

“Back again? I thought I told you it would be foolish to return to these lands, oh heir to the throne.” A rumbling voice scoffed from inside his cave as the dragon who owned it gaged that the clanking metal of armour had drawn close enough that the delegation would hear him.

Karotras had claimed this valley, the fact that it was on the maps as part of a kingdom already meant nothing to him. Their offer of alliance had been something he’d listened to until the terms became clear; they would welcome him if he were to play the part of steed for the kingdom’s crown prince.

He had snorted his derision yet kept himself barely civil, for any alliance to be reached he would need equal power, not become a subservient *pet*. He’d mockingly told them to only come back if a proposal of marriage was on the table.

The stomp of heavy boots stopped, none drawing close enough to enter the cave. Instead silence stretched on. With an irritated huff the dragon stood, stretching out his powerful limbs before striding into the light.

The glint of overly polished armour made him wince as he stepped loose, as well as made him overlook the large contraption that had sounded to him like just another royal cart.

“Loose!” Came an order from among the gathered troops. A loud snap of a firing machine preceded a shadow that fell upon him, a snaring weight, like a net but with fabric beneath the strands, knocked him to the ground.

“Mmgh! What is this?!” The dragon demanded, voice muffled by the cloying material that tangled his wings and held his form down.

“Advance!” The same ordering voice came. Armoured figures swiftly circled the dragon who took in a huge breath of air before trying to loose it as fire. The material resisted the flame, forcing the fire to flick along the dragon’s own body and out through the holes in the ground. He was rewarded with one yelping squeal from someone’s legs getting too much heat. “Bring the healers up.” They replied, having accounted for that, too.

“Release me at once!” The dragon yelled, his voice echoing around his head. The attackers were not dissuaded, heavy stabbing sounds of metal hitting earth filled the air as they drove spikes through the net. “No!” Karotras yelled in defiance, trying to strain.

“See, there, more pins!” A second voice commanded. The battalion were quick to remove all slack, stabbing far enough away that they avoided the dragons’ body and thus stayed out of potential harm, his claws already fumbling and useless, his breath skirted around as they left a corner of the net untethered, shepherding the flame out harmlessly.

Smaller weights pushed on him as some of the entourage climbed over his frame, he felt them crawling between his shoulders and up his arms, trying to shrug and thrash to shake them away. “Get off me you brazen beasts, I will rip you all apart!”

Two figures sat near his neck, one pushed up from below then between the three of them a strong metal clasp was snapped in place around the dragon's throat and over the bagging net stretching the fabric so that it was taut against his snout, brow and horns.

More stabs in the fabric pinned his legs, tail and haunches individually while more pressure grew around his front half, not just from the stabs, they must have been carrying heavy weights to throw too.

"Did you hear me?! Get off I said!" The dragon continued to bellow. One of the net-ropes was tugged back tightly and then pinned, roping behind his lips along the jawline before a hand traced the top of his face. A sharp blade pressed in then, too short and blunt to worry his scales but enough to cut into the leathery fabric. They sliced out a panel, revealing the dragon's eyes while leaving the rest of him covered and weighted. None of them so much as replied, their eyes and faces set with determined resolve; soldiers on orders.

The first voice who had issued the quick brusque commands stood up to her full height, an equine muzzle crested with a horn- though the dragon soon saw it was just ornamental, added to her helmet. They wore emblems similar to the soldiers that had come with the presumptuous prince before yet there was something different.

"Make way for her highness, Princess Farica Beaumont." As the presumed officer spoke, several figures stepped aside. The parted view let the dragon spy the one knight he'd burned, though his satisfaction fell as he saw the healer at their side, already numbing the pain. It might not even scar.

"So this is the lizard my brother wanted?" A delicate voice spoke, though there was nothing demure about the snide smirk on the fox's face. Princess Farica wore a fanciful and well tailored dress under the contrasting long, heavy gloves and an apron of the same fabric that webbed the netting.

"Hmph! If you think such a diminutive insult will rattle me, especially when delivered behind an army, you are as proud a fool as your sibling." He shot back.

"Hold your vile tongue!" The captain shouted, though Farica simply laughed, covering her mouth.

"Oh good, he does have spirit, hopefully you'll last a good long while." She said, striding closer.

"Your highness!" One guard said in concern as she stepped right up to him, setting her hand on his snout.

His eyes glowed angrily, he was tempted to belch as much fire as he could, to roast this woman to ashes, yet he knew if he did his foes would have a reason not just to humiliate him but to execute him on the spot.

“Let me guess, I didn’t choose to debase myself, so you’re making a big show to put me in my place and drive me off.”

“To put you in your place, certainly. Perhaps that means prison, after all you are an intruder in our realm. Not only that, you spurned the lofty position of being a royal mount. As such my dear elder brother handed you over to me.” She said, making him growl and push with his head, though the dampening sheet held him still.

“Handed me, as if he had any say in it.”

“Oh you do make a good point, dragon. Allow me to rephrase, he gave up his pursuit which meant he was out of my way.”

“What does that mean?” He demanded.

“Guardsmen, do get him prepared for our little trip to the paddocks.” The princess said, moving to his side and brushing his shoulders through the net.

“Enough of this charade!”

But they ignored him, stepping forward, laden with something heavy and curved. A muzzle, which they slid over his snout, it compressed the fabric to an intense press, forcing the dragon’s jaw to stay shut, his eyes widened as he growled, yet once it had past his lips, it pressed too securely for him to even speak through the side of his mouth!

“Mmmh! MMmmhmm nhhhgm!” He growled.

“It’s no charade. As you guessed my brother would want to drive you off but I... I think you might make a delightful steed, or perhaps an even better little pet.” Farica said in a near whisper, filling Karotras with rage.

The knife-wielder from earlier ducked back to his princess’ side, bobbing his head in subservience as he took the blade to the ropes around the dragon’s head. The muzzle was positioned to pin the flame-suppressing fabric underneath it. With that done he cut below the metal collar.

More figures worked with him, severing certain panels of the cloth to gain access without giving the dragon freedom.

The length of his arm would have set his shoulder at the height of her face if he was let to stand, yet subdued as he was he could barely jostle her. Those arms were also receiving attention. Long reinforced sleeves, the inside toughened to resist the limited range his claws would have, were dragged over his powerful arms then clasped in place with more metal. Pouches at the end blocked his claws, giving just enough room for him to place the heel of each foot on the ground. Unsurprisingly they carried more of the same sleeves to his legs, locking away his limbs.

“You’ll be coming back with me, little dragon. You’ll *wish* you’d gone with my brother, at least at first but I promise I’ll make you feel so fulfilled. I give all my pets the very best care.”

“Grrh! Nhhh mhhhhph!” He snarled back.

“My my, quite the temperament.” She mocked.

The captain of the guard had stepped forward, a heavy key in hand as she latched the metal band at his neck and on each of the sleeves, locking each one in turn. She held the key to her princess in both hands, though Farica turned her head, waved her hand in a gesture and simply said. “Do it.”

The captain stood to attention and nodded, placing the key on a stone before drawing her warmaul. Karotras stared in shock as the woman brought it down, shattering the avenue to freedom in front of his eyes. “Mnnnh!!!”

While his eyes fixed on the fragments in disbelief, the princess took one more accessory, a wide eye-level strap with a pair of shaded lenses. She tugged it around Karotras’ head, buckling it in place moments before the dragon snapped out of his shock into renewed tugs and flailing resistance. “Mmmh, mhmhha! Ghh hwhhhh!”

“Hush, or we’ll break the key to your muzzle too.” Farica threatened, knowing full well that even if she did that just meant greater inconvenience when they inevitably did have to remove the thing.

He let out a louder growl, glaring through the lenses at her. A few cuts were made to the netting before some of the pinning and weighty parts were lifted from the ground. He lurched to his feet, just as his captors wanted.

Instead of having him plastered to the ground by the net they pulled the cut pieces underneath his body, pulling tight to keep his wings flat against his back. The rest of it still hung in tangling confusion so that if he tried to move fast or erratically he would just trip over himself.

Farica chuckled as rose to straddle the dragon’s neck, hands holding onto the straps while her legs pushed against him. Too weighted down to really try to buck or throw her off. The guards moved to the wagons they’d brought with them, clipping strong tethers to the front of Karotras’ collar and at the net, forcing him to walk or be dragged.

The vulpine princess smiled as they strode off. “I hope you enjoy your training gear, we won’t be adjusting most of it until you’ve decided your role, this layer of glass, for example, will be a constant reminder of our control. I wonder whether you’ll choose to obey or resist, though either end suits me. Now,” she lifted her head to address the guard. “Take us to the paddock.”

Karotras growled out again. The threats, the humiliation and the insult of it all, if he clawed free he would wreak horrible vengeance on this entire blood-line. Though that all assumed he could escape before they fashioned an even worse outfit for him to endure...