



The Quest for the Phoenix Feather

Sofia Graves, Lamar High School

Once upon a time, there was a little girl who lived in a kingdom that was ruled by a malicious king named Richard. He made it a tradition that every year all of the children who had turned 10 in the kingdom would take a test to determine whether or not they had what it took to live in the village. If they succeeded then life went on as normal for them. However, if they did not, then that child would have to go on a quest of some kind to prove that they could remain in the village.

Now this little girl, whose name was Skye, had just turned ten two days before the annual test. It was a test of athletic ability and creative thinking. All of the children were sent through an obstacle course that was a mile long and changed for each kid. Like all of the other children, she went to take it with fear in her heart.

Most of the children that year passed the test, but two of them did not. One of them was Skye, and the other was her best friend Rose. As per custom, the king took a week to think about what quest to send them on. They were also given that week to say their goodbyes to their families and prepare for their journey. The week flew by and on the last day they gathered their supplies and went to see the king.

This was their first glimpse of him as he kept out of sight from the public; he had long greasy hair that stuck to his head as if it was slicked down with oil, and beady eyes that reminded them of an opossum. He told them in his nasally voice that their quest was to retrieve either a phoenix feather or a phoenix itself. They gasped in shock because they knew, as did everyone else in the kingdom, that only the way to get to a phoenix was a very long and arduous journey from which no one had ever returned. However, they had no choice; so they set off into the rising sun to where legend said the phoenixes live

They traveled many days and nights until they reached a peach grove that was inhabited by monkeys. Now these monkeys were not kind or cute at all; they were hoarders and never let anyone pass through the peach grove, because they wanted all of the peaches to themselves.

As Skye and Rose approached the grove, the monkeys started throwing peach pits at them and chased them away. As night fell, they devised a plan to

ward off the monkeys. The next morning they started talking very loudly about a wonderful peach grove that they had found on their travels only a short distance away. The girls started walking in the direction of the fake grove, and the monkeys, full of jealousy, chased after them. The beastly monkeys swung ferociously through the canopy and soon overtook the girls. Once the monkeys were far in the distance, Skye and Rose turned around, looked at each other and fell down laughing at the monkeys' gullibility. Once they had picked their share of the delicious peaches, they headed through the peach grove without any trouble.

They walked in the shade of the trees for another three days. As they came out on the other side of the grove they saw a mountain that looked like it was bathed in sunlight. The crags stood out against the blinding light. The peak appeared to be a golden point surrounded by fluffy clouds concealing the entrance to this strange land. They immediately guessed, from the legends they had heard their entire lives, that this was the home of the phoenix. They decided to rest that night to conserve their energy for the climb they had to do the next day.

The next morning they started climbing the mountain and once they were halfway up they came across a cave that weird sounds were coming from. It sounded like a giant beast was crunching on something very hard. They decided to avoid it, but as soon as they started to tiptoe away from it, a giant mountain lion with three tails and wings stepped out of the cave. It took one look at the girls and leaped straight at them. As it was soaring on its wings towards them they ran into the cave where it had come out of. The inside of the cave was filled with bones, many of them seemed to belong to other animals but some of them were decidedly human. The sight of all of the bones made the girls stop in their tracks and they were frozen with shock, until they heard the lion running towards them in the cave. They took to their heels and ran until they finally saw a light at the end of the tunnel.

They emerged from the tunnel to see a field of boulders that sat in a ring and they decided to hide behind the biggest one. The girls held their breath as the lion prowled past them and stopped, he started sniffing around and stopped right in front of their boulder. The lion swung at the boulder with his tails which pulverized it in one shot. They screamed and started scrambling away until Rose tripped on a very sharp rock that was protruding from the ground. She looked at it and without thinking took the rock and threw it at the lion. It was an

impossible shot but somehow the rock lodged itself in one of the lion's eyes. It reared up and roared in pain, swinging its claws in the air until it banged its head on one of the boulders and knocked itself out. The girls took a deep breath and looked around, realizing that they were at the top of the mountain.

What they saw took their breaths away; there was a giant tree that was at least a mile high. All through the boughs of the tree there were nests that looked like gold branches with jewels sparkling in the cracks. Each nest held a beautiful phoenix, their feathers were gold and red and some had hints of orange at the tips that seemed to sparkle in the sunlight. Then the girls saw one nest that was at the very bottom of the tree. It looked the same as all the others but the phoenix inside of it was much bigger than the other ones and she was missing some of her feathers. As the girls approached, it spoke to them, "I know why you are here," it said. The girls were flabbergasted and just stood there for a little bit until they got up the courage to talk. They asked her if she knew why they were there then why had she not stopped them from getting to the mountain? The phoenix told them that she had seen that they had good hearts and were being forced to get her feathers. She also explained that if they gave a feather to their king, then he would get magic powers that would allow him to rule the whole world.

When they heard this they knew that they could not give the king a feather, but they also really wanted to be able to live in their village with their friends and family. Then the phoenix spoke again telling them, "There is a way to do both, I'm about to go into my cycle of rebirth that every phoenix goes through. When I do, I will burn and die until I am reincarnated as an egg. If you take that egg to the king he will not be able to access my powers while I am an egg." The girls were very happy until Skye realized that the phoenix would eventually be reborn as an infant and the king would have complete control over her.

The phoenix laughed at that and said, "If anyone tries to take advantage of a baby phoenix all of the other ones will descend on that person in a fury and destroy him." At this, the girls saw what the phoenix's plan was, they smiled at each other and sat around to wait for the phoenix to start her cycle of rebirth.

After about a half hour, she burst into flame and when the flame died all that was left was an egg that was a deep red with veins of gold running through it. They picked it up and headed down the mountain past the lion's den, and

through the village. They walked through the monkey's peach grove and finally made it to their home village.

As they walked through the village everyone started cheering streaming out of their houses to welcome them home. As they were escorted to the king's palace all of the villagers followed them to the castle to try and see what went on inside. Once the girls were inside of the castle they were sent straight to the king and as soon as they stepped into his presence, the egg began to hatch. They placed it on the floor and it cracked in half.

A very small baby phoenix crawled out of it and stumbled around for a while, until the king picked it up with a malicious glint in his eyes. As soon as he picked her up, she let out a piercing shriek, and all of the other full grown phoenixes immediately flew into the room. They formed a menacing circle around him with their beaks flashing and wings spread and fire coming floating around them. They stepped towards him and he dropped the baby phoenix and started to run away. Immediately the four biggest phoenixes grabbed his hands and feet and carried him off. After that the malicious Richard was never seen again.

Once they had carried off the king, all of the other phoenixes returned to their home with the baby riding on the back of the phoenix in the lead. Skye and Rose reunited with their parents, and King Richard's son became the king. He was a much better king than his father and the first thing he did was he abolished the trial to determine if you could live in the village, and they all lived happily ever after.