

# The Wandering Knight

by William Rivera

The shopkeeper looked up from fiddling with the change in his pocket and found a broken shape standing before him. The man was ragged, wearing mismatched, rusted pieces of armor, looking like a poorly cobbled metal shoe. Feeling slight unease, he forced out his rehearsed lines. “Your armor looks worse for wear traveler, could I interest you in a new set?”

The knight looked like he had been hindered and broken down by the weight of the world and then some. Every inch of the man's skin was covered in clothing or bits of armor. The shopkeep could not discern if the person was actually a human.

The broken knight lifted his head slightly and spoke through the rusty and malformed face mask, “No good sir, this one will do,” the knight responded.

“Ah, but you haven’t heard my offer just yet,” retorted the shopkeep.

The dented, rusted helmet of the traveling knight lifted ever so slightly as if considering the offer. The shopkeeper took this small opportunity to reel in another customer. “Well because I have never seen your face around here before I should interest you in what the locals have in their–” the shopkeeper could barely finish until the knight put up his ripped, gloved hand to halt the keep from wasting his breath.

“This armor has been through many battles and can withstand anything that is thrown or stabbed its way.” The knight kept his hand held up, then quickly crushed the air in his palm, making a tight clenched fist.

“Sir, if you don’t mind me asking, who is it that you fight for?” The shopkeeper asked sincerely, wanting to know where this unknown man hailed from. After no reply the keep asked another question, knowing that asking a more specific question would give him more clues to where this man came from.

“What king do you serve under?” After the question was muttered, a long, awkward silence hung in the air.

A soft chuckle came from underneath the war torn helmet. The chest plate, barely hanging on by a makeshift leather pauldron in place where a metallic one should be, rose and fell ever so slightly. The laugh was soft but the armor made it seem loud. The creaking from the bent and misshapen pieces of metal and what appeared to be rust sprinkled about made the laugh seem more pitiful than humorous. “King?” the knight asked. “I serve no king.” The voice that traveled out allowed the shopkeeper to hear the smile under the battered helmet.

After another brief awkward silence, the keep spoke up. “You serve no king... but wear the armor of a knight? That sounds absurd. Unheard of even.” The keep sounded more enthralled than appalled.

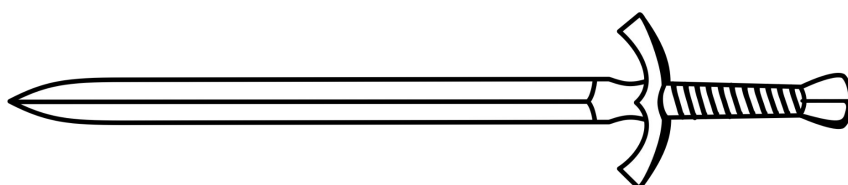
The knight was able to see the questioning look that he always got when he told someone he served under no one. “I do not serve anyone above me or those who believe they are above me,” the knight responded.

The knight's hand traveled to the side of his hip where the pommel of his sword rested.

The shopkeeper started to become nervous when he saw the knight's subtle hand movement to the pommel of his weapon. "I don't want no trouble my good sir, I only wish to show you the select items we have that would suit yourself properly." The shopkeeper bowed his head slightly as if to show he meant no harm.

"I wish you no trouble, my good sir," the knight said, "I only wish to show you who I am." The man unsheathed his blade in an instant with a whoosh of the air as he drew his sword. The sword glistened in the sunlight, the most beautiful weapon the shopkeeper had ever laid his eyes upon. A magnificent two-handed sword but handled as if lighter than a feather. A shorter hilt than perceived at first but a long and thick blade. The way the sun beamed off of it made it seem as if the blade were white. With a slight turn of hand, turning the blade away from the sun and into the keeper's view, he was able to see the silverness of it and the etchings of different names inscribed along the blade itself.

"What are all of those names you have on your blade? The men and women you have killed on your journey?" the shopkeeper asked, appalled by all the different reasons those names could be on the blade, none of them good. The shopkeeper's eyes grew wider in fear at this conclusion.



“No... nothing like that at all.” The knight rested the blade on his other hand as if presenting it to the man. The knight took a step forward to allow the keeper a further glance. The keep was transfixed as to how well kept this sword was in comparison to the armor. The difference was astounding. No rust shone upon the blade. Perfectly polished and shined. No dent or sign of wear.

“How do you keep your blade so well kept? Do you know a smith?” the keeper asked, curious to see who the master bladesman would be.

“No, I tend to the blade myself,” said the knight.

“Impossible,” the shopkeeper said, aghast. “How is it that your armor looks the way it does but your weapon is pristine?”

The knight lifted his head, almost prideful. “This weapon is solely used to defend the honor of my friends,” said the knight.

“Friends? You’re traveling alone if you haven’t noticed through that broken mask of yours.” The edge of the keeper’s tone was questioning but that is exactly what the knight wanted.

“Aye, I am alone. But what I wouldn’t do for the people that I have acquainted myself with along my perilous journey.” Before the shopkeeper could say anything, the knight continued. “I defend the honor and life of those who confide in me. These are all my friends.” The knight pointed to the names on the blade.

“This man here, Shannon of House Woodburrow, was a man who patrolled the village in honor of his house and his fathers name. He made sure to keep trouble at bay and allow the people of his village to live safely. When I traveled through he was nothing but kind to a weary traveler. We drank and sang songs together many a night, but when his village was attacked by a raider clan, he was alone in his battle. I offered my sword in return for his friendship.” The knight took a long pause, letting the memories flood back to the forefront of his mind. Strength filled his voice as he continued.

“The night was long and grueling but not a scratch was laid on him. We fought hard through the night. I was able to deflect the brunt of whatever came his way. I only wished to protect this new found friend. After sharing his story and what he wants for his future, I wished to protect him with all I had within me so he could preserve his past and live through his future.” The knight bowed his head slightly in remembrance.

“You protected the village out of friendship? After knowing the man for only but a few nights?” the keeper questioned. The tone the keeper had was a mix of amusement but the hint of wonder in the way he asked made the knight feel warm.

“Aye, my friend. Nothing but the truth. The armor matters not, for the blade speaks the truth. My power is this sword and the memories of every man and woman that I have helped. Although I have slain plenty, ‘twas but for the honor of a comrade,” the knight said. “I take the brunt of the force in order for them to stay safe. The scars on my armor show that their wounds are my wounds.

“The blade being etched with their name is them being remembered and honored through my journeys. Their names are my strength and what continues to push me forward. To allow a future that is bright and plentiful.” The knight flipped the blade upwards and rotated it down back into the sheath. “I will pass on your offer,” he said to the shopkeeper, “but I do appreciate you taking the opportunity to make the sale.”

The shopkeeper stood there in wonder at this mystical being in front of him. The armor seemed to become less rusty and worn and more broken in and ready. The keep rubbed his eyes in confusion at the subtle transformation. The shopkeep cocked his head in confusion. He thought back to when he first saw the knight. The knight did seem in terrible shape when he first walked up, but now he walked away confidently, the weight of the knight’s world briefly shared with the keep.

“Thank you for allowing me to share my story. If you’ll excuse me, there are companions to be made.” The knight walked off and made his way into the Inn. What a strange man, the keeper thought... a battle horn blew in the distance, as well as battle cry. The keep’s eyes widened. The raider village from the east had returned for its protection tax.

“KNIGHT!” screamed the shopkeep.

The knight turned back around swiftly, one hand gripping the sword hilt, ready to pounce on those who threatened his new acquaintance.

“What is your name?” the knight asked.