



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

José The Beast Slayer

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There was once a king who had a little daughter. He went to the Wise Man of the Forest to learn how best to bring her up, and this is what he was told:

"For twelve years you must keep your daughter in a tower in the forest. It should have no door, only a little window through which you may pass food to her. You must give her meat which has no bones in it."

The king ordered a tower constructed in the deep forest. It had no door, and only a little window. Here the princess was placed. Every day food was passed to her through the little window. The king himself took charge of this, so that he might be sure that there was no meat given her which had bones in it.

The years flew by, and at last the twelve year period was nearly up. Then the king went away one day and left the servants to carry food to the princess. They were careless, and gave her meat which had a bone in it.

The little princess had grown very tired of being shut up in the tower of the forest.

"Ah," said she when she discovered the bone in her meat. "At last I have something with which to make this little window larger. I've tried in vain to make it bigger with my fingers."

She used the bone to dig away the wall each side of the window and soon the little opening had grown so large that the princess could lean her head out of it and look up at lofty trees. That very day a duke passed that way on a hunting expedition and saw the beautiful princess in the tower. He fell in love with her immediately.

Now that the princess had some one to help her make the hole larger it was an easy matter to make it big enough to escape. That very night she ran away with the duke.

When the king returned from his journey he found the tower in the forest entirely empty. There was nothing but the yawning hole to tell him of his daughter's escape. He tried in vain to find out what had become of her, but there was no person who could tell him anything about her.

The princess had gone with the duke across a great river which no one else knew

how to cross. She lived in a big cave in the rocks, and after all the years in the tower it seemed a wonderful home indeed. She was never tired of admiring the trees and flowers of the forest and listening to the songs of the birds. When at last her baby son was born she thought that she was the very happiest person in the whole world.

Now when the baby was two years old, the duke decided that they must take him to a hermitage to be baptized. They went down to the great river and he carried his little son across it in safety. Then he returned for the princess, but on the way his foot slipped and he fell into the river. The strong current bore him swiftly away, leaving the princess on one side of the river and her little son on the other.

"How shall I get across?" cried the princess when she saw what had happened.

"Don't worry, mother," replied the child. "I'll come and get you."

To her amazement he crossed the great river in safety and bravely escorted his mother to the other bank in spite of her tears and cries of fear.

"Well done, my son!" she said when on the other bank. "You are indeed a son to be proud of!"

They went to a church and the boy was baptized. José the Beast Slayer was the name he chose. Then they wandered on until at last they came to a house with a door in which a little window had been cut. The boy thrust in his arm and opened the door as if it had been his own.

"Walk in, mother dear," were his words.

Together they entered the house and together they explored the various rooms. There was nobody there and there was nothing to eat. Accordingly, José went out begging. He asked alms at the royal palace and there he was given money to buy food. There was even enough left over to pay for a gun.

Now that he owned a gun there was no need of begging any more. He shot plenty of game for his mother and what was left he carried to the royal palace to give to the king.

One day in the deep forest he entered a cave where the giant of the forest lived.

"What are you doing here, little penny chicken?" asked the huge giant as he frowned down at José.

"I may be a little penny chicken, but I'm not in the least afraid of giants," replied the boy boldly.

"What, a little penny chicken like you not afraid of me!" cried the giant as he picked him up roughly and set him on his neck.



José seized the giant's long beard and drew it around his neck so tightly that the giant fell to the floor dead. Then José seized one of the money-bags and ran home with it to his mother.

"You must carry some of this to the king," said his mother when she saw it and had heard his story.

Accordingly, José carried the money as a gift to the king.

"Who is bringing me all this?" asked the king when he saw it.

"A little lad," replied the king's servants.

"Lead him in to me," said the king. "I'd like to see him."

Accordingly, the boy was led before the throne.

"What is your name, my lad?" asked the king kindly.

"I am called José the Beast Slayer, your majesty," replied the boy as he bowed low before the throne.

"Who are your parents?" asked the king.

"My father is dead," replied José, "and my mother is a princess who ran away from a tower in the forest."

José had often heard the story of his mother's life in the tower. It was the tale he liked best of all.

At the boy's words the king started and looked at him sharply.

"Tell me about this tower," he said eagerly.

"It was a tower in the deep forest," replied José. "It had no door, only a little window through which food was passed to her. She could never have any meat with a bone. This was because the Wise Man of the Forest had told her father that it was the best way to bring her up. One day her father went away and the servants gave her meat with a bone in it and—"

"I always suspected something like that," interrupted the king.

José looked at him in surprise.

"Were you there?" he asked.

The king nodded. "Go on with your story, my boy," he said.

José told all the circumstances of his mother's escape from the tower, just as she had so often described them to him. Tears were running down the king's cheeks when at last the story was ended.

"My lad, you are my own grandson!" cried the king as he took him in his arms.

"Proud am I, too, that I have a grandson like you! Where is your mother now?"

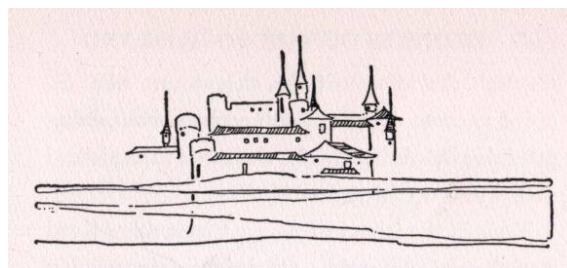
"My mother is in the house in the forest," replied José. "It is she who told me to carry the money to the king."

"Why did she never come to me?" asked the father.

"I think she was afraid she'd be punished for running away from the tower without any door," was José's reply.

When the princess was brought home to the royal palace there was a great feast held which lasted for three days and three nights. Then the king sent his men with José into the forest to the cave where the giant had lived. They brought home so many bags of gold that it required the entire royal army to transport it.

Years passed, and when the old king died it was José the Beast Slayer who was king of the land.



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