

Sir Daniel rode through through the sunlit forest on his rowan horse. The knight was on his way to help a village with a wizard, since the Royal Magician had already left some time ago for a mystical journey of enlightenment. The king felt that Daniel would be able to handle this particular mission. The knight wasn't complaining too much about it, since it gave him a chance to show off his prowess to the simpleton peasants, and how many knights at court could boast of having defeated any kind of magician? He was sure he'd come out of it intact, without any kind of curse, and be boasting about it to the serving wenches at the local alehouse back in the city over a tankard of ale.

"Boy! How much further to your town?" Daniel called out to the farm boy leading him to the village. The lad couldn't be more than fifteen, and was clearly in awe of the knight. Not that Daniel could blame the boy; he was rather impressive.

"Not too much further, Sir!" The boy yelled back. "Only a few more miles!"

"Good! The longer it takes to get there, the longer this wizard has to cause problems!" *And the longer I'll be away from the finest ale and women in the city,* Daniel thought to himself. Not that he expected the simple farm boy to understand. He didn't even remember the lad's name.

The boy had come to petition the king for help with the wizard, claiming his brothers had already gone to deal with the magician and had never come back. King Richard had dutifully listened to the young man's pleas, before declaring loudly that Sir Daniel would accompany the boy. They had left the next day, the knight obliging the farmboy's questions eagerly. It was nice to have an audience eager to hear his stories. Everyone at the inns and taverns didn't seem to care anymore.

They had both quieted down in the days since. The inns had dwindled in number as they had ridden down the road, and the young lad had run out of questions. Daniel could tell, however, that the boy was still fascinated and slightly frightened by the imposing figure the knight made. Once Daniel had his half-plate armor on, he knew the boy would be really impressed. The knight would have brought his full suit, but it wouldn't have been practical to fight in.

The sun had begun to set before they emerged from the forest and into the village. The horse's hooves plodded on the dirt path as the knight and farmboy made their way to the small inn. They passed shops and houses where fearful eyes followed them from half-open doors and closed windows. The few townsfolk that were out gathered around them in the small square outside the inn, some carrying makeshift weapons and pitchforks. Daniel looked over the small crowd that had gathered. It was a rather disappointing welcome; less than a knight from the capitol of his stature should have a grand entrance. One of the men stepped forward.

"Who are you, and what do you want here?" The man asked roughly.

"My name is Sir Daniel, a knight of the realm. I have been sent by King Richard to help you in your time of need. You need not fear this magician any longer!"

“And why should we trust you, eh? Several of our sons have already gone to face the wizard, and none have returned!” The man from the crowd yelled at Daniel in anger. “How do we know you’re not in league with the wizard?”

“I am no ally to the wizard that plagues your town. Magic is one thing I cannot abide. I will eradicate this menace from your humble village.”

“That don’t mean why we should trust you,” the same man continued.

“But you can!” The lad traveling with Daniel blurted out. “I was there when the king chose him.”

“Aye, and he had a chance to bewitch your mind while you led him here to his friend!” The crowd murmured in angry agreeance.

“That is enough!” The town elder called out before anyone had a chance to say anything. An uneasy quiet fell over the square. Daniel shifted in his saddle to make himself seem bigger and more important. “What Matthew says is true, the knight is here to help. I sent the lad to the king for assistance, so we will accept the knights help.” The elder glared around at the assembly, quelling any arguments. The crowd slowly dispersed, some grumbling heard. The man who had accused Daniel stayed long enough to stare at the knight distrustfully, before turning away. The elder turned to Daniel.

“Forgive our rudeness, Sir, I beg of you. We don’t often get visitors in our humble town, and I’m afraid that in these dark times, we’ve all grown suspicious and fearful.” The elder explained. “My name is Connor.” Daniel dismounted from his destrier before replying.

“No need to apologize. They were right to accost me like that. Magic is, after all, a shady business.” Daniel was upset over the greeting, but didn’t let it show. As much as he hated rudeness towards his grand self, Daniel hated magic even more. “Perhaps you could show me to the local inn, and tell me more about this wizard over supper.” Connor nodded and led the knight to the local inn.

Over a supper of roast lamb, seared potatoes with garlic, and brown ale, Connor and Daniel talked late into the night over where the wizard had moved in, his habits, and the best possible plan to remove the wizard without endangering the town even more. The young lad Matthew stayed with them the entire time, providing useful information about the wizard. More than once, Daniel wondered about how the boy knew so much. It wasn’t until the discussion began to wind down that things began to become heated.

“Absolutely not. It’s out of the question.” Connor said.

“Why? I want to go and help.” Matthew protested. “I have a right to.”

“No, I’m sorry, but Connor is right. You shouldn’t come.” Daniel told the youth. “It’ll be too dangerous. You haven’t trained, and during the fight I can’t guarantee you’ll be safe. You said your brothers disappeared after facing the wizard, so you should know how magic is, you don’t know what will happen.”

“Of course you don’t want me to come, so you can keep all the glory to yourself!” Matthew yelled at Daniel before storming out of their private room and out of the inn into the night. Connor and Daniel watched the lad leave. Since the inn was empty, there wasn’t anyone there to see the scene.

“He may be mad now, but it’s for the better.” Conner said sadly. “There’s something you need to know about the lad. He doesn’t have a family. He was orphaned at a young age.”

“So the whole story of missing family members was a complete lie?” Daniel was starting to get upset.

“No, that is true. Several young men have tried to face the wizard and haven’t come back. Don’t be upset with the boy, it was my idea to use the story as a cover. I wanted to be sure he was safe while traveling, in case he ran into spies of the wizard.”

“I understand.” Daniel sighed. “Why don’t you head home? If I am to face the wizard at dawn, I must make preparations with my equipment.” He had to do something to keep himself occupied, since it was unlikely he’d find a girl to help warm his bed.

“You are right. My wife must be worried. It isn’t too far of a walk, I should be safe.” Connor got up from the table. “I will see you on the morrow. Thank you for coming to our aide, Sir Daniel.”

“Do not thank until the deed is done. Good night.” Connor nodded and left the inn, leaving the knight to his thoughts.

Daniel stayed in the common room for a few minutes longer, swigging the ale that was left. It was some poor, weak stuff they had, but it was better than what they had had on the journey here. Once the ale was gone, the knight made his way to his room, staggering slightly. Fumbling, he removed his pants and tunic, falling onto the bed in nothing but his small clothes and remembered nothing more.

Dawn came early, finding Daniel in his room getting dressed in his armor that had been brought to his room last night before supper. Already imposing without it, the armor made the knight a more impressive sight. Stumbling a little, he staggered down the stairs, obviously a little tipsy from last night. Pausing at the base of the stairs, Daniel did his best to regain his composure. He had a job to do, one that would be best to get done as quickly as possible so he could head back to the city. The less time he spent in this out of the way town, the better. And if there was one less magician in the world, even better. But it wouldn’t do to have the villagers see him a bit drunk. It could ruin his reputation, after all.

After a few minutes, and more than a few run-ins with the tables, the knight managed to make his way through the common room and into the street outside the inn, where Connor was waiting for him. The dawn light spilled into the street, forcing Daniel to squint in the brightness.

“Have you made all your preparations?” Connor asked. Daniel nodded.

“Yes. Everything is ready. Now, lead me to this tower.”

"I will only lead you to the edge of town. I dare not get closer than that. You will have to make it the rest of the way yourself." Connor explained. Daniel merely nodded as the two of them began to walk without a word.

The whole town seemed silent; not even birds were singing to herald the dawn. It was as if even nature was waiting with held breath to see what would happen. Conner was the only one to notice, but didn't point it out to the hungover knight.

It wasn't long before they made it to the edge of town, stopping in the middle of the empty road.

"From here on, you are alone. All that I can do now is wish you luck. May the Gods smile on you in favor." Connor and Daniel stood there facing each other in silence before Daniel turned and trudged down the path before heading into the woods. Connor stayed and watched until the knight disappeared into the woods before heading back into the village.

It took Daniel a few hours to make his way through the forest. The sun was well up by the time he found the clearing with the tower. The sight of the rundown tower covered in vines made Daniel grimace partly in disgust, and partly from the headache and nausea. Swatting some curious bug away, the knight crept into the clearing and headed to the tower, looking for a way into the ancient tower. Grumbling, Daniel became upset when the only door he could find was blocked by rubble.

"Why would anyone self respecting want to live in a dump like this? There isn't even a way in!" Daniel muttered under his breath.

"Perhaps there would be, if you what to look for. Of course, that would assume you knew any kind of magic, which I doubt." Daniel turned around to find an older man standing at the edge of the clearing. It was difficult for the knight to determine how old the man was, but as he stepped out into the sunlight Daniel noticed the man was wearing a grey robe. Suspicious, Daniel's hand went to his sword.

"Who are you?" The knight asked roughly. "Why are you here?"

"I'd ask you the same thing, but it really isn't that hard to figure out. You were brought in by the villagers to stop me. You may find that hard for you to do, however." The wizard smiled at the knight. Daniel tightened his grip on his sword, oddly feeling slightly stiff. The knight paid it no mind, however.

"I am more than a match for you. I've defeated countless wizards before, you are no different from them."

"I know more about you than you think, Daniel. I know you overdrank last night, and are still feeling the effects today." Daniel lowered his sword slightly, surprised that the wizard knew who he was. "I told you I knew more about you than you thought. I even know something you don't."

"And what might that be?" Daniel asked sharply, bringing the sword back up to prepare to charge.

"Just how much of an ass you really are." Daniel stared in confusion, waiting to late to dodge out of the path of a blast of magic that hit the would-be hero square in the chest. Daniel was surprised it didn't knock him back, instead spreading a strange, not uncomfortable warmth through his entire body.

"Is that all you can do? I thought this would be a challenge." Daniel taunted.

"So did I." The wizard retorted. Daniel stalked around the mage, snorting in derision. The sound made him stop in confusion when he realized how bestial it sounded. Daniel didn't realize how much bigger and wider his nostrils had become. As he circled the mage, the knight strove to ignore an itch that seemed to be attacking his nose and ears. He didn't see any bugs that could be irritating. The irritation kept growing, however. Finally, Daniel couldn't stand it any longer and shook his head, waving a hand in front of his face to swat whatever was irritating him.

There was a brief moment of confusion crossing the knight's face as he was smacked in the face simultaneously by his hand and two strangely long things flapped when he shook his head. Running his hand along his face, Daniel discovered with horror that his face had started to grow outwards. His headache was quickly resolved as panic and fear coursed through his body. Trembling, Daniel moved his hand along his changing face, his gloves running over his short beard that had suddenly grown as they reached his ear. It twitched as he rubbed it, feeling the thick leather on his stretching skin and the bristly hair that was now beginning to grow thicker.

"What's happening to me?" Daniel cried out, his words slurring slightly as his mouth continued to change. His nostrils had continued to enlarge, taking up most of his face. The teeth in his mouth began to change, becoming squarer and flatter as his lips darkened. A slight bulge had begun to slowly grow behind him unnoticed as his muscles started

"I already told you; you're becoming the ass you are." The wizard simply smiled as he watched the knight continue to change.

"No, pleeeaaaargh!!" Daniel's plea changed into something bestial and unintelligible, his thicker tongue and new mouth made speaking impossible now. A small snort of pain escaped his nostrils as he began to gain size, straining against his unyielding armor and clothing. Daniel clawed at the straps, seeking to relieve the pain, tears in his eyes. A slight ping could be heard as his hardening hands scrabbled at the armor, losing dexterity.

Suddenly, the pain was gone as the armor began to dissolve away into nothing, simply disappearing. Under different circumstances, Daniel would be furious about what was happening to his armor; however, he was so relieved that he couldn't help but give a bray like moan of relief. Daniel rubbed a now hoof-like hand on his barreling chest and stomach sparsely covered in the bristly fur.

Grasping his rounder stomach, Daniel groaned as his organs shifted and changed, falling to his knees. His hands fell to the ground, completing their morph into his new hooves. It was then that Daniel discovered he couldn't stand back up, stuck on all fours like a true donkey. His neck thickened and lengthened to compensate for his new position as a short mane grew out, his

face and head completely asinine by this point. His legs were tickled by the tassel that had grown on the tip of his new tail, before fur grew in over the rest of his body completely. Daniel could feel his feet changing into his hind hooves, elbows and knees sliding up and closer to his chest and barrel of a stomach. What was left of his hands and feet stretched, his wrists and ankles becoming knees and hocks. As the tail finished growing out, fur covered any last skin that remained. Soon, where the proud knight once stood was nothing more than a simple donkey.

“Heeeehaaaaaw” Daniel brayed as his changes completed, taking a few timid steps in his new form. His ears seemed to droop sadly as he looked himself over.

“Oh, don’t worry. The changes are only temporary.” The wizard stepped forward. “Richard would be quite furious if one of his best knights was forever changed into an ass, no matter how much he deserved it.” Daniels eyes widened at the name. There was only one person he knew with that name. If the wizard knew Richard, that could only mean one thing... “Yes, Daniel, I’m afraid it’s true. The royal wizard Tanzrith stands before you.” The grey robe changed into a dark night blue garment with silver etched into the hems and a simple silver belt around the waist. The wizard seemed to change, losing wrinkles as his beard and hair became shorter and more well kept. It was still difficult to determine his age, since the years of magic had protected him from the ravages of time, allowing him to age gracefully.

“Haaaaaaw,” Daniel let out a forlorn bray. How could Tanzrith do something like this to him? They were both trusted by the king!

“Don’t feel too badly, my boy. You see, Richard asked me in private to do this to you. He felt that you didn’t have the humility to be a knight.” Tanzrith explained. “You are one of the best knights, no doubt, but you weren’t humble. So we put on this little charade to help you learn not to be so cocky.” Tanzrith rubbed the former knight between the ears. “No one in the village was in on it except for Connor. Though I think they may put things together when we leave.”

Daniel couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Not only was Tanzrith responsible for his current form, but he had been ordered by the king to do so. Daniel knew the other knights would never let him forget his time as an ass, however long it would be. The servants and pages would be laughing at him behind his back. There would be no way Daniel would be able to show his face without this disgrace following him everywhere. Daniel was so lost in his thoughts that he didn’t notice when Tanzrith slipped a bridle over his head.

“We’ll need to leave soon, since our welcome is worn out.” Tanzrith told the donkey, beginning to fit various saddlebags on the former knight. Daniel let out a small bray of protest. “There are some small things I need to do before we go. Gathering your horse, for one, and paying Connor for repairs. Reversing any magical effects and harm I may have done in this little lesson.” Tanzrith sighed. “Whenever Richard has me teach some kind of lesson, there’s always some kind of collateral damage to the local villages that I have to fix. It’d be so much easier if he’d allow me to do this right at the castle.” Daniel brayed louder, now trying to buck the bags

off. “You really aren’t helping this at all by being so stubborn.” Tanzrith pulled on the reins to lead Daniel out of the forest. “Don’t make this any worse for you. I have to admit, I thought you’d put up more of a fight. But you’ve always been in the ale. Maybe you’ll learn another lesson about drinking before a fight.” Daniel did his best to refuse to move, but Tanzrith was either stronger than he looked, or some magic was involved in getting the donkey to move. As they exited the clearing, Tanzrith turned back to Daniel. “Oh, one more thing. I’m also picking up a new apprentice. You may have already met him. That orphan boy, Matthew. He has much potential.” If a donkey could have shown emotion on it’s face, Daniel would have shown fear. “He was very eager to play his part. In fact, I may let him help me change you back. When the king allows it, of course.”