If You Live By the Sword…
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Once upon a time there was an old king who had three sons. The first son was strong and an excellent swordsman, the second son was an experienced archer and very smart. But the third son was wicked and clever, and only acted virtuously around his father, the king. One day the king realized that he would soon be too old to rule, so he gathered his three sons to him, and said, "I am old now and I cannot run this country much longer, and one of you must take my place. I will have a competition to see who will take over for me. There are three countries that have been a thorn in our kingdom's side for many years now. I will give each of you five years and whatever supplies you need to take over these kingdoms. They are equal in strength and number of people and will not be easy to attack. If at the end of these five years you have not returned victorious, I will send the whole army to destroy them and appoint someone else successor. However, should one of you secure a victory, I would be honored to grant you the inheritance of my throne. Now go, my sons, and offer me and our fellow countrymen your best efforts."

The oldest son took with him four hundred men with swords and went to take the castle by force. The second son took four hundred men but brought siege equipment and many bows as well. But the third son said, "Father, I will go myself with nothing but my sword and shield and one page boy." This the father granted him, though he was confused. So the five years passed and the king grew very weary in his last years governing the land. Still, he always looked out from the turrets whenever he could, to see if he could sight a son, riding home with the enemy's ripped flag in his hand. At the end of the five years, none of his sons had returned. So the king, fearing the worst, went out with his army.

When he arrived at the kingdom where his oldest son was, he saw the ruins of war and the wreckage of the city itself. Though it was battered and damaged, the castle still stood. His army quickly defeated the remainder of the enemy and entered the city. When they finally found his son, head down and with many fallen around him, it was discovered that he was gravely wounded. It appeared as though they had only attacked a little while ago, for the signs of a siege lay all about them. The king left his son under the best care of a physician along with a third of his army and continued onward to the next city.

From a distance they could see fire coming from the second castle and wreckage, with old ladders leaning up against the battered walls. When they got closer though, they realized that the fire was coming from the enemy burning the dead! The king and his men took this city too and found the second son leaning against rubble outside the castle. His body was in a crumpled position, his quiver was empty, and his bow was cloven in two. He was still alive but could barely move, for his legs were broken and he had sustained many wounds besides. Once again, the king left another third of his men there and continued on to the third castle. He thought to himself, "How is it that these two sons of mine, noble princes and excellent warriors, have both failed and lay wounded?"

When he finally got to the third country, he sent scouts to go closer to the castle and report back to him. The scouts went carefully at first, but seeing no guards became bolder and went all the way to the castle walls before reporting back to the king. After the scouts had come back to the king, and reported no activity, the king decided to go in himself with some of his men. They brought with them a battering ram, expecting to have to knock the doors open, but to their surprise, when they rammed the door the first time, its doors swung open. "How strange," muttered the king, but continued on with his men. There was a horrible smell in the city and dead bodies lay everywhere, all of them recently killed. The father and his knights called for his youngest son, but no one answered. As a last resort, they decided to check the jail, but when they got there they only found an old man and a dog, both still living! "How is it that you, who alone in this city ought to have been hung, are living, and the rest of the city dead?" asked the king. "All murdered," replied the prisoner. "What!" exclaimed the king, "How can this be?" But the old man would speak no more and looked away. "This is most strange," said the king.

All of a sudden, a man rounded the corner. He was a ghastly sight, covered with scratches, cuts and blood. He stood tall and strong, as blood dripped off of his blade. The king looked at the man closely and somehow he looked familiar. The man said, "Father!" and ran to him. Just as the king went to embrace his bloodied body, the son stopped, with a look of pain and confusion on his face. The page boy had stabbed the prince in the back! The king looked at his son, the son looked at his father, and then the son dropped his blade and fell into the king's arms. "I have brought this whole city low, and meant to take the kingdom for myself," choked out the son, "but I see that my treachery has come full circle." He gave a little laugh that changed to a cough, and said, "It was a mistake bringing this page boy here, for he alone saw through my lies. This kingdom belongs to the page, for he slew the last villain within its walls valiantly." And the prince died. "Is this true?" asked the king of the page boy. "Yes, your highness!" answered the page.

The page boy then proceeded to explain what had happened to the king. He gave the full story, saying, "When we set off to take over this kingdom, I asked your son how he planned to accomplish such a feat. For surely two men alone cannot take over a castle such as this? But the evil man only smiled and told me of a story about two brothers who were going on a quest to slay a dragon. The first son charged it head on, valiantly but foolishly too. He was quickly killed by the dragon but died bravely. The second son however, attacked the dragon from behind with a lance and thrust it into the back of the dragon, and thus won the battle. And then I understood, though your son was talking about the country we were to take over, he was also talking about the king. That's why when he was pretending to hug you, he was actually going to stab you. So I slew your son the same way that he had intended to kill you, by stabbing you in the back. And thus ends my tale."

By this time the king was so confused and shocked, he didn't know what to think. "How can this be and how can all these people be dead?" asked the king. "That," said the page, "was how he stabbed the dragon in the back. For though he could not take this castle head on by force, he entered as a citizen and slowly spread rumors and lies about

people, neighbors and friends for five years, until the whole country was on edge and suspicious of the next person, even a brother of his brother! Only yesterday he started an argument in the market, and a fight began with everyone turning on each other. It was a slaughter and the entire village was killed within a matter of hours, save a few. Your son hunted down the survivors until there were none left but the two of us. He commanded me to watch for you, and when you arrived today, I called him. He took his sword, bade me to stay back, and waited for your approach. However, I followed from a distance and guessing his plan, took a sword and spear, and killed him just as he was going to stab you in the back."

After these tragic battles, weary from war and scarred by grief, the king rode back to his kingdom in great sorrow. He passed away soon after arriving home, thinking that all his sons were dead, even though the two oldest were recovering well where he had left them. Their wounds were not as deadly as the king first thought, and although it took time to fully recover, they survived. The kingdom was split between the two of them, and the page was rewarded for his bravery in defending their father. As for the youngest prince, he lived by the sword and treachery, and thus died by the sword… stabbed in the back by a simple page who saw through his lies and falsehoods. Your treachery will always come back to haunt you.

The End