

Resound Act 1 - Party Monster

By Bartan Tirix

Chapter 0

The early morning came brightly, but with a thick pink sky. Creating a near wall of what appeared to be a painting along the clouds, the brighter hue on top of what was a deep navy in the distance. And where the wind was coming from, making its way into the mouth of the cave and filling it with the scent of incoming rain.

Within, one of the dragons grumbled while the other chuckled. A white and a copper, both wyrms slumbering on a large pile of treasure while spooning. Even within the female's full embrace; wings and a coiled thick tail, Jyrn just could not get warmed up by those metallic scales. Sending a shiver through her pale body and feel a teasing lick against her neck as those white scales clicked. "Guess we're not doing anything outside today."

"I never knew it to be so cold here..." Another grumble, causing Travv'esa to smirk at the smaller one's complaint. "We're not that high up, why...?" The sentence was interrupted by a yawn.

"It's just the seasons changing, I believe."

"This early? It feels like the summer just started."

"Yeah, several weeks ago." A nuzzling tease as Jyrn shivered again. "And I would help with that, buuuut last time I lit a fire..." A whimpering grumble left the white one.

"Sorry... The smoke just bothers my throat." Travv just shrugged a wing and softly rubbed the smooth scales of the sea dragon; the 'little spoon'. Letting the two rest in the quiet and hearing the white one begin to speak up, but stop.

"Yes?"

"N-no, it's nothing..." A nudge from that copper snout. "Really, it's nothing."

"Out with it, you sounded like you were going to ask me something." The larger female teased her command, getting a whimper in response. "Come oooooon, what is that funny little brain of yours thinking about now?" Jyrn sighed quietly, giving in.

"D-don't take this the wrong way?"

"Promise."

"Why... You're the ruler of these lands, yes?" A noise in confirmation. "They're yours. And you can make a home anywhere in them." Jyrn could feel the curious gaze from those grey eyes, wondering where the herm was going with this. "Why... here?"

"Why not here?" A whimper left the white wyrm as the female teased her, giving that smaller dragoness a lick along the back of her pale neck. "Relax, I know where you're going with this: I should have this Grand Throne, littered with piles and piles of gold! A large bonfire with a sort of chimney that the smoke could escape, and it should be at the highest point of my lands!" A playful glare that held a devious smirk from that copper head when the white one double took. "Sound familiar?"

It took a moment for Jyrn to think, but then it appeared like a spark in the dark. "Zanna...?" A nod from the copper female, though one painted in a smirk. "Zanna's home...!?"

"I got too drunk one night while we were playing his little games. I decided to play for Lairs vs just treasure, not even sure where such a dumb idea appeared from either. But."

"Y-you... Lost?" A shrug from that larger wing, covering the white one like a blanket. "A-and...?"

"Trust me, he was just as surprised about it as I was when we slept the night off. Both of us recalling it quite vividly and even offered to disregard the whole ordeal..." A deep, slow breath left that metallic muzzle as her eyes gazed through the wall of rock. As if being able to see the 'Throne' from afar.

"But... You didn't take it?" A noise in confirmation. "...Why? It was your home, right?" Not really much of a response besides another shrug. "...Travv?"

"It's okay, Jyrn. That place... Doesn't hold the fondest of memories for me. This isn't a downgrade, and for someone who often moves around... I don't need a place like that." A faint nod in understanding as they rested in silence.

"You said you inherited these lands?" A smirk was felt forming in that copper muzzle.

"And you want to know how I got them?" Another series of faint nods from Jyrn. "I suppose we can't do too much else today." The female teased as she got a bit more comfortable. "Y'know, besides sex." An instant whimper from the white one as she blushed deeply. "But I think you need a recharge." The

metallic wyrm took a deep breath, bringing herself back to that time... "Where should I begin...?"

Chapter 1

I left home a little earlier than I should have, yearning to just get out of the confines of my family's small territory. One that was already divided up by several dozen nests that wanted to stay near the fam-

Jyrn: "Wait-wait-wait.... The Zarkae Circle? Way to the west!?" *The copper dragon groaned*

Here I thought I was being vague enough. *Sighs* Yes, I came from the Zar-

Jyrn: "That's basically royalty! Why did you leave-!?" A sudden metallic paw on the herm's white snout*

Jyrn. I'm trusting that you keep this secret with you to the graveland. Nobody here knows where I'm from anymore and I'd prefer to keep it that way- Mostly because of how you just reacted.

Jyrn: "But-!" *The female glared at her, making the white one whimper* "O-okay... I promise."

Good. Don't get me wrong, The Circle was a damn paradise. Perfect humid weather, lush fields, sandy beaches, mostly dragons as the primary species... But it was just so boring. All we did was basically wait until the next shipment of decadence to come through and lay around. Did I also mention it was crowded?

After a while I just kinda got tired of it. I told my parents that I wanted to leave, and they were... Reluctant at first. But understanding. My mother was hoping to at least mate up the royal ladder, but... I donno. I just really dislike the family life; having hatchlings and being stuck with them for the rest of my youth.

So, before my season came and the others anchored me down-

Jyrn: "Anchored You Down...?"

Oh, it was kind of a tradition there. Your female friends would tie you or wrestle you down while every

new coming of age male would mount you heavily. The female's mate going first, of course, and they just have a night out of it.

Jyrn: *Gives a concerned look*

I guess from the outside it sounds kind of rapey, but it's all done with permission. There's been many dragons who've declined it. I didn't have a mate there, a few I liked but not enough to stay. I just... Wanted something else, y'know? I was just given so much in my life that I felt like nothing was my own.

So that's what I wanted to do: find my own way, my own path. Earn something of value by myself, which honestly was a lot easier said and thought of than done. Outside the circle was quite the reality check of how much that paradise spoiled me.

Jyrn: "Did you ever go back?"

...No. And regardless of how hard things got, to the point where I was jaw-deep in mud attempting to weather a hurricane above the trees... I didn't want to give up that search of mine. I knew things were going to be hard. I knew I was going to have to do some shady things, like scare away predators to get some of their hunts for myself. Occasionally steal some things, which got me chased out of territory after territory, mostly by other dragons who wanted nothing to do with a 'stray'.

Jyrn: "Stray?"

I kinda looked like one at the time. Dirty and possibly sick with disease, but I really wasn't. It was a blessing though, because I was in my 'Balls & Claws' phase. *The white one chuckled, making the female smirk.* And I was not pleasant to be around at the time, I'll tell you that. So many damn hormones raging through my system, add the adrenaline of life or death into the mix and see just how pleasant a scrapper dragoness can be.

Jyrn: "Scrapper?"

I used to fight a lot during these times, and quite dirty too. That's why I was often forced out by being outnumbered. *Travv took a reminiscing breath.* I was a different person back then, keep that in mind. I don't regret what I did, let alone the reputation I once made outside of these lands and the Circle, but... I have changed.

Jyrn: "For the better." *That made the copper one smile, leaning back to nuzzle the smaller herm.* "But go on."

...When I first entered these lands, I was starving. There had been a famine going around in the northwestern areas where I was passing through, and it was possibly a week or two since I last ate or had clean water. A little bit after entering here, I spotted a hunting party of sorts traveling along the road. They had quite the bounty of... Bison I think. I hardly cared. I was so damn hungry, that I didn't even survey the area, just swooped down and grabbed a whole bison and with it; the entire cart they were

carrying it on.

I didn't realize just how weakened I was due to the starvation though, let alone expected them to tie a corpse down so well. The horse pulling it broke free before I really took off over the treelines, but I only had the strength to lift it for so long. Dropping only a small distance away and falling into a clearing. Rushing into the debris of the wrecked cart, at least having a bit of forest for some cover as I sank my teeth into the still warm bounty.

I don't think I've ever ate so much and so quickly in my life, completely drowning out any of the hunter's shouts and calls growing closer. To us, a forest meant a barrier to hide behind, to them... They could just pass through it. I know why I didn't even think of that.

Jyrn: "Too damn hungry?"

Just waaay too damn hungry! And they were just about ready to engage before I spat a torrent of flame at them. To this day... I'm glad the forest was recently wet, because I would've burned the place down. Giving them something else to worry about.

Jyrn: "The hunters?"

No... The dragon that landed behind me. Barely spotting one when I was going for another bite of bison as I turned around and swiped at the one closest to me. Getting her to jump backwards as this bronze one looked me over, remember my description of myself at the time.

Jyrn: "...She must've been..."

Horried, not far off from my age either, and clearly unequipped to deal with anything that might be diseased or sick. Knowing probably that a single wound from me might've been a slow and painful end to her life, yet torn with trying to uphold a rule.

Jryn: "Rule?"

I'm getting ahead of myself. But looking back after this incident... I don't think I would've done anything different if I was in her scales. We hissed at each other, this bronze one trying to prowl and circle around me. Get between me and the bison until she spotted the gaping bite wound that I've already took, meaning it was already 'contaminated' with whatever I had.

Jyrn: "But you didn't actually have anything, did you?"

No. I was starving but not sick. I just looked the part to deceive others. And when I wouldn't yield, she took a few steps back and growled. Then another few as the snap of a few twigs got my attention only for a moment, instantly hissing at some of the hunters attempting to flank me. An Eagle of sorts, knocking an arrow and pointing it straight at me as a dark cloud passed over us.

It felt like time stood still for a few moments as I constantly shifted my gaze while a gale grew overhead, recognizing the pattern as slow wing beats. Before I was able to process it though, the ground quaked heavily and nearly knocked me off balance. This... Absolute mountain of a wyrm landed between me and the bronze one. Barely being able to fit into the clearing and I swear he was nearly four times my size at that moment.

Jyrn: "Four times? That seems exaggerated."

I was still growing during those years, so it may have been closer to three. But he... Towered over everything and everyone. Covered in scars and sealed battle wounds, age faded in his navy scales to a near desolate gray. His sheer presence was enough to make the hunters flee almost immediately, once they were freed from either his frightful hold, or from the winds his powerful wings created. I still felt the eagle's eyes on me, but I couldn't take my own gaze off of this behemoth.

He stared me down like an unworthy wyrmling, eyes shifting as he studied me... I'd be lying if I said I wasn't afraid, but my hunger kept my legs rooted beside the bovine's corpse. "Be careful Kaiser, she looks of disease-" The bronze one started, only to be silenced by a spread of a single massive wing. Once again finding her take steps back until she hit the treeline.

"Silence." He didn't have to speak loudly to shake the very trees in the forest, once again fueling the fear in my heart. Those faded gray eyes never moving off me. "I know the scent of sickness well." At that moment, I knew I wasn't getting out of here without losing something. This beast saw through my disguise and was only letting me live for his own agenda. Testing me to see what I would do... If I fled, he would strike me down. Likely in two blows. And if I attacked or threatened him...

"Clever." The mountain finally spoke again, making me and the bronze one make a faint noise in question. "But you trespass and you commit theft on my lands?"

"Theft?" I stupidly questioned, getting a growl in response that made me flinch. But I stood my ground. "I didn't take from you, I took from-"

"Everything within my sights is mine! **Everything!** You steal from the very worms in my soils, you steal from **Me!**" I remember never being so terrified in my entire life, and to this day nothing has ever matched that level of fright I felt within me. But it was my starvation that saved my tail right then, too damn stubborn to move or flee. Instead, I stood my ground beside the kill. Not without cowering a little, of course. "Do you object?"

"...No, elder." His gaze narrowed on me. "I did steal from you, but not with vain. For survival." I couldn't fully shake off the wyrm's intimidation, causing my voice to crack as he continued to stare me down... And all I could do was lock onto those cold eyes as they looked into mine. As if hypnotizing me...

"So you admit it?" A bit of silence and I nodded, followed by more silence. Until his head moved into a direction. "You will get your fill from that hunt." My eyes opened with puzzlement.

Jyrn: "Wait, he let you go!?"

"There is a river in that direction. You will bathe there to get rid of this disguise before you begin a panic in my lands. From there, Nyxaria will lead you to my lair." A motion to the bronze one, who was just as surprised as I was.

"K-Kaiser!?"

"If you attempt to run, she has full permission to tear you in half, wyrmling." He growled at me. "And if she fails, I will burn everything in your last seen direction until you either melt or die of starvation. Understand." He barely asked, and I nodded nervously. "Repeat what you must do."

"I... Will continue to eat your bounty. Then I will... Bathe in your river to the west. Accompanied by Nyxaria... She will then escort me directly to your lair."

"Where I will be deciding your punishment." That made my ears fall, but I didn't object. I lowered my head and nodded.

"I understand, sire." I still felt his gaze over me for a few moments, then moved over to Nuh. Hearing the bronze one yelp a bit in question before frantically nodding.

"I-I understand, Kaiser." Another set of moments as the mountain of a wyrm gazed over us equally before finally taking off. Nearly creating a storm from the sheer act of it and knocking a couple of the trees down. One nearly on top of the bronze one, causing her to scamper off to the side.

Chapter 2

I remember staring at Nyxar for quite some time before my stomach's fear was thawed out. Allowing me to feel hunger again and I went back to the bison, taking several bites out of it while the bronze one just watched me. It was a curious, but almost jealous gaze that I could feel over my dirty scales. "You're..." She started, but didn't get my attention. "Not actually sick, right?" I did pause mid-bite and barely looked at her. "He wasn't mistaken?"

"...I'm not carrying any illness or disease." I finally answered, taking another few bites as she slowly approached me. Circling around to the opposite end of the kill as I glared at her.

"Don't tell him." It got me a bit puzzled at what she was talking about, only to watch her take a bite as well. Not realizing until that moment just how thin this bronze wyrm was. I honestly couldn't tell if she was younger than me or not.

Jyrn: "I don't remember a bronze dragon anywhere around here... Travv?"

...We each got our fill, and then Nyxar followed me into the skies. I remember passing over a couple of towns to get a layout of the land, and well... They didn't look very prosperous. However, the vegetation of the land was immense. As if the Children only recently settled here, giving how few there seemed to be. There was one large garrison towards the far northeast that could easily be seen, several mountains.

"Down there will be good." The bronze one shouted from behind me, and I got a general direction of what she meant. Circling the skies to descend slowly and landing softly in the grass. Scaring off a few animals as I approached the waters, I remember hearing the bronze one land and remain in the long grass. Watching over me, though a bit uncomfortable at such a task. "Can I trust you enough to give you some privacy?"

"It's alright." I calmly stated, entering the water. "You wouldn't be the first dragon I bathed in front of." I barely heard her grunt a bit awkwardly at that, trying not to stare as I submerged myself in. Washing all the caked on mud, dirt, and debris off of my body over the past weeks. I honestly can't remember the last time I took a bath in clean waters at this point, but it created quite the dark cloud within. It felt refreshing, a little exciting with an audience as well-

Jyrn: *Whimpers shyly, getting the present Travv to smirk at her.*

Everything okay, dear~?

Jyrn: "I-is this what you think about every time I was teaching you how to swim?"

You mean, 'bathing in the nude', as the children call it? Skinny Bathing, I believe is the term? Something like that. And I'll admit to some interest in having some fun with you during those lessons, Jyrn'thellan, but I didn't press too hard. It was your first time... Instructing, after all. *Another whimper as Present Travv'esa bounced her eyebrows.*

Regardless, I felt the bronze one's stare nearly the entire time. And now that I finally had a full stomach, I didn't mind giving her a show. Rubbing my own paws across my copper scales to make sure all the caked on brown was finally off, then down my plated underside. All in full view of the watcher.

But I didn't want to take too long, slowly exiting out of the waters and allowing the sun's rays to dance over my clean form. Much how I look like now, just more glossy due to age. Not to boast *too* much, but Nyxar looked a bit-

Jyrn: "Stunned?"

Awestruck, yes. I honestly couldn't help but smirk at the look of those eyes, her jaw left slightly opened. Sitting there, hind legs spread apart, but her fores were trying to block the view. And as soon as her eyes finally reached back up to mine, Nyxar blushed. "Like what you see?" I asked her, watching as that bronze face attempted to sour and snort, only to go right back into gawking.

That is until another set of wingbeats were heard and another wyrm landed close by. Slightly bigger than the two of us, grabbing both of our attentions with his white scales. I immediately spotted a few scars over his body, various sizes and depths. A single broken horn off his skull, while the other side was completely vacant of one. And those Red discs looked over me, nearly huffing playfully afterwards. "You shouldn't be bringing in escorts, Nyx. No matter how gorgeous they are." A grunt from the bronze wyrm.

"S-she's not my-!"

"Really though," The white male took a few, unthreatening steps closer to me. "Where did you come from, copper-beauty?"

"Durra-"

"I think you missed a spot during your bath, maybe all three of us should go back in and-"

"She's the kaiser's new Nalazar." The scarred dragon suddenly took a step back from me, as if discovering I was contagious. Releasing a bit of a disappointed growl towards the other female as he glared at her.

"Taaaaaaath, girl. You couldn't have told me sooner? If he hears about this, he'll have my remaining horn." The white one snorted, sitting down in the grass heavily in a bit of protest. It was kind of cute, honestly, like a wyrmling having a tantrum.

"Please, once you get lovestruck it's hard to get any message inside that thick skull of yours." Nyxaria grumbled, and though the male didn't seem to notice anything... I could feel this slight bit of relief from her.

"And this isn't some joke, is it? You're not saving her for yourself-"

"Durra'varr." She scolded in a whisper.

"A dragon can dream." The white one grumbled, looking over me with almost longing and sighing.

"You're definitely prettier than the last few, that's for sure."

"Few?" I lightly questioned him.

"The Kaiser has gone through a lot of mates in the past-"

"They're not his mates, Nyxar. I swear everyone in the valley has told you this." Durra sighed, putting a

paw over his eyes for a moment. "(And you say I have a thick skull-)"

"What was that-?"

"I think my claws are getting dull- just thinking out loud. But they're not his mates, they're his *servants*." Another exhale through his white muzzle as he drifted his gaze over to the mountain. "He treats everyone and everything like property. No one is equal- or even remotely equal to Kaiser, including his 'Escort of the year'." Those red eyes returned to me. "No offense, fem. But you are... Definitely easy on the eyes-"

"For the sake of your own balls, shut up, thulla'ka [draconic term for like... an overly frisky male]." All I could do was smirk at the compliment really, as I laid down in the grass. Watching the others do the same and begin to relax a bit more.

"What keeps happening to them?" I pried, getting slightly worried looks that they kept sharing. Almost stuttering over their words. "I take it you don't quite know."

"Nothing is really ever officially announced, as you can probably tell." The bronze wyrm mumbled.

"Sometimes we don't even notice until months later. I remember the one before last; we assumed she was dead due to not seeing her for nearly two and a half seasons."

"What happened to her?" Durra gave me a slightly worried look.

"...I never figured out for sure, but her flight pattern was off. Be it due to her not being used to flying again, as Salik suggested, but..." I urged him to continue, knowing he had something else to add and he did so in a whisper. "I know... The flight motions of a recently injured wing. And by the look of it, I want to say it was broken."

"Kaiser broke her wing?" The other two scolded me immediately.

"Taath girl! Say it louder so the world can hear you, will you!?" Nyxaria scolded me.

"T-that's going to be a habit you're going to need to learn here, erm..."

"Travv'esa-"

"Trevv'era." I sighed a little, but smiled at his little joke. "You gotta... Catch your tongue, especially when speaking about the Kaiser. There's a lot of people looking to gather 'Good Reputation Points' with him." I couldn't hide my slightly sour look as I gazed at a nearby town. "Not like that ever really leads to anything, but people around here seem to hope that it can." Another whisper as Durra took a breath.

"...What happened to her? To Salik...?" The bronze one shrugged her wings and shook her head as if to say she didn't know. While the white's gaze fell a little bit.

"Nobody knows for certain, all we know is that a few months later a 'replacement' wandered in. And she didn't last very long either."

"I heard Kaiser got hungry one evening and ended up using her for a snack." The male's red eyes narrowed at Nyx as if to scold her. "One of the Loh'thoua [bird people] went up to plea for a land expansion and spotted blood all throughout his cave." I looked over at Durra for a confirmation, but he didn't seem to deny it. "Her stains are still there to this day."

"Those stains could be anything, but..." The white male mumbled, moving his gaze away. "I... Do recall hearing the struggle that night. I was thinking he was doing something else... But in the morning there was nothing left of her."

Safe to say the story worried me, but I know what would've happened if I just fled. Be it that Kaiser would hold a grudge and actually burn everything in the direction I was last seen, or he would blame someone else. Likely...

Jyrn: "Nyxr..."

Yeah... I didn't feel right leaving her behind, stranger or not. So I headed up to Kaiser's mountain with Nyxaria, landing before she did and I could notice just how... Anxious the bronze one was there. Within reason, of course, and that reason released a trembling growl that echoed through the mountain. Then a series of tremors that followed after every step, words don't even come close to how thick his intimidating presence was.

Kaiser barely squeezed outside the mouth of his cave, cracking it a little bit wider in the process as he looked over the two of us with an irked gaze. His faded Gray gaze landing on Nyxr. "What is the meaning of this, wyrmling." He barely asked, getting a slight whimper as she lowered her ears and wings.

"I-I... You... Wanted-" A low growl that felt like a distant thunder interrupted her, making the bronze one take a step back.

"Out with it." His heavy vocals made her whimper, no longer able to speak so I did in her place.

"Kaiser." I didn't get his focus at first. "We are just following your commands." Well, until now, and yes. It was very... Intimidating. This... Colossus looked at everything as if it were prey, and of course not recognizing me. "We met earlier-"

"I did not ask you for an answer, whelp. I want to hear it from her." Another whine from the smaller one as I stepped into his gaze, not quite getting his attention but he did release a grumble.

"My Kaiser, you must forgive her. Your presence merely has her starstruck, to the point where she is unable to speak properly. If I may do so in her place, in order to save your precious time." Those gray eyes narrowed, but at least started to focus on me again. Bowing my head a little as I continued. "Thank you. I am Travv'esa; the one you met earlier. You seen through my disguise, ordered me to get cleaned

up before anyone panicked, and commanded Nyxaria here to lead me to your Throne." His stare at least eased up a little, shifting between us.

"I specifically remember telling that one to send a message to the hunters."

"W-what? No, you asked me to-" A loud growl when Nyxar denied his story, once again cowering back while I stood between them.

"Forgive her, my Sire." I could tell that the behemoth was getting irritated by my intrusions. "That was my doing, not hers. There are many openings in the mountains near here, I requested that she specifically lead me to yours so as to not be late. That way I would not take up your..." A growl left his throat as he took a step closer to me and towered over my form. It was hard to not cave into instincts.

"Why do you keep talking as if my time is limited, wyrmling?"

"I speak because your time is *important*, Kaiser. Not finite." I never was more thankful for my teachings in how to speak while under pressure than here. I swear, Jyrn, the story makes me sound calm and collected, but I was probably ready to piss myself.

But I stood my ground for what felt like hours as those faded gray eyes challenged my own grey ones. And when they shifted back to Nyxar, I raised my wing to attempt to obstruct it... Only for him to quickly force my branch down with a paw, almost pinning me in the process, and continue staring at the bronze one. "Leave us, whelp. Deliver that message to the hunters in Insarri."

"M-message...?" She whispered, once again hearing that growl from Kaiser. I motioned my head to get her attention, needing to do it twice.

"Message about me not actually being sick-"

"R-right! Of course, my Kaiser." A low grumble from the titan as he finally turned about, keeping myself closer to the ground as that heavy tail swooped over me before getting up. Meeting Nyxaria's look, one of immense guilt as if she was never going to see me again...

"Zannagrae! [Draconic for 'Deceiver']" He called for me, I remember nodding at her defeated expression as I followed him into the large cave... Let's take a break. I want to get a drink.

Chapter 3

The two dragons (in the present) landed nearby a steady river, stepping inside and getting their fill of water. A bit of a strange location that was out of the way from their usual spot, causing Jyrn to look around. Barely noticing the copper one slowing down her movements to a complete stop. "...This is where you..." A heavy exhale left Travv that was nearly unnoticed from the sounds of the river.

"...Yeah. Where I first took that bath." She turned around and led the white one up to the patch of grass. "Where I first met Durra as well." A sad mumble from the intersex as Jyrn moved beside her and covered the female with a wing.

"If this is too hard on you..."

"No... It's okay. My memory isn't the greatest and I haven't really thought about them in a while..." Another breath. "I'd rather focus on the present, but you deserve to know, Jyrn'thellan." A sad look from those blue eyes.

"We can stop for today if you like." Travv shook her head in protest to the suggestion. "I can tell this is difficult for you."

"It is, but... At the same time it's nice that someone cared enough to hear it." The two smiled at each other sadly, nuzzling as the white one embraced Travv from behind.

"Please." Jyrn stroked the female's silver underplates in affection. "Continue. I'd like to hear the rest of it." A nod from the copper one.

I remember feeling distinctly cold while walking through the maw of that cave, like the mountain itself was swallowing a part of me. Causing my scales to click loudly but not get the attention of that massive wyrm. Leading me through what felt like a maze of twists and turns, until the echoes of his footsteps grew louder.

It was very dark, even after my own eyesight adjusted to it. And I ran into his tail when he stopped, quickly taking a step back as his head turned. Thinking Kaiser was glaring at me, but really he just took a breath and lit up a large brazier that produced a blinding light.

...A light that bounced off piles upon piles of metals. Silvers and Golds, coins and artifacts. Several hills reaching up the large cave's walls, hiding what appeared to be timber supports. A dozen large rock pillars were also getting aid from old lumber, making sure that the large room didn't cave in.

Jyrn: "Zanna's lair..."

Currently, yes. His actually makes it look much bigger just due to the amount of space he had compared to what Kaiser possessed. He had an absolute fortune, well over 30 times the amount Zanna currently has. No, I am not joking. About half the room he had in his cave was taken up by the sheer volume of valuables Kaiser had collected.

Even coming from a surprisingly rich nest, I was awestruck by the sight of it. Along with the blinding lights the flames created and causing a reflection... But there was a tarnish to everything, even if it hadn't developed yet.

Jyrn: "What do you mean?"

Seeing all this... Wealth, I could feel deep down there was a pain caused by it. Like this was the lifeblood of the land and the people within it, dragonkind and non... And it was being extracted from the body itself. Left here to spoil and rot all because of an ancient dragon's desire...

He caught me staring at it, glaring at me with those faded gray eyes with disapproval. "I know every coin in here by heart, Zannagrae. For every piece that is missing, I will take a piece of you as replacement. You will understand this."

"I do, Kaiser." I spoke clearly, but a bit sadly. Watching his gaze narrow before moving on. "What will my duties under you be?" That stopped the mountain in his tracks, to the point where I nearly ran into his hind leg. Catching another stare, though this one slightly puzzled.

"You've done this before." He nearly grumbled, taking his time to study what seemed to be every part of me. "Should I be suspicious?"

"Where I come from, we take care of our elders in many ways-

"So that, what? You may claim whatever they leave behind?" Kaiser growled, nearly curling his neck when he spotted my smirk.

"My Kaiser, if I were interested in wealth I wouldn't have left home." I started walking up to his side. "But if you are interested, their possessions would've been passed down to their descendants. If none no longer are around, then their friends or whatever they willed, but it would stay within the land." I remember him watching me, focused as if ready to catch any wrong move as I looked over a nearby mound of valuables. Catching a large candelabra sticking out of the pile-

Jyrn: "A what?"

It's one of those large candle stands for three candles. Designed kind of like a trident, or a three pointed spear. "No caretakers were to take anything as a form of payment, because we did not need it, my Elder. And I do not need yours." He growled softly at me. "But I do need to understand what it is you want me to do for you."

The navy one just stared at me for a long time, eventually adjusting himself to look at me closer. Seeing a bit of curiosity in his eyes before speaking. "Why is it that you are not afraid of me." His throat rumbled heavily as he exhaled, not relieving me of his stare. "What are you plotting."

"Who's to say that I am not afraid?" I lightly smiled at him. "I just do not cower like the others that are underneath you, but I do not mean that as a challenge or an insult, my Kaiser. Merely as a fact; you are indeed terrifying in size, but you have done nothing to give me any reason why I should fear you."

"I've done *Nothing*?" The mountain growled.

"You have forgiven me for my crimes of hunger, gifted me a meal, a bath, and now I am assuming a form of shelter- by your side. If I am understanding this duty correctly. If that is not kindness, what is?" No response, but his stare did begin to ease up. "As for 'plotting', I've only just arrived here. If you are suspicious, then you have the very power to dismiss me whenever you wish. You are this very land, after all, exile should be an easy thing to enforce."

"And what of execution." Kaiser grumbled, noticing the shocked look that leaked through my composure. One I attempted to hide soon after, but I knew he had witnessed it. Taking a breath and stiffing my jaw. "Did such a thing did not come to your mind?"

"It did." I swallowed a bit loudly. "I am just attempting to word such a response to convey that it will be a mistake." The huge one growled at me. "You see, even just stating it is already upsetting you."

"I do not make mistakes, whelp!" His voice vibrated the very piles of coins within the room.

"I did not state that you did, Kaiser. I only alerted you of a possible one, if you were to make that

decision." His gaze narrowed as he leaned in closer to me, muzzle slightly scrunching as if ready to bare his fangs.

"And what makes you believe such a thing would be a mistake, Zannagrae?" [Reminder: draconic for Deceiver.]

"Because, my elder; you will not find anyone else more qualified and willing to do this task for you." I softly spoke to him, watching those faded grey eyes stare me down for what felt like days. It took everything I had to keep eye contact against such a behemoth, but first impressions make up for a lot. And I was betting everything I had that I was right...

"Well he obviously didn't slay you." The white one teased, still comforting the female in her embrace. Webbed paws sliding across Travv'esa's silver plates as they basked in the sun. The dark clouds now invading from the horizon nearly on a death march above the lands. "So what happened next?"

"What do you think happened?" The copper one attempted to nudge Jyrn, pressing her tail against the white's own.

"I think you put this big scary dragon in his place, that's what." A chuckle from the metallic wyrm. "Knowing you now."

"Yeah, but... I feel like I made a lot of wrong decisions past this point. I often wonder if I had done things differently..." A frown from Jyrn as her hug got a little tighter. "But alright."

I felt his eyes over me for a long time, slowly adding more and more weight to my resolve until eventually it began to fall. Lowering my head and shoulders, ears a little bit while my wings weakly fought against gravity. Hearing the behemoth of a wyrm take a long loud breath before finally speaking up. "You are good at presenting yourself, wyrmling. I'll give you that. But I am still not convinced as to why I am keeping you alive." I remember almost double taking at him, refocusing on his eyes. While some fear passed through my chest... It was Kaiser that was taken aback, only by fractions of movement. To the point where I'm wondering if I'm just misremembering... But...

"However." He started up again. "Let's see what use you can be to me." I never thought of it until that moment, but I... Was actually worried that he might rape me when he said that. But he just turned further into his cave and continued walking, showing no signs of interest in that. At least not yet.

Jyrn: "Then what did he have you do?"

"Tell me, whelp." He called as he walked, his tail revealing a large and heavy ballsack between his legs. It was really hard to miss. *Chuckles* "When you were taking care of your elders, did you get any experience doing chores? Or were you only there to entertain them?" He gazed back at me as he headed towards a massive pile of furs, old blankets, and what almost looked like straw roofing from some of the Children's buildings. "Have you ever gotten those elegant paws of yours dirty?"

"I have, Kaiser." I confidently said, still slightly shaken while looking around and observing the room. As glorious as the treasures he kept inside were, they couldn't mask the mess of bones, blood, and rotting gore. Charcoal from a nearby brazier, soot covering almost everything whereas there was no good form of flu or ventilation for the fires. "Is that my first task to prove my worth?"

"It is a start. I'm assuming you recently ate." Looking over the area, I nearly double taked at the massive male. Only nodding in response.

Jyrn: "Wait a minute... When you two first met, he..."

..."Good." He grumbled, resting himself onto the bedding and still causing the ground to shake in the process. "You can start with that while I think of further use of you." I took a moment to look around, but felt his gaze on me. Watching closely as I met Kaiser's eyes, raising an eyebrow at me.

"Which would you like me to prioritize, my Elder?" He made a noise in question that almost sounded like a growl. "Which task bothers you the most? I will take care of that first." No response as he stared, less at me and more into space as he tried not to look around. "May I suggest this area?" I gestured around the 'feeding' area he had, hearing Kaiser release a mutter of near disapproval, but nodded regardless. "Very well." I lowered my head in a small bow before looking around, spotting a large golden tray of sorts and began filtering through the pile of old meats. ...I don't blame you for making that face, I've... Dealt with worse, but this was pretty high up there. By the look of it, he didn't have an aid for a very long time.

However... Upon digging through the horrid pile, trying to make out bones of what appeared to be limbs, legs... Wings... I spotted a sheet of scales.

Jyrn: "No..."

Dragon scales. Faded, but looked to be that of a lavender, heavily stained with a now caked orange. Before I could stop myself, my head turned and stared at him. Locking eyes with those faded grays again who just studied me, still and imposing. Reinforcing that the 'execution' method was definitely something he had done before...

To this day, I'm still not sure who that was. I hardened myself and just continued to work on the pile until it was full enough to carry outside and toss over the mountain. Getting out of his gaze to break down and let my fear get the best of me, but grasping the very ground as to prevent me from taking off. No matter how comforting the skies looked as the evening began to set in.

The forests, far mountains, the waters of the oceans. The small villages, birds and other dragonkin occupying his skies... The worst part about this land was him. Like a lingering storm of destruction, thundering with every step and reminding a beautiful landscape of a possible violent end if something didn't set right with its King.

If I left, there's no telling what the Kaiser would do. Who he would take it out on. What he would destroy, both inside and outside these lands. And I would never feel safe again underneath him or his ruling. I was given an unearned freedom when hatched, not knowing its worth until that moment. And in order to regain it...

Jyrn: "Travv..."

I would need to figure out how to slay a Titan.

Chapter 4

I didn't linger for too long out there, in case he got suspicious. Feeling those gray eyes lock onto me as soon as any part of my body was once again in his faded sight. Studying me closely while I gathered another collection of rotten gore and waddled out to toss it over the mountainside. Each time taking another moment to collect my strength before heading back in, almost always releasing a growling breath whenever he heard pawsteps from the cave.

Jyrn: "I can... Only imagine the smell."

It was there for quite some time, so yes. To call it horrid was only just the beginning, but you need to remember what I was doing before I came into these lands. My disguise required me to often be around the putrid meats and oils, I was used to it at this time. Was it unpleasant? Yes. But it aided my survival.

Jyrn: "Unpleasant isn't the word that would come to mind."

...Same with a lot of people who tended this behemoth before me, I imagine. But it didn't bother me as badly as it probably did them. I was just used to it at that point, however... The more I brought into the light, the more convinced I was that I was cleaning up a dead wyrm... And the fear that I might be next.

I hid it the best I could, just cleaning up what seemed to be multiple seasons worth of carcass and bone. Possibly even an entire year and a half, minus meals outside. And the entire time, those Gray eyes watched me. Studying me as if making a mental painting. A bounty poster of sorts. So if I ran...

Jyrn: "He could find you..."

After I was done, I met those intimidating discs. "Is this acceptable, Kaiser?" No response for quite some time. "There is only so much I am able to do without water. Will you allow me to retrieve a barrel-?"

"No." He commanded in a mutter. "I tire for the evening, and your constant pacing is interruptive. You will stop this task at once." I lowered my head in a bow to agree.

"Shall I leave you to rest?" Some more silence as that stare never broke.

"You will not, wyrmling." The mountain raised his vocals again, vibrating the piles of metal that surrounded us. "You will add a few logs to the fire and then sleep for the evening." I remember taking a moment to look around, spotting the pile of wood that was diminishing... And only a single bed. His.

Jyrn: "No..."

I nodded again, adding a few logs as I asked him. "Where will you have me rest, Kaiser?" Our gazes met again, watching him take a moment to decide before a simple gesture. Opening the space between his forepaws in front of his chest... The titan wanted me to share the same bed as him. Taking a breath and nodding again before turning towards the doorway.

"Where are you going?" The behemoth growled, instantly getting my lightly frightened attention. "I gave you no permission to excuse yourself."

"I understand that, my elder. I was only going to clean myself off before-"

"And give you an opportunity to flee? Perhaps arm yourself?" He was careful, I'll give him that. Judging by the many scars over his body, I imagine these were not just sudden thoughts. "No. I think not. I do not trust you, whelp."

"Therefore you will forfeit a night of comfort for security, instead of letting me be rid of the smell of decay?"

"I care not for your stench, Zannagrae. It bothers me not." I stiffened my jaw, continuing to match his gaze. I felt something very wrong about this, every scale that covered my body flaring up as if to all point

out the danger of such an invitation. And that first step towards him was like approaching an execution block, accepting my fate and approaching death.

...Jyrn. I'm going to try... *Exhales.*

Jyrn: "Travv-"

That night has replayed in my head so much that I can't really remember what was actual fact and what was nightmare. But I'm going to try... To be as clear as I can.

Jyrn: "Travv..."

This was very late into the evening. Past the point where the fires were nothing more than embers, yet there was still an intense heat. A humidity above where a heavy weight was felt. It wouldn't be the first time I let a male sleep on me, but there was something different about this, I remember thinking. A little groggy, waking up quite thirsty as well within the pitch blackness.

Then the weight moved. Lifted off. Making me mumble out of instinct... Only for those instincts to flare up, sensing an immediate danger just before a deep growl. But before I could make sense out of my surroundings, I felt it. A pair of monstrous jaws surrounding my upper body; reaching from my chest to shoulder to back. Biting down hard and swinging me, throwing my body like a toy into the blackness where I hit something solid.

Jyrn: "Travv-"

My sight was useless here, unfamiliar with the cave's layout still, let alone while in a panic. I was lost in the darkness, trapped within a behemoth's cage. All I could do was detect his heavy growls and tremoring steps. I faintly remembering him saying something underneath those vocals, replaying it in my head again and again trying to make out what it was. The closest thing I could think of was Varrokarr [think... Scoundrel, Thief, or Vandal].

My attempts to get up only revealed where I was, getting a massive paw against the side that nearly crushed me against the wall. The force of his might actually pushing me away from it as I coughed, getting hit again against something solid within the center of the room... Then the danger instincts again-

I barely got my head and chest out of the way in time as he attempted to bite me again. Ducking underneath his jaws, but it caught my arm within that ivory cage. The titan's teeth digging deep into one of the pillars, barely prying them open enough for me to move my arm... But not enough to get it out.

Silence as Travv'esa takes a deep breath.

Jyrn... Have you ever had one of those moments where... You were so terrified for your own life... Where it just suddenly switches to anger? 100% Rage where your thoughts and cautions about your own future are thrown aside...? This... Tyrant took away my freedom the first minute he met me, harrassed and

incarcerated everyone within his invisible borders... And now he was trying to take my life.

...A spark of fury lit up in me that day. I couldn't get my arm out of his maw, but if I was going to lose it... I would make the rest of his days a living Hell. I dug my dirty claws into his tongue, enough to draw blood and feel the muscle tense up. Ripping into it a little bit, I pushed my whole arm deeper into his throat, taking a hold of something- Anything to make this Krualla'Taath [Insult. Past that...You really don't want to know] pay for taking my limb, and just...!

I remember his growls turning into a whimper of pain as he pulled back, actually taking a chunk out of the pillar in the process and tossing me aside... That rock saved my arm, prying his jaws open as he finally released his vice. But I was still within that rage, even after getting hit into a pile and hear something metal drop. The scent of ash came very strong as a red dust scattered in the darkness.

Jyrn: "Red dust-? Embers?"

Yes, he knocked me into one of the braziers. I remember picking up the large bowl that held the burnt wood, just enough light within it for me to see the edges and spot some movement within the darkness. Swinging it at him and hearing the loud Clang of impact against his snout. The very front of that muzzle was armored, but the tops and the sides... Yeah, you've been hit there before, haven't you?

Jyrn: "Feels awful." *The two chuckled.*

I remember a growl and those danger instincts kicking in again. Ducking underneath his swinging arm and attacking upwards with the same bowl. Another clang, this time with the opened area, having some of the ash and embers still in it. Causing the dust to fly everywhere as it hit him in the eye.

I couldn't dodge the returning swing, but it didn't hit nearly as bad as the behemoth cried out in pain. Even though we couldn't see, I blinded at least some of his vision. Landing in one of his many piles of wealth a bit hard, I still scampered out of dodge in case he tried a follow up attack. Picking something large up, I'm not sure what it was and just tossing it at his general location. I doubt it really did anything, but it kept Kaiser occupied.

Running to find something else, either an exit or something to arm myself with, I knocked over another brazier onto a woodpile. Feeling it out before taking a deep breath and setting it on fire, finally giving me some light... But also revealing where I was too. Meeting eyes with that navy beast for a fraction of a second as he roared with his leaping swing. If I wasn't still enraged myself... I probably would've tried to dodge it and failed.

But I ended up moving forwards, just barely getting scratched by his swing as I spun around and attempted to whip him with my tail. Hoping to knock him off balance, but I ended up getting lucky. I didn't hit his side like I aimed for, but his package under his own tail, or at least judging by the sudden sharp whimper and stun as he landed in a large pile of fortune.

This was my opportunity to end this. I jumped onto his upper body, slamming the side of his muzzle

again. Taking his ear and twisting it-

Jyrn: "All kinds of fighting dirty."

Against something his size, this was already an unfair fight. *Another faint chuckle.* You use whatever the hell you can, and I was... Not in the mood to hold back... *Another breath.*

Jyrn: "...Travv?"

I swept my paw within the pile, looking for the first thing I could use... That candelabra. The large candlestick. Smacking the base of it against his snout in a different place before going in with a stab in the eye-!

...

Jyrn: "You...? Took away his sight...?"

...I stopped. Inches away from that terrified open eye, still trying to focus on the object that threatened it. Only for it to look at me, panting heavily with anger; one paw still wrestling his ear. The other gripping that golden makeshift-trident so hard, to the point of warping it. I wanted to punish him, to take away one of his precious senses for everything that he's done... I'm a lot of things, Jyrn. But Kasierslayer is not one of them.

My rage subsided. But my anger didn't. I pulled the weapon back but kept myself in that position as his focus returned to me. "Listen to me, Kaiser." I growled at him. "You can take a lot of things away from me; my dignity, my freedoms. I can live without, they do not define me." A few heavy breaths as the behemoth did not struggle. "But you will **NOT** take my life!!" I roared into his ear, feeling the beast nearly three times my size flinch. "My Own Survival Comes Before **YOU!** Understand!?"

No response, and against my instincts telling me to just cull him then and there... I let go. Tossed the improvised weapon back in the pile. Released my grip off his ear. Took a few steps away, still on edge and waiting for Kaiser to retaliate. That the first noise of movement got my intense glare, still damn well ready for a fight and ready to finish it this time... But it was just his head rising to better look at me within the warm glow, and he muttered.

"...Who are you?"

Chapter 5

Jyrn: "He... He asked you who you were?"

Apparently, and all I could really do was glare at this behemoth of a dragon. Meeting his... Questionable gaze. "I'm the one you enslaved yesterday." I snorted, not getting any relief from those Grey eyes. Causing my own to just study his as they looked over me within the firelight... As if for the first time.

"Where is..." He paused for a moment as if to search his mind for something. "Salik?" My neck curled a little, just before my body felt cold. Maybe it was the adrenaline finally subsiding, not realizing that it was his vocals being so naturally rough... Thinking he was growling at me this entire time, but. "Where is she?"

"...Lavender?" A grumble in question from the Colossus, once again pausing for a slight moment before nodding slowly. And I couldn't look at him, my face twisting into a mix of emotions. A deep sorrow, an intense anger. This... Monster killed her and he didn't even remember-? *A heated exhale from the copper one.* I was about ready to slap him in the balls again. To cull this tyrant before he could hurt anyone else...

Jyrn: "But...?"

I met his stare again, now slightly weakened by both fear and sadness. Watching it fall a little bit as the titan adjusted himself slowly. Putting me on edge a little in case he was going to continue his assault, but his facade fell. "...I see." He mumbled, even when he barely tried to speak, it sent vibrations through the floor. "...I killed her."

To this day I don't know why I did it, taking a heavy breath before speaking up. "...No. The others said she earned your freedom, and you needed to find a replacement. I just didn't recognize the name." He looked over my form, but surprisingly couldn't tell that I was lying... Maybe he just wanted to believe it. "You found me." Maybe it was to confirm something I had suspected all along, maybe it was just to try to save my own tail by de-escalating the situation. "Tonight... Was my first night."

"And I thought you were a thief." Our Grey eyes met, both a bit shaken at the event... But somehow on equal footing. I could tell he wanted to apologize, but was just too proud to say it. "Your name, it was... Vessetia?"

"Travv'esa." I corrected him in a slight whisper, worried that Kaiser might be quick to anger for pointing out his error. But instead, just lowered his gaze. Something so... Intimidating suddenly looked so vulnerable to me. "You've been having memory problems..." An observation of mine that nearly broke that mountain of a dragon, taking what felt like an hour to nod and admit it. "How many times has this happened." I barely asked, nearly losing my composure to anger. "How many Servants have you-?"

"Watch your tongue, whelp!" Kaiser growled, shaking the cave with his sheer vocals. Taking a step towards me and looming over. "Do you seriously think that is the worst thing I've done? You foolishly believe that the guilt of a few lives or even a dozen will subside this disease!?" His roars nearly dazed me, I remember taking a few steps back and nearly cowering out of instinct while some rocks were loosened outside of the (actual) mountain's shell. "You know nothing of me, wyrmling!"

"I-I know of the torment you bring to this land, Kaiser! Be it you or your disease-!" Me and my big-forsaken-maw sometimes.

"**TORMENT!?**" His voice hit me like a wall of sound, a thunderclap in the middle of the cave that cracked the walls. To the point where it deafened me to what he said next, now only being able to hear out of a single ear. "I was raised in such desolation- I've seen what they were capable of and vowed not to become that! Even if it means ripping away what freedoms these children have over themselves! I will be **GOD** if it means that I get to keep that in my lands!!"

...I don't think I've ever seen a dragon so furious in my life at that point, staring up at his heated Gray eyes that were nearly masked with the smoke of his pants. But just for a moment... I saw a crack. Watching the behemoth turn away immediately after and head towards his bedding. "Get the hell out." He growled.

Jyrn: "...He...?"

He let me go. And out of instinct, watching him until he was at a safe distance, I got out of there. My heart still racing within my plated chest as the cool night air surrounded me, skidding to a stop to catch my breath. Exchanging the hot air of conflict that surged through my body with the brisk outside as his statement replayed in my head again and again. *Get the hell out.* He exiled me? Freed me from his grasp?

I don't know how long I was out there, observing the land he ruled over. Lush and green, the glow of a few settlements scattered around. Occasionally hearing the mating calls of animal and dragonkin... And like a framed painting, I kept seeing Kaiser's crack in my mind. Drawn in the stars, painted in the clouds. Trimmed within the forests, stitched within the meadows. His influence was everywhere here, but... What would happen to this place if I left? What would he do?

Jyrn: "...What would the disease do'?"

Exactly... Truth be told, I didn't think I was strong enough to make a difference. I didn't feel like I could

protect these lands from him or that... Illness that was corrupting him. But I took care of my fair share of elders. A few got a little difficult before their time came, and they felt the call to the graveyard.

...Maybe Kaiser did some horrible things in his life. Both before he got here and in order to keep in power. Maybe he did deserve to die alone or be subject to a bloody revolution against him, slain by the very people he oppressed. But that crack...

With a deep breath, I turned around and entered his cave again-

Jyrn: "Oh, what the hell, Travv-"

-And was greeted by that same growl. I stood into the light to ensure the mountain of faded navy scales could see me. "Damn wyrm, what calls you-?"

"Why?" I nearly demanded, instantly setting the fire in his eyes as he started getting up.

"You Dare-!?"

"Why did you let me go?" It was incredibly hard to match his volume, I was basically roaring at the top of my ability. "Why set me free in your most kind way possible, instead of just killing and being rid of me?" Kaiser was taken aback but only for a moment, actually getting back up to a stand and looming over me. "You're more than capable of-"

"You Krualla'-!"

"You're scared." I merely stated rather calmly, yet it completely silenced his bellows. I don't even know how he heard it through the storm of his heated vocals, but that crack in his facade was seen again. This time, he didn't turn away to hide it. "You're afraid of what is happening to you... And you're afraid of what it might cost you in return; not simply your life, but everything you worked for up to this point." No response, as I looked back at the exit, nearly gesturing to the world outside this shelter. "I... Understand that fear of loss, Kaiser." My gaze returned to him, spotting some movement in his body but the beast was only resting on his haunches. "I think I can be of help." Silence as he stared down at me.

"...What do you want." He softly demanded as his Gray discs studied me. "What is your motive, Zannagrae? Inheritance?" I shook my head, but he nearly growled at such a response. A noise I was honestly growing more comfortable with.

"Kaiser, if I wanted either wealth or land, I would've never left my family's territory." I repeated myself from earlier, gazing at his piles of treasures, unamused by them. "I would've mated into the clans and proceed to have a boring life of decadence. Those do not interest me."

"Then what." It was barely a question, and he saw that I was struggling to find such an answer. "I can tell if you are lying to me, whelp. What desire of yours is valued so much that you're willing to give up your freedom for." It took me a bit to respond, and I could tell he was growing impatient. Eventually sighing

under my breath.

"...I do not know, Kaiser. Believe it or not, I just don't know what I want out of my life." His ears flattened against the side of his head in anger. "I've had freedom, I've had a future of wealth and territory. But I left because I didn't want that." My gaze moved to a wall, as if to look through it in the direction I thought I came from. "I craved adventure, exploration. To find what I desired..." No response. "And I've seen my fair share of things that are lacking such things: lands without the lush greens of yours. Villages and outposts slaying each other for sheer scraps. Desolations and rot that came with plagues..." A heavy exhale from me as my eyes returned to his paws. "...Maybe I just don't want to see the same happen here."

"And you think that I will do such a thing-?" Another growl.

"Not on purpose, sire. But I have experience with such diseases, I know how they progress and what they can do when sent down a spiral of destruction." The behemoth's jaw stiffened. "There's... No cure for it, Kaiser, and for that I am sorry. But I can at least help you prevent destroying your lands." Silence. Just those pale eyes staring down at me in near anger. "If you feel like I am deceiving you, then fine. Exile me again, or even threaten to kill me. But you will never find another willing servant that is more qualified to help you through this."

Again, I repeated myself, but he seemed to recall that. I swear, he just stared at me for an hour before laying back down onto his bedding, his back to me. Leaving me questioning what choice he actually made before finally speaking up. "...Get some rest. In the morning, we will think of a system that prevents me from attacking you in the middle of the night again."

The copper one took a deep breath, closing her eyes as the sun baked her reflective underscales. Ones still being pet by the white dragoness in her half embrace as the clouds crept closer. "Safe to say..." Travv started. "I didn't have a very good night's sleep for the first one."

"I can imagine." Jyrn replied, half worried about how the story would end. The only thing she knew for sure was that the copper wyrm survived. "I know it wasn't easy, but... Why did you not cull him...?" Those grey eyes stared straight up at the sky, gazing into space as a long breath left the female's muzzle. "I..."

"It's... Its not so black and white, Jyrn. Even if I did, who would've accepted my rule there? Who would've taken his place if I just fled? Who would fight over it and what would have been loss in the process?" One of her metallic paws stroked the white head gently as the intersex frowned. "As easy as it is to just think 'removing the problem' is the solution... It never is so simple. Truth be told, I doubt stabbing him in the eye would've done much. Blinded him in one side, yes. Perhaps maybe some other damage, but..." Travv'esa's other paw moved to her own head, massaging the space between her eyes as they closed. Feeling the white one move closer and rest that snout along the silver plates. "I still don't know if I did the right thing, Jyrn. It could've been much worse, yes, but..."

Some silence as Jyrn nuzzled the female softly, waiting for a bit before speaking. "But you did get some sleep?" A light chuckle.

"Yes, but it was like slumbering underneath a Guillotine." The two shared a nervous laugh. "The rest of the night was uneventful, but the morning..."

A deep growl woke me up, instantly putting me on edge as I attempted to make out where I was within the dark cave. Though I felt braced between his chest and a large paw, there was... Almost a protection factor in his hold. He was growling at something in the darkness, but it wasn't because of my presence this time around.

Jyrn: "A thief?"

That's what I thought, and almost feared until they announced themselves in the shade. "Kaiser? My liege?"

"I told you not to disturb me before sunrise." The behemoth grumbled crankily, still keeping me in place against his chest and arm.

"I-it is after-" Another vocal seemed to make the smaller creature whimper, allowing another one to

Speak up instead.

"It is after sunrise. The overcast blocked the light this morning, Kaiser." The other said, significantly less frightened by the presence regardless of the upcoming deep groan that filled the cave. Only to hear a clang and a curse under the breath of the one speaking, further making the behemoth grumpy.

"P-please sire, I really need to have these documents read by today, o-or else there may be dire consequences to Kol'tarra-" I spotted that old navy muzzle toss in the darkness.

"It's your damn village that you built on my land. You deal with it."

"B-but sire-" Another growl was followed by the nervous one's yelp.

"What the vizier is attempting to say sir is that the town might become a gateway for Nulachor to invade your land, if no response is taken. That's why it must be done today... Or preferred; a week ago." Another grumble from the beast of a wyrm but this... Smaller creature seemed nearly unphased by the intimidation. The fear was still there, but. "You demanded taxes from Kol'tarra, this involves you, my liege."

A deep, almost irritated breath from Kaiser as he finally let me go. Getting up and moving about towards one side of the cave while the other two scampered to ensure they were out of the giant's way. Hearing the beast search for something before grumbling, then searching another spot and adding some logs into a brazier. Lighting it and creating a sharp light within the cave that bounced off of everything. Startling the two smaller Loh'thoua as they shielded themselves for a moment-

Jyrn: "Oh, those bird people?" *The white one gasped almost immediately after in a bit of excitement.*

Yes. And one of them being that Eagle from the day before. Now getting a much better look at his brown plumage and armor. Though the two birds seemed to be startled by my own presence as well when I moved a little bit. Shifting gaze between us wyrms as if we were flanking them like prey, though much more focused on Kaiser's glare at them. At least until it moved to me.

"Zannagrae." He grumbled at me. "The firewood is low. Go to one of the settlements to collect more."

"Y-yes, Kaiser." I lightly bowed my head. "But-" A growl from him interrupted me, as if I were protesting such a command. "But which settlement?" His gaze intensified, almost angry until a realization came to his mind. Delayed, and soon after it relieved some pressure. Only to put it on that Eagle and motion towards him with that large navy head.

"That one will know." Which of course caught the hunter by surprise, shifting his head in those quick movements like the feathered ones do; between us dragons but nodding regardless before he was scolded. "Leave me and the vizier to our... Discussion." Slight bows from all around as I headed towards the exit, nearly following the eagle and watching as he patted the shoulder of the nervous tucan. Finally getting out into the fresh air where it was like a weight was lifted over us, causing me and the brown one

to both sigh of relief at the same time. Only to look at each other.

"Just how I like spending my mornings." He joked a bit. "Engaging banter with the ruler of the land, really gets the adrenaline pumping." It made me chuckle very lightly. "You're new."

"It's that obvious, is it?" I shuttered, getting my scales to click as I looked over the eagle. Meeting him with a nervous smile.

"I like to keep track of the dragons around here, in case one causes trouble. And I don't remember a brown-" He locked eyes onto me, suddenly realizing something and taking a step back. I caught on, lifting a paw to signal for him to stop. "You're that sick one-"

"It was a disguise."

Jyrn: "W-wait, didn't he hear the conversation yesterday? -Oh, you were speaking-"

Draconic, yes. I'm not going to go back and forth telling you when we speak common-tongue or Draconic. I've learned both of them as a wyrmling, just assume the change. Regardless, he looked me over with concern, and though I expected it to lighten up a bit... It instead twisted. Then I recalled the scrap during the night, making me sigh. "He... Didn't realize who I was during the night."

"And he attacked you." There's a lot of positions I detested in my life, but being the victim of Domestic Abuse...? I suppose it made me visibly angry, because the bird dropped it. "So you're not carrying anything?"

"No. I didn't bring anything into your lands." He tilted his head at me, making me double take at him.

"Our lands...?" The brown eagle quoted me. "You really haven't been here long-" A growl from Kaiser interrupted him, but not one towards us... Well, it could've been. "We should not keep him waiting much longer."

"Yeah. Though I do want to wash myself off first. I had to clean up a lot of rotten meat last night from..." I motioned inside, and he nodded at me in understanding.

"Zannagrae, was it?" Another double take from me. "Lets-" My look stopped him, giving his own in question.

"Oh, no. That's..."

"A nickname?"

"Nevermind. I'm Travv'esa." Another moment of study, but he let it slide. Nodding his head and giving a half salute.

"Arakin, Archelon Hunter Division Setra." My ears perked a bit and the eagle sighed reluctantly. "Rank 3.

I got demoted."

"Demoted?"

"-Let's not talk about it." Arakin half grumbled. I'm not sure why, but that made me chuckle. "I want to get the Vizier back before that storm hits. Wet paperwork doesn't do anyone any good." I nodded and we took off, though obviously I was much faster than him so I led the way to the river from the day before. Landing in the soft grass and I could already feel the comfort of the cool waters, but... "Hey! HEY! What are you doing!?" I remember barely catching the eagle's call, but he was pretty far away. Double taking to make sure he was talking to someone else, however...

"What?"

"Don't use that water source!" I tilted my head at him while I waited... A rather comically long time for him to catch up to me as well. To the point where I sat down and watched him glide to a touchdown. "That runs by a village that uses it!" I curled my neck. "For drinking water, downstream." Arakin grumbled, pointing in the direction of the waterflow and my eyes followed. Though there was nothing in sight at my position... I did recall seeing house-smoke around that direction even from the quick flight there. "...You used this yesterday, didn't you?"

...There was something in the bird's voice that really struck me, like this immense sense of guilt in my chest that only enflared when I looked into his eyes. Watching him exhale, somewhat in disappointment and as if he was just fed bad news. "Why did you choose this one?" He asked me.

"I... Didn't."

"Kaiser?" As much as that felt like an excuse, it was the truth. Making me nod and seeing that disappointed breath again. "He's never done anything for us." ...I remained quiet. "And he never seems to think long enough about his actions. But come this way, there's another that not many drink out of. Not enough to make a village sick in any case."

As the brown eagle took off, all I could do was just stare down the directions of the river, wondering what else used this path. Trying to think of all the things I was caked with in order to keep that disguise... And how much of it really would've made someone sick. That perhaps maybe I did bring some infection into this beautiful land after all, and not even realize it.

With a heavy sigh, I took flight and followed Arakin, catching up to him in half a moment it seems. But I couldn't keep myself in the air with his slower speeds, let alone with the wind heading towards us. Needing to circle around in order to keep following the bird while also looking over the lands and villages. Clearly marked out due to the deforested areas and white smoke of burning wood.

Jyrn: "To be fair, they are quite slow."

Miracle of flight being an impressive given, yeah. They can't match us. But my impatience grew more and

more as I attempted to be the follower. Making my body restless and grumbling before finally just coming up behind the bird and grabbing his body just under the wings with my forepaws, hearing his armor groan a bit in the process. Making him squawk loudly as I carried him and geared up to a reasonable speed. "What-!?" A noise in disgust. "What are you doing-!?"

I didn't bother answering him but kept moving until I saw a body of water through the trees; a small lake of sorts. "That water down there?"

"No! This way!" I tossed my snout but followed his directions, heading much closer to the ocean but seeing another small area of water that connects to the sea.

Jyrn: "A bay?"

Not quite. Almost too small to be called that. Also, landing with just your hind legs is difficult, making me almost trip and land on Arakin a time or two before finally dropping him in the grass. "Why!?" He growled at me, not seeing me shrug my wings.

"You were too slow, I was getting irritated. Besides, no harm d-" The eagle staggered forwards out from under me, holding onto an object that was dangling by a string... His bow, the one he wore over his torso, now broken and snapped at one end. "...Done..." ...Remember when I said I had that dumb voice in my head when I was younger? Yeah... This memory sometimes keeps me up at night, along with Arakin's scolding stare.

"Yeahhh... No Harm Done." He quoted me, making my eyes look away in awkward guilt. "You only broke my only means of defense, dumped my arrows from a hundred feet in the air, and words cannot describe the smell on my armor." He snorted, throwing the bow on the ground and heading towards the water.

"You could've just told me where it was-"

"And have you gone towards the first lake you pointed out, where; again, people use. And those people? If they get sick, they die." The brown one growled, making my ears move flat against my head, but... He was absolutely right. I was too proud at the time to admit such a thing, but Arakin was right. "This one is saltwater, something people cannot drink or use very well, and something that any disease you might be carrying on your scales will likely not survive in."

"What?" I double took at him. "You can't stop the winds of a plague, bird. If it blows in your direction, there's nothing you can do-"

"Look, *dragon*, that's not how things work." Seriously, the brass balls on this eagle. Half frustrated as he began taking off his leather armor, not really sure what was surprising me more; his tone or the fact that the eagle was stripping in front of me. "You've gotten mites before, right? Or know of them? In your scales?"

"I-I've heard my parents warn me about them, yes, but-"

"Think of diseases like.... 'Mites' for Mites. They're these ridiculously small living things that get transferred in various ways." I was still stunned by Arakin's actions while also following his words. "Through water, contact, and yes, sometimes even wind. But there are things you can do to prevent it."

Jyrn: "Wait, this is where you learned it from?"

Kind of. Regardless, it was a bit of an eye opener for me, but I treated it with some skepticism. Something that must've been clearly seen with my neck-curved and shocked expression, making the bird toss his beak. "I'm no expert. It's just a theory someone who is significantly smarter than me has been going on about." A bit of a heavy exhale, one of frustration and... Remorse? "I've just been trying to follow his advice."

"...Because you lost someone?" Those yellow eyes sharply glared at me.

"Because I care about these people, something you dragons seem to have a difficult time understanding. We're not insects underneath your talons; we're not here to annoy you or 'corrupt your lands'. We just want to live happy lives, away from your carelessness and wrath."

"Yet, you choose to live here under a tyrant? If you don't like it, just leave."

"And go where, exactly?" He snapped at me. "Forget the fact that most of us cannot fly- and the ones who can cannot do so while carrying anything remotely big or heavy. You've got everything you need in one package- We need things in order to survive." The eagle struggled to get a strap off one of his arms, yet all I could do was just stare at him, rather dumbfounded. "That's not to mention how everything is a threat to us; be it wildlife, dragons, disease, -Hell, even our own kind or others in its tier!"

"Tier?"

"Loh'thoua [bird people], Gnolls [hyenas], Taurus [bulls/bovine], Humans [boring people], you name it. Anything that's beneath 'Dragon' or 'Monster', we all have the same struggles. Yet, for some-!" A frustrated growl as he fought with the strap, clamping his beak on it. "Taathing-! Reason-! They think the best way-!" His beak slipped and Arakin hissed in frustration, making my wings and ears droop as I stared at him taking a few breaths. That guilt returning in my chest like a heavy weight, pulling my pride down with it, to the point where I found myself laying down close to the bird. Trying to look over the strap he was using and seeing how it worked.

"...The best way to what?" I asked him, encouraging Arakin to finish. Expecting that glare again as he exhaled and half instructed me on what to do for help. A pride that I knew all too well and struggled with at the time: asking for help, let alone receiving it.

"...The best way to make a living is to take from other people. Leaving them to either start over or perish." Together we got it off, allowing him to take the entire torso off and actually making me blush a bit at his feathery bare body. Only...

Jyrn: "Only...?"

Only to start working on his pants too. "I'm so tired of seeing this wheel of despair continue to turn, yet I can't do a damn thing to stop it."

"W-what are you doing?" That caught his attention, once again looking at me with those sharp yellow eyes.

"I'm washing my armor because someone decided that impatience was the best course of action." He snorted, pulling them down and completely exposing himself to me without a second thought. Nearly making me whimper.

"In... Front of me? Doesn't your kind have some sort of taboo about that kind of thing?"

"Well, being naked in public cities, yes. If you ever wonder why dragons aren't allowed in cities, there's your answer." Arakin snorted, making my neck curl as he came closer to the waters, though double taking at my questionable gaze. "That was a joke. You're big, you're clumsy in tight spaces, and you're a danger to everyone walking around you unless you stand perfectly still."

"And you've got the biggest mouth I've ever encountered. Were you ever told to use your inside voice?" I snorted at him as the bird began washing his clothes.

"And what? Continue to ignore the problem? Pretend that it is 'just a way of life and nothing can be changed'? That's how things stay the same, dragon." He exhaled in anger as I started to move into the waters myself. "But yes, I do have problems restraining my speech. I'll admit that."

"Hence, 'Demoted'?" A questionable stare from the eagle and my wings shrugged.

"That was something different. Lets just say I showed off on a show-off that was... In the family of someone higher in my chain of command. And he used his **daddy powers** to shove my rank into the ground." Arakin grumbled, exhaling. "Now I'm stuck, because those higher up seem to bend over the will of the command, and every time I'm up for a promotion now they'll think back and remember: 'Oh, Arakin? He's a good shot, *buuuuut* remember that time he pinned the General's son to a tree for two hours? We *cannot reward* such disrespect to our hunters, no matter how much of a jerk his son is.' And the horse says Promotion Denied."

Another heated exhale as he finally met my questionable gaze. "...You shot someone?"

"I shot his clothing with an arrow and pinned the jerk to a tree. Sure, it could have killed him, but he could've just as well killed citizens with his damn trickshots and showing off; firing **TOWARDS** a damn village." I don't know why, but his frustration made me chuckle. Arakin at least took it lightly, half smiling at my reaction. "So, like I said: stuck. Doing hunts as a grunt, escorts where I'm likely to be killed in action."

"By talking back to dragons?"

"I like to call it 'Planting Seeds', but sometimes you gotta break up the ground first, yes." My head tilted at the metaphor, but I didn't dwell on it. "At this point, who cares? I'd rather get barbecued by pissing off a dragon than to be toasted as collateral."

"So, 'go down fighting'."

"Go down *Changing*, girl. Have you not been listening?" Again, I just smirked at him while washing myself. Watching him take his armor out of the water to dry in the sun, but...

"Hey." A noise in question. "What did you call those small fires you make? When you're going to spend the night?"

"Campfires?"

"That was it." I chuckled. "Think we can make one here?" A questionable look from those yellow eyes, I remember his crown feathers rising up on a single side, as if they were an eyebrow. "It'll take all day for your stuff there to dry in the sun, yes?" No response. "I'll help." That one made him smile and nod, moving around to gather some things for it.

Chapter 7

I don't remember what we talked about while we waited for his clothing to dry, but I do remember how light-hearted it felt. Maybe it was a mistake, but I started to get attached to this eagle that I got paired up with, and was unable to keep myself from thinking about what he was talking about earlier. Trying to see things in his perspective... In their perspectives, as I watched him don the armor once again. "I get the protection thing." I started, half getting Arakin's attention. "But the fabric based ones couldn't possibly stop things like arrows."

"No, but they're not made to protect them from weapons. They're made to protect them from the environment." I made a noise in question. "The cold, the wind, they take a toll on us a lot more than your bodies. Some have it easier than others, Loh'thoua; we're fine so long as we don't get completely submerged in water. Rain we can deal with for a bit, but once it begins reaching our calamus..." He shivered, causing his plumage to puff out.

"Calamus?"

"You've seen a feather, yes? That 'needle' part of it in the center, or the base of it. The Stem, so to speak." I looked at him curiously as Arakin strapped piece after piece. "It further risks us getting ill in bad weather, especially when the wind blows."

"And with no shelter... Nor flames..." I trailed off staring at our campfire, just trying to imagine how difficult it would be if we couldn't just spray it to ignition.

"You can see why people here fear dragons." I barely spotted the bird double-take at the ground. Move towards the broken bow and grumble at it before beginning to take the string off. "Your kind is naturally born with armor, insulation, ways to create instant heat that can also double as a weapon. Talons, teeth, flight- Fast flight at that, if not a big sluggish." Though I know it wasn't his intention, I couldn't help but smile as if it were praise as we looked at each other again. "Aside from maybe being a big target, what are the downsides?"

"I know you're not trying to, but you're flattering me." The bird tossed his beak, making me chuckle. "I... Think I understand though. You have no choice but to submit and follow Kaiser's orders, yes?" A shrug and a nod from Arakin. "We're kind of in the same flight."

"Only because you finally found someone bigger than you." Another grumble, but I let it go. "Speaking of which, we shouldn't keep him waiting too much longer." He sighed through his nose as he gazed almost through the trees at the other villages. "Farathar has the biggest sawmill and probably the most wood to spare. We should head there." I made a noise in confirmation, getting up but looking over the eagle for a moment, to the point where he sharply looked at me back. As if staring down what little idea was baking in my head. "What."

...Maybe it was that guilt in my chest that birthed the idea. Maybe it was the fact I enjoyed listening to Arakin's views, how he seen the world and how he cared for people within it. Almost more so than himself, feeling like he was nothing more than a walking death sentence at this point in his life. But I ended up laying down beside him, morphing his glare into a stare of confusion. "...What are you doing. We just had a rest-

"Making a change." His head tilted and I rolled my eyes. "You're slow in the air, no'vaachr [Think... 'Lower in the food chain']. Get on."

"What did you just call me?"

"I called you a snack-at-best." I chuckled, hearing his groaning response. "I'm offering to help. Is this not what you wanted?"

"...It is, just..." Arakin studied me for a few moments. "I didn't expect an attempt so suddenly from a dragon."

"An outsider, keep that in mind."

"Please, they're all outsiders." The bird snorted as he fluttered and landed on my shoulders. "What exactly am I going to hold onto here?"

"That's for you to figure out."

"This was your idea!"

"And this was your Seed! They don't always expect them to grow the way we plan." I snorted, feeling him attempt to hold onto something. "Besides, it was either up there or in my jaws. And if you didn't like being wet or gripped by my paws-"

"Point taken. I think I'm ready- but!" I went into a stance to take off, but sharply stopped at his interruption. "...Go slow."

"The entire point of this was-"

"I know! But until I get a proper way to hold onto you, you're going to take it easy!" He hissed, but all I could do was laugh at his tone.

Jyrn: "The brass balls on this bird?"

The brass balls on this bird...! It's like he had a deathwish. Regardless, I tried to go easy and felt his talons grip across my scales in a brace. Just getting used to my movements as I ascended and leveled out, feeling him take a hold of my horn and come into my sights only slightly, giving me a direction. "Okay!" I confirmed him, waiting for him to move back but he didn't seem to be, so I banked- juuust as he began to move himself.

Jyrn: "Oh no."

Yeah, causing Arakin's foot to slip, and when I tried to catch him, I apparently pulled him away too much from my horn that he just fell through my arms. Loh'thoua have no grip, I swear. That, or its all in their feet.

Jyrn: "It's all in their feet, I believe."

I'd believe it. Anyway, so he fell, opened his wings and began gliding- while cursing, I might add. In some ways, I didn't want to wait for his slow flight again, but at the same I didn't want to go off ahead. So

instead, I circled around behind, came from underneath, and *tried* to let him land on my back. It half worked, but it took a couple of tries for him to get a firm hold again.

Jyrn: "But he was still mad?"

Arakin was still quite mad, yes. I kept feeling this intense heat as if he started a campfire on my shoulders, occasionally hearing his grumbling huff as I landed near the sawmill as soft as I could. Then laid down, feeling him flutter off. Creating an awkward silence between us as neither really wanted to catch the gaze of the other; him still just having probably one of the worst mornings, and me... I felt almost guilty, but I couldn't apologize.

However, eventually our eyes did meet up and I saw... Something else in his. Like a disappointment of sorts, but not a 'scold' or anything. It wasn't towards me, but... Arakin looked away and shook his head before I could figure out what it was, walking off towards some of the workers of the sawmill while I just stayed put. Scanning the place and watching how it operated. Some large logs were being sent down the nearby river, the people fishing them out of the waters with this large... Sickle on a rope? Trying to catch and hook into the wood with the help of several others. Bringing the log up to a series of many contraptions, using things like windmills and those water wheels to make large discs spin. Some using manual saws made for multiple people, cutting the wood into many different shapes.

An argument was brewing between the eagle and some of the people in charge of the mill, breaking me out of thought until I double took at something moving in the distance. A horse carrying a carriage, making me snort at the idea of them using animals to do their bidding- but... A shattering realization just kinda hit me: which was exactly what we were kind of doing to them. Forcing these living people to do work for us.

Jyrn: "And that guilt again?"

Yes, but I still had a problem, that was the thing. And it sounded so silly, but at the time I really had to break it down while I was waiting: what do they do to the horses to get them to pull that thing everywhere they go? I've spotted them whistle and whip to get them to move faster or obey. I'm not certain how smart the animals are, but they must get something out of it.

I was so deep in thought that I didn't even notice Arakin return until he exhaled in anger, making me double take at him. "Kaiser will get his wood in a bit. Some village might have to go cold for a while, but-"

"Cold?" I curled my neck, watching him give me a near scolding look.

"...Yes. Cold." Arakin bluntly stated. "Because nights here drop in temperature quite rapidly, and not everybody has pelts to keep them warm. Guess where a majority of those are." A grumble, but my ears slightly fell. "Though, not specifically at Kaiser's cave, but most of the dragons around here apparently need a lot. Not just wood or blankets, but a lot of everything." He snorted, completely missing my look of guilt as an actual child screamed, getting both of our attentions. But they were just playing with others, nothing alarming.

"What if..." I got the eagle's attention again as I looked over at the wood pile. "What if I only took enough for a single night?" Those yellow discs of his gave me the weirdest look of surprise and disbelief. "Would that prevent 'people from getting cold'?" Those... Twin circles just studied me for a long moment, as if trying to pry out any motive.

"It would, and they would be glad to hear it, but I just don't want Kaiser to take it out on them." He gestured to the mill. "If we're doing this, it's *your* tail on the line, understood?" His tone... Honestly, it worried me a little bit, but I nodded. Wondering just how Kaiser would take such a thing. Regardless, a day's worth of wood was... A lot more than I expected it would be, and it was a lot heavier to carry- especially while flying. I remember nearly losing a few logs when I landed back up at his cave; having them nearly roll off a cliff but at least Arakin helped by securing the opposite side.

Jyrn: "He kept up with you?"

He rode on my back again, said something about not wanting to take the risk of having a log fall on him. But since I had to go so much slower, it was easier for him to balance on my shifting shoulders. The eagle kept one side from rolling off while I rested on the other, panting at the 'workout' I just had. "That went better than expected."

"That was harder than I expected." I grumbled, nearly snorting when we both heard a growl from inside the cave, causing us to look at each other.

"Sounds like paperwork is going well." He quipped, helping me roll some of the logs inside enough to not worry about them escaping. This little alcove deep within the cave's mouth helped to just store them temporarily as we kept hearing the behemoth curse under his breath.

"They dare-!?" Kaiser growled, once again making the toucan whimper.

"I-I-I could be misreading it, K-Kaiser! It is just-" Another growl. "Their calligraphy is difficult to decipher without p-proper lighting-" A whimper from the black bird was heard as I started dragging a log in, feeling Arakin pick up the other end and helping me. I was using my jaws at the time- big mistake by the way, so he couldn't see me smile at him but.

"Calm down, our Kaiser." The eagle said after another growl echoed through the cave, vibrating the very coins along the floor.

Jyrn: "Brass balls?"

Brass balls. And of course having the opposite effect and just irritating the mountain of the dragon. Watching us with cold gray eyes as we set the log by the large brazier; one much too big for it. Making me wonder how he sawed them into chunks, only to hear the beast get up and lightly push me out of the way. Stepping on the wood and I kid you not; crushing it within a single paw. Releasing a grumble of pent up stress in the process before tossing it into the low embers and spitting a more-than-needed torrent of flame. Definitely brightening the place up as he glared at me. "Only a single log? That was all

you could bring?" My ears lowered, but before I was able to speak Arakin did.

"There's more in your entrance, but we only got a day's worth." The sharp glare from Kaiser even made the eagle reconsider his deathwish. "They'll get more in the coming days, but-"

"They wish to waste my time, is that it?"

"Well, her time." Arakin gestured to me, getting a loud hiss from the grey one that was closer to one of my own roars. Making the brown bird actually take a step back and half shield himself.

"She belongs to me, no'vaachr ['Lower on the food chain']! Her time **IS** my time!" That made Arakin remain quiet as the rest of us remained in silence. Letting Kaiser take a few heated exhales before looking at the vizier with a powerful gaze. "Have we done enough to warrant a response." He barely asked.

"I-I think so-"

"Good. Leave." A demand making the black bird whimper, rapidly pack up everything he had and head out. I started to follow them to the entrance, only to feel the navy paw's strong grip on my back. "And you." Another command, not a question.

"Just getting another log for you, my Kaiser." His gaze narrowed at me. "I'll still be within your sights."

"See to it that you are." He grumbled, motioning his head off to the side. "The woodpile is over there." I nodded in understanding as I headed over, getting a couple of those logs as the birds whispered harshly to one another, though I couldn't make them out. However, I did catch a glimpse of a coin the toucan was placing in his pocket, then Arakin's yellow eyes for a moment; looking back at me with... A bit of concern? Anger? Worry perhaps? I remember nodding at him to help ease such feelings- if I was even reading them right to begin with, I'm still not sure if he even saw it enough in the darkness of that tunnel.

Regardless, I went to work bringing in the logs as the mountain of a dragon rested in his bed. Watching me with a slightly narrowed gaze and an irritation that seemed to fill the rest of the room, though I know it wasn't directed at me, it still meant his frustrations were ready to ignite at any moment. After I nearly exhausted myself retrieving and moving those logs, Kaiser got up and approached me. The anger remaining in his vocals. "Come with me." He demanded, leading me outside and into the open air, where he took flight... And I followed.

Chapter 8

I followed him out to the coastal cliffs. Many of the rocks there were jolted out of the sea itself, erupted in pillars as if they were supports for a long forgotten age. Smoothed on the surface, allowing birds and dragon kind to land on them to rest while the waters down below gnawed at the base. Creating a series of rings from the moving tides carved into structures, wearing them down over time.

I landed a bit behind Kaiser as he took a step forwards towards the edge, facing the ocean waters as I took in the gorgeous view. Not a single sign of land far out, just an endless void of blue and cyan waters. Glistening with the sun as the rays created a lightshow. "It's beautiful-"

I started to say, only to get him to roar in anger! Quaking the entire area, sending heavy vibrations through the pillar we stood on. Actually creating small waves that echoed down below as I covered my ears and defended myself. Swearing I did hear some of the very coastal cliffs crack from his voice, eventually draining his lungs and leaving him winded... Or so I thought, he was just breathing heavily out of anger. "***Krualla'Taathvas! Every damn one of them!***"

I assumed that's what he said, I could barely hear at this point. "Foolishness of these children claiming to be acting under the power of a phantasmal god! They demand trade from me and my territory!? All because some Taathing village spread its mold into my lands!? I claimed payment for the land they thieved, nothing more! Yet these Krualla-!!" Another near deafening roar followed by a wave of absolutely intense heat, a breath of fire that started out pure white as if it were from the sun itself. Sending singeing warnings all around my body like I just entered an active volcano.

I remember stepping back again, only to feel the edge of the cliff as a cloud of steam erupted from below. Still very hot as it scattered everywhere while Kaiser calmed down, eventually taking off the mask and showing the near boiling water directly below us. "I should burn them all for such insolence! Again!" He growled, making it hard for me to recover my composure. Taking a few breaths before looking at me. "Which direction did you come from, zannagrae?"

I looked at him a bit sadly, remembering my disguise but wondering if he would as well. "...The northwest, Kaiser." I answered as those gray eyes stared into mine, though still kindled they did not seem

displeased with my answer. "I am from the far west, but came from the northwestern lands."

"And how desolate is that land now?" I couldn't stop my ears from falling a little, almost feeling the starvation resurface once again. "I see." The navy beast released his gaze and turned it towards the ocean, exhaling in half frustration but sitting down. "So well over 90 summers was not enough for it to rebound? Or has it been wartorn by the outsiders of my lands?"

"...I believe I've seen signs of both, I'm afraid." His stance at least made it easier for me to approach Kaiser, even after he began releasing a very long and drawn out growl. I suppose to him it was a grumble but...

"...Damn them...!" The navy titan snorted, and I don't know why but that made me lightly chuckle. It got his attention as I sat down beside him. "I am going to tell you something that you will soon learn, Vesset'esa."

"Travv'esa." A light grumble but he nodded. At least remembering that conversation last night. "But you're getting closer." I smiled at him, noticing the sour look. "And you detest politics-"

"I *despise* politics." He growled, and I once again chuckled. "It gives absolute fools hope that their choices and actions matter within the world."

"It arms the witful and allows them to do battle without any physical means." A strange look at me. "I know such things too well, and I'm afraid that it comes with the territory." A slow blink at me before returning to the horizon.

"They have nothing I want, and they want everything I have." Kaiser grumbled.

"Are you certain about that?" A low growl that time. "It is possible, but access to trade can yield more than just wealth or resources." His gaze narrowed at me.

"Like what?"

"Comforts, luxuries, -..." I trailed off, about to mention something else but tried not to. However, he detected it, making a noise in question urging me to finish. "You... May not like-"

"Out with it, Zannagrea." I smiled and shook my head, making him grumble before confidently looking him in the eyes and exhaling.

"Prosperity." And Kaiser's ears instantly went back, growling which only morphed my smirk into a full smile. "See? I knew you wouldn't like it-"

"My lands are plenty prosperous!"

"But your villages are not-"

"They do not deserve to be!"

"Kaiser." A heated growl as he looked out into the view, thumping his tail in protest and actually making me wonder if it would be enough to send this pillar into the sea. "I understand your need to protect your lands from them."

"If they expand their towns, they will use my forests as a resource-!"

"Kaiser." I urged him to listen, once again making him exhale like a wyrmling having a tantrum. "I understand, I really do. Especially when they're already doing it-" A near angry double take at me as I lifted my paw to stop his thoughts. "For firewood, I mean. Not expansions, but taking the wood from your forests." Another exhale, this time cooler than the rest.

"However... Have you ever thought that maybe... Things could be better if they were more prosperous?" The navy wyrm growled at my idea. "It is something to consider, Kaiser."

"I'm prosperous enough."

"But your people could be better." Another glare from those gray discs.

"They are not my people, they are vermin-"

"They are settlers that you have allowed to stay in your lands." I calmly stated. "...Several generations ago." Kaiser's neck curled. "Meaning, the ones currently living here were hatched in your lands."

"They are not my clutch, Travv." I smiled as he got my name right. Even if the shorter version.

"They... Really aren't, no. They are not your responsibility." I admitted, seeing him nod in agreement. "But you could give them a better life this way."

"Like they deserve it." Kaiser snorted. Not detecting my grey gaze onto him, that or he was doing a good job to ignore it. Until I touched his arm. Catching it and curling his neck again.

"What would they have to do *to* deserve it?" It was an amusing sight, honestly. A dragon, nearly three times my size, taken aback by a simple question. But I left it at there, moving my own gaze to the horizon as he did the same. For a while, the two of us just sat there, lost in thought.

The evening and morning were relatively uneventful, thankfully. At one moment I thought Kaiser wasn't going to remember me when he first woke up, but it seemed to come to him that I wasn't an intruder

rather early on. He still got my name wrong, but that was okay. I'd take that over him attacking me again any day.

I still felt sore from the day before, however, but I still needed to get that wood for the upcoming evening. Returning to the same sawmill again, landing outside of the area and approaching it by foot. Looking around to see if I could find that... Boss? I don't remember the title they used, but too many of them looked alike.

Looking around though, I spotted a brown set of wings and my eyes lit up. Further observing the Loh'thoua to make sure; brown and slightly white pattern. Eagle body structure. Yellow eyes that glanced over in my direction and he lightly waved at me. Not going to lie, it kind of fluttered my heart. Like seeing a new friend again, if you could even call him that.

Jyrn: "Awwwh~"

Chuckles from the two. Regardless, I laid down to wait for him, and was thankful for the moment of rest. Looking around at the many piles of wood and logs, wondering which one was for Kaiser. But my eyes continued to wander, spotting that carriage again being pulled by the same horse. Maybe it was just my imagination, but it looked... Happy?

Jyrn: "Happy? We're talking about a quadruped horse, right? Not a Taurus?"

Yes. It kind of baffled me for a moment, the thing was a slave to them, wasn't it? Why was it so eager to work, while the rest of the people around were... Mixed, to say the least. My first thought was that the horse was just an animal, unable to realize the situation it was in and as long as it got its needs it was happy. But looking at it, and I'm assuming one of the family members it belonged to get off the cart. Pet it a few times, talk to it, adjust its reins for more comfort... Maybe they were just treating it better? That's why it was happy?

It was strange, I know. And I cannot tell you why such thoughts were coming into my head; becoming so curious about how their society worked. But... I knew that if I could understand it, maybe... Maybe I could give them all a better life? By convincing Kaiser to help them somehow?

Arakin finished his conversation with the boss-foreman! That's the word, and started moving towards me again, when I was deeply lost in thought. Almost startling me when he spoke up. "They're still working on Kaiser's wood for the evening." I nodded, almost dreading the idea of carrying this load every day, but then... Then something came to mind. "It may be an hour-"

"How does your kind do it?" The bird looked at me puzzled. "If you want something somebody else has-"

"I am not going to enjoy this conversation, am I?" The Loh'thoua barely asked.

"But you don't just want to take it from them, what do you do?" Those yellow eyes just stared at me, a little dumbfounded at my lack of truism.

"...You... Barter?" My ears perked and my head tilted at him. "You know, offer trade? An exchange?" He was barely asking or suggesting, more just half scolding me as if I were a child as I looked around.

"People here don't just work because they want to, dragon. They work because it earns them a living."

"I get that, and it has something to do with the gold coins and values, but what I'm asking is..." A single eyebrow raised as I looked around, spotting a cart they use to haul stuff around. "I want that thing. It's like a big basket and it would make for carrying wood much much easier."

"...Okay."

"But I can't just take it, because you will be angry with me."

"Sure, let's go with that." Arakin grumbled, crossing his arms.

"So, what do I do? How do I get one of those?" The eagle just slowly blinked at me, only to see gears turning in his head. As if trying to think of something. "I... Want to be of some help to people, and not just take all the time."

"You are literally the first dragon I've come across to even remotely think about this." He grumbled, half sarcastically. As if looking at my dilemma was a joke. "So, you're offering to help? Is that it?" I half shrugged my wings, not really knowing how to answer. "People work to get paid. They get paid to afford needs like food and repairs for shelter."

"Because you have to build your own shelters to keep out of the cold." A slight look of disapproval, but he nodded at me regardless. "And if I remember correctly your kind does not sleep on your wealth."

"You could argue that some do by hiding their earnings under their bed, but you are correct for the most part. To everyone else, that is uncomfortable." Arakin stated, though a little weirded out about my interest in such a topic. "Anything left over can be spent on wants, like... buying yourself a cart." He had to pause for a moment at such a weird statement to say about a dragon. "Or giant basket, or whatever."

"How long would I have to work? An hour?" A blank stare from those yellow eyes. "...An afternoon?" A blink but no response, making my ears lower a little bit. "A... Day?"

"You have never worked a day in your life, have you?" I snorted at him in response. "Well, if so, you were paid a ridiculous amount. Look, ...Trev-?"

"Travv'esa."

"Travv- I was close. Building something like that takes a lot of work and craftsmanship-"

"So I should build it myself then?" The eagle raised a paw up, signaling for me to stop.

"It takes people a long time, close to a month to make something able to haul wood- at best. It is going to cost a lot." My snout and my gaze lowered as he sighed. "If you want to start working, I can talk to

Jara'kai, see what he thinks. But don't expect a good wage."

"Why though?"

"Because the mill cannot afford it. It can barely afford paying its own workers." My look saddened at the bird's grumbling tone. "That's what happens when there's so little money in the economy- and before you ask; you know where it all is." I slowly looked up to the large mountain where Kaiser resided, getting a few pats on my shoulder as a confirmation. "I gotta take off, Travv'esa. Good luck today." All I could do was nod as I stared up... Wondering...

Chapter 9

I eventually got the last log inside, but I was exhausted, to the point where I had to rest myself on top of the pile for a short while and catch my breath. From there, I could feel Kaiser's stare at me as he rested on his bed. I remember being slightly afraid to meet his gaze, expecting a heavy disappointment that some rich wyrmling that never had to work a day in her life would be struggling against wood.

"Travv'esqae." It was close, slightly getting my attention as my closed eyes faced him and nodded.

"Travv." He spoke louder, and I pried my sight open.

Only to witness the navy mountain lifting a single wing beside him. "I feel chill of cold. Come here." Kaiser demanded, leaving me to stare at him for a few moments as that old muzzle faced away. Still being held up in pride but refusing to admit he was doing me any favors. I nodded as I approached and laid down beside him, getting that wing that could easily shelter a house to nearly entrap me with its strength... But I knew what he was doing, as I leaned up against him.

"...Thank you." He grumbled at that, but it only made me smile as we rested a bit.

"...That work is hard on you." Kaiser eventually mumbled, letting me sigh in near defeat.

"I can't say I'm built for hard labor. I've dealt with some wood before, but nothing to this size, and it was always delivered by those much stronger." I lightly sighed, enjoying the rest but he went really quiet. As if thinking... And I honestly got a little worried. "What are you pondering, my Kaiser?"

"Perhaps I will get the birds to help you." Fear struck my chest a bit, knowing that probably meant enslaving them under punishment of death if declined.

"That will not be necessary." A low grumble from him. "The birds are too slow in the air as it is, Kaiser. I had to carry the one escorting me to the mill yesterday because even I grew impatient. However..."

"However?" He responded, hearing me out.

"I got to thinking today while I was waiting." *A low exhale from the copper one.* "That perhaps a large basket or cart of sorts could help, like the ones the Children use for their own wood hauling." A slight mumble from him of sorts. "It would make the task easier, but..."

"But?" He led me on, indicating that the mountain of a dragon was still listening.

"I would have to work for them, in order to pay for it." Kaiser curled his neck at such a statement, slowly looking at me in disbelief. Though the look in his eyes was slightly concerning, their curiosity was so vivid that it made me chuckle a bit.

"*What?*" The giant barely asked.

"I would have to work for them in order to-"

"You are a dragon, mufara'varr [a playful draconic insult of sorts, like 'Naive Weirdo']. Just take the damn thing for yourself and be done with it. They can't stop you."

"Kaiser-" His grumble made me chuckle again. "It's not about power, it's about who it will affect down the line."

"What silly things have the western nests been teaching you?" A snort from him, loud but very puzzled.

"If I took it from them, then they would be without."

"So?"

"And if they were forced to take? In order to survive?"

"They are not my responsibility, whelp! We've been over this." Kaiser grumbled, thumping his tail on the ground.

"That is true but if I took what I wanted from them, it is my actions that caused their suffering." Another snort from him. "...Do you believe in Lothranis [Dragon 'Heaven' of sorts]?"

"Do not bring your religious beliefs into this conversation, zannagrea-"

"What good are we to the world- to the eco if all we do is take?" A loud growl that time, actually vibrating the floor as I could feel him getting angry. "If all we do is disrupt-?"

"Silence." What felt like a roar was merely just a loud spoken word, flaring up the fear response in me. "You will stop thinking these silly thoughts at once, whelp. Things are the way they have been, power is the only thing that matters. If they cannot fight against you, they will either obey your commands or perish. Sympathy will only get you killed. This is the way of things, this is nature as a dragon. Do not bother to question it."

"Why?" A much louder growl that time, but I remained quiet. I was still quite young at the time for an adult, but to him I was just naive. I rested for a bit longer, then got up to resume some cleaning. Constantly looking at the piles of coins and treasures, wondering how much it would take to get one of those carts. Then low rumbling from Kaiser's vocals lightly spooked me into continuing my work, only to realize he went to sleep...

Jyrn: "You didn't..."

...No. Not at that time, anyway. It would've been easy enough to blame such a thing on that tucan Vizer, but... That guilt of such thoughts began to grow in my chest. However, it was subsided by my own hunger. Making me long for a hunt, and I left the cave quietly to do just that. Taking flight and looking around the area... Not really sure where I was allowed to hunt for myself. If there were anything I should avoid, like wild livestock of sorts.

Jyrn: "Did you not hunt the past couple of days?"

Kaiser had some food brought up for him from some of the other dragons, but I'm not certain who. I recall cleaning some areas when I heard something land outside, then take off again immediately. I went out to check, and a fresh kill was waiting for him. It was a dragon though, I knew the wingbeats easily enough, especially after hearing the difference of Arakin's. So I searched around for a wyrm at the time, any wyrm I could find.

Eventually spotting some white resting in the shade, what I assumed was napping so I circled around and landed quietly.

Jyrn: "What do you mean 'assumed'?"

Well, when I touched down on the soft grass, I could hear him grunting and growling. As well as the nearby bushes rustling, and I need to remind you; I was a bit naive at this time. Because when I went searching for the noises...

Jyrn: "Y-you found dragons mating?"

I found a dragon stroking off, close enough. One with a missing horn. *Jyrn makes pondering noises* Durra'varr, dear. And I was left awestruck standing behind his line of sight, watching him rather aggressively stroke off his shaft, but struggling with something. Only to eventually slow down and toss his snout. "For taath sakes, can't a dragon stroke off in peace-?" He detected me, but doubled taked, when he actually saw who it was. Blushing a little, but nothing compared to me. "Oh, it's you... Excellent timing! Could you do me a favor?"

I was slightly stunned but snapped out of it when I registered what he was probably asking for. Snorting at him loudly. "No!"

"Just hear me out, Copper-B. I just need you to lift your tail for me." I growled at him, though... Not gonna lie, I was half turned on watching someone pleasure themselves. It was an interesting experience for sure, but at this moment... I really couldn't afford fooling around. "Just turn around and lift your tail-"

"And let you mount me? No thanks." A slightly puzzled look from him as he tried to keep his... 'edge up'? You have his equipment, you know what I'm talking about.

Jyrn: "Y-yes."

"Please, you'd just throw me off anyway." I curled my neck at him. "Huh. You don't know how to do that-? Okay, bartering: I'll teach you how to throw off a mounting frisky male if you help me finish."

"I'm not muzzling you off-"

"All I need is a view." Durra nearly begged. "I'll stay right here, in this spot. Take ten paces away if you want to, just... Please help?" I don't know why I agreed to this, but I sighed and took a few steps back. Turning around and keeping a firm look on his stare; red eyes locked on my rear as I swayed my tail a little. Watching him furiously stroke his magenta member and pant, but he didn't try to get up. Occasionally squirmed as my tail lifted a little higher, showing off glances of my slit. Then a full view made him growl in heavy, surprisingly aggressive pleasure as he curled up and started leaking heavily from his tip. Repeatedly saying "Thank you, thank you!"

Jyrn: "Until he soaked himself?"

Until completely soaking himself in his own white... Paint on a white base- okay. This time the 'paint' analogy didn't quite work but you know what I mean. Again, at the time I had more pressing matters, but I... Honestly think this gave me a new fetish. I love watching others perform on themselves, but engaging is also quite fun.

Jyrn: "I... Don't think I've ever heard that about you."

I ask for it on occasion, and someday I would love to watch you perform~ *A deep purr as the copper

dragoness nuzzled the white one.* But I only ask it for males- or herms- that I know quite a while. The only one lately was Zanna a couple of years ago, and wow... If you ever want lessons on how to do it, ask him for a show, darling. He will give you all the confidence you need.

But back to the story, he huffed as his body went through the motions and jerks. Breathing heavily in relief as I stared at him, quite heated myself, but doing my best to hide it from the frisky male. "Oi... That is so much better. I just couldn't think straight anymore." The white one rolled over and got up, not paying any attention to the mess or his still leaking tool as he stretched his body. "What can I do for you CB?"

"Travv'esa." He nodded, trying to make note. "And I was..." Safe to say I was a little distracted by his comfort at such a state. "Wondering about any hunting rules in this land before I go out and about."

"Cautious thinker, I like that. Saves a lot of mistakes." Durra'varr stated, with some bit of remorse. "Welp, the northern forests are mostly for the hunting clans and Children of the lands. It's hard for us to engage in woodsy areas anyway so that's for the best. Anything that's fenced in, stay away from unless you want to get sassed by a bird or a cow."

"Taurus, I imagine?"

"Even their females have tempers." He chuckled, moving towards some nearby water and motioning me to follow him. A bit downwind from his surprisingly strong scent but I did so anyway.

"You sound like one with experience."

"Much, but I just cannot help it. The hairless plump things taste amazing when barbecued! The only problem is that the wild ones are in the forest mentioned earlier." He snorted. "And trees are not a dragon's best friend." He stopped in place as he thought. "Except this one dragon I heard about somewheres who actually lived in a tree."

"...He lived in a tree?"

"It may just have been a rumor, I don't know." Those wings shrugged as he walked into the waters to clean off, and I sat down to just watch him. "Aside from those things, anything is basically free game. We're tasked with hunting for the Kaiser and dropping a fresh kill off at his LZ [Landing Zone] at least once every day, so."

"So that is you?"

"One of us, anyway. It used to be all of us, searching out into the far northlands for kills and delivering them every day. Kaiser used to eat a lot more when I first arrived, it's been slowing down a lot since, but..."

"But?"

"I honestly got worried that he might be... Feeding on dragons instead." I felt a deep worry in my chest.
"New Recruits, so to speak."

"He hasn't." I stated, a bit sadly, getting him to look at my heavy expression and study it for a few moments.

"...I feel a 'But' coming along." I exhaled and nodded.

"But he... Has been killing them. I found rotten meat on my first day, lots of scales mixed in with it too. But the... 'Best cuts' were not taken."

"Then what the taath?" I remained quiet and... At least Durra could read people, knowing I didn't want to talk about it. "But alright. Due to us hunting in the north for a few decades, we've got a lot of Bison in the southeast we can hunt freely. Couldn't at first, but now they've kinda become a problem with eating so much green." The male gestured in the direction. "They're heavy as hell, but will get you full. Just don't pick the biggest one you see, that's the rule."

I double took at him. "Rule?"

"Yep. Something about making the later births bigger. I'm not a science wyrm, I just follow advice from others."

Jyrn: "That's where that comes from?" *A nod from the copper one.*

"Aside from that, eat the other species at your own risk. There's no real rule against it, but they have rallied against dragons for doing that in the past, and holy balls & claws do they ever hold a grudge!" Durra overdramatically tossed his snout. "Livestock is one thing, but kill one of their own, you'll never hear the end of it."

"...Experience?"

"Not me personally, but poor Nyxaria took a Taurus one of her first days here. They're still plotting against her, I swear. Something about organizing bounties, but very... Cautiously?" The male left the water and shook himself off. Now cleaned at least.

"What do you mean?"

"It happened before my own lockdown, but the Children of the land thought that they could take down Kaiser, and went after... I'm honestly not sure who it was, but if it was his mate then it would explain where all his mercy went. But they took out something of his, an escort maybe. She put up one hell of a fight but was fatally wounded before Kaiser arrived..." My body felt a little cold all of a sudden, and I even heard Durra's own scales click loudly in a shiver. "I still can't look at the ruins of the far Northeast, that entire city? It's a graveyard- which spooks the everlasting willies out of me."

I chuckled a bit nervously as he smiled a bit sadly. "He's the only one that walked out of that place. The 'Children' and their little bounty group? Couldn't even do a lasting scar to him... Well, not physically anyway." His red eyes looked up at the mountain where the navy behemoth resided. "Most new recruits say he has no patience, but I always thought he kinda did... They're just constantly spent dealing with the Children of his land. I don't know what goes on in that mountain, and I won't pry, but... Try not to push him too much, okay? It's well in Kaiser's power to turn this entire place into ashes and sink it into the sea."

"I... Know. I felt it." Some silence as he stared at me, watching my gaze towards the ocean where those rock pillars stood.

"I see." Durra'varr mumbled. "I won't ask what that was about."

"Nothing specifically here." I sighed, feeling those red discs on me again. "The north have been putting pressure on him for trade negotiations." The male exhaled in a curse. "Something about possibly invading if they don't get a response." A whimper that time.

"They are going to be the death of us if they keep prodding him." I lightly sighed in an exhale as he walked up to me. "You've gone hungry long enough. Come, let's get you fed first, then I'll let you wrestle me." I double-taked but he took off before Durra noticed it. Shrugging my wings and following him. Speaking of which, we should take a break. I'm famished as it is.

Jyrn: "Okay."

Chapter 10

The white dragoness let out a yelp before hitting the soft grass, being thrown over the copper female's back and hearing Travv chuckle. "It takes some practice, but with the right placements, you can throw them off." She gave the white one a little lick on the muzzle, allowing Jyrn to get up. "Here, you try it on

me." The suggestion instantly made the herm blush.

"O-okay." A bit nervous about such a thing, but the white wyrm did turn around. Feeling the copper nuzzle her haunches and stroke the base of her tail a bit before climbing over them with a deep purr. Leaving Jyrn in quiet pants as she felt the metallic hips press against her haunches.

"You have no idea how much I really want to do this~" Another loud purr from Travv'esa as she embraced the slightly smaller dragoness from above before getting into a good position. "Okay, a lot of this depends on where they are, so the first thing you need to feel for is their center of balance. It helps to lower your body a little, as if trying to heavily brace yourself- It'll make sense, trust me. Just don't go too low because it'll just be a matter of them turning to your side. You won't have any room to defend yourself if that happens."

"O-okay."

"Count their roots; the positions of their paws." Travv's head nuzzled against the side of the white neck. "Feel where their head is, they're going to be leaning onto that side for the most part, and that's the side you want to throw them over. Tuck in your wings, start moving your shoulders towards the opposite side- this will force their fore-root to reposition in order to retain control over you. This is your window, because it alters their balance and they're using you to make up for it. If you can catch it in mid-positioning, perfect: reach up, grab their head- horns make insane leverage if you can snatch them. Then throw your hips up as high as you can while pulling on that head-" A yelp from Travv as she was tossed over the white one, forced to roll forwards, putting her prone and open for attack. Though chuckling at the white one's shock. "Good job!"

"That... Actually worked?" A nod from the copper female as she got up.

"Okay, again." Purring once more when she climbed those twin white hills, playfully thrusting against them and loving the red tint on those white ears. Letting Jyrn remember the steps as she shifted those shoulders underneath the copper female. "Okay, you missed your window on the adjustment, but you can lock my arm with yours by wrapping around it. Now lean towards my head's direction and thrust those hips upwards-!" Another land in the soft grass but it wasn't quite as flashy. Still functioned well enough however. "Good~ Some practice will make it a lot easier though."

"But this works even when they've... Entered you?"

"Well, it won't work that well if they knot you, but."

"What about when they bite the back of your neck?"

"Well..." Travv took a deep breath...

"You'll have to fight against your instincts if that happens." Durra explained to me. "It will make it harder too because not only your body will want to lift your haunches..." He took a moment to huff and I chuckled. "He'll also be in a better position to be more balanced and correct himself." I watched him get back up. "Once again, if you'll allow me..." And I nodded, letting him 'mount me' but not insert his tool. Though I could feel it prodding my tail. "So, in order to do this, my hands would be on your shoulders, relying on your own balance to keep me stable. However, it is hard for the male to keep a perfect balance like this. If you can find where he's leaning against, shift your shoulders so you throw him to one side-" I do so, making him yelp a bit. Then reached back and grabbed his horn and threw him over, hearing him chuckle loudly. "You're a natural, CB."

"You keep calling me that." I playfully snorted, but couldn't help myself from smiling. "And thank you."

"Stands for Copper Beauty." Durra remained resting on the grass as the sun beat down on us. Not even shy about the fact he was once again hard as a rock. I kinda... Admired that about him.

"But really, thank you for showing me this. I'd ask how you learned it, but-"

"I mounted my sisters when I was younger." I double took at him, some of it being surprised at the actual statement as it was for how blunt he stated such a thing. Instantly getting him to laugh as I took it as a jest at my expense, making me snort playfully thinking he was joking. "And I mean really young!" Another double take at him.

"W-wait, what!?"

"I'm talking about wyrmling years, okay? I spotted not only my parents 'wrestling' on occasion but also a few other couples as well. I legit thought it was a roughhousing position to win against actual fights, and well..."

"Your sisters... Learned how to throw you off?" Durra's white head nodded, almost proudly too.

"I was the only brother, playing rough was in my family's blood. But boy was it embarrassing when I learned the truth about it. So many people in my nest thought I was into males because I used it on occasion growing up, until a friend finally told me what it was actually used for." A breath in reminiscence from him. "I'm glad I did it though, because it taught my sisters how to defend themselves, and saved one from being egged early on too. By some jerk of a wyrm. He never got that ear back." I winced at the thought of someone ripping one off- like that, yes.

"That..."

"Probably stun for seasons, I bet. But yeah, that's where it comes from. And even though I know I'm a total horn-derg, rape is not in my kinks. I will actively spread my teachings around-" I laughed at him. "to

prevent it to those willing to listen." I shook my head, but leaned up and gave him a friendly lick.

"Thank you." He smiled back, and I swear... I felt a spark between us. "For everything today."

"You're very welcome. Though don't expect that to work against Kaiser. His arms are as thick as my body is, there's no way you're breaking that root."

"Hopefully I won't have to ever try."

"Yeah..." The white wyrm sighed, and I could feel something heavy surrounding him. Like a burden of a question that was read in his eyes. "You've... Spent a few nights there by now, yes?" I nodded. "Did you ever... Find any evidence of...?"

"The previous 'caretaker'?" I tried to keep my expression stoic, but I think that only telegraphed what I saw. "Durra... Are you sure you want to know the answer to that." I barely asked, hearing him exhale quietly and shake his head.

"I think you just told me..." I looked off into the distance, as if to let him quietly mourn without eyes on him. After a few minutes he spoke up. "Well, I better not keep you any longer. Thanks for the help earlier, CB." There was still something off in his voice, at the time I just blamed it on the fact he just received some grave news. Or at least confirmed dark suspicions, so I thanked him again for the lesson and meal before I returned back to my duties.

Entering the cave my mind was still clouded, unable to shake off the look on Durra'varr's face. To the point where I barely noticed the lack of that mountain beast no longer on his bedding, and my instincts warned me too late. A heavy tail slap against my side sent me across the room and into the wall, the sting making me cough and roll onto my back. Paralyzing me from moving further as I heard Kaiser roar something at me, something I couldn't make out as he approached me. "Barely a few days here and you're already fornicating with that Thalla'ka!? [Frisky Male]" Just my damn luck that he would've actually seen that.

I tried to speak but he knocked the wind out of me, still feeling the heavy vibrations of every step closer. "You disappoint me, Zannagrae." His head gestured outside. "That one, I expect such behavior, but he's never tried to cross me like this. Such treason shall be punished by dea-"

"Parra'lae!" I managed to wheeze out, instantly making his head curl back in surprise... Then growl heavily at me in anger-

Jyrn: "W-wait. What is that?"

I'm not surprised if you haven't heard of it before, because I haven't until I was taking care of some elders. At that moment, I recalled a story about them using a certain word when in conflict with another wyrm; but only used when there was a misunderstanding. It was almost a plea to allow the other to speak and say their perspective before letting the other... Finish. *The copper dragon took a breath.*

This was a last ditch effort, hoping that he was either old enough to know of it, or perhaps such a word had spread towards these lands. With how angry he was at me though...

"Murr'trath [another 'not so good' thing to call a dragoness]...!!" The navy mountain roared at me, still half taken aback that I knew of such a thing. Stressing his jaw as he looked off to the side and exhaled an intense heat, spotting the flare of his flame within his snarl. "One chance, zannagrea! You get one chance-!"

"Smell my vent." I panted heavily, still trying to recover from his blow as he curled his neck and I opened my hind legs. Shifting between staring at my eyes and the base of my tail before finally taking a step closer. Leaning down and sniffing my slit, praying that Durra wasn't 'leaking' during our practice. But with a low growl from Kaiser as he returned back to his previous step, a vocal of admission that he was incorrect. "Durra'varr was teaching me how to defend myself from being forcefully mounted-"

"To prevent me from-!?"

"Kaiser!" I roared at him, speaking the word once again as if to remind him of the rules. "Parra'lae." A long growl as he sat down and thumped his tail in protest. "In case some intruder managed to get a hold of me, and tried to..." I took a breath. "He was only trying to protect me because I reminded him of his sisters, that is all." That one was a lie, but hush. "Such grapples would never work on someone as powerful as you, Kaiser. Durra said so himself." Those gray eyes stared me down. "I am finished."

"And what were you doing searching for him?" He growled.

"I was famished, and you were slumbering." I took a breath. "Someone keeps dropping fresh kills off here, and I wanted to find out who-"

"It is the duty of the other wyrms under my rule that-"

"But I did not know that, Kaiser. And *you were sleeping*." I reminded him, hearing a grumbling exhale from him. "I was not going to disturb your slumber for such a minor task, especially when another can easily answer such a thing." The colossus took a breath and closed his eyes, grumbling and shaking his head before returning to his bed. Giving me time to get up and recover from the stun, soon feeling his gaze on me, but not one of anger... Guilt perhaps? But he looked away once I tried to gaze into his eyes, lifting a wing to invite me in beside him. I took it, not really feeling like I had a choice, but not showing any sort of harm from the blow.

We laid there for a few moments as Kaiser calmed down completely, snorting at the event before asking me. "Where did you learn such a thing, whelp?" It made me chuckle.

"I took care of elders, my lord. They like to tell stories, and I remember learning of that old rule."

"You pronounced it wrong." He grumbled, making me chuckle... But I saw him smirk in the darkness. "...Here I was thinking that phrase was lost to time."

"Not entirely." I smiled at him, and he was quiet for quite some time. And I sensed something inside his chest, like a fear of sorts building up.

"...I think we found our..." He exhaled.

"Safety word?" A slow nod from the mountain.

"So I do not mistake you for an intruder again."

Chapter 11

The copper dragoness returned to the grassy field, landing softly within its padding shaded by the clouds overhead. Moving closer to the small trove of water that ran through it. Thirsty, yes, but unable to help stare at those grey that reflected back at her for what felt like several moments. Slowly prying off her mental strength as a heavy reminiscence continued to play in her mind. Still able to see all of their faces, smiling at the copper one like an old recording; lightly fuzzy due to age but still defined.

She missed those days dearly, even though it felt wrong to say such a thing. Especially compared to the days the wyrm lived now; free of tyranny and war. Suppression and explosive violence... Travv didn't miss those, but she missed the people she was with. And it showed within those grey eyes like a foggy glass, slowly cracking as she took a deep breath. Finally caving into those instincts and lapping the cool fresh waters as they traveled down to the ocean.

The dragoness felt a little fragile after satisfying that need, wondering if it was really worth telling this tale to Jyrn. That perhaps the less she knew about the past, the better. Yet, at the same time... Maybe the white dragoness wanted to know. Needed to know. And maybe Travv'esa needed her to know as well

before going further... Or was this just all in her head? What she desired to fix? To reclaim and undo a mistake-?

Some wingbeats caught those metallic ears, letting the copper one take a few breaths. Desperately trying to harden that mask and fit it back on before Jyrn landed. Cupping some water and splashing it over her face, washing it quickly as the wyrm touched down behind her. One more deep breath before turning around and smiling at the white one. "That didn't take too long."

"Y-yeah, thanks for pausing. I just have this one spot I like to go to for privacy and it's a bit far away-" Jyrn's explanation was interrupted by a small kiss from the copper female, making the white wyrm blush. "Did you want to continue? I'd like to hear more but if you're tired..." A slight breath from Travv.

"Let me do a little bit more before the storm reaches us. Then I'll stop until next time. Sound good?" The metallic dragon smiled at Jyrn's rather excited nod, taking another deep breath to collect her thoughts.

I remember waking up next to his warm body, the deep slumbers of his breaths were not detected but the grumbles of... Pondering. I couldn't process it at the time in my head, I just felt physically exhausted from the past few days that I just kept myself still and lightly fell back to sleep. Barely even noticing him adjust... Get up and leave the cave, taking a tremendous amount of warmth with him.

...Jyrn... Do you remember that storm that hit these lands in your third year here?

Jyrn: "I can't forget it. That's the one that flooded my cave and took pretty much my entire hoard out into the sea. I still haven't found all of it, but..."

Then you remember the feeling it gave you when it approached? Days before it was even visible, every morning it was like seeing the sky on fire. I ordered everyone to make hospitality for all the children in the lands to take refuge in caves occupied by dragons, well above sea level.

Jyrn: "Y-yeah... They were not happy. That's where I met Eura'thar, staying at his home along with dozens of others. And even then..."

His stronghold took damage from that storm. Zarrna'tek's still got a lot of water damage due to the sheer amount of rain it got. Zanna'grathe's old shelter completely caved in. But I don't think anyone died, there was just... An incalculable amount of damage...

Jyrn: "...Travv...?"

That feeling that we got from that storm... I reawoke to. Like a bolt of fear struck me to jerk awake, look around to notice Kaiser was missing. Moving to my feet and searching the cave briefly, I heard his voice roar outside. Calling someone's name or title, I couldn't quite pin it down, but I knew... At that moment I knew where he was.

I rushed outside and took to the skies, immediately spotting the mountain of a navy beast, as well as something brown flying towards the same direction. "Arakin!" I called out, getting the eagle's attention as I flew underneath him and tried to slow to his speed. Feeling him carefully drop down on my back and hold on to my horns tightly as I bolted as fast as I could to the sawmill. Landing a bit heavily but nearly pushed back by Kaiser's shout in anger, my instincts telling me not to go near him but... "My lord-!"

His gray gaze immediately paralyzed my voice and I swear my scales got covered in ice, feeling Arakin slide down my back and tail before getting that same stare. As well as the same reaction, forcing the bird to stop any advancement before Kaiser returned his attention on the cowering foreman. "Now speak! Do you know why I am before you!?"

"N-no, my king. Have the logs we've been cutting not been-?" A low growl from the navy giant interrupted Jara'kai and I feared the worst, as did everyone else.

"Kaiser-"

"Speak to me again and lose your tongue, Zannagrae! Understood!?" He roared at me, though not removing his gaze from the foreman. I took a step forwards, only to feel Arakin place a paw on my arm to stop me. Letting us share a look, but he was as distressed as I was. Not wanting this, but any action I took would only escalate the beast's anger. "Your cuts have been acceptable, but you make a very grave mistake No'vaachr! You've been making her wait." Kaiser tossed his head towards me and fear struck my heart. I knew it... At that moment, the mistake *I* made the day before. The wording I used... This was my fault.

"M-my liege?"

"You've been wasting her time, and therefore have been wasting **Mine**!" Those gray eyes looked around at everyone nearly taking shelter away from the event, worried that they might be targeted next. But... That's not what Kaiser was doing. He was making sure he had witnesses. "Let his life be a lesson to you all, if my Nalazar asks for something- *I* Have Asked For it! And you will give it to her, starting with that cart!"

That moment, the world seemed to move in slow motion as that navy paw raised. I heard Arakin's call in denial as the eagle bolted towards Jara'Kai, those gray eyes focusing on the advancing bird and changing his attack from a slam to a swat. I dove after Arakin, tearing up the very ground underneath me as I barely got an arm in front of the brown eagle before Kaiser's paw connected; hitting my body instead of

giving my friend a deathblow he probably wouldn't have ever recovered from.

To say that this mountain of a dragon was strong is an understatement, my lunge to save Arakin completely changed direction the moment the beast made contact with my arm and muzzle. Sending the two of us backwards, my shoulders slamming into a pile of logs that scattered into debris, a shower of broken wood and splinters. I remember the pain causing my body to lock up and nearly brace the eagle as we both heard that awful wet crush, silencing whatever cry the foreman tried as the ground quaked heavily.

His wingbeats were heard afterwards as his shadow cast a cold chill over everyone underneath it. I...It's hard to tell if it was due to the pain in my muzzle or the immense guilt I felt at that moment, but I remember breaking into sobs. Constantly apologizing as I felt as Arakin squirmed out of my grasp, never minding my bleeding snout as he looked past the debris and...

I remember seeing his face twist when he looked at the red stain in the grass; now a mix of feathers and rags dyed crimson. Glaring at my own grey eyes in this mix of scolding, sorrow, and betrayal. And all I... I... *A heavy breath from the copper one.* I have to stop here, Jyrn.

Jyrn: "That's okay." *The intersex embraces Travv tightly.* "You've done a lot today. It's alright."

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He told himself he wasn't going to finish it today, but the black wyrm found himself closing the hard cover at the end of it. Exhaling a bit in anger, not that the book was bad by any means, Zanna just told himself he was going to make this one last... More than one evening. Of course, that didn't happen.

Another exhale of disappointment in himself as he finished off his small bowl of wine. Wondering what time it was in the late evening. He had a long day tomorrow too: gathering a stack of firewood, visiting some people, hoping to get lucky through either of those events. It's definitely been a while since he had some company.

The dragon swears the wood runs out so quickly, adding one of his few remaining logs into the brazier.

Not wanting to go another evening without its warmth, he's gotten too used to the luxury of it. Taking a few moments to stare at it while it lit up his massive room, if only he could find a way to pay someone to deliver the wood up here. Such a task would be too straining on his kobolds and servants to bring it to this destination, making Zanna wonder how Kaiser performed such a thing.

His frilled ears flicked as the black one heard something land outside, or at least thought he did. He wasn't expecting anyone this late, instantly making his evening even more sour as the dark male likely knew what it was. Nearly snorting at the idea of a thief attempting to steal their lost gamble back from Zanna once again, well this time he was getting a scare. Quietly moving into his hallway entrance and hiding into a small corner, spotting movement and soft steps as the large creature quietly made its way through the dark corridor. Peeking inside the lit room and scanning the area before their scales clicked, now sensing Zanna.

"Stealing is hardly becoming of you." The black wyrm nearly announced himself from behind them, hearing the audible gasp, growl, and exhale from the draconic visitor. Watching them take a step back. "If you want your earnings back, play the game-"

"Taath, Zanna..." The voice of a female, puzzling him. "I'm not stealing from you, I'm just..."

"Travv'esa?" The black male stepped out of the shadows and into the very very low light. "What are you doing here at this hour?"

"What are you doing up?" She snorted, but there was something off in her voice.

"I was caught up in a good book," He paused, rolling his eyes. "And ending up finishing it the first evening I got it. Now I need to wait another season for the next one to arrive." A light chuckle from her. "That doesn't explain yourself."

"I..." His orange gaze narrowed over her copper form, attempting to find those grey eyes that were avoiding it.

"...Travv." Zanna half asked surprisingly thickly. "Are you here Searching For Ghosts?" The statement provoked those grey discs to lock onto him, revealing their sorrow.

"No... Yes... I don't..." The copper female exhaled, hanging her snout down as the black wyrm stood between her and the entrance to his cave; blocking it. "I just... Didn't want Jyrn to see me like this." A quiet breath from Zanna as he nodded, dropping the stern act and taking a few steps closer to Travv'esa. Whispering her to come closer and covering her in an embrace. "But I can't be-"

"It's alright, my Queen-" A frustrated growl in displeasure at the title, making him chuckle. "Is such a title still stained in your memory?" He half teased, feeling the copper head shake. "Come, let's get you by the fire."

