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How Khorya and Borya Trafficked a Chort

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— For fuck's sake... bastards... — mumbled Khariton, a stocky, shaggy and bearded ginger bloke with a long bestial scar across his face. Dangling his feet, chewing a straw, with a flask, a dagger and a loaded shotgun beside him, he sat in the horse-drawn cart stuck in the traffic jam on the bridge over a ravine. Khariton peeked over the bend and saw countless carts, some carriages and stagecoaches, one motorcar (bloody fumer), pedestrians, lurking among the vehicles, militia patrols keeping it all in vague order; in the distance – people swearing at each other, struggling to free the way by turning one large cart that blocked it, transversally – all jammed like it's the bloody exodus or a sales day. He looked down the road's edge near him, swallowed, and sneezed, losing the lousy balance of his position to gravity and almost falling off his cart. Downwards, dozens of metres or more, polishing the black stones, splashing, gurgling, the river murmured. Khariton felt dizzy, closed his eyes, turned around, leaned against the cart's side, and looked at the large chest behind him, padlocked, and wheeled for transportation conveniences.

— Wunst upon a time, I had a hustle in that bloody cold place called Tulubaika, there, — Khariton started his story, pointing to the forest, a

dense fence of tall birches, their golden crowns merging together, fighting for the reign over the pastel blue firmament. In response, a series of thuds sounded from inside the chest. — Hush! Quiet there! Lemme finish me story and then tha can litter t'air with thy dutty words again.

— Let me out, you bearded cunt! I'm thirsty! — sounded a nasty hoarse voice.

Khariton grabbed the chest by the handle and pulled closer.

— Cunt on me again and I'll...

— Cunt, cunt, cunt! You bearded cunt, you've mistaken me for someone else. For the hundredth time, LET-ME-O...

Pulling the chest closer, Khariton pounded his fist on it. — Hush! Folks here ain't nesh. A yabberinn chest won't surprise 'em either. Can tha hear t'water murmurinn beneath? Un moor peep, and I'll set thee on a few seconds flight to say "hey up" to 'em stones. Nice fellas, they are – chill, serious, harrrd. Tha'll bloody love 'em. — Khariton sighed tiredly. — And fuck t'reward, — added he, leaning closer to the chest. — Is that clear, lad?

Silence. Khariton patted the chest, turned around, rubbed his nose.

— Good lad... — said he, and indulged in a savoury sneeze, spattering a generous amount of snot around, then uncorked his flask. — Right. So, wunst upon a time, I worked in Tulubaika, servinn as a night watch

guard. Couple months ago it was. — Khariton paused to sip from the flask and grimaced. — Can't remember, lad. I was guardinn them sheep, a right good flock of furry bastards. Then, one bloody cold, coldblooded morning we noticed two of 'em went missing from t'flock. Poof! Disappeared, imagine those bastards! It didn't take long for us to realise that one sneaky creature, who was hidinn in t'forest during t'daylight, had robbed us of two horned pets entrusted to meself. See, t'night before, I was sittinn by t'fire, wholly holly-golly warm inside out: heart, soul, and arse – all that, first suppinn, then burpinn and fartinn with flammable substances together with me comrade – a wretch'n'twat, as it turned out. t'Creature had encroached upon our possessions, and Maria, oh, Maria, me magnificent mistress, had instructed Boris (that twat) and me to deal with that fearsome feral bastard and... Ahh... Shan't this deed pave a path for me to her fervent heart! Aye! — said Khariton, basking in engorging memories of callipygian shapes.

— He-he! — laughed the chest.

— What's funny, lad? — said Khariton, and spilt some liquid from the flask onto the chest. It seeped through the thin gaps between the boards and rained inside. — Here, tha's welcome, thirsty little bastard! Cheers!

— Fuck! What I lacked here was a bearded cunt pissing on me. No courage, no honour, you, fucking dimwit!

— Oi! What tha called piss?

— Ha! You've just called it so yourself!

Pulling the dagger, Khariton plunged it deep into one of the chest lid's gaps so that whoever was inside it hurried to dodge the weapon, twitch, and adopt the silence.

— Bloody smartarse bastard... — said he, dissatisfied. The silence, weirdly, was eerie. The least Khariton wanted now was to ruin his quest. — Is tha still alive out there, aye, lad? — asked Khariton, and sneezed again. He took a garlic clove from his pocket and ate it.

— Your knife is shite, too!

— Aye, alive then. Anyhow... Listen... I'm narratinn... Me magnificent Maria ordered me to obtain some head of t'nightly beast, and Boris, that wretch'n'twat, came with me. He said he had courage, a trap, a shotgun, and steel axes – perfect instruments to beat t'livinn bastard shite out of t'feral beast. So I trusted him and we went to wait for t'beast in t'forest. Bloody freezinn it was (Khariton sneezed), and we thought: let's wrap ourselves in some warm fur coats, sit down and wait, and Borya was like, "I'm gonna go and bring us some warm fur coats and ammo, I forgot t'ammo," and went away. Now, I don't know if he had t'courage or mayhap he didn't — I'm not sure here, and I'm not sure about t'coats either, because somehow, whether he had t'courage or not, that bastard didn't come back and left me standinn in t'blizzard without guns or coats, freezinn me hairy arse off — just like if I was a total twat, too, not able to understand a damn thing (he sneezed). Ain't I right?

The absence of sounds from the chest was bloody annoying.

— Oi, lad, is tha still there? Ain't I right, I'm sayinn?

— Right about what? — said the chest, wryly.

— That twat. See, what tha sees doesn't always match what t'other man's tongue wiggles to thee. An experienced and mature man would believe his own eyes more, except beinn drunk mayhap, and t'fact that tha's some kind of a midget and not a chort, I won't believe whatever shite tha pours into me ears from thy filthy mouth!

— THEN OPEN THE FUCKING CHEST AND SEE ME YOURSELF, YOU CUNT!

— Nah, if I unlock it, that'll break out and cripple everyone 'round here, mayhap even murder. That's what t'client told me. Does tha think I'm daft? Does tha take me for an idiot? Everyone knows t'only thing more deceitful and menacinn than a chort is a militiaman in un of 'em drunken stupors.

— LET! ME! OUT!

Here, another amply hairy bloke approached Khariton's cart from the front. He had nothing interesting in his appearance apart from bright blue eyes, raven hair with silver linings, a shrivelled and frayed beard and moustache, a blissfully stupid grin, protruding ears, and a big bag made of an old sack.

Khariton noticed him and cheered in relief.

— Huh! Here comes t'courier!

Howbeit, once Khariton looked into the courier's face, his cheerful mood evaporated. He took his flask and threw it into the courier, shouting:

— Oi, tha, wretch'n'twat! — Khariton jumped off the cart and pummelled the courier.

He groaned and hit back.

— Oi! Stop that, bastards, I have no time for you, — shouted one of the militia, a Zmei, which is a hefty anthropomorphic lizard, large tail, emerald scale, teeth, those dreadful teeth, crescent eyes, golden, clear, full ammunition, causing attrition of trust, tightening rectal fear, as he strolled near the conflicting hooligans. Khariton and the courier heard him and, ruffled and alerted, noted and obeyed the order, retreating to Khariton's cart.

— Is tha out of thy mind, lad? — asked the courier.

— Don't recognise me, eh, Boris, tha bastard?

— Ah, Khorya! — said Boris, squinting. — Tha alright? I see time hasn't been particularly kind to thee.

— Tha's t'reason for that, traitor.

Khariton knocked Boris on the head, rather friendly. Boris shoved him back. The Zmei militia busted them up again.

— I said stop that right now!

They nodded in response, clenching their lips, shivers running across their hairy backs. Khariton climbed up to his wagon, and sneezed again, blowing snot and drooling conically.

— Still sulkinn, ain't tha, lad? Maria refused to give me t'fur coats, sayinn she's "no charity and they aren't reserved for twats". Instead, she told me to seek 'em... well, in t'village, — said Boris, climbing up the cart and placing himself near Khariton. — So, I went to Tulubaika and drank meself to sleep (he paused). Wait, did tha stay in t'forest all that time?

Angry Khariton only muttered in return.

— Ha-ha-ha! — laughed Boris. — Why?

— He-he-he! — laughed the chest, hysterically. — To freeze his hairy arse off, of course! He-he-he!

Khariton slammed the chest.

— Boris, you're the first bearded twat that could cheer me up like that! I'm spinning in this pissed coffin, getting colics in my guts, literally am.

— Me pleasure, Chest, — said Boris and saluted, then, whispering,

added. — So, Khorya, tell me, is it that most wanted chort? Fer real? — He took a folded sheet of paper out of his bag and handed it to Khariton. On it, there was painted a menacing, hellish creature, a dark woolly man with red eyes, horns and hooves and a tail, absolutely fucking criminal.

— Aye, but t'bastard says he ain't no chort but a midget. Just like us, but a lil'lad.

— Midget? Wait, hasn't tha seen him thyself?

Khariton shrugged.

— I understand that you brave lads were born somewhere in a ditch in the arse end out of the womb of a mother enthusiastically consuming snuff, both are good fellas, to and fro, but this is still humiliating and insulting when you use the word "midget". Do you know we aren't comfortable with such an attitude? To say the least!

— Insulting that I use t'word "midget", midget? — said Boris. — I'll be rewarded one hundred lucres for thy midget head and I'm gonna use t'word midget unless all t'midgets grow up by at least a span! Shove thy semantics up thy midget arse.

— Ain't there a menacing chort in any quiet midget anyway, huh? — said Khariton.

— True that, comrade.

— I'm not a chort! And I'm not menacing! You two fucking bigots!

— Well, then let's open and find out, — said Boris.

— To open him, we first need to open t'chest, — said Khariton, grudgingly, sending the chest into a burst of chuckles, — and I ain't doinn that, I have plans for me life: I'm gonna sink in samogon today, so open t'chest thyself if tha doesn't wanna enjoy thy twatful existence any more.

— Wouldn't say any shorty, chort or not, could be dangerous, though. Not for me at least! — Boris jiggled the lock and lid of the chest, peered through the gap where the dagger still protruded, saw nothing recognisable, and sniffed. — Smells like... well, piss, like they're supposed to smell, aye? We'll go on with that!

— I told you! He-he-he!

Scowling and sulking, Khariton hung the shotgun on his shoulder, climbed over to the chest, grabbed it and commenced wheeling it out of the wagon, sneezing now and then.

— Where is tha off to, comrade? — asked Boris.

— I've been gettinn jerked here since noon and already heard plenty of drebbeden leakinn from his bastard mouth. I'm gonna drop him down t'cliff and look for lucres elsewhere.

— Oi-eh! Tha's gonna do what, comrade? It's me hundred lucres right

here, in this chest, and tha's gonna throw 'em away, aye?

— Aye, tha bets I am! Tha owes me for me physical sufferinn... (scratching his scar) and a fortune for failures in me personal life (sneezing)... See? — said Khariton, pulling the chest further.

— Just leave this midget to me if tha doesn't want t'lucres.

— Oi! Dwarfs, people with dwarfism, little people, not midgets! Remember, you, ignoramus? — shouted the chest, preparing to giggle.

— What did tha just say? Teachinn me here, ain't tha, midget? — said Boris. — Tha is me hundred lucres, I'll call thee whatever I like.

— t'Midget is right, Borya. Tha's an igarames, tha's talkinn 'bout a hundred but tha owes me thirty, which means tha must get a hundred plus thirty, which makes one hundred thirty lucres for t'job, then thirty to me, which respectively makes one hundred and sixty, to have a profit out of this bloody business.

— Yes, elementary arithmetic operations. Did you think a beard would make you a fucking Pythagoras?

Khariton kicked the chest and, having pulled the wagon's ramp, rolled it down without sparing. Boris chased him and gripped the chest by the other side, dragging it towards himself.

— Stop! Or I'm gonna drop THEE down t'cliff, Khorya!

— I counted one hundred sixty lucres, we can split it equally, tha gives me seventy and we're even, — Khariton said, which immersed the chest into a peal of hysterical stuttering diaphragmal sounds.

— Fuck thee and thy seventy lucres, bastard! — exclaimed Boris and swung on Khariton.

The Zmei militia saw him and growled:

— Oi! If you lot start a fight again, I'll charge you five lucres each, and one more lucre per every one of my lads on t'road. Understood?

— Understood, commander.

— Right. What are you hidinn in t'trunk from me? Traffikinn illegal animals, aye?

Khariton instinctively covered the chest with himself and gulped some emptiness. He glanced at Boris whose response was the same.

— Ghm... Aaa.. This... — mumbled Khariton and sneezed.

— Na-a-a-h, we're just traffikinn a chort, commander, — said Boris, waving his hand dismissively.

Dumbfounded, the Zmei went silent for a few moments, but then, suddenly, he burst out in a loud lizardy laugh, screechy and wheezing. Khariton and Boris exchanged confused glances again, scratched their napes, squeezing a little bit of nervous chuckle, and exploded with

laughter, too.

— Huh, you're funny, humans! I give you that. But... — the Zmei stopped, wiping tears, — you're makinn a lot of noise. I don't like noise. Last warning, then, remember: five lucres and one for each of us here. If you don't have it, you're not passinn through t'bridge. Clear?

— Aye-aye, commander...

Khariton and Boris nodded, the militia left, the chest "woke up" again, and whoever was there started knocking on the lid with increasing frequency. The hoarse voice started moaning from the inside.

— What a mess you fellas have made here... Was I not clear or something? Don't you understand me, don't you understand him? COMMANDER! I'M NOT A CHORT, I'M A DWARF! CAN'T YOU RECOGNISE A KINSMAN! CAN'T YOU SEE I'M SUFFERING HERE IN PAIN AND AGONY! THERE'S NOT ENOUGH AIR! NOTHING TO DRINK, ONLY DROPS OF YOUR PISS SAMOGON! DO YOU WANT TO KILL A DWARF? WILL YOUR CONSCIENCE BEAR IT, BASTARDS? DUMB AND DUMBER, YOU FUCKING LOONIES, FUCKING CHAUVINISTS WITH ONE BRAIN FOR TWO!

Confused, Khariton and Boris scratched their napes again, and synchronously shrugged.

— Khariton, tha knows, t'client won't pay me for a midget. There's a

chort on t'picture.

— No way, I'm not gonna open it. Tell me, can't tha read? "Extremely dangerous!" Ah, tha bastard... how much lucres does tha need to be happy?

— And samogon?

— And samogon, aye, sure thing.

— I don't know. Hard question.

— Is it more than thy twatful life, Boris? I know what fightinn t'feral bastard is like (he pointed at his scars and sneezed)... I ain't doinn that again.

— Then how should I know it's our chort. How do I know it's not a midget, really?

— I'm a dwarf, for fuck's sake, my name is Athanasios.

— A? Atha-what? — Boris tried to clarify.

— Call me Athanasios.

— Where?

— "Where"?!

— Shite, lad, I don't understand what tha's chirpinn about.

— He's sayinn his name is Athanasios.

— Oi-eh, got it! I ain't here to solve puzzles, aye?

— ATHANASIOS! IT'S MY NAME, YOU, CUNT! — the chest started sobbing, vanquished by the desperateness and stupidity of the situation.

Khariton kicked the chest, saying: — Oi, stop that! Why is tha cryinn?

— What do you think? BECAUSE SOMEONE IS GOING TO DROP ME OFF THE BRIDGE! — shouted Athanasios, moaning.

— Why is tha such a twat, Khariton? Tha's made t'dwarf cry. I can't believe me own eyes!..

— Nowt dwarf about him! He's a chort! I can't believe me eyes this is happeninn either!

— Well, if it fits into a chest like a dwarf, sounds like a dwarf, then it's probably a dwarf, doesn't tha reckon?

— Aye, or a bloody chort!

— I'm gonna cry more, I'm gonna cry, yes. Believe your cunt eyes and open the chest! — said the chest and submerged into artful sobbing. Khariton shook his head, readjusted his shotgun, and dragged the chest further to the road's edge.

— Tha not throwinn me gold down t'fuckinn pit, bastard! — resented

Boris and grabbed the chest, pulling it backwards.

— Tha's on his side!

— Just bring this chest to your client, and get your bloody lucres. — said Athanasios. — You will be surprised by the face of another fat bearded cunt when instead of a chort he gets a dwarf! Well, who would put a dwarf inside a chest, if not a complete fucking sadist cunt? Or are you one of those fucking arseholes who think they are superior to those who are smaller?

— Well, in general, aye, — said Boris.

— Sometimes, I just don't understand thee, Boris. Tha's either fuckinn mental or fuckinn genius. I don't know which's worse! Don't wanna pay — I'll drop him from t'bridge and get it over with.

— You cannot just kill a dwarf. It's a hate crime!

— Tha's just an extra load, whoever tha is. A bloody talkinn chest!

— An extra load? No one has ever treated me like that! Only you, cunts! Do you know how many find it funny that little people need to prove their courage and bravery? Do you know how many think that it's fine to joke with us? Even if I were a chort, would I deserve to BE LOCKED IN A CHEST? I just want to get out of here. But in the end? I am depressed! — Athanasios cried, gasping.

— Stop playinn innocent here! Tha's a hellish creature!

Boris rushed forward and snatched a hanging key from Khariton's belt.

— Oi! — shouted Boris in response. — Stop, don't do it!

Boris inserted the key into the padlock. Khariton aimed the shotgun at Boris.

— Tha's not doinn that!

— I am. What if he's really a midget, pardon, a dwarf?

— And tha believes him? Do I have to shoot thee to keep tha from doinn summat stupid? It says, "extremely dangerous". Holy gods!

— Hey! I'm not dangerous, I'm a dwarf, and your gods, by the way, the greatest shite of all times, Khariton. The longer I'm inside, the more I look through the gaps and observe what's happening around me, and eventually, I have nothing to do but admit that something is really fucked up in this world.

— Shut up, tha bugger!

— Would tha agree, Boris? Something is definitely off here.

— Well, in general, aye, — said Boris, nodding in affirmation, and turned the key. Immediately, Khariton aimed his shotgun at him.

— Step back! — said Khariton, going around Boris.

— Calm down, comrade.

— I ain't calminn down if tha ain't stoppinn thy treason again!

— Wait, what if he IS a chort? Chorts can make wishes come true, knew that? Why give it to some fat bearded cunt which isn't tha? We open t'chest and wish for all we want: lucres, samogon... Maria's heart?

— Aye, I see, I see now. Tha fuckinn scheming bastard! If tha doesn't step back, thy fat arse's wish for buckshot will come true!

Boris ignored him and continued to rattle the key in the lock.

— I've got t'fastest hands 'round here. If he tries to flee, I'll catch. No worries. Or mayhap does tha have a rope?

— If tha doesn't mind, please, tell me, is everything alright in thy twat's head, aye? First, tha says he's a midget. Then tha says he's a dwarf. Now tha says he's a chort. Make up thy mind, shan't tha?

— Well, better to consider all options, aye?

— Holy fuck...

— Ps-s-s! Don't listen to this drunkard with a frostbitten arse, — said Athanasios.

Attempts to unlock the chest were futile — either Boris was dumb, or the lock was hard, or both.

— Oi, Khorya, did I snatch t'right key? It doesn't give in.

— Boris, keep up the good work, — said Athanasios, — this might become the beginning of a marvellous friendship.

— Last warning, Bo... — Khariton was going to say “Boris”, but interrupted and prepared to sneeze, thoroughly.

As the clown music started playing in the background much louder than before, his whole body trembled, his fingers twitched, and he burst with snot and drool. Then a gunshot rang out, leaving a smoky cloud. A few droplets of blood sprinkled from Boris’s butt onto the chest. The militia buzzed in the distance and hurried to the incident, slowly getting through the traffic jam. Horses around stirred, swaying the carts. Athanasios squealed. Khariton’s jaw chose the downward direction, hair on his arse stood on end, as he lost all movement abilities upon realising what had happened.

Boris, wiping Khariton’s drool off himself, exclaimed:

— Oi, lad! What t’fuck! Tha’s drooled me all over! — Then he, feeling some minor pain pulsing in his arse (the shot only went off on a tangent, mainly hitting the chest), raised his eyes to Khariton, and added, — Tha’s almost shot me arse off!

— Ay-ay-ay-ay-ay! I’m sorry, comrade, it was... by accident. Does it hurt?

— Hurt?! What does tha think, bastard?!

Khariton stared at the shotgun and, terrified of where technological

progress had brought them and how dangerous that coldblooded thing was in his hands, shuddered and dropped it.

It shot again and hit the padlock.

— You, bastard! — shouted Boris and charged at Khariton, pummelling him in the face, and pushed him onto the road. They clung to each other and immersed in the duo of fierce frenzy, pulling, hitting, kicking, groaning and growling. The world around disappeared: the road, the river, other carts, the militia, even the chest and its content did not matter anymore. A chort or a dwarf inside, locked or unlocked, open or closed, who cared? There was only the fight, just like in a kabak in the good old days. Khariton managed to stand up on his feet, bellowed bestially and attacked Boris, smacking his comrade with one large fist after another. Now Boris reeled back, stumbled and fell onto the chest. It turned over onto its lateral side, and the broken padlock fell off.

The chest opened and from there crawled a dark woolly anthropomorphic creature with little horns, a hairdo à la Capoul, dressed in a tattered suit.

— Wait! Look! It's a chort! For real! — shouted Boris. They stopped fighting and stared at the chort, both flapping their eyes as wide as a lucre coin of the largest denomination.

Athanasios looked at Khariton and Boris with his red eyes, smirked, sent them an air kiss, and, his hooves clattering and his arrowhead tail waggling, leaning down, disappeared into the labyrinth of carts and

carriages.

At that moment, the militia appeared, two of them, including the Zmei, and pulled the hooligans aside.

— Who shot?! — The Zmei poked Khariton in the back, bending him down to his knees.

— Eghm, a gun, commander, — said Boris, alerted, staring at Khariton.

The Zmei pondered for a moment, puzzled, widening his lizard eyes, and added:

— And who held t'gun?

— Nobody, commander. It shot by itself. Here it is, lyinn still, a vicious thing.

— What does tha mean, "by itself"?

— Life's a gamble, a gun is a gun, — said Boris, shrugging.

— Aye, I've always said so, — said Khariton, nodding.

The Zmei sniffed the air: it reeked of deception. He noticed the opened chest.

— What was inside?

— A chort, commander. He's just fled! — said Khariton.

— A chort?

— Aye, a chort, t'bastard must've enchanted t'gun! — said Boris. — Vicious creature.

The Zmei looked at them, squinting his crescent eyes. He paused for a moment, and then nodded to the two militia just as the third one approached the accident.

— Seize both! Take 'em with me! — the Zmei ordered and waved somewhere forward. — A chort, ha-ha! — he chuckled, shaking his head.

Khariton and Boris, their hands behind their backs, followed him, getting poked now and then.

— Our lucres are lost because of thee, bastard, — said Boris. He looked disappointed as if the whole world's supply of flammable, gut- and soul-warming liquids had ceased to exist in one moment.

— Come on, Boris. Camaraderie before lucres, aye? And it was bloody fun.

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Beelzebufo, The Annihilator Of Dinosaurs

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