

Memory's Fragment Act 1 - When Angels Fly Away

By Bartan Tirix

Chapter 1

The autumn was definitely setting in, it's scent invading the very basic cabin where she slept. Naked, and not used to the cool mornings still, even if she wasn't that far north. Maybe it was just the different location as a whole, it was difficult to tell, but regardless it did wonders for her rest. Able to sleep until the morning light started waking her up.

Then a loud crunch outside perked those brown ears up. Getting the female to hold her breath and study them. Following the spacious trail outside of the one room cabin as she got out of her bed. Silently taking a nearby rifle that was leaning on the wall, and aiming it out the window with not so much but a single breath. Her white chest; calm. Her mind; focused down the iron sights. The trigger squeezed halfway, and then movement.

But something lighter brown. Long face, just like someone she knew. But the eyes were different. Wild, frightened, maybe desperate. Soon staring in her direction, making out the coyote after she took a breath and lowered the firearm. Moving a bit forward as she got up off the cold ground and adjusted the bandaged around her forearms. Walking outside with said rifle and half gazing at the deer as it browsed around the wilderness of the hill. Far enough into the forest to hide from the nearby garrison. Looking over it closely and its current guards on duty, not suspecting a thing.

As much as she wanted to just get the job done and over with, tomorrow would be her best bet. Moving back inside to hide the weapon once again and gather a few tools to head back out, the coyote crossed eyes with the wild buck once again. Not treating her like a threat, as if it knew it was almost safe around her. A strange concept for a nervous wreck, yes, but one she was content with.

The sun was piercing through the trees, displaying to the land the very name she was given far after birth. Or at least, the only part of it she could recall. Walking down the unpathed woods the canine has grown to know over the last few days almost seemed but a dream to her. Never wishing for a better place to stay, unlike several others who complained about the hard bed and the poor shelter that has been abandoned for years. Not even really offered for refugees or traveling merchants, until that last one came along.

Yes, that one was rather keen on his earnings, and not looking forward to a night of hunger. Even if the castle was not even an hour away, it was the coyote's cooking dinner that allured him. The wonderful crisp aroma of cooked meat over a campfire to a starving merchant, willing to part with anything to ease the torment of starvation. Let alone, cursing the fact he wasn't bartering provisions instead of cold iron and jewelry.

To his surprise, the female had no interest of such things. Nor his coin that he clutched tightly, like it was an obsession. Almost being able to still see his shocked expression as her present self cut down a tree and started breaking it into pieces with an axe. Reminding her of the very logs she was using for that fire, tossing one in while continuing negotiations. "I want information."

"What?" The crow double taked, wanting to just lunge at her bait that was willing to be served.

"I want to know when that general, Wrihan, is going to leave his garrison." A whimper from him. "Merchants know these things, that's why you've rushed yourself so much that you forgot to account for the extra food on this trip, yes? Tell me this, and this plate is all yours." A whine from him.

"How do I...?" No response. "How do I know you're not just going to kill me afterword?"

"I'm not a soldier."

"That doesn't mean you're not dangerous." As much as the avian wanted to weigh his options, his body was demanding it's needs louder and louder by the moment. "That's... That's all you want? To know when he's going to leave the walls?"

"And for you to keep your beak shut about me being up here, that would be nice." Another whimper at her rather strict tone, as she took a bite out of her own share. Not obnoxiously enjoying it in front of him, but it was very good. "If you don't show up with your supplies, they'll get suspicious. You're not my target, he is."

"So you are an assassin..."

"And you're a weapon's dealer. It's not uncommon for our trades to meet agreements, merchant." She cut his meat up into strips and tossed half a one towards him. Seeing that black beak instantly snap at it while airborne and almost cooing at its taste. Detesting his instincts at that moment, because it demanded more. Much much more. "Do we have a deal?" And that's all it took.

However, that was the easy part. The hard part was to find a good position to take the shot. Considering the range of such a weapon, and the massive opened fields around the garrison, it made things difficult. That's probably why the General and his men felt so safe out here. But safe also meant careless. That was the coyote's advantage for the moment. And judging by boar's past actions, he was notorious for being careless.

That's probably why they wanted to take him out. Aside from being an obnoxious feminizer that often only seen the gender as a pair of walking breasts and a set of legs. She was sure there was some kind of grudge or vendetta in there somewhere, but it was hardly the coyote's place to find excuses or even reasons to be invested in a job. At the moment, it was just a living. One she was just used to.

Taking her morning gatherings back to camp, those old memories came back in glimpses. Mostly, the good ones. Though, not long before they started repeating. No matter how bad things got, how heated those deserts were. How much she got sick of the taste of scorpions and snakes, they were still...

She couldn't say *happy* memories, more just content ones. That is, until the horse opened his damn mouth.

That debate bounced around her head from time to time, but the sight of something large and copper made her double take coming around the cabin. "Hi!" The large draconic one almost chirped at her, smiling brightly and almost showing the tips of his longer fangs. Getting the two to just stop and stare at each other for a few moments. "I'm selling pickled items for my mother!" A gesture towards a wooden crate strapped to his neck and chest. "Would you be interested in helping me?"

Another long stare as the canine dropped the carried wood to the side of the house and her gear. "I told her I wouldn't come back until I sold everything. We need the money for a magic elixir that's going to cure her condition!" Again, no response from the coyote. "I've got a variety of goods I'm willing to part with, and possibly any work you might need as well!" A slow blink from her brown eyes as his ears perked and head tilted. "Do... Do you speak Common?"

"...Yes." She finally answered, making that large tail wag again. "But I don't have any coin." Within an instant, those ears drooped and his wings sagged, almost brushing the ground.

"You don't...?" No response from her. "Do you know who might be interested though?" He whimpered, nearly reminding her of a large pup to be honest. Yet, she couldn't help but look over towards the garrison, making him do the same and perk those frilled ears up again. "They might?" He asked, rather happily. "That is a great idea!" It really wasn't. But before she could stop him, the dragon was on his way. "Thank you, kind sir!"

It nearly left the canine a little stunned. Now realizing that the dragon might actually give away her position here. Lifting a paw up to call to him, she felt something strange under the bandages around her forearm. Making her stop and study it for a few moments before hearing him take off. Now gone with no way to catch up to the wyrm. But maybe... Maybe she wouldn't have to.

Chapter 2

The two male guards communicated with groans and near whimpers, both from their maws and their mid-sections as they endured the boredom of gate duty. "So... Hungry..."

"So you've said, about eighty-two times since our shift."

"But I am."

"That doesn't mean you need to remind us. You're not the only one who's hungry."

"I just wish that merchant was bartering-"

"Food! I get it! We all do! Now stop talking about it. It's not like something is going to suddenly appear and sell us-"

"Good morning, kind madams!" The copper dragon shouted while gliding over them. Circling around and landing in the spacious fields before walking towards the guards. "Can I interest you or your fellow band members in some pickled goods?" The two just stared at the large one, unable to tell if he was a hallucination or not. "I have a box of goodies here I'm willing to sell at a good price, and even better cause!"

"...Are you seeing this?" The whiney guard whispered to the other.

"Yes. Yes I am."

"...Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Likely along the lines of it, yes." The more composed one cleared his throat and stepped forward. "Greetings... Dragon?"

"Phraxxis!" The copper one chirped.

"Phar... Whatever. We might not have enough coin on us," A sad look from the wyrm. "However, our boss inside might be interested on your wares." A very happy expression as that large metallic tail started to wag uncontrollably. "Why don't you come inside and speak with him?"

"You mean, I'm welcomed inside your walls!?"

"Yes, as long as you do what we say-!" A loud excited chirp as he almost bounced off his paws while walking. Barely able to keep himself still while those gates slowly opened, whimpering with impatience.

"IGetToGoInside, IGetToGoInside, IGetToGoInside!" The large one repeated in whispers while another patrol looked over from afar. Watching over them as they escorted the dragon within the garrison.

"I can't wait to try one of those pickles...!" The whiney guard whimpered in a whisper, leading the clearly distracted wyrm inside.

"Same. But I'm also curious as to what dragon meat tastes like..."

The gates closed without the guards on the outside, as the patrol nearly followed where the large one's heavy steps and constant questions through the walls. Not noticing the soft winds blowing through the trees, nor something sneak up behind him. Grabbing the Civet in a choke hold and forcing him to the ground before easing up a bit on his throat. Hearing him gasp loudly and desperately for air, and make out a pair of... Pillows against his back? "Listen to me carefully, pup." A whimper from him as that choke increased again. "I need you to deliver a message to your superior, understand?" A cough, but

a nod. "Repeat after me..."

"This is a very odd bed." The dragon stated, feeling the chains constantly wrap around his back, neck and paws. Not so much his tail though, two soldiers swat to unconsciousness was enough of a warning to just stay away from it. "Are these really needed?"

"Yes." One of the guards said. "To, uh..."

"Keep me from falling out of it?"

"-Sure."

"Wow. I wish I had these before. I used to fall out of the bed all the time, according to my mother!"

"It... Shows." The guard rubbed the back of his neck. "Now stay still while we do this. Our boss is calculating our expenses and giving you quite a bit for your wares."

"Really!?" Another tail wag, reaching further and knocking over several tables. "Maybe I'll finally be able to afford that elixir for her! She has a condition."

"I'm... Sure she does." The smaller one mumbled, unable to look into the wyrm's faded blue eyes. Though, his attention was caught by some shouting at the front gate, as the others finished binding the dragon. "I wonder what all that was about."

"Maybe more friends that came to visit?"

"Friends?" The soldier worried. "You... You weren't followed or sent here to distract us, were you?"

"Nope! I'm just trying to sell my pickled jars of goodies!" A blank look from the soldier. "Speaking of which, how does your soldiers like them?"

"I'm... Sure they're enjoying... What exactly did you pickle now?"

"Some fruits, veggies, meats! One is a stale bun I found a long time ago, and another is a rock! Though, I wouldn't advise someone eating that one-" A loud whimper from afar got their attention for a moment.

"Why would you pickle a rock?"

"Because it makes a great pet fish!" Another blank look. "Especially for the wyrmlings!"

"I... See-" A look over at a civet soldier walking quickly through the fortress, searching for something or someone. Getting closer, the guard noticed how almost roughed up he looked as he approached a Boar in a general's uniform.

"Excellent work on capturing a dragon, you two. This'll definitely feed us for an entire week!" The rather heavy looking hog laughed at his good fortune. "It's about time things started going our way a little!"

"The only reason why we were starving is because you were eating-"
"Wrihan Sir!!" The civet interrupted the guard, getting the boar's attention. "W-we have a problem!"

"What is it?"

"Sir... I was ambushed by someone outside!" A puzzling look from everyone. "Somebody grabbed me from behind!"

"Did you kill them?" One of the guards asked.

"Well, no. I didn't kill her..." Another questionable look.

"Attack her?"

"N-no..."

"Defend yourself in the slightest?" The civet shook his head at the general. "Then what did you do?"

"I-I... Took a message, sir." A few moments of staring at the soldier.

"You took a message?" It was barely a question, and after a long pause the boar started to laugh. "Fine, soldier. What was this message from this pair of tits?"

"S-she..." A loud swallow. "She wanted us to let the dragon go." A gesture towards the large one in chains, attempting to wave while overhearing the conversation. Getting the fat boar to laugh loudly, and eventually everyone started in on it. Leaving the civet feeling a little awkward.

"Or she'll what? Nag us to-" The general's neck suddenly exploded outwards, creating a cone of blood and flesh soaking everyone directly right of him. Leaving just a small thread of skin still attached to his body that eventually snapped off due to its weight. Making everyone yelp loudly at the sudden assassination and go into a panic.

"W-what!?"

"Was that a gunshot!?"

"I didn't hear anything!"

"Where did it come from!?" Several of them ducked and hid, trying to take shelter from the late general's left direction. Shouting up at the walls for any soldier higher to look out, but signal that nothing was seen.

"That doesn't make any sense! There's no hole or line of sight through several stone walls!"

"Then what the hell!?"

"...A violent stroke?" The rather calm guard half suggested, only for the far outer wall to completely get blasted outwards. A loud display of fire and burning stone that nearly caused the entire walkway above to collapse. Creating a hole big enough for the copper dragon to literally walk out.

"I-I think she's trying to tell us something...!" The civet whimpered loudly.

"You can't possibly suggest that she's some sort of witch, are you!?"

"I-I'm with Fosan! You got any other way to explain this!?"

"The dragon! Maybe he's doing it!"

"P-pardon!?" Phraxxis attempted to double take at the voice behind him. "I-I don't!"

"If we kill him quickly, maybe it'll stop!" Several others agreed in a panic, making the wyrm yelp and attempt to break out of the chains, only to hear the sounds of flesh, cloth, and metal suddenly freeze solid in a matter of seconds. Hearing several others whimper, witnessing their fellow soldiers completely stop moving while being covered in a thick frost. Then silence, other than rapid breaths of those who were terrified.

A few loud noises against the chains around the dragon made him yelp as they suddenly loosened. Not feeling any pain and slowly getting up and uncovered. Whimpering loudly as he was finally able to look around and really see the carnage that befell the area. Almost being able to faintly hear the heartbeats of those who were frozen before they slowly tilted and shattered into pieces along the ground. That unsettling look of light blue and nearly black red shards and chunks made him frown.

Terrified whines of those who were still looking over the area, trying to make sense out of the surrealism of magics. Perhaps curses or hexes that they prayed were just hallucinations from starvation. Still, the wyrm didn't feel comfortable here. Looking around the same areas many of them were, he got signals to just leave the area before more blood stained their grounds. With a loud swallow and a few slow pawsteps, he started moving towards the massive hole in the wall. Leading outside towards freedom, in hopes that's what the goddess demanded of him.

Though, a few steps outside, and he was left without direction. Wondering if she was still there or not. Let alone, who it was to begin with? His mother, possibly trying to protect him from the nice soldiers? Willing to buy his items-? His wares! He forgot them. Taking a slow look inside, he didn't feel right taking from them, considering the lives they have already lost today. A heavy breath, and Phraxxis turned about once again.

Then, a small light came from the distance, arching upwards at what he thought was just the sun in the sky as it fell. Bright red, as if to signal him. Yet, was it to warn him, or to call him? Maybe it was to signal for an attack on the fortress, in which case the dragon had better move out of the way. Taking to

the skies quickly, he circled around from above, trying to find any other signal or possibly movement. Yet, there was nothing about. No extra squads of rival soldiers, no backup approaching from the skies or forests. Making him stop in a hover to ponder what it was.

A loud snap from below raised his spines in fright, barely seeing a large wooden bolt aim for him at the very corner of his eye. Making the dragon's heart nearly stop before it- Showered him with splinters? Well, most of it. The metal head did manage to nick the membranes of his wings, and a small portion of the body gave his side a good swat, but a punishment he would gladly take. Let alone, a message received for him to move before-

A loud yelp as a metal cable wrapped around his forepaw. Anchoring down to a nearby hill that was occupied with nothing but tall grass, and something white and brown. Zipping up the cable towards Phraxxis and somehow seeing the metal rope disappear behind her in a shower of bright energy. That is, until she climbed up the midair dragon and felt the barrel of a rifle against his neck. "Glide." A whimper in question from him. "Go into a steady glide." She demanded.

A loud swallow, but the wyrm did as he was told. Almost feeling like he was being held hostage by her, until the barrel slightly moved. A loud click made him yelp and brace for pain, but instead a loud explosion against the ballista below him. The one that he was nearly shot by, now reduced to rubble in an instant. Just like the wall before. "Circle around and land near that hole."

"W-what!?" He tried to double take, then felt that barrel again. This time heated against his scales. "Please...!"

"You don't need to go inside if you don't want to, but I need to get his head." A loud whimper from him. "Do it." A swallow was heard through the wind and he did so. Landing in the outside, and feeling the coyote slide off of him with ease. "Attempt to leave and I will shoot you out of the sky, understand?" An innocent nod as he laid down. Trying to keep himself as low to the ground as possible. Watching the still naked female aim inside the walls and start hearing yelps again from the soldiers inside.

Carefully she made her way inside, scanning the area for any sudden movements and keeping her aim up. Dumping out a nearby sack that was probably used for wheat and stuffing the boar's head into it. Still not getting any movement aside from dozens of eyes watching her. No one else willing to risk their lives to avenge their late boss. Returning back outside the walls to find Phraxxis still there, and whimpering when he seen the now bloody bag. Granted, not fighting the female as she easily climbed onto him. "Fly."

"What?" That barrel again, making him faintly whine. "I-I mean... W-where?"

"West." A look in the direction. "Yes." A deep breath from the dragon as he attempted to remain calm. Given no choice but to obey her and take to the skies.

Chapter 3

His wings were getting tired, pushing on what felt like an entire day of flying in one direction with a gun to his head. Wondering if his fatigue was starting to show as the female adjusted on his shoulders. "Go lower and glide." She demanded, making him whimper and follow directions. Passing over a forest that soon turned into a large field. One that had much wildlife running through it as she aimed down with her weapon. "Keep still." The dragon did so, and after a few moments the gun unleashed a frightening sound that he wasn't used to. Nearly hurting his ears for nearly a minute before starting to feel taps. "Hey! Land near it." A wide circle around and he did so.

Finally touching down and giving his sore wings a rest, Phraxxis panted loudly. Feeling her get off and walk towards a large buffalo, now lying on the ground. A few sniffs in the air, and he could smell that horrid red once again, but also some much needed water. Walking towards it instantly got her attention, pulling out another weapon that he hadn't seen before: a medium sized revolver and aiming it towards the wyrm. Making him whine as he glanced over a nearby stream of water, then back at her. A few moments of silence and she dropped her aim, giving him permission to take a drink.

He never thought he would miss such a thing. Though not pure, but still refreshing against his dried, neglected throat. Doing wonders to aid it as he took a fill, then feeling the pain of hunger. Possibly what the coyote was feeling too. Speaking of which, the dragon could barely see her in the tall grass. If only he was so lucky to have such a structure, Phraxxis might be able to escape such a hostage situation. But for now, he was lost. Hungry, and not being hunted down. As much as he did want his freedom, it wasn't worth taking the risk.

Walking towards her, that smell of blood was very strong. Both making the wyrm woozy and starving at the same time. Finding the bag with the head inside first, forcing a whimper out of him before overseeing the corpse. Growing more empty of its insides the more she cut opened its belly. All with a knife that she stuck back in her boot. "I don't suppose you have a breath weapon."

"I..." He mumbled, looking around the rather flammable area for a moment. When his blue eyes came back around, there was that revolver again. Appearing in her hand as she looked at him and pointed at the buffalo.

"Drag it over."

"Drag it...? Where?" A quick aim to the nearby forest and the weapon fired loudly, without her even looking in the direction. Making him yelp and duck his head as a large tree fell down.

"Over there." She said, stepping forward to retrieve the bag as Phraxxis whimpered. Grabbing one of the horns and dragging it across the field. Trying not to pay attention to its constant insides wiggling free with every forceful pull of the large one. Hearing several more loud bangs and the wood

splitting from afar, then another one. Lighting the grass on fire and not seeing a hint of concern from the brown one. Even after it started covering a space about ten feet as she retrieved the log. Then firing in the flames after a bit, covering it with a thick sheet of frost.

It was strange to see such magics, let alone from such weapons. He's heard them firing in the distance before, but he thought they only left minor holes in targets. Leaving the copper one stunned for a few moments as the coyote setup the campfire. Then started preparing the meals. "How are you...?" No response from her. "Able to do this?"

"Long story." Those faded blue eyes looked over her, still not sure what to think of her more nude choices of clothing. Then the bandages along her forearms that he's never noticed before.

"Are you...?" A bit of a yelp when that firearm reappeared once again in her hand and shot the wood, instantly setting it aflame before she let go of it. Now finally witnessing the gun fall out of her grasp and dissipate into the air. Nearly seeing it in a wireframe before disappearing entirely. "Are you... Hurt?"

"No." She answered after a long silence. "It just raises less questions."

"About what?" No response that time, and the dragon laid down. Watching her take several large pieces of meat and put them on a large branch. Then angle that stick over the fire before walking towards the large one. Taking off the rifle strapped to her back and setting it on the ground, wondering why that one didn't disappear like the other before she started leaning against him. Giving him an awkward whimper and a series of mixed feelings. "What... Do I call you?"

"Dawn." She said, at least this time a little faster than previous answers.

"Okay, Dawn. I'm Phraxxis." Silence. "Dawn? What are you planning to do with me...?" No response for a while as she stared into the fire. "Are you going to...?" A loud swallow from him.

"I'm going to take you west, and complete my job." A whimper in question. "Then I'm going to pay you." A double take from him that time.

"W-what?" No response. "Pay me...?"

"For your assistance." They shared a long look. "For that job."

"But... I..."

"You lost your business, yes?" A sad look from those blue eyes, yet the brown ones were almost void of such things. Hardened. "And you were a good distraction. A dumb one, but good nonetheless." That actually made the dragon smile a bit.

"...Then what?"

"We get another job." A noise in question as she got up to rotate the meat.

"...Why me?" A long pause as she returned. Slowly taking the bandages off.

"Can I trust you to keep your maw shut?" A faint whine from him, but a nod regardless. Watching closely as those wrappings revealed... Symbols. Runes stained on her inner wrists. "I've been accused of being a witch several times in my life. I know enough to hide these whenever I'm in a new world."

"New... World?" He almost whispered. "Dawn...?"

"I'm not from here, pup." That only raised a dozen more questions for his curious mind, as he watched in amazement as those runes glowed and a pair of those revolvers appeared in her paws. Then a much larger one. A rifle, somewhat similar to the one she was carrying. Then a very very large one, who's barrel nearly reached the flames. "Ever since I got here, I haven't been able to do this." A gesture to the guns, each disappearing as soon as they left her hands. Then a gesture towards the fire and the burned grass before looking into his blue eyes, almost thickly. "So, why the hell can I do it around you?"

"I-I..." He only whimpered in response as those ears fell. "But... I wasn't..." No response, but Dawn's gaze didn't lift. "In the... With the Soldiers...?"

"I was able to add the elements to the shots, but not able to summon my own. Hence..." A gesture to the rifle on the ground. "From there, I took a position on that hill, and sniped them from afar." A sad look as she tapped his side a little heavily. "You're welcome, Phalix."

"Ph-Phraxis." He corrected the coyote. "And..." A defeated breath. "...Thank you." Another one. "All I was trying to do was help." She got up, tending to the meal once again and bringing it closer to him. Offering the dragon the biggest slice before summoning a firearm and pulling the trigger at it. Making him whimper at the incoming loud sound, but only heard a click from the hammer. Yet, a large gust of wind cooled off the meat for him to hold it easily. "Thank you." A faint nod from her as he gave into his hunger. Not really one to like it cooked this way, but not complaining in the slightest.

A long silence as the two ate. Watching the sun slowly set over the campfire and the beautiful day finally pass. "What happened to your mother." It was barely a question that startled the copper one. Only being able to look over the coyote with sad blue eyes. "Did she die?"

"...No. Not really." A almost whimpered. "She's... Petrified, I think the term was." A look away, towards a large rock in the distance.

"So, turned to stone."

"Yeah... It happened when I was younger, she was only trying to protect me from something. All I remember are shadows in a viney forest. Thorns everywhere, strangling everything." A deep from him as he nearly curled up to Dawn. "I barely made it out on my own, only because I was small enough to pass through it. But something was chasing me inside, trying to keep me in the forest."

"So, herding you." A look at the brown one, not knowing the term. "Like how dogs would herd

sheep."

"You mean the fluffy ones?" Half a smirk as she nodded, making him smile and start to wag his tail a little bit. "M-maybe. I'm not really sure, but my mother heard me. Tore an exit for me to barely make it out, but in return she was..."

"She was what?"

"Injured by that thing. The doctors kept saying it was some supernatural illness that was slowly turning her body into stone, and there was no cure for it..." A few tears fell from his snout as he took a breath. Maybe she shouldn't have told me, being so young. Or, that's what others used to say. But mother wanted me to realized and take advantage of our time together."

"Yet, you found a cure."

"Yes! Things were looking grim for her, but we met this crazy old wizard that said there was hope!" An odd look from Dawn. "I really liked him, he was very funny." A bright smile from Phraxxis that nearly got one from the canine. "But he said there was a bit of a catch... That her condition would eventually suffocate her..." A chuckle from the large one. "The man was trying to say another word, but couldn't pronounce it right. Ended up breaking his own tongue off by attempting so." An eyebrow raised at him. "He was very strange, but highly entertaining!"

"I'll take your word for it."

"A-anyway... He said that the best way to save her was to speed up the process very quickly, that way she wouldn't suffer or... Drown?"

"Asphyxiate?"

"That was the word!" Another bright smile. "So... We said our goodbyes, and that I would make enough money to pay the old wizard for his elixir."

"Which is why you were selling me...?"

"Pickled goods! O-or... That was the plan. I didn't sell much, but I didn't really know what to do." A deep sigh from the dragon as his wings drooped. "But taking it was just wrong, according to mother. She specifically said so: 'Phraxxis, you're my brave little wyrmling. You always have been. You'll figure out a way without doing harm to others.' Yet..."

"Assassination would probably fit in that category." Another defeated breath from the wyrm. "But you didn't agree to that, and I'm not paying you to assist me in the murders of others."

"W-what...?"

"I'll pay you to be my mount. My ride. How's that?" A bright smile as that tail began to wag again. "You're better than my last one, so far."

"I am?"

"Artheas was an obnoxious nag." A bit of a chuckle from him. "As long as you don't try to convince me that my work and decisions are wrongfully immoral, you'll get paid. Deal?"

"Deal!"

Chapter 4

The warmth of the sun and air felt wonderful against his scales. Regardless of the constant winds against him, it was nice to finally have the light behind the copper one. Giving him a much easier time to study the scenery, nearly making him breathless and smile like a goof at everything. Though, something he did come to notice was the shading of greens. Growing ever so lighter the more they headed west. Though, there were patches where the deepest of greens were still around, often indicating an area with nearby water.

Every once in a while, he would spot buildings and towns. Nearly waiting for the coyote on his back to finally grab his attention and let him know where to land. But nothing really came of it, making him wonder how far did Dawn come? So many places the dragon wanted to visit, but she didn't seem too interested in. Granted, the female barely seemed interested in anything, nearly the opposite of Phraxxis. An odd observation that came to his mind, but one that almost made him smile. Making them a great team.

Team. Partner. Terms of the sort came to mind from time to time, nearly making the dragon giddy. Loving the idea of just working or just doing a job for someone. Maybe 'Being of Help' was the correct term. The idea of being useful to someone, even if what they were doing was unsettling. It was a bit odd, really, the brown creature on his back seemed to be so neutral towards everything. Not really wanting to help others, but not outright rejecting them either. Willing to cull in order to protect the dragon, but not ruthlessly kill everything in sight. However, that last one did raise a question; is the reason why she was protecting Phraxxis was because of himself? Or was it because he was giving her those strange powers?

Even that raised more questions. Exactly what was she capable of, and why was the dragon granting these abilities? He was nothing special, or so he thought. The wyrm's mother thought the world of him, yes, but wasn't that the same for all parents? Was it the same for... Hers? The question made him too curious to really hold back, changing to a glide and attempting to look back at her. "Dawn?" He spoke over the loud winds, feeling a tap in response. "What... What were your parents like?"

He expected the odd look from those brown eyes, actually expected it to be a bit more surprising. Though the long silence was something he grew to normalize. At least with her. "They were... Normal."

"Normal?"

"Nothing much else to say. Not really poor, not really rich. Though some others thought differently." His ears perked a bit, but were soon folded back by the wind. "They had quite the wardrobe, most of the surrounding townsfolk often thought we were the richest people in town, but not really."

"But what did they think of you?" No response. Not even looking at the dragon anymore, even when he questioned her about it. Considering the canine's line of work, perhaps the answer was quite clear. Making his heart sink a little bit. "I like you."

"What?" She asked, rather quickly at that. More puzzled than anything.

"I think you're wonderful. In a boss-ma'am sort of way." That stare didn't let off, but all he did was smile at her. Starting his flight patterns once again and letting the words sink into her mind for the rest of the trip. Taking a few breaks for water and food here and there, but not for too long. "How far is this place?"

"Only a few more hours, I'm sure." Dawn answered, getting her own drink of water from the stream. Not noticing the puzzled look from the dragon until much later.

"How did you make it...?" He glanced the direction where they came.

"I walked." His neck curled. Once again, looking back and forth between the destinations. "Yes. It took a while."

"You... Walked?" A nod from her. "This entire way?"

"Yes." Dawn bluntly said, getting no relief from the dragon's gaze. "I'm used to traveling long distances."

"In this heat?"

"In worse than this heat." She took another drink before climbing back onto the large one. "Where I came from, most of the planet was nearly a desert."

"Why?" No response for a while.

"That's just the way things were, Phraxxis." Those blue eyes searched for the canine again, but not quite seeing her expression. Instead getting a few taps to signal him to continue. Taking one last drink for himself, he took off.

The sun was starting to get into his eyes after a bit, yet he was still able to make out a town in

the distance. Finally getting those taps Phraxxis has been waiting for, nearly chirping in response as he started to dip lower. Taking wide circles around the town and feeling the surprised gazes from below as he followed Dawn's instructions of where to land; a bit a ways out before walking towards the back of a two story building. Still getting a bit of a crowd to look at the dragon, who only greeted them with a bright smile.

A few taps told him to slow to a stop and let her off. Both with the rifle and the bloody bag that caused a few parents to cover their children's eyes. Well, before noticing that the coyote was still clothesless. "I'll be back in a bit. Feel free to mingle and take a drink from the trough, but don't destroy anything."

"Can I enter the town?" He excitedly asked the brown one. Only to get a look from her.

"You're already in it." She half shrugged, seeing him chirp and wag that tail with enthusiasm. Nearly making her smile as the town's children moved in to take a closer look at the wyrm. Entering the building from the back and going through the kitchen with a few surprised looks, spotting one of the females that worked there. One a little occupied with a male customer. "I'm back." The coyote stated, startling the sheep.

"D-Dawn!?" She shouted, getting the attention of many others within the brothel. "Holy Fish! I thought you were dead!"

"I love it when you talk dirty." The customer nearly whimpered. Enthralled with the softness of the wool, until he got shoved aside by the brown one.

"Where's Suzanne?"

"In the back." The sheep overlooked her once again. "And did you...?"

"Yep. Not a single bit of clothing. I'm hoping you didn't spend that money for that bet." A bit of a whimper from her. "I'm sure you'll get it back today."

"Yeah, yeah." A grumble from the wooly one as she motioned for the canine to leave her. Heading towards the back to spot a Crane working the bar a bit. Nearly getting her feathers to puff out a bit.

"Damn, girl. I'm glad your back and all, but put something on already. No need to give these people a free show." The avian chuckled.

"Not until I pass this in." The canine set the bag on the table, and half opened it towards her. Expecting the face of disgust. "How did that conversation go again? 'I don't care how you do it, I'll pay you twelve grand for that bastard's head.' If I recall correctly."

"Is that where you've been? Fluffles stated you went out for a job, and for some reason nearly giving you a stinkeye."

"We made a bet. Hence." A display for the lack of clothing. Getting the bird to toss her beak a bit and sighing a bit. Taking the bag, and a nearby coat and handing it to the coyote. "Has that been a problem?"

"Hardly a problem yet, but only because she's on a lucky streak. But I guess she's not the only one that's been streak-"

"Don't." A chuckle from Suzanne. "Maybe breaking said streak will fix her."

"Maybe." They headed towards the back where they kept the earnings, counting them out. "How'd you do it?"

"I ended up getting a little help."

"Help?"

"An unintended distraction."

"So... Not your..." A gesture towards the brown one's furred body.

"He didn't even see me." A bit of a frown from the avian. "Something wrong?"

"I just really wanted that asshole to know he was killed by a female, that's all."

"Oh, he knew. I ended up catching one of his scouts and sending him the message."

"Message?"

"That his taker was without a lower set, so to speak." That made her feel a little better, handing Dawn the payment. "Any new jobs?"

"Plenty of work in a place like this, if you're interested in *that* kind of work."

"Not really."

"There's no shame in it, Dawn."

"It's not that, Suzanne. I'm not good with people."

"Well, there's some that are just looking for a nice, well-built body." The bird almost flirted. "But it's your choice. I could ask around for you, if you like. It must've been a long trip."

"Not as bad as you think."

"It's four days on horseback from here to that garrison where he was stationed. You have to be tired."

"Only a day and a half from my form of transportation."

"Transportation...?" She asked while the coyote started to leave.

"Flight."

A quick change into something more fitting, and the coyote was clothed once again. Not that she disliked it, though some certain styles she would just refuse to wear. Corsets came to mind, as well as very tight dresses that would often present sets of assets. Still, the brothel understood, and Dawn had other methods of being rather helpful around. Even if some of them would make her disappear for a week or two.

Returning to the kitchen and using the back exit, she heard the giggles and shouting of pups and cubs. Only to find the dragon on his back while others climbed over him, giggling more than they were at how much they tickled his copper body. A bit of a sigh from the brown one, but not something she disapproved. Not even for the sake of their safety, it just wasn't in her. Still, they needed to get some things rearranged before the sun set, so time to interrupt their playtime. "That's enough, you guys." She half shouted to cover the distance, getting several moans and noises of disapproval. "We've got work to do."

"Already? We just got here, Dawn." Phraxxis whimpered. Waiting for all the little ones to get off him and still half giggling at his tickled wings, rolling back up to all fours when they were in the clear. "We're not leaving again, are we?"

"Only to hunt something, but we'll be staying here for at least a few days. See if I can get some more work." He smiled at that answer, nearly signaling the children that they would be back. "I'm surprised you let them do that."

"I used to do it to my mother when I was younger." A kneel down to let the canine up. "You're very good at that."

"At what? Telling pups to go home?" The wyrm chuckled at the response.

"I mean, getting on and off me. I've tried it a few times with others that were... Brave enough? Maybe that's not the word."

"Experienced, likely."

"Maybe. But they always seemed to struggle and pull on the spines." Half a grumble when he recalled such sharp pains, walking a distance a ways from the town just in case. "You don't even hardly touch them."

"That's because my last mount was such a damn whiner that I eventually caught on."

"Last... Mount?"

"Artheas. He was a talking... Horse."

"Horse?"

"Tell me you know what a horse is." She grumbled.

"Y-yes. You just..." He trailed off, but came to a stop. Looking back at her and meeting those brown eyes' questionable gaze. "Is he... Gone?"

"He's not here, if that's what you mean. Unlikely that he's dead, but could be." A sad look from his pale blue ones. "It happens, Phraxxis. You've been lucky enough to avoid such things so far, I assume."

"...Yeah..." He went a little quiet, getting a few taps on his side to get his attention again.

"Take a few circles around, we'll find another bison or something to drag home. These guys cook eighteen times better than I can." That returned that smile a bit.

"I look forward to it, boss." A solid nod from her as they took off.

Chapter 5

It weighted more than he expected, but nothing that his larger body couldn't handle. Yet, for some reason, he couldn't help but question her choice of walking beside him while the buffalo remained on his back. "How are you holding up?" She asked the dragon.

"F-fine. Just..."

"Heavy?"

"Very heavy."

"Well, it'll taste better than dragging through the dirt. Maybe next time I'll consider bringing a wagon instead. Even if it's just one with a single axel."

"Axel?"

"That bar inbetween two wheels that keeps them lined to a single pair. An Axel around here means one set of wheels."

"Oh. I suppose that makes sense." The copper one mumbled, looking over the town in the distance. "How did you...?" A noise in question. "End up working here?" A few moments of looking in the distance, and he thought Dawn was just avoiding the question. Nothing really uncommon with the canine, but she pointed off in the distance.

"Think it's that one. Beyond those set of rocks and a mountain, that's where I woke up."

"Woke up...?"

"There's a lake beyond there, one that dries up during the summer. Was like I suddenly fell into it and shocked me awake. Swam to the shore and climbed the highest point I could find." A puzzled look from those blue eyes. "That was about seven months or so back. Came to the town, did some work."

"Why?"

"Was all I knew at the time. Figured something would come around."

"You mean... You didn't remember?"

"No, I did. But." A breath as she thought how to put it, eventually getting a nudge from the dragon and a smile with it. "Phraxxis, there's people out there who attempt to control your life." A set of perked ears. "I guess, I was waiting for one of these people to give me a sign."

"Control your life...?"

"Not directly, but it's complicated."

"So... What we're doing right now is...?"

"Getting food, yes. But it's all part of a master plan of sorts. It's difficult to explain, whereas I was barely introduced towards it. Might not even work the same here."

"So, you were waiting for someone or something to give you a sign to guide you somewhere?"

"It lead me to you, didn't it?" He slowed to a stop, stuck in thought for a moment, but smiling.

"Yes... I supposed it did. And my travels lead me to you too." A nudge from the dragon. "I guess being controlled doesn't sound so bad."

"Of course you would say that." He chuckled at her.

"...Who would build a town out here?" The copper one said after looking around the dried fields. "All the other places seemed to have something around, like a river. Why here?"

"From what I can tell, it started out because of the mines within the mountains." A gesture to the distance that got his attention. "Back then, they only allowed males to mine for some reason, so there was next to nothing for female attention around." A gesture towards the brothel. "Suzanne noticed this, running more of a traveling companionship, and started making a lot of money around here. That was several years ago, and eventually decided to set up a small building for the services."

"Services?" He honestly questioned, getting the two to look at each other for several moments. "What services?"

"I question your innocents sometimes." A chuckle from him. "They do many things, Phraxx. From full body work, to socialization. Let's just leave it at that. If you're willing to know more, talk to them."

"Okay!" The enthusiasm was real, making her sigh and chuckle.

"Regardless, it became so popular that they started building more buildings around it. Wanting a place for them to eat, to drink. To spend the night in that wasn't a tent. The list goes on, and before you know it..." Another gesture towards the town.

"All that from one small traveling..."

"Brothel."

"What's a brothel?" A paw over her eyes that time, making the wyrm smile and nudge her again. "You're wearing clothing again."

"For the sake of children, yes."

"Is that why everyone wears things around here?"

"That's just common for species of the sort. I guess you could call them standards that they make for themselves."

"For children...?" A puzzled look at the town, perking those frilled ears and tilting his wedged head. "But...?"

"Don't think about it too hard. If there's one thing I learned about my travels is that you can't question the actions of other cultures. That's just how they are."

"And you need to follow their rules, if you want to be accepted by them..." Phraxxis said, almost sadly. But it soon passed. "Yet, you...?"

"I... Used to work at a farm." The coyote said a bit quietly. "The weather made it hot to do the fieldwork, especially with fur."

"Fur?" Almost an unimpressed glare from her. "I-I know what it is, but..." A gesture to go on. "Why bring that up?"

"Because you don't have a coat of your own." Those blue eyes looked back at his copper self.

"I've... Got a coat of scales?" A breath from her.

"...Humans were there." Those perked ears again. "And I was working for one."

"Is that... Bad?" No response from her, even after a nudge, but they were drawing too close to the town. The dragon took the hint and just followed her lead until he was freed of the extra weight. Shaking his haunches and nearly swatting the cooks with his tail unintentionally. "S-sorry. It's just heavier than it looks."

"It looks heavy." One of the cooks grumbled, looking over at the coyote next. "Did you get the bullet out?"

"Yes."

"All of it?" Almost a glare from those brown eyes. "I got customers to serve, I don't want any lead in their-"

"Buffalo brains?" A grumble from the male cook as Dawn's voice thickened. "I got it out already. I just left it out in the field. Unless you want me to go out and find it to please your sorry asses-"

"It's a common thing to ask, lady." The other one said. "We find it all the time during the butchings."

"Well, I'm not an incompetent hunter. The day you find a bullet in a wound that I made is the day you can start interrogating me about this, understand?" The two grumbled loudly, shaking their heads but no longer arguing against her. Signaling the dragon to follow her while the cooks started what they were being paid for. Waiting until they were out of earshot before whimpering at her. "What?"

"We... Didn't get the bullet-" Phraxxis whimpered.

"That's because there was none." A double take at her.

"What? I specifically seen you-"

"Pierce it's skull with a dense shard of ice. One that has already melted by now, no longer leaving a trace aside from the wound itself." Those frilled ears perked and his head tilted.

"How...?"

"They don't call me a Bullet Witch for nothing."

"I-I mean... How are you able to...?" A long silence as she slowed to a stop. Looking directly into his faded eyes and making him whimper a bit.

"...Did it bother you?" A noise in question. "To see him get murdered in front of your eyes? In front of his soldiers?" Those frilled ears fell. "You've been having nightmares about him being decapitated. I could hear it in your sleep, the way you tend to avoid looking at any animal we kill." A gesture behind them. "Not to mention, you feel very unclean." A step forward towards him, intimidating the dragon to step away as his scales clicked uncomfortably. "It doesn't go away, Phraxxis. You don't want to hear this, so drop it. Savvy?" Another whimper as she didn't wait for his response. Making him look back at his body for a few moments, almost able to pick out where the blood nearly dried out on him. "Let's get you washed."

The meal was possibly the best thing he's ever had. Still purring long after his share was gone, as

he watched the coyote split their earnings. "Normally, people tend to argue how the split is divided." She explained as they got comfortable within a nearby barn, likely used for storing rented horses for those spending the night.

"What do you mean?"

"As in, they don't split it evenly. Usually 60/40, or 70/30." A puzzled look as Dawn half sighed at the dragon. "As in percent."

"Percent?"

"Yes." A gathering of ten notes in her hand. "Everything has a percentage, 100% meaning completely whole. So, completely unfair would mean I'd get this 100, and you would get 0." She laid the ten bills over the table. "Every one of these would be 10 out of 100. Or 1/10th of the whole, just as an example."

"Okay?"

"So, 60/40 means I would get 6 of these out of every ten. And the rest would be the 4 left over for you." She split them accordingly, watching his eyes almost widen at something that was just truism to her. "That would use up the full 100%. A 70/30 would mean I would take 7, while you-"

"Keep three!" The wyrm chirped.

"Yes, but we're not actually splitting it that way." She took two on her side and put it in his pile, watching as those pale eyes looked over and counted them under his breath.

"Five and Five? So... 50/50?"

"Yes. That's completely even."

"Why would other people take more?"

"Many reasons. Sometimes they dealt with the expenses of living, like hotel rooms or meals. But usually it's greed."

"Greed...?"

"As in, the want to have more than everyone else. Usually for the sake of wanting it over needing it."

"But don't you need the money?"

"Not really." The female said, rather quickly as she packed up their earnings for a bit. "I don't need to buy weapons or ammo with you around," That made him smile brightly. "and..." She trailed off. Getting a nudge from his snout. "I doubt the money would help me get home."

"Can't I just take you home?" A look from those brown eyes, part almost hurt, but mostly

unimpressed. "I can just fly you there after we're done."

"It's not here, Phraxxis. I don't live on this world, remember?"

"Then how do we get 'Home'?" No response from her, as the canine prepared a nearby bale of hay to sleep on. "Dawn...?" After a bit of silence, the dragon reached over to nudge her again. "...I want you to tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"How..." A lick across those bandages on her forearm, nearly getting that cold stare once again.

"Phraxxis."

"I need to know-"

"No you don't."

"If I'm going to be your partner, I need to know what happened." No response. "I've... Been doing some thinking, and... It might help to know how it works." That stare didn't let up, making his ears fall but keeping his stance. "I-I've been honest with you, Dawn. I can... Handle this-"

"So me killing people for a profit isn't a big enough warning sign for you to realize the nightmare fuel you're asking for?" A whimper at her thick tone. "Drop it, Phraxxis. You don't need to hear this."

"...I want to."

"No, you don't." A long silence and he sat up.

"Tell me." He tried to sound stern, only to get that thick stare again. "Y-you need me, Dawn. If you want me to stay around, tell me why this is hurting you." That only made her half angry, nearly growling at the dragon and not getting the expression he was hoping for. "Or I leave."

"If you leave, I will shoot you down-"

"Which won't help you." He swallowed loudly, calling her bluff. After a very intense staring from those brown eyes, she swore at him. Getting up and leaving the barn in a storm. Making the wyrm sigh heavily, his heart still racing from the conflict. Only increasing a bit more when those frilled ears picked up her quick footsteps, returning to the bar with a large bottle and laying back down on her bed for the night. "...What is-?"

"You honestly think I'm going to tell you this without a fucking drink?" That made him smile sadly as she opened it, taking a heavy swig from it before staring at him with that same intensity once again. "Last chance to actually sleep comfortably for the rest of your days, dragon." The large one only laid back down, with that dumb smile over his muzzle. Making the coyote sigh and shake her head. "Idiot... I'll give you the short version."

Chapter 6

I mentioned before that I grew up in a small town. This one honestly reminds me of it, except there was less plantlife.

Phraxxis: "Really? Even less plantlife...?"

Yes. I couldn't tell you why, something about some biblical disaster that plagued the world decades ago. It was rarely recorded, let alone understood at the time. All people knew was how to somehow survive. Growing what they could out of the farmlands that still held little promise. Usually ones near water, whereas rain was quite rare as well.

There were a few farms that lived around our town... I don't even remember its name anymore, it's been so long. But I grew up there nearly my entire life. Typical family, blessed from our grandparents who were able to salvage some rather good looking clothes that lasted over the decades. It always made us look more prosperous than we actually were. I suppose my parents took pride in that, and each dress was sent down to whatever daughter could wear them. Me being the second youngest out of four.

But I was not one to really care for looks. Growing up, I found out how exactly hard up we were, despite how hard my mother attempted to hide it. As if it was somehow shameful to her that she was just like everyone else. Regardless, I started to find work when I was somewhat young. About Coming-Of-Age, really. Yet, there was always the discrimination that still plagued our kind.

Phraxxis: "Discrimination?"

Yes. They called us Fur'min, a play on the word vermin which can really tell you how we were looked at. From what I discovered, we were manufactured from humans. Or at least their image, and ever since then they seemed to treat us as lower in status than them. *Deep breath as she takes another drink* They weren't pleased about how we were taking their jobs, food, or even doing their farmwork. Afraid we were carrying some disease or something that could wipe out their species.

So you can picture how difficult it was to find work, let alone keep it. It seemed that everytime one of our kind got a decent pay, it was taken away to given to another human. That's how the older ones operated, but I found one that wasn't like them who went by the name of Rocco. He was a young farmer, inheriting land from his grandfather. It's distance was a bit of an inconvenience, so not many were jumping to grab whatever work he offered, but I didn't mind at the time. It beat sitting in front of a mirror grooming your fur all day to look pretty for those who didn't care for you.

I worked there for nearly a year, the work came naturally to me. During this time, my oldest sister got engaged and my second oldest, Ilizabeth, started to become jealous... Not only for the older one, but of all of us. She hated me for looking better than her, especially when I wasn't even trying. Soon

after, I remember our human servant getting a scratch on her face while I was away... I asked her about it, but she seemed too frightened to tell. Later on, she disappeared without a trace.

Phraxxis: "Disappeared...? How?"

...I kept working for Rocco for a long time, and he always treated me well. He was human as well, but didn't carry the same disgust for my species as others did. I was actually falling for him after a while, yet people started taking that the wrong way. Especially after I stayed at his place for a few nights at a time. It was nearly a two hour walk between our homes, and later in the year there was a lot of work to be done. However, when people found out about this, they accused him of sleeping with me. As in intercourse, which was far from the truth. Even after he publically denied it, stating we were sleeping in separate beds... People believe what they want to believe.

At the same time this drama was going on, humans were disappearing. Including my oldest sister's mate. There wasn't really a form of law enforcement at the time, so there wasn't much they could do. *Another drink* ...And then Rocco disappeared, during one of my stays back home. I didn't really think much of it at first, he was planning a trip back to his hometown for a few things. But then I found signs of struggle, and feared for the worst. I found tracks of a wagon within the dirt road that were unusual for there, took one of Rocco's horses and followed them to the best of my ability.

They lead to some ruins quite a bit out of town, far from earshot. Within the basement of such things were several rooms. Chains and shackles that were recently used. Clothing and jewelry all in a large pile, including Rocco's... Then inside, a cobblestone pool. Filled with something dark, but before I could identify what, I was knocked into it. Then held under to drown, but I managed to Struggle enough to swim to the other side, only to hear my attacker get impaled. Stating something about making the pool tainted...

Phraxxis: "Who...?" *Another drink* "...Elizabeth?"

It was sticky, like a cold syrup. Strong with the scent of decay, or maybe that was just the nearby bodies. All human. All missing. And yes, Elizabeth. She was so fixated on staying young forever, she thought that gutting humans and bathing in their blood would return her youth. The scary part was... It worked. She did look like the years were much better on her, and tried to kill me to preserve her secret. When I escaped to get help... She burned the town before I could get to it.

I tried to save anyone in my home, but even with it on fire, I couldn't find anyone. The only thing I salvaged was my father's old rifle, and some of its ammo. Somehow coming across Rocco's horse once again, I followed Elizabeth for months. Only to eventually lose it while chasing her down. All I could think about was revenge during those cold nights, seeing nightmares of him being gutted like cattle with her very own claws. Drained dry only to preserve herself... I suppose that's where I started to lose my humanity.

Phraxxis: "Don't you mean Humanity?"

...Along the way, I had to pick up jobs from time to time. I started to delve in criminal activity,

because that's the only thing that paid during the bigger cities. My first kill was some greedy merchant that had some sort of grudge of Fur'min... I never noticed how easy it was to take a life, even if they didn't do anything to me. I could never get clean after being shoved into that pool, it already washed away my innocence. All I had to do was aim the gun at their head and pull...

But I didn't get paid for that job. Instead, I took all the money and valuables I could find and just escaped. Used it to buy better equipment and information about Ilizabeth. Her whereabouts, expenses, locations that were visited and plundered. It was harder to tell who was going down the darker path between her murderous rampage and bloodletting, or me for hunting her down. But not for the safety of others... For myself.

Eventually I came across a Nightmare named Artheas-

Phraxxis: "Nightmare? Like... A living bad dream?"

More like a flaming horse. Highly intelligent, yes, but with a damn mouth that wouldn't shut up about moral standings... Like with you, I forced him to work with me by putting a gun to his head. Artheas was the only species of his kind that he knew about, so death wasn't really the option he wished for. Probably knowing he had a much better chance at survival, being labeled as a monster of the night, he stuck with me. Granted, for a price: Protection... He had his own set of talents, but such a high moral standing that he couldn't end another life. Even after it nearly poisoned him to death once, but that's another story.

As much as he didn't approve of assassinating my own sibling, he had a lot of time to talk me out of it. *A long drink* I can't tell you how much of a pain in the ass he was, the constant nagging and idea of morality. Be it right or wrong, what I was planning to do afterward, who I would go after next if I succeeded... I honestly couldn't think past that, and I really didn't care. At this point, I was already ruined by her, and so focused on the hunt that even the faint scent of her old perfume was enough to make me start racing into the night. Gun in hand, and likely hunting down some noble that didn't deserve it.

...You wanted to hear this, Phraxxis.

Phraxxis: "I... Know."

But I eventually caught up with her fresh trail of blood, though leaving behind my very own and getting a reputation for doing so. The hundreds of people who were literally following my footsteps with equal desires... I couldn't blame them. But if I died, then I wouldn't get mine. My determination was just more vile, no matter how many bullets I took.

She was up to something in some old temple. I remember Artheas calling for me to stop and think this through, as if it were some kind of pattern he seen. But like I was going to listen to reason at that point. I bolted inside, the middle of some ritual and shot anything that moved. Anything that looked humanoid, regardless of the clothing, but doing so messed up whatever they were getting at. Ilizabeth was there, alright. Trying to gain communication to something that would likely grant her some kind of power. Immortality, maybe. I didn't care, but that was my mistake.

We fought, whatever bathing in those pools of blood did to her made her much faster than I expected. Bringing a knife to a gunfight is actually more dangerous than one would think, and in her case, they were these large claws. Hidden deep in her robe, mostly for surprise attacks. The wounds of her victims made sense then, but she wasn't the only one who bathed in it.

Regardless, we wounded each other. A lot. If I died there, I honestly didn't care. As long as I died with her... But the addition to our wounds triggered that ritual. Causing some kind of small supernatural explosion that burned both of us and set the temple on fire. Then something got out... Something unnatural.

Phraxxis: "Is this how your arms...?"

Ilizabeth ran off to live another day, and I barely escaped thanks to Artheas. Yes, that's what happened here. All the weapons I was carrying somehow forged past my own body. These marks... Even after they were peeled off the skin, burned off, or even amputated once, they remained on. It's like the weapons were not a part of my body, but something far deeper than that.

Phraxxis: "Your soul?"

Maybe... Regardless, I now had two things to worry about: Ilizabeth and whatever this thing was called. We eventually discovered it was called a Legacy, and that there were four of them. The first one attempted to actually take me and Artheas out, but the horse convinced it to let us live. Working together to find the other two while it worked on the other side, wherever this thing came from. Weeks went on as we were just following leads and trails, never actually catching up enough to stop either of them. One of these things were hard enough to track down, and there was supposed to be two more of them. It was a mission that felt hopeless, to be honest. But we eventually found out something, the identities of the other two Legacys...

Phraxxis: "Identities...?"

They were me and Ilizabeth. Since we were survivors of that ritual, and whatever happened on the other side of that portal... We were the only ones able to act sort of like keys to those portals. Or else either side could be afflicted by each other's 'plagues', so to speak.

Phraxxis: "Plagues? You mean each other's bad...? But you could do some good for each other, yes?"

Perhaps, but the Legacy that allowed us to live detected something off about our reality. That there was something lurking in its veil, and he was right. Even if I didn't know it at the time, but that's a whole different story. That thing was a Zealot, willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of his home. It's a wonder that horse could even convince it to aid us to begin with.

Regardless, it hardly mattered to me at this point. My mission remained the same: assassinate Iliza, as well as whatever that other creature was. I didn't have a future at that point past her death, so if this allied Legacy wanted to execute me afterward... I honestly accepted it at that point. *A long drink*

There's a lot that happened inbetween, but the short story was; I caught up with Ilizabeth, and that damn horse... Artheas convinced her to aid us as well. All work together to take out the greater threat at that point. We even met up with someone else to help, but she wasn't important to this story. After a lot of work, chasing, and stopping every connection nearly made by that Legacy to reopen that portal, we caught up with it.

...That fight was the hardest thing in my life. Even with the three of us, we barely survived it with our wounds. Mine were fatal, the other female was fine overall, and Ilizabeth's could be treated. But I didn't take any chances. With the real threat finally gone, I finally shot her and took her life, then died on the way out of that temple.

Phraxxis: "Died...?"

I'll stop here, Phraxxis. Past this point is a convoluted mess that I can barely explain myself. Let alone within the lifespan of your life. But there, do you feel better knowing who you're partnered up with? Comfortable enough to sleep tonight, knowing how far I've gone just for the life of one person who crossed me? ...Get some rest. We have work to do in the morning.

Chapter 7

The long deep breaths echoed through the barn, exhaling sharply once in a while when a straw of hay tickled the dragon's nostril. Eventually waking the coyote up with the sunrise, and leaving without being noticed. Laying in the building in his slumber, his ears flicked from time to time at very silent footsteps, then his instincts detected the presence. Alerting the dragon awake and instantly looking at a small lizard hatchling. Crouching, reaching out as if to touch the large one but froze when Phraxxis moved. The two locked eyes for a moment, one nearly terrified, but the other curious. Soon piecing what he was trying to do, giving that dry paw a few sniffs and then a few friendly licks. Instantly relieving the room of tension and making the young one smile, almost giggling at the feeling of it.

Meanwhile, Dawn ordered their breakfast from the staff directly. Getting the Crane to smirk at the tone as she came through the front doors. "Harassing the boys, are you?"

"Only because last night's meal was only half decent. Considering what I paid for it, and what we ended up hunting down, it should've been better." The canine grumbled, seeing Suzanne's beak shake side to side. Then her eyes drifted up to the wall, where the boar's head was mounted. "The taxidermy here works fast."

"I can't say he was pleased at how well it was preserved, but I wanted it done. I've never been fan of trophies, but damn this jerk-off behavior needs to be made an example of."

"Don't get too carried away, or else you might scare off the customers."

"Considering what I paid you for it, I'd be encouraging me to find more work. If I were you, that is." She lead the way to the back room. "Speaking of which, no new hunting jobs of yet. But I do need something picked up over in Talhassa if you're up for that."

"Depends on what it is."

"Just your typical restocking shipment. This is the third time in a row that they've delayed it, and I need someone with your skills to make them soil themselves. Bonus if you take the crate back here yourself to show they have some competition."

"That is, if Phraxxis can carry it. I can strap it down on him with some reigns, but I'll have to borrow them." The bird nodded.

"Take what you need. Don't kill any of them if you can help it, but scare them. I want to make sure they have a right to fear females."

"Consider it done. We'll leave after breakfast."

The straps were easy enough to find, though it might be a little tight on the dragon. Considering the adjustments she might have to make in order for him to fly comfortably, it would be a bit close. Let alone, how much was supposed to be shipped. Worst comes to worst, she would just 'borrow' a wagon for the large one to pull. Still, the coyote would see what happens when they get there. Until then, she wanted to see what this loud purring was about coming from the barn. Just hoping that one of the girls didn't actually sneak in to-

A faint gasp was let out when Dawn opened the door, making the smaller child almost whimper at being caught around the dragon's neck. Seeing Phraxxis smile like a goof before opening those faded blue eyes made the canine sigh a bit and shake her muzzle. "Do I want to know?"

"He's just helping me wake up." The wyrm mumbled, seeing the younger one nervously smile, then continue stroking his neck. Letting those purrs fill up the large room as the female walked over to where she spent the night. Picking up the bottle from last night, with still a little bit left in it and finishing it in one drink. "Are you okay?"

"Fine. Why?"

"It's just..." Those purrs faded as the large one carefully got up, getting her almost lackadaisical attention. "I've seen people drink stuff like that, and the next morning..."

"I don't get hung over, if that's what you mean."

"Really?" A head shake from her.

"No. But I got us a job." A worried look from the dragon.

"What kind...?"

"Delivery and intimidation. Just have to scare some people into taking their work seriously." A bit of a sour look, but better than what he was expecting. "You might have to carry some stuff back as well."

"From where?"

"Talhassa. Should only be a few hours from here." Those frilled ears perked.

"Is that a city?"

"A bigger town than this, yes." His tail started to wag with excitement. "I take it that means you're on board-"

"Yep!" The large one chirped, almost getting a smirk from the coyote. "When do we leave?"

"After breakfast." Another half chirp as he got up and hit his shoulders on the staging above him, making him half whimper after. "Settle down. It's not going anywhere."

"But we are! This is so exciting! I get to see more of the world!"

"You say that as if you couldn't before." A bit of silence as he gave her a bit of a sad look, seeing those wings lower a bit. Twitching a bit when they touched a few objects around.

"She... Didn't want me to leave her."

"Your mother?" A slow nod as he stared at the ground towards the door. "Likely for your protection."

"That's what she said. I suppose she was kind of right." A deep breath as the small lizard placed a paw on his arm, making Phraxxis smile sadly at him. "I just... Miss her. A lot."

"It shows." A bit more silence as the canine opened the double doors wide. "Go play for a little bit while breakfast is cooking. I'll pack a few things for the trip." He smiled a little brighter at that, nudging the little one to climb on his neck and ride the dragon outside.

The forests seemed to get more greener the farther north they went. Though it wasn't exactly straight north, but it was definitely closer to water. Likely the coast, even if it wasn't directly in sight. But the winds carried it's scent over the mountains, making him excited to see it, but at the same time, the town was also approaching. Perhaps on the way back, he could convince the coyote for a small detour to see it up close. Maybe take a swim, but odds are this wasn't the last time the wyrm would see it.

If only there was a way to capture moments to keep as physical memories. Like creating a sculpture to relive a period of time over and over. Maybe going so far as to make synthetic dreams, if such things were possible. But a few taps interrupted his inventive thoughts. "Let's take a break."

"Really?" He tried to look back. "But we're almost there!"

"It's farther out than it seems. I don't want you getting too tired before we get there." A bit of a grumble from the large one. "You'll thank me later."

"Fiiiine." Phraxxis tossed his snout, actually making the coyote smirk even though he couldn't see it. Landing at a nearby lake and barely feeling her dismount, unlike the lizard this morning. His spines still ached from being gripped so hard, to the point where she ended up just climbing up on the dragon to take the little one off.

He couldn't help but look over at the brown furred canine again, still finding it odd why she was now wearing clothing. Though the cloak she took with her was now lying in the grass, the vest was quite visible. Working pants that seemed rather thick, but she insisted on wearing them to help against the wind during the flights. Hardly noticing the breeze himself, but his large body was quite armored. "What?"

A bit of a whimper as she caught the dragon staring at her. "N-nothing!" He stuttered, taking her gesture to have a drink and relax a bit. Doing so, and not realizing how much his body needed the refreshment. Like his own mother, Dawn really did seem to know best. Judging from her past, she probably did a lot of traveling... "Why...?" He started, not getting her attention just yet. "Why do you call yourself Dawn?"

A deep breath of relaxation from the female as she laid in the long grass. "I don't remember my real name. Not like it really mattered anyway, whereas that life was literally burned to the ground." That made his ears fall. "Dawn was a pet name Rocco..." A few steps closer to her and the wyrm laid down. Resting his snout on her belly, just below those body pillows which he still didn't know what they were for. Perhaps a question for another time. "He called me that because I seemed to brighten his day. He was corny like that."

"He tasted like corn?"

"No, corny as in cheesy."

"So, tasted like cheese?" That almost made her chuckle, making him smile as well, giving her a few licks.

"You're hopeless." A breath from her. "To be honest, I'm not sure why I kept the name. Maybe to remind myself of why I wanted to take her life." That made him a little sad.

"But... That's over now, right?" A faint nod from her. "So, what are you doing now?"

"Don't know. Just trying to live, I suppose. For what, I'm not sure."

"Why don't you help me then?" The canine looked at him. "I'm... Special to you for a reasons I don't understand, especially if there's been no one else that's..."

"There hasn't. Not that I know of anyway."

"Maybe even the old wizard can find out why. He seemed to know a lot of things."

"Maybe..." Dawn muttered, making the large one sense something off. "You told me, when that accident happened to your mother, you were small, right?" A large, almost energetic nod. "How long ago was that?" The copper one went to answer, then stopped himself as he thought. Looking almost frightened as he just realized his own size.

"I-... I don't know..." The female's brown eyes just studied him. "It only felt like a few years since I left."

"How long does your kind live for?" A shrug from his wings. "Time it takes to grow up?"

"I don't..." He trailed off sadly. "Is he even...?" Those blue eyes sadly looked off to the east. Returning to the coyote when she touched his shoulder.

"We'll find out after this job, how about that." A sad smile from the dragon. "Do you know how much money he asked for?"

"H-he didn't really ask for the money..." Those ears lowered a bit. "He asked for ingredients, and when I asked another about them, they said..."

"They could sell them to you for a price." A slow nod. "I might have to pay this guy a visit too."

"You're not planning to..." An unimpressed stare from the canine.

"I just want to talk to him, that's all." Those frilled ears went back, making hers do the same. "Don't start getting righteous on me, Phraxxis. That was part of our deal." A breath from the wyrm.

"Alright. But please try not to do anything harmful to them. My mother really wanted me to do this the right way."

"*Right* being subjective." Dawn grumbled, getting him to snort a bit as she climbed back onto his shoulders. "One thing at a time then."

"Yep! We see the bigger town first!" The large one chirped, taking off as soon as he got the signal.

Chapter 8

The averagely crude buildings were wondrous from the streets. They were even interesting from afar, but to look at them up close brought astonishment to those blue eyes. And to touch them would've been more thrilling, if it wasn't for the constant frightening presence of those around the dragon. Well, to be fair, he too was a little uneasy, especially with the coyote's roars from within a few buildings over. The brown female did say that she was going to intimidate them, but this was going a bit too far. Nearly making the wyrm hide between the buildings, and peer over at the loading docks behind the building from time to time.

Yes, Dawn could be rather scary when she wanted to be. Not that she wasn't before, but a lot of that uneasiness was more due to her long pauses inbetween answers or responses. More than just a lack of people skills, but something Phraxxis was still getting used to. Slowly being able to read the canine the more he spent time with her. However, she's never been angry, not like this. Almost expecting to hear gunshots coming from the building, loud noises that he still didn't like.

Eventually, he started to see movement. A few people stumbling and rushing to get a nearby wagon docked and loaded with several things. Likely meaning the dragon would have to pull it the way back, which honestly excited him a bit. Whereas he's never pulled one before, and the thoughts of such a thing was making that tail wag a bit. Thumping against the buildings, then more so when Dawn was spotted on the docks. Overwatching them load most of it before growling another threat and leaving towards where Phraxxis was hiding. "I know I told you to stay close, but you didn't have to hide. We're not fugitives."

"O-oh, I wasn't..." He looked between the two buildings he was in, almost whimpering. "You're just..."

"What?"

"-Scary when you're angry." A very very faint chuckle from her.

"You should see me when I'm really angry then, and not just passing words of warning."

"I-I'd think I'd rather not." He playfully whimpered, overlooking the wagon again. "Do I get to pull that?" The dragon asked, rather happily.

"Nah, they're getting around to it themselves, so we can head towards our next objective."

"I wouldn't make plans just yet." An unfamiliar voice said behind the dragon, instantly getting the coyote to summon a revolver and point it towards a scrawny male gerbil. Making him yelp when he identified the firearm. "Whoa-whoa-whoa! Easy... I'm just passing on a message."

"From who?" The brown one almost growled, not releasing her aim.

"Word travels fast, Ma'am. Especially when a military garrison has its general murdered and his

soldiers spooked." Her stare didn't lift. "Voan Losher would wish to speak to whoever performed such a thing, if you see where I'm going with-"

"And you think that was me?"

"Ma'am, there's not very many brown canines who ride dragons..." Those frightened grey eyes looked over her body for a moment. "T-though, they stated you were... Clothesless."

"If I refuse to talk to him?"

"That would probably be a poor decision, Miss..." She almost growled at that response. "It takes one a lot of effort to get Voan's attention, I believe he could be a powerful ally to you." A long moment of study and the wyrm whimpered a bit. Getting Dawn to take a breath and release her aim.

"Are you going to be okay here alone?"

"I-I would rather..." A slight head shake and she motioned the gerbil to lead the way, then beckoned the large one to follow through the streets. Stopping at a rather fancy looking place that he clearly could not fit in. "I'll just wait out here." A moment of study from those brown eyes, and they locked back onto the black gerbil. Making him yelp a bit in fright.

"If he makes any loud noises, or signs of struggle..." She growled at the smaller rodent, motioning the wyrm. "I will slaughter each and every one of you. Understood?"

"Y-yes, Ma'am." A loud swallow when her near death glare didn't lift. "I-I assure you, you'll be safe."

"It's not me I'm worried about." Half a growl as she took another glance at Phraxxis before entering.

The air was almost thick with second-hand smoke as she descended the stairs, hearing very soft music playing as the interior darkened to a lustful red. A pair of large bodyguards stood before a double door and looked over Dawn for a moment before opening them, not speaking a single word as if they were expecting her. Letting that smoky air get much stronger as she entered.

The lights were dim, trying to mimic the concept of an evening club in the early afternoon. The seats were all booths, spacious to give the clients their own privacy. Stating a warranty that no one was able to eavesdrop unless they somehow hid behind the booths without being caught. Honestly, in this light, it might be a little easier to do so, but still rather suspicious.

Regardless, there was hardly anyone around. Those who were tended to be in a much higher dress code than the coyote, one specifically that caught her eye was a rather large mole wearing white. Giving a faint hand gesture to come forward with a paw holding a cigar, already half used up and explained the thicker smoke. Regardless, she took the invitation towards the booth. One with a red bird sitting next to the mole. "You must be Voan." She said.

"Good. Somebody found you." The large one said rather calmly, taking a deep inhale from that burning stick.

"Sit down, love." The avian gestured.

"Dawn will do. I'm not fond of pet names." A gesture from afar, and a young waiter almost rushed to wait on the mole.

"Saurainari Iced Tea with some of those frozen orange rocks you have. And the lady will have whatever she likes." Another stare from those brown eyes, and Voan slowly nodded. "I insist. Treat yourself, they have a wide range drinks. Have you had dinner yet?"

"No, but I'll get something later." A moment of study before looking at the waiter. "Cobra Venom. Bring the entire bottle."

"M-ma'am... That's a 66%."

"I know." A bit of a whimper, then the mole started to chuckle.

"The lady knows her drink." Another slow inhale, and he dismissed the waiter. "I'm hoping you can take a 66 without it effecting you."

"Back where I come from, we ended up getting nearly 78. I'll be fine." Almost a laugh that time, as the large one took a breath. "What do you want from me, Loshier?"

"Straight to business so quickly?" The red one asked.

"I suppose I'm just wondering my odds of having to shoot my way out of here."

"You are in a safe space, Dawn." Voan said a bit slowly, making her wonder if perhaps he was under the influence of something. "I heard about the general. Many people did."

"We also heard about a certain brothel's new... Decoration as well." The bird added.

"And you're, what? Impressed by it?" She half grumbled at them.

"No... No. It's a little... Too graphic for my own tastes." A slow inhale and he put out the cigar. "I may have my own enemies, Dawn, but I don't wish such things upon them. To cull is one thing, to capture is another."

"You want me to hunt someone down." The coyote followed, seeing the mole slowly nod and gesture the bird to take something out of a case under the booth. Placing a greyscale photograph on the table of some canine with a really bushy mane. "Never seen him before."

"Pirates. Down in the Kainghson Harbor, I have a little side business. Under-the-table style with a reliable shipper."

"Meaning drugs?"

"Opium-"

"Sir...!" The red one whispered, getting a gesture to relax.

"I like to be honest with my business partners, Frayric." Voan studied the female for a few moments. "This one really seems to have experience, to hide such things is only showing distrust. Am I correct, Dawn?"

"Very much so." A slow smile from the large male. "So, you want me to hunt him down and take him alive, is that it?"

"Preferably. If he struggles or if... Accidents happen, then there's nothing we can do about it. As long as they stop and return what they stole." A shrug from him. "I'm a male of business, I'll even offer them work."

"So this isn't for torture then." A slow head shake as their drinks came. Taking the bottle, but getting a gesture to stop from the large one.

"Please, not in here. A whiff of that is enough to knock a rhino out." A nod from her as she took a look at the photo again. "You can keep that for identification."

"With a mane like that, I can't imagine how he could blend in." A look at the back of it revealed several large figures of numbers. "He got a name?"

"Nar-something."

"Gnargwrist." The avian politely corrected, making the coyote raise an eyebrow. "That's what we've got. I'm assuming it's a stage name."

"Most likely. Especially if they are pirates. But... Gnargwrist doesn't really flow off the tongue too well." A chuckle from the mole.

"I said the same thing." A large paw towards her, offering a shake. "Do we have a deal then, Dawn?"

"...Fine." She took the paw firmly, almost gripping it a bit too hard. "What about his crew?"

"Same goes. But if we can get their leader, odds are we can get the others to follow through." A bit of an uneasy look from the bird when Voan said that. "Your pay will be based on your outcome."

"I might be asking for something else by then." A noise in question. "Some ingredients needed to perhaps cure someone of an illness, if that's up your ally."

"Ingredients?" The red one asked.

"I don't know of what is needed just yet, but I'll find out soon." A slow nod. "We done here?"

"Only if know where to find him."

"I've got a good idea where." The canine replied to the mole, taking her bottle and heading out.

Exiting the building cautiously, it was a sigh of relief to find those curious blue eyes. Though still a bit nervous, they relaxed when they seen the coyote once again. Giving a faint smile and hearing that tail wag when she approached. "We got a job. A small one that will only take a night, if your visit can wait."

"Oh... Yeah, it can wait." He replied, a bit disappointed. Getting a brown paw on his copper shoulder and looking at her once again.

"It will only be a night. Tonight specifically, if we leave now. Once we drop him off, we'll make a trip to the east."

"Drop him off...?" The large one tilted his head. "Like an passenger?"

"An unwilling one, yes." A bit of a whimper and she sighed. "I'm kidnapping him, yes, but only to give him more work. He's a pirate, apparently."

"Meaning... He steals things?"

"Yes. So we're stealing someone who steals for a living." She muttered, climbing onto the dragon and hear him almost giggle at the sentence. "Need anything else here?"

"Nope! Let's go kidnap someone!" Phraxxis chirped, getting several strange looks from the townsfolk.

"Perhaps you shouldn't say that out loud. Not like anyone's going to stop us, but..." A bit of a whimper from the wyrm, and he faintly nodded. Taking off.

Chapter 9

It was nice to watch the sun set from higher up, overlooking a town harbor from afar. Though it was kind of a pain in the neck to attempt to look at both at the same time, whereas one was in the southeast, and the sunset being in the west. Still, it was nice to just lay back and relax a bit, though he was getting excited for the mission. Already hearing a rowdy crowd down below from this distance, meaning they likely didn't suspect a thing. For once, it felt like the dragon was spying or stalking prey. Rather than being seen almost immediately.

"Nervous?"

"More just excited." He replied in a whisper, hearing that tail sweep across the dried grass several times.

"I can see that."

"You don't feel excited about this?" The canine shook her head.

"I suppose I've just gotten used to it." A puzzled look from the large one, and he snuggled the side of his head against her chest. Getting Dawn to stop for a moment and look at him in question.

"Your heartbeat isn't any different. Wow..." A bit of a purr as he pulled that wedged head back. "Mine hasn't stopped racing."

"I expected as such. Just don't wear yourself out." An excited nod. "You remember what you need to do?"

"Stay close to the building, without putting myself in danger!" The dragon chirped.

"And you have a good idea of the distance by now, yes?" Another nod that was more like several. "It's going to be different in practice, but I don't rely on these that much. They'll make the mission easier, yes, but I can make do without them." Those blue eyes looked over her bandaged wrists. "Other than stay close, what do you do?"

"Keep an eye on the streets!" A solid nod from her that time.

"Good. We'll wait a bit longer, then head down."

The dozens of rowdy scavengers were even louder than she thought, as Dawn had to barely sneak close to the building to be undetected. Through the constant yelling, makeshift singing, they were unlikely on guard for anything tonight. Regardless, she would take the easy job over a hard one. Especially if it does pay well. Technically, that bottle itself would be worth the job.

Kneeling down along the side of a building, she summoned the rifle from her wrists and looked through the scope. Seeing the lens inside morph through the walls and search the crowded ground floor nearly full of pirates and dock workers. Yet, no sign of that bushy mane. Scanning up higher, not much on the first floor, but soon spotted the orange canine that matched the photograph. Drinking nearly alone on the top floor, looking out and away from her.

A relaxing half grumble from the coyote. If she knew he was going to be so high up, Dawn would've attempted a different strategy. Regardless, there didn't seem to be any other way down apart from the stairs. Meaning the bounty was trapped, so long as she could get in there without making a scene- "Hey!" A shout nearby instantly got her to move the barrel towards a drunk sailor staring at her. Firing a stunning bolt across the street and knocking him out immediately, but not without a bit of noise.

A few moments of listening to see if anyone else heard it from the inside, and it seemed clear. Until the main double doors opened and several others staggered out. Growling, she gave up on stealth and fired a shot at one of them. Seeing the bolt chain to the next one, then a couple more nearby as the coyote got up and started to walk inside. Taking one more glance above to see if the bounty was suspicious, but all he was doing was enjoying a drink.

Several loud shouts about being under attack came from inside the building and several of them started to rush out. One last shot from the rifle towards the ground before them and it exploded into a bright light. Blinding several of them and giving the brown canine time to charge in herself. Lariatting one of them in the neck while dropkicking a second one in the process, slamming the first pirate onto the back of his head as he was pulled down with her. Pulling out a revolver with her free hand and shooting concussive blasts into three knees before side-rolling onto her own. Ducking a wild swing from a blind one, slamming into the side of his knee with her fist, then firing another wind blast directly into his stomach. Sending the pig flying backwards into some water barrels.

A quick movement and she caught a rusty longblade with the firearm, between the barrel and trigger guard. Parrying it to the side and uppercutting the avian with her free hand and make her stagger backwards while holding her beak. Only to find that same bandaged fist now holding a second revolver and fire an excessive air blast. Knocking her back into a few others.

The coyote's sudden release of her weapons didn't stop a bull from swinging at her, barely ducking under his two hooks and lock arms with his uppercut. Using her free hand to resummon a firearm and shoot at his crotch point blank with a concussive blast to make him howl. Nearly too stunned to resist that locked arm being pulled behind the bull's back as she shot another incoming two pirates, drop the gun, then lift the bull backwards onto his head in a suplex. Pushing his body a bit to the side and half using it for cover as she fired several bolts into the crowd until they scattered. Taking off through different exits or hiding behind makeshift tables.

When it was clear that no others were going to attack her, only withdraw for their lives, Dawn continued upstairs. Pulling out her handcannon and cautiously moving up, she heard the click of a flintlock and quickly took cover. Feeling the small marble barely graze her shoulder fur before aiming at the direction of it and taking her own shot. A loud explosion of flames that blasted through the wood, both in the cone of fire the poorly designed stairway. Nearly making her fall downstairs, but grip herself enough to climb back up. Once again taking caution, and aiming down a rat on the other side who signaled surrender after witnessing such surrealism. Placing his own firearm down and letting her kick it down the stairs while she went up another flight.

He should've been more concerned about the fact the room below him just exploded, but the orange one just didn't really seem to. Half glancing at the doorway at the coyote aiming down at him, and then his table. One with a one-handed falchion and a bottle. Reaching for something she growled at him. "Don't."

But he didn't listen, taking the bottle and a large drink before speaking to her rather lackadaisically. "Y'know, most people just knock when they want to see me."

"And if I'm not here to see you?" Half a grumble from the orange one as he got up. Walking alongside the far wall while half picking up his weapon and looking out the window for a moment. "Someone wants to speak with you."

"Let me guess... Simon." A bit of an awkward silence as those brown eyes gave him a look in question. Only for Gnargwrist to double take. "Not Simon?"

"...No."

"Simmons?" A quick head shake from her. "Theodore? Temperess?" The female blinked at him for a moment. "Reily? Zanotos? Qubert? Helga?"

"This is starting to sound like a confession."

"Give me a minute, I'll get it." Another drink. "Oh, that Gnoll guy! What was his name... Kass-something? He had the fiercest mate, I swear..." A bit of a grumbling breath as Dawn lowered her aim. "Okay... Can you give me a hint so we won't be here all night? I've kinda robbed a lot of people."

"You say that like this happens often."

"Well, you're not the first one after me." A gesture down below. "How many of them are dead?" He half asked.

"...Maybe one. Almost shot me."

"Seriously?" A nod from her. "...No joke? I swear I heard a lot of gunshots. Are you just that terrible at aiming-?" A second gun appeared in her hand just as soon as it disappeared, firing a shot at his bottle while taking a drink with him even realizing it was broken. Looking at it, then her for a moment. "...Bet you can't do that again." Another shot, this time on the spout of the bottle really close to his hand. "And without even looking, wow." He tossed the broken glass to the side.

"I know my trade well."

"Well, you're not the only one." The strange canine took his blade in hand and stepped forward... Onto a loose board, that shot up and swat him in the snout. Causing him to stumble backwards and through the window, falling out of the building in the process. Leaving Dawn stunned for a moment at what just happened. Wanting to look out said window, but not quite trusting the poor craftsmanship of the floor. Deciding against it, she headed downstairs quickly. Getting that rat to squeak in surprise and surrender again as she passed, and exit the building quickly.

Spotting the canine running down the streets and instantly taking out her rifle once again. A shallow breath, and the weapon fired into the night, creating two steel balls bound to a metal wire. Seeing Gnarg turn around and slash downward at the bullet, getting the wire dead-center, but causing the two balls swing and whack him in the head on each side. Stunning him for a moment before falling backwards, out cold.

Catching up to the body, she quickly tied him and fired a signal into the night. Soon getting the dragon to land feel them get loaded onto his back. "How did I do?"

"Perfect." That made the larger one smile. "Alright, let's head back towards Talhassa. If we can make it there tonight, we'll be in the clear."

"Yes Ma'am!" The dragon chirped, flying for several moments before moving a little funny. "Dawn..."

"What is it?" No response. "What's wrong? Phraxxis?"

"Something's..." A few heavy breaths as he whimpered. "Something hurts...!" Her ears caught a loud shockwave in the distance, and soon the far horizon was lit up in massive flames. A sharp whimper turned into a loud cry as the wyrm started to fall out of the sky.

"Phraxxis!" The coyote called out, trying to wake the dragon back up while staying on him. **"Phraxxis!!"**