

The Flawed King

Synopsis: A disfigured peasant boy leaves the city to escape both his past and the legend of a future he knows he cannot fulfil, until one day a lost princess crosses his path in the jungle and changes everything.

Once upon a time, in the city of Aldegaard, a legend foretold the birth of a one-eyed child who would grow into a mighty warrior, capable of taming the beasts of the jungle surrounding the high city walls. A great warrior who would one day become king.

Tam was well aware of the legend, as were his poor parents. For each day Tam would make the journey to collect water from the citadel square only to see his disfigured reflection in the well water staring back at him. But Tam was not the prophesised child of legend. Tam was nothing more than a mutilated peasant boy. He couldn't defeat the other boys who would tease him for his deformity, let alone control the beasts of the jungle beyond the city.

Everyday Tam saw the look of desperation in his parents' eyes. Desperation born from hope. Hope that they if they continued to give up what little they had to nourish and protect him, he in turn might grow to lead them to a better life. False hope. Because Tam knew in his heart that with each passing day the only thing he could provide them was disappointment.

And so it was that now Tam crept through the darkened streets toward the city wall. He had never travelled beyond the city before. He wondered what might lay in wait for him on the outside. Before he had time to talk himself out of it he made a running leap, scrambling his way up the stones until he sat high among the ramparts. Once atop the wall he looked back over his shoulder at the flickering lamplight of the town. He wavered, thinking of his parents waking in the morning to find him gone. They would get over it in time. Perhaps they would realise, as he had, that his burden would only lead to further disappointment. Eventually they would find a way to forgive him, and perhaps, be relieved. With that Tam slipped down the outer side of the wall, the night enveloping him in darkness once again. He stole one last glance back at the city that had been home his entire short life, then turned, and began walking.

"It is getting late your Highness," said one of the royal guards, "We should return to the city at once. It is dangerous to be riding in the jungle beyond the city walls come nightfall, for there are all manner of creatures reside here."

"I suppose you are right Lord Jerningham," Princess Regina replied. With a wave of her hand the royal riding party turned and started along the track that led back toward the city.

They had gone no further than a mile when at the head of the party, Lord Jerningham held up a hand.

"Why are we stopping?"

"Shsh."

"I beg your pardon Lord Jerningham, but I am Princess Regina, heir to the throne and I will not be shushed by your..."

"Do you hear something?"

"What?"

Suddenly several armed men leapt from the undergrowth at either side of the track.

"Stand and deliver!"

Lord Jernigham drew his sword as the men rushed the procession. As the melee whirled around her, one of the bandits slashed at the Princess' horse which reared up in fright. The horse charged forward, galloping off the path and into the jungle.

"Stop!" Princess Regina pleaded as she clung tightly to its mane. But the horse ran on. Vines clawed and scratched at her face as they raced deeper into the jungle. Out of the gloom a large branch loomed. The Princess tried to duck, but was struck and fell from her horse to the ground below.

Princess Regina's eyes adjusted slowly to the darkness. She had no idea how long she had been lying there, or indeed where exactly 'there' was. She stood slowly rubbing her throbbing head. As she did so she had the uneasy feeling she was not alone. From the undergrowth to her left came a guttural growl. As she stepped slowly backwards she caught a glimpse of a glowing pair of yellow eyes in the underbrush. The creature in the shadows growled again, then leapt forward. Regina turned and ran as fast as she could. Behind her the sound of heavy hooves on soil drew nearer. Ahead a wall of tall trees blocked her path, the branches too high to reach to escape. She turned pressing her back against one of the trees. The large black shadow of a beast was almost upon her now. She was about to close her eyes when a rope ladder dropped from the branches above. She scurried up the ladder before tumbling into a large hole in trunk of the tree. She collapsed onto the floor of the makeshift shelter and lay still until her breathing and the sound of the beast below subsided.

"Who are you?" She whispered to the silhouetted figure in the tree beside her. "You saved me."

He moved forward from the shadow until he sat alongside her. She gasped as her eyes met his.

"I am Tam," he said.

Over the ensuing days he tended to her wounds until they healed. She too healed wounds of his own, seeing past his disfigured exterior to the gentle caring strength within. She gave him her heart and in return he kept it safe.

Regina persuaded Tam to return to the city with her, and while the citizens stared in disbelief at the deformed wretch that accompanied their beloved Princess, over time they too came to see beyond his superficial scars.

Tam taught the people how the jungle was a place to be respected, not feared, and that with tolerance and respect the two worlds could co-exist in harmony.

In time Princess Regina and Tam were married, and being a Princess, one day she became Queen and Tam did indeed become King. Together they ruled the kingdom of Aldegaard, and lived happily ever after.