

KNIGHT'S GAUNTLET: *DUNGEON DWELLER*

A Short By

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FADE IN:

INT. DREDMORE PALACE - DUNGEON - DAY

Sunlight shines through the barred windows. Candlelit torches on the walls flicker in the breeze.

A rat scurries across the floor, plucking remnants of food.

A dozen cells, eleven empty, one occupied.

MARRUS, 36-40, scruffy beard and hair, wearing tattered rags, sitting against the wall inside his cell, watches the rat.

The rat follows a breadcrumb trail into the cell.

Marrus pounces on it like a cat. It squeals as it bolts from the cell like a rat out of hell. Marrus reaches out after it.

The rat enters a hole in the wall.

Frustrated, Marrus slams his hand against the bars.

NIGHT

Moonlight shines through the barred windows.

Marrus, sitting against the wall of his cell, eagerly watches the hole in the wall. His stomach rumbles.

The clinking/clanking of heavy steel armor approaches. Marrus seeks the source, and locates it --

-- a KNIGHT, late 30s, blood red pupils beneath his bloodshot eyes, wearing heavy steel armor, coldly admires Marrus.

Marrus glares at him -- if looks could kill.

KNIGHT

Hungry?

Knight callously grins.

MARRUS

(defiant)

No.

Knight sneers, and walks away -- crushing stale bread in his fist, leaving breadcrumbs in his wake.

Marrus watches him go -- a steel door slams, a lock engages.

DAY

The rat plucks breadcrumbs off the floor.

Marrus intently surveys it.

The rat follows the breadcrumbs into the cell.

Marrus scrambles toward it, just about reaches it -- the rat squeals, and scurries out of the cell --

-- entering the hole in the wall.

NIGHT

Marrus, sitting back against the wall of his cell, tirelessly stares at the rat's hole. Clinking/clanking approaches.

Knight grips one of the bars, and tilts his head.

KNIGHT

Hungry?

MARRUS

No.

Knight snarls, and walks away.

Marrus stares after him -- the door slams, the lock engages.

DAY

The rat enters the cell. Marrus pounces like a cat, covering it with his hands -- it bites him. He yelps.

The rat scurries out of the cell -- and enters its hole.

Marrus angrily growls as he cradles his hand --

-- blood drizzles from the bite. He deeply considers -- then wipes the blood away.

MARRUS

No.

NIGHT

Marrus, sitting against the wall, cradles his bitten hand and rests his head back against the wall. Clink/clank (O.S.).

Knight, outside the cell, wraps each hand around a bar.

Marrus just stares at him.

Knight focuses on the bite -- like a predator drawn to prey.

KNIGHT

Hungry.

Marrus coldly narrows his eyes.

MARRUS

(cold)

Beckoning, is it not? The *scent*. It must anger you, being drawn to prey yet being unable to strike it down. *Like a moth to a flame.*

Knight scowls at him, flaring his nostrils.

Marrus showcases the bite on his hand -- blood drips from the wound, drizzling down the side of his hand.

Knight concentrates on the dripping blood, licking his lips. He resists the urge, and walks away in a huff.

Marrus chuckles -- the door slams, and the lock engages.

DAY

Marrus, haphazardly sitting against the wall on the verge of unconsciousness, drools as he stares straightforward.

The rat, outside the cell, stands on its hind-legs, sniffing.

Marrus dips in and out of unconsciousness.

The rat tilts its head, squeaks.

MARRUS

(hoarse)

What are you staring at, *mouse*?

The rat lands on its front feet, and sniffs the air.

Marrus snarls at it -- and coughs. He groans, forcing himself upright. He coughs, and splutters -- spewing up blood.

The rat slightly recoils, raising its front left foot.

Marrus wipes blood from his chin, and painfully groans.

DORMAK (O.S.)

(nearby)

You're not looking so good, dearie.

Marrus seeks the voice -- no one present.

MARRUS
Who is there?
(beat)
Show yourself.

DORMAK (O.S.)
Your wish is my command.

Smoke tornadoes around the rat, engulfing it.

Marrus pushes back against the wall.

The smoke tornado rises, and poofs --

-- DORMAK, mid 40s, demonic with scaly crocodile-like skin, and horns protruding through his skull, dusts off his hands.

Marrus' eyes widen in abject shock.

Dormak shivers, and wriggles about. "Spits" fur.

NOTE: Dormak is very expressive and eccentric, uses multiple accents, and motions a lot with his hands.

DORMAK
Ugh... I'm never doing that again.
I tell you, being a rat, really not
as much fun as it looks. Though, I
must admit, the positives outweigh
the negatives! It got me in here...
with you...
(serious)
...which is so much more enjoyable
when you're not trying to eat me.

Confused, Marrus furrows his brows.

MARRUS
You're the mouse?

DORMAK
(rolling eyes)
Obviously. And it's rat, by the by.

Dormak grimaces, sticking his tongue out. He plucks a strand of rat fur from his tongue, and cringes.

DORMAK
(sickened)
That's disgusting.

He dusts his hands off.

MARRUS

(angry)

All this time, it was you?

DORMAK

(Scottish accent)

Aye, we just established that a wee moment ago, laddie.

MARRUS

Why?

DORMAK

Why does the sun rise, only to set?
I have no idea. Perhaps try being a little more... well, *clear*?

Marrus sneers at him.

Dormak sighs.

DORMAK

Fine. I wanted to see how far they could *push* you, before you bit the bait. Turns out, it was rather far. And you still haven't bitten, which is *exceptionally* impressive.

(pointing)

This is my *impressed* face.

Dormak giggles, rubbing his hands together like a small child at the candy store.

MARRUS

Who are you?

DORMAK

Right. Where are my manners?

Dormak gracefully bows.

DORMAK

Dormak. *Demon King. Dealer. Healer. Destroyer. Harvester of souls, men and women, I do not discriminate... it's all about equality, my dear!*

Dormak skips to the bars, and grips them.

DORMAK

(excited)

And you... you are Marrus. Ooh yes, yes you most certainly are!

Marrus stares at him -- if looks could kill.

DORMAK

Oh, I have been waiting to meet you
for oh-so long, and the now the day
is finally here, I feel all giddy!

MARRUS

Get away from me.

Dormak steps back one foot.

DORMAK

Is that far enough, or should I-

MARRUS

(growling)
Leave.

Dormak frowns and scrunches up his face.

DORMAK

Well, I was going to say "*should I
take another step back*", but... why
would I leave? I came here, to this
dusty old dungeon, to talk to you.

(beat)

I have a *proposition*!

MARRUS

(vindictive)
I seek nothing from you, *wretch*.

DORMAK

Nothing?

Dormak's face scrunches up as he weighs his thoughts.

DORMAK

Are you sure you seek *nothing* from
me? Nothing at all. No? Hmm...

Dormak twirls his hand palm-outward -- a fresh apple appears
in his hand, so shiny it almost glistens in the sunlight.

Marrus edges forward, drawn to the apple.

Dormak smiles, repeatedly raising his eyebrows up and down.

DORMAK

(inviting)
Hungry? It's yours, if you want it.

Marrus, edging forward, stops in his tracks.

MARRUS
(defiant)

No.

DORMAK
It's not an illusion. Your eyes do not deceive you. *The apple is not a lie.* I plucked it from the orchards of *Kerambour* this morning. And you know what they say about the people of *Kerambour*...

Marrus just looks at him.

Dormak considers, and shrugs.

DORMAK
I'm sure someone will say something one day. Maybe. Probably. Possibly.
(beat)
But enough about *Kerambour*.
(beat)
Marrus, I've come to bargain.

MARRUS
Then you have come for nothing, for I shall not make a deal with you.

DORMAK
Ye might change yer wee mind, after ye hear what I have to offer!

Dormak disappears in a waft of smoke --

-- and reemerges inside the cell. Marrus jolts back against the bars, visibly shaken.

Dormak squats down in front of him, displaying the apple.

DORMAK
Apples are delectable. They have a rather... shiny disposition. Always so welcoming to the eye. Making you want to bite into them... and savor their ever-so-delightful juices.

Dormak runs his other hand across the apple -- it blackens.

DORMAK
(methodical)
But when an apple rots, it becomes much less appealing. You watch it, withering, as it blackens like ash. Slowly fading, until the core...

Dormak crushes the apple -- black juices seep through gaps in his fingers, drizzling to the floor.

DORMAK

...becomes rotten. So you toss it aside, and forget about it. What it once provided, it no longer can.

Dormak wipes off his hand, and looks Marrus in the eyes.

DORMAK

And that's what you are, Marrus. A *rotten apple*. Only...

Dormak claps him on the shoulder.

DORMAK

...where others forget you, I still have need of you. And if you allow me the chance, I can provide you a reason to exist. A *purpose* in life. And what's more... I can offer you the one thing you seek, the one and only thing that keeps you going.

Dormak leans close to Marrus' ear.

DORMAK

(whispering)
Vengeance.

Marrus edges away from Dormak, who offers him a sly grin.

Dormak stands upright, and looks around the dungeon.

DORMAK

Do you really wish to die alone in some dark, dreary, disgusting cell?

(beat)

Or do you wish to be free? *Like a dragon soaring across the skies...*

Marrus thoroughly considers this.

MARRUS

Why do you need me?

DORMAK

Truthfully, I don't. But a wise man once told me, a very long time ago, in another age... *that with a great power, comes a great opportunity...* why do something yourself, when you can have others do it for you?

MARRUS

I am no slave.

DORMAK

Do you see chains? Shackles?

(beat)

This deal does come with a *price*...
but enslaving you, is not the cost.

(sincere)

You have my word.

Dormak extends a hand.

Marrus glares at it -- considers his options.

DORMAK

Do we have a deal?

NIGHT

Knight pushes through the door, and methodically walks down the aisle -- empty cells both sides of him.

He reaches Marrus' cell -- and squints.

The rat, in the middle of the cell, stands on its hind legs, squeaking as it sniffs the air.

Knight unlocks the cell, and yanks the door open.

The rat looks up at him.

Knight raises his foot to stomp --

-- a curved dagger plunges through his back, and erupts from his chest, spurting coagulated blood. He looks down, unfazed.

KNIGHT

(disappointed)

One would think you would learn...
but it appears you have not.

Knight turns around, dagger still in his torso.

Marrus, in full knight's armor (minus the helmet), hair tied, beard trimmed, coldly stares at him.

KNIGHT

Mortal weapons cannot wound me.

MARRUS

(sly)

I am aware.

Knight slightly turns his head "what?".

Dormak giggles (O.S.). Knight faces the source.

Dormak, leaning against the bars inside the cell, just waves at him as if to say "bye-bye".

Knight blinks a few times, slightly off-balance. He stumbles into the cell as veins in his face blacken.

Dormak widely grins.

Marrus coldly watches Knight.

Knight drops to a knee, and presses a hand to his chest. His skin cracks like porcelain. He growls/groans.

KNIGHT
(growling, at Marrus)
What have you done to me?!

MARRUS
Demon's Blood. Highly toxic...
(beat)
...to something like you.

Knight drops to all fours, and lurches.

MARRUS
I warned you this day would come...
you refused to heed me.

Knight's flesh slides off his face like melting ice sheets -- he snaps his gaze onto Marrus, and viciously scowls at him.

Marrus coldly narrows his eyes.

KNIGHT
You will suffer for this.

MARRUS
Perhaps, but not tonight.

KNIGHT
(menacing)
I'll see you in Oblivion.

Marrus smirks.

Knight disintegrates like glass -- his armor collapses to the floor, ashes drift on the air, slowly fading away.

Dormak whistles, and "painfully" hisses.

DORMAK
That looked painful.

Marrus raises the curved dagger, and coldly inspects it.

Dormak nudges Knight's armor with his boot.

Marrus locks onto Dormak -- intently wresting his hand around the dagger's handle -- Dormak acknowledges this.

Marrus methodically surveys Dormak.

Dormak chuckles, and extends his arms "go ahead".

Marrus lowers the dagger.

DORMAK
Oh, you're no fun.

MARRUS
(impatient)
What happens now?

DORMAK
(pointing)
See that door over there?

Marrus glances at the main door.

DORMAK
All you have to do, is walk out of it. *To freedom and prosperity!*

MARRUS
(RE: Dagger)
You gave me *this* for a purpose.

DORMAK
(playing coy)
I did?

Marrus just looks at him.

Dormak smirks.

DORMAK
They said you were smart.

Dormak claps his hands together, and rubs them.

DORMAK
What I need you to do, is walk out of that door... and finish what you started all those months ago.

Dormak claps him on the shoulder, and points at the door.

DORMAK
You killed him...

Marrus and Dormak lock eyes. Dormak grins.

DORMAK
...now kill *her*.

MARRUS
And then I'm *free*?

DORMAK
Yes.

MARRUS
I kill her, and in exchange, I have
my freedom back, and we're through,
just like that?

DORMAK
As the wind blows.

Marrus offers a slight nod "OK".

DORMAK
Oh goodie. I knew I could count on
you to get things done.

Dormak hugs him. Marrus awkwardly reacts. Dormak steps aside,
and "lays out the path" with his arm.

Marrus approaches the main door.

DORMAK
And when you're done, do be sure to
seek me out. The dagger shall guide
you. Until then... TA-TA!

Marrus looks back --

-- Dormak snaps his fingers, and vanishes in a waft of smoke.

Marrus inhales, and faces the door. He grips the handle.

CUT TO BLACK.