

“Once upon a time,” Jarlin indulges in the musings with waves of his stick-thin arms, “the legendary Jarlin plucked poor Princess Fiona from the claws of that *miserable* beast.”

Dainty fingers stroke his pointy beard. Blue eyes look down at his noble steed.

“What a *wonderful* start to a story! Wouldn’t you agree?”

Buttercup, a mangy steed that’s dubiously a horse, keeps her empty eyes ahead: gazing at nothing. She trots along: unthinking, ignoring, patiently marching towards the sweet release of death.

Jarlin is unperturbed. He keeps his gaze on her. Wouldn’t *you* rather do that than stare at the same-old black slabs of volcanic rock?

“Oh? Not grand enough? Not *interesting* enough? Good dear Buttercup! Our tale might not be interesting *now*. But have faith! Our stories are just getting started.”

Buttercup’s heart lifts. That is because her heat hasn’t quite caught up with her legs.

Indeed, it takes a second *after* Jarlin rode her off the cliff for it to fall.

And so, the duo’s shouts echo across the volcanic crater. The sound dies as it flies into the dark sky. By the time it reaches the highest room in the tallest tower of the black keep—it’s but a whisper. Neither Princess nor dragon rouse from their slumber. The soft rumbles of an approaching storm shake the sky.

Thunder bellows in the distance.

Clank! Metal clatters: Jarlin’s visor, flipping up.

“Holy Bremen *turducken*...” Jarlin groans. His vision swirls. “That hurt. ...Don’t despair. While our pride may be shattered, our bodies are... not.”

His eyes steady. And what was once a blurry potato is now a Buttercup-shaped blob. Yet, she's far away. She trots with new energy. Her tail holds high. A strange figure is beside her.

The figure whistles. "Holy *caballa*, what a tale."

The horse huffs.

"Caballo?"

A whinny.

"Yegua."

Buttercup chuffs.

"*Yeguita*."

"Buttercup?" Jarlin stands.

"Hm?" A smooth voice glides out of the figure. "You hear something?"

The mare replies with a rough snort.

"Oh, I agree. Not something worth paying attention to."

Jarlin's eyes can finally focus. A familiar wolfish face peeks from a deathly hood.

"It's odd. I can't help but feel like I'm forgetting something. Oh well." Death says as they walk.

"H-hey..." Jarlin protests.

It's too late. They've already faded away.

"Curses! *Again!*?" Leather squeaks as he clenches his gauntlets. "I can't stand this! I am tired of being forgotten!"

The first raindrops fall.

He stands. The joints of his shabby armor grind. And Jarlin looks to the castle ahead. He peers down its long rope bridge. He imagines crossing it, braving the fact that one wrong slip would send him careening into the lava below.

The story in his mind fast forwards. He enters the castle. Rescues the Princess. He'd never best the dragon but he *can* sneak by. If even Death can't notice him...

Passion fills his voice. Now, it's deeper. Quivering.

"Hear me!" He proclaims in ember-flecked air. "For now, nobody knows the great Jarlin. But once I fulfill this quest, once I do what none have done—I will be *unforgettable!*"

He breathes. Lightning flashes in the sky.

And takes the first step of a renewed adventure.

The castle's great hall is blanketed in cool shadow. Tiptoeing up step upon massive step, Jarlin can't help but feel the size of an ant. His well-worn leather soles crunch the stray debris peppered atop the crumbling floor. Glowing warmth rises from the crevices of split stone—red and ugly like unhealed scars.

Jarlin's shallow breath is a sharp echo in the dead silence. The only path to the building's belly is through a sea of the failures before him. Armor, weapons, and ash-covered bone are plenty.

Step carefully. Jarlin thinks. His eyes are wide. He sweats as he stretches over a suite of armor much like his. Their bones are mottled black. And their hands, somehow, are cast in gold.

“*Err.* I shall not fight that dragon.” He shimmies through gaps in a collapsed pillar. His breastplate grinds whilst he squeezes. Once through, he moves onward. And the further he delves, the more he hears the distorted echo of a sleeping dragon’s snores.

In the blue-tinged dark, Jarlin sees the glimmer of gold.

“The dragon’s... hoard?” He whispers as quietly as he can. “But those sounds—the snores—they come not from that room. Where might the beast lurk, then?”

The radiance of treasure’s gleam invites a curious glint in his eyes. After all, the dragon surely is not there. It must be the safer path. Though... he is unsure as to *why* the dragon sleeps elsewhere.

Is it confidence? A trap? He ponders, stepping into the light. *Does she care about it at all, I wonder?*

The light from an overhanging ginormous chandelier casts great splotches of reflecting light across his armor. Coin light and candlelight dance across his armor: moving as he steps through a vast ocean of wealth. His fingers twitch. Yet they do not fill his palms with coin. He remembers the knights before—and how they had palms of gold.

Thus, he leaves the gold behind. But he can’t help but give the room one last look. Though he has touched not a single gold piece, his eyes still stick. He walks backwards, admiring the room’s beauty. Its golden light fades from him. He fails to notice the weakening floor.

Crk! The floor cracks. Dust shifts. It hisses—sliding between split stone to patter the open floor below. Jarlin is a statue. He dares not breathe. But once he does, not an instant more than the musty castle air enters his lungs does the floor collapse.

Jarlin shouts, throwing out his arms. He falls—but only to his waist. He stays suspended between floors, lodged in the stonework. Chunks of stone shatter loud and echoing. His trusty blade slips off his hip. And its clatter is just as deafening.

From the empty antechamber to the echoing hall, the clatter and crumble sprawls. Down and deeper, the sound delves: until its reverberance rings in the dragon's ears.

Finned earflaps twitch. Sleepy eyelids lift away, revealing brilliant emerald eyes. Her dark pupils tighten to slits. A seismic rumble breeds deep in the dragon's throat.

Another? Elizabeth grumbles in unparsable draconic speech.

Claws scrape stone. Their tips click. They slot between the tiles of stone. And she *pushes*. Standing tall—she rises, reaching her full, towering height whilst her scaly pads pound the reinforced floor. Despite her softly pear-shaped body putting the full brunt of its 100-ton weight upon the floor, stone splits not. The castle's lowest level is its most stable.

「I thought they gave up? It's been so long. But what else could it be?」

Her small wings spread. Her long tail straightens. She pulls her body in a cat-like stretch.

「Night after night.」

With a great big yawn, her painted lips part. Her words slow. Deepen.

*「Knights, knights, and **more** knights!」*

Crackling saliva splits; it hangs from her widening jaws. She bares her fangs as her throat opens—the elastic flesh pulling back. The depths of her throat display: deep, gleaming with wetness, and mopped with sliminess.

「Think I could ever forget the sound of their little steps? Sounds the same as they did then.」

The bellow of the sleeping dragon is a thundering warhorn. It shakes the dust from the walls. It reaches the struggling Jarlin. But he's so caught up in his own panic, he doesn't notice the snores, indeed, stop.

「Just... now? There's only one?」

Elizabeth stalks silently up ancient steps. She uses the most stable path. She keeps her claws raised so as not to click. She slithers through halls in which she hardly fits—like a fluffy croissant shoved down a tube. Yet the stone-on-scale scrape is lost in the volcanic bubbling and general noise of the decaying keep. Her proud, pink body pushes into an empty antechamber. And from the ceiling, what does she see?

Two thin knightly legs wiggling helplessly in a crack leaking torchlight. The light pours into the swirling fog. The dark room's sole point of interest are the limbs of the little ant in the ceiling.

「This is the knight sent to slay me?」 The dragon thinks, creeping closer. *「Seems they ran out of good men.」*

She inspects him from every angle. Her body twists around the misty sunbeam. Her long, scaly face pushes into the warm light. Her lids fall, half-covering her eyes in a long-lashed curtain. A playful smirk spreads up her lips.

「He's not the hunkiest.」 Steam flows through her fangs. *「So eating him isn't gonna be... sensual.」*

Cinders fly from her nose. 「*And he isn't acting all that important. So it's not gonna make me feel **big**.*」

A tiny fire lights in her heart. 「*But y'know? The best way to make a bad meal feel good: gotta play with your food.*」

The fins on her head move back. Her eyes are sultry.

「*Let's give him a little tease. Let's make this **fun**.*」

She purses her lips. But instead of blowing a kiss, smoky heat fumes from mouth to knight.

“Ah!” Jarlin spouts. “This warmness—this scalding sensation! The broken floor... It is a trap! Below me, lava is rising! Danger is approaching! I—must—!”

The little man's pathetic struggles double. The waves of heat cooking him chop from a steady stream to pulsing waves. Elizabeth is giggling. Each punch from her lungs pushes fluttering sparks from her lips.

Crk! The stone cracks again.

“No!” Jarlin pleads to a higher power. “Please! I've yet to learn to swiii—*aaah!*”

Jarlin plummets with the pebbles and sand. Enshrouded in smoke, he can't see. He flails before falling upon something soft. Wet. Slimy. He oozes off the strange soft bed, pushed by a wall of horrible, hot air. Then, he falls once more: wrapped in mucilaginous slime. And he smacks onto a debris-built bed of dirt and straw. A great dusty explosion envelops him whole. And he gasps in the choking powder.

“Blech!” He wrinkles his nose in disgust. “Alive and uncooked. But at what cost?”

He lifts an arm. And the snotty gooeyness stringing across his limb squirts and pops.

“This muck doesn’t burn. Yet it’s hot and smelly as dog breath. What is this foulness? How did I...?”

The shroud of dust pulls away. Elizabeth’s green gaze filters through the haze. And soon, her full dark silhouette reveals. Jarlin’s breath hitches. Fear quiets his words to a whisper. But his mind fires in screaming panic.

The smoke clears enough for Elizabeth to share with him her tricky smile.

“Ahem.” Jarlin clears his throat.

He stands—with the utmost caution. He hardly clanks before clapping his visor down. Precise, robotic.

He turns on a dime, marching away like a toy soldier: to the golden torch-glow of the spiral stairs.

The dragon sees not what he cannot see.

That’s the idea, anyhow.

Imagine his surprise when he hears the dragon match his pace.

D-don’t panic... His pupils shrink; his eyebrows rise. Frankly, it looks like his eyes are trying to catch his lifting brows.

“Resist it: the temptation—to turn around! Do *not*...” He mutters, quiet as a mouse. If he hadn’t said it himself, he never would’ve heard it. Elizabeth’s quaking footsteps echo, dull and heavy. They hammer him with such volume, he feels the bass punch right through him. All this—and Jarlin had a head start. She’s still so far behind him.

Growing louder.

Heavier.

Closer.

He hastens his pace. His march gradually slips into a hasty little stride.

“Just a bit more. I can reach the stairs!”

But as he hurries away, he fails to escape her game. Those stomps behind him? They don't skip a beat. Her talons click; his armor clanks. Perfectly synchronized.

Now, she's much nearer. Her steps pummel his heart. He bounces; the earth shakes. His queasy stomach tightens in fear. And before he knows it, he breaks into a run. His rapid footsteps finally match his racing heart.

Now, Jarlin learns the same lesson as a mouse: the cat *always* has the greater stride.

An explosion of sound. Bricks split. The keep creaks. Elizabeth leaps to catch her quarry. Jarlin slips as the building shudders. He falls not on stone, but scale. The dragon's tail breaks his fall. It wraps around him tightly. The castle's dry air whips across his skin. He's passed tail to claw, then brought to the dragon's face.

Jarlin squirms beneath her gaze, hair ruffled and messy.

“Heyyy...” Jarlin tosses Elizabeth a bashful greeting. “Can I say that this *isn't* what it looks like?”

Jarlin's blood freezes as the dragon gives her chops a fat, sloppy lick.

「*Really?*」 Elizabeth watches the man tremble with the vibrations of her deep draconic speech. 「*You look like a snack. Just like all the others. Even got the same wrapper.*」

Jarlin spies the hungry look in her eyes. “Wait—I don't *kill* you!”

Elizabeth shows her teeth.

「*I do.*」

“Can we talk about this!?”

「*Sure. After dinner.*」

“You’ve got better things to eat, I’m sure!”

「*Oh, indeed. And I’m gonna drown you in it. If you survive breakfast, that is.*」

Her lips curl. Jarlin is granted a front-row seat as her rotten tongue slathers her fangs with new layers of slime.

「*Tomorrow is Tribute Day. So... I hope you like horsemeat. Villagers love giving that stuff.*」

She admires the squirmy rat in her clutches. Then, the dragon puffs Jarlin a heart-shaped smoky wisp. The knight gags as it wraps around his face.

「*Because you **really** don’t seem to like what a diet of **men** smells like.*」

An amorous huff flutters past her lips. Her gentle sigh pitch-bends high. Meaty breath pulverizes Jarlin’s already-decimated pride.

「*Though, it’s been **quite** a while since **that** meal. Mayyyybe the smell has soured.*」

Elizabeth opens her mouth. It’s as mundane as it gets, really. But to the man clutched in claw, she casually creates a nightmare. Her fang-filled jaws widen. Tongue flops out. Bubbles of frothed spit sit close enough to smear her tongue in yolky, filmy white.

“Stop!” Jarlin fights the *train* of eye-watering bestial breath shoving up his nostrils. She ignores him. She smacks her rotten tongue to scaly palm—squishing, spreading, tasting; the dragon’s tongue works to extract everything from the screaming

flavor-filled crumb. Jarlin's muffled protests fill the dragon with such... excitement. Her life is so dreary. Old memories, the taste of man—it burst back into their full clarity once her tongue scrubs him up her fingers.

*「Mmm! Tastes **just** like what I remember.」*

Her haunches bounce in excitement. Her tail lashes. Her breathing sharpens.

Elizabeth's pupils, now fattened, dig into knight. He lifts, dangling by her clawtips.

She flicks him into the air.

And claps him into the cage of her jaws.

The impact drives Jarlin into her tongue. As saliva drips behind his ears and spreads along his back, he wheezes—face twisted in disgust and fear. A lift of her tongue clocks the back of his head into her palate. And *that* digs the man's face deep into her squishy taste buds. He whines, deeply disgusted. Electric and sharp fear explodes throughout his body. His slimy fingers scabble across the ridged roof above. He knees the muscle below, recoiling from the plappy sounds his strikes create—and the hideous warm wetness that splatters his rear and groin.

Slurps and smacks and bubbly, spitty pops—grotesque noises squelch from the shifting, grinding cave of wet meat. Elizabeth puffs her cheeks, swishing spit. Bubbles swipe across Jarlin's shoulders. He's soaked to his under armor. Like the trapped vermin he is, he wails. The dragon shuts him up: slamming her tongue to the walls—soaking him in saliva 'til he slips and slides across her tongue like butter in a skillet.

By now, her toy has lost its flavor. So, it's time has come.

She could just swallow him without moving a muscle. But where's the fun in that? Once he's gone, he's gone. She's going to extract every bit of oyster she can get. So, she lifts her head. She bears her neck. She lets her tail sashay and allows a claw to touch her throat. And how she adores Jarlin's distress as his bed turns into a slide!

Splatters and smacks, those are the sounds of Jarlin's repeated attempts to grip her taste buds. No matter what he tries, he slips away. Closer to her open throat. It opens wide. He's blasted with putrid air. He shouts a final cry to help as a warm cloud of death fumes from her throat and consumes his body.

Elizabeth swallows. Jarlin is shunted into the esophagus. He gasps in the sticky air. Her guts crush him. Pressed into a wet pocket, he grimaces. Elizabeth's heart is a hammer into his skull. Her throat's vile lubrication lathers his skin. The muscle grinds against him constantly.

Once the wave of peristalsis passes, the tunnel opens up. Drool slops from above. A gulp, yet again. And Jarlin is crushed through another creamy pocket of horror.

Swallow.

Scream.

Draconic sigh.

Jarlin's cry.

"Help...me..."

A revolting, rubbery sound echoes throughout her throat. The sphincter to her stomach opens. The esophagus dilates to let her meal slip right in. Mucus crackles as the walls pull apart. And Jarlin clears out those slimy webs; he's flushed out her throat and propels into her stomach's disgusting contents.

No! The very core of Jarlin's being withers. Hyper-aware, he is of the thick, hot slop wiping his skin.

Kings and queens, no, no, no!

He reaches blindly for the surface he does not find. The slush flowing across him is watery. Goopy globs of dragon vomit pelt his body as he's subject to whirling current of her busy gut. Shifting tides throw him wildly; the chaos stirring in her belly as the muck-licked walls smash and stretch.

Bursting bubbles feed gas into the noxious air. With a decisive clench, the gut folds lurch—crushing inward, hugging the soup. Air forces out, punching open the esophageal sphincter and rocketing out as a slobbery, guttural belch. Her burp's bass resounds deeply in the pit of her stomach. Dragon vomit lashes across the walls, sloshing as the walls steadily push inwards. The soupy chunks of her more-solid vomit crush to the bottom, burying Jarlin in meats, fruits, and greees mashed so thoroughly—it's impossible to tell which parts of this infernal smoothie once walked, and which bits were picked from a tree.

Elizabeth's booming voice clashes with her rumbling guts.

「That was fun.」

Gauntlets tear through half-digested rubbish. Jarlin, crushed against the floor, now knows which way is up.

「Wish I could eat you again, really.」

A ferocious growl of her guts. The stomach's folds curl as her belly churns. Their immense weight presses his breastplate. He's held there, trapped. Flailing as he's

sucked deeper into the folds, the muscle rolling across his body, food trapped with him smothers his body in creamy wax.

Groowwwrg... Elizabeth's guts tremble.

「*Ohhh... that's weird?*」

The knight's innards seize as the food surrounding Jarlin bursts into pulpy fog.

「*Hehe! Must've been something I ate.*」

Kicking and desperate for air, Jarlin pries himself from the walls. Shoving forth into silt-ridden soup, the hero bursts to the surface. Gasping, he chokes on air that burns like dragon's fire. Truly toxic, Elizabeth's stomach reeks fouler than any wasteyard. It's a hideous mix of animal breath and a barf bag—and roasted on a sweltering summer's day.

With the first of Elizabeth's steps, Jarlin sees the meaty swamp sway. The stomach tilts, slamming globby hunks of congealed meats through the filmy moss-like peat of goat's cheese. The unmistakable odor of wine stabs Jarlin's nose as he scrambles to not be swept under again. No doubt, it's all part of the tribute. It's her favorite drink on lonely nights. And tonight, she seems she's guzzled quite a lot.

“Release me!” Jarlin shields his eyes from the slop dripping down his hair. “Don't do this to me!”

「*Oh, shut up.*」

Just like the other filth in her gut, Jarlin is swept away.

「*Jaelyn, or whatever.*」

Pushed back and forth as her low-hanging gut swings, his continued hollerings for freedom drown in the omnipresent rumblings of her guts.

「You're as good as dead. Get comfortable.」

The dragon's footsteps rock the world—shockwaves rippling through the quivering soup.

「I know I will be.」

Popple and boil, these are the viscous sounds of the thick vomit's toil. Food chunks whirl in the bouncing, churning hammock. Droplets rocket from liquid to wall. The heavier chunks keep their place within the mire—helpless in the rain that follows. Jarlin smashes face-first to the wall drooling with misery. Oatmeal-like slosh piling against his spine as the stomach's tilt drags its contents to one side, he grips the walls. Well, he tries to at least. His fingers keep on slipping off the folds. More and more gluck runs across his body before he's ultimately overtaken. By the time her next lazy step throws her belly to the other side, Jarlin is a screaming statue of mud—grinding against a wall that showers him in slime.

As the crumb in her gut continues to drift and suffer, Elizabeth arrives at her hoard. The floor, weak as it looks, does not crumble. Her weight is spread evenly over a large area. Jarlin's heavy armor concentrated it all on one weak point.

And so, she lounges in a sea of gold. Ruby-studded goblets tumble in a landslide of clinking coins. The glittering treasure acts like a blanket, rolling over her claws—the metals already warm.

「Heyyyy. I dunno if you're still alive. But if you are, I just wanna let you know: I hope you're just as fun coming out as you were going in.」

Elizabeth closes her eyes.

「 Though, that might be a while. Lizards, y'know? Hopefully I won't forget about you~」

And she blows a heart-shaped, smoky puff of satisfaction.