



Melody and Harmony

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Humor, Retold Fairy Tales, Romance

Let's face it, kids n' people: Times have changed. We have cars instead of horses, horses instead of bicycles, bicycles instead of unicycles, polar bears instead of—

(NOTE: This introduction has been abandoned as it was clearly nonsense)

Times have changed. Especially for you lady-types who may or probably not be reading this. Today, you can do whatever you want. Do any job, use any last name, live anywhere, marry whoever you want, marry no one, have babies, don't have babies. The world is your oyster...unless you don't like oysters, in which case the world can be, like, your linguini or something. Maybe with some shrimp in there. Or is it shellfish you don't like?

(This is your last warning!)

Okay, sorry.

What I'm trying to say is that being a woman has changed a lot since this story took place. Back then, a young girl had only one job in life: Marry well and bear many sons. This was true of all girls, be they poor or really quite wealthy. Common or ever-so-royal. So whether you were just the daughter of the village smithy, or Princess Melody, when you reached that certain age (18, in this case) it was time to get engaged.

So Princess Melody knew that she would have to marry and be beholden to her husband and do what he said and keep his house and raise his children. None of that really appealed to her, which is why she came up with the tasks in the first place. Three impossible tasks that no man could possibly complete. This, she was

convinced, would be enough to save her having to marry some jerk.

But Princess Melody was one of these beautiful-type princesses you're always reading about in books like this one, which means that, despite the impossibility of the tasks, many-a-man still tried to win her hand in marriage, though they all failed after the first task and gave up.

But then there was Prince Melvin. He wanted to marry Princess Melody for many reasons, one of which was that they were both called "Mel." Mel and Mel. He thought that would be cute. Don't you think that's cute? So, Melvin sent his page boy, Harold, to go to Princess Melody's kingdom and face the tasks on his behalf.

"But if you want to marry her," asked Harold, "why aren't you doing the tasks?"

"If I did that, what would be the point of my even having servants? Now go!"

Harold did as she was told. And, no, that wasn't a typo, I used the correct pronoun there. You see, Harold was, in reality, Harmony, a young girl who, not unlike Princess Melody, disliked the role women played in the vaguely medieval but non-specific time and place when fairy tales happened, so she decided to put on a fake mustache and wear boy clothes in the hopes of making a better life for herself.

It didn't, really, because male or female she was still poor. And if womenfolk got a raw deal back in the day, it's nothing to how the poor were treated. Sorry, this is getting needlessly political. But the point is that her name is Harmony and she's dressed as a boy, but she's really a girl.

Harmony traveled on her horse for a full day before arriving at Princess Melody's castle. On the way, she passed a stream and saw a big, fat fish that had jumped too high and landed on the ground. The fish was gasping, unable to get itself back in the water. Taking pity on the little guy, Harmony picked him up and set him back in the river and he swam off.

Later she came upon a baby fox which had been caught in a hunter's snare. Again, she took pity on the animal and set him free.

Finally, she came to a bee hive. And there were two naughty little boys preparing to light a fire and smoke the bees out. She yelled at them and they ran away. The bees were safe at home once again.

Finally, Harmony arrived at Princess Melody's castle and announced that she had come on behalf of Prince Melvin to face the challenges. Like all the others, she was brought before Princess Melody and, like all the others, she was momentarily stunned by the princess's beauty. Her golden hair was like sunshine, her skin was flawless and she was wearing a gown that looked like it had been woven from moonlight.

"Young man," said Melody, apparently taken in by Harmony's disguise, "you must pass my three tests, which no one else has ever passed before. The first task is to retrieve my treasured emerald ring from the bottom of the Fallin River."

"Why is it called the Fallin River?" asked Harmony.

"Because you have to be careful not to fall in."

And she was right about that. The Fallin River ran much, much faster than most rivers do. If you put so much as a toe in the water you would be swept away by the current. Standing at the banks, Harmony understood why nobody had ever been able to pass the first test. And she wasn't a very strong swimmer to start with.

Luckily, there was a fish who owed her a favor. Turns out the fish she had saved earlier lived in this river and was quite used to the current. He was more than happy to retrieve the ring for Harmony. She thanked the fish and returned to the castle, proudly holding the ring aloft.

"Well done," said the princess, genuinely surprised that Harmony had succeeded. "I guess you move on to the second task."

"What is the second task, highness?"

"I...I can't remember. No one's ever gotten this far so...wait I wrote it down somewhere." A handmaiden handed the princess a small notebook and she flipped through a few pages before she found it. "Okay, got it! You have to find my beloved ruby ring. Which is buried in the forest on the edge of my kingdom."

"Where? I mean, where in the forest is it buried?"

"Well, if I knew that, it wouldn't be much of a challenge, would it?"

The forest was about a hundred miles square and was almost like a maze. So even if Harmony could find the ring, there was a real chance she wouldn't be able to find her way back to the castle.

Just then, who should come up to her but a family of foxes. The littlest one she recognized as the fox she had saved from the snare. She explained her current predicament to the foxes and asked for their help. They enlisted the help of every badger, vole, weasel, rabbit and assorted burrowing critter in the vicinity and they uncovered the ruby ring in no time. Harmony thanked her little friends and returned the ring to the increasingly stunned (and more than a little annoyed) Princess Melody. After all, these tasks were specifically designed to be unbeatable and here this upstart boy was blowing through them like nothing!

"Fine! So you got the second ring. But you'll never manage to pass the third task. My beloved diamond ring was stolen by a giant. You have to get it back for me."

Well, you probably know where this is going, but here it is: The giant lived in a cave in the mountains. Standing at the entrance to the cave, Harmony seriously considered giving up and going home since she really had no idea how to fight a giant. Then something started buzzing around her face. It was a bee. As a matter of fact it was one of the bees from the hive Harmony had saved. A moment later it was joined by the rest of the swarm and they followed Harmony into the cave.

"Giant!" she cried. "I am come for Princess Melody's diamond ring!"

"You can't have it!" said the giant. "Go away!"

"This is your last chance to give me the ring."

"And this is your last chance to go away!"

"Okay, you asked for it." And the bees swarmed around the giant's face.

"No! Stop! I'm allergic! Call them off!"

"Only if you give me the ring!"

“Fine!” and he handed Harmony the ring.

Princess Melody was getting ready for bed when one of her handmaidens (the same one who had handed her the book from before as it happens, but that’s not really all that important to the story) told her that Harold had returned with the diamond ring. She was understandably shocked that he had survived the giant. In fact, she was actually kind of angry, and she stormed into the throne room to confront this upstart.

This time, of course, she didn’t have her makeup on and her hair was still wet from her nightly bath and she was just wearing a nightdress and a robe instead of the gorgeous gown from earlier. But she was still the most beautiful woman Harmony had ever seen.

“Are you kidding me?!?” roared the princess in a very un-princess-like way.

“What? I got your ring back like you asked me to.”

“You weren’t supposed to actually do it, you idiot! I don’t want to get married. That’s why I made the tasks impossible to do! I don’t want to be tied down to some man and be treated like his servant or something.”

“Neither do I,” said Harmony. “That’s why I wear this.” And she took off her fake mustache and told Melody the truth about who she really was. It felt good after so many years to be able to just be herself with someone. And Melody was delighted that she didn’t have to put on a big show with Harmony the way she did for all the men who came to seek her hand.

It’s rare, in this world, to find someone around whom you can truly be yourself. And Melody and Harmony stayed up all night, talking.

A few days later, Prince Melvin received a message from Princess Melody’s castle. It was delivered, not by Harold, but by a different messenger. It read as follows:

Dear Prince Melvin,

When I left for Princess Melody's castle, I swore that I would not return without winning her hand for you. I am happy to say that I am able to keep that promise because I failed to win her hand for you and, therefore, I am not returning.

In fact, since I was the one who actually completed the tasks, Princess Melody is going to marry me. Maybe next time you want to marry someone, you'll talk to her yourself instead of staffing it out to a servant.

Best wishes,

Soon-to-be Prince "Harold"

Don't worry about Melvin, he wasn't too heartbroken. In fact, a few weeks later, he met another princess called Melanie and they got married and they were still "Mel and Mel" (seriously, does no one else think that's cute?

And, as if this actually needed to be said, Princess Melody and Princess Harmony lived very happily ever after.

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