

Adventures of the Twin Princesses

Once upon a time, in a faraway land that was still filled with magic, there were two beautiful young princesses who lived in a magnificent castle on the edge of an enchanted forest. The two princesses were twins, named Carolyn and Elizabeth, and they loved to explore and have adventures together. They were very clever, and sometimes very brave, and together they helped their parents, the King and Queen, take care of the land they ruled over.

Early one morning, the two princesses woke up in their beds, and when they looked out of their castle window at the vast forest down below, they noticed a strange, thin cloud of evil-looking black smoke rising up from the forest in a small valley a few miles away. It wasn't a huge cloud of smoke, so it didn't seem to be a forest fire (at least, not yet), but it looked bigger than a simple little campfire. The trail of smoke seemed to twist and slither back and forth as it rose slowly into the sky, as if it were alive.

Princess Elizabeth gasped with excitement, and said "Carolyn! We must go investigate whatever is causing that ugly smoke! It might be something dangerous that could threaten the trees of the enchanted forest." Princess Carolyn nodded, saying "I've never seen smoke like that before. It's definitely something mysterious." The two of them rushed to get dressed in their adventuring clothes as quickly as possible.

- Do you leave immediately and start running as fast as you can towards the smoke?
- Do you first eat a good breakfast, and then leave on your adventure?
- ***Do you take the time to eat a good breakfast and also ask the King and Queen for their permission and advice?***
- Do you simply ignore the mysterious black smoke and have a tea party with your stuffed animals?

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The two princesses made a very wise choice and decided that it would be best to have a good breakfast and talk to their parents about their plans before leaving the castle. So, they each ate three pancakes with syrup, and then also ate some scrambled eggs and bacon just in case they wouldn't be home before lunch.

As they were finishing their meal, the King and Queen entered the dining room and gave warm hugs to each of them. Then the princesses carefully explained about the sinister black smoke they had seen rising from the forest. Princess Carolyn said, "The smoke looks *evil* somehow, Father! It must be something magical."

Princess Elizabeth promptly chimed in, "We want to go check it out for you. We love investigating mysterious occurrences like this!"

The King smiled at them as he listened to their excited plans. "Well, to be honest, the Queen and I noticed the smoke this morning also, and I was just about to send a group of soldiers out there to make sure everything is OK." The King looked at the two girls thoughtfully. "It might not be safe..."

Both of the princesses squealed together, "Oh, please let us go! We can take care of ourselves! Please please please?"

- Do you try to convince the King to let you go investigate the black smoke by yourselves?
- ***Do you let the King send the soldiers to go along with you?***
- ***Do you decide to just let the soldiers handle it, and go clean all the horse poop out of the stables instead?***

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The King smiled and considered the situation for a few moments, then announced, “Of course you may go investigate. I need my best mystery solvers to figure this out, and that means you two girls! However... I am concerned that there might be something dangerous out there, so I am going to send a group of soldiers with you, and I want you to promise to be very careful.”

“We promise, Father,” Princess Carolyn said with a serious voice, and then both girls gave huge smiles and giggled excitedly.

The beautiful Queen stepped forward then and said, “I had a feeling you girls would want to go investigate, so I went ahead and packed some important things in your backpacks. I put a strong rope in Carolyn’s backpack, and there’s a knife and a torch in Elizabeth’s backpack, and of course you each have your own bottle of water.”

The King added, “Now, I suggest you meet up with the soldiers down at the stables, and you can ride your horses out to the valley where that strange black smoke is coming from. That will be much faster than walking.”

Princess Elizabeth’s eyes lit up when her father mentioned the stables. “Oh boy!” she said. “That reminds me! All this week I’ve been looking forward to doing my chores, because I just *love* shoveling horse poop out of the stables! Let’s do that before we go on our adventure, Carolyn!”

Princess Carolyn just rolled her eyes at her sister and said, “*Really?* You want to clean up horse poop instead of hurrying to investigate that mysterious black smoke?”

But Princess Elizabeth crossed her arms stubbornly and said, “I’ve been looking forward to it *all week*.”

Princess Carolyn sighed hopelessly, and said “OK, I’ll help you just so we can get it done faster, but later you have to help me with one of my chores.”

“That’s a deal.”

Everyone in the entire castle was amazed and slightly amused at Princess Elizabeth’s strange fascination with cleaning up horse poop in the stables. Ordinarily, nobody complained about it though, because nobody else really wanted to do that particular chore, and they were quite happy to let her take care of it. This time, however, Princess Carolyn decided to help her sister. Soon, the chore was completed, and both princesses mounted up on their magnificent horses, Blackberry and Buttercup.

- Do you ride off immediately towards the mysterious black smoke?
- ***Do you first ask the stable master for a map of the surrounding area?***

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The stable master was a large man named Rufus who was in charge of taking care of all the horses belonging to the King and the castle soldiers. He was well aware of the princesses love for adventures, because they usually took their horses out riding at least three or four times a week. Like the Queen, Rufus had also noticed the strange black smoke right when he woke up in the morning, and he immediately began saddling Blackberry and Buttercup for the day's journey, because he just knew that the princesses would insist on investigating for themselves. Thus, when the princesses arrived at the stables, they found their horses all saddled up and ready to go, along with the four soldiers who were going to be their escort. Rufus also handed a detailed map of the forest to the princesses, which they stored in Carolyn's backpack.

"We hardly need a map, you know," said Princess Elizabeth. "We've been riding in these forests all our lives. I think we know them pretty well by now."

The leader of the soldiers spoke up then, saying "Even so, your highness, it's always better to be safe than sorry." He was a grizzled old warrior with a nasty scar on his left cheekbone, and his name was Sir Jorgen. The princesses were very fond of him.

"Yes, I suppose you're right, of course," said Princess Elizabeth.

Sir Jorgen introduced the other soldiers as Elgar, Gabriella, and Vokorin, but of course the princesses already knew who they were from having seen them around the castle. Princess Carolyn spoke up, "Are we finally ready to leave now? Let's go!" Jorgen signaled for the main gate to be opened, and at last the two princesses galloped out of the castle and across the open field that lay before the edge of the forest.

By this time it was the middle of the morning, and the sun was shining warmly. But although the open plains around the castle were wide and warm and sunny, when they reached the edge of the forest they could see that a dense mist hung in the air between the trees, making everything within the forest seem rather gloomy. The princesses looked at each other with a moment of uncertainty. The soldiers just smiled confidently though, and Gabriella nodded for them to proceed into the trees. Sir Jorgen merely cautioned, "Let's move slow and stay close together, so nobody gets lost in the mist."

They continued that way for a while, but soon after they lost sight of the edge of the forest, a loud shrieking roar startled them and made them stop in their tracks. The terrifying sound seemed to be coming from every direction at once!

- Do you give up on your adventure and hurry home to the castle, where you can take a nice safe nap in your own bed?
- Do you immediately start galloping forward in what you think is the right direction, hoping to find whatever made that shrieking roar?
- ***Do you stick with the soldiers and proceed slowly, just as Sir Jorgen instructed?***

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Each of the princesses were torn between conflicting desires; part of them wanted to ride straight back home and hide under their covers, and part of them wanted to charge straight ahead and fight whatever fearsome creature produced that horrible shrieking roar. Fortunately, they remembered Sir Jorgen's instructions to stick with the group and proceed slowly, and that's just what they did. Wordlessly, Sir Jorgen took the lead while the other soldiers moved their horses to surround the princesses, determined to defend them whatever the cost.

Again, that terrible shrieking roar pierced through the mist, "Aaaaaiirrrreeeeeghhh!" And once again, it was impossible to tell what direction the sound was coming from.

Elgar looked across at Gabriella and muttered, "What is that? I've never heard anything like *that* before. Have you?"

Bringing up the rear, Vokorin quietly cleared his throat and shot them both a look, and from that point on they rode in silence, listening intently for any sign that the creature might be close. Sir Jorgen dismounted from his horse and walked ahead of it, searching the ground intently for footprints. The princesses kept expecting to encounter a ferocious monster at any moment, so they were completely unprepared for what happened next.

Without warning, Sir Jorgen suddenly dropped straight down into a hidden pit that had been camouflaged with thin branches and leaves. Sir Jorgen's horse reared back on its hind legs and whinnied, but fortunately it didn't fall into the pit on top of him. An instant later, an enormous, hairy forest troll appeared out of the mist and gave another terrible shrieking roar. "Aaaaaiirrrreeeeeghhh!" It stood at least nine feet tall, and its entire body was covered with filthy matted fur that had leaves and twigs stuck in it.

Gabriella, Elgar and Vokorin sprang forward and drew their swords, putting themselves between the beast and the princesses. Carolyn and Elizabeth looked at each other and felt truly afraid for the first time since leaving the castle. This was *much* more dangerous than they had expected! But even though they were afraid, the girls remained very brave. There were only three soldiers left to fight the giant forest troll now, and they all knew that might not be enough. The girls knew that there had to be something they could do to help.

- Do you have Elizabeth get out her tiny little knife and join the soldiers fighting the giant forest troll?
- ***Do you have Carolyn get out her rope and lower it down into the pit, hoping to rescue Sir Jorgen?***
- Do you cooperate and try to light the torch in Elizabeth's backpack?

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When Sir Jorgen suddenly dropped straight down and vanished into the pit, Princess Carolyn gasped with concern and immediately reached for the rope in her pack. Princess Elizabeth understood what she hoped to do, and knew that they would probably have to work together to help get Sir Jorgen out of the hole... The only problem was, they didn't even know for sure how deep the hole was. What if it was too deep for their rope? What if the bottom of the pit was filled with poisonous snakes, or jagged rocks? But Princess Carolyn knew it was no use thinking like that; they had to try, no matter what.

As the terrible forest troll growled menacingly and advanced on the group, Gabriella looked back over her shoulder at the princesses and nodded approvingly as she saw the girls getting out the rope. "Good idea, girls. We'll hold off this beast as long as we can, but honestly I'm not sure the three of us will be able to drive it off. We'll need Sir Jorgen's help!" Elgar and Vokorin spurred their mounts forward with their swords held high, to prevent the forest troll from advancing closer to the princesses, while Gabriella hung back with her bow, firing arrows.

As Princess Carolyn uncoiled the rope, Princess Elizabeth bent down near the edge of the pit and peered into the darkness below. "Sir Jorgen?" she called. "Are you alright?"

They both felt great relief as they heard Sir Jorgen's gruff voice call back to them, "Yes, I'll be fine, but I'd rather not stay here very long. Now, what's going on up there? What are those noises I hear?"

Carolyn wasted no time explaining, and simply began lowering one end of the rope down to Sir Jorgen. As her eyes adjusted to the darkness of the pit, she could tell that he was clinging to a small ledge about 10 feet down. The actual bottom of the pit (if there was one) was lost in the darkness below. "Elizabeth!" she said, "Quickly now, tie the other end of this rope to Buttercup!"

"I've got the rope!" called Sir Jorgen.

The girls worked well as a team, and in a jiffy they used the horse to pull Sir Jorgen back up to the surface. As he got to his feet, he quickly surveyed the battle and could see that things weren't going well. Elgar and Vokorin were finding it difficult to get close enough to do any damage to the troll with their swords, and Gabriella's arrows seemed to just bounce off the monster's thick hide. Without hesitating, Sir Jorgen said "Keep back, Princesses!" and then charged into battle swinging his huge two-handed axe.

- Do you have Elizabeth get out her tiny little knife and join the soldiers fighting the giant forest troll?
- Do you cooperate and try to light the torch in Elizabeth's backpack, hoping that the fire will scare the beast?
- ***Do you tie the rope between two trees and try to make the troll trip over it?***

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The princesses realized that there was no time to lose, so instead of rummaging around in their backpacks again, they decided to try using the rope to make the giant forest troll trip and fall. When Sir Jorgen charged ahead with his giant axe, Carolyn and Elizabeth each took one end of the rope and ran toward two trees that were about 25 feet apart. Their rope was just long enough reach between the two trees. The young princesses tied the rope securely about 3 feet up the tree trunk, then nodded to each other when they were both ready. Now they just needed the monster to walk into their trap!

“Sir Jorgen,” called Princess Carolyn, “lead it over here!” But Sir Jorgen and the other soldiers were so busy trying to stay alive in the battle that none of them could hear her small voice.

Princess Elizabeth had a different idea; she decided to get the creature’s attention directly. She picked up a rock and hurled it straight at the troll’s head, smacking it right in the ear. The hideous beast slowly turned its grotesque head towards the princesses and snarled fiercely. “Hey you big, stinky troll!” she yelled. “Come and get us!”

That did it. The soldiers’ faces were filled with shock and concern as the foul beast stopped swatting at their swords and started loping toward the two princesses. “Quick!” shouted Princess Carolyn, and they quickly darted back away from the troll, neatly ducking under the rope that the girls had strung up between the trees. Then the soldiers noticed the clever trap they had prepared, but the troll just kept charging forward, completely unaware. Sir Jorgen was more than a little worried that the troll would see the rope at the last second, or run around the trees, or just step high enough that it completely missed tripping over the rope. But the princesses knew how to set a good trap, and everything worked perfectly. The rope caught the troll right on the shin just as it was beginning to pounce, hurling it forward through the air. It made that shrieking roar one last time and stretched out its arms to break its fall, and then — PLOP! The troll’s arms, head, and entire upper body plunged head-first straight into the same pit that Sir Jorgen had fallen into, only getting stuck at the chubby waist. The troll’s legs were sticking straight up in the air, kicking wildly, and they could faintly hear its muffled roars rumbling beneath the earth. It was clear the troll was completely wedged!

The princesses took one look at those hairy legs kicking in the air, and they burst out laughing with amusement and relief. After a moment, the soldiers joined in also. “Well princesses,” said Sir Jorgen with a smile, “I am impressed. With all our weapons and armour, we couldn’t even scratch this beast — but with just a rope you’ve taken care of it quite nicely.” Then he muttered, as if to himself, “What will I tell the King?”

- Do you get up close and try to tickle the troll’s feet?
- ***Do you retrieve your rope and proceed on towards that mysterious black smoke?***
- Do you decide that the forest is just too dangerous, and head back to the castle to have some lunch?