

Sir Blunder

A Bedtime Story for Big People

Walter Kerr

EXOPLANET
PRESS

Copyright © 2017 Trent Eades

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by reviewers, who may quote brief passages in a review.

No characters in this book are based on actual people, except for those that are.

Editing and book design by ExoPlanet Press
Cover illustrations by Zoë Eades

Printed and bound in the United States
First Printing

Published by ExoPlanet Press
P.O. Box 22672
Knoxville, TN 37922
Email: info@exoplanetpress.com

ISBN-13: 978-1979878104
ISBN-10: 1979878102

*This is a story of none of us
Living or none of us who is dead,
Except for all of those of us
Who meander in my head.*

*Now each of us is a part of us,
That is those of us we touch.
The matter is with most of us
We touch the bad too much.*

PROLOGUE

Once a beautiful princess named Gretel was desired by a wicked wizard. Gretel despised the wizard and gave her love instead to a nice young man named James, a prince from a neighboring kingdom. All people, both rich and poor, feared the wizard, and though Gretel also feared him, she would bestow no favors on him. Finally in a fit of rage the wizard brewed up a cauldron of spiders, scorpions, and pussycat tails. He crossed his chest three times, stood on his head, winked at the moon, and took a sip of his new-made brew. Then he chanted:

*Cursed be you, princess,
So proud and bold,
No one will know you,
You'll be so ugly and old.
And my naïve prince,
Whom the princess adores,
You'll be an ass forever more.*

Instantly Gretel was an old, old woman, and so very ugly that no one could stand to look upon her face. No longer being

recognized as the princess, she was driven from her father's palace into a great wood from which she was told to never leave. Plodding behind Gretel was James, whom Gretel, not knowing his true identity, called Rudolph the ass.

All good people have a fairy godmother. The princess had one. Bad is stronger than a little good, but very good will win over bad. The fairy godmother waved her magic wand over the wicked wizard who was transformed into a powerful dragon.

*Now Old Dragon,
So scaly and smelly,
Be hated by men
And crawl on your belly.
Get in that forest
Where Gretel will abide,
But harm her, Old Dragon,
And surely you shall die.*

Then the fairy godmother appeared before Gretel. She told her that a dragon would live in a part of the forest separate from her abode and would not harm her as long as she did nothing to so irritate him that he lost his uncontrollable temper.

"Do not despair, dear princess," the fairy godmother said, "for in time there will come a knight ordained of God to release you from your bondage. He will be trained from childhood to fight and slay this unsavory creature. But being a great warrior will not be enough. His armor will fall from heaven, and he will know victory will be his. Faith will win all. Only then will your youth return."

Gretel, Rudolph, and the dragon lived in the forest for a thousand years.

I

AND SO COMES BLUNDER

There was a small village in a broad valley overlooked by the forest home of Gretel, Rudolph, and Old Dragon. The villagers were simple folk—and poor. Days they worked like the beasts of burden they were. Evenings they bolted their doors against the strange, terrible darkness.

In the village living with foster parents was a little boy named Blunder because whatever he tried to do he usually did wrong. His trouble was that he could barely see well enough to tell night from day. Few knew this, and fewer cared, and he was too young to know he was different than other children.

Blunder's foster parents were named Miller. Thus Blunder was Blunder Miller. In those days, folks were often named after their crafts or character traits. Mr. Miller ground wheat into flour and that is how he got his name.

Mrs. Miller was a proud and cruel woman. Although the Millers had nine children and were poorer than their neighbors, Mrs. Miller feigned airs usually reserved for royalty. Indeed, Mrs. Miller did have a claim to royalty in that a friend of her

second cousin's had served as a maid-in-waiting in the castle of Duke Fontaine, who ruled and collected taxes from the villagers. Her own father had been a peasant who was hanged for chicken thievery, a subject never mentioned in Mrs. Miller's presence. In fact, Mrs. Miller had severe headaches whenever anything undesirable was done or mentioned in her presence. Then she would retire to her bedroom where she would disturb the household by moaning and groaning for hours.

Mr. Miller was a good man who long ago had sunk under the burning lashes of his wife's tongue. Now his every deed was but to humor her. When it was learned that Blunder was incapable of work and would therefore be a burden on the household, Mr. Miller's troubles were unbearable. Thus he took Blunder from the house and made him a small bed of grass under a shed that was also occupied by Rover, the Millers' dog. Then Mr. Miller spoke to Blunder:

"Blunder, Rover will protect you from the night goblins. When the sun goes down, close your eyes and the witches cannot get your soul. If you should open your eyes and look directly at the moon, the moon man will eat you. The other children have promised not to clean their plates, so there will be a little garbage thrown out the back door for you to eat."

Mr. Miller had done what he had to do, but he was not a happy man. A river ran through the village. Each day Mr. Miller walked alongside its banks on his way to and from work. Today his heart was too heavy. He took off his shirt and tore it into broad strips from which he made a rope. One end he tied around a large rock; the other end he tied around his neck. He took the rock in his hands and stepped off into the water.

MR. MILLER'S FEET

When Mr. Miller did not return home, everyone knew that the goblins had taken him into the forest where he was fed to Old Dragon. Their breadwinner being gone, the Miller children went to work in the duke's fields each day. Blunder also tried farm work but was soon dismissed. Mrs. Miller accused Blunder of being a gourd-head and cuffed him soundly, after which she took to her bed with her usual headache.

Rover, the dog, was Blunder's only companion. Together they prowled alleys living off bits of garbage, or they roved the countryside where Rover sniffed out bird eggs which they ate raw. The villagers would have been horrified if they had known that occasionally a decrepit old woman of the forest gave the pair tidbits of food.

Blunder had no fear of the night. Hunger drives out such fear. Through darkness Blunder walked securely holding Rover's tail. The boy and the dog found happiness together. The dog forged for food so that the boy might live, and the boy gave love to the dog.

Mrs. Miller fretted over the fact that Blunder added nothing to the family's living. It never occurred to her that she gave nothing to Blunder. The Miller children were always too tired to think of Blunder at all.

Quite by accident, Mrs. Miller did get something from Blunder.

Father Ding-Dong was the village priest. He was called Father Ding-Dong because as a boy it was his job to ring the church bells.

Most people who work for the church are good people, but sometimes there can be a real stinker. Father Ding-Dong was the stinkiest stinker of them all.

One day Father Ding-Dong visited Mrs. Miller to comfort her in her time of grief. Also he hoped to come away with a few coins.

"Mrs. Miller," the priest said. "I have come to comfort you in these bad times."

"You are always a comfort," she said.

"Mr. Miller was a fine man. I tell everyone that Brother and Sister Miller are the best people."

"Truly we tried to meet our lot without complaint."

"Strange," the priest said, "that his faith could not keep the goblins away."

"It is strange," Mrs. Miller said.

"There must be some sin you knew not of."

"Nary a sin."

"A little prayer for safety's sake?" the priest asked.

"Yes, a little prayer."

"You will have to pay penance money."

"We have no money," Mrs. Miller said.

"Only a few coins."

"We haven't a few."

"I'll pray hard. I'll pray for half price."

"Maybe you could pray on credit?"

"There has to be a sacrifice. There would be no sacrifice until the debt was paid."

"Poor Mr. Miller."

"I'm sure he has one foot in hell," the priest said.

"Couldn't he stand on one foot at a time?" Mrs. Miller asked.

"I weep for Mr. Miller's hot foot. Is there anything you could trade?" The priest looked around the dismal room. He saw nothing worth carrying away.

Mrs. Miller thought of Blunder. "We could work for you," she said. "The church garden needs weeding."

"You have nine children."

"Alas! Their labor has been sold to the duke. But there is Blunder."

"I have heard," the priest said, "that he is not very bright."

"Oh, he is a remarkable child—and as strong as an ox."

"He must not be more than five years old."

"Six, good father."

"Why does he not work for the duke?"

"Goodness, Father Ding-Dong. He is a guest in our home. We would not send a guest into the fields."

"But you would send him to the church gardens?"

"This is an emergency. Remember Mr. Miller's foot."

"For how long would I have the boy?"

"Until Mr. Miller's foot is cool."

"He must have committed a very bad sin. Both feet may be down there."

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"Say a week," the priest suggested. "I would have time to pray for him really hard."

"Dear boy! We will miss him so. But keep him for a week. No, keep him for two. We must be sure."

"Such a noble sacrifice."

Mrs. Miller stood up straight. "Father Ding-Dong, there is something else."

"Yes, feel free to share your burdens."

"I am more than a commoner," she confessed.

"You never looked common."

"I have gentle blood in my veins."

"I knew! I knew! I could tell!"

"I treated Mr. Miller as an equal."

"There will be an extra star in your crown in the hereafter."

"I never insisted on my rightful station. I let Mr. Miller and the children wait on me; I didn't demand a valet or a maid."

"Bless you."

"But now I think it is time to claim my proper station."

"True! True!"

"I dreamed of one of true heritage, rich and desirous of my hand. Only he was too shy to come forward. Pray that he may have courage, good father."

"How long has it been since Mr. Miller disappeared?" the priest asked.

"Three weeks."

"A short time."

"Think of the years I've lost."

The priest nodded sympathetically.

"Pray, that he may hurry to me," Mrs. Miller said.

"It would take some powerful prayer."

"You are powerful in prayer."

"How old is the man of your dreams?"

“Twenty-five, perhaps as old as twenty-eight.”

“Why, Mrs. Miller, how old are you?”

“Twenty-three.”

“Twenty-three! Mrs. Miller, I baptized your oldest son. He must be all of sixteen now.”

“The children’s lives have been hard. They aged fast.”

“There must be more penance.”

“You may have Blunder for a long, long time.”

“Hmmm. Next week is my week of fasting.”

“Such a fine man you are, father.”

“I cannot pray while fasting.”

“You must!”

“The cause of prayer is great. I would be forgiven if Blunder fasted for me.”

“Blunder would make a fine faster. He doesn’t like food anyway.”

“This way I could get right on Mr. Miller’s feet.”

“Father, you are a very holy man.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Miller.”

“I am not a selfish woman, but my children suffer. If you prayed for my coming marriage first, I could help them sooner.”

“You certainly could.”

“Mr. Miller would be doubly pleased for waiting.”

“That he would, oh gracious woman of wisdom. When I get around to Mr. Miller, I’ll ask for an ice pack as a reward for patience.”



Father Ding-Dong bade Mrs. Miller farewell and returned to the village church where he lived. Mrs. Miller sent Blunder to him soon after.

Father Ding-Dong had in the past begun his fasting with a full belly. He now thought that it would be noble to begin while still hungry. In fact, he was so in sympathy with Blunder's empty stomach that he ate enough for both of them. Then he directed Blunder to a spot in the church yard where he was to sit or stand for a week without any food and only a little water in the early evening.

Night fell. Crisp cold winds swept through the church yard. "Blunder must be freezing out there," Father Ding-Dong thought. He drank a glass of wine to warm his blood. He then drank another glass to warm Blunder's blood. Clouds covered the sky. The rain came down. Father Ding-Dong drank more wine. He did not drink for himself anymore. It was all for Blunder's comfort. "Fasting is a fine thing when two people work at it," thought the father as he chewed on a leg of roast mutton. "From now on, I'll always let Blunder help me fast."

The week passed. Father Ding-Dong had a fine old time. Gorged on food and bloated with wine, he sometimes forgot to take Blunder his glass of water in the evening. Once he remembered that he was supposed to pray for something, but, not being able to remember what, he decided it was of little importance.

What of poor Blunder? Although he was but a poor little boy who was sneered at for being the blunderer he was, he had gained wisdom through hardship. Father Ding-Dong warned him that if he moved from his place of fasting he would be struck down by lightning. But each night as it grew dark, Rover sought out Blunder. They would leave the church and somehow, someway, somewhere manage to find a little something to eat. On the morning of the last night of fasting, Blunder and Rover returned to the church yard. They had stayed out too long and now the sun was shining. By the morning light

they saw a strange sight. Father Ding-Dong was stretched out in the churchyard. He lay on his back, his face toward heaven. The cloak he wore about his shoulders was furled back from his body. His stomach was bare and open as if slit by a knife. Father Ding-Dong had eaten and drunk until his stomach had burst.

Mr. Baker, good Christian that he was, knew that the father could not lie, but observed that for one who had not eaten for days he sure was full of an awful lot of shit.