

Griffin kept thinking back at the Renn Fair. Should he have bought that armor? It was shiny, a symbol of opulence and status, but he could *feel* the bleeding hole in his wallet. That wasn't even taking his family's reaction to it into account. They'd definitely have a field day either making fun of him or chastising him for wasting his money on something so useless—at least in their eyes.

"They just don't get it..." He whispered to himself, gripping the steering wheel hashers, straining his palms just a tad.

A full suit of armor like this—spotless, polished, with *genuine* golden markings across the plating, and not a sign of damage in sight—usually would only be privy to those with immense wealth. It was a miracle that the shopkeeper was either kind enough or *dumb* enough to price it at such an affordable value. It was a once-in-a-lifetime chance, and he would *definitely* have regretted it for years if he didn't take it. The staff even helped him take it to his car! It was just... *too* good. He'd just have to live with the consequences and bear it.

Glancing at the clunky armor, he couldn't help but think back at the strange shopkeeper that sold him the loot in the first place. How could he not? Every part of the strange woman left an impression on him; her scraggly, disheveled hair—the array of dreamcatchers and amateurishly made crystal amulets hanging from her booth's ceiling—the strange shawl patterned with a psychedelic design that covered almost all of her petite frame—the strange, witch-like cackle that she made when she finally sold him the armor.

"What was up with that lady?" She was the spitting image of 'crazy' that his parents would always warn him about. Then again, that lack of normalcy was probably the only reason that she was so confident in selling him the armor at that price. "If she ever finds out about the *real* price, she's definitely going to be pissed."

Parking his car on the lot, Griffin opened the car door to fetch the armor. Placing his hands right underneath the shoulder pads, he pulled. His muscles immediately tensed up as he realized how heavy it was. Now on his own, the painful realization of how much the suit weighed made his almost childlike joy dissipate in an instant. The giddiness morphed into the fear of not being able to even drag it home in the first place. He just barely managed to drag the torso and the helmet out of the car, and—

"Howdy, neighbor!"

Griffin's face scrunched up into a despair-filled grimace. It was going to be a mess to explain it to his closest family members, and having to do it to the neighbor that he barely knew sounded even less appealing. He quickly tried shoving the armor back into his car, but he saw that it was too late when his neighbor's shadow was cast all over him.

It wasn't the first time that Carlos had been made aware of Griffin's odd lifestyle. One time, he received and opened a package that was meant for *Griffin*—He, fortunately, received a game package, nothing quite embarrassing, but the danger of him finding out about Griffin's weirder interest never truly left his mind—while some other times he loudly reminded him that

he left his door unopened, always without fail trying to get a peek inside. Fortunately, he always stopped him before he could gawk.

I really need to remember to leave that thing locked at all times.

Turning around, he met his neighbor with the best attempt at a smile he could muster. “Heeeeeeeey, Carlos!” Even he realized that his voice sounded strained and fake, but under the suffocating sun and the suffocating pain of social interaction, *no one* could be peppy under those circumstances. “Uh, do you need something?” He delivered the last question without the plastic jolliness, much to his chagrin.

“Oh, nothing. I just saw you fiddling around in your car and I thought that I could come over and help.”

Deliver an explanation or try to drag the armor by himself. Griffin would rather take the option that would get him some strange looks from now on but left his back mostly intact. With the armor bought, he wasn’t in a position to afford medical bills for a thrown-out back.

He gave the rundown of the situation to Carlos, omitting the price tag from the story. Just as suspected, his neighbor’s expression twisted into a clearly understanding but perplexed curiosity. He’d certainly babble to the entire apartment complex about his weird purchasing habits from how confounded his body language was—clapsed hands, quivering mouth, and halfhearted nodding.

“So, uh, do you need some help with your... costume?”

“It’s not a costume.” He clarified, much more harsher than he intended. “It’s a collector’s item.”

“Yeah, that. Do you need some help with that?”

“*Definitely.*”

Shuffling the armor out of the car, Griffin held the upper half while Carlos held the bottom. The man’s confusion was written all over his face, and Griffin felt a little bad about dragging him into this. It wasn’t like they would bring up the topic again—he certainly *hoped* to god that that would be the case—but it still made him feel even more ashamed of his strange armor fascination. There was a strange old-timey mystique that allured him towards the old, seemingly clunky-plated suits. Even as a child, he always dreamed about wearing the kind of shining armor that knights of old age would wear.

“Almost there...” Carlos grunted, barely able to push through the last set of steps. He had to be careful of the sharp greaves and sabatons, adjusting his fingers ever so slightly with each step.

The two let out a satisfied yet weakened exhale. Their plain shirts were darkened by sweat, the summer heat growing harsher and more suffocating by the minute.

"Thanks..." Griffin panted, back bent over and hands on his knees. Sweat droplets trailed from his hair to the ground, splashing against the grimy, unclean surface. "Will try to repay you later." dust-coated floor. "So, uh, I'll be going now. I gotta mount it on my study."

"You need help with that too?"

"Nah, I got a case to display it in. No need to help me put it in."

"Suit yourself, then. Do know that you can come to me for help if anything else comes up."

Griffin swallowed. The thought of having Carlos wandering around his house—gawking at *all* of his knighthood-themed memorabilia made his stomach churn. "Will do, neighbor." He dragged the armor inside as fast as he could and, rapidly waving goodbye, closed the door—a giant weight finally lifted off him once he was out of Carlos' sight.

Sliding down the door, Griffin rested easy as pride swelled within him once again. He was on the home stretch. All he needed was to put it on to finally relish in that euphoria. Tenderly rubbing his hands down the helmet, he smiled. "Time to see how you fit on me."

His bed creaked as he rested all the armor's weight on top of it. Even without the armor stand inside, all the pieces were mercilessly pushed down on the springs. However, even when sprawled out on the bed, each piece looked *majestic*. The gleam of the gold adornings reflecting against the sun was like gazing into a tiny piece of heaven. *This* was what he was hoping for his entire life.

The rush was so intense that he didn't even think of switching to more fitting clothes. Grabbing the chest plate and putting it above his head, he seamlessly squeezed into it. He shivered at the cold touch of the plating against his body. He vigorously rubbed his hands on the chest area, feeling the texture of the crest engraved onto the metal and excitedly trailing his palm so he could feel every millimeter of the carved decoration.

"Holy shit, it's so much better than shoddy recreations in museums!" Giggling like a love-struck high school girl, Griffin continued to revel in the feeling of wearing the chest plate. It was euphoric—thrilling—blissful. It was truly like opening a brand-new toy on Christmas. He could move effortlessly with it.

Quickly fiddling with the leather straps on the neck and back of the armor, Griffin quickly began securing the armor against his body. The sensation of the firm, hard yet ergonomic garb around his body made him swell with pride. Even if it was all in his head, Griffin had never felt such intense elation. He felt like he could do *anything* now that he was wearing it, the air brushing through the gaps between the chest plate and his body. "This was so worth it! I'm gonna wear this every day after work—"

OH, HOLY BRAVE WARRIOR OF MODERN TIMES. I WILL KNIGHT YOU IN A TIME MOST IMPORTANT.

The voice echoed in his head like the lingering ringing that would follow an explosion. He stumbled around the room, drunkenly waltzing through the floor as he tried to regain his

balance. The world spun around, everything turning blurry. The untethered elation finally reigned itself in as nausea began nesting in the back of his throat.

W-what the hell happened?! I was... Wearing the armor and...

His muscles flared up with adrenaline yet again, this time even more fiercer. His whole body was pushed into overdrive, blood violently flowing through veins like a tempestuous stream making its way through a creek. An intense electric current coursed through his frame, building into each individual line of muscle. Every crevice pulsated intensely, surging forward until the armor *clamped* against the surging biceps like a bear trap fastening against its prey.

“Crap!” His airflow stopped harshly. The only source of cooling was the natural frigid touch of metal against his body, and the chest plate was losing that trait quickly as his natural warmth spread against the metal. “W-what the... it wasn’t this tight. Did I trigger a mechanism or something?” The possibility of having bought something like an iron maiden in armor form passed his mind. The haunting possibility was horribly likely, considering the *plethora* of medieval torture devices sold at the Renn Fair as pricy collector’s items. “Okay, okay. Just breathe. I haven’t been skewered, so I probably haven’t triggered... whatever hidden blade is in there.” If there even was one, but he couldn’t risk acting like there wasn’t.

He tried to calm himself down as he stared at his chest and arms, trying to determine what exactly had caused the rapid spike in pressure. The voice... well, that was probably just his imagination. His brain was definitely playing tricks on him, because the more he tried to find the answer, the more ridiculous it sounded. He wasn’t actually being attacked, he just had to calm down.

Calm down. Breathe. Relax. In. Out.

He was just having a difficult time. That was all—

YOU MUST UNDERGO TRAINING. YOU HAVE ONLY STARTED.

The same invigorating candor erupted across his muscles. The taut sensation across his frame pushed forward, now directly rubbing against the metal. It squeezed his body mercilessly, squeezing every inch of his pulsating body. The rippling growth across his muscles could just barely be contained by the hard, iron shell. Like a beating heart, it surged rhythmically, only that instead of returning to its original size, it continuously expanded with each thump. Each growth left an even more intense ringing in his ear, overlaid on top of the already stinging pain of the voice’s assault on his mind.

This is real. Oh god.

He immediately tried unbuckling the straps on the back, yet his lumbering shoulders—once a mere tiny mound for joints and now broad spheres of pure muscle—prevented him from smoothly reaching his back as he did earlier. Looking at his arms, they weren’t doing him any favors either. The dainty, frail limbs that failed to carry the armor up the stairs earlier in the day were now monuments of rippling, defined muscle. The sight was so much to take that in an awe-inducted stupor, he felt like he needed to flex his arms just to check if they were real. It

was that same giddy excitement to try something new, yet twisted into something more... intoxicating—something worming its way into his brain, tickling his morbid curiosity.

A loud screeching sound filled the small room, as the steel plate strained against the sudden bout of pressure thrown back at it. It felt good, yet that stimulating rush of euphoria deepened the hole in his stomach. Something so impossibly fantastic that he couldn't even begin to fathom was afoot, and not even pure bliss could completely erase his unease.

“Woah, this is...” He shook his head, bringing some sense into himself. “This is definitely a curse! That fucking hag was a witch!” Griffin saw *red*. To have his love of armor twisted like that. Unforgivable! He raised his arms once again, and pushing past judgment or common sense, tried curving them towards his back once again. The strain immediately settled in, a stinging ache spreading across his body as the armor piece pushed back.

His arms burned like they were covered in hot, burning coal. He could do it—he had to. Griffin’s fingers twitched, readying themselves to grasp at the leather straps.

Griffin’s pectorals—seemingly turned firmer and plumper from the sensation of them rubbing against the chest plate—throbbed as the excess mass had nowhere else to go. The armor had filled out a few minutes ago, and the growing muscle was being mercilessly squeezed underneath.

Finally, as he continued flailing his arms around, he got a hit. Without a second thought, he pulled as hard on the band while trying to unbuckle it from the armor. It should’ve been an easy process... it would’ve been. It should’ve been. The strap was as hard as stone and heavy as the armor itself. Not only that, but it remained taut and tight in place, refusing to loosen its grip even slightly. He struggled, pulling desperately and using every last ounce of strength he could muster. Yet, in spite of every effort he put forth, the leather band refused to budge.

“God dammit! Why isn’t... What the FUCK?! What did I do to deserve this!”

And then, to compound on his already twisting stomach, Griffin heard his front door being unlocked. He stopped messing with the unmoving strap, paralyzed by a fear far more potent than the one belonging to a curse.

The fear of social humiliation.

I forgot to lock the fucking—

“Yo, Griffin! Did you *seriously* leave your door open again?”

Shit. Shitshitshit. Pushing his freedom into the back burner, Griffin clunkily turned around. He wrapped his hand around the doorknob, but before twisting it, he felt something wrong. It was like a strange omen passed through his chest like an actual gust of air, despite the fact that it should’ve been an impossibility. Then again, the *entire* ordeal was nonsensical.

“Helloooooo? Are you there, armor boy? You—holy *shit*! Is that a sword?!”

Turning around, the pieces of the armor had begun to float off the bed. The entire bottom half of the armor, pauldron, arms, gauntlets, and the helmet lingered with a ghastly miasma carrying them through the air.

He should've fought. He should've tried resisting. He should've tried *something*, but his mind simply wouldn't flare up with defiance. Helplessness had nested itself into his mind. As he stepped back, the armor clanked against the doorframe.

"Hello? Griffin, did I come in at a bad time?"

Ya *THINK!*?

They surrounded him, their shadow cast all over his increasingly hulking frame. Like a cornered animal that had nothing to lose, Griffin swung at the armor. He swung his right fist, but the corresponding armor parts swarmed it mercilessly.

"N-no, wait!"

The pauldron attached itself to the chest plate, surprisingly managing to perfectly fit onto his brawny shoulder. The arm plates and the gauntlets soon followed, forcing further growth in his arm. The weight imbalance of his already somewhat built left arm and the burgeoning right one made him tilt sideways, his plated palm pushing against the wall for support. "Nonono, stop!" He desperately grasped the gauntlets to push them away from his hands, but the gauntlets were equally firmly planted just like the leather band.

As he desperately pulled, he felt a knock on the door.

"I'M BUSY!" Griffin kept pulling and pulling. His already overworked arm muscles burned even more intensely, grunts as fierce as the one of a mindless beast joining the cacophony of the ceaseless armor clanking. "C-can you leave?! I'm busy with something right now!"

"Are you sure? You sound like you're going through something heavy..."

"N-nope!" He pushed harder against the door in case Carlos tried to open it. He moved his hand from the gauntlet to push against the door; a fatal mistake. The left arm set quickly swooped in to cover the limb in plated metal. "I-I'm fine, I'm fine! Totally fine!"

His legs trembled as the continuously swelling muscle mass on his body's upper half pushed down. He leaned in further against the wall, the pressure against his chest continuing to tighten. *Deep breaths. Breathe in, breathe out. Breathe—*

The sound of cracking wood pierced through the cacophony. Like a timbering log, the combined weight of the armor and himself crashed through the door. A deafening clangor echoed through the room as the armor *smashed* against the ground.

"Holy shit!" Carlos screamed, having just barely avoided Griffin's fall. "W-what... but you said that it wasn't a costume! And... what happened to you?!"

"I CAN EXPLAIN!" Griffin let out a whiny scream, face flushed and hot. His face shined with sweat that had built up from the intense heat, the metal plate around his body only *worsening* the suffocating warmth peering through the windows. "J-Just give me a minute! I can make everything make sense, just let me, uh... think of a way to explain—"

The two cuisses split in half. The hind parts *slammed* against the back of his legs, sending him tumbling forward, but just after he arched towards the floor, the other half came in soaring from behind, circling towards the front and clamping themselves across his legs to fully encase them in metal. Griffin immediately knew what was coming, but the foresight did nothing to prepare him for the revolting embarrassment crawling up his throat.

Carlos stepped back preemptively. "G-Griffin?"

"Just... don't be weird! It's not weird!" He moaned, readying himself for the bout of pressure to travel down his legs. The bony, weak limbs began to swell. His thighs and waist—the only parts besides his head that remained uncovered by plating—pushed against the fabric of his pants. They bulged out, stretching the denim to its limit almost immediately.

Griffin could feel the lower parts of his legs expanding without an end in sight, but it was another thing to see it firsthand. The way the creases accentuated his hulking frame drew Carlos' eyes to his girthy, muscled thighs made out of firm hard muscle that a bodybuilder would be jealous of; the worst-case scenario. He wanted nothing more than to crawl into the earth to avoid the shame. Even worse was to see that the sight wholly enraptured his neighbor. He looked transfixed, almost hypnotized by his legs, and the feeling of being gawked at like a trophy made him squirm.

"I-I didn't mean for this to happen! It just... it just did! Out of nowhere! It's insane!" He continuously waved his hands wildly as he explained, the armor jingling from the sudden bouts of movement. "It's a curse! You believe in curses, right?"

"I... I don't—"

Carlos stopped, his face contorted into a horrified grimace. He leaped to the side as he saw a soaring projectile launch from behind Griffin. He immediately sidestepped the flying helmet, just barely managing to avoid it, but the floating armor piece stopped dead in its tracks and shot straight at Carlos' head. It smashed into the man's head, sending him to the ground in one swift blow.

The sound of his body limply landing on the floor was deafening. Griffin stood paralyzed, mouth open as nothing but empty air went past it. The silence was mortifying. Carlos was breathing, but he was motionless.

Suddenly, a ghoulish cackle echoed from the hall. The silence would've been preferable to it. It carried nothing but euphoric malice, like the sound of the devil itself laughing at his misfortune. He already had a clear idea of what would lay behind the shadow of the hallway, but seeing the familiar figure of the shopkeeper crawl from the darkness and into his home still sent a shiver down his spine. Her appearance now looked less charmingly cookey and more like the spitting image of an evil witch.

“Seems like you’ve gotten accustomed to knighthood!” The woman’s voice was shrill, like an edited sound file made to sound far more high-pitched than it should be humanly possible. “I knew that I chose the right person to be my knight! You truly are the chosen one!”

“Y-YOU!” Griffin tried lunging at the witch, but the armor suddenly turned stiff, losing all movement and turning into a statue in the image of a knight’s armor. He couldn’t even take a step by the time the armor clamped up entirely around his body. Yet he pushed through the fear of paralysis, his fury still stoked. “Get me out of this thing *now*! I swear to god, I’m going to kill you!”

She wagged her finger—long, slender, and covered in spots with a *bizarrely* long fingernail at the top. “Seems like you still have some ways to go before you achieve true knighthood...” She tsk-tsked at him. “But I suppose I should’ve expected this. You still have some pieces of your armor missing!”

“No, nono! I want this thing *off*! NOW!”

Griffin’s petulant whines only served to appeal to her wicked sense of humor. She cackled gleefully, holding her hand against her stomach. Despite being so small, her entire posture and demeanor carried an air of absolute superiority. She held all the power, and she was very aware of that fact.

“Ah-ah-ah. One cannot be a true knight if they aren’t wearing the proper equipment.” She clasped her hands before performing a thundering clap. The shockwave shook the entire room, the armor further squeezing Griffin inside. “Dressup time’s over, youngin!”

Griffin put in his all. His body surged with vigor and adrenaline... only to get nothing more than a tiny budge that made the iron clank just slightly. That was all he could do. He could feel the faulds and crotch piece slowly inching closer. He wasn’t directly looking at it, but he could feel the creeping chill of the witch’s miasma slowly wandering toward him. It was like water slowly getting up to his neck—an inevitable fate.

“N-not there...” He pleaded, less out of a genuine attempt to salvage the situation but from a whimpering reaction now that couldn’t either fight or fly away from danger. “Please?”

Instead of slamming violently against his body just like the other armor parts, the crotch piece gently hovered towards its appropriate position. Griffin shivered as it embedded itself into the rest of the armor, fully completing the set sans the helmet. It was tighter than any other metallic piece, barely leaving any space for his junk and thighs to breathe. He desperately tried moving his arms. Griffin wasn’t even expecting to pry it open. The desperation had run so deep that he would kill for the chance to simply *adjust* the crotch piece slightly to give himself more room to move.

“Much better, you handsome lad!” The witch cheered, scurrying towards her knight and gleefully pulling on his flushed cheek like an obnoxiously affectionate aunt. “Feeling the surge of duty? Of honor? Of accepting your position as a thrall?”

“Never! I’d rather lose my money *and* the armor and not serve you, you weird woman! Get me out of here!” Griffin spat back, close to his breaking point. His voice quivered, shaky and scraggly. “Please, I didn’t even scam you!”

“One should always accept the call of adventure... but if you do not comply, I suppose that I could assist you in seeing things my way.” She wagged her finger, the helmet following her movements. She tilted it above Griffin’s head, gleefully smiling at her captive. “See you soon...”

“Wait, NO—”

She cut off Griffin’s speech mercilessly. The helmet slammed down onto his head, perfectly fitting around him. Immediately, a strange fog slowly began to envelop his mind. It was like an extinguisher had immediately put out the intense, fiery rage that had built up through the entire afternoon. At one moment, he was ready to scream his lungs out in defiance, and the next... it was like he had been dipped in soothing, calming water.

Wait, no... I can’t relax! I need to break free of this armor...

The tension around his muscles oozed out of them. His strong stance morphed into a slouched, relaxed posture. The relaxation forcefully wormed its way through his body. Griffin was trying his best to focus—pulling all his concentration on reminding himself of his stolen freedom, but every second, the task grew harder and harder. His attention was constantly pulled away from his mission... his mission...

My mission... what was his mission?

He carried conviction through his body. That part of his thoughts had remained untouched, but where that strong conviction was directed towards had begun to grow blurrier. It was something virtuous, something that was worth fighting for. Freedom! But freedom from what? Was something imprisoning him?

“Your armor looks quite good on you...” The witch gently reminded, running her hand down his plated chest.

MY armor?

Did he own the armor? He knew he was of humble origins. His house didn’t carry an excessive amount of riches like a king’s, so to own an armor like the one he was currently wearing seemed paradoxical. An impossibility! But he also knew well that he didn’t steal it. Someone like him would never resort to petty theft. He was *above* such disgusting, honorless behavior! Only an immoral cur would ever do something so foul!

“Ah, you’re confused... Guess I haven’t properly knighted you.” Rubbing her chin, she then took a warbly stick out of her coat pocket. “Come down, will ya?”

The armor clunked loudly as his body and the armor both positioned themselves in accordance with the witch’s words. He didn’t even know how or why he felt compelled to do such a thing.

The only thing he could pick up on from his actions was that they felt *right*. Putting his knee against the floor, and bowing down to the woman talking to him... it made his body surge with satisfaction. He even shivered from the sudden thrill, the feeling so potent.

What... is this? Who is she? Who... Am I?

"Ah, that's much better. You look rather dashing in that armor, even better when like this!" The woman said through yet another cackle. She brandished the stick, purple energy emanating from the tip. "Now, to knight you properly..." Slowly, she lowered the wand toward the knight's head. It made a slight 'clink' when the tip brushed against the metal. "...Sir Griffin."

A rush of adrenaline befell the knight. Just like being talked to by his mistress lowered him into an intense sense of easiness comparable to water, the recognition of his knightly vow was like being forcefully taken out of that peaceful state. He stood up sharply, saluting by jamming his gauntlet-clad hand against his forehead in a proud salute.

"Thank you, Madam!" Griffin said—No. That wasn't his proper name anymore. *Sir Griffin* exclaimed in a loud, booming voice. His tone had morphed into something far deeper, assertive, and masculine. There was no fear, shame, or submission of any kind left in his brain. His new muscled frame wasn't a source of embarrassment but a great achievement of his after years of training to be a proper knight. Only men that were properly strong could ever hope to achieve such a title, and he found himself incredibly lucky to be one of the few that could. "Whatever are we doing in this abode? Is this... my house?"

"Yes, but we must not waste any time." The witch teased, trying to hide her giddy excitement. "After all, the *renn fair* will be leaving soon. We must hurry!"

"I'm very sorry for the delay, ma'am! But, there's one thing we should do before leaving..." Looking down at the unconscious man sprawled out on the floor, Sir Griffin pressed his thumb against the chin of his helmet. "Whatever should we do with him? I do not mean to speak over you, but I cannot abide leaving an innocent in harm's way. What if this man needs proper medical attention?"

At first, the witch couldn't care less. She had successfully gotten the knight she had been seeking for a long time. The screaming and rattling surely must've gotten the attention of someone. Hassling herself with dead weight would've just gotten her into trouble... that was what she thought at first, but as she gawked at the unconscious man, a delectable idea came to view.

"Well, you surely require a squire, don't you, Sir Griffin?" She asked inquisitively.

"Oh, indeed I do!" He enthusiastically cheered. "Ah, how I long to impart some knightly values onto someone else! We are in dire need of men willing to get themselves in some armor and learn how to fight!"

"Well, I think that we have found you a future recruit..." Twirling her wand, the witch began to envelop Carlos' unconscious body in her purple miasma. The man slowly rose into the air, levitating towards her. "We'll get him suited up once we get him. How does that sound?"

“An excellent proposition, ma’am!”

“That’s what I like to hear, Sir Griffin...”

Passing through the doorway with her knight and potential squire in tow, the witch smiled to herself. The scent of magic—sweet if not a little overwhelming—lingered in the air as they left Griffin’s house forever, embarking on a quest for new knightly vows on the horizon. She fiddled with her wand, ecstatic to repeat the same process in the town next to this one.