

Bridget of Bristol: The Bawdy Brigandess
in
The Prince in the Poppies

*a 10-minute roll-in-the-poppies for peasant girl & prince
(or slightly less, depending on the prince)*

by Jeff Goode
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(A pastoral roadside. Enter a CHARMING PRINCE.)

PRINCE

Ah! What a fine morning for a sovereign prince to doff his crown and don the guise of a mere commoner in order to travel unnoticed among his unsuspecting subjects. Just like I've read in all the fairy books!

Why, if my courtier's could see me now, they should barely recognize me! For I have left behind my orb and scepter and all the outward shows of my inward nobility— Especially that orb, which would have been a dead give away.

(He admires his reflection in the enormous bejeweled engagement ring he is wearing, but thinks nothing of it.)

And I have set out in quest of romance and adventure. Because the romance has been in short supply around the castle of late, since I became engaged to the princess. What has she been telling people?

So I crept out of the castle this morning alone and unaccompanied, save for my white stallion, Monkey Business. And together, we galloped off into the rustic forests which I had always heard surrounded my castle.

What adventures shall befall me this day on my daring sojourn! Perhaps I shall rub elbows with the middle upper and upper middle classes. Or maybe even... the lower...upper class. Perhaps I shall meet a bawdy peasant girl, who will be charmed by a bouquet of poppies that I have hand-picked just for her! Or a bawdy serf or milkmaid, who will be smitten with me at first sight. Or maybe even a bawdy shepherd lass. Or a brewer. Bawdy nun, perhaps. Bawdy housewife.

O what a day full of promise this promises to be! But first I shall want a hearty breakfast. You there, serving wench!

(Enter a FEMALE BRIGAND.)

BRIGANDESS

What did you call me?

PRINCE

Yes, I did. Bring me a half side of bacon, some farm-fresh eggs, and a tall chalice of fresh-squeezed goat's milk. With a single lemon peel curled into the shape of a rose blossom as a garnish.

BRIGANDESS

Who do you think you are?

PRINCE

Ah! I'm glad you asked. I am, of course, none other than an undistinguished peasant. Just one of many grateful but nameless subjects who dwell in the domain of the sovereign Prince Harry, your—I mean, our noble ruler, who, I'm sure you've heard, is every bit as dashing and handsome in person, as we've read about in all the tabloid proclamations. Now, about those eggs... Sunny side up. But not too sunny. More of a late autumn daybreak over an idyllic field of poppies.

BRIGANDESS

You realize this is not a restaurant?

PRINCE

Well, of course not. It's an idyllic field of poppies. Where do you think I got the idea for the eggs? But if it is not a restaurant per se, it is still the perfect place for an early morning repast, if I do say so myself.

BRIGANDESS

But you can't just stop anyone you like and order breakfast.

PRINCE

Of course, I can, I'm the prin—Oh, wait, I'm not him.

BRIGANDESS

You're not who?

PRINCE

Oh, no one of consequence. Just some nameless noble who thinks he can order people about at his whim. When that is obviously not how we do things around here. ...Is it?

BRIGANDESS

No.

PRINCE

Well, I don't see why not. You are a serving wench, are you not?

BRIGANDESS

No, I'm a brigand.

PRINCE

And I passed a tavern not a half a mile back. Surely, you can fetch me something from there. That is your name isn't it? Shirley?

BRIGANDESS

No, it's Bridget. Bridget of Bristol. And I am no serving wench, but a notorious brigand.

PRINCE

Bridget of Bristol?

BRIGANDESS

Maybe you've heard of me?

PRINCE

Not that I recall.

BRIGANDESS

Well, you should. I'm notorious.

PRINCE

Why then do you have the name "Shirley" embroidered on your bosom?

BRIGANDESS

Do I? I always wondered what that said. I'm not much for reading, I barely made it past the 3rd grade. But the 4th grade is sex education, so I'm looking forward to starting back up in the fall.

PRINCE

Well, it does. It says, "Shirley".

BRIGANDESS

That must be because I purloined it from the Earl of Shirley, when he passed through these woods not two weeks ago.

PRINCE

Are you a larcenous laundress, then?

BRIGANDESS

No, a brigand.

PRINCE

Perhaps you are a bawdy fishwife, and this shirt washed up in your nets when the earl was swimming upstream of you.

BRIGANDESS

No, I'm a brigand. I stole it from him at sword point.

PRINCE

But that's impossible. I saw the Earl of Shirley just yesterday. And he never mentioned an incident with a fishwife or a laundress.

BRIGANDESS

Because I'm a brigand!

PRINCE

He did say that he was beset by brigands, recently, and in these very woods.

BRIGANDESS

That was me! I'm the brigand.

PRINCE

No, I'm afraid you're thinking of someone else. The brigands he described were a band of strapping young, heavily-armed woodsmen who set upon him and robbed him of all his worldly possessions.

BRIGANDESS

Woodsmen?! Is that the story he's telling?

PRINCE

Yes.

BRIGANDESS

Argh! So he didn't mention me at all?

PRINCE

No, I'm sure I would have remembered if there was a woman involved. For he would have been the laughingstock of the kingdom. (*laughs*) Or principality rather, if you want to get technical.

BRIGANDESS

Argh! How shall I ever gain the notoriety I richly deserve, if every man I waylay lies about the encounter to his friends afterward to puff up his own manhood?

PRINCE

You haven't been with many men, have you?

BRIGANDESS

No. I was saving myself for 4th grade.

PRINCE

Yes, well... They do that. But fear not, your reputation shall be made today. For I have no reason to lie about the encounter we are likely to have right after breakfast, as my own manhood is inflated enough it needs no further puffing. Though you are certainly welcome to try. But rest assured that whatever transpires betwixt us here in the privacy of this lush pastoral setting, shall soon become the stuff of legends. Our encounter will be immortalized in ballad and song and the occasional bawdy limerick throughout the land, wherever such tales are told. Now the bacon... I don't like it too crispy.

BRIGANDESS

I gather that you are not the lowly peasant you appear to think you seem.

PRINCE

Drat! Am I that obvious? What gave me away? Was it my impeccable diction?

BRIGANDESS

No, your horse. That's him over there, isn't it?

PRINCE

Monkey Business? He is rather a noble steed. I should have known he couldn't keep a secret.

BRIGANDESS

Yes, and he's got a gilded saddle and the sterling silver stirrups.

PRINCE

He refuses to leave the stable without them. Bit of a fop, as stallions go.

(Brigandess takes out a bejeweled rapier.)

BRIGANDESS

He had this sword on him, too.

PRINCE

Give me that! That's mine!

BRIGANDESS

I would, but I want to see what it fetches on the open market.

PRINCE

It won't fetch anything. It's one-of-a-kind royal heirloom. They tell me it's priceless. Who would buy such a thing?

BRIGANDESS

Well, maybe I'll keep it then, as concrete evidence that I once robbed a duke.

PRINCE

Concrete!?! I'll have you know that those gemstones are real! And I am no duke!

BRIGANDESS

An earl then.

PRINCE

An earl?!? Give me that. (*snatches the sword away from her*) I don't know what sort of barn you grew up in.

BRIGANDESS

It was an A-frame.

PRINCE

But they ought to have taught you to pay proper respect to your elders, your parents, and your prince!

BRIGANDESS

My what?

PRINCE

Oh, pox on my wagging tongue! My charade is foiled. Well, I was never good at parlor games. It's true, you have found me out. I am your prince.

BRIGANDESS

My personal prince?

PRINCE

Do you have another?

BRIGANDESS

No.

PRINCE

Well, then.

BRIGANDESS

I don't think I need a prince.

PRINCE

Nonsense, everybody needs a prince.

BRIGANDESS

Do you need a prince?

PRINCE

Well, everyone but me needs one.

BRIGANDESS

Why, what are they good for?

PRINCE

Any number of things. Taxation, for example. You wouldn't have taxes without me.

BRIGANDESS

I don't pay taxes.

PRINCE

That's lucky. Probably shouldn't have mentioned the taxes anyway. Well, there's also topiary. The castle grounds would be completely devoid of sculptured hedges and commemorative statues without someone like me to model for them.

BRIGANDESS

So you're a stonecutter's assistant?

PRINCE

No.

BRIGANDESS

You're a gardener?

PRINCE

No!

BRIGANDESS

Then what?

PRINCE

Who do all the effigies in the palace garden resemble?

BRIGANDESS

I've never been to the palace.

PRINCE

Oh, you're impossible!

BRIGANDESS

And you, it seems, are useless.

PRINCE

All right, I didn't want to bring this up until I got to know you better. And you started the 4th grade. But if you must know, I am also quite an accomplished lover.

BRIGANDESS

Don't you mean to say that you're a skilled lover?

PRINCE

Aren't they the same thing?

BRIGANDESS

Not exactly.

PRINCE

What's the difference?

BRIGANDESS

If you made love to Snow White and all seven of her dwarves at one go, that would be an accomplishment.

PRINCE

Indeed!

BRIGANDESS

If none of them was grumpy after, that takes skill.

PRINCE

Ah! Then I am accomplished. "Quantity over quality," I always say.

BRIGANDESS

You really are useless.

PRINCE

You would do well not to mock me. I may not look it in these hand-me-down capes, but I am a person of considerable wealth and influence.

BRIGANDESS

Then give me the wealth, and you may keep your influence for another day.

PRINCE

You will receive your tip at the end of the meal, madam, and not a moment before!

BRIGANDESS

I am not a waitress! I am a brigand!

PRINCE

You? A brigand? Young lady, you are profoundly mistaken.

BRIGANDESS

I think I would know.

PRINCE

You are a brigandess at best.

BRIGANDESS

It's the same thing.

PRINCE

Not in the least. A brigand and a brigandess have as much in common as a barkeep and a barwench.

BRIGANDESS

Which are also the same!

PRINCE

Not at all.

BRIGANDESS

What's the difference?

PRINCE

One of them keeps a bar, and the other is the only reason to go into one.

BRIGANDESS

I thought beer was the reason to go into a bar.

PRINCE

Nonsense! A man may drink beer in a barn. But wenches are what separates a pub from a pigsty.

BRIGANDESS

What about pigs?

PRINCE

From what I've seen, they've both got pigs. At least, I think that's what I saw waiting tables at the tavern I just passed. That's why I didn't go in.

BRIGANDESS

That pig is my good cousin Curley O'Hurlihy, I'll have you know. And he cannot help it if he is big-boned! And born with a vestigial tail.

PRINCE

Nor can a pig.

BRIGANDESS

Argh!! I was going to spare you out of pity for your pitiable love-making. But now you drag my extended family into it, you have enraged me past what a working woman should have to bear! Prepare to be robbed!

(She attacks. They fight.)

PRINCE

All right, but I warn you, I am as skilled at arms as any man at court. For I am undefeated in over fifty practice bouts. And some two hundred more where my opponents threw down their weapons and surrendered before I even drew my blade.

BRIGANDESS

I think I'll take my chances.

PRINCE

I admire your spunk. But aren't you afraid that when I'm done with you, I may attempt to ravage you?

BRIGANDESS

Or maybe I'll ravage you.

PRINCE

You wouldn't!

(She disarms him. He pretends he did it on purpose.)

PRINCE

Very well then, I surrender.

BRIGANDESS

I would have thought an unbeaten swordsman would be harder defeated.

PRINCE

Well, admittedly, when it's a man threatens to ravage me. I put up a better fight.

BRIGANDESS

Not to worry, I have no designs upon your honor. Only your money. Now, hand it over.

PRINCE

Ah! The negotiation phase. This is where I truly shine. You desire money. I have no money. Well, I guess that settles that.

BRIGANDESS

Oh, malarkey! Turn out your pockets.

PRINCE

I am penniless. I swear it!

BRIGANDESS

A penniless prince? Do you take me for a fool?

PRINCE

No, but it seems you have taken me for one! But unlike the Earl of Shirley, I do not leave the castle alone and unescorted with all my worldly possessions in my pockets.

BRIGANDESS

No? Because judging by the bulge in your bloomers, you have your weight in pound notes stuffed into that codpiece.

PRINCE

I'm sorry to disappoint you, lass, but my codpiece is skintight.

BRIGANDESS

Ha! If what you say is true... I'm not sure why you think that would be a disappointment.

PRINCE

My treasures are all safely back at the castle. You have robbed the only man in the land without a shilling to his name. Other than my paupers. And their families. Also the serfs. But fear not, you shan't go home empty-handed. For I am still quite taken with your spunk, and I've decided to reward you for it. So how about if I seduce you, and we call it even?

BRIGANDESS

How is that even?

PRINCE

Did I mention I'm an accomplished love maker?

BRIGANDESS

A minute ago, you were an accomplished swordsman. I'm not sure your self-opinions speak well for your skills.

PRINCE

I haven't had any complaints.

BRIGANDESS

Oh, you poor thing. If you've had no complaints, then you're not doing it right.

PRINCE

That seems counterintuitive.

BRIGANDESS

A woman only wastes her breath on a man if he's worth fixing.

PRINCE

She does?

BRIGANDESS

Do you feed your peasants when they're starving?

PRINCE

No, it's cheaper to get new ones.

BRIGANDESS

And do you bother to whip a horse when he's already gone lame?

PRINCE

No, that's what we feed the peasants.

BRIGANDESS

You see?

PRINCE

It still seems to defy logic.

BRIGANDESS

You haven't been with many women, have you?

PRINCE

I've been with any number of women.

BRIGANDESS

But none more than once?

PRINCE

I don't like to repeat myself.

BRIGANDESS

There's your trouble. Repeat customers are the surest sign of success in any endeavor.

PRINCE

In that case, I shall have to make love to you twice.

BRIGANDESS

No, deal! I'd rather see what's behind that codpiece.

PRINCE

(snickers) You want to see it?

BRIGANDESS

That's right. Show me what you've got.

PRINCE

But I'm afraid the only valuables I have on me are the family jewels.

BRIGANDESS

That'll have to do. Hand them over!

(The Prince snickers.)

BRIGANDESS

What?

PRINCE

Nothing.

BRIGANDESS

Then let me have the family jewels. And be quick about it. And quit snickering.

PRINCE

All right, if you insist.

BRIGANDESS

I do. I insist.

PRINCE

Then prepare to feast your eyes, and your hands, on Prince Harry's royal jewels!

(He drops his pantaloons.)

BRIGANDESS

Holy Saint Johnson!!

PRINCE

Thanks. I get that a lot.

BRIGANDESS

What in the name of all that's unspeakable is that?!

PRINCE

That, as you so loudly put it, is my—

(She kicks him resoundingly in the groin.)

PRINCE

Gah!

(She drops her sword and hurls herself upon him, pins him to the ground, and punches him repeatedly in the groin.)

BRIGANDESS

Back! Back ye devil! Hie thee to whatever unholy damnation ye sprang out of!

PRINCE

Ow! Oh! Oy!

(She refrains from punching him long enough to go fetch her sword. He curls up in a fetal position.)

PRINCE

Sweet preservation...

(She comes back and attempts to stab him in the groin.)

PRINCE

What?! No! Stop! What are you doing?

BRIGANDESS

Hold still, man! There's a great squirming serpent devouring your loins! Die, devil wyrn!

PRINCE

Madwoman! Those are my loins!

BRIGANDESS

Those're your loins?

PRINCE

Of course!

BRIGANDESS

All that's loins?

PRINCE

Yes!

BRIGANDESS
You're kidding.

PRINCE
No, I'm not!

BRIGANDESS
What, are ye deformed?!

PRINCE
I think I am now.

BRIGANDESS
I've heard stories of such creatures dwelling in men's drawers. But they always turned out to be magical gnomes. Or tiny damsel-devouring dragons. Not loins. And you say it's attached?

(She tries to grab him.)

PRINCE
Keep your hands off of me! Have you no respect for my princely anatomy?!

BRIGANDESS
It is princely, I'll give ye that. Let me see it again.

PRINCE
No! Back away, she-devil! Or I shall have you brought up on charges of treason!

BRIGANDESS
I think you're overreacting.

PRINCE
On the contrary! You have just done more to damage the line of succession than any amount of inbreeding and syphilis. If I have no heir, it's on your head. Oh, I shall be swollen tomorrow. And not the kind of swollen one generally prefers.

BRIGANDESS
Well, it serves you right, if you expected me to make love to that monster.

PRINCE
He's not a monster! Oh...

BRIGANDESS
Well, he's not a magical gnome.

PRINCE

I suppose you'd prefer one smaller but with a good sense of humour?

BRIGANDESS

It's not the size of the blade, but the skill of the wielder that counts.

PRINCE

But I'm skilled in all the courtly arts.

BRIGANDESS

Well, unless one of them is foreplay...

(He grabs her and kisses her. She melts.)

BRIGANDESS

I can't wait for 4th grade.

(She grabs him and kisses him back. They both pause to catch their breath.)

BRIGANDESS

What else did they teach you at court?

PRINCE

Do you know what a fingerbowl is?

(Her knees buckle. He catches her.)

BRIGANDESS

Whoops. Wow. Little weak in the knees.

PRINCE

I shall take you to places you've never been before. And make love to you in those places.

BRIGANDESS

Such as?

PRINCE

Have you ever been to a poppy field?

BRIGANDESS

Yes.

PRINCE

Well, I haven't. So let's start with that.

BRIGANDESS

Now hold on...

PRINCE

Imagine a life of luxury beyond your wildest dreams. Imagine days of lavish splendor, and nights of endless passion. Decadent treasures and hedonistic delights.

BRIGANDESS

I could give up my life of crime, and food service. I could have my own name embroidered on my bosom.

PRINCE

Shirley, I love thee.

BRIGANDESS

Bridget.

PRINCE

Yes, of course. Take off your blouse.

BRIGANDESS

I beg your pardon? That's presumptuous, even for a prince.

PRINCE

I know, but it says "Shirley" on the embroidery and the man is a friend of mine, so it takes me quite out of the proper frame of mind.

BRIGANDESS

I see.

PRINCE

But if we both remove our shirts—I'm sure it will be easier for me to remember your name.

BRIGANDESS

Do you mean it?

PRINCE

From this moment forth, there shall be no other woman for me, but you. No other whispered name shall cross my lips, save that of— What was your name again?

(She slaps him.)

BRIGANDESS

You're a liar!

PRINCE

I, a liar!? How could you possibly think that?! Already?

BRIGANDESS

That ring! That jewel-bestudded ring upon your finger.

(She has just noticed the enormous jeweled engagement ring he is wearing.)

PRINCE

Oh that, um...

BRIGANDESS

You swore to me you had no treasure upon you.

PRINCE

Oh, but this is nothing. It's just my engagement ring. Here, you can have it.

BRIGANDESS

You're engaged?!?!?! *(takes the ring)* I'll take it.

PRINCE

Well, yes. But barely.

BRIGANDESS

How dare you seduce me under pretense of being a charming, handsome and available prince?! When there is a princess back at the castle to whom you have already betrothed your love, and everything that goes with it.

PRINCE

Well, not everything.

(He tries to kiss her again.)

BRIGANDESS

Argh!! Unfondle me, you fiend! I shall never forgive you for this!

(She attacks. They fight.)

PRINCE

Wait, let me explain! I admit, there is a princess back at the castle to whom I have sworn my undying love...

BRIGANDESS

Yes?

PRINCE

But she's back at the castle.

BRIGANDESS

Oh! You!

(She attacks with renewed vigor. They fight. She defeats him and holds him at sword point.)

PRINCE

Wait! You didn't let me finish!

BRIGANDESS

Well, they'll be your last words, so make 'em famous.

PRINCE

(thinking on his feet) There is a princess to whom I have sworn my love, who is back at the castle, waiting for me to return to her arms and marry her and make her lord of half my estate, and rule forever with me in peace and universal harmony...

BRIGANDESS

Yes?

PRINCE

...But she means nothing to me!

BRIGANDESS

That's better.

(She throws herself into his arms again and kisses him.)

BRIGANDESS

I knew a prince this charming couldn't be all bad. Will you take me back to the castle now and make sweet love to me in the lavish splendor of your royal bedchamber?

PRINCE

Yes, or there's a bedroll on my white stallion.

BRIGANDESS

It's not very royal.

PRINCE

The horse is royal.

BRIGANDESS

How do I know your intentions are honorable? And you aren't just saying all this to get me topless in the poppies?

PRINCE

Can't I do both?

BRIGANDESS

Then you mean all the things you said?

PRINCE

Every word of it.

BRIGANDESS

So the princess?

PRINCE

Means nothing to me!

BRIGANDESS

And Shirley's shirt?

PRINCE

Distracts me terribly!

BRIGANDESS

And the life of lavish luxury?

PRINCE

I said imagine it.

BRIGANDESS

Hmm. All right, but I'd better not have to imagine the nights of endless passion.

PRINCE

Rest assured, my sweet, when it comes to love making, I am never disappointed.

(They roll in the poppies.)

BRIGANDESS

O prince...

PRINCE

O barwench...

BRIGANDESS

(correcting) Bridget.

PRINCE

O midget...

BRIGANDESS

Bridget!!

PRINCE

Sorry, you got me thinking about dwarves earlier.

(She rolls him over onto his back.)

BRIGANDESS

Who would have thought when I left my hovel this morning to rob travelers on the high road that I myself would have my heart stolen by an accomplished prince. Who would make me one of his accomplishments right here in the poppy fields of Bristol. That I, Bridget the Brigand, would become legendary not for my swordplay, but my foreplay. Not for acts of thievery, but acts of indecent exposure on a public thoroughfare. You know, maybe we should move a bit farther off the road.

PRINCE

O brigandess...

BRIGANDESS

Be with you in a minute, prince. To think that I, after a lifetime of disappointments, should finally find myself in the arms of a lover who is never disapp— Wait a moment. What do you mean, when you say that you are never disappointed.

(The Prince snores loudly.)

BRIGANDESS

Argh!!

~~ FIN ~~