moonshine pearl of such beauty and radiance that the girl was unable to move or to speak for a full five minutes. As the shock and surprise subsided, Hazel realised that she did believe in witches and fairies and she let out a yelp of joy, hugging Miss Huddlestone so tightly that the old dear thought she would burst her seams.

By the time that Hazel had greeted everyone she met on her way home that evening with a massive smile and wave, by the time that she had expressed her joy to the world a hundred and one times, her pockets were positively bulging with gem stones and pearls. She arrived home a little later than usual to find her mother and her sister waiting impatiently for their tea. As soon as the front door shut they both began to scold her for being so late and so inattentive to their well-being.

“I’m sorry for being late, Mum”, replied Hazel, smiling in spite of the hurtful things that were being said. She walked over to the coffee table in the middle of the living room and filled the spaces in between empty cola cans and the over flowing ashtray with a heap of brightly shining diamonds and pearls. “But I can explain...”

“What the bloody hell have you been doing?” screamed her mother as Estelle immediately knelt down by the coffee table and

started to pick out all of the biggest diamonds from the pile. “Where the chuffin’ hell have they come from?”

Hazel told her mother and her sister the whole story about their mutual friend, about her being a witch and about her wonderful gift. By the end of the story the entire family was beaming. At last their suffering was over and their fortunes assured. Mrs. Milligan cuddled her youngest daughter to her ample bosom for the first time in years and called her things like ‘darling’ and ‘poppet’ and ‘precious’. Every time that Hazel smiled at her mother or her sister she reached into her jeans pockets and added another sparkling gem to the pile on the coffee table.

By nine o’clock that evening the family had enough booty in their living room to retire from the domestic cleaning and washing business forever more, and Hazel, tired out from smiling so much with all of the love in the house, went to bed to dream happy dreams of a future where neither the bogeyman nor the tallyman would ever come to get her again.

Once Hazel was safely tucked up in the land of dreams, Mrs. Milligan, having allowed her eldest daughter to keep a few of the smaller diamonds, then swept the pile of jewels into a plastic food container. Sharing a bottle of fizzy wine with Estelle, she set about making her own plans for a future far removed from the heartache and stress of her current life.

“Hazel’s luck should be yours by right, my girl”, she said to Estelle. “From now on we’ll keep her here on Wednesdays while you visit that daft old bugger. With a little bit of work you should be able to get her to do the same trick for you. She was half raving when we moved in here and she’s obviously gone the whole hog now. Treat her nice for a few weeks and we’ll be millionaires by Christmas”.

“I’m not visiting the daft crow, ma”, replied Estelle with a whine. “She’s old and she smells and everything.”

Mrs. Milligan looked at daughter number one with a hard ratty stare.

“Do I have to?” whimpered the girl.

“You’ll do as you’re bloody well told, miss”, hissed her mother, and with that, and despite all of the sullen whinnying and misery

that Estelle brought to bear, schemes and plans were laid for the following week.

Come the Wednesday afternoon, Mrs. Milligan locked Hazel in the under stairs cupboard and frog marched her eldest daughter to the village shop, where she bought the finest assortment of soft centres that the proprietor had to offer. Then she ordered a taxi to take Estelle to Lower Risington. In no time at all Estelle found herself on Miss Huddlestone's doorstep, box of chocolates in hand, forcing the most wheedling of smiles across her barely cleaned teeth. The taxi parked up at the kerb side, Estelle having told the driver that she'd be no more than ten minutes.

Miss Huddlestone opened the door to her beloved Hazel but found there instead the gum chewing, pony-tailed whine that marked Estelle's presence in the world. She let out a long sigh, but nonetheless she ushered the girl into her home and brought the tray full of tea things through to the front room.

Estelle sloped into one of the armchairs, declining a drink or a biscuit. She chucked the box of chocolates at the old lady and pouted.

"Are you sure you won't have a cup of tea, dear?" asked Miss Huddlestone

"No", grunted the girl.

"Oh well" replied the old woman. She took a sip of Earl Gray and looked at her visitor over the rim of her teacup.

"Would you mind awfully fetching my glasses from the kitchen? I must have left them on the work top and I can barely see anything without them"

"What am I", complained the girl, "you're bleedin' slave or something? I'm not a skivvy, you know!"

Estelle gave the old bat one of her looks, a look that told you to sod off because you were boring and didn't understand anything important. Miss Huddlestone, who was no stranger to angry young women, having spent many years in secondary education before taking up her current line of work as a white witch, returned the look, eyeball to eyeball, pensioner to youth, and won the contest hands down.

"I'll tell you what you are, dear", she said calmly and quietly, as she put her cup down on the tray. "You're a rude and spoilt little

hussy, definitely your mother's daughter. You've all the breeding of the pigsty, but despite your ill manners and your attitude I will give you a gift, just like I gave lovely Hazel a gift. Every time you give someone one of those vacuous and disobliging looks you will find a little present in your pocket."

"Vac...what?" muttered Estelle

"Just leave now, dear, before I get really pissed off"

Estelle had her pride. No one had a right to talk to her like that. She gave the old hag her most vicious, drop-dead stare and stormed out of the little house. She slammed the cottage door shut and jumped into the waiting taxi, barking orders to the driver to get her back to Upper Rivington pronto.

That might have been the end of Estelle's ordeal, except that Miss Huddleston's power to grant gifts was unparalleled anywhere in England's green valleys. The car had only gone a few hundred metres down the road when the driver slammed on the brakes and turned to look at the girl on the back seat.

"What the bloody hell is that smell?" he hissed nasally, holding his nose tightly shut between his thumb and forefinger. Estelle pouted, stuck her hands in her pockets and was about to deliver her best ignoring look when she made a dreadful discovery. Her right hand, rather than being thrust into a soft, warm pocket full of dark, tight nothingness, had actually made contact with something altogether more disgusting. She felt something soft and warm all right, but whatever it was it was certainly of some substance.

"Out", yelled the taxi driver, in a horrified, gagging voice, and out the girl got. She was left stranded in the middle of a country lane on a bright and sunny summer afternoon with nothing to show for her effort but a pocket full of dog mess and a smell that seemed to follow her whichever way the wind blew.

When Estelle eventually reached her home, bedraggled and exhausted after her long walk under a baking sun, she hung around in the front garden, not daring to enter the house. As soon as her mother caught sight of her lurking there in the front garden she rushed out to find out how the afternoon had gone.

"Well?" she demanded urgently, before taking a step back and asking, "Have you trodden in something?"

Estelle stood there dumbly, mouthing words but unable to make any sounds, and so, after a few mute moments during which she could feel her mother's anger rising, she pulled her right hand out of her jeans pocket and let little gobbets of half baked ordure drip from her fingers. At the sight of the awful gift given to her by Miss Huddleston both mother and daughter wailed like banshees, cursing their ill luck and the name of poor Hazel to hell and back.

"It's all her fault", screamed Mrs. Milligan. "I'll beat her black and blue, I'll tan her, I'll strip that smile of hers from her bones!"

Needless to say, poor little Hazel, who had been locked away in the cupboard for the whole of the hot and sweaty afternoon, had finally come to the end of her own tether. When her mother unlocked and opened the door, Hazel burst through the opening like a small hand grenade and ran out of the house, down the road and far, far away, taking her wonderful gift with her. No one in Upper Risington ever heard from her again, although there were rumours that she ended up in London, where, it was said, she married a prince or a famous footballer and lived happily ever after.

As for Estelle, try as she might she couldn't break the habit of her early years and she never learned to smile. Eventually, after suffering many years of ridicule and evil odours, she learned to never wear any clothes that had pockets attached, but by then the following wind that had first assailed her one Wednesday afternoon in her teens had saturated her skin. Wherever she went people called her names until, one summer some years later, she took herself off to a remote corner of the Lake District, lay down in a corner of a field and there, as far as anyone knows, she still remains.

Mrs. Milligan, meanwhile, minding the Tupperware tub full of diamonds and pearls taken from Hazel when she had come home from visiting Miss Huddleston's bungalow, found that a life backed up by a little capital was much more bearable and now lived in genteel respectability in a seaside villa on the south coast with a retired bank manager, which goes to show that happy endings, even with Estelle's tragic and lonely life taken into account, usually have little to do with what some people deserve.

A Question of Spin

(Loosely based on Grimm's Rumpelstiltskin)

Once upon a time there was a poor political lobbyist, which is in itself an uncommon thing. He spent many years at his trade but even after a lifetime of work the only true treasure that he possessed was his lovely raven-haired daughter, Emily.

Towards the twilight of the man's career a combination of luck and subject matter expertise finally gave him access to the country's top political hombra and in order to appear as a person of more significance than he really was he told the great politician that his daughter could spin the worst gobbledygook into solid gold prose.

"That's a talent worth having on the team", said the politician to the lobbyist. "If she's really as good at this presentational stuff as you say she is bring her to my office tomorrow morning and I'll put her to the test".

The next morning the lobbyist and his daughter attended upon the head of state. After some polite preliminaries the young woman was taken into a room full of the most incomprehensible government policy papers, briefing documents and committee meeting minutes.

She was made to sit at a computer and one of the politician's more officious aides said, "Now, you're not to leave here until you've finished the lot. We want all of this bullshit turned into easily readable prose that gets our message across but also hides the skeletons in the closet. If you fail your father will never work in Westminster again". Then he closed the door and left her all on her own to finish the job.

So the poor lobbyist's beautiful daughter sat there and wondered exactly what she was meant to do. All she ever did at her father's office was make coffee and answer the phones. She wasn't even sure how to switch the computer on, let alone how to use a word processor. She had no idea how she was going to turn all of this officialese into plain and clear text.

No matter how hard she thought about it, she simply couldn't work out what to do and became terribly disconsolate and miserable. She tried to read one of the documents, but apart from

recognising some of the more obvious words and phrases, she was completely stumped by all of the jargon and, realising that both she and her father would soon be the butt of jokes throughout the Westminster village, she started to cry like a baby.

Suddenly the door burst open and into the room stepped a small, bald man in a brown three-piece suit. He looked the girl up and down a couple of times and said, "Good morning, miss, why are you crying so bitterly?"

"Oh", answered Emily, "I have to rewrite all these official government papers so the common folk can read them but not really understand them. I haven't got a clue how to do it".

"It's just a question of spin", said the wee bald man with a chuckle. "Now, what will you give me if I translate all this stuff for you?"

"I'll give you my necklace", replied the girl. "It's real silver and diamonique".

The little man took the necklace immediately, sat himself down at the computer and looked at the first document. His fingers moved across the keyboard in a dazzling blur and in no time at all the printer was churning out a brilliantly concise, but simply worded version of events that answered all of the Prime Minister's needs. The little man continued working on the documents for the entire day until, with just five minutes left before the government official returned, he finished the last of them.

At five o'clock, and not a minute before or after, the official returned to the room in the company of the great politician. When they saw the pile of translated documents they were amazed. A few more minutes passed, during which the United Kingdom's glorious leader read some of the newly minted papers. He was so delighted with the results that he gave Emily a small peck on the cheek and one of his renowned, election winning smiles. Never one to look a gift horse in the mouth, he recognised a rather beautiful and useful filly when he saw one, and his thoughts turned to the Ministry of Defence, which was well known for the sheer head splitting boredom it induced in anyone stupid enough to read its papers. The lobbyist's daughter was told to report to the Chief Secretary at the Ministry of Defence the next morning.

At nine o'clock Emily was shown into an even bigger room than the one she had been in the day before. Around her were stacked nearly one hundred manuals, status reports, intelligence briefings and detailed planning exercises designed to cater for any military emergency. Once again the official in charge told her that she had just one working day to précis all of this stuff and turn it into something intelligible to the leader of the nation's government.

The young woman leafed through a manual describing the operation of the army's new standard assault rifle and began to sob. "What the hell is a slide bolt release widget?" she muttered, as her tears fell onto the brightly buffed parquet flooring.

There was a brief, peremptory knock on the door and with a flourish the small, bald man entered the room. This morning he was wearing a grey two-piece suit, betrayed in its modernity by the fact that the trousers were bell-bottomed flairs. The little man looked like he was drowning in the thing, the suit being at least two sizes too tall for him.

"So, young lady, what'll you give me if I spin this load of old tripe into something more coherent?"

"You can have my ring", replied the young woman. "It's real gold and has faux elvish writing on the inside".

The little man grinned at her, sat down at the computer and once again worked his magic, turning every one of the unintelligible documents into something resembling a primary school reading book.

"It's best to keep it simple if the Old Man is involved", he said as the final piece of paper emerged from the bowels of the printer.

Having collated and filed the last of the documents, the wee bald man slipped out of the door just in time to avoid the returning government official.

The great politician was so pleased with the results of the young woman's labour that he almost skipped around his office. In fact he was so delighted by it all that he demanded that she return the very next morning to work her way through an ocean of Treasury figures and policy documents. After all, he'd been in office for three years and he still didn't have a clue about the nature of the fiscal policy that his government was pursuing.

As requested, Emily presented herself at the gates of Her Majesty's Treasury the next morning. She was quickly ushered into the biggest office yet, where, emerging from the shadows, the Prime Minister took her hand and whispered, "Pull this one off, my love, and not only will your dear old Dad become my personal press secretary, but I'll bloody well marry you!"

Emily waited for the sound of footsteps on cold marble to recede. This time she didn't bother to open the documents or to read their contents, but instead she pulled half an onion out of her pocket and made herself cry, adding some loud gulps and sniffs just for good measure. As usual there was a rap on the door and in came the little man.

He'd obviously had difficulty with yesterday's oversize suit, so he'd made sure his clothes fitted him perfectly this morning. However, the combination of a loud plaid jacket, a striped shirt, tartan golfing trousers and white loafers somehow missed the sartorial target he'd been aiming for. He took his sunglasses off before he spoke.

"You now the drill, love"

"But I haven't got anything left to give you", said Emily, trying to look as sad and forlorn as she could. "My dad's just a poor lobbyist and you've already got all my dear departed Mum's jewelery".

"Then you'll have to promise me that when you're married to old jug ears you'll pass on a few snippets of information. You know the sort of thing; tips on cabinet reshuffles, early sight of government policy, juicy titbits about personality squabbles and all that jazz".

Emily decided that discretion was required in such matters, and once she was the first lady of the country then who knew what might happen. She promised the little man what he wanted and sat back to work on her nails while he converted every last scrap of paper in the room into a layman's guide to the country's tax and spend financial regime.

Within a year Emily and the great politician were married. Her father's new role as the Prime Minister's personal press secretary largely consisted of lunches with some of his old lobby friends and off the record briefings with favoured newspaper hacks, so all in all everyone was very happy. Emily didn't give another thought to the

small, bald man until one day he suddenly appeared in her boudoir at Number Ten, Downing Street.

"Got anything for me, then?" he asked.

"And what if I say no", Emily replied brusquely.

"Then I tell him it was your Dad who inadvertently leaked the stuff about the pensions crisis to the press. Might mean an end to those lunches..."

The first lady suddenly realised how dangerous this little man might be and became extremely worried about where this might all lead. She promised him riches, a knighthood and a lucrative position as Chief Executive of a non-governmental organisation, but he was having none of it.

"No, I want gossip. Nice, fat, juicy gossip. That's what you promised me and that's what I'm going to have".

Emily began to cry and sob and wail so much that the little man decided to give her three days to come up with the goods just so that she would shut up. The last thing he needed was the secret service asking awkward questions about how he'd found his way into her bedroom, and, if he was being entirely honest with himself, he found Emily quite enchanting to be around. He felt sorry for her. Somewhere, buried deep beneath the outer layers of his hard-bitten, bottle-nosed hide, he still had a heart.

"Tell, you what", he said, "if you can guess what my job is in the next three days, I'll leave you alone forever more".

Emily spent the whole of the next night compiling a list of every possible job title that might exist in the world of newspapers, television and radio. When the little man arrived the next morning she tried everything she could think of but it was all to no avail. He was not an editor, nor was he a hack, nor was he a plague of boils on the bottom of mankind.

The next night the first lady studied the shadow cabinet posts of all of the opposition parties in the country's parliament. When the little man came to her again she called him many things, including leader of the opposition, shadow trade secretary and old weasel features, but not one of these job titles were correct.

In desperation the first lady finally consulted one of her husband's aides and asked him to go onto the Internet and find out

the names and job titles of every single spy in the world. It was a long job and the aide didn't return until early the next morning.

"I'm sorry, ma'am", he said, "but I haven't been able to find out the names or job titles of any spies. Apparently they're all secret".

"Bugger", said Emily, pulling a large foolscap folder from under her mattress. She leafed wistfully through a couple of pages listing all of the extra marital affairs that her husband's cabinet ministers had been involved in since taking office. She supposed this would have to do.

"I did see one strange thing though, ma'am", continued the aide. "As I was walking through the civil service quadrangle this morning I saw a strangely dressed little man doing an odd sort of jig and singing a weird song. He was hopping up and down like a madman and crying:

*I've got juicy gossip,
My diary's going to be full,
No more Mister Nice Guy
Now I've got all the bull!*

"When he started singing I recognised him immediately.", continued the functionary. "Bullington Minor. We went to prep school together. Strange behaviour, I thought, for a man on the Arts Council. Then again, perhaps not. Those artistic coves are all a bit doolally."

Emily could taste the pure, unadulterated delights of victory.

"So what exactly does he do? For a job, I mean", She asked.

"Oh, erm, he's the council secretary, I think. Pushes paper around mostly, writes communiqués, that sort of thing."

Emily was over the moon when she heard that her tormentor was one her husband's more obscure minions, at least that was how she thought of all and any public servants. With the help of her husband's aide she checked the government lists and sure enough in the Arts and Heritage Year Book there was a picture of the horrid and slimy toad.

The little man came to call later that morning and asked the first lady, "Well, what's my job, then?"

Emily thought for a moment or two and replied, "Are you a janitor?"

"No".

"Are you a nuclear physicist?"

"Ha, no! One more guess..."

"Well, then, you must be the Secretary to the Arts Council".

"You bastard", screamed the red faced little man. "Someone's sneaked on me, haven't they? How can I publish my diaries now?"

In his rage he stamped and stomped on the floor with so much force and spite that his left foot sank right through it and he fell through the rafters all the way up to his waist. Then, in an absolute fury of passion and anger, he seized his right foot with both of his hands and tore himself in two.

Emily called down for maid service and quietly slid her dossier on ministers caught in flagrante delicto back underneath her mattress. As she did so she made a mental note to slip out to the shops later that afternoon so that she could buy a nice new foolscap diary.

Only The Names Change

(Loosely based on Andersen's The Evil Prince)

History books are full of names and dates. They are full of stories about great lords and ladies and about the things that men do in the world, and some of these stories may even be true to a degree. Much the same can be said for little stories such as this one, except little stories like this are usually much more accurate than any history book. This is a tale with roots that run deep into the folds and the valleys of the country, a story from a time before enlightenment brought its own challenges to the people of this dark land.

The world is a very big place, with room enough for everyone and room besides for all of their differences. Unfortunately some people prefer a world that bends to one particular will rather than a world that reflects the views of the many. There was once just such a person. He was, at the outset, an ordinary man, whose only

thought was to make a world more comfortable for him and his own kind. We shall call him a prince, for every story should have a prince.

Our prince began life in a humble way, growing into and learning some of the methods of the world common to his people. He sought their approval, promising them much and delivering on some of his promises. In short, he was no better, but no worse, than any other prince. He strived for the public good, especially when it coincided with his own interests, and took thanks in as many ways as such thanks became available to him. He tried to face the dangers and the troubles of his people as well as he might, until, faced one day by a strange and threatening combination of events from the far side of the then known world, he decided that this confluence of opportunity and challenge was his moment of destiny.

Our prince was skilled in many ways, not least in his powers of persuasion. Faced by something that he did not really understand, he listened to advice and sought out experts, and he found himself having to make a choice. Should he open his heart to the world or should he seek protection from it? He made his choice.

He convinced his people, his courtiers and his councils that the only way to secure peace was by striking fear into the hearts of his enemies. One by one he sent his armies out to the far corners of the wide, wide world bearing fire and sharp edged blades. His soldiers trampled down the grains in the fields and set mills and workshops and cities ablaze with red fire. He looked on as the fruits of one civilisation after another charred and burned on the branch. Everywhere mothers hid with their babes behind smoke drenched walls, but the soldiers marched on, rooting these potential assassins out for their pleasure.

Wherever his soldiers ranged, the prince's name became fear and dread, and his power grew and grew. He sucked wealth and might from every conquered land and city. His treasuries overflowed and his warehouses filled with every luxury and every loaf. At no time and in no other place had anyone amassed so many of the riches of the world.

Mindful of his place in the history books, our prince used his vast wealth to build huge palaces, monuments and castles. He

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