

## An Untitled Tale

In the forest outside of a kingdom, a huntress was following the tracks of the strange creature that had destroyed her abode. She nocked an arrow to her bow when she sensed that the trail was very fresh and that the creature was nearby. The leaves rustled and she whirled to see a bipedal lizard-like creature – the source of the footprints. She was about to fire when the creature told her to stop and listen. The arrow was loosed, but it bounced off its scaly hide. Undeterred by the creature’s armor, she drew her bastard sword and was about to strike it when it said, “Hold! I hold the key to your future!”

The huntress still held the sword to the creature’s throat, and sensing that she was not going to kill it yet, it continued, “Beware the cockatrice plague! Remember the weapon that guides all weapons.” With those words, it bolted away. The huntress pursued the creature, ready to slash its throat, but soon, she lost the lizard-man’s trail and found herself in a small clearing with a clear pool. At the bottom of the pool were a shiny bastard sword, a long bow, and a quiver, all magical.

“You will get these weapons when you earn them,” said a voice. It was the lizard-man! The huntress growled, but the lizard-man disappeared again, and the huntress found herself at the drawbridge of a castle. The stone may have been once some other color, but now it was tarnished and faded beyond recognition, and a dark cloud hung over the castle. The inhabitants all ignored her, and upon closer inspection, were either completely turned to stone, or were slowly turning into stone.

The huntress’ instinct guided her to the throne room, and her hand was on her sword, ready to strike. In the center of the throne room was a young man, but as the huntress looked at him, he seemed to turn into a cockatrice and then into an old man. A twinge of fear went through her, but she ignored it, sheathed her sword, pulled out her bow, and fired. She struck straight and true, but he only laughed and leaped at her. The huntress dropped her bow, pulled out her sword again and began slashing with it. The man chanted some harsh words, then pointed at the huntress. She could feel herself slowing down, but the lizard-man’s words suddenly echoed in her mind as her arm grew stiff and the sword fused with her hand into cold stone.

Summoning all her strength, she thrust the arm-sword into the man. The man crumpled into a ball on the ground, but she continued to pound on him until the sword broke off and her hand was about to fall off as well. Just as he breathed his last, her hand became flesh again, as did the rest of her. The stone statues in the room came back to life, including the old king and queen. As she looked around, a shining sword appeared in her hand, her bow and quiver took on an eerie glow, and a familiar voice said, “You always had these weapons with you, and now, behold the result of your actions!” It was the lizard-man, except he was now revealed as the prince. He bowed down before her, and when he offered his hand to her, she refused, insisting that her home was in the wild. Without another word, the huntress walked off back towards her forest, never to be seen in the kingdom again.