



KNIGHTS ERRANT

and the
Warrior Princess

Book III of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*

Updated and annotated by
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To my daughters, Laurel and Blythe:
May you make your ways fearlessly
with God's purity and strength.

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 ANTO I.

*Guyon encounters Britomart,
Fair Florimell is chased:
Duessa's trains° and Malecasta's
Champions are defaced.°*

*plans
defeated*

1

The famous Briton Prince and Faery¹ knight,
After long ways and perilous pains endured,
Having their weary limbs to perfect plight°
Restored, and sore wounds right well cured,
Of° the fair Alma² greatly were procured,
To make there longer sojourn and abode;
But when thereto they might not be allured,
From seeking praise, and deeds of arms abroad,
They courteous leave took, and forth together yode.°

put right, healed

by / pleaded with

persuaded

rode forth

2

But the captived Acrasia° he sent,
Because of travel long, a nigher° way,
With a strong guard, all rescue to prevent,³

*a villainess of Book II
nearer*

1. Whatever you do, don't think of "fairy" in terms of Walt Disney characters or pretty little winged things. In Spenser's world, fairies are more synonymous with the elves of Tolkien's Middle Earth. Seriously. You don't want to mess with these guys. By the way, these are our old friends, Arthur and Guyon.

2. See Book II.

3. They wished to prevent her rescue since she still has allies.

And her to Faerie court safe to convey,
 That her for witness of his hard assay,[°]
 Unto his Faerie Queene he might present:⁴
 But he himself betook another way,
 To make more trial of his hardiment,⁵
 And seek adventures, as he with Prince Arthur went.

trial

3

Long so they traveled through wasteful ways[°]
 Where dangers dwelt, and perils most did wone,[°]
 To hunt for glory and renowned praise;
 Full many Countries they did overrun⁶
 From the uprising to the setting Sun,
 And many hard adventures did achieve;
 Of all the which they honor ever won,
 Seeking the weak oppressed to relieve,⁷
 And to recover right for such, as wrong did grieve.

*wilderness
dwell*

4

At last as through an open plain they yode,[°]
 They spied a knight, that towards pricked[°] fair,
 And him beside an aged Squire there rode,
 That seemed to couch under his shield three-square,
 As if that age bade him that burden spare,⁸
 And yield it those, that stouter could it wield:
 He them espying, began himself prepare,
 And on his arm address his goodly shield
 That bore a Lion passant in a golden field.⁹

*rode forth
spurred*

5

Which seeing good Sir Guyon, dear besought
 The Prince of grace,¹⁰ to let him run that turn.
 He granted: then the Faery[°] quickly raught[°]
 His poignant[°] spear, and sharply began to spurn

*Guyon / grabbed
piercing*

4. He sent her to Glorianna to be judged.

5. That's what knights did; they looked for hard tasks.

6. Sounds a little extreme to me.

7. Think Robin Hood, but without the tights. Unless you like the tights. But who am I to judge?

8. It appeared too heavy for him. Come on, he was old.

9. This is an important detail. A "lion passant" is a lion walking (in this case, on a gold background). It symbolizes strength (obviously), bravery, and, above all, royalty.

10. As a favor, Arthur let Guyon take this challenge.

His foamy steed, whose fiery feet did burn
 The verdant° grass, as he thereon did tread; *green*
 Not did the other back his foot return,
 But fiercely forward came without dread,
 And bent his dreadful spear against the others' head.

6

They been met, and both their points arrived,
 But Guyon drove so furious and fell,
 That seemed both shield and plate it would have rived;° *splintered*
 Nevertheless, it bore his foe not from his saddle,
 But made him stagger, as he were not well:
 But Guyon self, ere well he was aware,
 Nigh a spear's length behind his crupper° fell, *the rear end of a horse*
 Yet in his fall so well himself he bare,
 That mischievous mischance his life and limbs did spare.¹¹

7

Great shame and sorrow of that fall he took;° *he was embarrassed*
 For never yet, since warlike arms he bore,
 And shivering spear in bloody field first shook,
 He found himself dishonored so sore.° *seriously*
 Ah gentlest knight, that ever armor bore,
 Let not thee grieve dismounted to have been,
 And brought to ground, that never wast before;
 For not thy fault, but secret power unseen,
 That spear enchanted was, which laid thee on the green.

8

But ween¹² thou what wight° thee overthrew, *creature*
 Much greater grief and shamefuller regret
 For thy hard fortune then thou wouldst renew,
 That of a single damsel¹³ thou had met
 On equal plain, and there so hard beset;
 Even the famous Britomart it was,
 Whom strange adventure did from Britain fetch,° *arrive*
 To seek her lover (love far sought alas),
 Whose image she had seen in Venus looking glass.° *Venus, goddess of love*

11. He landed well and did not hurt himself.

12. Some words and their variations are common in Spenser. *Ween*, *wot*, and *wit* all mean "to know" or "to realize."

13. Hah! It was a girl!

9

Full of disdainful wrath, he fierce uprose,
 For to revenge that foul reprochful shame,
 And snatching his bright sword began to close
 With her on foot, and stoutly forward came;
 Die rather would he, then endure that same.
 Which when his Palmer° saw, he began to fear
 His toward° peril and untoward blame,
 Which by that new encounter he should rear:°
 For death sat on the point of that enchanted spear.

*his holy companion
 upcoming
 experience*

10

And hasting towards him began fair persuade,
 Not to provoke misfortune, nor to believe,
 His spear's fault to mend° with cruel blade;
 For by his mighty Science he had seen
 The secret virtue of that weapon keen,°
 That mortal puissance¹⁴ might not withstood:
 Nothing on earth might always happy¹⁵ been.
 Great hazard were it, and adventure foolhardy,
 To lose long gotten honor with one evil hand.°

*lose to
 sharp
 deed*

11

By such good means he him discouraged,
 From prosecuting his revenging rage;
 And eke° the Prince like treaty handeled,°
 His wrathful will with reason to assuage,
 And laid the blame, not to his carriage,°
 But to his starting steed, that swerved aside,
 And to the ill purveyance of his page,
 That had his furnitures° not firmly tied:
 So is his angry courage fairly pacified.

*also / persuaded
 abilities
 saddle, armor*

12

Thus reconcilment was between them knit,
 Through goodly temperance, and affection chaste,
 And either vowed with all their power and wit,
 To let not others' honor be defaced,
 Of friend or foe, whoever it debased,

14. *Puissance* meant strength, power, or might. It's one of Spenser's favorite words, so be looking for it.

15. In this case, he means "lucky."

Nor arms to bear against the others side:
 In which accord the Prince was also placed,
 And with that golden chain of concord tied.
 So goodly all agreed, they forth aside did ride.

13

O goodly usage° of those antique times, *tradition*
 In which the sword was servant unto right;¹⁶
 When not for malice and contentious crimes,
 But all for praise, and proof of manly might,
 The martial° brood accustomed to fight: *warlike*
 Then honor was the meed° of victory, *reward*
 And yet the vanquished had no despite:° *abuse*
 Let later age that noble use envy,
 Vile rancor to avoid, and cruel presumption.

14

Long they thus traveled in friendly ways,
 Through countries waste, and also well edified,° *desolate and developed*
 Seeking adventures hard, to exercise
 Their puissance, whilome° full sternly tried: *at times*
 At length they came into a forest wide,
 Whose hideous horror and sad trembling sound
 Full grisly seemed:¹⁷ therein they long did ride,
 Yet tract of living creatures none they found,
 Save Bears, Lions, and Bulls, which roamed them around.¹⁸

15

All suddenly out of the thickest brush,
 Upon a milk-white Palfrey° all alone, *gentle lady's horse*
 A goodly Lady did by them rush,
 Whose face did seem as clear as crystal stone,
 And eke° through fear as white as whales' bone: *also*
 Her garments all were wrought of beaten gold,
 And all her steed with tinsel trappings shone,
 Which fled so fast, that nothing might him° hold, *the horse*
 And scarce them time gave, her passing to behold.¹⁹

16. If you forget the whole Goths and Vandals thing. But Spenser is being poetical.

17. Grisly. I like that.

18. Say it. You know you want to. "Oh my!"

19. Seriously, guys, a beautiful woman comes running out of the forest on a horse? Does this happen every day? Do we really want to trust this situation? Think about it.