

# Honest Work

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M -> F Anthro Dragon, SFW

“It’s dead.” Sir Ignacio lowered his blade as he surveyed the pile of dragon bones.

“Of course it’s dead.” Iron Knives, the party’s resident wererat thief, pointed at the skeletal remains with one of his daggers. “Otherwise we’d have been roasted the minute we walked in!”

“I suppose that makes sense, eh Vlach?” Sir Ignacio turned to the party’s wizard, a hooded figure whose

glowing yellow eyes always seemed to look *through* whomever the magus directly addressed.

“When we descended the great steps into this subterranean lair, multiple outcomes awaited us. This is but one of them.” Vlach D’Agosta pointed at distant cracks in the cave’s walls. “I would assume that another party beat us to the punch. So be it.”

“You’re not surprised?” Sir Ignacio removed one of his gauntlets to wipe accumulated sweat off his forehead. Reinforced ‘heat-proof’ armor didn’t leave one lacking in perspiration.

Vlach shrugged him off. “Not particularly. Just disappointed. Perhaps I can make this work nonetheless.”

“A shame that I only got to sing once. My lute feels neglected.” Bard scratched at his graying beard, and the dwarven cap he’d bought at the Bazaar of High Morning drooped forward and covered most of his face despite his best efforts.

“I feel extremely neglected. If I had eyes then I’d be crying, mourning this colossal waste of my time.” The disembodied voice of Bard’s enchanted musical instrument echoed off the cavern walls.

“You have such a way with words, Lute.”

“Thaaaaaannnnnnkkkkk yooooooooouuuuu.” The ethereal voice lingered far longer than Sir Ignacio would have liked. Magic artifacts always rubbed him the wrong way. Spells were one thing, sentient pieces of equipment another.

Truth be told, none of his *party* would have been his first choice. He found each far too roguish, rough around the edges, and the constant bickering, thieving, and lack of fighting skills irked him to no end.

But money *was* money, and Sir Ignacio never declined the opportunity to strike down a dragon. Acquiring coins in the process satisfied him enough that he didn’t care what shifty figures crossed his path. More often than not, half of them would bail along the contract anyway so Sir

Ignacio found that taking payment upfront and in full usually saved him trouble.

“If you don’t mind me asking, Vlach, what do you intend on doing now?” Sir Ignacio asked the wizard. “If you want to find another dragon, that’s going to cost extra.”

“Hmm... another... oh heavens no, this *will* do just fine. Most assuredly.” Vlach broke into a wide grin, flashing aged decaying teeth. “I have everything I could possibly need right here.”

Sir Ignacio didn’t notice the rat thief and bard step out of the way between him and the wizard, their backs inching up toward a divot in the cavern wall. Even as Vlach lifted up both arms, palms outstretched and cackling with violet electricity, Sir Ignacio didn’t take his eyes off the skeletal remains.

“I am a little disappointed I didn’t get to slay a dragon—” Ignacio stopped as the blast of electricity cut through him, a lashing that made the already dimly lit cavern fade to complete darkness.

“A soul for a soul.” Vlach snarled and steadied himself as he drained the vitality from the knight with one hand, his other directing a second beam of energy into the dragon carcass.

“Would you look at that, Bard?” The rat thief’s beady eyes reflected the flashes of electricity like fireflies dipping and dancing over a midnight pool. “True necromancy.”

“He’s still alive though–”

“Won’t be for long, ay. The killing lightning will take his breath, pass his life force into tired bones, and soon we’ll have a loyal dragon in our party in lieu of a steadfast knight.”

“And how do you, lowly rat, know of arcane practices?” Lute strummed another question toward the furry rogue.

“Ay! Watch your strings, Lute!”

Sir Ignacio gave a final groan of agony and broke into stray twitching convulsions before lying still. The draconic bones, however, did not stir. Instead the archaic skeleton continued to rest on the cavern floor, untouched except for slight burn marks. Moments passed in eerie silence before Vlach lost his temper.

“Bah! Failure!” The wizard screamed and threw up his hands, twirling around and stomping his feet in rage. “It’s not fair, I tell you! It’s not fair!”

“Maybe you lacked the most important component of all? Love.” Lute’s disembodied voice brought the wizard to a standstill.

Vlach’s eye twitched in frustration. “Bard, I’m going to destroy that instrument. I’m going to pluck out all its strings and–”

“Believe me, I’ve tried.” Bard sighed and looked down at his enchanted instrument. “Lute’s the bane of every tavern and pub across twelve kingdoms. I’ve had bounties put upon *my* head because of ‘em.”

“I enjoy being a force of chaos, yes.” A strum of pride echoed in Lute’s response.

“You’ll be destroyed one day–” Bard mumbled under his breath.

Lute had a response prepared for his Bard. “Only dragon fire can pierce my resin and destroy me. And, last I checked, there are no dragons here.”

“Please keep rubbing it in–” Vlach’s fingers tensed and curled inward.

Iron Knives crossed his arms across his furry chest. “What now, Vlach?”

“Nothing. Let's just go.” Vlach turned back toward the cavern entrance. “No one else will venture down here. I’ll post a notice that Sir Ignacio fell in battle to the dragon... and then I’ll begin the process of refining my next spell.”

“Are you going to include us in your next adventure?” Bard spoke both for himself and the diminutive rodent beside him.

“Wasn’t planning on it.”

“Cool.” Bard, Lute, and Iron Knives spoke in unison.

Sir Ignacio woke up on the cavern floor with a splitting headache that matched the worst of his saturnalia feasts. Pounding pressure found a match made in hell with streaks of light that seemed burned into his retinas even as he rubbed at his eyes and hissed in displeasure. Memories of what actually transpired only came back after he’d caught his breath, particularly when he’d inhaled deep through the dull pain enough to remember just how the wizard had double-crossed him.

“Live and learn.” The knight pulled himself to his feet and began his trek back out of the cavern.



The afternoon sun striking his face didn't alleviate his headache, if anything the pounding inside his skull grew worse as the knight squinted and lowered his eyes toward the ground as he pressed on.

Sir Ignacio didn't notice the initial smattering of black scales that raced across his exposed flesh, he didn't feel the pale ivory horns that emerged as bony growths along his forehead, and he didn't pause as his spine elongated and pushed up closer to the intense afternoon sun, his neck popping and arching forward with a defined serpentine arch. Even when his thinning face pressed forward into a reptilian snout, Sir Ignacio didn't falter as he stumbled back toward town, in fact it was only when his armor began to warp against the contours of his altered frame that he stopped and started paying attention.

“You have got to be kidding me—” Sir Ignacio's slitted eyes narrowed and then crossed as he tried to process the active expansion of his huffing, twitching muzzle as well as the higher pitch of his voice passing across sharpening teeth.

He'd worn masks before, at festivals and parties, but he'd never felt his face actively tugged and shaped into one by invisible hands.

Whatever bindings kept his steel boots intact yielded to the growth of his feet, his toes merging into three distinct digits tipped with shiny black claws as his heel contorted up toward his leg, bringing him into a digitigrade stance.

“Wonderful, just *peachy*.” Sir Ignacio hissed as a pressure built at the base of his spine. He knew *enough* about dragons, dragonfolk, and the odd lizard wandering the countryside to know that a tail slowly inched its way into life. He could feel each vertebrae emerge and link to the previous one, spines erupting from his new appendage's tip.

No, the tail wasn't a shock. Instead, the metamorphosis had another surprise waiting for him.

The transformation, it seemed, wasn't merely content with changing him into a dragon. No, the aching and burning that crawled inside his torso expanding and

altering the shape of his body had an ulterior motive beyond just the draconic.

Sir Ignacio stared down at the distortion forming on his chest. The fact that he now had a decidedly feminine bust pushing out against his breastplate made the knight realize that maybe he wasn't much of a 'he' anymore for that matter. His altered voice, a distinct alto, now made sense with the popping of her hips.

*Sir Ignacio. Lady Ignacia.* Whichever worked best, she could contend with.

A final blessing or aspect of the curse arrived with a crunching freeing snap as leathery bat's wings tore free from the plate armor upon her back. Stumbling forward with her new appendages flapping, Lady Ignacia hissed under her breath as she attempted to retain her footing. She'd have to regain her sense of balance through painstaking effort, that much became clear.

The gender change and the wings also weren't the last surprise.

“Magnificent! Such power!” The voice that emanated from one of Lady Ignacia’s tight yet still intact bracers made the dragoness do a double-take.

“Oh no. Don’t tell me. *Enchanted equipment.*” Lady Ignacia groaned and started clawing at the bracer stuck to her arm. “I can handle a little metamorphosis, but even I’ve got standards.”

“Behold! A dragoness standing proudly upon two legs! A scaled paladin–”

“Two things. First, I’m not a paladin. I don’t bind myself to any ‘oath’ alright? Second, I have a zero tolerance policy for magical *talking* artifacts.” Her claws slipped under the steel gauntlet and managed to unclasp the bracer’s locking mechanism. “Sorry.”

“Wait! Don’t throw me aside! I have such wisdom to impart upon you, fair draconic knight!” The bracers pleaded to no avail as Lady Ignacia left them in the dust. “Please!!!!”

“Magic never ceases to amaze.” A few stray sparks

slipped from beyond her scaly lips as she pressed onward toward her village.

She'd make this work, somehow.

Upon stepping into town, her claws scraping against the cobblestone beneath her feet, Lady Ignacia kept up a brisk pace as she wandered into the market. Eyes turned, guards clutched their swords and spears, and merchants immediately began evaluating if their wares would even fit the imposing creature walking in their midsts. As much as she wished she could stop to shop for armor that actually fit, Lady Ignacia needed coin to do that, and her pouch hung empty of any gold all thanks to the treachery of one decrepit old wizard.

Lady Ignacia noticed that as she shopped, more and more heads slowly turned away. Still, the knight felt exposed with her ruined armor bent out of shape, so she tried her hardest to remedy that at the first shop she could dip into. Luckily for her, the blacksmith in question didn't seem to mind her ferocious new appearance.

“How can I help yee–” The weathered man scratched at his soot-covered beard with callused fingers.

Lady Ignacia craned her neck to look at multiple sets of gilded chainmail and plate armor, inlaid with gold and ivory, the kind usually well out of her price range. “I’m looking for a set that fits to a more... feminine frame... I wouldn’t need boots or a helmet either if that cuts back on cost.”

“We do custom fits, ay.”

“Looks like I don’t have much of a choice with these.” Lady Ignacia gestured to her thick tail and fluttering wings.

“Can I pay in something other than gold? I’ve got a bad run of luck.” Honesty usually proved to be the best policy.

“Depends.” The armorer kept his reply brief. “Are you willing to part with one of your obsidian scales?”

Lady Ignacia's eyes narrowed. "Are you telling me that these scales... my scales... are valuable?"

Would she even need to pursue the wizard at all—

"They're valuable to me and me alone. One day I dream of constructing a set of draconic armor fashioned from the very hide of a scaly beast. The scales are worthless to others." The armorer-blacksmith grunted his reply as he heaved and shifted the armor set Lady Ignacia eyed up off the wall and onto his workbench.

Apparently he decided that she'd already say yes.

"Fine. One scale."

A single pluck from one of her sharp talons did the trick, and Lady Ignacia produced a glittery obsidian scale to hand over in exchange for clothing that didn't chafe.

"I'm skilled at my craft, but this will take time to fit. Perhaps an hour."

“I’ve got time.” Lady Ignacia listened to the bustle of the crowd outside in the marketplace. “Nobody is *expecting* me, anymore.”

“Very well. Take a seat. You can watch me work if you’d like.”

“I would like that. I’m curious to see how you’ll shape the ivory trim.”

“With the utmost care.”

“Good.”

After departing the armory with a shiny new coat of armor, Lady Ignacia dipped back into the crowd of afternoon shoppers, still keen on locating any traces of the wizard who betrayed her. She found her first lead rummaging through the refuse of one of the cobblers' stands.



“Excuse me.” Lady Ignacia stared down her long snout at the diminutive ratfolk thief looking back up at her. “But have you seen Vlach?”

“What the—” Iron Knives’ dark eyes widened as he trembled before the hulking dragoness, now adorned in fitted armor. “A dra-dragon!”

“Surprise. Where’s Vlach?”

“Y-you died!” The rat pulled himself closer to the bin of rubbish as if he might dive in.

“Not exactly. Again. Where’s Vlach? Is he still in town?”

“N-nope.” Iron Knives’s whiskers twitched in nervous displeasure as his hairless hands still sifted through different cuts of leather. “He left town in a hurry.”

“Are you sure?”

“Look, I’m just hired for jobs as a fluffy scoundrel. Everyone wants an animal sidekick for adventures, I fill

that role while adding my trademark snark. I got my coin, I moved on—”

Lady Ignacia peeled back her lips to flash her many fangs. “Well I didn’t get my coin—”

“Vlach double-crossed you! That’s the whole point! I didn’t get any coin either, if that makes you feel better. We all got screwed over.” Iron Knives kept one beady eye on Lady Ignacia’s sword resting upon the dragon’s curvy hip. “But I see you got a shiny new form out of the magical mishap. Lucky you.”

Maybe she *was* lucky.

“I’m not exactly upset about the new senses. Everything’s become clear.”

“Ah so you finally can *really* smell and hear just how much of a dump this entire town is.” Iron Knives relaxed a little when he realized the dragoness didn’t intend on chomping down on him.

“Please. Who do you take me for? I’ve known this town was a trash heap for years.”

But home was home.

“If you don’t know where Vlach is, at least tell me where Bard hobbled off to.”

“Ah. That I know. Bard went to the tavern–”

“Which–”

“Uh, the Lonely Apple. That tavern. I don’t think any of the other establishments would put up with the Lute.” Iron Knives placed a select piece of tanned hide into his tiny rucksack. “That instrument just doesn’t shut up.”

“Thanks.” Lady Ignacia’s eyes narrowed at the ratman. Maybe she should give him a smack for good measure. A slap to remember for his betrayal...

“No hard feelings, eh? I know I’d be mighty angry if someone tried to kill me to resurrect a dragon.”

“We’re not friends, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

“Right, right. Of course not–”

Lady Ignacia made sure that when she turned, her thick tail swept the ratfolk’s legs and the bin of leather scraps beside him. The clutter and cursing that followed brought a thin smile to her face as she stepped back into the awestruck market crowd. If fame always felt like this, then she had no complaints.

The biggest obstacle facing her at the tavern proved to be the door itself, and Lady Ignacia had to arch her serpentine neck forward to make sure her horns didn’t scrape the frame.

“Wha- YOU DIED!” Bard’s jaw dropped at first sight of the anthro dragoness towering in the tavern doorway, though Lute continued to play a joyful ballad on its own despite the presence of the newcomer. “A... a... A DRAGON...”

“Hardly.” Stray trails of smoke drifted up from Lady Ignacia’s slitted nostrils. “Vlach’s magic worked in a roundabout way. Looks like he got his dragon after all.”

“You’re–” Bard instinctively brought his hands up to shield his face from any prospective blasts of fire. “Please don’t burn me!”

“Calm down, I’m not going to hurt you. At least not yet. Just tell me where Vlach wandered off to.”

“To kill him?”

“No.” Lady Ignacia rolled her slitted eyes and sighed. “I need to find him to demand my payment.”

“This is about money?! But you’re a... you’re a giant lizard!”

“Honestly the scales itch a bit, but they’re growing on me. I can stack armor now too, steel plates upon scaled ones. And the fangs and claws are a nice backup to a sword... point is, I’m not angry at Vlach, I just want my coin.”

“Hey! Dragoness! Are you going to buy anything!”  
The tavern owner shouted from across the pub.

Lady Ignacia threw up her arms in frustration. “I’m broke. That’s the whole reason I’m harassing your bard here.”

“I see, well... our no loitering policy extends to mythical creatures so you’re either going to have to scrounge up some coin or get-a-out!”

To think that this establishment, of all places, tried to keep up a decorum... it made her grit her reptilian teeth.

Lady Ignacia’s head swiveled back to the trembling bard. “Seriously, if you know where Vlach is just please tell me.”

“Not to butt into a conversation where I have no business, but I’d reckon the Wizard is in a Wizard’s Tower.” A scraggly-haired peasant chimed in with a hopeful air in his voice.

“Are there any Wizard Towers around here? I’m not familiar with any–”

Lady Ignacia tried to think back to any abandoned fortresses, castles, and keeps that dotted the countryside.

“They constructed one atop the old silver mine that belonged to Grand Duke Aestra. Just laid the last bricks only a few days ago.”

“Well there we go! Finally getting some valuable information!” Lady Ignacia’s thick tail swished back and forth in delight. Now she was finally getting somewhere. Sure she still had to *confront* Vlach, but at least she knew the whereabouts of his hiding spot.

Bard tapped Lady Ignacia on her armored shoulder. “G-great! Hey, uh, before you leave... Can I ask you something personal?”

“I don’t want to get into the nitty gritty bits of my transformation–”

“Oh no, it’s not about that. Haha, oh, uh I can see that you’re definitely a dragoness.”

“Just out with it, man. I’m losing daylight here.”

Bard instinctively sped up his words. “I’ve heard that dragon fire can destroy magical bonds. Specifically the invisible runes that empower certain, erm, artifacts to operate the way that they do–”

Lady Ignacia rolled her eyes. “You want me to destroy Lute?”

“BARD! WHY! I THOUGHT WHAT WE HAD WAS SPECIALLLL–” The instrument sprung to life at Bard’s side, golden strings twitching and vibrating on their own accord.

The tavern owner interrupted the conversation between the bard and dragoness. “If you destroy that wretched thing, free drinks are on me, Miss.”

“You have cider?”



“Yea.”

“PLEASE. BARD. REMEMBER OUR ADVENTURES! OUR BOND!” Lute shrieked as Bard handed the instrument to Lady Ignacia.

“While I don’t consider myself a paladin, I am glad to provide community services.” Lady Ignacia flashed a toothy smile before blasting a wave of purple fire across the instrument.

The results of her blast, however, were anything but expected.

“AHHHHHHH FREEDOM!” The wave of shadow that burst upward from a charred Lute made the dragon

“Did I just unleashed a spectral plague upon the land?” Nervous jets of smoke poured from Lady Ignacia’s muzzle. “I feel like I just unleashed a spectral plague upon the land.”

“Yeah you might have, but at least the music stopped.” Bard gave an awkward grin. “Victory?!”

“Hooray...” The barkeep’s muffled response underpinned the uncomfortableness of the situation.

Lady Ignacia’s armor rustled against her scales as she turned toward the door. “So I’m going to go see Vlach now, but, uh...”

“We’ll let you know Lute comes back and tries to plunge us into an age of darkness.” Bard glanced toward the door, then up toward the corners of the pub ceiling. “Always vigilant, we are.”

Lady Ignacia saw herself out without any further comments, the dragoness keeping her head low as to dip under the door frame as she scampered back out into the street.

She had a tower to travel to, a winding journey along familiar roads, but with enough pep in her step she knew she could make it before nightfall. Having enough gold to buy a room back in town was as good a motivator as any other. In new shimmering armor, Lady Ignacia wandered

off into the late afternoon fully aware of the many eyes watching her depart.

“Knock knock.” Lady Ignacia forced herself into the wizard’s tower, a single kick from her hefty dragon foot smashing through Vlach’s front door.

“I saw you approach on the scrying mirror–” Vlach leaned back in his throne, legs crossed as he chewed on a fingernail.

“Where’s my money, Vlach–”

Vlach raised a bushy eyebrow in surprise. “Money? Coin? You don’t care that I tried to harvest your life force to revive a dragon and conquer this entire land?”

“Don’t get me wrong,” Ignacia’s boney eyebrows narrowed in displeasure. “I’m mighty upset about that. But I care about payment just a little more.”

“Can I ask why?” Vlach eased back into his throne.

Lady Ignacia drew closer, her claws scraping against the cold stone floor of Vlach's tower.

“Because ultimately I want to settle down. You know, the dream. The farmstead. The wife. I guess maybe a hoard of treasure now to ease that persistent *desire* pounding inside my thick dragon skull. For me to achieve any of that, I'll need my payment.”

“You are mighty persistent—”

“Look if you literally just pay me, I'll leave right back along the tin road the way I came.” Lady Ignacia pointed toward the shattered door.

Vlach rolled his eyes and snapped his fingers. In response, a sack of coins perched atop a stone pedestal rose from the floor between wizard and dragon.

“See! Was that hard?”

Vlach audibly sighed as Lady Ignacia retrieved her payment. “Please just go. This conversation is starting to drag on.”