

Ye Gode Boke of Knightly Conduct

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or,

How Sir Diederic made certain
his squire became a true knight

As remembered and written by Arnout, with the
help of Father Onno of the priory of Saint Ethelbert

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For my mum, Mahani Suryatenggara, and my brother, Rob.

Simon and Ari, Maud, Bea, Tamara, Enrico, Bram and Netteke, thank you for being there and supporting me when I needed it the most.

Special thanks go to Sarah de Waard. Without her I would never have thought to take up writing fiction. My *Gode Boke* would never have been as good as it is now without her talent as an editor.

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Foreword

Oh, to be a knight! A knight who is of a true and noble sort; one who lives up to the lessons of old that teach you to become a member of this most honourable position. A man can become a knight true and fair by living his life by the rules and morals set down by his peers. The lessons will shape a youth and mould him into the finest knight. Only the truest of these brave and blessed men shall be permitted to pass on the knowledge and experience of what it truly and verily means to be a knight. For it is this select group of men that encompasses all things considered true and noble and so forms the pinnacle, no verily and for certain, is the epitome of The Knight.

The knight who, in his role as protector of the weak and defender of the realm, has a heavy cross – in the form of a bow, dagger or sword – to bear. Legends, poems and songs speak of his prowess, his piety and bravery in the face of evil, the way he will swoon the hearts of fair ladies.

There is, or was, for we do not know whether or not he is still among the living of this world, one man who incorporates all virtues of a true knight. The lessons he has taught his squire justify his legendary status and prove his ability to transform the youth of men into the crème de la crème of the knightly world.

The following stories are a record of the famed and honourable Sir Diederich of the House of Mal a la Tête, son to Wilhelm of the House of Mal a la Tête, Duke of the duchy of Grand Migraine, Bearer of the ominous sword Pluckaduck, member of the Order of the Great Golden Goose, Flag

bearer for His Imperial Highness, blah blah blah, put upon husband and terribly tired father to his sons, and his virtuous and piteous wife, Kriemhilde of the House of Mal a la Tête, born of the House of Nibelung, Duchess of the duchy of Grand Migraine, member of the Order of the Sacred Secret Recipe of the Divine Almond Cookie, Lady in waiting to Her Majesty and most devoted wife to Wilhelm of Mal a la Tête and most put upon mother to her sons.

Noble and worthy knight of the Holy Crusade, Sir Diederic is third in line to inherit his father's place. His fate is unknown as he was captured and taken by a flying earthworm with great big teeth during the magnificent tournament that was held by Sir Frederik of Ulsus Ventriculi.

Not yet mentioned is that Sir Diederic was very masculine, known for the ever-present scruff, and was the potential spouse to the fair Lady Ada up to the point that the evil worm flew off with the knight in one of its mighty claws.

These lessons are true and worthy of following as the Good Lord has willed them to be remembered by Arnout, knight and member of the Grand Order of the Brooding Dragon. Verified and written down by the venerable Father Onno of the Priory of Saint Ethelbert, with input from various trustworthy people who knew the knight personally.

The following tales are to enlighten the vulnerable young men and lead them into manhood and proper nobility; if not worldly nobility, then one of the soul and the heart, not to mention being able to effortlessly kick behinds and saving one's hide by diplomacy while they are at it.

May the Good Lord bless all who shall follow the sound advice in this humble chronicle. That the Good Lord also blesses Father Onno, Sir Arnout and most of all, that He may bless Sir Diederic, wherever he may be.

On the Basics One Born of Noble Blood Needs to Know

‘Achoo!’

The loud sneeze cut through the sound of the rain splishing and splotching, falling from the heavens in veritable bucket loads. The sneeze was followed by a wet sniff, accompanied by a grouchy grumble. It had been raining since before dawn and the two men on horseback were feeling decidedly cold, wet and miserable. Not to mention that the older of the two seemed to be in a steadily worsening mood. The horses were also a pitiful sight to behold and seemed to be holding a contest of who could look the worst in hopes of getting some extra snacks in appreciation of their hard work once they would stop and were taken care of.

‘This is not right; for Heaven’s sake, why is it raining since yestermorning?’ the younger of the two riders muttered angrily. He refused to admit he was sulking. The older man looked at his squire through the rain that kept falling down relentlessly. The buckets had evidently been replaced by bathtubs, without a doubt the kind that could fit more than one person at a time.

‘Oh? What exactly did you expect to happen then, Arnout?’ the knight inquired. ‘After all, this country is known for its wetness. That means wetness in all its forms – including rain.’

The squire slumped and refused to look at the knight. Just when it seemed like the knight would not get an answer the lad spoke up.

‘The weather should have been beautiful; neither too hot nor too cold, with birds singing in honour of the Good Lord and serenading the marvel of His Creation. A pleasant breeze should be lightly ruffling the leaves of the trees.’ Arnout glared and frowned before sneezing once more and tried not to give in to the urge to wipe his nose on one of his sleeves. ‘You know what I will do, master? I am going to sing myself, like everyone does in all the stories I heard back home. The troubadour would sing about heroes like Arthur and Gawain. That’s what we are supposed to be doing during this trip! We should sing about our travels and adventures.’ Arnout commenced to sing a ballad, sounding more like a choking duck wheezing from pneumonia than actually singing about the adventures he and his master were certain to have.

The knight reached over and slapped his squire on the back of his head. ‘You know the drill, start with your generation. Now!’

‘What was that for ... ah, it was the ballad, right?’ the squire groaned as he tentatively felt the back of his head for any damage. He counted himself lucky. His master was not wearing his armour; if he had been wearing his gauntlet, the slap would certainly have sent him to La-la-land.

‘Arnout,’ the knight said, his voice sounding like silk over steel despite the rain splashing all around, ‘you know the drill. Siblings. Now!’

Arnout sighed, sat up a little straighter and started to drone in a monotonous, somewhat nasal tone of voice. ‘Johanna Maria Brechwalda, my younger sister, Arnout Michaël, that’s me, Arnulf Roderick, my older brother, and Floris Maximilian, who is my oldest brother.’

‘Parents!’ the knight barked.

‘My mother, Reinildis of Encephalitis Maior; my father Maximilian of Meningitis.’

‘Grandparents!’ the knight snapped.

‘My maternal grandparents are Bernulf of Encephalitis and Aedelbertha of Encephalomalacia; my paternal grandparents are Alexander of Meningitis and Helena of Hemicrania,’ Arnout droned on obediently through his sniffles, trying to prevent his voice from failing.

‘Good. Now what is it you might possibly inherit from them?’ the knight queried as his mood seemed to lighten a little.

‘A massive ache in the head, I suppose,’ Arnout grumbled, trying to avoid another swipe from his master for his insolence. He was not quite successful but at least he didn’t get hit too hard.

‘Let’s start easy then,’ the knight said wearily as he shifted in his saddle. ‘What have your parents set aside for your sister’s trousseau, seeing as I cannot imagine someone with her temper spending her life in a convent as a humble, obedient little nun.’

Arnout blinked. The last thing he had been thinking about was his sister, least of all seeing her married off to some poor fellow. The height of a trousseau was definitely something that he had never thought of as something he needed to know. Knowing your family tree was one thing, but this was something a bit more than droning the names of your ancestors.

‘Yes, lad, I want to hear what you know about the trousseau. You should know; the trousseau consists of the estate, moneys and or goods your dear parents have set aside to aid your sister in her marriage. The things she and her children – if the Good Lord is in a wicked mood and chooses to bestow them upon her – can fall back on if her husband passes away or goes missing in action during a war or something like that. The things you won’t inherit unless she dies and your parents decide to split it amongst the then still living children.’

‘To be honest, master, I don’t exactly know the extent of her trousseau,’ Arnout said hesitantly. ‘All I know is that my oldest brother is supposed to inherit the title and everything that goes with that. My second brother is meant for the Church as far as I understand, and I am to be a knight if the Good Lord allows so I can amass my own honour, fame and influence, and hopefully be awarded a little land of my own with a nice little castle and the means to provide for myself and my liege-lord. Or I could be given the hand of a lovely maiden in marriage. About sisters I don’t know anything aside from the fact that they are most definitely not lovely maidens who should be rescued or married. My sister is more of an annoying pain in the behind, and I don’t understand her at all. According to my father this is one thing that is not likely to change at all. He says that he doesn’t understand my mother half the time either.’

Sir Diederic, scion of a House whose parents knew how to instil this knowledge into their offspring, sighed deeply.

‘Arnout,’ Diederic said, speaking slowly and clearly, something his squire was known to react to in alarm, ‘this is the sort of thing you should have learned before becoming my squire. This is what will influence your life, youngster. Family, both the ones born within wedlock and the ones outside; acquaintances, potential spouses, influence and power – everything depends on knowing these things. How else will you know if you can lay claim to a kingdom? Or know what you can gain by pledging allegiance to whatever sovereign desires that from you? Family trees, estates; honestly, that you should not know this is ridiculous! I would not be surprised that next you will probably tell me that you have no idea who your illegitimately begotten relatives are.’

Arnout startled and nearly fell from his beloved Penelope. ‘Illegitimate offspring?’ he squeaked, both horrified and affronted. ‘Master, you cannot seriously tell me that anyone in my family has sired ... any ... Aaachoo!’ Arnout glared at his master as he angrily wiped his nose.

Diederic looked condescendingly at his squire. ‘Yes Arnout, illegitimate offspring. Every noble House worth its name has at least one in each generation. It’s something one brags about. Not to mention the fact that you can always place one of your illegitimate children in high places where one who is burdened with a title is not able to go. Well, provided they don’t act like the spawn of Satan of course, but most of the time they do hold important positions where we are not allowed to do so.’

‘Do you mean that even the noble House of Mal a la Tête has at least one ...’

Diederic smiled as he replied, ‘You are likely to meet one of the more notorious bastards of our family during our journey to the Holy Land. But don’t worry; he’s a long way away yet.’

Arnout hesitated, not daring to ask further. He would most definitely prefer that the subject was dropped completely and that they would talk about a safer topic. Talking politics made his skin crawl.

‘As soon as we find a nice, warm tavern I will tell you why it is so important that you know your lineage and your relatives, be they legit or not.’ Diederic swiped at a lock of soaked stray hair that had managed to get into his eye. ‘Do not fret, squire mine. You are not the only one who had to learn this lesson. Let me tell you about how I made a fool of myself when I was introduced at the Imperial Court because I ... I will tell you what happened to me as soon as we have made ourselves comfortable.’

† † †

About the Author

Cynthia Perch lives in a small village in the Netherlands, whose inhabitants are a constant source of inspiration. In between caring for her family she hammers out plotlines and places strategic plotheoles that drive her editor insane. She discusses all her plots with a plush raven called Benedict, a trusty companion who lives beside her computer.

When she is in the right mood, nothing is safe from her satirical (if slightly clouded) gaze. On several occasions, characters from the book have revolted and refused further cooperation. They have been dealt with.

There's a great organisation in the Netherlands called Bartiméus that helps people of all ages with a visual impairment to stay independent in all facets of life. They can help on various levels, from hobbies and being able to keep doing house chores to helping with the process of finding a job and giving employers information on what a visually impaired employee needs to work to the best of their abilities and what to expect. If you know someone who can benefit from the help Bartiméus can offer or if you are someone with a visual impairment, don't hesitate to contact them and ask for their help. And even if you don't need their assistance, please consider supporting them. More information can be found at www.bartimeus.nl.