

## The Lonely Life of Sir Orion the Great

There once was an honorable knight by the name of Sir Orion the Great, strong and steadfast. Though he was young, many of his fellow knights who had years upon his twenty-three turned to him when problems arose, despite their own personal sentiments being against such an act. By the people, Orion was hailed as one in a million. Still, the great Orion, with all of his accolades, was, for all accounts, *lonely*. Day by day he resigned himself to such a fate, the loneliness which consumed his very being. That was until he met his one true love, knocking his entire world off its axis in one fell swoop. But she, too, would not last, and Orion would be lonely once more.

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Orion knew the trek to Arдона's neighboring kingdom, Eldon, was long and arduous, at least a week's long journey, yet still he had been the first to volunteer. Some called him childish, foolish even, while others thought of him as overzealous, but Orion knew the truth. This was his last chance to be near her until she was gone from his life forever. And deep down, even though he was filled with an overwhelming anger over the situation he had found himself in, Orion couldn't let that opportunity pass him by.

The knight had been given very clear instructions: ensure the princess' safety as she travels from Arдона to the kingdom where she is to be wed. Nothing more, nothing less. He was her sole protector, the only thing standing between her and the dangers of the forest that separated the capital city from the rest of the magnificent kingdom of Arдона, and beyond. The

powerful Ardonen king had feared his daughter would become a target if she were to ride with a full caravan, so only one knight was permitted to accompany her.

Stepping out into the first clearing they'd encountered in quite some time, Orion took the opportunity to regain his bearings. After nearly three days of travel, he definitely needed it. Orion made his way out of the driver's box of their simple single horse-drawn carriage, careful to avoid looking behind his seat through the small open window as he did. A soft voice came from inside the cabin. "Why are we stopping? It's not dark yet."

"Yes, my lady," responded Orion, "You are right, it is not, and I sincerely apologize. I just figured it might be good to take a rest before we begin again."

"Well, Sir Orion the Great, if you say so, then it must be true." Orion could practically visualize the small smile tugging at the corners of Princess Elowyn's lips as she said the words. She'd been teasing him for the better part of three days now. Little phrases here and there; a swish of her dress that could be seen out of the corner of the knight's eye. All to get under his skin, but Orion had refused to crack.

He'd wanted to be near her in their final days together. Of course he did. But Orion had a duty to uphold, and Elowyn had a habit of gravitating all of Orion's attention towards her; duty be condemned or otherwise. And, though Orion refused to admit it, a small, selfish part of himself refused to look her in the eye because of where they were headed and what she must do once they arrived. Orion wanted to remember her as his one true love, the girl who had opened his heart and mind to a multitude of indescribable possibilities, with a light of hers that few could claim they held within themselves. What he didn't want, what he had *never* wanted, was to see that light dissipate any more than it had the day she'd told him of her engagement.

They had snuck off to meet in secret in the farthest part of the garden, as they often did, in a spot close enough to the castle's outer wall that they would not be discovered by those inside. Orion had just returned from battle, and the first thing he had done was request a meeting with Elowyn. Orion stood, waiting patiently for his beloved, and soon, there she was, entering his field of vision. Her soft blonde hair was tied up in a rigid hairstyle, which was odd. And her clothes were entirely too formal for a secret meeting. Orion suddenly felt underdressed in his commoner's clothes and found himself wishing he had kept on his regalia from his return home.

Orion had rushed towards her, arms open wide, ready to embrace her. Elowyn had stopped him in his tracks, placing a shaky palm on his chest. "Is something wrong, princess?" Orion asked, dumbfounded. Tears began falling down her face, warping her usually joyful exterior. "Eldon has threatened us yet again, and father fears they will overtake our borders if we do not act!" She fell into his arms, trying to wipe her tears as they came.

"Then I will fight. I will ensure you and the kingdom are safe, Elowyn, if it is the last thing I do." Orion had hoped his words would calm her, but all they had accomplished was sending her into a stauncher emotion than sadness: *anger*.

"Don't you see? My father is sick of all the fighting and bloodshed." Elowyn took a shaky breath, the usual lightness in her face hardening into something Orion had never seen before. "It has been decided that I shall travel to our neighboring kingdom and spend my days there. I have already been promised to their eldest son." She paused, fighting back the words, until eventually, Elowyn whispered, "I am to be married, Orion, in three weeks' time."

Elowyn made her way out of the carriage, forcing Orion back into the present. He quickly turned and began to fiddle with the map in his hand, still unable to face her since that fateful day

in the garden. They had four days left of their journey, and the next two were expected to be the most taxing due to the treacherous terrain of the forest's more uninhabited areas.

After thoroughly examining the map, Orion went to refill their water supply in a nearby stream. When he eventually returned, Elowyn had made her way back into the carriage. Orion's much needed break was officially over.

They had been back on the path for quite some time when Elowyn finally spoke up. "Now what should my next piece be about? An ode to the liveliness of spring?" She asked. This was new. So far, Elowyn hadn't tried to strike up a true conversation, only little comments after long stretches of silence.

Elowyn sighed after she received no response. "You're right, that *has* been done before. Hm. What about a poem that centers around a lovely princess and her grouchy guard? The princess suddenly goes insane from a mind-numbing silence, takes over their carriage, and crashes it into a nearby stream. How does that sound?"

A surprised sound escaped the knight's lips, and Elowyn giggled, taunting him once more. "So, he lives!" She exclaimed, tapping on the frame of the still-open window behind him. Orion had kept it open just in case the princess needed him, and now he was regretting it.

"Please, Elowyn, I am trying to focus." It was all he could think of saying in the moment, though there were a million other things running through his mind. Why was she acting like this? How could she laugh when just days before she had been crying in his arms?

"Focus on what, the trees surrounding us on all sides? The crumbling dirt path? That is all you've been focusing on for the past three days." Elowyn stuck the quill she had been using for her poems through the open window and tickled the knight, furthering his resolve that at their next stop he would surely be closing that window.

“It’s not that simple; you know that,” said Orion.

“Oh, it isn’t, is it now? Well then, enlighten me. You are Ardon’s greatest hero, after all.” Elowyn sneered.

Orion stopped the carriage, hurriedly getting out. He needed to be on his own two feet, where his thoughts always seemed to be clearer. “Don’t you understand, Elowyn? They are sending you away, *I* am taking you there, and we will never see each other again! This is no laughing matter.” The darkness of nighttime was beginning to creep in, casting a shadowy haze over the area in which they had stopped.

“You don’t think I understand that? Of course I do. But I still want to spend these last few days I have, in the only home I’ve ever known, with *you*. And all you have done for three days is ignore me as if you never loved me!”

“How could you say such a thing to me?” Orion asked, incredulous. “Of course I loved you! I still do...” His words hung in the air between them. Elowyn had followed him out of the carriage, now standing behind him.

“Then look me in the eyes and say it!” Elowyn placed a hand on his shoulder, and it finally happened. Orion broke, and he turned to face her for the first time since their fates had been sealed. But before Orion’s eyes made their way to hers, Elowyn wrapped her arms around him. Orion stood there, frozen in place, tears slipping down his cheeks.

Amid the tears, Orion suddenly noticed a heavy weight being lifted from the sheath at his side. Before he could react, Elowyn pushed herself back, a shining double-edged sword in her hands. Elowyn was shaking now, pointing the sword inward.

“Elowyn, please. We can find another way, I promise.” Orion pleaded, though he knew full well the consequences of defying not just one, but two powerful kings.

“I refuse to live in another gilded cage, my love. That is not the life I want, nor the one either of us deserves.” Elwyn drove the sword into her stomach, collapsing to the ground.

Orion ran to her, picking Elwyn up in his arms. Elwyn’s quill had fallen to the ground, mixing with the dirt and blood at their feet. The knight looked into her eyes and whispered, “I love you.”