

St. George and the Dragon



Illustrations by Nichola L. Robinson
Based on 'The Seven Champions' by Richard Johnson, 1596

In the darkest depths of a thick forest lived Kalyb, a wicked enchantress. Terrible were her deeds and few had the courage to challenge this evil witch.

Her wickedness was legendary and she delighted in carrying off innocent newborn babes and putting them to death.

And death was probably what she had in mind for the son of the Earl of Coventry. The Earl was the Lord High Steward of England and his duties forced him to travel far from home. His wife had died during child birth, so he had to leave his son in the care of servants.

But Kalyb, with spells and charms, managed to steal the child from his careless nurses.

Yet the child was marked from the beginning for great deeds; on his right hand was a blood-red cross and on his left leg a golden garter. These signs so affected Kalyb that she could not kill the child, and so he grew; each day becoming more handsome and strong until eventually he was the apple of her eye.

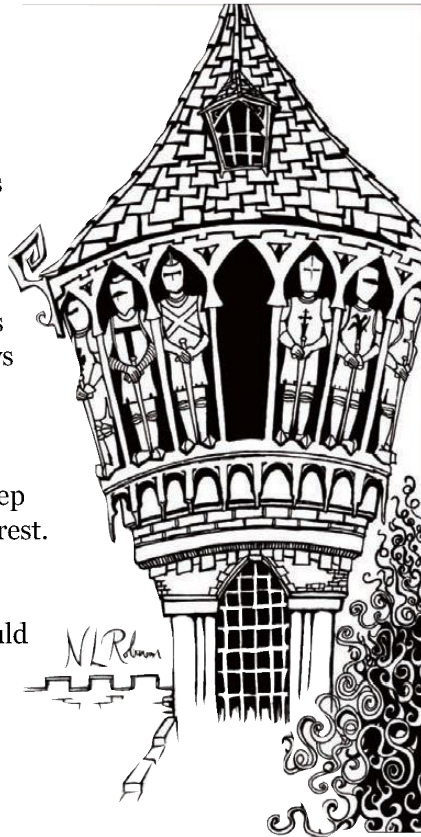


When he was fourteen he began to thirst for adventure, as all young boys do, but the wicked enchantress wanted to keep him in the forest.

He wanted glory and could see the evil inside Kalyb, so she attempted to bribe him.

One day she led him to a castle and showed him six brave knights who were imprisoned in the tower. She said "Behold! These are the six Champions and you shall be the seventh. Your name will be St. George of England. But only if you stay with me."

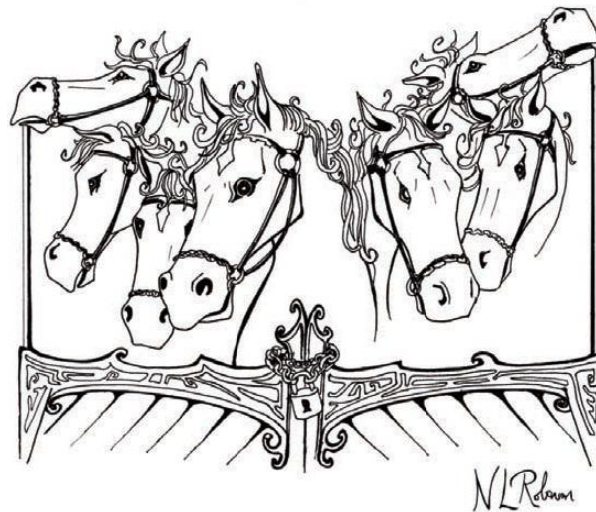
But he would not.



Then she led him to a magnificent stable where seven of the finest horses were kept.

"Six of these," she said, "belong to the six Champions. The seventh and the best, the swiftest and most powerful in the world, whose name is Bayard, will be yours. But only if you stay with me."

But he would not.



Then she took him to an armoury, and strapped on his chest a breastplate of purest steel and placed on his head a helmet inlaid with gold.

Then, taking a mighty sword, she placed it in his hand and said "This armour, which no weapon can pierce, and this sword called Ascalon, which will destroy all it touches, is yours. Surely now you will stay with me?"

But he would not.

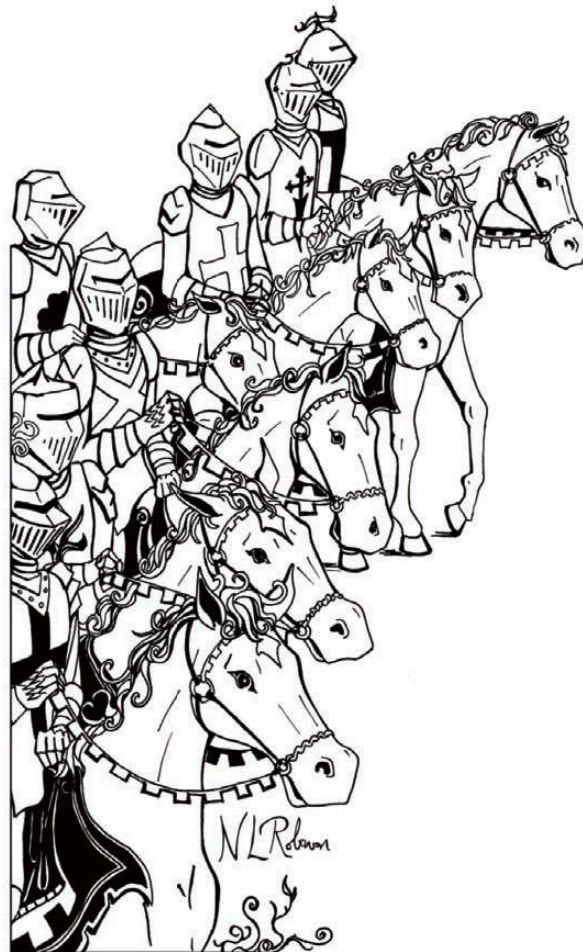
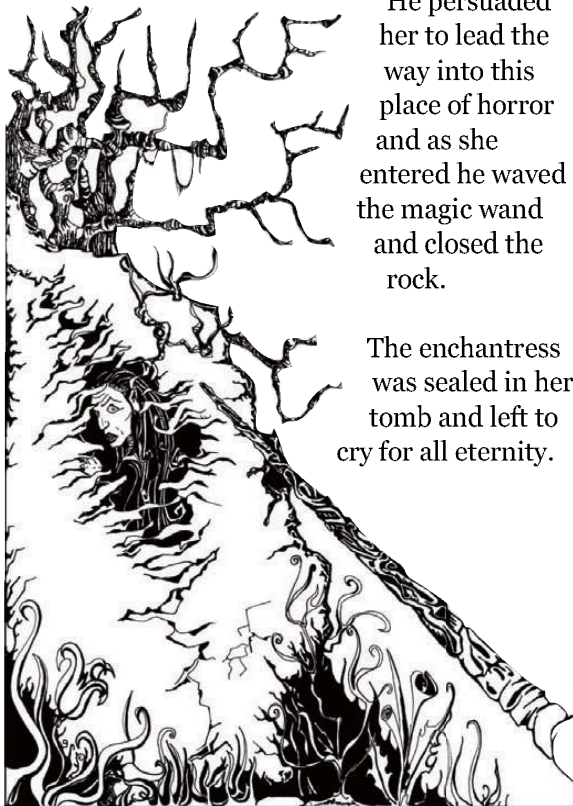


Finally, she tried to bribe him with her own magic wand, giving him power over all things in the enchanted forest. He threw it at a rock hoping it would break and end Kalyb's power.

To his surprise the rock opened, and in it was a view of a cave with the bodies of infants who had perished at the hand of the evil Kalyb.

He persuaded her to lead the way into this place of horror and as she entered he waved the magic wand and closed the rock.

The enchantress was sealed in her tomb and left to cry for all eternity.



And so St. George was freed from the enchanted forest, and rode to Coventry with the six other Champions;

St. David of Wales,
St. Andrew of Scotland,
St. Patrick of Ireland,
St. Denys of France,
St. James of Spain
and St. Anthony of Italy.

For nine months the seven Champions exercised and trained in all the arts of war. So when Spring returned they were ready and set forth to seek foreign adventure.

Thirty days and nights they rode until they came to a place with seven paths. The seven Champions agreed to each take a separate path. They said farewell and with good spirit rode to their destiny.

St. George, on his charge Bayard, journeyed until he reached the sea where he boarded a ship bound for Egypt. He eventually arrived in a land that was deathly silent in the day and with a brooding darkness at night.



It was here that St. George met a poor hermit. He asked the hermit for a bed so he could rest his tired limbs.

The hermit replied "You have come at a terrible time.

Our land has been ravaged by a cruel dragon who demands the sacrifice of an innocent maiden every day. He has threatened to send a plague and scorch the earth so that no man or beast may live. For twenty four years he has terrified our land, and tomorrow it is the beautiful Sabia, daughter of the King, who must die".

He explained the King had promised to give his daughter in marriage, and the crown of Egypt, to any brave knight who would kill the dragon. "For crowns I care not," said St. George boldly, "but the beautiful maiden will not die. I will slay the monster."

The next day he rose at dawn and buckled his armour, laced his helmet and sharpened his sword. He mounted his trusted steed Bayard and rode into the Valley of the Dragon.

On the way he met a procession of old women who were weeping and wailing. At the front was a beautiful damsel dressed in the finest Arabian silk; he knew it must be Sabia, the King's daughter.



He dismounted and bowed before the lady, asking her to return to her father's Palace because he was going to kill the dreaded dragon. The beautiful Sabia, thanking him with tears and smiles, returned to the Palace and St. George rode to meet the beast.

Soon the brave knight was at the dragon's lair and shouted for him to come out and fight. The dragon let out a mighty roar louder than thunder and spat venom from its mouth; its wings were burning flames and its eyes empty and cold.

From shoulder to tale it was forty foot long, its body covered in scales harder than brass with a great golden belly. Its size and appearance would have made any other man tremble, but St. George steeled himself and prepared to fight.

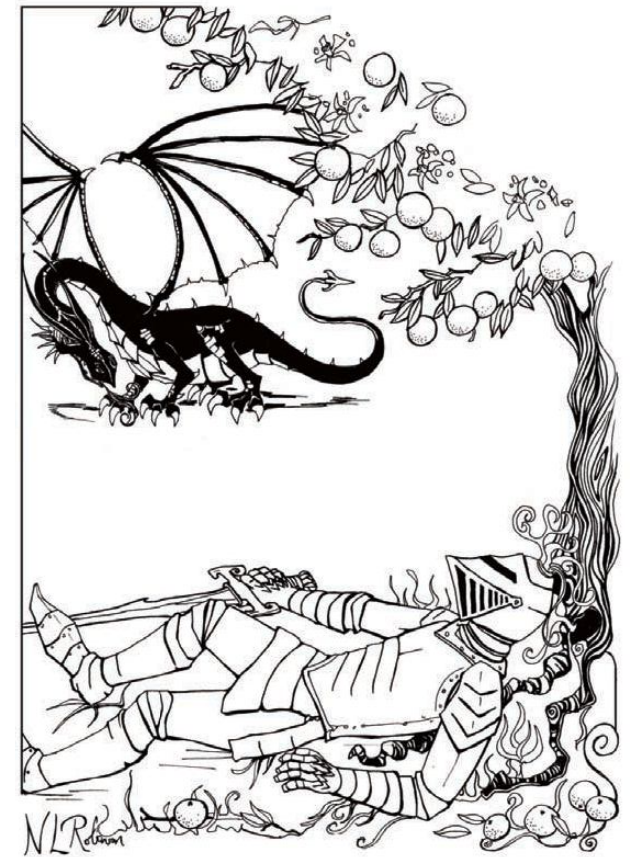


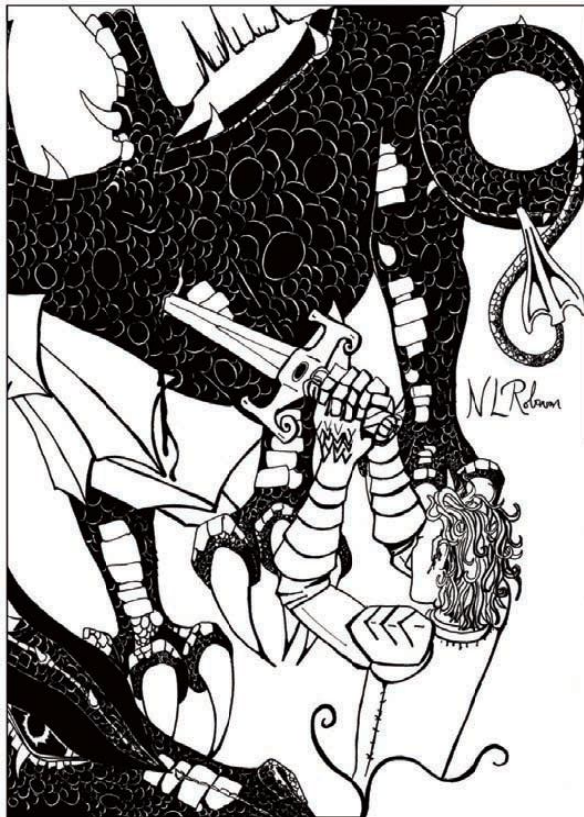
So fierce was the dragon's first charge that St. George nearly fell to the ground. He recovered himself and thrust his spear into the dragon's belly, but the spear shuddered and split into pieces. The monster roared and whipped both St. George and Bayard with its tail.

St. George was thrown from his horse, but by good fortune landed under a flowering orange tree. The fragrance from the tree has magical powers; no poisonous beast would dare come within seven feet of its branches. So the valiant knight lay there to recover his senses, until with eager courage he rushed back into combat.

Again he struck the dragon in the belly with his mighty sword Ascalon; this time the dragon was wounded and purple venom spewed from its body and splattered St. George. The venom was so powerfully evil that his breast plate and helmet burst into a thousand pieces.

St. George might have been killed, but again he sheltered under the branches of the orange tree. Here he prayed that God would help him in his fight against evil. Then with a bold and courageous heart he advanced and thrust his sword under the soft wing of the fiery dragon. He pierced its heart and all the grass and flowers around him turned crimson with blood from the dying monster.



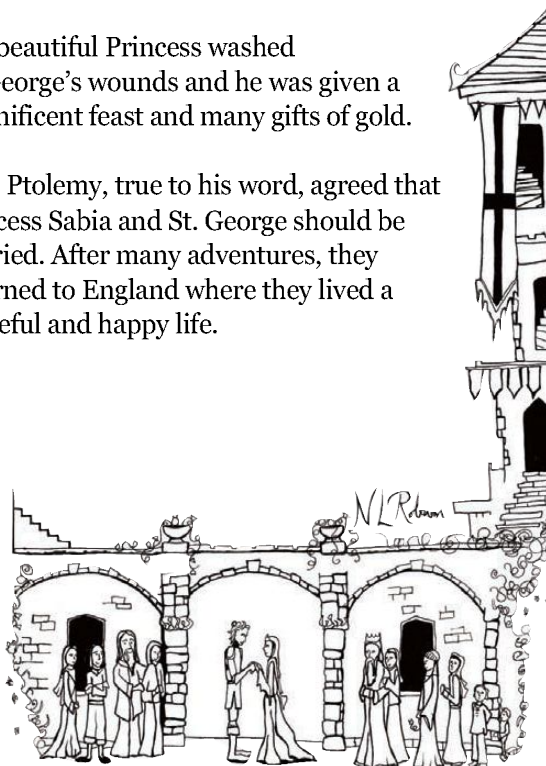


The brave knight took a deep breath and with all his strength cut off the dragon's head and hung it on the shaft of his broken spear. Exhausted and wounded, he mounted his horse and proceeded to the Palace of the King.

The King's name was Ptolemy and when he saw the dragon was dead he rejoiced. He ordered the city should be decorated to honour the hero, and a procession of noblemen and musicians escorted St. George to the Palace.

The beautiful Princess washed St. George's wounds and he was given a magnificent feast and many gifts of gold.

King Ptolemy, true to his word, agreed that Princess Sabia and St. George should be married. After many adventures, they returned to England where they lived a peaceful and happy life.



The story of St. George and the Dragon symbolises the great English characteristics of courage, chivalry and charity.

St. George is the Patron Saint of England and every year on 23 April the English celebrate their common heritage and future together.

St. George and the Dragon story
adapted from the original text
(The Seven Champions by Richard Johnson, 1596)
by Graham Smith of St. George Unofficial Bank Holiday.



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