



# The Bridge

## A Parable

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# The Bridge

There once was a country where many, many happy people lived. There were so many people that the king struggled to keep track of all of them. There were short ones, tall ones, skinny ones and even not-so-skinny ones. There were strong ones and weak ones; there were ones with light-colored skin and ones with darker-colored skin. There were hard-working ones and there were ones that worked hard most of the time. But, even though there were so many kinds of people, the king loved them all, and he loved them more than they—all these different kinds of people— could ever love him. All in all, the people were happy. And the king was very happy, too. The king wanted the people to love him more, and he just knew that sooner or later they all would. So, he wasn't worried about their affection towards him and kept on doing nice things for them.

One day, the king decided to start building a new bridge over the Gold River, the longest and widest river in the kingdom. He was sure that this new bridge would be a great benefit to the kingdom and that everyone would need to help build it. Yes, there would be something important for everyone to do, essential things for the short ones as well as the tall ones. The thin and the not-so-thin would have very important jobs, too. The king became happier and happier as he thought about building the bridge; he

knew that once it was finished, it would cause the people to love him—and each other—even more. The bridge would ultimately connect the people living on the east side of the Gold River with those living on the west side; once it was finished, the bridge would help the peoples on both sides of the river to accomplish more for the kingdom and to even enjoy each other more.

But there was one thing that concerned the king: how was he going to ensure that everyone in his kingdom would have something important to do? He dearly wanted everyone working on the bridge to do those things that they were good at doing. How could he ensure that the jobs of the short people would be just as important as the tall people's jobs? He thought and thought and thought. And he leaped joyfully out of his golden throne when he finally came up with the solution.

The king called for all his knights, the heroes of the kingdom, to travel to every town, village, hamlet and farm to tell the people to come to a big meeting in Central City. He also told the knights to inform the people about the bridge project and how each person would have a important duty in that project. So, once the knights received their mission, they took off for the towns, villages, hamlets and farms. They traveled to Appleville, to Celery City, they crossed Strawberry Stream and even made it to Parsley Place. And why was Parsley Place so important? John the silversmith and his family lived and worked there. John was a very polite and hard-working man, and it was his primary duty

to make many beautiful things for the king and his court. Why, John once made a silver platter that the king and only his most-important knights used for the birth of the king's son celebration banquet. When John heard that the knights said about the bridge project, he became very excited. Usually the king would send him a letter when he wanted him to make silvery things. John was excited to think that this time the king would actually talk to him face-to-face to enlist him to craft something wonderful for the kingdom.

The day when everyone arrived at Central City, the king was nervous and very excited at the same time. His heart jumped every time he would look out the castle windows and see all the people. He loved his people very much... much more than they could ever love him. But, as mentioned before, this never bothered him.

Finally the time came for the king to address the people; it was time to tell them personally about the bridge project.

"Fine people of my kingdom! This is your king speaking! I'm very pleased that you came to Central City today. After our meeting is complete, there will be plenty of time for us to gather together to talk and to enjoy each other's company. I have provided more than enough food and drink for everyone. Oh, I do love you all so very much!"

The people cheered. And tears once again came to the king's large and dark brown eyes.

"Here is how I want us to build this wonderful bridge. I thought long and hard on how I wanted to do this to make

sure that everyone could take part and use their special talents and gifts. So, listen very closely. Starting today, from now on—until the bridge is completely finished—I will not be sending letters to you. I know that this is a big change... and that it will take time to get used to. But it is the best way that I can inform you of what I want you to do. So, instead of using letters delivered by my knights, I want you to set aside a certain time where we can sit down and talk to each other face-to-face. With my assistance and direction, my son, the prince, has designed a way to make this possible. I know it will be difficult at first, but please be patient and willing to do it. Now, everyone, return to your homes and decide on a time when it will be most-convenient for you and I to have our talks. Then, as we talk face-to-face with each other, I will tell you what I want you to do in order to be an important part of the bridge project!”

All of the people clapped and cheered; they were overjoyed that the king and the prince designed a way to get rid of the old letter-delivery system. Even John the silversmith was very happy, although he was a bit confused. Everyone went back to their town, village, hamlet or farm and continued to be excited about the king’s wonderful plan.

As the weeks went by, the king’s subjects talked face-to-face with the king. And during these talks, they received his instructions for their jobs on the bridge project as well as other important things he wanted them to do. Before too long, the bridge was nearly half-complete. Everyone was working hard; they all had a specific duty that cor-

responded to their personal talents and gifts. And no one complained about having too much to do. And no one became lazy because they didn't have enough to do.

But, John the silversmith and his family had a few problems.

For the first few weeks after traveling to Central City, John kept his appointments with the king. However, as time passed, he got too wrapped up in his work in Parsley Place. He also got very busy with his family. And he even worked so hard on the bridge that he began to not take time to talk to the king. Even though he began to miss many appointments, he continued to do a fine job as he worked for the king on the bridge project: he still showed up every time he was supposed to and everyone continued to praise him for the wonderful job he was doing on the bridge. But, there were still some problems.

John, at the beginning of the bridge project, was instructed to craft shiny pieces of silver tubing that would be used to make the bridge's spectacular handrails. And he was doing such a super job! The king, the prince and the knights were very pleased with his work. But as he got so busy making the silver tubing, forgetting to talk personally with the king in the process, he didn't discover that he had made more than enough tubing for the handrails. Because there was more than enough shiny, silvery tubing, the king wanted John to begin to do something else. The bridge project only need a certain number of tubing pieces; now it was time to craft shiny, silvery nails. But, John didn't

know that the king desired that he would make silver nails instead of silver tubing because he had forgotten to keep his appointments with the king!

John continued to show up at the bridge site, bringing with him the many finely-crafted, shiny, silvery tubes for making handrails. Before he realized it, he had made enough tubes to fashion enough handrails for a dozen bridges!

Now, the king knew all that John was doing (and there were more people besides John who were not keeping their appointments). But the king's gentle but strong hands were tied: John had agreed to keep the appointments, and he was the one who had forgotten about them.

The king loved John and his family very much... just as much as he loved the rest of his people. The king knew that this bridge must be built and that it had to be built according to his plans. He soon became very sad that John, and too many others, had decided to do things their way instead of doing things his way. Back in the days of the letters, the people knew that if they didn't so what the king wanted them to do, they they would have to forfeit their privilege of living in his kingdom; they would be forced to leave and could never return. The king didn't want to order John and the other people who were doing things their way out of the kingdom, but he knew that he had to. He was a king who honored his word.

So, with a very heavy heart and with tears in his eyes, the king sent one of his knights to tell John that he and



his family had to leave the kingdom; they had forgotten the agreement they had made that one magnificent day in Central City.

As John and the other people who had been told to leave trudged slowly past the castle on their way out of the kingdom, the king's eyes continued to be teary and his heart was very heavy. He was so unhappy. But the bridge had to be built according to his plans and his time frame: this was, in fact, his kingdom.

**The End**

# Excerpt from Betrovia

Book One of The Land of Betrovia trilogy

“Good morning, beautiful Tamara! Did you bless us with this royal feast of a breakfast?” Kristof asked as he came into the dining room from the kitchen. Tamara didn’t even look up.

“Did you close the back door?” The other way to enter the inn was through the south door that led into the kitchen. Kristof, nineteen years old, a few inches shorter than Patrik but taller than both girls, slipped off his coat, draped it over the back of his chair, and sat down next to Galena. “Well, did you close it?”

“Why yes, dear Tamara, the door is effectively shut. No bears, wolves or other wild creatures will be invading this domicile from that access point. However, Galena – from the look on her face – doesn’t appear to believe me.”

“Don’t get me involved in this! I have to work with her all day. You can rile her up and then saunter outside to escape her wrath.” The grin on her face revealed sarcasm. But Tamara still had not made eye contact with the young man. “Do you want me to get you anything from the kitchen? There’s a bit more potatoes.”

“No, no... unless Tamara wouldn’t mind frying a few eggs for me?”

“Stop it! Just stop it. What are you so glib about today? Can’t you see that breakfast has been prepared and served already. Stop being so rude and eat what’s on the table!” The elder daughter looked up at him, her dark brown eyes framed by her glistening black eyebrows. She pointed at the half-full plate of food and motioned for him to help himself. Franck chuckled with amusement.

“Oh, what a riot, what a wonderful scene! Kristof, it never ceases to amaze me how quickly you can get her dander up. Do you practice this between my visits?” The purveyor of both common household wares and antiques divine, pushed himself away from the table, signaling that he had finally reached his limit. “Oh,” he continued. “Did you remember to brush down Fairchild this morning? Or at least last night? Like I asked you?”

“Of course, Uncle Franck, and your steed is much more attractive because of it. You know, I don’t understand why that old horse hasn’t bolted out from under your portly frame and taken refuge somewhere in the forest.” Franck immediately roared with joy.

“Ho, ha, ha! You are quite the jester, you son of a Haarigoian! I never do tire of coming to this wonderful hovel of tasty delectables and spry humor! Yes, this is one of my favorite places between the Plains and Lycenia!” He laughed, standing in the process, and belched one more time. “Oh, ladies, please excuse the rudeness of a fat old man. But I’m sure you understand. Unlike Kristof, I have no one in the world to impress, to appear suave and sophisticated in front

of. Oh yes, Kristof, you have the whole world before you, you do!”

“Uncle Franck, might it be advantageous for me to join you on your journeys someday? I’m sure that I’d be able to gather more material just by being with you!” Patrik shook his head and smiled.

“Uncle Franck and Kristof... now that would be quite a pair. Yes, indeed... quite a pair,” Tamara mumbled. Since Franck had already moved away from the table and waddled over to the east side of the room to chat with the other guest, Tamara and Galena began to clean off the table.

“Now wait just a minute! I’m not done with that!” Kristof said, grabbing the bowl of cobbler back from Tamara.

“Stop, boy-hired-to-work-outside! Breakfast is over and it’s time to go back to work. Go outside!”

“Can’t I have just one more spoonful?” Both young people held tightly onto the bowl.

“Let go of the bowl so I can clean up this mess!” She successfully yanked it away from the scruffy young man. “Good. Now go outside and do whatever you were supposed to do before disturbing our breakfast.” Kristof leaned back in the chair, putting his hands behind his head and stretched.

“Why are you always so mean to me? When are you going to realize that you’re seriously in love with me and are just upset that I haven’t asked your father for your hand yet?” He successfully ducked the spoon that had been in

the cobbler bowl; it landed at Franck's feet. Tamara's spare hand immediately covered her mouth, and she rushed into the kitchen.

"Here's the spoon," Franck said. "Suppose you won't be taking this to her directly, eh?"

"Is that a challenge? You don't think I'll walk right in there and demand an apology?" Kristof cajoled.

"No, I am thinking just the opposite. I envision that you're considering sauntering in there, picking up something left over from our meal and dumping it on directly on her head!"

"No, that wouldn't work... too forceful. I would need something more subtle...."

"I'm kidding," Franck said. "Listen a moment... before she comes back out." Franck then proceeded to summarize how he had successfully convinced his wife to marry him. Patrick had heard the story too many times before, and – staying out of the tussle between the two young people – felt impelled to interject in the middle of the summary.

"Kristof, this conversation has to conclude. You need to head back out to the barn. Did you forget that we are scheduled to go to Noran today? Even though it's not snowing or raining now, I think it might be later. We need to get started very soon."

"Patrik, give me a few more minutes with the boy. If he's going to be your son-in-law someday...."

“What? Uncle Franck! He has work to do! And I’m sure you do, too!” Tamara picked up the last of the breakfast dishes. “Kristof \_works\_\_ \_for us. And that’s it! The sooner he wakes up to that reality, the better!” Franck scratched his nearly-bald head.

“Tamara, sweet Tamara. I can retire tomorrow if I so desired. However, I enjoy traveling too much – visiting wonderful friends like you – to hang up my leather overcoat quite yet. Whatever *work* you believe I have to do can wait.” Tamara didn’t hear him since she had already scurried back to the kitchen.

“Kristof, give the horses a larger portion of oats today. We will leave for town within the hour.”

“An hour? And more oats? Yes sir! I got it!” With that, he put on his coat. “Should I use the kitchen or the front door?”

“Front door, please. Leave the girls alone. They have things to finish in there and don’t need any more distractions. Now go on outside. I’ll bid Uncle Franck goodbye for all of us.”

“Goodbye? That sounds so definite... so final.” Franck headed for the front door, following Patrik’s lead. He left the warm confines of the dining room so Tamara and Galena could finish without any more interruptions. Once outside, Patrik stopped at the top of the porch steps. “So, tell me again where you’re heading? East? Back to Lycentia?”

“No, no. I left the capital city a few days ago. I’m heading for Dreut.”

“What? I thought you’d given up going that far west? Too dangerous for an old merchant like you... isn’t that what you’ve said? What are you planning to buy or sell there that you can’t proffer in a safer environment?”

“Oh, don’t misunderstand, good friend. I’m not going to the front to make any gold. My motives are much more juvenile than that!” he said, laughing. “I heard that there’s this Haarigoian named Ulek.... quite huge and quite ugly... with a temperament akin to a wounded wolverine... only twice as mean. He’s challenged the commander there to a duel of some kind and....”

“A duel?” Patrik asked, looking up at the clouds. Small patches of blue stood out behind much larger areas of gray and white. “What kind of duel? That doesn’t sound like something any Haarigoian could conceive on his own.”

“Ha! I can’t agree more,” Franck continued. “Since I was headed for a Rigarian village but a few miles from the border....”

“Eh? Rigarians? What has gotten into your head lately? Haven’t you been warned to stay away from those traitors?”

“Yes. And then again... no. Why do you keep interrupting?” By the time Kristof had led Fairchild to the porch – to be burdened once again with the weight of the rotund businessman and his belongings – Franck had summarized all he knew about the most recent skirmishes between the Lycentians and the Haarigoians. While the two friends finished their conversation, Kristof brushed the horse one

more time. “Kristof, you pamper that horse like he’s your own. If I only had a few gold coins, I’d give one to you.”

“Oh, not to worry. My wages here more than compensate me for my efforts,” he said, his words ending on a higher pitch.

“Ha! That is highly unlikely! If I were to ask Tamara, I’m sure she’d say that you’re grossly overpaid!” Even with that taunt, he reached into a pouch hanging from his right side. “Here... add this to your bank account.” Franck said and winked. It was a silver coin. Kristof nodded his head.

“Thank you, fine sir. You are *always* welcome at The Lonely Fox,” he said, bowing much too deeply for the occasion.

“Kristof! Come back to the barn! Hurry! I need your help with something!” Galena yelled as she headed for the modest structure the family courteously referred to as “the barn.” The hireling, leaving the two men to see what Galena was so emphatic about, waved good-bye but said nothing more.

“I suppose it’s time for me to go, my white-haired friend. Please express my sincere gratitude to your lovely daughters for another fine stay.”

“I will do that. When do you think you’ll be heading home to Lycentia?”

“Can’t say for sure. You know the life I lead now – with Sereal wishing I were dead! Ha!” Patrik thought about the last time he had seen Franck’s red-haired Knaesin wife.



“Can’t say I regret her temper, though, knowing that I’d probably behave much the same way if there was any Knaesin blood flowing through my veins.” And with those being the last words that the innkeeper thought he would hear from the portly traveler for many months, Patrik stepped back onto the porch, smiling as he looked up at what had turned into a nearly blue sky. A solitary cloud caught his attention for a moment, then he opened the door of the inn.

“Innkeeper, may I have a word with you?” Patrik was startled and looked for the source of the voice. It was the other guest.

“Yes sir, what may I help you with?”

“Before arriving here last night, I met two trappers on the road west of here who said they knew you.” Patrik’s eyes became large and lively as he talked to the man. In the course of that short conversation, Patrik learned that the traveler had sold a trap to the trappers. He, then, sensing that this was an opportunity to illicit some comments about his inventions, asked the guest to look at a trap that he’d been designing. The merchant politely declined, emphasizing that he, like Franck, needed to be going. Patrik thanked him for the information about the trappers, and the conversation ended as abruptly as it began.