

Drawing the Duke

By: IndigoRho

Rain poured from the dark sky, drenching the small hamlet of Croford and turning its small streets to mud. Normally such weather would have driven the populace indoors, but most were willing to endure it for even a moment's glance at the grim procession making its way to the outskirts. Knights in full regalia marched down the road, with a bannerman riding atop a horse in the middle...and a lone figure being pitifully dragged behind. Despite never having seen the captive in person, every last one of the townsfolk recognized them from the official portraits the law required all shops, inns, even churches keep. Grand Duke Wire the "Generous". A self-appointed title, one he was rumored to often gloat about before ordering the brutal executions of prisoners. Some wondered if he'd try to invoke it at his own approaching execution.

Duke Wire was a shadow of his former self. The wolf's usually luscious white-and-tan fur was caked and matted in mud, as was the gold embroidered uniform he'd loved so dearly. His ample gut was mostly exposed, appearing painfully taut and too large for his outfit, and wobbled with every bump in the road. Only his red boots were spared the muck, suspended just above the ground by the same rope binding him to the horse. For over an hour he'd been slowly dragged from his prison to the site of his execution. His captors had ensured the pace was just enough to cause him horrible pain while still keeping him alive, a practice the fallen monarch had once been rather fond of. He wasn't able to appreciate the irony, though, thoroughly dazed from pain, small trails of blood following in his wake.

Inevitably the procession came to a halt in a field just outside the hamlet, followed by a crowd of curious townsfolk. The most ornately armored of the knights dismounted his horse with a clatter that caused more than a few onlookers to jump. He was a bulky ram, the left side of his body marred by a suspicious collection of injuries; broken horn, an eyepatch, a missing arm, and a beautifully carved metal peg where his hoof should have been.

The ram loomed over Wire, grinning. "My liege, I've been waiting for this day for a very, very long time."

He carefully lowered his peg atop Wire's paw, shifting his weight into it until he heard a slight cracking sound amidst the wolf's screams.

"Duke Wire the Merciless." The ram pressed down again. "Duke Wire the Mad." More pressure. "Duke Wire the Glutton. The Sadistic. The Bloody. The Killer."

The air was filled with a terrible mix of Wire's cries and splashing raindrops.

"I could waste a lifetime listing off your crimes against the Duchy, so instead I'll settle with one that's rather dear to me." The ram finally released his peg, revealing a mangled paw. "Throughout your reign you demanded every artist in the land paint your portrait, every sculptor carve your likeness, every bard sing your praise. Any who refused or didn't meet your standards were horribly maimed, tortured, or outright killed."

Wire writhed in the mud, cradling his ruined paw. "M-mercy! Please, mercy!"

"I doubt you remember the statue you ordered me to sculpt, let alone what you had done to me when the finished work was damaged in transit to the palace," the ram continued, scratching at his eyepatch. "I believe your exact words were *Harming anything in my image is just as heinous as personally harming me*. And then you ordered your guards to inflict those same wounds upon me."

A slurry of pleas and threats erupted from Wire, though all seemed ignored.

"I wanted to make up for that failure, though, *my Liege*. Despite my condition, I was able to have you drawn for miles across the countryside for others to see." A faint wave of laughter broke out amongst the knights and crowd. "But I believe the entire Duchy deserves to witness my creation, and for that to happen in a timely manner we'll need to split it into pieces."

Wire's eyes went wide and his jaw dropped in horror. "N-n-no, I'm the Duke, you can't do this to me!"

“Oh, but just imagine how wonderful it'll be to be admired in every corner of the Duchy. Simultaneously.”

The ram gestured towards some knights, who quickly brought over three more horses, along with rope. As Wire twisted and screamed the knights roughly tied the wolf's arms to separate horses, then temporarily freed one of his legs before retying it to the final steed. The horses were gently guided into position, extending Wire's limbs outward and gradually lifting the terrified monarch out of the mud and into the air. His struggles decreased as the tension built.

“You can't do this to me, I'm the Duke!” Wire yelled, his attempt to sound commanding hindered by noticeable fear in his voice. “This is treason! Treason! I'll give a mountain of gold to anyone who frees me! No, a castle, a big one! I'll make you my heir!”

The ram looked his former liege in the eyes and smiled, giving a stark thumbs down with the one paw he had left. All four horses whinnied and trotted away at once. Wire could feel his limbs being stretched in all directions, the pain quickly overwhelming every existing ache. Muscles and nerves were torn away at an agonizingly slow pace as the horses were prevented from simply galloping away. Not until the Duke's screams were at a peak did the ram knight order the quartering to proceed. With a thunderous crack the horses were finally unleashed, and Wire's limbs were messily ripped from his body, sending the mutilated wolf falling to the muddy ground hard.

Wire gagged and twitched, the pain nearly too great to comprehend. Blood gushed from his wounds, soaking the limp sleeves of his uniform and mixing with the mud. Many in the crowd covered their eyes and ears.

The ram coldly approached Wire once more, this time carrying a small axe. “Still alive? Good.”

Wire's quivering eyes looked up at the axe rising above him, and followed it as it was brought down hard upon his neck. The Duke coughed out a spray of blood as the axe cleaved through his neck-fluff and flesh, wedging half-way into his spinal cord. He convulsed violently, blood running from his mouth, before a second swing severed his head completely, finally putting an end to Duke Wire the Generous. A cheer rose above the rainfall, and the ram knight let out a long sigh of relief; the Duchy was free of the tyrant.

The ram grabbed a hold of Wire's head by the tuft of his white hair, the only piece of the Duke he truly cared about. Wire's jaw hung open, blood trickling from his lips, his eyes angled in different directions. He was a mess, but he'd be recognizable, proof Wire was slain and not merely in hiding. Those still loyal to the Duke would hopefully give up, and the Duchy could begin the long road to recovery. While the ram didn't know who would ascend to the throne next, he hoped the terrible fate that had befallen Wire would serve as a warning to any who attempted to emulate his madness. Hopefully.