

The Girl with the Short Hair

by *Nina Horvat*

Once upon a time, in the Seventh Kingdom of the world lived a wealthy merchant and his wife. They had a daughter that they adored named Lena. She had long dark hair, dark eyes and rosy cheeks. She grew up taught by the best teachers, and although she liked to study and read, she loved being outdoors. Since she was an only child, her father indulged her—he taught her how to ride a horse, how to use a sword, and he even taught her martial arts, even though it was not proper for a girl to learn such things.

One day, Lena made an announcement. “I want to cut my hair. I want it to be short like a boy would wear it.”

Her mother was horrified. “What on earth are you talking about, Lena?! No man will have you if you cut your hair.”

“I don’t need a man,” answered Lena.

“Every woman needs a man to take care of her!”

“Did you not see me wield a sword? I could slay a dragon! I could fight off a bunch of robbers!”



“Nonsense! Girls are not made to fight dragons and robbers...”

“What is this I hear of dragons?” Lena’s father entered the room.

“Talk some sense into our daughter, my darling. She wants to cut off her hair.”

“Whatever for? Your hair looks lovely!”

“It gets tangled into bushes and branches, and it gets in my way when I ride and when I fight!”

“Never mind then, you won’t be fighting for much longer,” her father said.

“What do you mean?!” asked Lena.

“The time has come for you to get married, my dear. I doubt your future husband will appreciate your fighting skills.”

“I don’t want a husband.”

“You must have a husband, Lena. It’s just the way it is. I have already arranged for you to meet some suitors.”

“But father...”

“Do not worry, Lena. Your mother and I won’t force you to marry someone you do not like. We will search until we have found you a suitable match.”

“Then you will search forever!” Lena stormed out.

Lena wanted to continue her studies and perfect her martial arts technique. She did not wish to be somebody’s wife and stay at home taking care of the house and children. She wanted to see the world and have adventures! She immediately started thinking how she could get out of having to marry. Maybe she could pretend she was sick all the time. Nobody likes to be repeatedly coughed on. She could make up a suitor, forge letters and feign a broken heart. Nobody likes to be cried on. She could try talking nonsense non-stop. Nobody likes to have their ear talked off. If all else failed, she could run away.

But as time passed, Lena was none the wiser, and the first suitor was introduced to her. He seemed nice, if not a little boring. They went for a walk in the apple orchard. But as he took a bite of an apple, he started to choke. His eyes began to water, and he was gasping for air and waving his arms. It was Lena's quick thinking that saved him from certain death by an apple—he swiftly administered the Heimlich maneuver, and he spat out the bit that almost led to his death.

“Thank you...,” he choked out.

“You are very welcome. Shall we continue our walk?”

They walked and talked, and Lena was bored. She could think of a hundred things she could be doing that were far more interesting. As she was going through her latest sword lesson in her head, she heard a scream and looked around. Her suitor had slipped and almost fell off a cliff. He was holding on for dear life to the root of a tree.

“Don't let go! I shall pull you up!”

“You cannot! I am too heavy!”

“Shut up and give me your hand!”

He reluctantly let go of the root with one hand, and Lena had no trouble pulling him up.

“Thank you...,” he breathed out.

“You need to be more careful,” said Lena.

They went back to Lena's house, and her suitor said goodbye to her parents and left.

“What on earth happened on your walk, Lena?!”

“Whatever do you mean, mother?”

“Your potential husband ran away, covered in mud and on the verge of tears! What did you do to him?!”

“Nothing! I saved him from choking and from falling off a cliff!”

“That... I... Well... Lena. This is not proper behaviour for a lady!”

“Would you rather I left him to die?” asked Lena. Her mother huffed and puffed but said nothing.

And so the second suitor was brought to meet Lena, and they went for a walk. This time, Lena did not take her suitor near a cliff, just to be safe. She may not have wanted to get married, but she wished no ill luck to her suitors. She chose a wooded path she often took, thinking no trouble would find them there. But as soon as they set foot into the woods, they were surrounded by three robbers.

“Surrender your money!” yelled one of the robbers.

“We haven’t any money with us,” Lena said.

“Fine. Then we will take your pretty self with us instead,” replied the robber, while Lena’s suitor promptly fainted.

“I’d like to see you try,” said Lena.

One of the robbers leaped and tried to grab her, but Lena threw him over her shoulder, delivered a few swift kicks to the other two robbers, and managed to steal their swords.

“Off you go now, before I really get angry!” said Lena.

“If there are more women like her in this town, I am not going near it!” cried one of the robbers as they ran away. Lena started gently slapping her suitor on his cheek to wake him.

“Where are the robbers?” he asked, coming to his senses.

“I fought them and scared them away.”

“You?!”

“Yes, me. Is that so strange?”

“Well... yes. After all, you are a girl.”



Lena pursed her lips but said nothing. What would be the point? This was not the man she would marry. They went back to Lena's house. The suitor said a quick goodbye to her parents and ran away.

"What did you do to this one?" her father asked, amused.

"Saved him from some robbers."

"Did you now? How do you always find trouble, Lena?"

"I like to say trouble finds me."

"Indeed, it does..."

Soon it was time for Lena to meet her third suitor.

"Third time is the charm, Lena!" her mother said.

"We shall see..." answered Lena.

Her third suitor was very nice and polite—and a bit more interesting than his predecessors. They went for a long walk, and Lena thought he was perfectly nice, but she could not see herself spending the rest of her life with him. She was so lost in thought while he was chattering away that she did not notice they were in the forbidden part of the forest, said to be occupied by dragons. She realized where they were when she stepped on the handle of a sword.

"Where are we?" asked her suitor.

"We are in the forbidden part of the forest. We should turn around."

"Did you hear that?!"

"Be quiet. There are tales of dragons in these woods."

"Dragons?!"

They could hear the shuffling of leaves and branches and then a loud roar. Before they could do anything, a dragon stomped its way through the trees towards them.

"Run!!!" yelled Lena. The suitor was too afraid to move. The dragon was coming closer. "Move! We need to go, NOW!" but he was frozen



in place. The dragon started breathing fire and singed Lena's hair. She quickly put out the fire and grabbed the sword from the grass. When the dragon was upon them, she swung the sword with all her might towards the dragon.

"Stop! I mean you no harm! Let us leave!" Lena told the dragon and swung the sword a few more times. Her suitor finally unfroze and started running. Lena followed. She could move easily through the trees. The dragon lost sight of her through the thick forest, so she escaped.

Her suitor didn't even say goodbye to her parents; he mounted his horse and ran away. Lena's parents were beside themselves.

"You could have been killed, Lena!" her father yelled.

"But I wasn't!"

"The forbidden forest is no place for a lady!" her mother yelled.

"It's no place for anybody, but look, I am perfectly fine!"

"But look at your beautiful hair... It's singed..."

"At least now you will let me cut it," said Lena and stormed out.

A few days passed, and her parents sat down with Lena to have a serious talk.

"Lena, your mother and I thought a lot about what happened, and we decided you do not have to get married."

"And if anyone in town has something to say about it, I shall tell them my daughter fought off a dragon!" her mother added proudly.

"Will you let me cut my hair now?" asked Lena.

"I already brought the scissors," answered her mother, straightening out the back of Lena's hair.

"Would you like me to cut it for you?"

"I want to do it," said Lena as she cut her long hair.

And so, Lena lived happily ever after, unmarried. She went on to have many adventures, and she travelled throughout all seven kingdoms. Legend has it that Lena formed a group of female knights who saved many confused, lost and kidnapped men along their way, and little girls in all seven kingdoms listened to stories about Lena, the brave girl with short hair who knew how to fight, ride a horse and wield a sword.

The End