And the mome raths outgrabe

by yuffiehighwind

Summary

Lady Jacqueline, aka Jack the Giant Killer, does an honest day’s work for once, and saves a village from a fearsome beast.

Notes

Based on episodes up through S2 Ep13 “Tiny.” Inspired by the poem “Jabberwocky” by Lewis Caroll. When the episode “Tiny” ended I suddenly had this new head!canon that a portal had opened up between Wonderland and Fairytale Land many years ago, and some humans and monsters from Wonderland were chucked through, stranding them in Fairytale Land with no way back. This fanfic presumes Jack didn’t travel to Wonderland herself. Her reward, the mushroom - something that grows so abundantly in Wonderland - was so valuable because it was one of the few magical relics from home the villagers had left.

Later Note: Jossed/retconned in S1 Ep9 of Once Upon a Time in Wonderland "Nothing to Fear."

Jack heard the beast before she saw it.

The mercenary was no stranger to the monsters that lurked in her land’s dark forests and unforgiving mountains. When she was very young, Jack hitched a ride to the coast and quickly became familiar with the sea’s harsh creatures as well. Her education started out small, challenging sharks when a leisurely swim went wrong. She worked her way up, quite unexpectedly, to a kraken that had surged to the surface beneath her passing ship. She was leaning over the starboard rail, sharpening her knife, when the water foamed and a pulsing red tentacle emerged from the depths. It was soon joined by six more appendages, and the crew swung into action when the
creature wrapped itself around their ship. Jack stayed away from the ocean after that. Not out of cowardice, but because life was short. Why throw it away?

Bears and great cats kept their utterances to the typical roar or growl. Birds of prey let out their piercing shrieks and kraken were shockingly silent killers. Jack had never encountered a dragon, and counted herself lucky she hadn’t, no matter how alluring the prospect was of killing one. But she could imagine the flap of its huge, leathery wings, the rumble in its chest from the fire building within it, and the deafening sound its throat produced once that gaping maw opened to unleash its terrifying power.

This creature burbled. It sounded as though someone was slaughtering a goat, but its death cries were that of a song bird, and the sound’s tones were indistinct, overlapping. A whisper so loud she could hear it yards away, through the trees.

Jack ran from the sound, but not fast enough. She felt the breeze on her face as the creature flew past her. She abruptly stopped and turned to run in the other direction. Jack wasn’t afraid, but she had been taken off-guard. No sooner had she left the village and stepped into the gloomy forest, acclimating her eyesight to the darkness, the noises started. With the creature so near, she had no choice but to lead it away from the village. Not because she cared what happened to the villagers, but because that was the deal. She would receive her prize only if she slayed the beast that had plagued them all these years.

Two burning embers peered through the trees at Jack. They blinked once, twice. She unsheathed her sword and stared down the flaming eyes.

“You want a fight? I’ll give you one.”

The creature emerged from the dense trees and if Jack craved the chance to take down a dragon, this Jabberwocky served more than adequate practice. It was twice the size of a horse, a winged reptilian beast with a long neck and an ugly mug Jack would joke was almost as bad as her ex-lover’s. But her ex had no snapping jaw to speak of, nor antennae protruding from his bony skull, thick lips peeled back to reveal sharp fangs. The Jabberwocky’s long tail swatted at Jack, who deftly avoided its attacks, while the creature suspended itself midair with frantically flapping, dragon-like wings. This was a creature used to gliding from tree to tree; it awkwardly landed in front of Jack and held up its massive, three-fingered forepaws to swipe at her. These hands were as big as Jack herself, and the Jabberwocky could wrap its claws around her middle and pull her into the air, if it wished. Her armor would impede any attempt to eat her, but that didn’t mean the creature couldn’t just drop her from a great height.

The Jabberwocky took to the air again, to escape the thrusts of Jack’s sword, aligning itself above the mercenary to drop down upon her. She had a choice, then, to move or raise her blade to impale the creature’s heart. It would be easier to take a swing at its long, snake-like neck, severing its head, but the beast was closing in. It was now or never. Jack plunged the sword into the Jabberwocky’s chest, and it wailed in pain, clawing at her. The creature keeled over, its strength waning, and landed on the forest floor. Jack dodged its snapping jaws and pulled the sword with all her strength from the beast’s ribs. She leapt onto its neck, wrestling it to the ground and brought the blade down - once, twice. With a final desperate burble, the Jabberwocky was dead. It would not harass the village again. Jack nudged its head with her boot.

Panting, sweating and thoroughly spent, Jack sat on the still-twitching Jabberwocky’s neck and caught her breath.

She wouldn’t be doing that again any time soon.

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Jack returned to the village dragging the creature’s head. She held the bloody thing in the air, then threw it on the ground in front of the village’s matriarch. Radiantly happy faces and joyous cheering followed her to the woman’s hut.

The woman chortled when Jack presented her with the long-feared Jabberwocky’s skull. Jack smirked back, and the crowd surged forward to raise her upon their shoulders.

Jack soaked in the attention, her memory flashing back proudly to her past conquests of chimaera, gryphons and harpies. The people gazed at her as though she were a living legend, one they would tell their children and grandchildren about, when in fact they were carrying a common thief who moonlit as a monster slayer only when she became especially restless and suicidal. Jack couldn’t help that she’d become good at her job. It merely took practice, cunning, and a hefty dose of luck. Sometimes Jack prayed to the gods, on quiet nights, like these people had prayed for a hero. She prayed for an opportunity to stop moving all the time. Years later, Jack would think she finally found it with a dashing prince as amoral as she was. She would be played for a fool, however.

The village matriarch was an old woman - a hundred years old, at least, or so Jack had been told. But the one standing before her - clad in the fine, silvery fur of a wolf, with long, braided white hair encircled with a black silk band - couldn’t be more than sixty, Jack thought. She carried herself like a younger woman - posture straight, with a regal countenance, her skin much less wrinkled than an elder one century old. The corner of her mouth turned up slightly, as she looked at Jack with an almost sly expression, as though she had predicted this outcome all along.

“Come here, child,” the woman beckoned.

The crowd hushed and Jack approached, still coated in sticky, foul Jabberwocky blood, and knelt before her.

“You have slain the Jabberwock, my girl. Our gratitude is boundless and we are in your debt.”

Jack kept her head down and replied, “I shall receive the payment I was promised, madam?”

“Yes, yes, of course. My people are preparing a great feast to celebrate your victory as we speak.”

“I mean the fee I was promised,” Jack said, voice low. It seemed inappropriate to insist, but she would not accept going unpaid.

The old woman quieted, appraising the mercenary. Jack felt like a specimen held under glass and raised her head to meet the woman’s gaze. Her eyes were actually directed somewhere just over Jack’s right shoulder. Noticing the milky whiteness of them, she realized the woman was blind.

The woman turned and entered her hut. Jack stood and looked around as she waited. Villagers scurried around the mercenary, prepping her victory party. The old woman emerged a short time later carrying a small cloth bag tied with string.

“We are of modest means and can provide no gold, but I think this should suffice,” she said, handing Jack the purse.

Jack didn’t bother to hide her disappointment, now she knew the woman could not read her expression. She kept her voice appropriately awed.

“What is it?”

“A mushroom,” the old woman replied, matter-of-factly, smiling slightly when Jack rolled her
eyes. Could she somehow see her after all? Then the woman added, “It has transformative properties that may be useful, someday.”

Jack’s face lit up. Magical relics were just as valuable as gold, if not more so.

“What properties are those?”

The woman barked out a laugh that took Jack by surprise.

“Ingesting it will make you grow smaller.”

Jack’s brow furrowed, slightly confused.

“Significantly smaller. I suggest preserving it for when the time is right.”

“How did you come by such a food? Are you a witch?”

“Oh, no, no, no. Just well-traveled. In fact, it comes from the same land as that vile monster you fought.”

Some young women approached Jack, then, and motioned for her to come to the bathhouse to get cleaned up for the celebration. But the mercenary wasn’t finished questioning the wise woman.

“When did the Jabberwocky come here and hide itself within your forests?”

“Oh, a long time ago. I was just a girl, then.”

Curiosity still nagged at Jack, and she had a limited window of opportunity to ask questions.

“Why do you think it lingered here all those years, and never moved on to seek other prey, or a larger territory? Why did it choose your forest?”

An odd expression crossed the matriarch’s face, so fleeting Jack would have hardly noticed had she not been watching the woman closely with a liar’s trained eyes. She looked pained as she considered Jack’s question, but no sooner had the sorrow manifested itself on her features it was gone again. A split-second decision was made, and the woman surprised Jack by giving her that same sly smile from earlier.

“Between you and me,” she said, “I think it was looking for the way home.”

Puzzled, yet strangely satisfied, Jack returned the grin, then turned on her heel to leave with the other girls that were insistently pulling at her stained shirtsleeves.

One of the other elders approached the wise woman to make inquiries about something or other - Jack was no longer paying much attention - and the mercenary barely registered the name he used as she walked away.

Jack thought she heard him call her Alice.

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