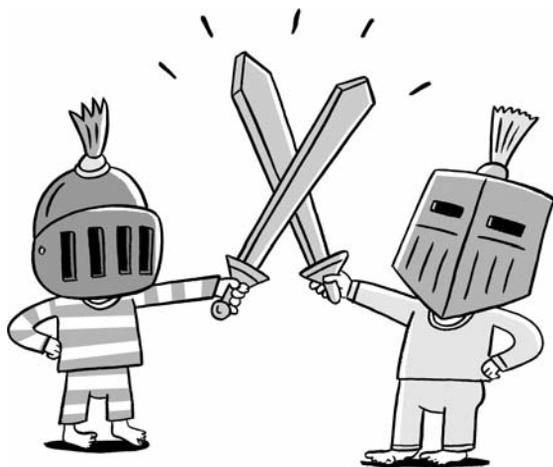


TWO

May We Helpeth You?



Did you go to bed? I had to. And I must have fallen asleep because I was sleeping peacefully when a voice shattered the morning silence.

“Wake up, you slumbering clod!”

I opened my eyes.

Orville was standing on my bed, bellowing at me. “Wake up, I say! Time is wasting!”

Usually I like it when Orville wakes me

up. But getting yelled at was a little much. I rubbed my eyes. “Did you just call me a clod?”



Orville took a deep breath and struck a pose. “I, Orville the Riot, have chosen our mission for the day.” He pretended to blow a trumpet. “Hear ye! Hear ye! On this day, the Brothers Riot shall rescue a damsel in distress!” He waited for my reaction.

“You’ve got to be kidding.”

“Kidding I am not.”

“That’s a lame mission, Orville.”

“’Tis not! ’Tis noble, Wilbur.”

“I think you’ve been reading too many of those King Arthur stories, Orville. Why would you want to rescue a damsel in distress?”

“Because that’s how you become a knight, and I’ve always wanted to be a knight.”

He obviously didn’t understand the whole situation. “Do you realize that what a knight usually gets is a damsel’s hand in marriage?” I asked.

Orville looked suitably horrified. “Why would I want another hand? I’ve got two of my own right here.”

My point exactly.

“Let’s pick another topic,” I suggested.

“We can’t. I already wrote it down.”

“*What?*”

He showed me the *Secret Riot Brother Mission Book* where we write down our missions. We had a new rule.

*Riot Brother Rule #16:
You have to write down
your mission of the day.*

We made it up because we were getting into arguments and changing our minds and Riot Brother Rule #5 is Don't change your mission in the middle of the day.

“Guess it's too late,” Orville said.

I sighed deeply. “We must go forward with this mission. We cannot change that rule. But we'll make up a new rule. Riot Brother Rule Number Seventeen: If you rescue a damsel in distress, you do not have to marry her.”

Orville looked suitably relieved.

I went on. “Now, as you know, Rule Number Two states that we cannot tell anyone our true mission, so we cannot tell a damsel that we are rescuing her from distress. We just have to do it.”

“But how will we know if she is in distress?”

“I guess we can ask her if she’s distressed. But then we have to zip our lips and just undistress her.”

“Bingo bongo, Wilbur!”

We went down to breakfast.

Mom was just finishing her tea and toast.

“What about her?” Orville whispered. “Since we don’t have to marry her, she could count as a damsel, couldn’t she?”

“There’s only one problem,” I whispered back.

“She’s too old?”

“No. She doesn’t look distressed.”

“Uh-oh. I hear whispering,” Mom said. “That usually means trouble.”

“How are you this morning, Mom?” Orville asked. “Are you distressed?”

“I’m just dandy,” Mom said, turning a page of her newspaper.

“Rats,” Orville said.

“Sorry to disappoint you, kiddo.”

“Should we whisper some more, Wilbur?”

Orville whispered. “That seemed to distress her a little.”

“I don’t think we’re supposed to distress the You-Know-Who first. I think we’re supposed to find her already distressed,” I whispered back.

“Right,” Orville nodded. “Call if any distress pops up, okay, Mom?”

Mom laughed. “Deal.”

We went to school early, of course, and sat outside on the bench, looking for damsels in possible distress.



Margaret Lew arrived, carrying her trombone case.

Seeing a real live girl made me wonder about this whole damsel-in-distress idea. First of all, the girls I know can rescue themselves. Second of all, what if girls thought we wanted to help them because we were in love with them? That would be terrible. Then we would be distressed. And who would rescue us?

A little voice inside me said, "Retreat! Retreat!" But then a louder voice that was even deeper inside me said, "You are a Riot Brother, and it is your duty to follow the Riot Brother Rules." Then another voice added, "Just go with the flow, dude." It's kind of crowded in my head.

While I was listening to my inner voices, Orville's inner knight came charging out.

"Lady Margaret, that looks distressingly heavy!" Orville jumped up and grabbed the

trombone case out of her hand . . . and then he dropped it on her foot.

“YOW!” she screamed. For a damsel, Margaret can really let one loose.

“Sorry,” Orville said.

“Oh, by the way, Margaret,” I called out as she began limping in. “We’re all going on that field trip, remember? So you didn’t have to bring your trombone.”

“Urggh,” she said, which I guess is what you say when you’re angry at yourself for lugging in a trombone case for nothing.

Ms. Geary, the art teacher, arrived next with her arms full of supplies.

“Wow,” I said. “Here comes a definite damsel in distress!”

She must have heard it because she laughed. “I can’t say I’ve ever been called that before. Will you boys help me with the door?”

“We shall and we will, fair lady!” Orville cried.

What happened next was really a good thing if you think about it in a certain way. See, if we had succeeded in helping Ms. Geary, then our mission would have been over and there wouldn't be any story; and if there weren't any story, you wouldn't have funny stuff to read; and if you didn't have funny stuff to read, you would flunk out of school and your parents would be distressed; and if your parents were distressed, they would lose their jobs and cry; and if everyone cried, the dirt would turn to mud, which would make all the worms come out; and then the birds would eat so many worms, they'd be too fat to fly; and then the cats would eat so many birds, they'd be too fat to chase after the mice; and so the mice would take over the world, which would be great if you were a mouse, but not so great if you were, say, a piece of cheese.

So, really, it was a good thing for cheese that Orville and I both jumped to get the door. But

I'm not so sure Ms. Geary would say that it was a good thing that I accidentally tripped her just as Orville was swinging open the door because the door kind of smashed into her and she got splattered with a little purple paint.



Okay, it wasn't a *little* paint. Her glasses were purple. Her dress was purple. Even her shoes were purple. It was a *lot* of paint.

"Isn't purple your favorite color?" Orville asked hopefully.

"It used to be," she said, pushing a strand of purple hair off her purple face.

After we apologized and helped her clean up, Orville asked if the clean up would count as a rescue from distress.

“No, Orville,” she said.

We could not try to rescue any more damsels because the bell rang.

“Orville,” I said as I wiped the last of the paint off the door. “I have to admit, I’m kind of glad to hear that old bell ring. This rescuing business is a lot of work.”

Orville sighed. “I knoweth what you mean, O goodly Wilbur.”

He looked so sad, I thought I would try to cheer him up. “Well, if they made kids into knights just for talking like one, thou would most certainly win, O goodly brother. For a third grader, thou art not too shabby.”

“Your words are liketh chocolate to my ears!” Orville said.

“I think you mean that my words are to your ears like chocolate is to your tummy.”

“Do you have any chocolate?” Orville asked.

Sadly, I had to shake my head.

“If I did, I certainly wouldn’t put it in my ears,” Orville added. “Why are we talking about chocolate anyway?”

“You brought it up!”

“I did?” He sighed. “Well, I have goodly taste.” He bowed. “Farewell, O Wilbur, until we meet again!”

