

*“Father, tell me a story.”*

*“Shouldn’t you be asleep? It is well past your bedtime.”*

*“I can’t sleep. Please, tell me a story and I promise I’ll go to bed.”*

*“Your mother already told you one.”*

*“But hers are so boring. She never tells stories with dragons in them.”*

*“You do know there is no such thing as a dragon, right?”*

*“Please, father? You tell the best stories.”*

*“And then you’ll go to bed?”*

*“Promise!”*

*“Alright then. Hop into bed and I’ll give you a parable. But I’m warning you, little missy, it might be a bit too grown up for your young ears to handle.”*

*“I can handle it.”*

*“Well, I’m sure you can. Let us begin, shall we? In our...”*

... world, the world of Corwyn, during a time deemed The Golden Age, there was a council of magistrates and judges called the Fe’auron.

*I love the Fe’auron!*

*Please, buttercup, do not interrupt.*

*Sorry, father.*

*It is alright. Now...*

The Fe’auron were the sworn keepers of peace and justice in the world, and their actions had kept the world safe from dangers too numerous to count and too great to measure. It is with these brave men and women that we turn to the tale of...

# The Dragon & The Three Knights

~ IN THREE PARTS ~

## THE FIRST KNIGHT



“The council has come to order, and we ask that the candidates would step forth as we impart our final decision,” said Oz’rah, the grey-bearded Magistros. He stood behind the judge’s table while the other magistrates sat comfortably in their considerably cushioned chairs. “For the task of procuring the great magic artefact from the heart of the dragon’s den to ensure stability in our land, and peace in the ages to come, we have appointed our representative. He is a man who is truly upright—a man who maintains tradition and order. He is someone who will follow the laws of man to the letter, questioning not why such edicts have been put into place. The council calls forth, Sir Regulus Mandamus.”

With conviction in his step, the gallant knight took five confident strides forward to greet the council of judges. The Magistros eyed the respected knight, pleased with his sterling head-to-toe suit of armour that truly echoed his heavily protected emotions. He wore a helmet that covered his eyes with a protective sheath and donned a flawless shield that could stave off the fiery breath of a demon-ogre. “I, Sir Mandamus of the Fe’auron union hear the call of the council. I shall seek out the dragon’s den and retrieve the virtuous artefact.”

The many nods that came from the judge’s table

forced a smile to crack on Sir Mandamus' lips, yet he stood firm in martial obedience as he waited to be dismissed.

“Well said, Sir Mandamus. Go now in diligence, and return only once you have obtained the artefact.”

And so, Sir Regulus Mandamus left the council in search of the mysterious dragon's den. From town to town he rode on his subservient steed in search for anyone who might know the whereabouts of the den. He rode persistently, until one day he came across an old man. He stood, unwavering in composure and posture, like a statue.

“You have been looking for me,” said the old man with a calm, collected voice. He looked wise beyond compare as though behind his grey eyes lay volumes upon volumes of lore. His hair was long and his skin was spotted; yet there was a great amount of strength in his words as well as in his step.

“Have I?” replied Sir Mandamus.

“Yes, you have. You seek the location of the dragon's den so that you may procure the magic artefact that lies somewhere within her mighty treasure trove.”

“How do you know all of this, old man?”

“You may call me Tatmai, and to answer your question—I know a great many things, especially in regards to finding dragon lairs.”

“Will you show me the way, Tatmai?”

“I will. And I will instruct you on how to pass the three guardians that block our path, but you must follow my instruction precisely, and without question.”

Sir Mandamus agreed, knowing that with this wizened man's guidance he would soon complete his quest in finding the magic artefact.

With the old man leading the way, they journeyed

through the vast Plains of Karnath and into The Jagged Mountains. They ventured through swamps and deserts, canyons and bayous, until finally (after many long days of travel) Sir Mandamus no longer knew where he was. But he did not question the old man, for with every stride Tatmai took, he walked with conviction and assurance. There was an air about him—Sir Mandamus believed—that made the knight feel safe; no matter what uncharted territory he found himself in, he knew Tatmai would rightly see him through it.

“We are here,” said the old man when finally they reached a cave opening at the foot of a listless bayou river. Sir Mandamus tied up his horse before following the old man toward the dark cave. “Can you even see with that helmet covering your head?”

“I see well enough,” said the knight. “With this helm I am protected.”

“Sacrificing one’s sight in favour of greater protection may eventually prove to be fatal,” replied the old man.

“As I said, I see well enough.”

“Yes, well... within this cave lies the first gate where a guardian, hungry for the food of nature, stands watch. You must take up the fruit of the trees surrounding us, and offer their pulp to the guardian. Follow my instructions, for this is the way it has always been done; it is the way it has to be done.”

“I shall,” replied the obedient knight.

“With the fruit in your hands, peel their skins and crush their pulp until the juice flows into the guardian’s cup. Only then may we pass.”

Sir Mandamus did as he was told, grabbing several pieces of fruit from the trees. As they entered the cave, he noticed a towering stone statue in the shape of a

lion standing vigilantly before them.

“The lion is a proud and gentle animal, but it also has the potential for great destruction,” said the old man. Beneath one of the lion’s paws a bowl was similarly carved out of stone; it was there that Sir Mandamus knew he must offer up the fruit’s nectar. Any fear Sir Mandamus had that this feline guardian of the dragon’s den might attack him was quickly alleviated by Tatmai’s presence, for he was wise and had steered Sir Mandamus in the right direction thus far.

As instructed, the knight crushed the fruit with his bare hands and let the nectar fall into the lion’s bowl.

“You have appeased the guardian, Sir Mandamus,” said Tatmai, who had stood by him through the entire process. “Let us proceed to the second gate where the guardian of song rests in its timeless state.”

The knight followed the old man through the first gate. The lion did not flinch as the two brave men passed it.

Soon, the judicious old man came to a halt. “The second guardian lies before you now. Do not be fooled by its sluggish demeanor, for if you do not do exactly as I say it will surely devour you.”

Sir Mandamus looked ahead and saw a large stone statue shaped to the likeness of a sea tortoise. Its tired, wrinkled face was frozen in time as it carried an unimpressed expression through the ages. The tortoise looked as though it had withstood much hardship and work, having little time—if any—for recreation.

“Are you a man of music, Sir Mandamus?” asked the old man.

The knight believed that Tatmai already knew the answer before he asked the question. “Music is for the

flimflams and the jesters. It is too unpredictable; it is too whimsical. I do not believe it serves a purpose.”

“You have always clung to what can be precisely measured, good knight, and have obviously wasted no time with frivolous imagination.” Sir Mandamus smirked at the old man’s remark with a nod of appreciation. “However, I must ask that you take up this flute and offer your song to the tortoise in exchange for safe passage across the second gate. This is the way it has always been done, and so you too must adhere to this convention.”

The old man removed the reed instrument from his pouch and gave it to Sir Mandamus. “You will find that it will play, even beneath unskilled lips such as yours. You must play for the tortoise for one straight hour—only then will it let us pass.”

Sir Mandamus did not like the prospect of playing music for such a long time. He had no idea what to play, let alone how. Yet, he clung to the belief that the old man would flawlessly guide him through to the end, for he had safely guided him thus far. And so, without hesitation, he pressed the flute up against his lips and he began to play.

For one straight hour the stone tortoise watched as the knight played his song. The tortoise did not move, but Sir Mandamus recalled Tatmai’s warnings that if he did not play for an hour, the guardian of the second gate would surely devour him.

“You may stop now,” said the old man. Sir Mandamus was tired and winded after playing the instrument for one full hour, but he did not complain. “The tortoise is satisfied; it will not harm us.”

Again, Sir Mandamus followed the old man through the gate.

After a time they approached the third and final gate. “Before you lies the owl,” said Tatmai. “To appease this final guardian you must offer it a bit of your essence. Follow these instructions to the letter, and you shall be well on your way to facing the dragon.”

Sir Mandamus nodded as he looked at the statue of the owl perched over a pillar of rock. The owl was life-sized, and therefore quite small, but the knight trusted the old man whole-heartedly and knew he would lead him past the guardian unharmed.

“This is the way it has always been done: Remove your dagger from its sheath, and cut the palm of your hand to expose the blood that flows through your veins. Once the scent of your blood is in the air, we may proceed.”

Dutifully and without hesitation, Sir Mandamus removed his dagger and cut his palm with the edge of the blade.

“Is it safe now?” asked the knight.

“Safe?” replied the old man in his usual monotonous tone, “Have you not always felt safe under the protection of my knowledge? Has a single moment passed with me at your side when your instincts warned you that something was amiss?”

Something was amiss, and only now did Sir Mandamus realize it. He began to feel numb; he found that he was now having trouble breathing.

“From the day we first met,” continued Tatmai, “you, in your unwavering loyalty to the law and to duty, trusted my guidance completely. Never once did you question what it was you were doing at my command.”

“You... you told me not to question you,” stammered the falling knight as he struggled to understand what

was happening to him. “You told me that what I did must be done a certain way because it was...”

“...the way it had always been done,” finished the old man, sounding like an automaton without emotion. “Simply because a task has always been executed a certain way in the past does not mean one should not question it. One should never blindly execute a task without understanding what it is he or she is doing.”

“What have you done to me?” asked Sir Mandamus.

“I have done nothing,” replied the old man, who now looked ravenously hungry. “Your impaired vision did this to you. Just like that helm you wear on your head, you have sacrificed your sight in the hopes that you might be better protected. You have willingly blinded yourself, Sir Mandamus, by trusting too much in my knowledge of the past.”

Sir Mandamus could no longer move his appendages. He lay paralyzed beneath the old man’s feet. “I do not understand.”

“The fruit you crushed in your hands contained a paralyzing toxin that takes effect once it enters the bloodstream, but only after the toxin has been in contact with air for about an hour—hence the time I had you spend playing the flute. Once you had obediently cut yourself, you gave the toxin a place to enter your body.”

Sir Mandamus began to resemble the statues of the lion, the tortoise, and the owl, for he could no longer even bat an eyelash. He simply stared in utter horror as the old man began to reveal his true intentions as well as his true identity.

“Had you taken the time to look at me, you would have seen who I truly am. I am the dragon, and I am



also his consort. It is my task to bring all that is known in this world to the forefront of the minds of men and women, but when they drink too heavily from my cup, when they must rely on my knowledge of the past to be able to face the unknown future, then that knowledge eventually consumes and devours them.”

And with that, the old man began to devour the paralyzed knight. Sir Mandamus could only watch in stoned horror as the old man—who was also the dragon—began to eat his flesh.

## THE SECOND KNIGHT

“Sir Mandamus has been lost,” said the Magistros with a pit in his stomach as he slowly sat back into his cushioned chair.



Many of the other judges and magistrates similarly read the signs, and they too understood that their champion knight had fallen. “We must choose another knight for this crucial task,” said one of the magistrates.

“I concur,” said another. She jiggled a rune-carved gemstone in her hand and tossed it onto the table next to the other divination stones. “However, we must choose more carefully this time. Sir Mandamus was lost to us because he relied too heavily on laws and tradition, I say.”

“If that is the case, then Sir Mandamus was lost to us long before he ever set out to find the artefact,” replied the grey-bearded Magistros. “I say then, our next champion should not adhere so closely to regulation and law.” There were many murmurs amongst the

other Fe'auron judges. "I say that we elect a man who is not afraid to question tradition or advancement—a man who ponders about the unknown with each step he takes. He will be more wary and will not so easily succumb to the trappings of false security, which is often accompanied with the accumulation of knowledge. Send for Sir Pan Lé Dyte."

And so, the council of judges and magistrates sent their next champion in search of the dragon's den. From town to town Sir Lé Dyte rode upon his somewhat nervous steed in search for anyone who might know the whereabouts of the dragon's den. Through Bogrythe and The Civilized Lands he searched, and just as the cautious knight began to lose hope, an old man appeared before him.

"You have been looking for me," said the old man with an unwavering voice. He looked wise, yet he was surely hiding something behind those wizened eyes of his.

"Have I?" replied Sir Lé Dyte.

"Yes, you have. You seek the location of the dragon's den so that you may procure the magic artefact that lies somewhere within her mighty treasure trove."

"Who are you, sir?"

"You may call me Tatmai. I can lead you to the dragon's lair, and I can instruct you on how to pass the three guardians that block our path. However, you must follow my instruction precisely and without question."

"I am in need of the knowledge that you possess, good sir," said Sir Lé Dyte, "But I will not follow you blindly into the dragon's den. Accompany me, if you will, but do not get too far ahead of me so that I can no longer see you."

Although it took much longer to traverse the land without Tatmai leading the way, they eventually found their way through the vast Plains of Karnath, The Jagged Mountains, and through at least one swamp, a desert, a mighty canyon, and through the bayous. Finally—after many days of travel, and after repeatedly questioning the old man’s motives—the knight reached a cave entrance at the foot of a bayou river.

“We are here,” said the old man. Sir Lé Dyte tied his horse and followed Tatmai into the dark cave, making sure the old man was always in plain sight. “You are a very cautious man, Sir Lé Dyte. Yet, you do not protect yourself with a helm.”

“My eyes and my instincts protect me more than any helm,” said the knight, who always kept one hand on his sword-sabbard. “So long as I can see what is coming, I can react to it accordingly.”

“Simply because you are always on the lookout for danger does not mean you are protected,” replied the old man.

“As I said, I see well enough.”

“Of course you do,” said Tatmai as the two entered the dark cave.

They approached the statue of the lion, and Tatmai instructed Sir Lé Dyte on the procedures required to pass the initial gate. At first, the paranoid Sir Lé Dyte examined the fruit, but he said nothing as he crushed the pulp in his bare hands.

“You have appeased the lion. Let us proceed to the second gate, where the guardian of song rests in its timeless state.”

And so, the knight followed the old man through the first gate; he kept one eye on the old man, while the

other remained on the statue. The lion did not so much as flinch.

“The second guardian lies before you. Do not be fooled by its sluggish demeanour, for if you do not do exactly as I say it will surely devour you,” said the old man, but the knight became suspicious.

“I have not seen so much as a twitch from this statue, nor the last. Are you sure this guardian will devour me if I do not appease it?”

“Do you question my accumulated wisdom and knowledge, Sir Lé Dyte?” The apprehensive knight did not answer him.

“Take up this flute, my wary knight, and fear not.” The old man removed the reed instrument from his pouch and gave it to the knight. “Offer your song to the tortoise in exchange for safe passage across the second gate. This is the way it has always been done.”

Again, Sir Lé Dyte questioned the old man, but Tatmai was able to ease his cautious mind with a few carefully worded phrases.

For one straight hour the stone tortoise listened as the knight played his song, and once he had appeased the guardian of the second gate, the knight and the old man passed the barrier unharmed.

After a time they approached the third and final gate. “Before you lies the owl,” said the old man. “To appease this last guardian, you must offer it a bit of your very essence. Follow these instructions to the letter, and you shall be well on your way to facing the dragon.”

“Nay,” said the knight. “I have let you lead me long enough.”

“Sir knight, you must listen to reason. The knowledge I possess is extensive, and it will guide you safely.”

“The knowledge you possess is indeed useful, but it is not absolute. I have drunk quite enough from your cup, I believe, and I must be careful not to indulge too heavily in your knowledge of the past. If I let you lead me any further, good sir, I am only letting myself be devoured by traditions and laws that have gone unquestioned for many ages.”

“Your words hold more truth than you realize, Sir Lé Dyte,” said the old man. “I shall accompany you no further.”

With that, the knight passed the third barrier without so much as a chirp from the owl statue.

Pleased with himself for not succumbing to the trappings of the old man and his accumulated wisdom, Sir Lé Dyte continued down the darkened path toward the dragon’s den. Yet, he was still paranoid about the old man.

Had Tatmai truly left the knight be, or was he still lurking somewhere in the dark?

His eyes darted from shadow to shadow as he waited for anything that might eventually jump out at him, yet nothing came.

Onward he cautiously pressed; his eyes were on the lookout for any sign of movement, while his ears strained for unfamiliar sounds that might alert him to danger.

Suddenly, as he entered a wide cavern with many heavily shaded areas, a voice called out to him in a startling manner.

“Sir Pan Lé Dyte,” the voice skittishly murmured from behind the shadows. It was not the voice of the old man. It was a woman’s voice.

The knight darted around, orienting himself to where he believed she stood, and from the corner of

his eye he thought he saw the woman's figure. Yet, she was not quite a woman, for she also possessed the characteristics of a spider.

He heard the woman's call from behind him once more. Again Sir Lé Dyte turned to face her... no longer was she there.

He became horrified.

He drew his sword immediately as he backed up against the daunting cavern wall.

"Sir Lé Dyte," came the disembodied voice from the shrouded areas of the cave.

The knight began to panic. His heart raced as it threatened to jump from his chest, and his hands began to shake.

Yet again, from the corner of his eye he saw the woman. This time she slithered across the ground like a serpent. He violently swung his sword in unfettered, panic-stricken fear, yet the only thing his weapon touched was the cavern's thin air.

"What do you want from me?" he shouted to the creature, who only seemed to exist in the unknown areas of the cavern.

"Disarm yourself. Sacrifice your weapons to me," whispered the voice into Sir Lé Dyte's ear. Immediately he turned around and fell backwards.

Again he swung his sword, hoping to hit something, anything in this dreadful cave!

"Lay aside your weapons and trust my nurturing embrace, Sir Lé Dyte, or be devoured by the dragon that lurks in the dark."

"I cannot disarm myself!" shouted the knight as he clung to his sword with sweaty palms. "I will need my weapons to conquer the dragon, just as I need them to conquer you!" Again he swung, hoping to pierce the

woman with a lucky blow.

“Lay down your sword!” she said, but the knight would only listen to his instincts—not this temptress in the shadows. Fervently he swung like a ferocious beast. He swung, and he swung until Finally his uncontrolled momentum guided his sword into the body of the dark assailant.

For a moment he thought he could see her face; he knew he had pierced her body, and he watched as she cringed back into the shadows like a wounded animal. She disappeared.

Sir Lé Dyte searched high and low for the horrific creature, but her body was gone.

“Did I kill you?” he asked. No answer came. “Did I kill you?”

The knight ran from the cave.

He ran for so long that he was no longer sure where he was. He began to panic with each step he took. Somewhere, deep within the recesses of his mind he knew that he had not killed her. How could he have killed her? She was the embodiment of everything that was unknown to him! He knew that she was still lurking somewhere in the shadows—she had to be. His eyes darted back and forth like the pendulum of an irregular clock. He needed to see her, yet he knew she would never be within plain sight.

“Did I kill you?” he asked again, shouting into the vast unknown. Paranoia was quickly overtaking him. She was going to come for him—as was the old man—but he wasn’t going to be able to see her coming.

Lost in the maze of tunnels and shadows, Sir Lé Dyte began to curl up into a ball. “Where are you?” he shouted. “What are you?”

“I am the dragon,” she whispered from afar, “and I am her consort.”

Sir Lé Dyte could no longer hear her soft voice over the maddening voices that whispered within his head.

“Had you been willing to sacrifice the defenses you clung to so fervently, had you been willing to let go of your sword and your armour, and taken a leap of faith, I would have led you through the unknown as the nurturing mother that I am. But just as your thoughts are being devoured by your own paranoia, so too will I devour you, my child.”

### THE THIRD KNIGHT

“Like Sir Mandamus before him, Sir Lé Dyte has been lost,” said the Magistros with a great deal of despair. The others could read the signs as well—their second champion had fallen to the vast unknown. “Who now can we send to retrieve the mighty artefact from the dragon’s den? Thus far, we have sent an objective man who clung to the law, knowing that they were there to protect him. Then we sent a man who was willing to question everything, a man who would not so blindly fall into the traps of the unknown, yet without the foundation of history and some trust to guide him, he fell into the arms of paranoia.”

“Then you must send me,” came a voice from the main entrance to the chamber. It was Sir Ivory, the newly appointed knight of the Fe’auron. “I will find the dragon’s den and return with the magic artefact you seek.”





“You are too young to go on such a quest,” replied the Magistros.

“By whose standards? Where in the books of law does it state the age one must be to partake in such a journey?”

“You have just recently finished your apprenticeship, knight, and you have yet to see the true evils that this world carries in its arms—evils that are often hidden beneath false veils.”

“That is precisely why I must go.”

Upon hearing this, one of the wizard-healers stood from her seat, not far from where Sir Ivory and the Magistros spoke. She listened intently, having a special interest in this particular conversation.

“That is precisely why you must not go, boy! Sir Mandamus and Sir Lé Dyte were experienced, accomplished men, and they did not return with the artefact. What makes you think you could do better? I have made my decision. You are not going on this quest; we will find another.” The Magistros was clearly upset with the knight.

“Are you not letting me go because you think I am incapable of retrieving the artefact, or because I am your son?”

“Our blood ties have nothing to do with my decision. You will not venture out into the wilderness on your own until I say you may, and you will respect my decision as your superior. As Chief Magi—”

“Let him go, Oz’rah,” said the magic-healer with a calm, tranquil air.

“I beg your pardon?” asked the Magistros, eyeing the woman with a jolt.

“Let our son go,” she said again. The same soft harmony could be found in each of her syllables, just

as it always had. Her voice could lull an angry beast of burden to sleep, or it could wake the lazy petals of a sleeping lotus flower. “Great Magistros, you have protected our son all of his life, and you have prepared him for the dangerous and often chaotic world that we live in. Now you must let him go. Have faith that the knowledge you have given him will act as a sturdy foundation—a foundation upon which he may build his own life.”

“You are wise, and you are a nurturing mother to him. But I am his father. It is my job to protect him.”

“You are his father, but that role is not stagnant with a rigid set of rules; it morphs and changes as the progeny changes. You must now protect him in other ways. Protect his confidence.”

The Magistros’ wife was wise beyond her years, and he knew she was right about this as well; the two of them had properly prepared their son for the world, and now it was time to let him go. Oz’rah only wished his son wouldn’t take such a giant leap from their protective arms.

“Sir Ivory. That name was chosen for you because you possess a kind of purity like no other. You are wise like the elephant that is led by its ivory tusks, and you do not allow yourself to be tainted by the easy path of temptation. Go now, and remember the lessons your mother and I have taught you. Seek out the dragon’s den, and return with the artefact.”

“Yes Magistros,” said Sir Ivory as he kneeled, “and thank you, father.” With that, Sir Ivory left the Fe’auron chambers. He left his mother, his father, and his brethren behind in search of the magic artefact that no previous knight could procure.

From town to town Sir Ivory rode on his companion

steed in search of anyone who might know the whereabouts of the dragon's den. He journeyed far and wide, and in his travels he saw many wonders. He saw the land of Bogrythe, and he saw the Plains of Karnath. A full season had passed when finally an old man appeared before him.

"You have been looking for me," said the old man with an unwavering voice. He looked wise, but looks can be deceiving, Sir Ivory knew.

"I do not believe that I have," replied the knight.

"Yes, you have. You seek the location of the dragon's den so that you may acquire the magic artefact that lies somewhere within her mighty treasure trove."

"Who are you?"

"You may call me Tatmai. I can lead you to the dragon's lair, and I can instruct you on how to pass the three guardians that block our path. However, you must follow my instruction precisely and without question."

"Lead on," said Sir Ivory. Just as he had for an immeasurable amount of time, Tatmai led yet another man toward the dark caves in the bayou.

"We are here," said the old man. Sir Ivory tied his horse. "You have said very little, Sir Ivory."

"I have been thinking quite extensively," was all the knight could say.

"Of course," replied Tatmai before instructing the knight to grab some fruit from the trees.

As they approached the statue of the lion, Tatmai instructed Sir Ivory on the procedure that was required of him to pass the first gate.

"Tell me, sir Tatmai," said Sir Ivory before crushing the fruit in his bare hands, "are you hungry?"

"No, I do not get hungry," replied the old man. "I

eat, but I do not get hungry. This is the way I have always been.”

“Sometimes it is good to be hungry; though my father once said that one must also be careful not to indulge extensively in empty provisions.” The knight crushed the fruit in his hands, and the two proceeded toward the second gate.

“The second guardian lies before you. Do exactly as I say, and it will not devour you,” said the old man. “Take up this flute, bright knight, and offer your song to the tortoise in exchange for safe passage across the second gate. This is the way it has always been done.”

“You offer invaluable information, sir, but simply because it has always been done in this manner does not mean it is the only way.”

“I have instructed countless men and women in my time; the information I possess is tried and true.”

“I will not play the flute, sir Tatmai. Will it appease the guardian of the second gate if you play it instead?”

The old man did not like being diverted from the way things had always been done. He liked being in control, though he knew that the end result would be the same: an hour of playing music would still allow the toxins in the fruit to mature, no matter who took up the flute. Tatmai agreed, and he played while Sir Ivory watched with straight eyes.

When one hour had passed, Tatmai put away the flute and the two of them passed through to the Final gate.

“Before you lies the owl,” said the old man. “To appease this final guardian, you must offer it a bit of your very essence. Follow these instructions to the letter, and you shall be well on your way to facing the dragon: Remove your dagger from its sheath, and cut

the palm of your hand to expose the blood that flows through your veins. Once the scent of your blood is in the air, we may proceed.”

Sir Ivory looked at the man, not with questioning eyes, but with eyes of understanding. “I know who you are,” said the knight.

“Oh?” replied Tatmai.

“You are my father.”

“I assure you I am not,” said the old man as laughter escaped his dry lips (perhaps for the first time in many ages).

“Not by blood, no. Yet, you speak as he does. You cling to tradition, and you rely too heavily on what you already know—you are unwilling to venture into the unknown, for then you would risk losing everything. My eyes are open; I see you.”

“You believe I am leading you into a trap?”

“No, you are only doing what you have always done. You have no personal ill will towards me, I see. Yet, if I follow your instructions to the letter, if I let myself be blinded by your unwavering certainty given your knowledge of the past, surely I will never reach the dragon’s den.” And with that, Sir Ivory removed his dagger and slashed his hand. Blood began to ooze out of the superficial wound.

“You see who I truly am; certainly you know that I am testing you. Yet, you still cut yourself. Why?”

“So that maybe you will learn something new,” said Sir Ivory. The blood flowed, yet the knight did not fall victim to the paralyzing toxin. “You may be the embodiment of all that is known, but if you are to grow you must come to understand that the vast unknown is still infinitely large. Hiding behind your protective wealth of knowledge and tradition can only

take you so far. I am willing to bet you have never set foot beyond the third gate.”

“In a manner of speaking, I have not,” replied the old man. “I am knowledgeable beyond your comprehension, yet you have taught me something new today. I am, from time to time, willing to take another step into the unknown, so before you go, teach me one last thing.”

The knight noticed that the old man had a few more wrinkles, a few more spots on his hands than the number that had been present only moments ago.

“Tell me why it is that you did not succumb to the toxin in the fruit.”

“I will answer this if you promise to accompany me throughout the rest of my journey.”

“You would still have me by your side, even though it is in my nature to eventually devour you?”

“As I said, I see you for what you truly are. So long as I do not allow you to consume me, you may prove to be a useful implement along the way.”

“Then I agree to walk alongside you. Now, feed me—tell me that which I have not yet come to understand.” The old man no longer looked the same. For one, he looked hungry; he looked like he had an appetite.

“It was the flute,” said Sir Ivory. “While you played the flute you became distracted with the sounds that you were making. I am guessing it was the first time you encountered anything new in a long while; no one had ever asked you to play before. It was then that I knew who you were. It was then that I understood your motives. I used the distraction to wash the pulp of the fruit off my hands using my water canteen.”

Sir Ivory saw a smile crack from the old man's lips. "Now, let us continue into the dragon's den together."

Side-by-side, Sir Ivory and Tatmai ventured further into the dark unknown. Tatmai's eyes began to dart from shadow to shadow as he waited for anything that might jump out at him, yet nothing came.

Onward they pressed as Sir Ivory was on the lookout for any sign of movement, while his ears strained for unfamiliar sounds.

Soon, the two of them entered a wide cavern. Suddenly a voice called out to the knight like a whisper in a wind.

"Sir Ivory," the voice skittishly murmured from behind the shadows. It was a woman's voice.

The old man darted around in fear, but Sir Ivory stood firm.

"Sir Ivory," came the voice again, this time whispering in his ear. "Disarm yourself. Sacrifice your weapons to me, Sir Ivory, or be devoured by the dragon that lurks in the dark."

The old man began to swipe his hands at the darkness, but Sir Ivory held him back. "No," he said.

"We must attack it."

"Why would you attack what you cannot see?"

"Lay down your sword," said the woman's voice from all corners of the shrouded cavern.

"If you disarm yourself, Sir Ivory, you will be defenseless!" replied the jittery Tatmai.

"Sometimes you must put aside your defenses to continue forth," said the knight.

"She will kill you as soon as you lay down your sword!"

"Perhaps. It is always a risk."

"Why will you not listen to someone you have

known for a fair bit of time now, someone who knows much about the world, yet you are willing to listen to the voice of one you have never known, nor can even see?”

“Some call it a ‘leap of faith’. My father took a leap of faith by letting me walk away from his sheltered embrace, and it is my hope that his actions will prove to be fruitful,” said Sir Ivory as he removed his sword from its scabbard.

He laid the weapon down and similarly began to put aside his armour. Once he had removed his breastplate, his waist guard, and the rest of his armour, the cavern became significantly lighter. An older woman stood before him now, and she appeared to be rather unthreatening.

“I was afraid of you?” asked Tatmai in mild shock. “You are beautiful!”

“Come, Sir Ivory. Take my hand and I will lead you through the unknown to the dragon’s den,” said the woman, ignoring the old man.

Sir Ivory left his weapons and armour behind as he and his two companions followed the path to the dragon’s den.

The dragon’s den stretched farther than the eye could see, and it glittered with treasure so vast that one could not spot the individual pieces. A mighty dragon rested atop her fortune; she too was infinitely vast—Sir Ivory could only see her head and her tail.

“Mighty dragon,” Sir Ivory shouted with reverence. “Accompanied by your consorts I have ventured into your den so that I might ask that you give me the magic artefact I seek.”

The dragon eyed the young knight with an unreadable expression.



“You have come with neither armour, nor sword. You did not try to sneak up on me like some have in the past, and you have asked with a humbled approach that I release one of my most prized possessions to you.”

Sir Ivory said not a word.

“Surely you must know I do not give up my prizes lightly. Why not slay me and take whatever you like from my hoard?”

“How can I hope to slay that which I cannot fully see?”

“Surely, you are afraid of me.”

“I do fear you,” replied the knight. “For you have the power to destroy me. But you also have the power to provide for me. Like the wise man beside me, there is much you can teach me. Like this nurturing woman, you can lead me through the unknown. This can only happen if I do not let myself become blind to your nature, whilst realizing that I am incapable of fully understanding that nature. All I may do is ask for that which I seek and leave my fate in your infinite hands.”

The old man cowered in fear.

The nurturing mother placed her hand firmly upon Sir Ivory’s shoulder.

The dragon, still, was unreadable.

“You have spoken well, wise knight. You have surpassed many obstacles and you have approached me with a meek and humble attitude. Still, you must understand that it is sometimes within my nature to reward the unjust and punish the just. In that vein, Sir Ivory, I might still destroy you, or I may give you the very thing that you seek.”

“I knew this before I set out on my journey.”

“Then step forward, bold knight, for my decision has

been made.”

Sir Ivory did not know whether in these next few moments he would walk away with the magic artefact he so nobly sought, or die at the mighty dragon’s behest. He took one final breath as he approached his future.

*“... The end.”*

*“But, father, what happened to Sir Ivory? Did he return to the Fe’auron with his prize?”*

*“I think that the time to rest your eyes is long overdue.”*

*“Please, father. Just tell me what happened to him, and then I’ll go to sleep.”*

*“I’ve told you enough this night, my buttercup. The rest you must figure out on your own. Goodnight. I shall see you in the morning.”*

*“Goodnight.”*



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