

Crimson Knight

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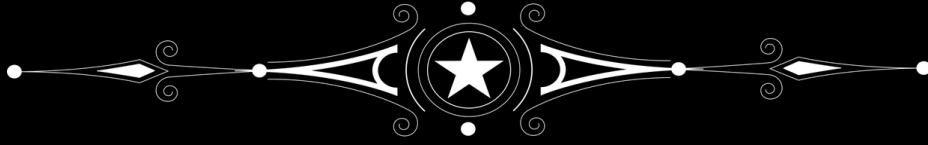
A crowdfunded story

By

Desmond Fallout

The following contains: Werewolf transformations, Male to female TG, awkward romance

Read at your own discretion.



Chapter 2: The Dragon in the Castle

Count Travis Mikro was the kind of person whose reputation depended on who you asked. To the knights he was a legendary warrior that rose to paragon status in the kingdom over its last two wars. Nobles considered him a brown noser for dealing directly with the king, allowing him a status with the common people as a pioneer in keeping the economy stable during such troubled times.

For the ones that did business with him, the old man was a greedy, cheap ass, piece of trash human being.

But he was a rich piece of trash. That's what remained important to a veteran getting on in years. Having been rewarded authority over a region that bordered the capitol of Durge itself, the Mikro family took full advantage of the fact most trade goods had to come through them. Fees, taxes, and even the common workers expenses were like another battlefield the man enjoyed mastering.

Today hadn't been any different. Lots of hard materials needed to be shipped along to the outer parts of the kingdom, while tons of medical supplies and magic items were getting returned to the capitol for the king's army. Being ravaged by several warlords leading bandit tribes wasn't technically another war, though it sure drained resources like one. There was a reason while most other counts and merchants sneered behind his back, they still dealt with most of Travis' demands. A kingdom exhausted from conflicts can't well remove the heart stabilizing its economy.

Travis might have been able to barter a higher price if his stupid nephew had any commitment to his duties. While the guards spent two hours finding the lazy sponge sleeping in the stables, most carts got to escape after paying only the bare minimum expenses. What good is having a mage to inspect enchanted items for curse tampering if they can't charge for it?

There was little point fuming about it at the end of the day. People got paid. Coffers got filled. Ending the day a little bit richer than when it started was more than enough to lull a man into peaceful slumber.

"SIRE!"

You know. Until one of the sorry excuses for a guard earned their pay by slamming open the bedroom door at four in the morning. At least that what time Travis hoped it was. Any earlier and he vowed to personally flog someone before lunch time.

"By the seven stars, Ted! You better be here to tell me there's a spontaneous shipment silver or better for me to tax."

"Um, m-my name is Allen, sire." Most security workers in the kingdom followed a simple uniform design consisting of a cheaply made half-plate armor and a masked helmet. Because of this they all tended to blend together with a busy counts daily work. So, when the glare Travis gave his current employee through disheveled red hair said he couldn't care less about identities, they decided to pivot back to the matter at hand. "A monster has broken into the keep demanding to speak to you."

There was a long silence while Travis sat up in his bed. A mind still groggy from the fading dreams of a beautiful island retirement needed time to process the news he'd just been told. "So, my ex-wife came back trying to get another severance payment from me? Just have her chucked in the river."

"N-no, sire! This is an actual monster. It's taller than any man, really rounded, and a crimson red."

"You sure it's not Nancy?"

"S-sire! Please!"

The exasperation could be heard through the guard's bucket head protection. Something that got a chuckle out of Travis while he reluctantly rolled out of bed. Something told the war experienced count there wasn't nearly as much agency going on to justify such panic. Unfortunately, it still looked like a mess he couldn't just wave off and resume sleeping. Slipping on a robe over his bed garments, Travis gestured for the guard to lead him out, finding two more awaiting to provide him with a proper escort. Not that the way their armor clicked with all the nervous shaking fostered any confidence in the count.

When they reached the great hall four more guards were already there with weapons at the ready. Only a pair of torches had been lit near the group, leaving the rest of the place in near darkness. A minor detail Travis didn't fault any of them for. One of his major rules for staff was to limit all expenditures as much as possible. Overuse of light sources happened to be one of those things he could do without every damn night.

Still, the way it looked like everyone was in a fuss over nothing in particular was grating his already sleep deprived nerves.

"So, where's the damn emergency!?"

One of the guards wordlessly removed a hand from their spear to point deeper down the expansive hall, directing Travis' gaze. Far down at the opposite end were the double wooden doors connecting this room to the front courtyard. Sitting directly on one

of the tables meant for the lowest of important guests was everyone's apparent monster.

"Oh."

Suddenly the unease of his security was making a bit more sense. Even from this distance Travis could guess the thing towered a couple feet over the average human. The silhouette in the dim light suggested a large build with wide hips smudging the surface of his polished tables. Wings fluttered from behind their shoulders looking far too small to lift their figure for flight and a meaty tail twitched its rich furry tuft while resting across its elephantine thighs.

To these younger people working for coppers on the hour this might have been their first look at a monster. Unlike the beast men commonly used for slave labor across the kingdom, these races of bipedal creatures were true terrors forged through generations living off a harsh world. Although, that was admittedly a broad term for lots of beings the kingdom had discovered. There were over a hundred recorded encounters with different monsters. Some like the fairies barely exceeded the size of a book and were more annoying than a threat. Others, like the dreaded chimera's, were the type of creature more than capable of taking out the entire half-dozen guards without batting an eye.

For Travis, a man that'd seen true horrors of war, this bulky thing lurking in the dark only came off as some fat dumb ass that could use more cardio. The look of pure irritation he gave them never faltered as he made his way over to a throne atop a small set of stairs. It was his usual position when wanting to receive guests and citizens trying to petition him for some problem or another. A bare minimum courtesy, done out of habit in all his business dealings.

"Good evening, Count Mikro. It's a pleasure to meet you once again."

The creature spoke in a voice that was surprisingly light and gentle for its girth. Spotting the subtle shape of breasts on its chest resting atop a pronounced stomach bulge helped the count guess this person's gender.

That and the fact they were obviously naked.

"Afraid I can't say the feeling is mutual. In fact, I can't recall ever meeting an obese nightmare such as yourself in a positive context." Every word that left the count bit with the man's pent-up ire as his way of show they were ready for a fight. A stark contrast to the gasps of shock and petrified whimpers of the six armored men standing between the pair. "Credit where it's due, you are shockingly polite for breaking into my home like a common thug. What possible reason could something like you have for bothering me at this horrific hour? For that matter, what good for nothing wretch do I have to fire for even letting you waddle in here like that?"

"S-sire!?" One of the guards must have had a surprising rush of courage. Not for speaking up, but actually turning their attention away from the beast to address their boss. "Should you really be antagonizing it like that!?"

"Will you idiots calm down. It's just a Drykmir."

Now there was a name Travis hadn't needed to utter in a decade. Drykmir were a race of reptilian creatures that formed a tribal confederacy nation along the kingdoms north and west borders. Almost all of them stood taller than a man, and possessed strength well beyond a squad of decently trained knights. Their scales ranged in a wide variety of colors, which seemed to denote both their magical affinities as well as what tribes they belong to.

Many legends in and out of the villages attributed their features to resembling the ancient dragons of old. A part of what contributed to their fearsome reputation. The other part was the fact their united army had nearly wiped out Durge in all-out war over forty years ago. Somehow the current king had arranged an armistice that still puzzled those that remembered like Travis, for it left the kingdom in a fairly favorable state after being on the losing side.

Perhaps that is why he shouldn't have dropped the name of such a notorious race among those that have never seen one. Hindsight is kind of annoying that way. The guards broke ranks in a flurry of different emotions; pacing small circles in place, shouting obscenities, saying their final prayers to whichever god they worshiped. While all this was going on, the aging count reached beside down to take a swig from the wine flask he kept there for such headaches.

"Experienced soldiers cost more money. Experiences soldiers cost more money." The mantra went unheard over the clanking of armor. It was one Travis had developed out of habit every time a basic job function couldn't be carried out.

Well, mostly unheard. Through all the noise came the thunderous laughter of the large figure threatening to break his table under her over generous weight.

"Get back in line before I have you all managing the warehouses!"

His loud command carried the angry authority needed to override everyone's inexperienced fear. The five moved into a side-by-side position to form a living wall between Travis and their Drykmir guest. Although this time their spears remained in a formal, aggressive, position.

The rounded lizard flicked the bangs out of her hair, clearing her throat once the commotion had died. Despite the darkness, her continued amusement was evidence in the air. "To be honest, your guards at the gate were actually very heroic in their attempts at turning me away. However, I simply had to see you as soon as possible. Nighttime was also the only way I could see you. I'm sure you of all people would understand the uproar I'd cause walking through your village in my condition. Try not to be too hard on those boys. I'm trained enough that'll regain consciousness without any serious injuries."

"Hmm."

Travis furrowed his brow, not looking the least bit reassured. More to the contrary, he'd had this discussion many times before. This absolute tank of a beast had taken great care to break as little as possible of his things, with minimal harm to his staff in the process. Yet now she acted like she couldn't take his entire escort out in under a minute?

This Drykmir wanted something from him, but didn't have the leverage to barter for it. Travis had this kind of build up to a point before with humans, beast men, even some elves and dwarves when they fancied a shipment. To get such behavior from the reptilian's was something new. Granted all the one's he'd ever dealt with were at the blunt ends of hammers and maces.

"I'm sorry. Who, exactly, are you, anyway?"

"Oh!" The calm bravado vanished from her voice. Tension seized up the Drykmir's tail and wings as she suddenly showed reluctance for speaking her next words. "Apologies for the late introduction. My name is Ulric Jenkins. I've come here out of desperate need for your help, Count Mikro."

A silence lingered in the hall for so long that a couple guards turned to make sure their employer was still with them. While he still appeared to be breathing, the red-haired man's eyes had gone from squinting in suspicion to wide open shock.

"Ulric Jenkins?!" He slowly repeated that name, sounding unsure if he wanted to be angry or entertained by its utterance. Being a hardened business man, Travis opted for the former. "One of the ten captains serving under the king? The same Ulric Jenkins that disrupted my entire shipping network six months ago?"

"I'm so glad you still remember me!" The Drykmir woman uncrossed her legs with a cheerful demeanor returning in her tone. "That makes explaining my situation a lot easier."

"Like hell it does!" Travis leapt to his feet. A motion that nearly sent his guards tripping over their own. Spears once again trained their pointed ends on the shadowy guest, but after a moment the count commanding them flopped back down with an angry growl. "Ulric Jenkins costed me thousands of gold sickles seizing those shipments. I had to spend far more favors than I wanted trying to mitigate all that expense from my quarterly profits. He's more likely to receive my blade in the throat than a favor." He allowed his mouth to curl in a cathartic grin. "In fact, the man you claim to be was supposed to have been executed a week ago. Apparently, he got too frisky with the king's daughter for his own good."

The statements didn't seem to faze the massive female creature much. The relaxed twitching had returned to her fat tail. If anything, a smugness could be felt mirrored on her obscured face.

"I suppose you are one to be well familiar with underhanded conspiracies. Most of your caravan leaders plead guilty to either being part of the Black Spirals or bribed into circumventing much needed supplies from the kingdoms citizens towards those

bandits. Of course, there was never any evidence to incriminate you or your inner circle, so it's not like I'm here to make wild accusations about the past. What good does that do any of us?"

Travis's fingers dug into the rests of his chair. Good money had been spent keeping his little scandal confined to as few higher ups in the royal court as possible. Plenty of rumors always circled around about how he was managing to prosper while three bandit armies pillaged the kingdom in recent years. Only a certain someone had ever gotten close to proving the truth in some of them.

"I met with Ulric in person shortly after the incident," Travis said, spurred by many questions fueling a morbid curiosity. "He carried that same irritating tone when dropping me some advice. How did it go again?"

There was a pause before the female picked up on his cue. "Feeding a gluttonous beast can only forestall its wrath for so long. You're just a pig they're waiting to get fat enough to skewer."

Rage boiled in the counts blood at hearing the exact words, with the exactly inflections, delivered to him with a such a serenading voice.

"Ulric Jenkins was a human man with an overly flawed sense of justice. You are obviously none of these and expect me to believe such claims?"

"I hardly take you for a fool, dear count, but circumstances have changed a lot of things in the past week." The Drykmir's hands came to rest on the rounded edges of her belly. Wings folded around her shoulders as if trying to shield their corpulent figure. "There's not a lot of options for someone in my position."

"Heh. So why am I supposed to be one of them? A random Drykmir stomping around the heart of an unfriendly nation without even a shirt on their back is a curiosity, but not something worth my charity."

"Yet my story might enlighten you to a few things going on worse than making deals with warlords." She straightened up again as if never showing any previous meekness. " While most of the kingdom knows you for various shrewd dealings you make, I'm also aware the people living in your lands prosper as well. You can't erase the great warrior that saved hundreds of lives during the Drykmir wars."

"That was a lifetime ago."

"Be that as it may, there are things in motion I fear threaten a lot more than your coffers. If my hope of appealing to any sense of honor, then perhaps your self-preservation might be interested in hearing me out."

Travis rubbed at his temples with both index fingers. If this had been anyone, anything, else they would have been tossed in a cell for a week. "The tale you're spinning me so far sounds of complete insanity. At least, the parts I can make sense of.

I wouldn't be surprised if you were hired by another count as some kind of plot to undermine me."

The beast shifted her hips. "You think a Drykmir would come all this way east for that?"

"I have no delusions my reputation with their nation is even worse than my one in the kings' courts. Even someone of your gross physique could make for a clever assassin."

"I'm not sure how to take that."

"There's a number of possibilities for your presence and good salesman doesn't trust anything on blind faith. No! I'm not bothering with this any further unless you agree to a memory scan by my personal mage."

"I am perfectly fine with these terms," she said without hesitation, surprising Travis with her bluntness. "My opinion of you might have diminished if you didn't take such reasonable precautions. Where is your main mage, anyway?"

"My standard protocol for intruders is to have him roused immediately in case magical responses are needed to counter the threat." The counts posture deflated into a slump that sunk him deep into the large chair. "But knowing my luck? He's probably dozing off in a hiding space among the horses in my stables, or inside a kitchen cabinet. It might be another hour before the retainers find him, assuming he doesn't get hungry and show up on his own like a useless gremlin."

"Oh..." Silence lingered for a moment while she drummed both sets of claws on her stomach. One of the guards coughed. "You know, I don't mind sleeping in the stables while we wait for him to show up? A comfortable place to sleep is one of many things I haven't had in a while."

"And I would love to get back to my own pleasant dreams too," Travis said in a grumble. "But we are getting this settled so I can send you on your way. Someone should check the cellars just in case he..."

A snapping of fingers occurred so close to the Drykmir ears she leapt from the table in a fright. The whole table was sent toppling over with the thrashing of her weight, in turn rocking the guards into their previous panicked defensive positions. Having long, pointed ears made the draconic race naturally exceptional at hearing, so for anything to catch them off guard was a fairly impressive feat.

What wasn't appreciated by everyone in the hall was the cascading effect caused by the simple gesture. One by one the lamps and torches strewn about the walls, including the chandeliers overhead, erupted in freshly kindled flames with barely a second pause between them. The large space bloomed with enough light to rival an afternoon in less than ten seconds. Travis had to cover his eyes with the rest of the guard, uttering several obscenities in a few different languages.

"Damn you to the pyre, Nathan! I warned you to never do them again."

What might have looked like a much younger version of the count had made themselves known in front of the entrance doors. Aside from the matching red hair and peach skin, their scrawny frame wore a blue cloak and brown pants like bed sheets. Glimpses of a pony tail were hidden behind their hood, while the goatee of red bristle looked a few days off from needing a trim. The thing that really set the two men apart was their complete jarring attitudes. While the older Mikro continued cursing in their efforts to rub some vision back into their eyes, the young relative dismissed everyone's threats of violence with a loud yawn. Their eyes never seemed to open more than a bare crack while they shambled on lazy legs past the enormous and confused visitor mere feet away.

"If everyone is going to run around like the kingdom is falling, you could at least turn the lights on, uncle. I nearly ran into the walls three times just trying to remember where this place is." The robbed man paused after passing a few tables. His head darted from right to left scanning the guards, some of whom had still not returned to their ranks with spots in their eyes. "So, what's the emergency?"

Travis took his time drawing in a deep breath for his long, defeated sigh. When he was ready, he held up a finger in a spinning motion. "Turn around, you dumbass."

Even the simplest of commands didn't seem to spur Nathan into action right away. The relatives stared down each other for several seconds until it was clear Travis would not elaborate any further.

"What's so important about your tables? GAH!!"

Now basked in the glow of fire lights, the Drykmir looked larger than Travis first thought. Her bipedal body wasn't that far off from a human woman's, if thickened out by what could be assumed was a mix of fat and muscles. Massive hips that couldn't fit the counts chair helped support the lizard tail that was thicker than Nathan in general. They worked with a grossly distended stomach to give her a very squash-shaped body. Most of said body was covered in dark red scales like the guard that'd awoken Travis mentioned, though her front had plating of black going from her neck, over plump breasts and down to the inside of thighs like an apron. When her wings fluttered one could catch glimpses of membrane web connecting the bone joints with a dazzling gold. They matched her long, dirty hair parted only by a pair of snow-white horns near the top of her head.

She still looks a lot better than Nancy, Travis thought with a small click of his teeth. This was certainly the widest Drykmir he'd ever seen, but there were no delusions who could still win in a straight fight between her and the five idiots overpaid to protect him.

Strange the same panic couldn't be seen in Nathan. After the initial shock of finding a monster eight feet tall, red, and girth was standing in his immediate proximity, the younger Mikro had gone into some form of catatonic state. Perhaps a defense

mechanism kicked in that convinced him the woman wouldn't see him if he remained still.

She decided to take the initiative and break the moment by raising one hand with a stiff wave. Her wide muzzle split into a smile that lifted plump cheeks into very deep, adorable dimples that naturally forced her eyes shut. "Hi!"

What this unwittingly showed to Nathan were the numerous fangs that tended to fill a carnivorous bipedal creature's muzzle. Fresh saliva helped them gleam off the torch lights like miniature daggers.

There was a loud crash that made their Drykmir guest jump again. When she reopened her eyes there was only empty space left to greet. The mystery of where their new arrival had fled was quickly solved when she glanced towards Travis to ask, only to find the younger red head had not only taken shelter behind the counts throne, but had somehow climbed to the top of its ten-foot-high back rest.

"Uncle!" he shouted, pointed a finger back down at her. "There's a pregnant dragon in your dining hall!"

Her wide-eyed gaze slowly drifted down to meet Travis's. The line of guards that'd been knocked over in Nathan's expeditious retreat went largely ignored.

"This is Nathan, my nephew and court mage, if neither were apparent." Travis waved a hand upwards where the subject in question clung to decorative oak wood for dear life.

"He seems nice," she said slowly, unsure how to process the scene in front of her.

Travis's guards were looking just as annoyed as their boss while they helped each other up. They didn't even bother forming ranks. Two seemed to over dramatize leg injuries as an excuse to sit down. And still the count sat staring back at the dragon like this was just his typical Monday.

She almost pitted someone that had to look that miserable on a daily basis, until the open door drafted a cold breeze across her bare, and expansive, backside.

"I assure you, if it wasn't for the life debt I owe my sister he would have been living permanently up north in the mages college where I dumped him," Travis explained rather bluntly. "But his skills are good enough for my basic needs when checking merchandise that passes through."

"Is she going to eat us to feed her young!?" Nathan squeaked from his high perch.

"Will you just come down, you useless excuse for a trained...wait." It wasn't clear why Travis didn't realize the meaning behind Nathan's simpering right away. He shifted from glaring up at his poor excuse of a nephew back at the Drykmir down the hall. Eyes

narrowed with a sudden understanding as he scanned her big body with increased scrutiny. Now that there was plenty of illumination, it was clear that black scaled belly was way too roundly defined and firm to be pure fat. It was easily one of the biggest parts of her. "You're pregnant?!"

"Uh," she said, pointed ears drooping against her neck. Knees pressed together while hands reflexively lifted to hug the front of her large spherical middle as if they could block everyone's view of it. "I promise, there is a very sound story that explains everything about this."

"Of course there is. One moment, please."

There were many different actions a dignified nobleman hyper-focused on business could have taken in resolving these events. Standing up and removing a shoe wasn't even on the Drykmir's list of possibilities. In a sharp turn, he sent the footwear flying for a direct hit into Nathan's face. The attack had his apparently desired result of electing a sharp yelp on impact, and then again when Nathan came crashing onto the floor of his great hall. Aside from a few chuckles under their bucket helmets, the guards gave no real reaction watching Travis retrieve his shoe before resuming his seat. Seeing the poor mage had the large dragon's wings slumping with her concerned frown.

"I think you broke my nose, Uncle!" he whined behind both hands covering his face.

"Nathan, we both know you're more durable than that. Plus, you know six different healing spells. Now when you're done pretending you have an excuse to loaf on my floor, our extremely gravid guest here needs her memory scanned until I'm sure this isn't some collaborative plot to ruin my profits."

"You're the boss!" Nathan said, jumping to his feet with a carefree demurer like nothing had just happened. The Drykmir couldn't even see a blemish on his face. Although, she did note as he walked over that his squinty-eyed gaze lingered downward a few seconds too long before making eye contact with a smile. "Nice to meet you, gorgeous. Follow me, please."

"Um, thanks?" she swallowed back hard. If Travis didn't know better, he'd swear she'd been blushing under those scales.

Nathan practically glowed brighter than the lamps while he marched through a side door with the big creature shuffling on trunk legs behind him. The rich golden tuft at the end of her spiked tail did a better job of sweeping than floor than the servants with how heavily she dragged it along.

By now, most of the great hall's commotion was waking up the keeps other occupants. Few dared to come out into the hallways to investigate directly, with most quickly retreating back into their rooms upon seeing their bare-scaled visitor. The duo walked along for what seemed like minutes to the Drykmir, taking so many turns she'd become convinced they'd circled the entire forts outer wall. Just when her massive foot-paws didn't feel like they could bare the strain of her extra weight any further, Nathan

suddenly pivoted to fling open a door that'd been largely obscured by a bookcase on hinges. Its position at rest didn't seem to cover the handle at all.

"Is that room supposed to be secret or something?" she asked, watching the young human vanished inside. With only a moment's hesitation, she ducked as low as her belly would allow to avoid slamming horns against the archway.

"It might have been in the initial designs," Nathan said with a shrug. "According to some of the older staff, Uncle Travis got into a fist fight with the construction crew, who I think was an ox beast man at the time. Not sure who won, but Uncle allegedly got them to work for lower wages. That's probably why a lot of the place has very skewed architecture."

Her snout wrinkled unmasked disgust. "Can't imagine it's fun working under such a cheapskate."

"It's not that bad." Nathan grinned, having busied himself moving stacks of books and piles of handwritten documents.

The chamber itself was an unorganized mess, yet no less comforting. Several bookshelves lined the walls filled with even more tome's than were on the floors and two-seat sofa. A golden rimmed mirror hung next to painted glass window. What got the Drykmirs attention were all the various tools and relics on a display rack most likely meant for various arcane purposes. After making enough space by adding to the corner piles, moved a chair around to the front of the desk and gave its velvet cushioned seat a pat.

The open invitation didn't spur a single step forward. Her focused remained on the human-sized furniture's thin wooden legs with great concern. Only when Nathan gave the cushion several more pats did she relent, if only to be spared feeling like a dog being called. She eased into the chair, taking great pains to figure out how to awkwardly position her tail against the back rest. As expected, the cushion couldn't cover half of her hip span. Every last fiber of wood strained against her weight, but to her amazement, the expected sharp drop didn't come.

"I've enchanted almost all the furniture with extra support," Nathan said upon catching the Drykmir's expression. "You'd be surprised how often things get violent around here."

"Honestly, I probably got a good idea seeing your uncle in action tonight. That man comes across as very high strung for all his experience." She shifted her position, feeling embolden to get more comfortable. "Still, this is some pretty skilled magic. No wonder your uncle hires you."

"Pfft!" Nathan gave off a sputtering noise in response. His attention had gone to thumbing through one of the bookshelves. How anything in this room could be easily found was beyond her imagination. "He doesn't pay me much beyond food and shelter. You heard him; my mom dumped me here when I was a kid and blood is the only thing keeping me around."

"Oh. Sorry."

"No worries." Nathan pulled a tomb from the scattered assortment, flipped through several pages, and tossed it onto one of the piles along the far wall. "I had fun when he sent me off to mage school. My talents didn't blossom like he'd hoped, but that college had a ton of great reading material. Ah! Here's the guides on memory spells."

The Drykmir's wings grew tense. "Wait. Have you ever done anything like this before?"

"Plenty of times!" Nathan sat the book upon his desk so he was standing at her side. Feverish flipping brought him to the desired section which he studied with an idle stroking of his chin fluff. "I think the last time Uncle Travis asked for one of these was three years ago now. He was upset his third wife, Patrica, was having an affair with another towns banker and they were plotting to steal his assets."

"Oh yeah?" Her ears flicked upwards unable to help hearing a bit of gossip that didn't revolve around her rotund figure. "And did you find out if they were?"

"Nope. Never had a chance." Nathan chuckled at having to recall the incident. "I'm great at following written material, but holding the raw essence of magic stable under pressure is the worst. They resisted my spells with such violent fervor that it caused a back wave and scrambled their minds. The banker thought he was a dog and Patrica became convinced she was a traveling circus clown. They ran off into the mountains east of here before I could even try resetting them to normal. Last I've heard they've become very popular in dwarven taverns. Uncle was surprisingly fine with that outcome."

For the first time that night, the bulkier woman felt genuine fear at being inside this counts fortress home. "You're joking. Right? Please tell me you're joking!"

If Nathan even heard her pleas, they were going largely ignored. His mouth was already mumbling in rapid chants barely above a whisper. All his focus went into hand gestures that gathered an increasing green glow. The spell was already being cast in accordance to whatever instructions were written.

"You might experience a loud buzzing noise." He said as the hands outstretched towards her incredibly alarmed face. "Just try to relax and flow with me."

"Wait! I've totally changed my mind!"

She'd barely gotten the words out before Nathan had clamped his palms on either side of her head, folding back the pointed ears resting there. The loud buzzing certainly hadn't been an exaggeration. It attacked straight through her brain, causing the arms raised in defense to fall limp across her hefty stomach. Her tail slowed in its twitching until coming to a complete stop. Slowly the edges of her vision began to fade. An inky black ooze seeped in along the periphery, devouring more and more of the office in a ravenous feast until she couldn't see anything but the red bridge of her snout.

The emerald green of her eyes dulled from a grey mist overtaking their surface. Suddenly a different time and place came into being. One that was still so fresh it caused her heart great pain to have to revisit so soon. The memories played back with such realism as standing in the middle of a stage performance.

TO BE CONTINUED...

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Afterward

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