

The Quest of Sir Warren

An arm rose above the torrent of fire. The heat of the flames turned the rocky ground to glass and soot. With a lunge forward and a thrust upward into the dragon's mouth, the knight pushed his sword deep until the brain was found. The flames stopped. With a shudder, the red dragon collapsed. The knight cast aside his now melted shield and double-tapped the beast. No sense in taking risks. Satisfied that the dragon was well and truly dead, Sir Warren began removing charred pieces of his armor. Shame, really, this suit had been nicer than others he'd worn. Lighter and more breathable. He whistled, and Ivan, his warhorse, came over the rise of a nearby hillock. Tied to Ivan's saddle horn and following behind came the packhorse bearing a second suit of armor.

Sir Warren retrieved his longbow from Ivan's saddle and strung it while looking over the slain dragon again. The knight let out a long breath and inwardly thanked the court wizard who had gifted him the potion of fire resistance. This dragon had been younger and smaller than others Sir Warren had faced, but the amount of fire he held had definitely warranted the use of the precious potion.

With his bow strung, Sir Warren drew an arrow from a special quiver, notched it, drew, and fired it downward into the open jaw of the dragon. Upon impact, a heavy cloth unfurled like a banner from the shaft of the arrow. It read: "This creature is the kill of Sir Warren, Knight of the Order of Heroes, Third Company, Blackford Lodge. All claims, honor, rewards, and other related boons associated with the slaying of this creature are the right of Sir Warren, and through him, the Order of Heroes. Any attempts to steal associated boons and credit will result in punishment from your local royal authority."

Next, Sir Warren pulled out his field journal. The arrow was crafted to be especially hard to remove, but regulations required that he keep an additional record of his accomplishments and deeds on his person for accounting purposes. Today made a total of seven giants defeated, two curses broken, five witches destroyed, sixteen princesses and one prince rescued, two impossible feats achieved, four evil knights subdued, and now three dragons slain. The water serpent last year was counted as a "legendary monster." A typical record for a seven-year Professional Hero. Sir Warren sighed again and turned to don his spare suit of armor.

The afternoon found the knight and his animals miles from the rocky vale where the dragon had laired. Sir Warren had been warned about the beast and asked to dispatch it on his way to rescue Princess Diome. As a member of the Order of Heroes, he was contractually encouraged not to refuse local monarchs such requests. Although he was a member of the Third Company (the "White Steeds," as other members called them) and was specifically assigned to rescuing imprisoned persons, but, all Order members were expected to lend a hand in dealing with destructive, evil monsters where they could. On that note, Sir Warren remembered the notices about a vampire coven growing throughout the Five Kingdoms, and resolved to buy a crossbow and something silver in the next town.

That night he camped at the base of a waterfall. It was late summer and not too cold. His two picketed horses whinnied, and Sir Warren idly threw twigs into the flames of his campfire. Flames. Dragons. Vampires. Lost princesses. Diome. He didn't have much hope, but he said a small prayer for the princess anyway. Supposedly, she lived in a mysterious cottage in the woods, only five days away. His heart beat louder and more quickly as he wondered if he was

Commented [BP1]: I love how you start right in the middle of the action!

Commented [BP2]: This passive voice may sound a little unnatural to readers. Do you like this phrasing better?

Commented [BP3]: This language is a little colloquial. Are you sure you want to use it? Readers will understand what it means, of course, but it may seem a little out of place to them.

Commented [BP4]: At first, I pictured the arrow going inside the mouth and sticking into the back of the dragon's throat, which made picturing the banner after a little strange. After a while, I realized you probably meant that he'd shot it downward into the jaw, so I thought adding a clarification here might help other readers, too.

Commented [BP5]: The quotation marks come across as slightly sarcastic, which I don't think is the tone you're going for.

Commented [BP6]: This paragraph feels a little out of place. The only action we really have here is Sir Warren simply being miles away from the dragon's lair and remembering a notice about vampires. The explanation about his obligations as a Hero doesn't seem to come naturally from the action or Sir Warren's thoughts. Then, suddenly we jump in the next section to his overnight camp. Could we perhaps combine this section with the next and find a better way to incorporate these important details with his thoughts either in the previous or following section?

Commented [BP7]: I love how normal you make these heroic deeds sound to Sir Warren. It really just sounds like part of the everyday job!

too late. She had been waiting a long time. Spirited away at the age of eight by a witch acting on behalf of the king's enemies, ~~now~~, nine years later the girl still waited for rescue.

It wasn't that her parents, monarchs of the next-door city-state, hadn't tried. In the first three years of Diome's captivity, her parents had convinced three separate knights of the Order, and ten times as many of their own, to rescue their daughter before her location was actually found. None of those knights had ~~actually~~ returned except the last one; ~~and~~ he had died of a strange curse the next day. At that point the king and queen had run out of knights, just as their enemies had wished. The royal pair were forced to focus on local troubles. The Order did not unlist the quest, but as a rule, any quest that claimed the lives of three or more Order members was either reserved for senior members, or put on the back burner.

The Order ~~had been~~ ~~was~~ founded to accomplish the dangerous and the impossible, but it didn't view its members as expendable shields, either. So Diome had waited. Besides, she had only been eleven then and, wrongfully, many knights inside and outside of the ~~e~~Order thought that maidens were only worth rescuing when they were of a more marriageable age. ~~The thought made Sir Warren clench his teeth and fists.~~ Too many knights waited to try the "rescuing act" until they were ready to settle down. They didn't know what he knew.

Sir Warren's first quest, seven years ago, had been to rescue Princess Elenor. She had been kidnapped by giants at the age of ten, and kept in isolation in a tall tower for the next nine years. Elenor's ransom had been paid by her parents when the giants first took her, but either the giants had been too stupid or too cruel to actually return her. ~~But they had brought back proof that Elenor was being kept alive.~~ Nine years later, Elenor's parents heard the tale of a maiden locked in a tower by giants in the Mountains of Mourning. Bright-eyed, young, and a bit of a romantic, Sir Warren eagerly accepted the quest.

The journey had proved uneventful, minus being chased by a pack of wolves through the third forest he had to pass through. The giants had moved on from the tower long ago, so when he found it, there ~~were~~ ~~was~~ no monsters to confront. High in a small, green, secluded valley with a stream running through it stood the lone tower built of old stone. No doors or outside crenellations. A deep and wide ditch surrounded the base of the tower to deter any thoughts of escaping. There were two open windows at the top of the fifty-foot structure, though. Hopefully they led to Elenor's room. It made sense, since that was probably how the giants had put Elenor there in the first place.

Sir Warren had called out Elenor's name three times while circling the tower on horseback. No response came. That had concerned him a little. Still, perhaps she was a deep sleeper. Or maybe a monster was in the room with her, setting a trap. Trained to be resourceful, he had cut down a nearby sapling with his sword and fashioned a pole. He stripped off his armor down to his quilted vest, because one must always be safe, and took his long dagger, because one must always be prepared. ~~Taking also~~ ~~Also taking~~ the climbing kit he'd brought along for just such an event, he vaulted across the ditch with his new pole.

Using the kit, Sir Warren ascended. The ~~windowsill~~ ~~window sill~~ was lined with overgrown potted plants, some bearing vegetables and berries. Sir Warren admired Elenor's resourcefulness and hoped she wouldn't mind him clearing some pots away to help him enter. He let go with one hand, swept four pots off the sill and into space, and in one swift motion hoisted himself over the windowsill and into the tower. He landed on his feet, and froze. He could not breathe. He could not take his eyes off it.

~~Hanging from rotting~~ ~~crossbeam~~ ~~eross~~ ~~beams~~ in the ceiling by a rope made of fraying ~~bedsheets~~ ~~bed sheets~~ tied together, swung a skeleton in the rags of a fine dress. A few strands of

Commented [BP8]: Good action slipped in here to show us how Sir Warren feels about all of this.

Commented [BP9]: There seems to be some logic missing here. How did the parents not know where she'd been kept before? Why did the giants bring back proof of her existence? It might make more sense if the parents simply never heard where she was or if she was even alive, but then heard the rumor and desperately hired Sir Warren.

Commented [BP10]: This is a really great moment of surprise for the reader, even more so because of Sir Warren's optimism building up beforehand. Well done!

what might have been blonde hair still stuck to the skull. He didn't know how long he stood there before he slowly approached and cut her down. Around the bones of her right hand hung a golden locket with a picture of a young princess and her family. He took this, and a journal he found, when he left the room with Elenor's body.

He buried her where he had cut down the sapling. The sun was setting then, but he could not stay the night there. The small, green valley felt like a tomb, and the presence of the lone tower made him think of the lone corpse hanging in its room as time and weather decayed it to bones.

That night he read her journal. She wrote of her sorrow at being stolen away from her parents. She was hopeful of rescue, but as months passed and winter came, her writing became grimly determined. A ten-year-old forced to survive alone. She described how she lived off frequent rain water and the seeds her captors had provided her for window gardens. She had two furs that she did her best to cover her windows with in the winters and bad weather. Those first two winters were cold and extremely lonely. But she remained hopeful. She couldn't be forgotten. She wrote how she used her two dresses, her ripped up sheets, and her only girdle to lower herself out of the tower that next spring. She expressed her sorrow and depression when she realized that the drop from the end of the rope would still leave her with a broken leg or worse at the bottom of the ditch around the tower. As the years wore on, her writing grew more despondent. After her seventeenth birthday, she stopped keeping track of days. One winter later, she wrote a final entry. Disjointed, interlaced with meaningless scribbles, she expressed some final hopeless thoughts and closed the book. She had been dead for over a year.

Sir Warren had returned Elenor's locket to her parents, and spent the next four months on a quest to find a magic shield. He slew his first giant, lifted a curse, and ended the reign of Sir Halladan the Wicked. Then, he accepted a baron's quest for the Order to rescue his lost daughter Sarah. Missing since age thirteen, she had been kept in a faraway Keep for the last twelve years. Managing to destroy the witch who guarded the castle that held the maid, Sir Warren walked in on another corpse. She had poisoned herself as despair of being rescued took its crushing hold.

Sir Warren began to ask other knights about rescuing quests and discovered similar stories. When a maiden was successfully rescued, she was often in need of severe rehabilitation and nowhere near ready to marry a Hero or return to a life at court. Or any semi-normal life at all. That was when Sir Warren requested to be reassigned from the Fourth Company, "General Questing," to the Third Company, "Damsel and Royal Rescue." Not many knights wanted to rescue a princess younger than sixteen, and the Order preferred its members to focus on maidens who were older. But Sir Warren went to lengths to find families with kidnapped daughters between the ages of eight and eleven. He even accepted quests for stolen princes and sons. The families were confused, but grateful.

Sometimes, Sir Warren was still too late. Sometimes he rescued an older princess, but took her to Ashwell Abbey where he knew the nuns would help her before returning her to her family. This practice often earned him sharp reprimands from the Order. But he was too good to be dismissed. Many knights either perished or "retired" to a less strenuous order of knighthood after three to five years of fighting dragons, chasing giants, and crossing all terrains known to man. Many knights of the Third eCompany retired even sooner if they rescued a marriageable princess on one of their first quests. A princess with a large inheritance or one who had a father with no sons. Sir Warren, however, was on his seventh year in the Third Company. Not even pleas from the Order to use his experience for training squires or filling administrative positions could stop him from pursuing maiden after maiden, tower after tower.

Commented [BP11]: Why does the Order have this preference? Simply because the knights prefer it?

Commented [BP12]: You seemed to capitalize "Professional Hero" earlier. Do you want to capitalize "knight" too? (I think it would be fine to leave it like this, honestly.)

Commented [BP13]: Jumping back to Sir Warren was a little abrupt, so I felt this "however" helped the reader pause enough to catch up a bit.

Commented [BP14]: I love what this whole career story tells us about Sir Warren's character. The reader really grows to love and respect him for being such a decent knight!

_____ And so Diome. Sir Warren had found her questing record in his search for truly desperate maidens. Seeing that her last recorded location was only ten days away, he had sent her parents a letter regarding his intentions, gathered supplies, and set off.

Late the next morning he rode into the village of Pyne. The town had been named for the forest of pine trees that surrounded it, but the royal surveyor at the time had misspelled the name when filing it. No one had bothered to correct it.

The knight wrote a letter to the Order detailing the slaying of the dragon, apprised a couple farmers of its death, and bought a crossbow and five silver arrows. He prayed at the church in the center of the town, received a blessing from the priest, and asked around about any witches or lost princesses. No answers. He left Pyne by the end of the day.

The surrounding forest was so thick with trees that Sir Warren could not use the sky to guide his eastward course. No matter. His sword, named Polaris, had been forged out of ore mined near the top of the world. Whenever he spun it on the ground, the blade would point north. Beyond this remarkable ability, the sword was incredibly resistant to dragon's breath and other metals. He had found it in the wallet of a giant he'd slain four years ago, and carried it ever since.

After two days, he was out of the forest. In two more days he stood in front of a large, whitewashed cottage with a stream running behind it. It was disarmingly charming with a red-brick chimney and a yellow, thatched roof. In his early days he would have walked up to the front door and knocked right away. This morning, he sat and began his stakeout. Witches were funny. In a terrifying way. Patience was a virtue, he had learned.

He spent his day watching the cottage and tying wildflowers into a charmed necklace that gypsies had taught him to make. As night fell, smoke began to rise from the chimney, and a light came on in a window. To wait or go in? Was it the witch or the princess? If Sir Warren waited till morning, would he discover the people were enchanted to appear only at night? Or if he did enter now, perhaps he would find Diome, only to have the witch arrive home behind him in an ambush. Or it could be a hundred other outcomes either way. Maybe it was a blind old wizard living near a stream of magic fish, and no witch or Diome at all. Life could be uncertain like that.

He went to the door unarmored. Unarmored though. Maybe after all these years the witch could be persuaded rather than fought. He didn't want to ruin the chance by provoking violence with his appearance. He knocked, and noted with some amusement and swift following anxiety that the chimney smoke paused in the air as he did. The door made an unlocking sound and swung open. Kings alive! The witch was probably home. He entered slowly, resisting the urge to finger the flowers around his neck.

_____ An old woman in a black dress with ivy stitched into it sat in front of a bubbling pot over the lit fireplace. It didn't smell like spider's legs and toad's blood from here. More like potatoes. In a stew. Sir Warren held eye contact from the doorway with the old woman for five long seconds.

_____ "Won't you sit down," she asked in a pleasant, granny voice. Sir Warren cautiously sat on a stool on the opposite side of the hearth from her.

_____ "So," she said while stirring the pot. "You brought your sword but no armor. What good'll that do you if I get the drop on you, eh?"

Commented [BP15]: Maybe include a reminder here that he had a slight detour with the dragon? It might help readers remember the timeline a little better so they're not caught off guard when we get back to the present action in the next paragraph.

Commented [BP16]: I think the quest vibe here will really appeal to people who play games like Dungeons and Dragons. Nice details!

Commented [BP17]: I took out the scene break here (even though you can't really see it when all the markup is turned on) because I thought there wasn't enough of a time gap to really call for a break.

_____ “Ah,” he began. “Yes, well, I didn’t want to appear violent, but I carry Polaris so often I suppose I forgot to leave him behind.”

_____ “Hmm. That’s a lovely flower charm you’ve got there.”

_____ “Why, thank you.”

_____ “Gypsies teach you that?”

_____ “Indeed.”

_____ “The ones that make cheese in the snow?”

_____ “The very same.”

_____ “Hmm, yes, quite nice.” Sir Warren decided to let the air still for a moment. He really didn’t know where to take their conversation next. The woman broke the silence.

_____ “Here for Diome are you?”

_____ “Well, as a matter of fact—”

_____ “Oh, don’t get flustered, deary. I won’t do you like the last fellow if you don’t draw your sword on me. I felt this day would happen, and you know what? I’m sort of glad it did. Pleasant conversation and all that, quite charming.”

_____ “I see.” He really didn’t, though.

_____ “Tea?”

_____ “Excuse me?”

_____ “It’s Potatoe Tea, my favorite. Would you like some?”

_____ “Why yes, thank you.” As she got up to ~~pour~~ it into a cup, he asked, “So you were expecting me tonight?”

_____ “Well yes, deary, and last night. And every knight before. See what I did there?” She winked.

_____ He accepted his tea with a nod and a quiet “thank you.”

After an initial sip, and feeling no ill effects, he continued, “So, you’re the witch who took Diome?”

_____ “It’s a profession, deary, not a way of life.”

_____ “My apologies.”

_____ “All’s well.”

_____ “It’s just that the witches I have met do seem to make it a way of life.”

_____ “Mmm. What’s your name?”

_____ “Sir Warren of Northhold, ma’am.”

_____ “Ah, yes,” she cackled. “You have met quite a few witches. Mind you, ~~the~~ those ones in Northhold all ~~took~~ take it too far. They’re the kind that give us a bad reputation. Of course, most magic can easily become unpleasant, anyway.”

_____ Sir Warren made a face that suggested thoughtful agreement and nodded in small movements. “So Diome,” he began again.

_____ “Do you use the needle much?” the witch interrupted.

_____ “I’m sorry, what?”

_____ “The amount of times you begin a sentence with ‘so’ is quite pronounced.”

_____ “Right, my apologies—”

_____ “Don’t apologize, just mend your ways and move on.”

_____ “Very well.” He sipped his cup. “Diome does live here, yes?”

_____ “My name is Lisel, by the way. I tell you, manners are not your strength, Sir Warren.”

The knight forced a smile and let out a short breath at his tea. Lisel smiled from her chair.

Commented [BP18]: Why is he so unsure? Didn’t he come into this hoping that he could reason with the witch? The dialogue so far has been great, and I’m guessing the witch’s apparent politeness mixed with bluntness has him caught off guard, but the reader may need a bit more explanation to be sure.

Commented [BP19]: Haha, I love the joke here—but how does Sir Warren get it? I mean, maybe he doesn’t...

Commented [BP20]: Some of this back-and-forth dialogue gets a little choppy after a while. Consider adding in a little action here to show us a little more of the tone of the conversation. Maybe Sir Warren awkwardly scratches at his noes or the witch keeps stirring the pot cheerfully, or even starts bustling about bundling up herbs or whatnot.

Commented [BP21]: Kind of a funny tag on to the sew/so joke. (I like how the witch is so clever with her words! Adds depth to her personality.)

“I’m sorry, Lisel,” he ~~stumbled~~—remembering just in time to give his apology before his reasons. “I suppose I spend too many days fighting monsters to be polished in my manners.”

“Manners are the mask we wear over our natural behaviors, deary,” she smiled. “All is forgiven, and I am not offended. Besides,” she sighed and sat up in her seat. “I’m dragging this out. Yes, Diome lives here, but she is not in tonight.”

“Oh?” The knight paused a moment in raising his cup to his lips.

“Yes, she is attending her first Coven by herself tonight. Quite exciting. Not to worry, I made sure she would only attend one with good women. None of those crazy devil worshippers you’ve met.” Sir Warren choked on his tea. Lisel waited for him to regain his composure, watching the knight with slightly raised eyebrows over her own tea cup. She let him break the silence.

“Please, tell me how that came to happen.”

“Well yes, of course. You see, her father’s enemies promised me payment if I would take her and hold her as leverage or distraction against him. I thought, ‘Easy money,’ and I agreed. Well, Diome grew on me—and I began to like her. She’s quite pretty and uncommonly sweet. I hated to see her sad, so I tried to make it fun for her. You know, teaching her to cook and catch toads, asking her for creative ways to get rid of the knights her father would send. She’s quite clever, you know.”

“Did you kill all thirty-three knights the king sent?”

“Goodness, no! I’d say only eight ever made it here. Some of them we hid from, others we made to fall in love with pigs and elope, and a few still lie sleeping across the stream. I suppose we’ll wake them up some day. I only killed the ones who were mean and threatening like that last one who I . . . Well, we don’t need to talk about that right now.”

Sir Warren stared at Lisel with a mixture of worry and determination to try and show an open mind.

“When you say we,” he probed.

“Well, yes,” she started again. “At first she wanted to be rescued, naturally. But I think that after a while she began to enjoy her time here and decided to make the best of it. She wasn’t going anywhere. Anyway, her father’s enemies never did pay, so I cursed them to lose all their battles and gold, then chose to forget about the whole thing.

“But I couldn’t return Diome. It had been years at that point, and we’d gotten rather close. So I asked her if she would be willing to stay with me until her eighteenth birthday, and then I would take her home. And if she chose to stay, I would teach her everything I knew. And so it happened, deary. Now she’s a talented young woman with everything she needs to be a successful witch. Or a princess if she wants to.”

Sir Warren put his elbows on his knees and leaned his face into his hands while staring into the fire. No words could express his thoughts in this moment. Perhaps in fifty years he could have predicted something like this, but at the present he found it hard to say or plan anything.

Besides, what if Lisel were lying? Not that Sir Warren took her to be the lying sort. Eventually, while still staring at the fire, he asked, “When will Diome be returning?”

“Oh, tomorrow morning, I expect. Would you like to wait for her? I’m not holding her ransom anymore, and her eighteenth birthday is only nine days out. Funny that fate would bring you here now.”

Sir Warren paused for a moment, then said, “Yes, thank you.”

“But of course, deary! You may sleep in front of the hearth if you’d like. It is late.”

Commented [BP22]: Technically, you can’t really stumble out words, but if you want to keep this dialogue tag readers might not notice.

Commented [BP23]: I think a dialogue tag or action could be really effective here in showing Sir Warren’s shock—maybe having him wheeze a bit or something?

Commented [BP24]: I combined these lines because this action and dialogue go better together.

Commented [BP25]: What about her makes him trust her? That detail in his thoughts might be nice for the readers to see. Especially since he seems a little unsure of that a few lines down.

_____ “Please pardon me, ma’am, but I prefer to sleep with my horses outside.” Lisel seemed alright, but Sir Warren didn’t know how far he could trust her.

_____ “Very well, sir knight. But if you catch your death of cold out there, then I shall think you rather silly.” Sir Warren rose and handed the witch his cup, then turned to leave. As he opened the door and stepped into the night, she called his name.

_____ As he turned, she said,

_____ “Sir Warren, I’m so sorry, but I lied. It was potato soup, not tea. I simply ~~only~~ had only tea cups to put it in,” she finished with a soft smile.

_____ “Oh. Yes, well, that’s quite alright, ma’am.”

_____ “Call me Lisel, deary.”

_____ “Yes, of course. Good night, Lisel.”

_____ “Sleep well, Sir Warren.” The knight stepped out and closed the door.

Sir Warren dreamed odd dreams that night. Dreams of a young princess ruling subjects ~~whothat~~ she had all transformed into rabbits.

He woke in the field outside the cottage to the sound of laughter and clanking metal.

_____ There in the morning sunlight, a laughing maiden with nut-brown hair chased Sir Warren’s now enchanted suit of armor in a game of tag. This was Diome, the knight assumed.

He stood, fed his horses, and approached the cottage. Lisel offered him a seat inside and breakfast, and when he had finished, the maiden strode through the doorway.

_____ “Diome,” Lisel called as she fried more eggs, “leave Sir Warren’s armor alone. He’s come a long way to see you and he doesn’t need silly little witches damaging his armor with childish games.”

_____ “Yes, Lisel,” Diome responded as she chose a stool next to Sir Warren. “My apologies, ~~sSir kK~~ knight, I promise that I didn’t damage anything.” The knight didn’t know what to say. His reaction timing seemed unusually slow this morning.

_____ “Well, Sir Warren,” Lisel said as she placed another plate of toast and tomatoes in front of him, “Diome and I talked about things extensively, and we agree that she should return with you to her parents after her birthday tomorrow.”

_____ He paused in his eating, “I thought you told me that Diome’s birthday was nine days out?”

_____ “Well, yes,” Lisel answered while avoiding eye contact. “But we did put you to sleep for eight days. Diome came home, and we had much to discuss. Final magical training, what it would mean to go home, the party tomorrow; it just didn’t seem right to discuss it all with you around. More eggs?”

_____ Sir Warren felt taken aback. To put it mildly, He spent the rest of the day helping the witches clean their cottage and listening as Diome told him of her exciting life as a witch’s apprentice. Every now and then she asked him to tell a story of one of his quests, but he could tell she found them rather boring.

The next day they celebrated Diome’s eighteenth birthday with a happy meal and some gifts. Lisel presented her apprentice with a willow rod, a circlet of wild flowers, and a new red dress with birds sewn into the hem. Sir Warren, not having much time to prepare, gave the princess a tooth from the ~~R~~red ~~D~~dragon he had slain not too long ago. She received it with some wonder and amusement.

On the third (or tenth) morning of his stay at the cottage, Sir Warren and Diome prepared to leave. Lisel approached Sir Warren first. “And what gift may I give you, ~~s~~Sir ~~k~~Knight, for

Commented [BP26]: Should we capitalize this since we capitalized Potato Tea earlier?

Commented [BP27]: I thought I’d capitalize this since it seemed to take place of a knight. If you’d rather we leave this lowercase, though, it should be fine.

Commented [BP28]: Is there some action you could describe here to show us his surprise rather than saying what he feels? Especially since you move right after into him helping around the house as if nothing strange had happened. (Maybe an adverb there would help? “He spent the rest of the day warily helping the witches...” or something like that.)

Commented [BP29]: I can’t help but think of McDonald’s when I read this. Consider changing.(:

Commented [BP30]: Since this term wasn’t capitalized before, I kept this term lowercased for consistency.

your devotion to reuniting Diome with her family, and for your kindness towards us? Would you like me to enchant your sword? You do seem to like it. I could make it talk; you must be lonely on your quests, and I would be sure to make it a witty companion for you.”

Sir Warren played with the idea for a moment, then responded, “Thank you, Lisel, but no. I think it best if my sword stayed silent. If you will give me a gift, let it be this. Thirty-three knights preceded me in trying to rescue Diome. They were all men with hearts and minds and hopes. Their loss is not a light one. Please, awaken the ones who sleep beyond the stream, that they at least may return to those who may have loved them.”

“Very well, Sir Warren,” she responded solemnly, “they will return home. And they shall know it was by your request. But you must take this as well,” and she reached up to kiss him on his cheek. “Now, when you are an old and gray knight sitting alone in your castle, you will have these days to cheer and comfort you again.”

She held him in her gaze a moment longer, then asked, “Sir Warren, why do you quest?”

His response came slowly. “There was a lonely girl, in a faraway tower. I do it for her.”

Lisel nodded slowly.

“Some people,” she said, “would say to quest for only your heart’s sake. Others would say to let the past govern your future. I cannot tell you anything but, Only this: do not lose yourself in someone else’s quest. You may not be finished, but resting your sword for a season is alright, too.”

Lisel next moved to Diome. “Be good, my little one, my protégé. And you remember: always be grateful to this good knight. More often than not, the ones who need saving are those who think they don’t. Be grateful, and return to those who love you dearly.”

“I will,” the princess said as she leaned down to hug the witch. “And I promise that I will come right back to see you as soon as I can. So we can prepare for winter.”

“Do what you think is best, my child,” Lisel whispered. Diome mounted the packhorse wearing her dress and her crown of flowers. The rod and her belongings sat safely in her lap.

Wearing his unenchanted armor, Sir Warren mounted his warhorse and began leading the way to Diome’s kingdom. He turned back once to return Lisel’s waves of farewell, and offered the princess a handkerchief when she began to cry silently. As hard as life was in the Order of Heroes, Sir Warren felt at that moment that being a knight was easier than being a princess.

Sir Warren did not wed Princess Diome the Witch. Nor do we know what sort of reward he received from her father the king. This story will not tell us if the knight ended alone and gray in his castle, or if he had an altogether different ending. We won’t read here of how or if Diome bridged her two worlds together. Lives are more than one story. All that should be said at this point, I think, is that Sir Warren kept questing.

The End.

Commented [BP31]: Should he mention the ones who eloped with pigs, too?

Commented [BP32]: This last paragraph takes on a very different tone as we start to get a sense that there might be an actual person narrating this story. This could be jarring for the reader. I really like the line “Lives are more than one story,” because I think that will resonate with people and that it helps us see that there’s a different purpose to telling this story. However, the last line might leave readers wondering what the purpose actually is. Didn’t Lisel tell Sir Warren he could rest? Why does he choose to keep questing? It almost feels like his encounter with Diome didn’t change him when it should have somehow. Consider letting us see a little more of Sir Warren’s thoughts here at the end so we can understand how he changes (if he does) and why.