

Wrong Side Of Heaven Act 1 - Page Avenue

By Bartan Tirix

Chapter 0

The weather was oddly cold, for how costal the warm island was. A thick mix between mist and smoke seemed to surround it, blocking the long view of the wreckage. "What a mess..." The smaller white dragon said with awe. Although he was taller than the humanoid Binturong, the dragon was still, and will always seem young. "I wonder what happened here?" He said, getting closer looks at the larger hulls of metal that seemed to scatter the island's grounds.

"Someone destroyed a large tower." The binturong said, getting out what almost looked to be an eletronic tablet of some sort from his heavy brown cloak. Paying more interest to it than his surroundings, while the young one seemed to gaze at whatever they walked by. Trying his best to make out what the remains were to. "It says in the log that this tower was built by cybognetic Kou-toans." The white one looked at him with a tilted head and perked ears. "Think Frog People." He replied, lackdasically. "From what I can tell, a tribe must have thought ill-ly against the use of magics, to the point where they tried to clear the world of such things."

"Using the tower?" The dragon's head tilted the other way, and then pondered. Lifting his head up and scratching the tip of his chin with a small claw. "Perhaps using it to easily adapt to a frequency where such a weapon can travel long distances and cover much more ground."

"They warned me that you were enthusiastic." The binturong grunted, getting a slight smile out of the younger one. "And gullible." That one made his head lower and his ears drop.

"Sir? What are we doing here? I don't see any bodies around."

"Most of them have already been tended to. Although it is still a bit early for you to start Reaping, I figured that you should do this one."

Maxx - No More

"Why?" The dragon asked, as the binturong slowly came to a stop. Looking straight forward at the center of a very large paved circle. Though much of it was damaged, an adult black dragon laid in the center of it. Seeing it caused the white one to hold his breath.

A small tone from the tablet broke the silence of the very early morning. "Damnit. The Force wants to see me immedietly." It still didn't phase the white one, almost frozen with remorse and fear. "I suppose I'll give you a few minutes to grieve. Do not do anything until I return, understood?" He said

sternly, getting a faint nod from the dragon. "I'll be back."

And just like that, the dragon was alone for the time being. It honestly scared him, but slowly he began to take a step closer to the limple body. He knew who it was, though it ached him to think of such a thing. As he got close enough to identify the face, the white one let out a loud whimper. Collapsing from the pain in his heart. "You did it... You actually did it..." A tear rolled down his muzzle. "I only thought it was a theroy... It was only just a thought of mine but... To learn more than one..." A sniff. "You didn't deserve this... You didn't deserve to lose your younger brother, and you didn't deserve to go mad in his after image." Only the silence condoled him.

"...I'm sorry. I should've been more careful with my power. I didn't think it would backlash so easily, let alone freeze my lungs solid. You even did your best to thaw it quickly, but either way..." The younger one took a few moments. "You were always better than I was at the performance... I could always picture it in my head, that came so easily to me... But to actually do it, I would mess up so badly sometimes..." A faint smile came on his wet muzzle. "You don't deserve..." It was then his eyes lit up. His brain started going through theroy after theroy once again. Through all the lore he had learn the past two hundred years of learning to be a Reaper.

The white dragon stood up. "...I might be able to do something. Perhaps give you a second chance." He whispered. Looking at his surroundings to make sure he wasn't being watched. With alot of effort, he managed to roll the black one onto his back, being able to clearly see the multiple chest and body wounds that were fatal. Pulling out some of the sharp debris from the collapsed tower, he couldn't seal the wounds just yet. The white one grabbed his brother by the temples of his head with both paws, and whispered his chants.

"dnim ym hcaer nac I
traeh ym hcaer nac I
dniheb uoy evael I t'nac yhW
eciohc a dah reveN
eciojer leef reveN
eciov renni ym nmad I..."

Slowly drawing out the energies that remained within the body. "This might hurt you a bit. Maybe even do some damage to you, but overall you'll thank me." Slowly tracing down the neck with his right paw, and stroking the black one's thick chest, his paw was driven inside the dragon's heart with a grunt. The faint glow that surrounded the paws shone brighter for a bit as the white one slowly pulled out his paw with a glowing light.

A whitish light... The very remains of his only brother, scaled down to this light that seemed to dance and stroke his paw in affection. It's warmth was rather welcoming, as if it identified who the white one was. It brought a smile to him, but he wasn't here to escort him. Not anymore. Tracing his left paw over the wounds, he slowly managed to get them closed and sealed. Though the internal damage was there, it wasn't fatal for now. "Alright brother, you need to continue your own life. Stop obsessing over me, and just be happy." As he placed the right paw with the black dragon's soul over the black chest, a

loud grunt came from him. Being very careful on the method, he pushed the light back within the body. It seemed to scream and scratch his white paw in pain, and eventually getting some reaction out of the body as well. "I'm sorry... I know this hurts, but-" Then something slipped, getting a painful reaction out of the younger dragon as his paw sank into the black chest and was yanked out.

An unreal pain covered his arm, and he could feel it climbing slowly. Looking over at his older brother, just now beginning to cough and breath a bit shallowly. Though still in pain, the white one smiled. "I think it worked..." His gaze fell upon his right paw, slowly beginning to fade away and become ethereal, causing his smile to fade as well. But it was brought back sadly. "I'm... Alright with this. I'm okay with this, brother."

As he laid down beside the larger one, still struggling a bit to breathe, he stroked him a bit. Trying to get him to relax and fight through the pain. But something else suddenly came to mind, causing the white one's green eyes to widen for a moment. "They might... Be able to track you in some way. Perhaps using..." His mind began to brainstorm quickly as he fought against the pain of fading away. "I can cryptit your Identification. I can make it so they can never find or obtain you if I mix it in with mine." Attempting to sit up a bit and stand on his right paw, he collapsed. Now noticing it completely vanished, and his center core was beginning to become clearer. Instead, the younger one began using his left paw, diving back into his brother's chest. Another few jerks and muffled roars in pain, along with coughs and hisses, the white one managed to change it. "There... You won't be found after this. They won't be able to see you easily, nor follow you." All at once his chest felt numb. The white one began fighting to breathe and stay with him just a little longer. "I want you to live on, Brother. Make the life that I could not... It's my final gift for what I put you through. Please, live H-" And the white one collapsed. His last few breaths spent with his only family.

"...H-happily..."

Chapter 1

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### Note:

The Following two chapters are directly ripped out of Zhaiiothe Act 7 - Collapse My Dream for the sake of this story alone, and those who wish to start on this one. If you've already read that Act, feel free to skip

to Chapter 3 to continue. If you wish to see what happens after Chapter 2, look into Collapse My Dream.

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The pain woke him up again. Everything from the old scars that he bared on his beaten body, to his shattered wings. Tied poorly with bandages by those who knew nothing of his kind. Yet they once again forced him to live, not knowing any different. He hated them for it. Once again, that misanthropy gave him a little comfort. He used that anger to snort and get awake.

The large creature studied his surroundings, still really unsure of where he was. Ever since he was brought here four days ago, he hasn't been able to move. "It's what I get," he muttered to himself. "I should've made sure that I was-" His thoughts were interrupted by a large wooden door that was softly closed, and his ears studied the area. "Come to pester me more, have you?" He waited for a reply from his caretaker. When he heard nothing but silence, he snorted once again, and just laid his head on his paws.

Even though he detested her species, he was big enough to admit that even a few of their apples were not terrible. Once in a while there would be a few good people within the sea of terrible, selfish ones. The dragon knew that from experience. But it didn't make it any easier on him when they were once again taken from this life. That pain alone almost never made it worth making the relationship in the first place.

The dragon felt a soft hand under his chin and started to scratch it lightly. It was just a little secret that he made with her. Something he gave, when she cared for him so much. Although it was still a bit on the shy side, it still felt good enough for the dragon to start to purr loudly. Only to be interrupted by a childish giggle. It confused the dragon enough to gaze at the one causing him to unveil the softer side of him. His Amethyst eyes widened when he discovered it was a small boy who snuck into his shelter.

The morning was very warm as the blonde woman stepped outside her temporary home and into the small town. The basket she carried under her white clothes held their breakfast that was made by her and her homeowner. She gave a few people that were walking by a nice smile, until she heard a small boy screaming from the north side of the town. Followed by a large hiss and a thunderous noise that came from the barn the dragon was being nurtured in. After she seen the boy made it outside safely and was just frightened, she just laughed loudly and began to walk toward the barn.

The woman was still laughing when she opened the barn and closed it behind her. "I can't imagine how you think that is funny. Did you put that scrapper up to this?" The large black beast hissed, still unable to move.

"No, I did nothing of the sort. I'm afraid I am to blame for such an attempt though. The children here are so curious about you, and they wanted to know more." She set their breakfast on a table, and

started to withdraw curtains. The dragon growled at the sunlight hurting his eyes.

"Well, thanks to your misinformation, that menace nearly got fried." The dragon snorted.

"It wasn't misinformation. All I told them was that you liked being scratched under the chin, like this." As much as the dragon tried to fight against it, she overpowered his will with her soft hands.

"I only like this by those who have permission to do such things, Tia." He said, his ears still back, but unable to resist purring a bit. "And I told you that in confidence." He forced himself away from her hand.

"Confidence." Tia giggled at him. "I'm the only one who can understand you here. It's hardly considered Confidence." She teased, getting their breakfast ready.

"I would consider it such a thing." His tail thumped on the ground, and grunted at the sudden pain it caused to his back. "You're the only one in this settlement that I trusted." The black one said his thoughts out loud, and couldn't stop himself.

Tia smiled at him. "You trust me, do you Devil?"

The dragon snorted, curling his neck to an S and doing his best to look away from her. Only to reveal his dark ears starting to glow a bit purple. "Trusted. Past tense, human. And right now I'm not sure if I can trust you with any more of my secrets." She just chuckled at him. "And here I was almost considering giving you my real name."

"Well, I would like to call you something else. Devil seems so dark and demeaning. But other than Dragon, no one really knows what to call you. It was just a name an elder woman called out when she was frightened by you, when you came here on that flatbed." Tia smiled sadly at him. The dragon gave out a loud exhale and rested his head on his paws once again. "As frightened as they are of you, they're thankful for what you've done." She reminded him, only to have him roll his eyes at her and lightly toss his snout.

"Back to this again, are we? And I've told you several times: I did nothing for these people. I was looking for rest." Devil growled. "And clearly, those who are trying to 'help' me are only making me suffer longer."

Tia let it go for now. She knew very well that the dragon was trying to die in battle. Against an army that was to attack this town, and just a mile outside of it too is where he fought the Ettins. Singlehandedly, this dragon routed at least three quarters of the Ettin giants, but was nearly beaten to death in the process. The townsfolk tried to save the beast by bringing it to the outside of town and perhaps heal it, but no one here knew anything about dragons. Most never even knew any existed, Tia being one of them.

But Devil is rather intelligent, for how bitter he is. Even though he's told her that the dragon had been abused by humans before: Been locked away, controlled, and forced to defend their lands from

harm, Tia could still see some good in his self-tainted heart. And as an Oracle, she was to find a way to give him salvation. Away from the pain that haunts him in life.

"Here." She gave him a large plate. "We made it this morning, I hope you like it." She smiled at him. Devil studied the plate a bit, filled with several types of meats, bread, and some stuff in a bowl. He could smell herbs in it, and let out a low growl. "You won't taste them. And they will make you feel better." The beast sighed, and accepted the plate. Tia then began to eat as well. "What do you think?" She asked.

The dragon was quiet for a bit. "Reminds me of old times." He managed to mumble out. "Better times." And he finished his breakfast. Devil then tried to change his uncomfortable position a bit, but every little movement seemed to cause him pain.

"Still not feeling better?" She asked him, trying to comfort him by stroking his neck. "You're probably going to be sore for a while, these things take time to heal."

"I know of a very quick treatment." He snorted, still fighting with his body and it's pain.

"What we gave you should help it, and when it kicks in, I have a bit of a surprise for you." She smiled at him. It got the dragon's attention, but he didn't seem hopeful for such a thing.

"You better not expect me to be a plaything for the children." Devil's comment sent Tia into giggles. And she shook her head at him. "I don't like surprises." He bluntly stated.

"I'm just going to get you some fresh air. There's a meadow nearby that you can relax in and get some sun." The creature growled. "It will make you feel better."

"And will be a great place to display me to your people as well, I imagine." He tossed his head. Still fighting the pain in his back. They really did a number on him this time.

"I've already talked to the guards. They're to stop others from gawking."

"You say that now, but what's going to stop them?"

"I will." Tia smiled at him, putting up a small fist. "Now stop moving so much. You'll want to save your strength. Here, let me try to change these splints. But I'm going to need help-"

"You realize you can just make this easier on both of us." He snorted again. "Just kill me and get it over with. In three hours, I'll be good as new." The idea brought a frown to Tia. She didn't like the thought of trying to end his life, even though he's suggested it several times a day to her. He's even tried to do it himself a few times, but he's been too weak to do much.

"...Just bare with it, okay? For me?"

"What are you so afraid of?" Devil's Amethyst eyes locked onto her sky blue ones. "I know your kind fears death because you fear what you don't understand. But I do understand it, Tia. And even if I finally stay dead for once, It'll be salvation for me." The dragon gave up trying to move and just rested his

head on his paws once again.

Tia stroked his ears a bit. "I know it will be. And I understand the idea of passing. But..."

"You can't do it. It's against your nature to, I understand." Devil sighed.

"...That creature you seen. He said that you can only truly pass when you've discovered a reason to live, correct?"

"Bartan. And yes, that's what he said." He lightly turned his head toward Tia's direction. "Here I never thought you'd bring that up again..."

"It's been two days since you've... Asked me. And..."

This time he got up enough to really look at her face once again. "You're... Considering it?"

"I will, Devil. I'll try to teach you how to really respect life. And let you discover that reason, but I can't... Liberate you." She smiled sadly at him. The black one gave a sigh, and began to wrap a large arm around her. Pulling Tia to his chest.

"...Thank you." He said quietly. "...That is what the meadow is for?"

"Yes." She smiled at him, stroking his neck again. "But I can only do it on my terms. Not yours, understand?" He gave a nod. After a little bit of time, Tia squeezed out of Devil's embrace. "Now, I would like to change these bandages, but I'm going to need some help." The dragon's reply was a grumble. "I know, but I can't do it alone. Bare with it." She tapped him on the snout a bit while she gathered the dishes in the room.

After giving the creature some refreshments, Tia went out to get a bit of supplies and a few extra arms. Walking through the town she smiled and greeted everyone she's grown to know in her short time of staying here. It's been nearly two weeks since she came to this town of Norray, and Tia loved the area. It was very warm during the late spring, but not dry. It almost seemed like a little piece of heaven that was cut out and laid here for people to relax in.

Tia's first stop was the local carpenter Phil and his son Sam. Although Phil was quite a big fellow, and certainly older than Tia by at least twenty years, Sam was about her age of 19. She'd grown to like his company, and he always seemed to enjoy when she visited. "Good morning, sunshine." Phil greeted Tia as she looked around the large sheltered area where they worked.

"Good morning Phil. It's quite lovely today, isn't it?"

"Yes. Although I suspect we're due for some rain soon. The moon last night seemed to have a glow to it." He returned her smile. "What can I do for you today?"

"I placed an order for some new splints. Are they finished yet?"

"Ah, yes. For the Devil is it?" She giggled at the name. "It's hardly a name for someone who has saved our town, but I don't suppose he offered anything better?"

"Not yet. But I do agree, he definitely needs a new nickname for the time being. If you think of something, you should let me know."

"I have just the thing: The Black Tornado Mk. III!" And the three shared a laugh.

"I think that might be a little long, but the effort is worth it." Tia replied. "Sam, can you bring the new Splints to the barn and wait for me there?"

"You want me to wait?" Sam asked, rather surprised.

"Yes, I can't place them alone. I would like a few extra hands if you're not too busy."

"Y-yeah, I can do it. Just as long as the beast doesn't try to eat me while placing them. I can only assume that it must still be in pain."

"He is, yes. But as long as I'm there, he shouldn't do anything rash. I'll meet you there." Tia gave a smile, and went off.

Her next destination was Milly's home. She and her grandmother handled most of the medical supplies and often assisted the town's doctors. "I was wondering when you were going to come around Oracle." The elder woman greeted her.

"Please, Tia will do fine." Tia smiled at her. "Is Milly around?"

"Back here, Tia. Just doing some inventory." Milly shouted from a back room. "I was looking over the notes you gave me a few days ago about his injuries. That was quite a list."

Tia gave a nervous nod. "Yes, it seems that body of his has caused him alot of grief. I've never seen anything like it before."

"I know it's not right to question an Oracle's abilities, but are you sure about this? We've gotten the obvious ones: Broken wings, fractured tail, cracked ribs, and quite a few opened wounds. Those we can help with. But the inner damage..."

"I know. But most of it just seems to be bruises. They will heal normally. Even the few wounded organs seem to be doing quite well. He's a fast healer, I can tell that much. He won't need the amount of supplies that a human would take. The big things are to help the bones heal." Milly nodded at Tia, knowing it must be hard to search through the body of a stranger and find out what's wrong with it.

"And... All these scars?" Tia have a sigh. "It's alright dear. But you know we can't do anything about them. I hardly even noticed he had them."

"Most of them are beneath the armored scales now. I... Wrote them down to show people what he's been through. And the pain he has to live with."

Milly held Tia by the hand, and made her look into Milly's eyes. "You can't heal everyone, Oracle. Even though you have been blessed, try not to get caught up in the pains of others, okay?" A faint nod came from the younger blonde. "Alright, I'll get your supplies for the dragon. Was there anything else you need?"

"Actually, I was planning on replacing the splints on his wings. Could you give me a hand with them?"

"Sure thing. I'll be over there in a few minutes." Tia gave her a soft smile and left for the barn once again.

Sam set the sets of splints down against the large building. It was originally supposed to be a stable for the new farmers that worked at the north, but with the fear of the Ettins attacking within the last week or so, it never got finished. (Just as well.) he thought. (Perhaps it was for the best father delayed its completion. Overall, we instead made it into Devil's home for now... For how little he seems to appreciate it. Poor thing must just be in pain.) He sighed heavily, but the warm fresh air lifted his spirits and brought back the young man's smile once again. Knowing Tia won't take too long, he began waiting. As a habit of not liking silences, he began to whistle.

"Cut that out, Damnit!" Although he couldn't understand the creature's language, the roar was enough to startle him. After staring into the direction of the roar, he could hear Tia laughing from a far.

"Agitating the patient, are we Sam?" Tia said between her giggles.

"I-I didn't mean..." She motioned for him to stop and kept her smile. "I really didn't think he would be able to hear me. I honestly been told that my tunes are quite pleasant at that." Sam scratched the back of his head.

"Don't worry yourself over it. He's quite grumpy right now." Tia said, opening the barn. Sam grabbed the splints and waved at Milly in the distance. He waited for her to enter before going in himself.

"Don't tell me that you brought the one that was making that horrendous noise." The dragon grumbled.

"That noise was a whistle, and it's quite pleasant to listen to." Tia teased him.

"Well, when you're ears are as sensitive as mine, come back to me and listen to it. You'll agree with me." She giggled at the beast's remark.

"You speak to him with our language? Can he understand it?" Sam asked, finally looking at the

creature up close.

"Sadly no. I can't really explain it, but it's like when I speak; everything understands me. I'm often a medium between species." Tia smiled.

"I'm assuming that he foolishly asked about my language?" Devil snorted again. Trying to glare at the unwelcome visitor's direction. "Well tell them to hurry up and get out. I don't like people staring at me."

"Be nice you. Besides, it would be nice to get to know them a little better." Tia smiled. Making the other two humans rather nervous at the 'Be nice' part.

"I don't need friends Tia." He growled.

"Well, I'm not going to be here forever, so it wouldn't hurt to try to make a few."

"You want me to make friends with a species that I can't understand? Genius plan. Nothing could go wrong." The black one's sarcasm made her laugh again.

"W-what did he say?" Sam asked, still studying the dragon's wings.

"He doesn't want to make friends that can't understand him."

"That I can't understand!" Devil snapped at her. "They can understand me just fine. For example, they know that I'm not fond of them. And they're looking at me as if I'm probably going to turn around and eat them." Another giggle. "Tell me I'm wrong."

"You're wrong." The blonde teased him. "Don't be nervous you two, he won't eat you."

"I never said that!"

"But you won't." Tia tapped his snout.

"I suppose when you're around I won't. But you don't need to tell them that." He curled his neck to an S, and making her smile again.

Milly motioned Tia to translate, but she just motioned for her to let it go. "Alright then. I've wrote out a few more herb orders for his diet, it should make him feel better but... We don't know what effects this might have on... Other creatures."

"He's a dragon. And I'm sure everything will be fine." The dragon gave Tia a glare, and once again she just tapped him on the snout.

"Your sketches of his wings were quite spot on Tia." Sam said, studying the wings after taking the old splints off. "I spent most of yesterday sanding, and they look like they should fit perfectly." Although the young man only came up to shoulder height of the beast, he could see the wing quite well, and where it was broken. However he would need to be on the creature's back in order to assist properly.

Without asking, he grabbed a hold of the dragon's spineful mane, and pulled himself up causing the creature to hiss at him and curse at him several times.

"Get off me!"

"He just needs to be up there for a moment, until we can get the splint changed." Tia assured the creature.

"You could've warned me he was going to do that." Devil hissed.

"Would you really let him try if you knew?" Tia teased, getting Milly to help her with the bottom Splint.

"No. But that's besides the point." The beast snorted. Spines raising quite high and squirming a bit. "Move your damn feet!" He hissed behind him.

"Sam, can you please move your feet? Try around there." And he did so. "Does that feel better?" All Tia got for a reply was a loud growl, but it was enough. The three worked on getting the Splints on. "Do those feel comfortable?"

"No." The dragon said bluntly.

"But do they feel better than the others?" Tia smiled at him.

"...I suppose so." As much as he hated to admit it, the extra attention to the smoother wood surface was more comfortable.

"Then we're done. Thank you two." Tia and Milly gave Sam some room to get down. But the dragon had other plans. When the young man was about to jump off, he shuffled his shoulders hard in one direction than the other, causing the male to fall off and land hard on his side. "Devil!" Tia swatted him on the shoulder and helped Sam to his feet.

"Enough of this. Meadow time." The dragon rose to his paws, as much as it hurt to move. He grabbed the woman dressed in white and threw her on his back. Hissing at the other two while he turned around and shoved opened the door. The sun was still bright outside, but he could still make out several buildings to the south. Along with a lot of people in the roads through town, now staring at him. He growled at them as his scales turned white, and slammed on the dirt road below. A few feet away from him a large ice wall started to form. Dividing the dragon from the other townsfolk and breaking their gaze. He then started toward the northern end of the town.

"Devil?" Tia asked, still on his back but finally getting used to the dragon's limping walk.

His scales once again black, the beast turned his head to look at her the best he could. "It will melt by the afternoon. Be thankful it was an Ice wall. I was planning to make it solid rock." He snorted.

"But what was that? You changed color and...?"

"I Atoned to Cold." The puzzled look on Tia's face urged the creature to continue. "...Where I grew up, we were able to choose a path to follow in order to gain power. We were not simply given things like breath weapons, but were to study and earn such powers. Many were just manipulations of our surroundings, like the grounds under our paws or flames that kept us warm." He grunted as he laid down, helping the young woman off his back. "We sacrificed many things to gain that power, but only after learning to respect it."

"But you..."

He sighed loudly through his nostrils as he slowly laid his head in the long grass. "I was good at it. Very good. It came so easily to me, to the point where I was the only one who was able to learn all forms available to study. Even then, that wasn't enough. I honestly obsessed over it, so much that I wasn't satisfied with just using one. I had to use several together, creating chains of the Atonements and making different effects. But even that power marked me." She stared at him with worry, and just comforted him by stroking his neck. Whatever he was talking about, it was a sign of trust to her. "Where I came from, there was no such thing as a black dragon. They were whatever color that matched their Atonement. But whereas I studied so many... I don't even recall what my original color was. It's been too long."

"You're the color off all of them put together, then? Until you focus on one of them?" He gave a nod.

"Because of my obsession, I'm now painted with the color of darkness and fear. After a while you get used to others calling you things like... Devil." He snorted towards the town. "And it's not just humans that fear what they don't understand."

Tia gave a soft smile which confused the dragon, making his neck curl. "I don't fear you." She said softly, her smile growing at his tossed snout.

"You understand me, so you don't count."

She shook her head. "I can speak with you, yes, but I don't understand you." The black one looked at her again. "There's something I didn't quite tell you earlier. When you were sleeping, I wanted to check on your wounds, and find out what was hurting you, so we could find a way to treat it. And... When I was looking through your body, I seen... Scars." The dragon sighed and looked away. "I know what they are, and I know they still hurt you. Be it there anymore or not. And as much as I could feel them as well, even if it's just a fraction of what you feel, I still cannot state that I understand it. And I cannot say that I understand you."

"So you're saying these scars define who I am?" The dragon snorted, and she giggled at him. Causing him to tilt his head at such an odd reaction.

"These ones do. What are these scars to you?" Again with the stroking under the jaw. After looking around to ensure they were alone, he began to purr a bit.

"...Memories. Ones that are not meant to be treasured."

"Oh? That's not what I see." Again with the puzzled look. "I see marks, reminders of those who you've tried to save. The mark of heroism." The dragon snorted at it through his purrs.

"More like the marks of failed attempts to finally rest-"

"Don't sell yourself short. Despite your true intentions you always attacked those who were going to do harm to others, did you not?" Her smile almost faded during his long silence, until he took a sigh of defeat. "You are a good person, I can tell that about you. You have very soft eyes, no matter how bitter you've become over the Eons."

"Is that why you've chosen to assist me? Because you think I'm a good person?"

"I know you're a good person. You're just often irritated by the actions of others. That doesn't make you a bad person."

Another snort and a small glimpse of a smirk the dragon tried to hide. "And you say you don't understand me."

"I don't know what you've been through. And I can't tell you what your next action will be. I don't understand you enough in that way. But that doesn't mean I wouldn't like to." Tia's smile returned. "I think in the end, if I'm ever going to teach you to respect life, I'm going to be able to understand you. But only if you say it's okay." Once again, the dragon gave her an odd look. "Most people want to be understood, but you're far from them. Even the most simple things I want to run by you before I go further."

This time, the dragon didn't hide his smirk. "You're too kind. I don't like it." He teased.

"Well then. I'm just going to have to be more stern with you." She giggled. "Now take me back to town, or I'll kick you in the stones!" She did her best to stick her nose up in the air, and the dragon just shook his head.

"I... Don't want to leave just yet."

She smiled at him. "We'll come back, I just want to pack a lunch for us. I wasn't planning on getting abducted suddenly."

"Well keep that in mind from now on, if you're planning to bring over guests." Devil snorted as he grabbed Tia once again and placed her on his back.

Chapter 2

"The Black Tornado Mark III?" Devil repeated Tia's odd suggestion for another name. His neck was a mix of curling and tilting in confusion along with Tia's constant laughter at his expression. "I can understand the Black part, but what's with the tornado?"

"I'm not sure, I guess they're supposed to be threatening and fierce?" She replied between breaths. She was still preparing their lunch while they spent time in the meadows. At least no one followed them out there. "Although I've never been near an active one, but I've seen the devastation they've caused."

"I know of it. I've caused a few myself." That gave Tia a worried look. "...Not here, I mean. But..." The dragon trailed off, knowing where that conversation lead would make her sad. "Still, it's hardly a name suited for a dragon. Did your people come up with any others?"

"No one else really did, no. I think they're still looking at you as a beast instead of a person." She smiled sadly at him. But he understood. Others couldn't communicate with the black creature, and when they did, it was just a series of hisses, growls, and roars. He couldn't blame them for being afraid of him. "But I think I found one suiting." That broke the dragon's thoughts and he looked at her with wonder. "How about Atlas?"

"Atlas?" Devil repeated.

"Yes. He's a person of legend here. One who sacrificed himself to bare the entire weight of the world on his own shoulders, so that other people could live knowing it would never fall." She smiled at his head tilting. "I always found the story fascinating, and rather heroic. He deals with the pain of others so they won't have to. I honestly think it matches you in a way."

The beast looked away from her, and Tia knew what was going on in his head for that moment. "I'm not-"

"You are. Maybe not in your eyes, but to those of us here you are. And you've always dealt with this weight that you carry. It may not be the weight of others, or the weight of the world itself. But it's something you've been fighting against this entire time."

"And you don't think it's disgraceful that I've given up on carrying it?" He let out a low growl. Although the anger wasn't directed at her purposely, the thought of it still gnawed at him.

"Atlas, how old are you?" His ears went a little low when he thought about it. "If whoever thought of that ignorant opinion of you cannot see how long you've held this burden, they deserve to be slapped. You've suffered enough, Atlas. You deserve to be freed from this pain." She stopped what she was doing and gave the dragon an unexpected hug around his neck.

"Tia..." Atlas started. "...You're too kind." And he held her back, tightly. Even though his ribs were screaming for him to let go. "Fine." He let out a bit of a groan while he partly released his embrace. "You and the others may call me Atlas. But you are never to call me that H word, understood?" A glint of pain shown revealed in his eyes when Tia looked into them.

"Alright." She smiled sadly at him. But if it would make his pain easier on him, she would accept his terms. Even though to her, as well as the rest of the small town's folk, would see the creature as one.

The beast eased his hold on her. And cleared his throat. "...So, where do we begin?" Tia giggled at his uncomfortable reaction. And continued making their lunch.

"Hmm." She stared at the distance in thought. "Look around you. What do you see?"

The dragon found the question to be odd, but did as she asked. "I want to say the right answer is Life." He grumbled, and she giggled at his lackadaisical response.

"There isn't any right or wrong answers to life." She smiled at him, giving him the large cutting board she was working on. The lunch's aroma caused the creatures nostrils to flare and inhale deeply, making his mouth water as he went in for a bite. It wasn't until his first swallow that he actually paid any attention to what Tia actually said. Atlas' delayed response of opened ears and a slightly tilted head caused her to cover her mouth and laugh a bit.

"So it's a trick question?" Atlas snorted.

"No, it's just some answers are better than others. But you're correct for the most part." His ears went back when she teased him, as he took another few bites out of his meal. "There is life all around us. From the plants we're resting on, to the birds in the sky. And you must know that this life exists within itself, being so old."

The dragon let out a low growl. "Don't call me old. It sounds insulting." He snorted.

"That was the point." She giggled again. "You're like a cranky old man." Another grumble, and he motioned for her to go on. "But yes, there's a circle of life that connects with itself. Be it when a tree falls and makes a home for raccoons, or when one of those raccoons are hunted by a lynx and fed to its children. They all work with one another in-"

Atlas tossed his snout. "Yes, yes. I know of this. What's your point?"

Tia just smiled at him a bit. "Well... I've been doing alot of thinking lately. And I believe your lack of value to life is because of this cycle. When you... Become deceased, you don't leave anything behind, do you?" The dragon shook his head as he took another bite. "You don't support the circle, and you really don't have any use for it. You've been excluded from it for so long."

"And you're saying that if I support this cycle, I'll be-" A sudden sharp pain started to appear in the dragons left arm, and he grabbed, hissing under his breath.

"Atlas? What's wrong?" Concern leaked from her voice as she tried to comfort him. As the beast grunted through the pain a bit, he realized it wasn't going away.

"I should probably head back. Or else you're going to need that flatbed again." He said, rather calmly. Tai looked at him with worry. "You should get back to the town and probably warn them."

"I don't want to leave you in this condition-"

"So you expect me to carry you back to town while I'm having a heart attack. Wonderful." He sharply tossed his snout while he got up and started limping toward town. As much as she really didn't want to, Tia had no choice but to leave him like this.

"...I'll be back soon. Please be careful." She stroked his neck when she went past him, and ran back to town. As the creature's limp began to slow down, his breaths started to become shallow. Her words before this episode echoed in his head ("You don't support this cycle, and you really don't have any use for it.") His head became light. His balance was a struggle to keep, and eventually he gave into gravity. (And she says she can't understand me...) His last thought made him use his final breath to chuckle.

Atlas woke up in darkness once again. Pain still ravaged through his sore chest and he grunted with every little movement. A gasp in front of him caught his attention. "Are you awake?" He could smell Tia, but he couldn't see her.

"I can't see anything. Taath... Am I blind again?" The creature grumbled. Feeling the area around him, against his sore warnings. He felt a large bed made of straw, much like the one in the barn he stayed in the past few days. It even smelled like it.

"Hold on, I'll remove the blindfold." Atlas felt Tia's soft hands around his head. He also felt something else odd about them, they almost felt... wet. As she slowly took off the blanket covering his eyes, a bright flame became visible to him. It was a lantern on the table, with several other things spread among it. Books, pages, and samples of herbs. Atlas studied them a bit, then his gaze went to Tia's face. "...You didn't make it too far, but we were able to get you breathing again. Then we brought you back here. You've been out for nearly 8 hours." A low growl omitted from the creature's throat. "Atlas..." He rested his head on his paws, turning it away from her. "I had to look through your body again to see what was causing it... I think you had a bad reaction to the herbs this morning and it-"

"Leave." The dragon said sternly. "Tia, just go home."

The woman was quiet for a few moments, and then she stroke his head a bit. He didn't fight with her, but he paid her little attention. "I'm sorry." She whispered, and she left the building with the lantern. Atlas waited until he could no longer hear her footsteps. Then waited to hear a door close in the distance. When he did, he took a deep, angry sigh.

Guilt kept Tia from resting too much during the night. It wasn't so much that she made a mistake, and someone nearly died because of it. It was just an experiment after all. There was no way to tell how the effects of herbs would turn out on a different species. But it was fact that she was the only one Atlas had trusted. ("Leave.") The way he said it really got to her.

Tired of thrashing in her bed, Tia decided to get up. The morning light was beginning to break the night sky, but it would still be an hour or two before the town began to wake. She prepared a small breakfast for her and the dragon, and set out to the barn where he was being kept. Even though she was sure that he was still irritated, Atlas was still ill, and under her care.

She felt a little uneasy when she approached the barn door. It felt like something was wrong when she opened it and barely seen the beast in the building. Its body looked limp, not even bothering to hold itself up anymore. Then, she could smell it. Reminding her of the first night she'd seen him. A strange mix of burnt blood and metal brought the faint memories of the dragon being dragged into the building, horribly injured and beaten senseless. "Atlas?" she called out, but there was no response from the creature.

Tia walked in and set down the tray on the table. As she looked at him closer, she could easily tell he wasn't breathing. A large puddle of murky redness was caked onto his underside, and a bit on his chin. A faint sob leaked out of her. Though Atlas suggested many times that he would never die, it seemed to her he had finally succeeded. The dragon took his own life by gnawing at his wrist. As the sun began to light up the morning, it illuminated slightly where the dragon had laid. At closer study, Tia could see that the creature's arm, though caked with blood, had no wound. As the woman tried to turn over the other paw, her soft touch caused the dragon's head to shoot up and gasp for air, knocking Tia off her feet.

Atlas coughed a bit while taking deep breaths and clearing his dried throat. As he looked around, he almost seemed lost to where he was. The creature searched the air for something, and it lead him to a barrel filled with water nearby. As he got up with ease, he lapped at it desperately. Tia finally started to get up, now that her heart stopped racing, and she got the dragon's attention. "You... Are..." He spoke. After a few moments of what looked like a migraine, he finished. "Tia?"

"Y-yes. You do remember me, don't you?" She studied his body, now standing quite strong, and limple. Although he still wore the stilts on the wings, and many of the bandages, as well as patches from his injuries, they didn't seem to ache him like they used to. It was then, she was sure what he had done during the night. And why he sent her off early. The thought of it angered the woman.

As Atlas took another quick drink, he stretched a bit, getting the kinks out of his body, and laid down in front of Tia once again. He looked toward the window "It's still early morning. Why are you up so early?" and while he was returning his snout to her, he got a soft punch in-between the nostrils that got him to sit up. A loud growl came from him while he shook off the blow. "What was that for!?" Atlas hissed.

"You... You liberated yourself, didn't you!? Is that why you pushed me away last night? You just wanted to give up?"

"I thought it was a fair plan. Considering I was finally strong enough to do it." He growled at her, laying back down. "Besides, it wasn't giving up. It was letting go. There's a difference."

"Regardless, I told you that I didn't want you to do it!"

"You said that *you* couldn't do it. And *you* didn't. I did. And now I'm finally free of that distraction, so we can finally focus on your teachings." Tia sighed angrily at him. "Why are you so upset over this?"

"Because-!" She was quiet for a moment. "Because it goes against what I've been trying to teach you."

"Which is what? That pain equals existence?"

"No! It's that pain brings people together! And when they're together, that pain becomes easier to manage when they share it!"

"And you want me to share my pain with people who don't understand me? You want me to open my gates and flood the world with agony? Is that it?"

"If it would stop you from constantly living through hell..." Tia stopped herself, and took a seat. As she took a few breaths, the large creature studied her. After a bit, he gave her a little nudge with his snout, and she placed a hand on it.

"Tia... You have to stop trying to shoulder my pain. It will only ruin you." He said softly. Although he really didn't like showing this side of himself to others, he's grown to know that it's sometimes the only way others will listen to him. "If it helps, I believe you are right. But you alone cannot be burdened to uphold what I carry."

A sad smile crept over her face. "Then we'll just have to find someone who can." The dragon let out a small sigh, and a bit of a sad look. He motioned for her to get up, and lead her into his chest. For a while, Atlas held her there until Tia went to sleep.

"Tia? ...Tia? You don't want to sleep all day." A few nudges knocked the woman out of the small dream she was having. She woke up to a bloody dragon's chest, and gasped at first, pushing herself away. "It's fine. It was from last night." Atlas stated, almost grinning at her reaction.

As she got up, and out of the creature's light hold, she took a look out the window, toward the bright sun. "How long was I asleep?"

"Only for maybe an hour or so. How much rest did you get last night?" The woman's constant yawns answered him. When she turned toward the dragon once again, she had an odd look on her face,

which then turned into giggles. Atlas curled his neck back at the strange reaction. "What is it?"

"You actually sound concerned about me. It's a first, really." Tia only laughed more at the dragon's snort.

"It's all in your head." He laid his head back down on his paws, trying to face away from her. "All I'm saying is that you should take better care of yourself, and stop trying to heal the world so much. You can't heal it when you're disabled." Although his tone did sound sarcastic, Tia seen right through it. As she finished prepping their late breakfast, she couldn't help but look at the bloodstains over the beast. Eventually, the creature caught her. "...What?"

"We should really get you washed after you eat." She handed him a plate with a smile.

"You are not bathing me again. Now that I can move at my free will, you're not going to take advantage of me like that anymore." Tia couldn't help but laugh at how serious Atlas sounded as he took the plate from her hands. "Besides, I think I would fancy a swim after this. Perhaps hunt something more filling."

"You'd prefer a wild animal over my cooking? It's not that bad."

"Not at all. It's not the best I've ever had, but I would never describe it as Bad. There's just a liberating feeling about hunting by yourself that I miss. I haven't done it a for a while. You should try my cooking next." Atlas teased, only getting a smile and a shake of her head from the woman. The two finished their small breakfast and the dragon stretched again. "So, Tia. What will you do with your day now that you no longer have to tend to me?"

"Well, I can finally start socializing with the townsfolk once again, and possibly tend to others that have some minor injuries or medical mysteries. However, I'm not done with you yet." She smirked.

"Of course not. You must teach me to respect life once again, or something. For now, I'll just go wash up."

"I'll come with you, but I want to tend to these dishes first."

"If you must. I'll be near that meadow when you're done." The dragon squeezed through the doorway of the barn, and stretched his wings out in the opened air. Only then remembering that the stilts were still attached to their branches. With no regards to the fine craftsmanship of it, he broke the stilts and tossed them aside. Then flew off. Saddened by the amount of work Sam put into them, Tia picked them up to see if she could somehow put them back together, but it was not possible. Instead, she stashed the broken, splintered fragments away for the meantime. Tia would beat the dragon with them for such disrespect when she caught up to him.

And she did just that after tending to her chores. Packing a small lunch, and collecting the broken stilts in a blanket, she set off to the meadow. Down the road, she could see the dragon's haunches barely over a small hill. The more she approached him, the more she could hear him growl. It was very loud and

deep, much like a wild rabid animal. Getting a better visual, she could see his spines raised very high, wings were spread to make him look bigger, and his claws were digging into the dirt. She could barely make out his curses and denials through his growls. "Atlas? Atlas? What's gotten into you?" She placed a small hand on his shoulder, but it didn't settle him. He was staring into the distance, at a strange, white furred creature Tia had never seen before.

Chapter 3

She had never known such fear. Not until now. Running through the blackened woods filled with so much uneven ground, she could still hear him. Coming after her, possibly for her life or some other reason. What little clothing she still had on to protect her skin from the cold seemed to be working against her. Teathering itself to every small bush and branch it could. Constantly making loud snaps and rips to let him track her through the darkness.

Her legs gave out into the massive drop in the grounds, causing her to fall face first into the leave covered dirt. Scampering, she made her way back up, only to feel that she did hurt her ankle a bit. She could still walk, but it would slow her down. And then he would catch up to her. Make her a slave once again or worse.

Her best option was to hide. Perhaps the darkness would for once aid her. Under what almost seemed like a very small cliff, covered in plants and an old log. She did her best to get through quickly, without making too much change to the scenery. As she waited, she did her best to calm down. Slow down her breaths so they wouldn't be so loud. But her body was too exhausted to try. It wanted to regain it's energy, and the fear wasn't helping.

"Where did you go, lassie!?" The man came around, shouting into the woods. Noticing the displaced trail of leaves and disturbed ground. She witnessed him try to follow it with the bright moonlight's help, only to feel something slither and begin coiling around her arm. The cold touch made her whimper loudly inbetween breaths, enough for him to notice. "Hiding on me, are we?" He pulled out a flintlock pistol and aimed at the area she was in. "Come on out, I ain't gonna hurt ya..." He chuckled while grinning at her with an unwelcoming smile.

As the snake around her arm kept climbing, it stopped for a moment. Faintly feeling a vibration into the ground, before a heavy thud came from far behind her, above the cliff she was hiding in. Then another one almost directly above her. "What the-!?" The man yelled only to suck in a breath, attempting to scream before being crushed by something very large. The loud snap of the man's bones and body almost made her sick, and somehow could hear it through the firing of the pistol. The bullet for it pinged off in the distance away from her, and the snake around her wrist quickly climbed down and retreated.

The young woman sat in silence, waiting for something to move. Anything. But nothing did for several minutes. She eventually gathered her strength and crawled out slowly. Trying to look away from the crushed body of the man that tried to capture her. But she couldn't help herself. He was nothing more than a stain, barely recognizable now except for his clothing. Whatever fell on him must have weighed a very unusual amount.

But what did? She couldn't help but be somewhat curious to the large black object. Stopped after tumbling over a few trees. As she approached what seemed to be almost made out of obsidian, carved with several things that almost looked like appendages. But it was very hard to make out in the darkness. Slowly she began to approach and softly touch it. It was... Warm. Scaly, but very warm to the touch. Slowly outlining what felt like a very large bat wing, with a few spines sticking out here and there. Then to the main body, she could begin to make out the creature's head.

Again, approaching with caution, she felt it, and it was still warm. But it was no longer breathing. Whatever the creature was, it was indeed dead. No longer responsive. But it was the thing that saved her life, and that made her heart sink a little. Once again alone within the cold world.

Cold. She never felt so cold before. The Autumn was definitely making her life harder lately. And so far, this creature was the warmest thing she could find. Her wagon was attacked by those bandits, and it wasn't safe for her to attempt to go back there. As much as she didn't want to take more out of this creature, she searched it's awkwardly positioned body for a comfortable area to lay. One that held shelter with it's other wing for her. Even in it's death, it seemed that this creature gave her more than most of this entire world did. She curled her body into a ball, and attempted to sleep the rest of the night away.

The faint singing of birds that still lingered the area before migrating started waking her up. The woman barely noticing the sunlight to her surroundings, but unable to penetrate the onyx membrane of her savior's wing. Slowly getting out of her warm circle that she made with her body, the creature's body was beginning to become colder due to the night. Although one wouldn't think sleeping on it's inner thigh would be comfortable, but it was one of the best sleeps she's had for a while. Now that the light had returned to her world, she was able to study the creature a bit more. Including this strange pouch between it's hind legs, as well as this slight opening a little ways toward it's front. By the look of it, it

looks like there was something hidden inside.

Curious, she tried touching it a bit with the tip of her finger. The soft scales were a bit cold, but the hole still held a bit of warmth inside. Feeling around inside caused a loud breath to be sucked in and startle her. A few heavy pants as well as the wrustle of leaves made her look at the black creature's head, now moving attempting to look around. With a grunt, it began to get up. A few snaps and kinks ommitted from it's body, until it started to move the leg she was on. Although she hit the ground under two trees with a thud, she tried to keep her mouth shut. This creature, the one that died last night was somehow still alive?

As much as she wanted to whimper, she kept herself silent as the beast got up... Only to rest his haunches on the trees directly over her. Coughing a bit, clearing his dried throat, and getting the rest of the kinks out of his sore body, he grunted a few more times. He muttered something the woman couldn't quite make out. And soon after shifting a bit, one of the trees he was resting on split loudly, causing her to squeal.

Quickly the beast got off and turned around, swating a few small trees with his tail in the process and studying the ground with semi-perked ears. Slowly spotting the dirty brown haired human woman in the ground where he was sitting. "What the hell were you doing down there?" He asked, very unconcerningly.

She looked at him in both a bit of fear and awe. "Y-you can... Talk?" The creature tossed his head, muttering something him getting stroked off everytime he was asked that. Standing in the direct light she could really see his entire body; completely black aside from his purple, gem-like eyes. Large wings with one slightly hanging lower than the other, and a rather well-built tone of muscles under his scales. Although frightened by it, she never seen such a beautiful creature in all her seventeen years of life. "But... You were dead..."

"Yes, yes, Probably. But back to my question: what exactly were you doing down there?"

"I-I was just..." She attempted to hide a bit more down her hole, feeling a bit of anger from the beast. Eventually his gaze met with the remains of the man, and he tossed his head once again and covered his eyes with his paw.

"And that's why my side hurts a little." He muttered. "Please tell me that wasn't your husband."

"H-husband?" She repeated him, a little embarrassed.

"Boyfriend?" She shook her head. "Father? Brother? Uncle?" Again, shook her head. "Friend? Anyone of any importance? Not sure why I'm bothering to ask, I'm not apologizing." He snorted and then began to walk away into a clearing. When he was out of her sight, she began to get up and follow him at a distance.

Within the clearing was a small spring that attracted him. Tending to his much needed thirst, he spend several minutes lapping at the cool water. Only eventually to get a brain freeze. After a bit of

grunting, the creature's scales rapidly changed into a crimson red. Hissing while shaking his head a bit, the woman could see faint flames coming from his mouth. And soon enough, he was down lapping at the waters once again. Watching him do it was actually making her thirsty as well, but she stayed behind for a bit longer.

As the now Red beast sat down, he began looking to the sky for a few moments, then slightly looked behind him. "Still following me, are you?" She was quiet for a bit, but clearly there was no fooling this one. Slowly she came out to the opened area and studied him while heading to the stream. His scales showed no trace of the obsidian as before, but now a glossy crimson over his entire body. Looking over, her eyes met his, as well as his rather annoyed stare. She lowered her head a bit as if to say she was sorry, and he snorted. Looking back at the sky while she got herself a drink.

The water was very cold, but soothing none the less. The dew of the grass was damping her clothing, and the cool morning wasn't helping her. Soon enough, she would probably catch a cold if she didn't find a form of warmth. "What time is it here?" He asked her, rather unexpected.

"...I-I don't know..." He looked at her annoyed again. "I was never taught how to tell time..." He didn't remove his gaze for several minutes. "I-I can do some labors. Cook a little and clean." The beast curled his neck. "I can also read a little and count to twenty-"

"What are you saying?" The large creature studied her for a bit, then looked to where the two spent the night. She remained quiet until he spoke up again. "Who was he?"

"H-he?" Another glare. "Oh... He was a bandit, one of the many that attacked our wagon. I-I managed to get away, but I was caught until-"

"I fell on him." He finished her. "And now you're thinking I'm your new master?" He snorted.

"I-I..." She stammered, trying not to upset him. "I didn't have-" Those purple eyes brought a little bit of fear back into her heart. After a breath, she swallowed. "I don't have anyone... And you saved me, twice." Again, his neck curled. "The nights are cold here..." It took him a moment to piece it together, but he did. Grunting at the result.

"So it must be morning then. That's what I thought, but wasn't hoping for." He muttered. She looked at him a bit, wondering what was on his mind. "Means I'll have to fly on the other side of the world to see the stars." Again, she just stared at him until his wings spread out and surprising her to the point where she fell backward. The spread instantly causing him to growl in pain and lower his left wing. He looked at it for a moment, and grunted again while trying to move it.

"What's wrong?"

Another bit of a flinch when he moved it. "I must've sprained it when I landed last night." He said. Then his scales changed to an aqua blue, surprising her again. "And sleeping in that position didn't help much either. Regardless, I shouldn't fly for a bit." What seemed to be a bit of a thick mist seemed to come out from the stream and cover the branch of his left wing. It sizzled slightly, and the beast did

slightly grunt but stopped soon after. After that, his scales returned to black and he stepped through the stream.

"W-where-?"

"I'm hungry. Do I need an excuse to do every little action?" She didn't respond, but tried to get across the stream herself. Stepping on a few rocks, but slipping off of one and getting her leg wet. The slight splash got his attention and he muttered something about children being helpless. "Still planning to pester me?" He asked, a bit harshly.

"I-I..." She lowered her head once again, not wanting to displease him. She could feel his gaze once again over her. "I-if you don't want me to..." He sighed, looking into the distance a bit. "I can find somewhere else to go-"

"If you're wet like that, you won't live long enough to find something else. Let alone someone who's willing to pick up a sick stray." She was quiet for a few moments, until another color change caught her eye. A vibrant green this time. "Take off your clothes." He demanded.

"W-what?"

"They're wet. Take them off or else you will catch an illness. I'll look away in the meantime, to make you feel less uncomfortable." And he rested on his haunches, staring into the distance directly away from her. She was hesitant at first, but she didn't argue with him. Slowly she took off her old rags and placed them on the ground. Covering herself up with her hands. "Done?"

"Y-yes, master." She said, almost expecting him to look.

"Stand perfectly still. And keep your hands off your body for now." She looked at him wondering what he meant, but soon she could feel several plants coil up her legs. She gasped at them at first, but they didn't hurt her. They were covered in large leaves that appeared to be growing very very quickly. Soon climbing up to her mid section and over her torso. Then making their way around her arms. After completing that, the Leaves began to bend and curl to her body, covering it completely. The plant then severed itself from the ground, finishing off by making her some footwear.

At first the leaves felt a little cold, but soon warmed up with her body's temperature. "That should last you until we can get to a village or a town. I'll get you to there, and that is all. Understood?"

"Y-yes. Thank you, master." His ears went back when she said that.

"And don't call me that. I'm not your master." He got up, and started walking as his scales returned to black.

"O-okay... What can I call you...?" She asked, picking up her wet clothing.

He grumbled at her, but it was an honest question. "...Atlas will do."

The black one exhaled loudly, laying down in the rather sunny and calm day. Hoping that the white dragon lying next to him would get the hint. Still, he kept right on talking. Disturbing the black one's longing for rest. (First my new roommate won't stop talking to himself, now every instructor wants to pester me to join their Atonement. When will it end?) He grunted, trying to keep his purple eyes shut and away from the light of the sun. "Then she theorized that if you incased a large ball of pressure within a thick structure of ice, it could possibly explode! Sending shrapnel shards in all directions-"

"Yes, yes. That was discovered over fifty years ago." The black one tossed his snout. "Look, Articulo-"

"Arty'Kukai-"

"Whatever. If you haven't gotten any new theories since then: Get up, and leave me alone." He stared him down until the white dragon snorted and left him. Releasing a sigh of relief to finally be alone since he got here yesterday, the dark dragon resumed his rest. Only to overhear others talking about him.

"There's no way he's the Black Death. That's only a myth anyway."

"More like a tall tale. Taking out armies single handedly, coming back to life against several records. He's just another stray looking for a school."

"I'm not sure why everyone's so hyped about him. He looks smaller than most, below the average of all the males here. He's even still in his wyrmling coat [Hatched Color]."

"Yet, he's really given several of the instructors the reject. For a stray, he's being awfully picky and egotistical."

With a loud exhale, he almost wished he could deafen himself for the time being. Just so he could shut the world out. Even beginning to regret coming to this nest. Barely even a day here, and he was already making mental plans for just creating a home by the coast. Perhaps on an island where no one could bother him.

As the sun began to disturb him, the black one gave in. Getting up and sitting in the shade of a nearby tree. A few moments later, he could hear another set of paws moving to him. "I'm sleeping." He muttered.

"How did you do it?" The female asked.

"Mother of Bahamut, you guys just do not listen to the word No, do you?"

"Seriously, how did you do it? Charcoal?" She rubbed a paw on his shoulder, getting him to open his eyes and look at the very dark purple dragon. Almost coated in a black that didn't look natural, and was unfinished.

"Do you mind?" He growled.

"Nope, not charcoal or paint. It actually feels real." She leaned in to sniff him. "No fumes. So how did you do it?"

"Do what exactly?"

"Get your scales to this darkness. It's remarkable. Almost as black as the night."

"I've been told darker." She sat down hard in front of him. "...You're not going to leave me alone until I give you an answer, are you?" He asked, lackadasically.

"Nope."

He sighed. "Call it a Hatch-Defect."

"Really? Yet it hasn't ever shown up in any literature. Except in horror stories."

"Well, I'm that horror story then." He muttered, trying a different position to get comfortable. Only to have her lean right on top of him. He growled loudly with his eyes still closed.

"I've had a theory-"

"That's nice."

"-Of slightly igniting the pigments within scales. Causing them to burn out a little bit. Then flash freezing them in the state of jet blackness." She explained, completely ignoring him.

"Sounds like alot of work."

"It took a Gold, Red and White one, and it worked for the most part. As you can tell. But it tends to fade over time, and it kinda hurts. That, and you need some rather compedent dragons." She really studied his scales, trying to find some method of evidence. "Males are so easily submissive if you use a little tongue."

"Oh, you're the Easy one of the nest, aren't you?" He taunted, expecting to get her upset. Only to feel a tight grip on his stones. A slight hiss and grunt came from him, as he glared at her aqua blue eyes.

"There's nothing wrong with bartering. And Males tend to have a nice form of exchange ready at any time. Speaking of which, you feel quite packed with... Currency." She smirked at him.

"Only to have nothing to trade but said currency. I can't tell you how I got this color." He stated, even after getting a few squeezes.

"Hmm... Too bad then. But still, lets go somewhere else more private."

"I told you to leave me alone. I got nothing for you, so go about and find another male to pester."

I'm sure there's several right now that are looking under your tail while you're on top of me."

"Probably, but I'm not just after anyone's attention." She began nuzzling against the black one's body, purring. "Your color is just really doing it for me. Now either get up and follow me, or get stroked off here. I don't mind doing it in public, but you don't look the type to enjoy an audience." A low growl from him, and he called her bluff. Or at least attempted to until she began licking his sheath.

"Okay-okay. Taath, I swear you females are just overbearing."

"Quit being a kresskre." She tossed her snout after he tossed his. Stroking his jawline with the tip of her tail, she lead him into the forests below.

The meadow was quiet. The perfect time in the morning before the predators were awake and hungry. As many of the antelope were licking the dew off of the grass, a small slam could barely be heard by a few to the southeast. And one in the center immedietly collapsed, causing the others to scamper in all directions. A long stone spike retreated into the ground below the fallen one's head. Exiting out of it's brain while the now bronze colored beast approached it. "And that's how you hunt when you just don't feel like moving." He muttered to himself, smirking. The woman came from behind him, looking at the corpse and making a face at the slight insides peaking out of the top of it's skull.

"Are you planning... To eat it like that?" The brown one double taked at her, slightly curling his neck. Then snorted.

"Of course not. I got tired of always eating them raw." He sat down a bit in front of the antelope, changing his scales to a Red and burning the grass in a rather large circle. Back to green to grow what seemed to be several small trees in the center, then derooting them. A flash of the Aqua blue as he drained them of moisture before piling them up and setting fire to them after changing back to red.

"Y-you don't just set it on fire?" She asked, getting a rather harsh glare from him.

"No! Not unless you want to taste nothing more than ash and char." Another snort as he changed to a new color: Silver. Placing paws on the ground and raising them slowly. Having a couple of Iron poles raise up with him. After forming them, he placed them parallel on the sides of the fire, and made a third long one with a crank at the end. "Something like this you need to slowly cook from all sides in order to get the center just right." The beast then implated the corpse like a splitroast, then set it over the fire.

"Oh... I just thought you would-"

"Eat it like a wild animal?" He asked, rather harshly at her. Again, the woman just lowered her

head and sat down quietly. A very low growl came from his throat while he exhaled. "Things are not always what they seem." He stated, making two iron plates from the ground and tossing one to her.

"I-I'm... Sorry." His ears went back, but he didn't say anything. Just continued cutting off the skin of the animal while it rotated over the fire. "...Can I ask... What you are?"

Another exhale, and a few moments of silence. "Dragon."

"Dragon...? But I didn't think there were any such things-"

"There probably isn't on your planet." The statment puzzled her. Not really knowing what a Planet is. Eventually the creature met her gaze and tossed his snout. "World. Your lands, and everything on it. It's called a Planet." She couldn't help but look at the ground, unable to really picture what he was talking about. "I'm not going to explain if you're not going to understand. But I'm not from your land."

"Oh... How do you know?" She really shouldn't have asked that.

"Because my planet is gone. It died eons ago." He remained quiet for a long time, trying to hide the pain of his past. But could feel that gaze on him once again. "...Many many many many 'Twenty' years ago. It no longer exists." She stayed quiet after that. Though something kept echoing in his mind. ("You don't support this cycle...") With a heavy sigh, he spoke up. "How much do you know?"

"W-what?"

"About your world." He tried not to look at her, but her silence said it all. "Do you know this area?" Again silence. He actually faintly looked back to see if she was even there anymore, only to see her lower her head in shame. "...What about your name?"

"Name?" She asked, almost surprised. Causing the dragon to clear his throat in a bit of uncomfot.

"Yes. Granted, odds are you won't be around me long enough for me to bother asking, but do you even know it?" He said, trying to defend his prying action.

"I... Don't have one." It caused the large one to look at her.

"Why?" The question actually startled the woman. "What did they call you until now?"

"...Girl."

"Well, that won't do." He muttered loudly. "Why didn't you get one, even for yourself?"

"...I don't know how." He grumbled at her.

"What do you mean? What do you want to be called?" The question seemed to puzzle her. "What do you want for a name?"

"M-masters give us names, if we deserve it."

"They give you names...? As in an Identity?" She didn't understand the word. Once again, he grumbled. Finding it increasingly harder to socialize with someone. "Fine then. What about Elexus?"

"El...exus?"

"Yes, for a name. How does that sound?" She looked at him strangely again, as he tossed his snout. "Look. Where I came from, we fight for who we are. We make ourselves, forge ourselves through the life we have. And there's no reason why you cannot do that here." She looked deep into his purple eyes. "Forget what other people think of you. Forget what rules they make, they only apply to those who follow them. Forget what they say about you. Now tell me, who are you?"

She couldn't help but stare at him for a few moments. "I'm... A slave?"

"A slave? Is that what you want to be?" The woman lowered her head, still unsure of where he was going with this. "Answer the question." He said a bit harshly. Getting her a bit afraid of him again.

"...N-no. I don't."

"Then don't be a slave."

"Then... What am I?"

"Not What. Who."

"Who?"

"Who are you?" Again she was puzzled by him. "You're suppose to say Elexus. Now again: Who are you?"

"...Elexus?" The creature gave her a solid nod.

"Yes. Now don't you forget that." He tended to the meal for a bit longer. "If you forget that name, you lose who you are."

"Elexus..." She repeated it silently a few times. Feeling an odd empowerment from the name. Then he gestured a paw to her while still keeping an eye on the antelope. She slowly placed her hand in it, pulling herself up to the paw. As the dragon's gaze left the meal and went straight to her, she met it with a smile.

"...I meant your plate." He bluntly said, getting her to blush and giving it to him.

As he cut a few parts off and handed it back to her, she smiled at him again. "Thank you, Atlas..."

"Mhmm..." He mumbled quietly, getting some himself.

"And... Thank you for the food." It caused him to stop for a moment, then gave a faint nod. One bite into the meal caused her to almost moan at it loudly, being the best thing she's ever tasted in her mouth. "This is...!"

"It's alright. Could use a bit of oregano." Though she didn't understand what the dragon meant, she could see a faint smirk on his silver muzzle. It in turn made her smile at him. The beast that gave her an identity.

Chapter 4

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" The green dragon was a bit hysterical, hugging the dark purple one tightly. Granted, she had a reason to. "Thank you all so much!"

"It's our pleasure." A red male said, getting the rest of the search squad to follow him back to the nest.

"Just keep an eye on them from now on." The dark purple one replied. Almost prying the green one off of her. "Wyrmlings are hatched to cause trouble." The other female nodded, thanking her once more before herding the two younger ones back home. When they were out of earshot, she sighed heavily.

The black one came up behind her. "You did a good thing-"

"What the hell was that!?" She spun around, getting into his face.

"What was what?" He sat down.

"You know what I mean." She hissed at him. "That cave nearly collapsed on them, and there wasn't a single bronze in that squad." The black one's ears went back. "I seen you support that celing with rock... Bronze scales-"

"That doesn't mean it was me."

"-Purple eyes! There's not another damn bronze dragon in this nest that has them!" He just looked away from her. "You don't want to tell me, fine. But stop getting the instructors to jump through hoops for your approval if you've already chosen an Atonement!" She turned around, slapping him in the side with her tail as she stormed off.

For a few moments he was silent. "...If you promise not to tell anyone..." It got her to stop, getting furious.

"You should've at least told me! Here I was kissing ass for you to get into Air-" When she faced

him, he was purple like her. "...What?"

"...You want to know how I got this black scale color?" He changed to Bronze. Then Red, Green, White.

"That's..." She came closer to him. "Impossible... No one's ever been able to learn a second Atonement." He exhaled loudly as he reverted back to his black form. "...Is this the reason why you left the Nest?"

"...Yes. That, and I got tired of being pestered by others." He looked into her blue eyes. "But I don't... Want to lose you, Nitaka. Even if it means..."

"You really are the Black Death, aren't you..." He didn't answer her, but the look in his eyes said it all. She came completely up to him and grabbed his muzzle. Forcing her tongue into his.

"So, you are looking for the stars?" The woman asked as they both began walking across the warmer fields. The sunlight seemed to really make a difference in temperature to the leafsuit she was wearing.

"Yes. With it I can find where I am. It's a map for those who are lost, if they know how to read it." She looked at the black dragon until he met her gaze. Then tossed his head. That was beginning to make her smile a little more whenever he did it. "Tell me you know what a map is."

"Yes. I have seen a few on parchment, but I'm not very good at reading them." She admitted.

"I had a hard time reading it at first as well. Until someone taught me how."

"A friend of yours?"

"I would hardly describe him as a friend. More like a damn nuisance. Kinda like you, really." He smirked at her to let her know he was at most half joking.

"So you're not trying to find this friend?" He shook his head. "What are you looking for then?" He exhaled, looking away for a moment.

"...Someone else." He didn't elaborate.

"Then maybe I can help you find them?"

"It's doubtful..." He said a bit quietly. Shaking his head to shrug off the pain. "Only because you've just admitted to me that you can't read maps very well, have no idea where we are, and are so out of shape you can barely keep up with me." He held his head high, slightly looking down at her. Just now noticing that she was somewhat limping. "...How's your ankle?"

"Ankel?" Elexus repeated him.

"I know that limp." He stated, staring straight forwards.

"Oh... It's fine. I can still walk, but-"

"The weather hasn't been too kind to it, and walking on it more won't give it time to heal." Atlas snorted. Causing her to think that she should know better. A low growl ommited from his throat as he began to slow down. His ears were back, and his spines were raised a bit high as he began to lie down beside her. Looking away from her, he could tell that Elexus was just staring at him. Probably wondering what she did wrong. "This will be the only time I will allow you to do this."

"D-do... What?"

"Get on." He demanded, still not facing her. She hesitated at first but slowly approached him. Never attempting to ride a horse before, she didn't really know how to get up on the large beast. Even the soft grip on one of his spines caused him to grunt a bit. Getting impatient, the dragon's scales turned bronze as he slammed the ground with a paw. Making the ground just below her raise up in a platform, and getting her able to stand on his back. As she sat down and grabbed what she could to hold onto, the platform lowered back into the ground, and his scales returned to obsidian. "Just watch the left wing. It's tender around the joint."

It caused her to look at it for a moment. "O-okay..." She said, a bit nervous when he started to get up and walk forward. Slowly getting used to the pattern of his moving shoulders as Atlas traveled. "Thank you, Atlas."

"Yeah yeah... Don't expect me to do this for you, or anyone else. I've been someone's mount before, and I won't tolerate it again." He half snapped, but she felt like the anger was not directed towards her. Regardless, she stayed silent for a while.

"...Why do your scales...?" He turned his head to attempt to look at her. "They change color."

"It's how I Atone and use power." He knew that she wouldn't understand that. "It's how I... Control or create things. Each color represents a different manipulation." He exhaled through his nostrils, changing from one color to another as he began to list them. "Red being the control of Fire and Heat. Blue being Water and Pressure. White, the handling of Frost and Cold. Violet is the Air and Sound. Bronze is the Ground and Earth, as well as Rock. Green is Plantlife. Silver is Metals. And Gold is Light."

"And... Black?" Another exhale from the beast.

"...Black is the color of all of them put together. It is none of them, yet it is all. With it, I can control any of them, but it's harder when I'm not in the proper Atonement. I can also mix them together to create different effects."

"Like?"

"Heat and Air, for example, to create the sparks needed for Lightning. I've also learned to... Construct weapons out of these disciplines." The more he seemed to go in depth about this power he held, the more scared Elexus was becoming of him.

"You... Hurt people with...?" Again, he tried to look at her.

"...If I need to, yes. And quite often." She was silent. "You can't protect anything without harming something else." The dragon snorted. "That's just truism."

"I... Don't know-"

"Of course you don't. You're not old enough to know or understand." After a bit of silence, Atlas could feel her reposition herself a bit. As well as her foot accidentally tapping the sore wing, causing him to flinch and growl loudly.

"Sorry." She whimpered.

"Be more careful." He hissed. "What are you doing back there anyway?"

"I just... Wanted to lie down a bit."

"I suppose sleeping on the ground for the night isn't too comfortable." He muttered.

"I... Actually slept on your leg." He tried to look at her while tilting his head. Thinking back to that morning was still foggy in his mind. He didn't remember feeling her on his forearm. Unless... "Which reminds me, are you okay?"

"Other than my wing, I'm fine." The dragon grumbled. "Why?"

"It's just... It looked like you had something swollen between your legs." Again he tilted his head. "And you had a small hole in your scales. Almost like a bellybutton-"

"Dragons don't have bellybuttons. We're hatched from eggs." Lightly tossing his head thinking (Like she would really understand that.) "Unless landing on that bandit-" Atlas immediately stopped in place with his eyes wide, just now connecting the dots.

"Is something wrong?"

"N-no." He said, hoping she didn't see his ears turning a bit purple. "But don't speak of that to anyone. At all. Ever." He resumed walking.

"Why?"

"I meant, starting now." He tossed his head, getting her to giggle quietly. "It's..." He grunted. "Do you know the difference between Males and Females?"

"I..." She didn't finish. Giving him the impression that she was most likely never taught. With a loud, slightly embarrassed exhale, he cleared his throat.

"You... Know what's between your lower legs, correct?" He hated explaining this to others. Let alone a different species. The dragon felt her raise her head, possibly looking at her own area. "Don't touch it while you're on me." He grumbled. "But Males... Have a lower... Horn. For lack of a better word. Along with that..."

"Pouch?"

"Sure." He was thankful she couldn't see his head through his spiny mane. Being able to see his purple snout reflecting in some water. "But when you find someone you love, the Male places their lower horn into your... Area. And that's how children are made."

"With love?"

"Some could argue, yes. But don't let anyone down there without your consent."

"Consent?"

"Meaning personal agreement. As in, you welcome them down there, and wish to give them that gift."

"Well... You have my... Consent then Atlas-" The strange whimper coming from the beast half startled her. Making her wonder if she accidentally hurt his wing again.

"Don't give it to another species!" He stopped to cover his face with a paw.

"Why not? You've given me so much lately-"

"It's the principal of the thing. You're only suppose to... Do that with your own species. As in another human. Preferably Male."

"Why male?"

"Well, unless you don't wish to have a child, you could go with a female, but..." He turned to Air to hide the growing purple in his face. Worrying her that he might end up doing something. "My point is, you can't just give it to anyone, even if they helped you or saved your life. You save it for someone special-"

"Like you-"

"Not like me." Atlas grumbled. "I mean another human. You can't do it with a dragon."

"I'm not sure I understand." She was making it very difficult for him. "Why wouldn't I want to give you something for everything that you've given me?"

Again with the strange whimper. "That's... Because my..." A sigh. "My 'horn' wouldn't fit inside you." He bluntly said.

"I guess they are a bit big." She said, looking at the several on his head.

"Not those horns. Although I wouldn't suggest using those either."

"You have more?" Another whimper.

"All males have... Lower horns."

"The one near your pouch?"

"Yes."

"But I didn't see it earlier." Elexus said, trying to remember the area.

"That's because it wasn't showing then."

"When does it show?"

"During a special time." He muttered

"Special time? Like when you want it to?"

"I often wonder if it has a mind of it's own, to be honest." Atlas grumbled.

"Can I see yours?"

He did his best to double take at her. "N-no!" He snorted loudly, getting her to giggle just now realizing how embarrassed this was making him.

"Why not?"

"It's suppose to be private. It's something you share in secrecy."

"Secrecy?"

"Meaning, when you're alone with someone."

"But we're alone now-"

"Someone besides me." The dragon grumbled. Exhaling loudly at the giggling woman on his back.

"But I'm afraid I don't understand, Atlas."

"You will when you find someone you love. And when you give them that invitation."

"And you can't be that person?" Another exhale from him that seemed a little different from before. "I just... You said it was a gift-"

"It is. Suppose to be anyway."

"But it's not something I can give you? For everything you've done for me?"

"Trust me, getting rid of the cackling witch on my back will be payment enough." How the dragon said that made her laugh. It honestly made him smile a bit as well.

"Someday I'll find a way to repay you then." Elexus said, trying to pet his back a bit. The jagged rocking of his walk slowly putting her to sleep.

Chapter 5

It was a series of purrs, both his and hers that slowly got him awake. The warmth of the fires and that cool scent of the ocean created one of the most relaxing moments in his life. So much, that it felt like time stood still within that cave.

The black one was sleeping on his back, while the dark purple was using his neck and chest as a pillow. He didn't mind though, in fact it got him to smile. To wake up with her in his arms. A few rubs on his belly told him that she was awake. Spreading what liquids were still wet from the night's session. "M'morning..." He mumbled, slightly stretch and getting her to do a bit of the same. Slowly nuzzling her head and muzzle to his body until they were nose to nose. Greeting him with a soft kiss. "My Elexus..."

She smiled brightly at that. "You're too sweet." Another kiss, deeper than the last. One that eventually broke out and got the female to start licking outside his muzzle. "Last night was wonderful." She said, resting on his body while he stroked the back of her neck. Searching for the affectionate wounds.

"That it was. Possibly the best I've ever had."

"I know it was mine. You're much better than other males." Another nuzzle.

"Experience." He chuckled. "How long have you been awake?"

She stopped her purrs at that. "...How did you know?"

"Your paws. You can hardly keep them to yourself when you're thinking." He gave her a lick on the top of her head. Followed by a few more on her spines.

"My paws?" She couldn't help but notice that she was doing it again. "You're rather... Observant. I didn't even notice."

"I pay attention to things I'm interested in." It made her smile. "You tend to do that when you're thinking alot." It got the purple one to stop and pet his side, under the wing. "What were you thinking about, Nitaka?"

"...Just things." He stopped prying, giving her a soft pet on the jaw to tell her that she didn't need to answer. That in turn lead to more purring, but very soft. "Shroud?" He grunted a sleepy noise in question. "How many mates have you had?"

"I never really had one." He yawned. "I've had a few relationships with others, but never stayed long enough to find a mate."

"...So, are you planning to move on?"

The question stopped him for a moment. "I'm not sure yet. Moving out here is far enough really. I barely get any instructors anymore, so I don't really have a reason to leave." He gave her another lick. "If anything, I have a reason to stay."

"You are..." She smiled again, unable to finish her sentence. "Shroud?" Another noise in question. "...Can I tell you a secret?"

"You can tell me anything. Depending on how hard you're going to squeeze me if I let it out is based on how protected it is." Another chuckle.

"...I was only attracted to your color when I first saw you."

"I figured that." Another yawn.

"But after getting to know you..."

"You learn there's nothing to be afraid of..." He said quietly. Getting her ear to flicker.

"...My point is... There's someone else that I... Wanted to be mated to." She swallowed. "And... I don't think it's going to happen."

"Someone else?"

"...Because of that... Will you be my mate, Shroud?" They looked into each other's eyes for a few moments.

"Second place, huh?" He asked, breaking the silence. Though it hurt her for him to say that. He whispered to himself again. "When two rivers..." Then after a bit of silence. "...Yes. I will." That brought her smile back, and once again they kissed. A long tender one that made her lay on top of him. After she broke it, once again licking the scales around his black face. "Can I ask...?"

She didn't look him in the eyes. "...It's..."

Awaking from the daydream, the black one must've been walking for hours. Completely zoning out while dusk started settling in. Attempting to look back to see if the woman was still on him, the dragon could half feel her when he started to move a bit out of rhythm. Still, the woman needed her rest. And he could prepare a meal for them in peace. A nice soup actually appealed to him.

After making it, the woman was still sleeping. "Elexus? Elexus, wake up. Wake up, or I'm tossing you off my back." Atlas grumbled. But she moaned a bit in reply. Feeling the air growing colder around her. It was almost sundown. "Screw it." He mumbled. Sitting heavily in place, and causing the human to slide onto the base of his tail with a yelp.

"I-I'm sorry!" She shouted, scampering off of him as he tended to his stiff back. Looking around, she noticed the large pot sitting above the fire, as well as what seemed to be a crude table and shelter with a small bonfire area. Unlit at the moment. "Did you... Make all this?"

"I had the time to, yes." Atlas said, tending to the soup and making some bowls. "Granted, I'm so used to such things that I rarely go without." He handed her a bowl. "I'll make us decent beds afterword."

"Thank you." She accepted the bowl, smelling the many vegetables that wouldn't be able to be found in this area. "How did you...?"

"I can grow them on plants. Though, they don't taste too well plain. So it might be a bit thin when it comes to the taste." He took a lap of it for himself. "Not terrible. But much better if you grow the ingredients yourself, the normal way. Providing you have the patience for such things." He snorted, making her giggle at him.

"I can't imagine someone so old to be so... Not patient."

"You mean Impatient. And I'm not old." The dragon replied, his ears back.

"You're not?" That caused the black one to stare at her unimpressed. "It's just, you're so big and-"

"That doesn't mean I'm old." Atlas grumbled. "Besides, how would you know? You never seen a dragon before."

"I mean... You're wise and..." He slightly curled his neck, now realizing that she meant Old in a good way.

The dragon exhaled through his nostrils. "...Usually when you call someone Old, it means that they're getting frail." She looked at him with her head a little low. "As in, they're growing weak."

"Oh... I'm sorr-"

"You need to stop that." He said, taking a few laps. "There's no need to apologize for every little

mistake." A few more laps of his soup. "You'll end up wearing out the meaning of the word. Eventually you won't have anything to say when you are truly sorry. It's how dragons do it."

"You... Want me to be like...?"

"Shouldn't everyone?" He curled his neck a little at her. She didn't know why, but it made her giggle a little. It's something that's always irked him a little; how every species tends to make the same mistakes. (For considering themselves to be 'intellegent', they all rather narrow minded.) Atlas thought to himself.

"How do you then?"

"Hmm?" He double taked at her, breaking himself out of thought.

"Act like a... Dragon."

"...Well..." The beast started to rub the back of his neck. "First: you should always consider yourself to be the most important thing in existance. Because, as a dragon, you are." It made her laugh. "The only one that might possibly be above that is your mate, but odds are they will think the exact same thing. Second: Never attempt to show weakness or embarrassment to others. They should know you for being symbolic of Strength. And never admit that you are wrong, because as a dragon: You're not." He smirked at her laughing again. "And last: Accept that everyone and everything is different. They have their own ways of doing such things, even if they are worse than yours. But feel free to suggest overbearing criticism, especially if they are of a lesser species, or younger than you. For they just do not know better." Another series of giggles even got him to chuckle a litte bit himself. "Hypocritical, yes?"

"I'm not sure what that means, but." She couldn't help herself.

"An old friend of mine wrote that to torment and amuse others, as well as myself. I thought he did a good job on it."

"Old friend?"

"Yes, a very long time ago." He said a bit quietly, as his smile saddened. "I best be starting the night fire and make the beds. It will be dark out soon. Finish your meal for now." Elexus nodded at him and did what she was told. As the dragon made two beds out of leaves and hay, and a large fire within the metal drum. She couldn't help but reflect on the pain she had seen in his eyes. But she was unable to really understand where it came from.

After she finished her meal, the woman began to look up at the stars, just starting to appear across the night sky. Trying to picture them being used as a map of some sort, and how would it possibly work. Elexus never understood exactly what they were, but she always felt some strange comfort looking at them. Many people here often thought of them as deities or gods of guidance. Showing them a way home, or to someone that could even make their life better. Much like-

"There, all made." Atlas interrupted her thoughts. "It should be more comfortable than sleeping

on me." He halfy grumbled, getting a faint smile from her. As well as something else within that look. It caused him to curl his neck, as she just smiled a little brighter.

Getting up, she walked towards him, and did her best to hug the large beast's chest. But being nearly eighteen feet tall, she could only really hold his forearm. "Thank you, Atlas." She said.

"Another word you tend to overuse." He exhaled, but with a faint smile on his face that he wished he could hide. "Go on, get some more rest. We should be able to find a village tomorrow." She nodded at him, making her way to her oddly comfortable bed of leaves and straw hay.

"Good night." She said, getting a nod from him as the dragon began to study the sky. She stared at him for a few moments, really wishing that she could do something special for the beast, for all he had done for her. For now, she just wanted to sleep. Feeling exhausted from the long stretch of hardships in her life, this one day was the best day she's ever had. And hopefully, she could find something for him tomorrow.

As Atlas looked up to the sky, connecting a few of the stars and their positions. Seeing a few similarities within them, it began to race his heart a bit. Making sure his eyes were not playing tricks on him, he went over them again, and then a third time. Exhaling in disbelief, he grew a faint smile over his muzzle. "I'm... Here... He kept his promise..." A small tear of happiness came out from his eye, as he shook his head. Now all that was left was to find her. Somewhere in this world was the one he was searching for.

He knew that smell. That strange mixture of herbs and some kind of paste. It honestly made him a bit weary, it was so strong. Slowly opening his purple eyes, the room was indeed dark. But a faint few things he could recognize. "You're up, are you?" The female voice said, lightly giggling at him. The dragon knew that laugh, as he turned around and seen the blonde haired woman in the white dress. Sitting at a table, reading a small book that she tended to go through whenever he was sleeping.

The beast held his breath for a moment. "Tia...?" She smiled at him. "Please don't tell me I'm dreaming."

"You're dreaming." She teased him, getting the black one to toss his head.

"What did I just say?" He muttered. "And how do you know?"

"Well, you don't live in this barn anymore."

"I never lived in the barn." He snorted. "Your people captured me and imprisoned me here." He tried to look offended, but it just made her laugh. "But you are here, aren't you?"

"What do you mean?"

"On this planet. I'm on the right one."

"Yes, for the most part. We are on the same planet. We're just not..."

"Together." She nodded sadly at him. "But I'm going to change that. I did what Bartan asked me to, and now all I need to do is find you."

"Well, yes. But there's no rush." The statement made him curl his neck. "There's no reason you can't help other people in the process-"

"And keep you waiting? You're suppose to help me end my life, remember?" She looked sad when he said that. Causing him to sigh. "...Sorry, but you need to realize..."

"I... Do, Atlas, I do." She got up, and leaned into his arms. "But it wouldn't hurt to help those in need when you pass them by."

"Easy for you to say. This last one won't stop pestering me." She giggled at him. "Say what you will, but being a pest is being a pain to others." He snorted.

"...Tell me about her." It got the dragon to tilt his head. "Come on. Talk."

"...She's a pest. An absolute ignorance. Possibly the worst one that I've ever come across. She has no opinions for herself, no life experience-"

"How do you know that though?" Another tilted look, but with some grumbling. "You never really listened to her story, have you?"

"That's because it's boring to listen to her-"

"Yet she is willing to listen to every word you say. And I listened to you when you felt like you needed to talk."

"I never felt like I needed to talk." He snorted again, looking offended. "You just pried like a gossip." She couldn't help but laugh at him. Giving a few taps on the black broad neck.

"Still, you felt better doing it, correct?"

"Perhaps with someone who understood me. But not if they are not going to understand, or if I have to stop at every other word to explain in detail what it means." Another giggle. "Hush you. I used to think you were bad, but this one's a whole new level of awful."

"You're terrible." Tia tried to push him. "But when she does somewhat understand, you like that feeling, don't you?" He sighed. "It reminds you of your son, and how you used to teach him."

"He was a horrible wyrmling." The dragon grumbled. "But what do you want me to do with her?"

"What she wants to do."

"What she wants to do?" He curled his neck while he thought about it. Then it clicked in. "No! No-no-no-no-no!" He covered his face with his paw.

"Why not?"

"Apparently my dreams are more perverted than I thought."

"Stop avoiding the question."

"Because-" Grunting, while his ears were turning purple.

"I never noticed you did this. I guess I never looked too closely at your ears." Tia lightly brushed one of them.

"She's illiterate. She doesn't understand the consequences of actions, and she's too young to make those decisions."

"She's only illiterate because she was never taught. And if you teach her how to make you happy-"

"It's not making me happy, it's turning me purple." She laughed at him. "And she doesn't understand the morality of such things!"

"But didn't you already tell her that she shouldn't care what other people think of her? She's already a slave in their eyes-"

"And if I teach her to do this-"

"She will know how to please a mate when she finds one."

The dragon sighed heavily. "I feel like I'm arguing with myself."

"Simply put; you are." She teased him. "But only because one reason."

"And that would be?" His purple eyes locked onto her blue ones.

"That you want this."

The dragon grunted awake, being able to hear a voice calling to him. "Atlas?" The voice was coming from behind him, around where the warmth was. He muttered something towards it, but it wasn't anything logical. "Are you okay?"

"M'yes." He yawned, showing his fangs and snapping his jaws a few times. "What's wrong?"

"It's just... You were making noises." He stretched a bit, being able to see the sun starting to

somewhat rise in the far distance. "It almost sounded like you were in pain."

He studied his body for a moment. "I feel fine. Go back to sleep for a bit longer."

"Okay..." Elexus was quiet for a bit. "Atlas?"

"Mmm?"

"...It's a bit cold on my side."

"M'can grow the fire a bit more if you want."

"A-actually..." She stammered. "Could I just sleep with you?"

"M'sure..." He answered not really thinking it over until she was halfway to him. And now just connecting what noises he was probably making in his sleep: Whimpers. Possibly ones of pleasure, whereas he was erect during the night. "...You might want to stay around my chest for a bit." He said, trying not to sound embarrassed.

"Okay." And the woman snuggled in. Not thinking of looking under the wing that covered his red weapon. "Thank you." She smiled at him, getting a mutter of something in return.

But the longer he was up, the more awake he became. His mind going through many of the details in his dream, and wondering himself if he really wanted this. That if she wanted to do this, would he let her? It wouldn't be the first time another species stroked him off. Let alone a human one. But they all understood what they were doing. Elexus did not. (But at the same time... Isn't it better if I teach her? Before someone attempts to take advantage of her?)

He snorted, a bit louder than he meant to. (Why am I considering this? It's not my problem if something happens to her. She's not my responsibility, nor is she someone I care for... Or is she?) That last question echo'd in his head several times, only to be broken by her stroking his neck a bit. (...Taath. She's growing on me...) As the dragon sighed deeply and slowly laid on his belly instead of his side, the woman looked at him again.

"What's wrong?"

"...I..." He hesitated for a moment. (Come on, just say something. Ask her again if she wants to.)

"Atlas?"

"...Elex..." He started getting uncomfortable as he turned his head away from her. But doing so, she was able to see his ears.

"Are you ill?"

"...No."

"Your ears. They're a different color."

"...Dragons... do that when they're embarrassed." That admission was hard for him to say. "It's the way we... Blush."

"What's wrong? Bad dream?"

"You could argue that." He grumbled. "But no." With one more deep sigh he closed his eyes and said it. "My... Lower horn is showing."

It took a moment for her to remember exactly what that meant. Then she looked at his chest, the direction of the area. "Oh... Do you want my... Consent?" He whimpered at that.

"I... Don't know." The dragon said, not liking this softer side of him being shown. Another sigh. "Elexus, I don't want your consent, but I don't want you to be fooled or misled by someone else trying to take advantage of you either." She didn't say anything to him. Usually meaning that she didn't understand. "I..."

"Atlas..." She got up and walked to where she could see his purple eyes. "You have given me enough. If you wish something of me, I will gladly give it to you."

"It's just..." He didn't try to fight against her, but he didn't want to look at her eyes either. "...To pleasure another species is very often frowned upon in your society. I can't ask you to if you don't understand what you're getting yourself into."

"Oh..." She looked down for a moment. "Then, can you... Teach me?" Another faint whimper from him. "I-I know you've given me so much, b-but I trust you." He was quiet still. "Atlas...?"

"This isn't something I can ask of you." He muttered to himself. Placing a soft hand under his jaw, the woman tried to get him to look at her.

"I can't... Really explain it. But ever since I met you, I've felt... Stronger. With everything you've taught-"

"Taught." The dragon corrected her, still feeling awkward. But it got her to smile, and him a little as well.

"Please? If I can do something for you, will you let me?"

"Elexus..." Though so many collisions were going through his mind, he took a few deep breaths to slow everything down and clear it. Nodding at her. "...Okay. I'll show you if you really are willing to do this."

"I am." She said, getting their eyes to lock together. "Just tell me what to do." Another nod.

"Step back for a moment." And she did, as he took another breath to roll on his back. Though it hurt his wing slightly to do it, after resting in place the pain faded. Doing so showed the large red tool sticking out of his lower belly. "That is a male's lower horn. It has many names, but it's all the same thing." The dragon explained a bit shyly.

She carefully stepped on his wings to get a closer look at it. The crimson color of it seemed to reveal a more fleshy skin rather than scales. It was a thick shaft, from the base to the tip that held a head. Several soft spines seemed to grow out from the bottom in a straight line and point down towards the sheath. While the spines on the other side seemed to turn slightly, flowing with the curve of the opening flare.

Towards the base of the shaft held small grooves on the sides. Marked as if they were slightly stripped with an extra layer of flesh. Not far from the pouch she had seen earlier, which appeared to be slightly bigger, possibly due to the warmth or excitement. Looking over them, she couldn't help but stare at it, wondering what it was all for. "What do you do with this?"

"Usually, in order to Mate or have Sex, the male would stick this in the small tunnel between your legs." She looked at it again, while trying to feel for her area that he was talking about. "Of course a human's Horn is going to be much smaller and able to fit inside you. But for now, I want to explain how this works. The male side at least."

"O-okay." She looked at it again from different angles, almost memorized by it's shape.

"The contents of that pouch is what holds the seeds that make children. It's a bit of a sensitive area for males, so don't hit it unless you are in trouble with one. It would be inbetween a human's legs, just as yours is."

"Seeds?"

He nodded, still feeling a bit uncomfortable. "Yes. Have you ever attempted to plant a few seeds from an apple before?"

"Not myself, but I have seen someone do it."

"In essence: the apple seeds are in that pouch, and well... your lower body would be that ground where it grows."

"Oh..." She couldn't help but look at her belly. "How does it get in there then?"

"Go to the horn. At the very tip of it, you'll notice a small hole." She nodded at him when she seen it. "The seeds mix in with a slippery substance, and then are shot out of that hole. In a way, I suppose you could say it's the way the dirt is... dug to plant the seeds." The metaphor was keeping him purple, but she seemed to be understanding. "But it's the process of doing it that makes the seed... Ready."

"How do we do that? With the horn?" The dragon nodded.

"The design sends pleasure throughout the body to make it more enjoyable. After so much of it, the seed will be released as a white liquid."

"But you need a... Female to release it?"

"Actually... You don't need anyone else to release it." She looked at him puzzled. "You can release the seed without needing to mate with another. Which is what..."

"You want me to help you with this, so you can receive... Pleasure?" He sighed heavily at that.

"Elexus... I don't want you to do this if you have any doubt." She looked at him about the word. "Doubt meaning... Regrets. As in, thinking back and not wanting to do this. I..."

She just approached the red shaft. "What do you want me to do?" The dragon looked at her a bit sadly. "I will pleasure you, Atlas. Please let me do something for you." A loud exhale from him, and he nodded. Laying his head back down.

"...I want you to softly place both hands around it, and gently rub it up and down. Just the upper half for now." And she softly did. The touch of her warm hands got him to exhale again and breathe deeply. Stroking it very slowly, and exploring the shape of it herself. She was concerned about the pointy spines at first, but after gently feeling them, she could tell that they were not nearly as threatening as they seemed. But instead soft.

Another loud breath from him as she gently touched the top of it. "Are you... Hurting?"

"No... It's just... Sensitive." He said trying to control himself. "Elexus..." She stopped for a moment. "I'm... Doing this is going to cause me to make a lot of sounds and noises. I won't be able to control myself much." He said, swallowing. "Don't be alarmed by them, it's only natural for dragons to do this."

"Okay." She said, resuming.

"In the case of even that something does hurt, I'll use the word Stars somehow. Understood?" She nodded at him, slowly going over the upper shaft. After several minutes, she began to enjoy it actually, getting the different reactions from the dragon's breaths and noises. Which went from breaths, to a constant growl in his throat. The woman's actions seemed to just hypnotize him, making him completely submersive. To the point where she tried to go a bit lower.

The first touch of the ridge sent a loud moan from him, and a foggy liquid leak out from the tip of the horn. She was concerned for a moment to the point where she stopped, allowing him to explain. "That's a very sensitive area... You never want to grip those ridges too hard, because they really make us fire faster."

"Fire?" She asked, a bit worried.

"The seed. Not like the fire in the drum."

"You mean... This stuff?" The woman asked, looking at the small dribble leaking out of the red shaft.

"Yes... That's normal. It just makes it easier to mate by... greasing up the horn."

"Greasing?"

"Making it more slippery."

"Oh... So it's safe to touch then?"

"Or ingest, yes." Without looking, he could feel that puzzled gaze. "To eat."

"Eat?" She made a bit of a strange face. "You can eat this stuff?"

"It's not harmful to. But you don't have to. I wouldn't suggest it right now anyway." She resumed working the upper shaft a bit. "But be warned..." Atlas said, between breaths and moans. "When... I do fully release... There will be a lot of it."

"So what do you want me to do?"

"Keep going for now. Feel free to tease the ridges once in a while until I say I'm ready. Then just focus on them. And don't stop until I have." She did so, completely submersing the black dragon in pleasure for several long minutes. After a bit, she found that it was starting to get slightly dry, and attempted to try some of the pre he was talking about. Gathering a bit of it on her hands and covering the crimson horn with it. And the dragon was correct; it did make it much more slippery and easier to rub.

As his breaths began to get much heavier and louder, almost more primal, that pre kept constantly jolting out of the tip. Accumulating in a rather large puddle on his belly. Placing one hand across the line of spines, while the other began teasing the ridges, she felt the tool pulse out the foggy liquid. As well as getting the dragon to squirm his lower area a bit. Even thrusting to her movement. A bit of contained roars got her to slow down a bit, but she kept in mind to what Atlas said about him not being able to hold back. She resumed for a bit, until she thought he was trying to speak to her. "R... Rea... Ready..." He managed to get out.

A faint smile and she followed his earlier instructions. Stroking the ridges on both sides really got him to start moving more and more, including his tail thrashing between her legs. The sheer force of the dragon's body, unable to hold back, was remarkable. Louder and louder his roars in his muzzle got, until he couldn't contain them. Alternating between two hisses and a loud roar.

Through the constant movement of his lower half, Elexus could see the dragon's pouch beginning to deflate slightly, and soon the horn began to thicken. A series of rapid breaths came from Atlas as he began to brace back. It startled her, releasing a loud roar as the first white torrent launched from the red tower and soared through the air past his head. Then a second one barely landing on his chin. The horn gave out a forceful pulse while every stream shot through it. She kept working on him until the streams of white stopped coming out, hearing that loud, constant growl from the black one's throat. His muzzle, though painted with several streaks of white, had a bright and satisfied smile over it. Bigger than she's ever seen on him.

"Are you okay?" She asked, unable to help herself from smiling as well. But she got no response from him other than the constant breathing, which was slowing down. Soon to a speed as if he were in a deep sleep. Again, she couldn't help but smile, and feel... Accomplished. Knowing that she actually made him happy. She found out how to make him happy, and it was well worth it in her eyes.

Carefully going across his right wing, she whiped some of the white 'seed' off his neck. His voice echoing in her head ("Or ingest, yes.") Talking about eating it made her want to smell it first. And it gave off a strong scent. So she took his suggestion to pass on trying it for now. One adventure was enough. For now, she would just sleep beside him, until the dragon woke from his slumber.

Chapter 6

"I don't quite get it." The dark purple dragon admitted. Getting the black one to chuckle at her and making her ears go back. "You want me to make a doughnut in the air?"

"Using the force of the wind, yes. If you can do that, and make the entire thing roate in one direction, things that go through it can accelerate."

"But what's the use in that?" She curled her neck.

"Well..." He shrugged his wings while turning his scales purple. Then made a small pocket of air nearby him and shaping it as a doughnut. Picking up a nearby rock in the green meadow they were in, he tossed it in. Going through it, the rock was flung much faster. Hitting something in the woods hundreds of yards away. "I know we don't normally use weapons besides our Atonements and claws. But it doesn't hurt to think of ways to use improvised objects as weapons."

"So you want me to throw rocks at enemies?" She teased him, but getting a closer look at the clear object he made. Poking it with a paw seemed to almost try to suck in her arm.

"You, of course, can even throw yourself in it." The female tilted her head, and he tossed his. "Not as a weapon, but to get some extra speed while flying or something. I tend to do it once in a while. You can also make it in the opposite direction if you really need to slow down."

"I guess that could be useful. Perhaps give you a softer landing if things get rough."

"Like landing on an air pillow." He teased, but his ear flickered to something in the distance. Causing his scales to turn black again. It got her attention too, and they soon seen another dragon come

around. Much smaller and younger than the two.

"I found you two." Shroud snorted at the blue one. "Aull'oon said you'd probably be out here with the stray."

"Is that what they're calling me nowadays?" The black one snorted and looked away.

"What is it, Mondiu?" The purple one grumbled.

"The instructors want everyone back to the nest. Something about an important announcement at dusk." The blue female looked a little worried. "There's been humans in there. A lot of them lately. Looks like a ring of leaders of some sort."

"And what would they want?"

"Probably some new building or wall they're too lazy to build themselves." Shroud grumbled.

"Odds are it's more important than that if they're calling a meeting, Stray." The black one hissed at her loudly, getting the younger one to step back.

"I'd watch what you say, wyrmling. You haven't dealt with humans as I have."

"Shroud." Nitaka got between the two. "But he's right. Watch what you say Mondiu. Just because he doesn't have an Atonement doesn't mean that he's harmless."

"Whatever. Just make it back for the meeting. Or skip out on it to spend yet another night away from your family." The blue one snorted while taking off.

"Damn things." The male muttered.

"Wyrmlings at their best." She teased him, at least getting a bit of a smirk out of his muzzle.

"...Have they been...?"

She sighed a bit quietly, laying down. "A little. They think I'm following your pawsteps of leaving the nest. And therefore think that I'm no longer trying to be a part of it."

"Are you?" He laid with her, wrapping her with a wing.

"...I don't know. I'm thankful for what they gave and how they raised me. But whenever I'm there, all I can think about is you." She looked into his purple eyes, and the two locked lips for a while. "Shroud?"

"Hmm?"

"What do you think about children?" He grunted loudly, tossing his head to the point where it fell to the grass. Getting the purple one to laugh loudly.

"You want the honest truth?" She leaned into him, nodding. "I detest them. Never want a set of my own really."

"Not even just one?"

"Not at all." He muttered, a bit sadly. "Meaning, no rolling around in my cave when you're in heat. Or I'll have to come to that nest and mount you where you stand."

"You and every other male." She laughed. "We tend to go elsewhere when that season starts."

"Meaning I'll have to find a replacement. Perhaps I'll build a dragon out of wood or smooth rock to mount while you're gone."

"Not ice?" The sharp, shocked, and almost painful look on his face was too much for her. She couldn't stop laughing for several minutes.

"ICE!?" He repeated, just as she was getting control and lose it again. "Are you mad!? Do you know how cold that would get?!"

"You... Could... Manag..." She started to cry laughing.

"Just because it feels good with you doesn't mean it'll work well on males. Using ice of all things, jeez..." But he couldn't help smiling at her. "And now you got me thinking about it."

"Thinking about what?" And he softly bit the back of her neck, getting her to moan loudly and lift up her tail.

It was the first time in a very long time he woke up purring. The shelter protected his eyes from the bright sunlight, and inbetween the shade as well as the small fire still going; he was the perfect temperature. With a few grunts, the black one began to stretch his limbs and start to get awake. Feeling someone lean on the side of his neck, he licked his muzzle a bit then attempted to cuddle with the woman out of instinct. The vibrations of his purr started to tickle her and get her more awake than he was. "G'morning, my Elexus..." The dragon said between his purrs. Only to get her to giggle, and break him out of his instinct and his purrs with a small, surprised whimper.

"I never knew dragons could be so... Um..."

"Affectionate?" He said awkwardly. His ears starting to turn a little purple.

"I think so."

"Means Fondness. Tenderness. Kind. After that performance of yours last night, any dragon

would be submissive." She giggled at him again, still not understanding what the last word meant, but she had a clue what it was about.

"So, I did well then?"

"Very well." Atlas couldn't help but purr a bit more. "That's the best I've had for a long time."

"How long exactly?" She stroked his neck.

"Many a twenty." The black one teased. His purrs getting louder.

"What is that noise? You don't seem angry..."

"It's..." He stopped it for a moment. Sighing. "It's a purr."

"Like a cat's purr?"

"Yes." He cleared his throat awkwardly, getting her to giggle at him.

"You don't like it?"

"It's not exactly that... It's just something we can't control. But others can, if they know where to rub."

"Well, I found out one area last night." She teased, looking down towards his messy belly. "Are there others?"

"I'm not telling." She laughed at how serious he sounded. "You would not believe how many people try to control us once they find those special areas."

"Are you afraid of that? Being... What was the word you used? Menap...?"

"Manipulated?"

"I think."

"Means to take control. So it fits." He couldn't help but smile at that. (She really is learning from me... She really does listen.) She giggled at him again, causing him to attempt to look in her direction and almost trap her between his jaw and neck.

"You're just... Messy" She said. "Looks like someone needs a bath." He snorted, doing the best to toss his head while laying down.

"And you're forgetting who you're talking to." His scales shimmered to that aqua blue as the dragon's body turned into a white mist. Causing the dried release to fall to his flattened bed. When he reformed, he was standing on all fours getting the kinks out of his body. He turned around to look at her, only to look at the mess and shake his head. "You weren't kidding."

"Yes, there was quite a bit of it." She said, getting up herself to look at it.

"Did you end up tasting it?"

"N-no... I thought I shouldn't just yet." He nodded faintly. "Even though you said it wasn't... Ham?"

"Harmful. Correct." He emptied the bowls they used for soup and filled them up with water from the air.

"What does it taste like?" He chuckled at her curiosity.

"At first it tasted rather bitter and salty." She gave him a strange look. "I was force fed it once. Long story. But after meeting with someone, he wanted to make it more enjoyable. Have you ever had Black Liquorice?"

"Liqu...orice?" She gave him a puzzled look while accepting the bowl. Then looked at the white stains. "I don't think I've ever heard of it."

"It's a form of candy on some planets." After a few laps, he pondered. "I might be able to make some from scratch actually. Hardly something for breakfast, but." He began working. Growing some plants, starting the fire once again, and making a table to work on.

"Y-you don't..." He didn't listen to her, and she gave up trying to convince him out of it smiling. "What is... Candy?"

"It's a form of dessert." Completely focused on his culinary arts, he didn't bother looking at her to start explaining in depth. "Like a small meal to finish off a complete meal. They're often sweet, but fattening. You ever notice how upper class people tend to be... Well, Bigger?"

"I haven't seen too many, but yes. They do seem to be taller."

"I meant as in wider. Bigger bellies and the such."

"Like you?" That time Elexus got his attention, completely shooting his head up then spinning his neck around to face her. Ears completely back and spines raised, she couldn't help but laugh out loud at him.

"Not like me!" Atlas hissed. "I'm perfectly heathly for my size!" He snorted loudly, returning to work. "But those people tend to have alot of it."

"Candy?" He nodded. "Or just food in general?"

"Both really."

"Like you?" He growled at the woman, not looking. "I seen how much of that soup you ate."

"Which is appropriate for a dragon of my physique!" He snorted. "Besides, it beats being scrawny

like you are." The red tail thumped on the ground beside her, slightly startling the woman. But it got her to really look at it a bit more. Even touch it a bit. "What are you getting into?" He muttered, being able to feel the slight strokes of her hand.

"You got me wondering..." She said, slowly climbing up his body with her arms, exploring. "About those areas you mentioned."

"And you think I'll just let you discover them?" His neck curled. But her hands didn't slow down until they got to his haunches. Feeling the hamstrings a bit, he grumbled uncomfortably, getting her to laugh.

"This is making you embarrassed?"

"It just... Tickles." He said, resuming. Soon she went around his large thigh, and looking closely at his pelvis. "Do you mind?"

"How do you get your horn come out?"

His reply for a few moments were a series of awkward grunts. "I'm not telling you! Now get out of there and sit patiently until this is ready."

"It comes from this hole, right?" She asked, feeling around his sheath. With a yelp he stepped back.

"Elexus..." He grunted. "I know you're getting more... Curious about this, but try not to press on it."

"So just touch softly? Like those... Ridges?" A bit of a whimper that time.

"Not what I meant. I mean, don't... Try for it right now."

"Oh... I just wanted to..."

"There's just a time for such things. And if you force it... It's not as enjoyable." Atlas' face was turning purple. "It's better if it comes naturally."

"But what causes it-?" She stopped at the end of her sentence, just now seeing a little red tip coming out of the hole. "Is that...?"

"Hmm?" He asked, before he looked down and tossed his head. "Now look at what you've done." He snorted, just resuming his work.

"That's your horn? Why is it so small now?" She asked, looking closely at it, lightly giggling at his embarrassed grunts.

"It... When it's not in use, it stays smaller inside the body. But certain things will cause it to... Grow and make it's way out." He sighed. "It's called Arousal."

"Arousal?"

"Meaning, being prepared to mate."

"Or get pleasure?"

"Well, the pleasure is in the mating." He grumbled. "Why are you so interested in this?"

"...It's just... It makes you happy." That one made him stop and sigh. "And I just thought..."

"If you knew more about it..." He didn't finish. "You're not stroking me off another time this morning." The dragon resumed what he was doing as she gave a faint nod. "...The scales around the small opening is what's called a sheath." She looked at his head, ears still purple as he continued. "It's a very sensitive area, so if you lightly tickle it, it will cause the Horn to grow."

She looked at it again. "Can I...?"

He sighed, a bit irked. "You may. But just don't try to release me right now. Or else I'll spend half the day sleeping." It brought the woman's smile back. He panted a bit heavily when she first touched it, seeing the red weapon slowly stretch the sheath out.

"How does it do that? It felt kind of hard earlier. Is it a bone?"

"Actually, it's just blood that makes it dense." A moment of silence. "Hard."

"Oh." A few traces around the outside of the red tip got him to breathe a bit heavier, and the horn begin to slip out a bit more. "It's just so..."

"Big? Red?" She lightly chuckled. "If you call it small, I'm going to bite you." Elexus laughed at him.

"I was going to say... It looks..."

"Unique? Dangerous?"

"Beou...?"

"...Beautiful?" He asked, a little surprised at her.

"Yes, that's the word." She tickled the sheath again, but didn't get a big reaction out of him. "Is something wrong?"

He cleared his throat awkwardly. "Nothing." It caused her to smile again. "One might say that dragons themselves are beautiful." He snorted, as if the statement was obvious.

"I always liked that word, but I..."

"Couldn't remember it?" He looked down at her to see her faintly nod. For a few moments, he

resumed working. "...Do you know what it means?"

"It means... Pretty? Doesn't it?"

"Along the lines of it, yes." He exhaled. "An old painter I once knew... He defined Beautiful as everything working together in such a way that nothing needed to be added, taken, nor rearranged in any way, shape or form."

Again, she just smiled. Softly touching the horn, now almost at it's full size. "Beautiful fits." Though the touch got him to shutter, his currently red scales clicking, he couldn't help but smile at those words.

"...Thank you." He said, getting a bit of a surprise out of the woman. "But don't go any further with it." He grunted. "I want to get some traveling done while it's still daylight out."

"Okay." She just looked at it, studying everything he taught her about all this. But a few questions came to mind. "Um, Atlas?"

"Hmm?"

"After you... Released?" He gave her a nod in conformation. "You didn't respond too well when I asked if you were okay."

"That's because it really makes males tired to do that."

"Tired?"

"Yes. Our brains release a drug that helps the body relax. That usually leads to a comforted sleep that can last hours."

"So, you get... More pleasure after it?"

"To a degree, yes."

"Which is why you were... Purring?" The dragon grunted at the word, but he nodded. "It sounds really loud."

"It probably does. But it's usually out of our control."

"I like it." She said, now passing the red horn area and tickling his belly a bit. "It makes me happy when you make that noise." That ached his heart.

"You would like it." He tried to make it sound like a joke, but it didn't come out too well. The woman sensed there was something wrong, but knew she couldn't pry it out of him. Instead, she just continued under his arm and chest, then to his forearm. Looking at what the dragon has been working on this entire time. His purple eyes trailed down into her blue ones, and she met them with a smile. He tried his best to hide it, using a sadder smile. "It's not hard right now, but taste some of it." He handed

her an iron spoon with this black liquid on it. It looked rather oozy to her and she almost questioned it without saying a word. Only to have him tossed his head. "It doesn't taste bad! Try it."

And she did, getting a nice strong sugary taste, as well as something tangy like molasses. "Mmm..." She moaned at it. Still getting used to the strength of it. "That is..."

"Perhaps still too dull in flavor, but you can get an idea of what liquorice tastes like."

"And your... Release has this flavor?" He nodded. "Because of a friend?"

The red one tossed his head. "I would hardly describe him as a friend." The woman laughed at him.

"Is it the same person who taught you how to... The stars."

"To read them, yes. He was... Strange, to say the least. Rather pervertive." She tried to mimic his head tilting at the word. "Meaning, he was obsessed with sexual acts and pleasure. Much like you're getting to be." Another laugh, but he couldn't help but smile as well.

"Why don't you call him a friend?"

He sighed. "It's... A long story. One that is just not interesting to listen to." With a smile on her face, Elexus just shook her head. "Come on the other side, help me roll these things for now and we'll have them on the road. I can harden them quickly after we get them into rolls."

"Okay." And she did her best to assist him. "Atlas..." His ears perked, but he continued. "You can... Share with me, if you like. I'll gladly listen-"

"But you won't understand." He muttered, trying not to be harsh. "Elexus... The less you know about the things I've went through, the better. There's no reason why you need to carry my pain." He closed his eyes for a few moments. "I know you mean well. Several others did too, but... You don't need anymore pain than what you have." She nodded at him a bit sadly, but she understood.

"Alright." After getting the treat rolled up. Her eyes caught on his lower horn, and she giggled how it was still erect. The dragon looked at her, and followed her eyes to it, then tossing his head. "How do you... Put it back?"

"It will go back on it's own. It's just stubborn and wants your attention." He snorted, getting her to laugh again. Putting out the fire, the dragon laid down beside her again. Getting the woman to question him silently. "You'll just be staring at it the entire trip. This way you can't walk between my legs and try stroking me to unconsciousness." Laughing at the big word, she walked up to him and tapped him on the shoulder. A bronze shift, and the ground lifted up to his back.

"How's the wing?"

"It'll be fine in a day or two."

"I'll be careful." She said, studying his spineful mane as he changed back to his natural obsidian.

"Try not to pull on them. They're tough, but it's like pulling your hair." Atlas snorted.

"Okay." As curious as the woman was about it, she didn't pry. The two set off to the distance once more.

Chapter 7

The sun was pestering him. Longing for his attention or just toying with him, along with the clouds constantly shifting the light to shine in his eyes. Seeing that mix of black and dark red on his eyelids while he was trying to sleep. An hour ago, the shade given by the trees aided him against the harassment. But as the day went on, the sun liked to move. Irking the lazy dragon who felt like he just got comfortable.

His black ears began to pick up some footsteps in the distance. They were small, bipedal, and casually walking. He expected what it was, and considering it wasn't running, it was nothing to be alarmed about. Therefore: it could wait for another time. "I'm sleeping." The black one half hissed while it got closer to him.

"It doesn't sound like you are."

"Well, I am. So whatever you want, I have no interest in, and you should just go back to where ever you came from." He snorted, doing his best to look away from the annoyance of the sun.

"I came from the nest to the west of here."

"The only nest in these parts, you mean." The dragon corrected the male voice.

"And one of them said you might be out here sleeping. Or... Tending to yourself. The beast grumbled at him. "Which I'm... Assuming, and hoping, she meant bathing."

"Assumptions make an ass of you. Regardless, she's half right. And I'll bite her neck for sending yet another pest to me later. But you came out here for nothing. Now go away."

"But you-"

"Go. Away." He growled loudly.

"...You've heard of the Mountain Giants to the north-"

"They're not a threat to us."

"They've already taken out a few villages and towns near the mountains. And we've spotted them looking at our city-"

"Maybe I didn't make myself clear about the Us part: I meant to say, they're not a threat to dragons. If you guys are unable to defend yourselves from such things, that is *your* fault."

"...We've convinced the nest to aid us." Another growl from the dragon got him to open his sleepy purple eyes and stare at the black haired human. "They see it as a threat as well. And are willing to work with us to eliminate it."

"And who says I'm a part of that nest?"

"The purple one thought you might ask that. She's willing to fight as well." The man thought it would give the black dragon a bigger reaction, but his wings just shrugged and his head rested once again in the grass. "Really? Nothing?"

"If she wants to, then let her." The beast was very convincing for how concerned he actually was.

"Anyway, a dozen of them offered to be used as mounts for aerial tactics. She suggested that I come for you-"

"You. Want to ride me. In a battle against Giants?" The black one has never felt so insulted. He got up, towering over the human. "Exactly what were you thinking when you came out here?" He hissed at him.

To his surprise, the human stayed composed. "I was thinking to ask what was told to be the strongest dragon in these lands to help us against this threat."

"By making me look like an animal."

"Not like an animal. Granted, your wings would be convenient in battle, but we need something large and smart if we're going to win against them. We need something that won't be scared. Fearless, one might say. Brave, and fierce. Not to mention fast." It was a little flattering, to be honest. And it did calm the dragon down a bit. "Many of the faster dragons have already sought human partners. But that purple female, in secrecy, told me you are actually faster than all of them."

"And if I'm not?"

"Then I seek the dragon that even other dragons fear." The dragon looked away, a bit proud but trying to hide his smirk. "Will you have me as a partner then, Shroud?" His ears went back, knowing he probably got the name from Nitaka.

The black one said nothing while returning to his shady area. Laying down and facing away from him, attempting to resume his sleep. "You know, other people will hear of you soon enough." The man continued.

"And you don't know how hungry I get when I'm tried. Leave or be eaten before you can fight in this war."

"Alright then. How about a challenge?" It got the dragon's ears to perk up. "You take me for a test flight. As long as I can hold onto you, I win; and you will help us win this war. If you win, I'll tell no other human to pester you. And if they do, you will eat them."

"That is if you do not become a stain." The beast muttered.

"Is that an acception?" The human male smiled.

Shroud got up to look at him once again. To actually look at his equipment; nothing more than a small bag for a lunch, and a walking stick on him. "You challenge me with no safety equipment, and no tricks?" The human gave a solid nod, no fear was shown in his eyes. The black one actually liked that about him. "You don't know what you've gotten yourself into." The beast smirked.

"So, that's a yes?"

"I accept then, human. As long as you can hold onto me, then you shall have the Black Death's aid for your city."

"...So you are..." There was a bit of surprise, but no fear as the man approached him, dropping his gears on the ground to show he had nothing else on him. As the dragon laid down, the human climbed up easily on the black shoulders. Getting a firm grip on his long spines. "My name's Vanitos-"

"Don't bother. After this, I'll never see you again." The dragon got up recklessly, and took off to the skies. The sheer power of his wings was enough to bend the trees from several feet away. Climbing into the warm air was a bit refreshing for Shroud, but this wasn't a leisure flight. It was one to end all annoyances from that city.

He could still feel the tight pull on his spines, meaning the human held onto him during the takeoff. It honestly irked him a bit, but if he fell off there it would've half ruined the fun the dragon was about to have with him. Starting off with some climbing, the black one looped to a Half Cuban 8, getting him to almost dive into the grassy lands where he was sleeping in. Banking hard to the right (North), he did an Aileron Roll in hopes to fling off the man. But the grip didn't loosen, only tighten a bit as Vanitos held himself pretty close to the dragon's neck.

Growling, Shroud went faster. Manipulating the air and winds to create pulses that would only push him forward. Almost flinging himself like an arrow. Although the motions of him doing this would cause him to slow down and speed up drastically, it just pulled on his mane a little more with every pulse.

Coming up to a tall rock wall at the coastline, the dragon did a Barrel Roll to slow down. Folding his wings in, just barely missing the top of the rocky plateau. Spreading them out once the water was below him, and diving towards it. Pulling level to it, and feeling the water splash under his black belly.

The amount of speed that it gave him started parting the water at it's surface. But still, he could feel the human on him.

He snorted loudly, creating pulses above the water once again. Making another one before he started to slow down. After five or six, he couldn't get much faster without Atoning. As much as the dragon didn't want it to come to that, he didn't want to lose either. Flashing his scales to a light purple, he forced himself higher into the air a ways. Half gathering the energies from the air and heat to create sparks of lightning around him, Shroud became one with it. Riding the stream of bolts straight north in incredible speed for several minutes.

It looked like a bright ball of lightning spitting the sky in two from a distance, and it was soon out of sight to anyone who was still on the land. With such little preparation, the dragon couldn't keep it up for long. Releasing the electronic state, the two dropped down into a snowstorm. Making it very hard to see through. Diving a bit to prepare an Immelmann Turn, Shroud didn't see the snowy land until it was too late.

Although he did try to climb up before he hit it, the dragon still ran into the icy grounds chest first. Sending him tumbling across the white fields, and the human flying off him. Although the landing hurt, Shroud just shrugged it off for now. Just noticing the lack of weight against his spines. "Hah! Looks like I win!" He shouted proudly in a random direction. Half looking to where the human landed. Eventually seeing Vanitos climb out of the snow.

"Are you okay?" The human asked. Getting the dragon to snort at him.

"I'm fine. You on the other hand will need to find another mount. Though I will admit, I didn't expect you to make it this far." He trotted toward him, only to see the human still holding on to something long and black.

His spine.

Shroud didn't notice it until his purple eyes caught it, but there was a bit of a sharp pain on the back of his neck. "That..." The human looked at him, and then at the piece of mane within his hand while the dragon snorted loudly. "That doesn't count!"

"What? It's still part of you! It counts!"

"It does not! Besides, you fell off!"

"I only fell off because you crashed landed!"

"See? You admit it!"

"But I was on you until you landed! So that means I-" The cold winds from the storm stung both of them for a few seconds. "...We should discuss this later. We need to get out of here before we freeze."

"You mean before you freeze." He snorted. Looking around. "I can't tell which way's north."

"Can't you sense that or something?"

"Not with my head ringing."

"Well, we landed over..." The two looked around, not able to tell where the dragon landed before. The snowfall from the storm seemed to be thickening, and probably covered most of it up. "What should we do?"

Shroud's ears went back. "...I have an idea. But you can't tell anyone." Vanitos looked at him with a bit of worry.

"So, after getting a little woozy, we decided to stop and rest for a bit. Only to have my little brother rest on top of me. By the time our parents came home, and noticed the broken barrel, as well as most of the wine all over the floor, I thought our father would've skinned us alive."

"Because the wine was over...?"

"400 years old. That's twenty twentys put together. And it makes the wine, well... Strong. So strong in fact, that my brother couldn't hesitate. Now, he's always had a silver tongue; being able to talk or convince anyone of anything providing he didn't panic. So he explained to our parents that it was the wyrmlings outside earlier that morning."

"The ones that were playing around with the rocks?"

"Yes, and that one of them managed to throw a rock so hard that it went through the wall and broke the barrel." The woman laughed. "And that we attempted to fix the wall, but the wine was so strong, that we couldn't stand up straight after we did."

"And they believed him?"

"For the most part, yes. It even got our father to hiss at theirs. So we got away with drinking some of that wine, but we were just too young for it. I never had such a hangover in my life."

"What's a hangover?" The woman asked.

"It's a headache due to dehydration." A few moments of silence and the dragon lowered his head, exhaling loudly. "Being thirsty. Very thirsty."

"But didn't you just drink?"

"Wine and other alcohol are a liquid, but they don't hydrate you well. It's a common mistake younger people tend to make. Sometimes drinking themselves..." Atlas didn't finish.

"They can... Die from it?"

"...Yes. But it takes alot of it." For a moment the two were quiet, and she noticed his right ear perk up and flicker. "You hear that?"

She stopped and listened to a bit of ringing in the distance. "Are those... Bells?"

After a bit, the ringing stopped, but the dragon got a good idea where they came from. Though it was through a forest, a rather thick one for his size. "You might want to keep yourself close to me. I'll attempt to get most of them, but odds are I'll miss a few branches." He said, turning his scales to green. With a bit of concentration, the trees began to bend away from his path. Though they wouldn't move so much to harm themselves, so the dragon did have to squeeze through them. Grunting and flinching at his hurt wing whenever a branch touched it.

Making his way through the forest came a clearing where a few houses seemed to reside. Further out, they could see a tall tower with a bell inside. "That's probably to a town." Atlas said, not getting a response from the woman. "What is it?" He asked, trying to look back at her.

"N-nothing..." But he could tell what was wrong. (She doesn't want to leave me.)

He exhaled through his nostrils. "...You can start a new life here. One with a purpose." He said, still not getting any response. "You won't find that traveling with me."

"...I know, but..." Elexus stroked his neck. "I'm just going to... Miss you."

"Probably. But I'll be glad to be rid of you." He snorted overdramatically. Getting the woman to smile, but not laugh. "It'll be okay. Who knows, maybe someday I'll come visit you. See how far you've come."

"Because of you." She said sadly. It made the green one sigh a bit. As he got closer to the houses, he laid down. Turning bronze and moving a platform next to him. For a few moments she just stroked him, but eventually climbed off with her clothing.

"I'll shield you while you get dressed. That leafsuit is going out of style." He said, moving around her and covering her with his large right wing.

"Yes, but it lasted. Like you said it would." Taking it off, she realized how dried it got. Starting to change into yellow and brown colors, the leaves still held her shape while she took it off.

"Don't be afraid to rip it. No one's planning to keep it." He grumbled, not hearing the crinkles and tears of it. He just felt another pet on his side, as well as her standing out of it. After she put on her dried rags, she came out to his chest. "I can't say those rags look great on you."

"I know. But..."

"Odds are your new owner will find you something better to wear." It caused her to lower her head. "Hey." He tried lifting her chin up a bit, but his paws were too big. She just ended up holding onto his paw for a moment. "You can make yourself a better life here. You just need to be confident."

"Act like a dragon?" She smiled sadly at him.

"Exactly. Do everything a dragon would do. You've had a very good role model this last day and a half." He held his head high. Feeling her hug his chest the best she could.

"Thank you for everything, Atlas." It ached his heart to say goodbye once again, but he tried not to let it show. "For everything you taught me."

"Yes, yes." He squeezed her a bit between his forearm and chest. "Now keep your spirits up. Okay?"

"Okay." She stroked up his neck and under his jaw. It was all he could do not to purr, as he pried himself away from her hand. "If you ever need anything from me, even if it's to-"

"Shhh." He whispered. "Don't ever mention that to people, okay?" She smiled at him.

"Don't be too... Dragony to come and get me."

"You mean prideful?" She giggled at him that time. "Eventually your vocabulary will increase over time." She nodded at him. "Take care of yourself, Elexus."

"You too." And the dragon got up. Changing his scales to a Gold got her curious.

"People tend to be less afraid of Golden creatures." He muttered, as the two began to walk towards town. He couldn't help but look down at her as she looked at the buildings and many stands that were around, and notice how she was no longer limping from her ankle. (She'll make someone happy. Hopefully they can see her for what she really is.) Though the dragon was getting quite a few stares, the two nodded at each other and went their separate ways.

The dragon was almost forced to go through the larger roads due to his size. Though he was trying not to step on anything important, every once in a while something got under his paws. Be it some old pieces of fruit or vegetables, to the occasional puddle of something he really didn't want to look into. He never liked human cities, always found them too cluttered to do anything. But as a wyrmling, he didn't mind them. Many places to hide and spy on people, as well as a lot of food to steal.

Looking through the stands, there were many things for sale. Usually foods and blankets of all sorts. The occasional jewelry stands caught his eye, but he forced himself away from such shineys. It was a bad road to go down for a dragon, a lesson he learned a long time ago. An addiction really, that he had to wean himself off of.

But Atlas wasn't looking precisely for the wares the merchants were selling. He was actually looking at the merchants themselves. The older the merchant, perhaps more tanned as well, the more they had traveled in their lives. If he could find one that looked decently middle-aged, odds are they passed through the village he was being held in before. And that could send him to Tia.

Eventually he came across one that looked to be in the margin of acceptance to him, selling a variety of exotic things. "You there, have you heard of a village that held a dragon for a while?" He startled the male merchant that was tending to something in his wagon. Looking a bit shocked, the man overlooked the Golden creature. "It had issues with Ettins if I remember correctly. Do you know which direction it was it?" The man looked at him a bit more, then spoke an entirely different language Atlas couldn't understand. Causing the beast to curl his neck and tilt his head at him.

After a few moments, it clicked in. The other humans that were in that village spoke a different language as well. All except for Tia. For the life of him, he couldn't remember why. Still, she was the only person that could understand the dragon. Tia and...

The dragon grunted. Trying to motion to the merchant using body language. "I'll be right back. Two minutes, tops." And the dragon rushed back to where the two parted off. The streets seemed to be getting more and more crowded, and full of people. Not only did the creature need to slow down and watch his step more, but he was having a hard time distinguishing their clothing to Elexus'. They began to look the same to him, probably due to the stress of the situation. As much as he loathed to admit it, Atlas now needed her to find Tia.

"I can cook, read a little, and do many labors if needed. Perhaps wade on you and your family." Elexus was trying to appeal to an older man with a rather ridiculous mustache. Doing her best not to smile or giggle at it. As the man was looking over her, his eyes got a little wide as they went back up to her face. "I can also count to... What's wrong?" The man took a step back as a shadow came over them.

"Too bad, she's not for sale." The dragon growled. Though probably knowing that the man couldn't understand him anyway, he just picked up the woman by the mid section with his jaws. She gave out a loud yelp, but not scream.

"Atlas-!?"

"Ayem gedding eau foor sumefing." He attempted to explain. Double taking at the man. "Dat muslash loocs rerrickulus." The dragon snorted, as he carried the woman away.

"Atlas! What are you doing?" She kept asking him, as she was being abducted through the streets.

"Wike Uoor weely gooin twwo unnersand ee wike dis." ...Yeah, she couldn't quite get it either.

"...What?" The dragon tossed his snout like that, causing her to yelp loudly, thinking he might drop her. A few minutes later, he set her down on the cobblestone road. "What on earth has gotten into you?" She looked at the dragon, and then at an older merchant fellow she was in front of.

"Translate for me." The dragon grumbled.

"Are you okay ma'am?" The merchant asked, still a little timid of the golden creature.

"I'm not hurt. Just... Startled."

"I don't blame you." The merchant helped her up.

"Enough small talk!" The dragon grumbled.

"Seriously, what has gotten into you?"

"Is it alright?" The man asked her.

"Ask him if he knows about a village that usually had ettin problems."

"What do you mean?" The woman looked at the gold one. "What ettin problems?"

"Ettin problems? Are there ettins coming here?" The merchant worried.

"N-no. It's just-"

"Ask him." The dragon growled. Getting the woman to look at him again. "He can't understand me. No one else can but you." Atlas looked away, sitting down with his ears back. "So I need you to translate for me."

"He can't...?" She looked at him, and then the merchant. "You can't understand him?"

"No Ma'am. Can you?" She nodded at him.

"I was traveling with him for a day and a half. I never noticed-"

"Get him to answer my question."

"O-okay... Do you know of a village that had ettin problems?"

"A village that has ettin problems... There's quite a few to the west of here." He pointed into the direction, getting a large reaction out of the dragon. As much as he wanted to go, he only heard a small bit the conversation. "If you're looking for a specific one-"

"What did he say?"

"He said there are quite a few in that direction."

"Ask him about one that held a dragon that was injured for a while." She looked at the golden one with a bit of worry. "I'll explain later."

"Have you heard of one that was holding a dragon?"

The man gave it some thought. "Yes, actually. Many people were stating that a black devil attacked the ettins that were threatening a village. But it was hurt badly. It was brought back and nursed back to health if I remember. I was talking to a younger woman that called it a dragon."

"Where was this village?"

"To the west, like the others. If you follow the roads, you'll run into two villages before you reach that one." The dragon grumbled impatiently, making the merchant a bit nervous. "But when you come to a fork by a waterfall, you want to take the left road."

"Okay." Getting a nudge from the beast, the woman just patted him on the snout with a smile. "If you follow the road, you'll find it. The third village to the west."

"We'll find it." The dragon grabbed her again with his jaws and took off with her yelping again.

"Thank you sir!" She shouted back, only to get the man to tip his hat a bit nervously. After a few moments, she shouted at him. "Atlas!" But the dragon didn't bother to talk again. Looking around for something specific, he found a large statue made of gold. Walking towards it, the creature set her down on a bench. "What are you doing?"

"Getting you some new clothes. Well, the money for new clothes." She looked at him for a few moments, while his scales turned bronze. Making a small hole at the rocky bottom of the statue of a man standing up. Then turning Silver, knocking on the statue. There wasn't any echo inside of it, and the woman looked at him puzzled. Placing a paw on it, a series of coins began falling out of the hole, as the dragon's paw moved up along the statue's leg. Amazed at it, the woman looked at Atlas.

"How did you...?"

"The statue is solid gold. I'm assuming your world's currency uses some type of gold, correct?"

"I-I think so. But..."

"There's usually symbols on it, I know. Check your pocket." And she did, finding a single gold coin inside.

"How-?"

"In a dragon's society, Golds are not usually trusted well. They can often bend light and make some illusions with it. Or turn themselves invisible for a short period of time." She still looked at him, not understanding. Smiling at him tossing his snout. "While you were talking to him, I grabbed one really quick. The dragon you seen there was a projection for a few moments. Now let me see that, and pick up those coins." She gave it to him, and picked up the blank gold coins. Though something felt wrong with doing this.

"Isn't this... Stealing?"

"Only halfy. We're stealing something no one will even notice or use. They will still have their statue to look at or worship..." He knocked on the leg of it, getting a slight echo now. "Whatever this guy did to deserve a gold statue. And you get some better clothes on your back." The dragon explained. Taking the coins in paw and concentrating to make them identical to the original. "Now take these and

get yourself some new clothing. Be sure to take something more fitting for travel and easy to move in."

"To... Travel?"

It made the dragons ears go back, and turn purple. Causing him to look away from her. "When Two Rivers Run Together, They Can Never Be Distinct Again." Her silence claimed that she didn't understand. With a heavy sigh, he spoke. "I... Need you in order to find someone."

"Because they can't understand you..." Elexus said quietly, getting a smile to grow on her face. "Alright. I'll go with you Atlas."

"Of course you will. You can't keep yourself away from me even if you tried." He snorted. Getting her to giggle, and him smirk a little bit. "I'll be on the west side when you're done. Probably in a field somewhere taking a nap."

"Yes, the elderly do need their rest." She laughed at his surprised expression as she walked off. Getting a hiss from him after a couple of grunts.

Chapter 8

Pressing his paws into the snow, large ice walls began to form up. Making a small room for the two caught in the storm. Along with an angled roof. Though it was still cold, it made a large difference on the human. "How on earth...?" He looked at the now White dragon. Then examined the walls. "Solid ice?"

"The ground was too far down to use rock. I would've had to break through a very thick layer of ice in order to bring it up. So..."

"Still. I never knew dragons had this kind of power..."

"And you will remain ignorant about it from now on." Shroud snorted loudly. Changing to a Green and feeling the grounds once again. "Understood?"

"What are you doing now?"

"We got out of the winds, but not out of the cold. You'll still freeze to death if we don't get a fire going. And I don't see you carrying around a spare tree." The dragon snorted again. "I'm looking for the tundra, seeing if I can possibly get something close enough to a plant to burn for a little while."

"To start a fire, with your breath?" The dragon growled at him loudly, causing Vanitos to wave his

arms in defense. "N-not like it's bad or anything. I mean... Dragons can breathe fire, right?"

"We can make the illusion of such things by spitting flames out of our mouths. But we don't actually have glands that would produce such bile. We only created it. And keep it providing we find a source of food for it-" The dragon sucked in a breath. Then turned back to white. Feeling a bit of cracking on the floor below him, the human stepped back to see a large circle in the center of the room get carved out. After turning to red, the large ice cylinder began to rapidly evaporate. Almost forming a cloud above them of steam. Changing to a Green, soil and grass began to fill the hole. "There we go." The dragon smiled proudly. Then growing a tree on the grounds, dehydrating it, and splitting it into large sections.

"Here, let me help you." The male began to pile it to the side, while Shroud worked on making the fire. Noticing the human walking strangely.

"What's wrong with you?" He grumbled.

"Hmm? Oh, just a slight sprain in the ankle. I'll be fine." He then chuckled a bit silently. "The cold ice will actually help keep the swelling down."

"Well, too bad. I don't like the cold." A few moments later, the flames grew, and the dragon created a small hole in the roof for the smoke to escape.

Vanitos stared at the fire for a few moments. "I cannot believe this."

"Dragons are amazing." The now black one fed his ego.

"You're like a jackknife." The comparison puzzled him. "Like, you're everything anyone needs to survive into one." The dragon nodded in understanding. "The giants won't stand a chance with you guys behind us."

"...About that..." Shroud grunted, rubbing the back of his neck and finding where the spine was pulled out. "Dragons... Can't do all this."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, they can, but it's going to take several different kind." The man looked at him. "You ever wonder why dragons are often the same variety of colors?"

"Noticed, yes. But never questioned it. I just thought it's how you were born."

"Hatched." His black ears went back. "Well, those colors mean something..." The dragon explained for the next few minutes about the Atonements and their schools.

"So they're all the color of the art they chose to follow." Vanitos nodded. "What's black then?"

"Black doesn't exist..." Shroud grumbled, exhaling through his nostrils. "It's not in any record, nest, or even theory. I was the only one who could study multiple Atonements."

"So Black is none of the Atonements, but it is all of them." The man pondered. "Which is why people call you the Black Death. You know everything, and therefore are basically unstoppable."

"You really know how to flatter me." The dragon muttered.

"I know how dragons tend to get. And I know how to appeal to them."

"And now I feel like I'm being manipulated." He gave the human a harsh glare while Vanitos just smirked at him.

"Regardless, it'll be a while until this storm passes."

"Yes."

"...How are we going to do this?" The two were quiet for a few moments. "Can I ask you something?"

"Can I ask you something in return?"

"Sure. You first."

"How exactly did you 'convince' that nest to risk their lives for yours?" Shroud glared at him harshly.

"Simply put: I didn't. I got in late. But from what I understand, we only explained our situation-

"That's Yakwash if I've ever heard it. What are they getting in return?"

"A threat eliminated before it becomes a greater one." The dragon growled at him.

"Giants are not a threat. You're probably overreacting-"

"We seen their scouts."

"What you probably saw was a hunting party. Not a Raid party. There's a difference."

"And what about the villages they attacked-?"

"Do you have any clue how territorial they are? You probably built it on their lands and they left it alone until the village expanded."

"Are you seriously trying to talk your way out of helping us?"

"I'm trying to convince you to not risk any dragon's life for your foolish ones." Vanitos face went cross, but he didn't say anything for a bit.

"...Are you trying to save her life too?" It made Shroud pause for a moment.

"...It's her life. If she wishes to fight in a war, then I won't stop her."

"You can't be serious. I thought you two were mated by the sounds of her talking about you."

"We are, but she loves something more than me."

"And that would be?"

"...Death."

The young woman browsed the streets for stores. Although she didn't exactly know how much she had for currency, but she was sure that it was enough for some clothing. She had over twenty coins in her hands, and they looked very identical to the others; just newer.

Looking at one store that had many fancy clothes within the windows. Many of the dresses that appealed to her. Though she thought the dragon might like the look of them as much as she did, he wouldn't approve of it. ("Be sure to take something more fitting for travel and easy to move in.") She sighed quietly. (This place doesn't look like it would have anything of that sort.) And she moved on.

A few homes down, Elexus spotted another shop more fitting to what Atlas meant. The opened door was rather welcoming, and she entered, looking at the many variety of clothes. The woman at the desk gave her a very unwelcoming look, but Elexus took a deep breath and approached her. "Good day. I'm looking for some new clothes that would be comfortable for travel." The older woman studied her for a moment, seeing the coins in her hand. The younger one lifted her hands and showed her the golden coins. "Would this be enough for them?"

It surprised the elder one, giving Elexus once again a bit of a dirty look. "And where, may I ask, did you come up with this kind of money?"

It hesitated her for a moment. "M-my Master gave it to-"

"Ohhh, and your master sent you here to get new clothing. I thought you stole it." The elder one's tone entirely changed. "You said clothing for traveling?"

"Yes Ma'am. We're heading west for a bit."

"Those are some rainy areas. You'll need something a bit warm and thick to keep you dry. After all, you won't be any use to your master if you're ill, child." She got out a few things; a gray long sleeved shirt that didn't look like much. Some brown pants with some black shoes, made to be weather worthy. And a thick brown jacket that seemed to be very heavy and full of pockets. "They don't look like much, but at least they won't mistake you for one of their children." She said with a rather pleasant tone.

"How much would all of this be?" The older one looked at the coins again, and picked out six of them.

"This should do finely. Did you want to change in the back? We have a small room for just that over there."

"Thank you, I will." Elexus took the clothing and went inside the small dressing room. A few moments into changing her clothes, she heard the voice of a man who entered the store.

"Good day, Margret. Do you know where your children are today?"

"Last I check, they went over to Chuck's for the afternoon. You know the silly games that they tend to get into these days. Why? Is something wrong?"

"Just slightly concerned. Browsing the wares today, I spotted a golden beast over the crowd! Walking through the streets at that! Some say that it's even kidnapped and eaten a slave!" The woman gasped at him. "I've seen some children sneaking about. I half wonder if they're going to approach it."

"Um..." Elexus spoke up. "Excuse me?"

"Yes?"

"He's not here to hurt anyone. We're just passing through."

"He? Who do you mean child?"

"The Golden creature you saw, he's my Master." There was a silence in the store, as the young woman finished dressing. Coming out, the two upper class people were staring at her. "He didn't eat anyone, Atlas just needed me for something." She said shyly.

"Atlas?" The man questioned.

"The dragon." The two looked at each other for a moment. "And he won't harm your children. It's... Doubt that he will enjoy them."

"Doubtful you mean?" Elexus lowered her head at that. "...Are you sure it won't...?"

"He won't. He might scare them away, but they won't be hurt." She tried to reassure Margret.

"Alright dear. Is there anything else you need?"

"No, this will do fine. Thank you." And the young woman left the building.

Taking the long way to the west, Elexus wanted to browse the streets for a bit. There were many things that looked pretty, but didn't really hold a great value to travelers. Coming up to one of them that seemed like it held many medical supplies, then something came to mind. "Excuse me?" Elexus asked the merchant.

"What can I get you ma'am?"

"My master recently got hurt. Something he called a... Sron...?"

"Sron? Hmm..." The man pondered.

"He hurt a muscle, but he didn't break anything."

"Oh, a Sprain?"

"Yes!" Her face lit up. "I'm sorry, I'm still learning some of these words. He's quite smart and..." She blushed at him.

"I think I have just the thing." He pulled out a wide bottle. "This is Warming Massage Oil. It will relax the sore muscle for hours, allowing it to heal faster."

"How do you use it?"

"Just spread it on. Nothing else to it." The man smiled.

"Okay, how much?" The woman showed him her collection of coins.

"Two will do perfectly." He said, making the exchange. "Thank you, Ma'am. And I hope your master feels better."

"I'm sure he will." She smiled at him as she left. Heading back to the western side, something caught her eye in the stands...

Out in the field, Atlas was trying to sunbathe. The golden scales, though reflecting a lot of light, were just keeping him warm enough to stay comfortable. He would completely lay out, if it wasn't for that constant feeling of someone gocking at him. And that was really ruining his rest for him.

The dragon's ear flickered with every whisper he picked up. Though he couldn't make out all of it, he knew it was the voices of children. Every once in a while he heard a small step in the grass, as if it was trying to be quiet. He growled loudly when he could almost feel it a few feet from his wing, causing it to stop advancing for a moment. Then a few more whispers caught his ear. "I swear, if this thing touches me..." He gave off another loud warning growl.

For a few moments there was nothing but silence, then a soft brush on his right wing sent the dragon hissing loudly. With a flash of lightning, he appeared on the other side of the road and roared loudly. Scaring away the many children that were in a group, and then creating an ice wall to block the path of the one who touched him. Still growling loudly, and bearing his fangs where the child could see him, the now Black dragon slowly approached it. As the kid stumbled backwards and whimpered, the beast snapped his jaws and opened them widely. Going in for bite- "Atlas!!" Elexus shouted at him.

"Worst timing ever, as usual." The black one grumbled, as the young woman came around the wall and got between them. "You just had to come back now, didn't you?"

"What on earth are you doing!?"

"I was planning to have the breakfast I missed out on." He snorted at her, sitting and getting a horrified look from Elexus.

"He's a child!"

"That doesn't mean he isn't edible. Besides, there's plenty of them around. They won't miss one."

The woman turned to the child. "I'm sorry! He won't eat you-"

"Says who!?"

"Says me!" The dragon growled at her. "If you want to find that person you're looking for, you won't be attempting to eat anymore children!"

"You're growing some serious stones, girl." Atlas snorted. But something deep down inside of him couldn't help but like the new strength she carried. He looked away with his ears back to hide his smirk.

"Go on. And no more pestering animals-"

"Animal!?" The dragon roared. Getting the kid to scamper away around the ice wall. "Who are you calling an animal!?" It actually startled the woman.

"N-not you. Just-" Another loud growl and Atlas turned to leave the town. Slaming the ice wall with his tail hard, causing it to crack. Elexus swore she seen steam come out of his nostrils as he began walking aggressively away. Thinking perhaps she went too far with him, and too quickly.

For the meantime, she stayed back. Giving the dragon some space and time to cool off. After about ten minutes of following the road, she caught up to him. "Atlas?"

"Not taking your own advice, I see." He snorted at her. When the dragon glared at the woman, she had that puzzled look on her face. Tossing his snout he grumbled. "You told that wyrmling not to pester animals."

"You're not an animal-"

"But I might as well be!" He hissed. "I am, in the eyes of every person on this planet." His spines raised up as he looked away from her. But Elexus started to understand. She was the only person that could understand him now.

"...I'm sorry." The woman apologized, but he didn't say anything for a few moments.

"...It's understandable." Atlas muttered. "...It was the correct thing to say." Once again, he looked

directly away from her to hide his face. "...You get tired of hearing it after a while."

"Animal?"

"Animal... Beast... Monster... Devil... Black Death..." Elexus just stroked his arm, and the dragon came to a stop. Still looking away from her. "Maybe that's why I'm trying so hard to do this."

"Do what?" Atlas still didn't face the woman. "You mean that person you talked about?"

"...Yes." He sighed as he began walking again. "Her name was Tia. She was a nurse or something, I... Lost the details-" The dragon double took at the woman not following him. "What?"

"Oh, I thought you were stopping to lie down." He tilted his head, a bit irked. "So I could..."

He snorted. "You called me old. You're walking." She couldn't help but smile at that, as the woman caught up to him.

"What did you mean that you lost the...?"

Atlas sighed through his nostrils. "Sometimes when I wake up... I tend to lose some information and memories." She caught a glimpse of pain in his eyes before he could look away. "It's gotten as bad as not being able to remember my own name, or what species I am before."

"And this... Tia?"

"She promised to help... cure me of a curse. But before we could really get into it, I was called away."

"Called away?"

"...Someone needed be for something. And he promised me that he would return me to Tia. But when I came here..."

"You landed in front of me?" The dragon nodded. "Perhaps it was fate then? You did save my life when you returned to this... Pan...?"

"Planet?" Elexus nodded at him, but he grumbled a bit. "Perhaps it was Fate." She lowered her head at his tone, and he caught it. "Nevermind, long story. That anger is not directed to you. Regardless, the important thing is that I have a lead."

"Yes, as long as we follow this road, and take a left at the fork, we will find her." Elexus smiled at him, and the dragon gave half a smirk back. "Which reminds me, I got you a couple of gifts with the left over coins you gave me." It got him to tilt his head and perk his ears, making the woman giggle at his sudden attention.

"Dragons like gifts." He stated, trying to get his ears back to normal and not turn purple. After she giggled again, he nudged her. "Out with it. What did you bring me?"

She dug through her pockets and pulled out an amulet with a Amethyst at the center of it. It caught his eyes immedietly. "What you made from that statue was worth an awful lot. The woman there said that this was actually worth more but she would give me a deal. She wanted to sell it for a very long time, but couldn't find anyone who would buy it." She laughed at his constant focus on it. "It reminds me of your eyes, so... Atlas?" She waved at him, but there was no response. Looking at his eyes, she could see that the pupil had widen to a round circle, compared to the black slit that it usually was. And his purple Iris seemed to be rotating counter-clockwise slowly.

"Atlas, you're scaring me..." Elexus whimpered, then she heard him quietly begin to purr. Slowly moving the gem side to side caused the dragon to intensely follow it, keeping his ears perked. As the woman started to move the amulet away from him, he leaned in closer to it. When she placed her other hand on his muzzle, it snapped him out of it. Lifting his head away and shaking it a bit. He covered his eyes with his paw. "Are you okay?"

"Yeah... Just, never give a dragon a gemstone. It messes with our vision." He grunted for a moment. "I... Appreciate it, Elexus. But I used to have... An addiction to treasures like that."

"Addiction?"

"We're like ravens sometimes... We love shiney and sparkling objects. To the point where we sometimes do... Bad things in order to add to our hordes."

"Bad things?"

"...Aside from the basics of stealing and murder; blackmailing, raiding... Sometimes leveling kingdoms for their stashes..." He sighed, trying not to look at her. "It becomes an obsession to us. The want to have more, even if we can bathe in our hordes. Some go so far as to consume it."

"Con...sume?"

"Eat." She gave the black one a strange look. "We go so far as to want to add it to our own bodies. We digest it, and almost add it to our blood."

"So you've eaten gold?"

"I never got that far. But I have had sex with piles of it before." It got her to giggle at that, trying to picture it in her mind. "When you're in love with such things as much as we are, you tend to get aroused rolling in it. One thing leads to another..." He shrugged with his wings.

"But I don't understand how you could... I mean, you said that the horn goes..." She laughed at him tossing his snout.

"You're thinking about it too hard." He snorted. "But you're probably... Better off keeping those things away from me."

"What got you to stop before?"

Atlas exhaled out of his nostrils. "...You know that friend that I don't consider a friend?"

"The star one? He did?" The dragon nodded.

"His name was Bartan."

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I was living alone in the core of a mountain. There was only one real way inside, and that was from a hole in the top. This place was magnificent, many small crystals and gems seemed to bounce the light of the sun to illuminate... Light up, the space inside. Which in turn would light up my horde. I absolutely adored it, for at that time those treasures were my love.

Because of that, I led a rather solitary life... Alone. \*Snorts\* The only social interaction I would often make would be harrassing others for their valuables. If I seen another dragon, it was a fight to the death, then a hunt for their horde. Yes, it was a different time. And I was much different back then.

One rainy day, I was sleeping in my piles. Completely submerged... Covered, wrapped, swimming as if it was water. Don't lower you head at me, you'll learn eventually. Anyway, I was spending the day sleeping in and being lazy. Typical of me at that time really, that I didn't even hear or expect him to flutter in.

Elexus: "Who? Bart?"

Bartan, yes. And don't give him a pet name. He doesn't deserve it. I could half hear him looking around and getting into my horde. Slowly waking up and getting the mountain of golden objects off of my face, I seen the white furred thing take a close look at one of my coins-

Elexus: "White Furred? I thought he was a dragon like you."

Like me? Taath no! He'd be a discrace to dragons everywhere!

Elexus: "Then what was he?"

He was... I honestly have no clue. Have you ever heard of a creature called a Chimera? Of course you haven't. It's a mix of several parts of creatures into one body. \*Sigh\* Try to picture some kind of large wolf thing with a Polar Bear's face... You don't know what a Polar Bear is, do you? \*Makes a small, crude rock statue of a Polar Bear\*

Elexus: "I never seen..."

That's because they often live in northern areas, where it's often very snowy.

Elexus: "Question?" \*Glares at her\* "If you could make a statue of the bear-"

I don't remember all the details about him. \*Snorts\* Besides, my elegant works of art would be too good for him.

Elexus: "Works of... Art?"

Quiet you. I'm telling a story. Anyway, I seen him looking closely at one of my coins, and instantly roared at him. It barely moved his four ears, and that honestly irked me more. "Relax." He said. "I'm only looking at it. I won't take it." I growled at him again, completely getting out of my bed.

"That's mine. Put it back." I snarled at him.

"Is it?" Bartan looked at me a bit harshly. "Do you know who made it?" I grumbled. "Do you know who you got it from?"

"Like you would know any bet-"

"Carl F. Longsonne. He got it from his father after his childhood home burnt to the ground. It was one of the few things that survived that fire, unlike his mother and brother." I just kept my glare on him, while his gaze went back to the coin. "It was made by Jezus Reinnengain, in the loving memory of his best friend. Which was actually a cat named Dio. If you make the light shine on it the correct way, you can see his pawprint on the front side. Here." He held it up in the correct way, and he was right.

I snorted at him. "What's your point?"

"This coin has alot of history behind it. The many people who held onto it, appreciated it's value and those who've touched it." He looked at me again harshly. "And now it resides in the horde of a dragon. Upon thousands and thousands of other coins, never to see the light of day, nor the true appreciation they deserve."

"Get out of my lair." I hissed at him, returning to my bed.

"Atlas, what you're doing here won't fix anything. It won't make you happy-"

"I swore I was pretty happy until you came along. Now get out."

"How much treasure is it going to take to fill that void inside you? How much gold is it going to take to replace that empty heart of yours-?"

"As much as it takes!" I roared at him.

"And what makes you so sure it will be enough!? No amount of metal is going to let you forget about the pain. And no amount of it will ever bring her back to you." ...

"Then what will!? A full planet's sacrifice!? Exchanging my own cursed soul!? What!?"

...He placed one of his paws on my shoulder. "Nothing will. You can't bring back those who've already moved on. And you know that she wouldn't want to be back." I still growled at him, but he was right. "Now it's your time to move forward past this."

"...And if I can't?"

"You can. But look at this..." Bartan gestured towards the pile near us, every piece of treasure I've taken over the many years shined, mirroring the black dragon gazing at them. "Metal will never comfort you. It will only reflect on what you've become. It can't give you the support you need to survive, nor the comfort you need to heal. Only one thing can."

"And that is?" I looked at him, to my surprise he was much closer than I thought he was.

"The love of another person." It was then he kissed me, opening my lips with that tongue of his and lapping it thoroughly against mine.

Elexus: "He kissed you?"

Yes. He was often like that. A bit too affectionate if you ask me.

Elexus: "Did he do anything else?"

I'm not answering that. And stop laughing.

Elexus: "Oh, come on. What did he do?"

You would be interested in this, wouldn't you? \*Double takes at her\* ...You really are, aren't you? \*Tosses snout\* Fine, I'll tell you. But once you hear it, you can't unhear it. Bartan's tongue went a bit deeper in, as he pulled his body closer to mine. He had six legs in total, two sets of forearms... These ones, you! Fore as in forward. Even you could've gotten that.

Elexus: "Atlas."

Right. With the front paws, he stroked heavily at the back of my neck, while the middle ones tended to go after my biceps for some reason. Then at my sides, under the wing. Eventually pushing me on my back on top of the pile. His tongue was poisonous. Giving me this contagious warmth that soon began to spread through my entire body. Making me submissive, and unable to fight against him-

Elexus: "Did you say... Poisonous?"

Yes. But only in a figure of speech. He actually didn't poison me, but... Look, I just don't like him. I was using it as a negative connotation. I felt like he took advantage of me, but he did in turn cure me of that obsession. I'll admit that. \*Snorts\*

~~~~~

"What happened next?" The woman asked him, a large smile on her face told the dragon she actually knew, but wanted him to say it.

"What do you think happened?" Atlas grumbled. "He ended up stroking me off until I almost released, then had sex with me. Without my consent, I might add."

"But..." He glared at her. "You're both male, right?" A slow nod in response, and then it hit him.

"How did you...?"

"He..." The dragon grunted, his ears turning purple. "When... The way two males have sex is... One of them sticks their lower horn into the other's tailhole." He looked away, ears back and trying to ignore the gaze of her looking under his tail.

"But isn't that where...?"

"Yes, that's where we excrete." After a bit of silence, he looked at the woman who was making a face at him. "Don't give me that. Dragons are extraordinary clean creatures, unlike your species. We can even tongue that area without tasting anything foul."

"So, he kissed you and then...?"

Atlas grumbled at her again. "I already told you."

"Well, that doesn't count. Come on."

"You're getting aroused by this, aren't you?"

"We do have a long way to travel, don't we?"

"Fair point." The dragon sighed heavily in defeat. "But no staring at or touching my lower horn."

"You mean the one that's showing?" She giggled.

"Hush. I can't help it if the memory of it arouses me." He caught Elexus giving him a strange look. "What?"

"You want to know what I think-?"

"Not really."

"I think that you really enjoyed yourself." The woman laughed at him tossing his snout.

"You would think that, wouldn't you?" Atlas grumbled. "...Maybe a little. Regardless, I'll keep the rest of that session to myself."

Deleted Scene Available

<https://www.furaffinity.net/view/14888810/>

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I don't even remember how long I was out for. But when I awoke, I didn't have the hangover that I expected to have. Although, I did have a furry blanket over me instead. Bartan woke up with my grumbling, if he was asleep that is. "Sleep well?" He asked me.

"M'how long was I out?" I tried to ask before yawning.

"Three days." I double taked at him while he nuzzled me on the neck. "How do you feel?"

"...Fine." I responded eventually. He smiled at my disbelieved expression. "Really? Three days?"

The bear chuckled. "Yes. Don't worry, I kept you healthy, cleaned the mess we made, and no one else got in." I took the time to look around while he rested a bit more on my chest.

"...Why?" He looked at me.

"Why not?" He smiled, like you often do, when I tossed my snout. "Because I care. And I want you to be happy." Another nuzzle.

"Of course you do." I said sarcastically.

"...Do they give you what you want?" I knew it was going to come to this. The bear picked up a few more coins that shined in his brown eyes. "Are they capable of giving you what I did?"

"No one is capable of giving what you gave." I snorted at him. "Not even remotely close."

"But you enjoyed yourself, did you not?" He gave me a smirk as my ears went back. "I know you did, I could feel it as well."

"Maybe." ...Shut up.

"These... They can't give you that."

"And?"

"They can't give you satisfaction. They can't give you support when you feel down. Though you can pleasure yourself rolling in piles of them, they can't pleasure you in the way that another person can."

"...And?"

"You want to know what I think-?"

"Not really."

"I think that you look to these things because you're afraid of another loved one dying before you do." It shot me through the heart. "The harsh truth Atlas is: You'll outlive every one of these coins. Every treasure, perhaps even the very planet you now live on." He looked me in the eyes. And when I tried to look away, he gently pulled me back with a paw. "There's no running away from it. And when



that, what little support that these things give, are swept out from under you, what will you do next?"  
Bartan rested his head on my chest once again, licking at my neck.

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"What did he mean by that?" The woman asked the dragon, but he wouldn't face her. "Atlas?"

"...Someday I'll tell you. Maybe."

Chapter 9

The winds were getting warming the further south the dragon flew. Though it was only for a few hours, he had spent enough time in that cold snowstorm. He longed to get back to that grassy field and sleep for the afternoon. Then spend the night with his mate. However, he would have to drop off the human on his back first. As much as he detested going near their city, especially at a time like this, he might as well do it. "Shouldn't be long now. I can see the coastline at the distance." He said to Vanitos.

"I'm grateful, but..." The dragon growled at him. "I still think you should fight with us."

"Then have you pester us for the next threat that comes to your city." He snorted. "Eventually you'll need to learn how to defend yourselves. If you can't, then that is nature." The man didn't say anything after that. As they got closer, a dark cloud could be seen in the distance.

"What on earth is that?"

"Looks like smoke." The dragon said lackadasically. "Probably from someone burning something."

"That's too much for a normal fire. Lets look into it." The dragon double taked at him, or did his best to.

"What?"

"We should look at it. It might be someone in trouble."

"Define 'We'." Shroud grumbled at him. "I'm dropping you off outside the city. If you choose to spend the rest of your day investigating a bondfire, then you do that."

"Please Shroud! If there's people in trouble, it will be too late by the time I get there. It will only take a few moments with you already in the air."

The beast growled at him, but tossed his snout none the less. "If any human bothers me after today, I *will* devour them. Do I make myself clear?"

"Yes. Thank you." Shroud still grumbled at him. As he flew closer, he could tell that the smoke was much thicker. Though, he never admit to it out loud, it looked like a village was on fire. And over the mountains, they seen just that.

As the dragon perched on a more flattened area of the high mountains, the two looked down at the many destroyed buildings in flames. While the raid party of giants were also setting flame to the village's fields. "See, that would be a raid party."

"We have to get down there! We have to help them!"

"What do you mean We?" The dragon curled his neck. "And what help would you be unarmed?" He snorted.

"I can't just do nothing. That is my people down there!"

"And if you just run up to a giant, you'll be killed." He growled at the man. "That's what it's like to be at the lower end of the food chain."

"Then what do you suggest? We let innocent people be killed?" The dragon didn't answer. "And what if that nest is next?" It got his ears to fold back.

With a loud cross between a grunt and a growl, Shroud tossed his snout. "...What weapon do you usually use?"

"What?"

"Answer the question!" He roared at him, impatient.

"...I'm skilled in archery and one handed blades. Why?" The black one drove his front paw into the solid mountain ground. Hearing a series of steam hissing and the ground moving, Shroud tore out a human sized bow from the hole in the ground made of the earth and rock. A few arrows that seemed to be letting off streams of hot air rested on the outer curve of the weapon. Shaking off some of the debris still attached to it, he handed it to Vanitos. "What...?"

"It's a bow you dolt." He hissed at him. "You have four shots. Use them wisely, but one of them should take down a single giant. Be careful of the backlash, and once your out of ammo, throw it. They have a tendency to be... Unstable."

"Unstable?" He looked at it's somewhat crude, yet elegant shape. "Is this thing is going to explode?"

"It might." He heard the man whimper. "Now hold on, I'll drop you off over there, near the people running away." After he felt a tug, the dragon flew down.

"What are you going to do?"

"Have a picnic." He grumbled sarcastically. And hoping the human caught the sarcasm. Swooping down around a giant that was chasing some villagers, Shroud got its attention. Igniting the air around his paw, he sent a burst of flames into the giant's eyes. Blinding it for a few moments while the dragon landed. As soon as the mount was still, Vanitos drew one of the arrows and fired it at the giant's chest. The arrow launched with immense force, knocking the man onto the dragon's wing, and forcing the dragon to kneel to one side. "Don't fire it on me!" He hissed at the man, as he rolled off his wing and onto the ground.

"Sorry!" Vanitos got up, looking at the giant that completely fell over. It was hard to tell, but it looked like the arrow blew a hole in his chest the size of pillar. "Good gods..."

"That's number one, by the way." The dragon snorted. "Now only use them when you're in danger. And if it starts ringing, throw it away... Far Away." As the black one reached into the ground once again, he made himself a bow made out of molten rock. "You focus on getting them to safety, I'll get rid of the raid party."

"Be careful." Shroud just snorted at him, as he took off. "Everyone! Follow me!"

Although it was a bit awkward to use such a weapon, the Black one could do it. Quickly banking in the air after spotting a few giants that were trying to crush the villagers. Landing on the side of a rocky mountain, the dragon knotted an arrow and fired it. The draw itself seemed to circle around his aim with thin flames, and bursted out around him when the arrow took off. Flying through the air, the projectile gained a long tail of that thin flame. Slowly shortening like it was a fuse. As the arrow drove into the giant's right shoulder with a sharp pierce, the fuse soon followed it. Reaching the very end of the arrow and then exploding loudly in a sea of wicked flames and force.

As the flames cleared, the right arm was nowhere to be seen. But its head and neck were just barely connected to its left shoulder. Over 70% of its chest was missing, and that was enough of an indication for the dragon to move to a different target.

The next one was going after a caravan full of injured people. A quick aim at the giant's chest, and Shroud began to slip off the steep edge. The sudden movement got him to fire by accident as he regained his balance. Though the shot did miss the Chest, it ended up landing in the giant's path. As the fuse reached the tip of the arrow's tail, it blew off the giant's right leg. Causing it to roll on its back and cry in pain.

Hissing at the ground he was standing on with a temper, the black one drove his claw into it and quickly forged a different arrow. Loading it on the bow, and then swooping down. Atoning to Earth, he

landed just for a moment and slammed the ground. Causing a thick pillar to raise behind the downed giant's chest, and lifting it's head a bit off the ground. Taking to the air once again and landing hard on the giant's face, Shroud drew the arrow aiming directly for it's eye. Roaring as the arrow charged up with a volcanic lightning, the release of it threw the dragon off. The projectile went cleanly through the skull of the thirty four foot creature and hit the ground below. Exploding on that impact and tearing the upper body of the giant to shreds.

Using the blast of the ammo, the bronze one took off again towards more in the distance. He couldn't hear much but ringing until a few moments later. A few blasts behind him could barely be made out. Mostly due to the massive vibrations sent through the air. Looking back, he seen another giant fall around Vanitos' area. (This is much bigger than a raid party...) Shroud thought to himself. But snorted at the fact of admitting he was wrong to that human.

Looking forward again, he gave a loud yelp to a giant that almost grabbed him. Just barely diving down and between it's legs. Sliding on the ground as he drew another arrow at the now bending over giant. Revealing something the dragon really didn't want to focus on. Closing his eyes, he fired into the giant's lower area, turning about with the force it gave off and not bothering to look back after it exploded.

Flying straight forward into a group of five reinforcements, the bronze one could start to hear his weapon ring. Quickly dodging a swing of the first giant's club, he shot it in the shoulder and went straight up to the second giant's face. Shoving the bow in the creature's maw and withdrawing behind it. Hearing the first arrow explode and the giant scream. As the dragon changed to a silver and quickly made a dome shield on the ground around him. Made out of several layers of metals.

The second explosion vibrated the shield, and soon enough the giants were wailing on it. Trying to break through. With a quiet breath, Shroud changed back to bronze. A few moments later, the giants broke through the metal shield with their clubs, only to find a hole inside, big enough for the dragon to fit through. Soon after, a large quake. Then a second one.

A ways out from the group, Shroud erupted from the earth carrying a large maul made of rock with a diamond head. Spinning with an overhead, single arm strike, it slammed against the grounds. Sending a trail of sharp rocky spikes at the three giants. While two of them made it out of the way, the third got snared by a jagged rock piercing through it's foot. Causing the large one to fall backwards and get several more of the spikes erupt through it's body. From the shin, hamstring, lower torso, heart, and finally the brain.

The other two tried to flank the armed dragon. The first one taking a large swing at him to distract him, while the next one tried to attack from behind. Roaring, the bronze one clashed his hammer against the club, sending a massive amount of force and vibration that echo'd loudly through the air. The wooden club was shattered into splinters, and the vibration was so powerful, it shattered the bones in the giant's arm. Following through, Shroud flew up to that shoulder and threw all his weight into a slam against it. Another massive shockwave rippled through the creature's body, causing every bone to shatter and crack loudly, and even cause parts of the skin to split open.

Upon landing, the last giant took a swing at the dragon. Barely blocking the attack with the side of the maul, the bronze one pushed the club aside. Gripping the earthly weapon close to it's head, Shroud threw it forward. Letting the weapon slide through his paw and hold onto it on the opposite end of the handle. As the hammer thrust forward, it sent a forceful wind that knocked the giant backwards. Jumping onto it's chest, the dragon cracked the side of the giant's head to stun it. Roaring once again while the weapon screeched with magnetic energy, Shroud executed the creature with a heavy overhead slam. The impact sent an unreal shock through the earth and caused it to shake harshly for several seconds. Even getting a few fissures to erupt and split opened.

As the dust cleared and revealed a horrendously bloody mess. Panting to catch his breath, the dragon looked into the distance to see several more giants standing back. Along with a rather tall one in the front center with several totems of skulls around it's neck. Snorting loudly, Shroud threw the hammer at it. Though such a weapon was hardly made for throwing, it seemed to go straight after the tall one. Only for it to step to the side and miss it's target. Exploding into shards and fragments far behind the group of giants.

As the Totem one gave the order to fall back, the dragon growled a bit, shaking his paw. But his arm felt so sore after the battle. He let them retreat for now, while Shroud himself went to find Vanitos.

Many of the villagers still survived the raid somehow. It was hard for the dragon to really find the man he was looking for. To be sure he didn't land on anyone in the tall grass, the dragon came down at quite the distance away from them. Slowly walking towards them to show that he wasn't an enemy. Regardless if he was back in his blacker form. "Shroud!" He heard Vanitos, even though shouting out his name to other humans just irked him and made his ears go back.

"You have to announce it out loud, do you?" The dragon snorted once he spotted the man. "Please tell me you disposed of that weapon."

"Yeah, I did as you said. Not really sure where it went though-" A small explosion came from farther away, getting both of their attention. "...Nevermind. How are you? Are you hurt?"

"I'm fine. Just sore. You?"

"Same. You weren't kidding about that backlash." Vanitos rubbed his shoulder. "I don't suppose all dragons can do that?"

Shroud tossed his snout. "Of course not. It's an art that I'm still trying to master. But they're stable enough to use in battle at least. Just not very long." The man looked at him with a bit of fright. "What's wrong?" The dragon grumbled, just now seeing a bit of a shadow over him. While trying to look up to where it was, a huge rock fell on the dragon. The last thing he heard was his own spine snapping from the massive weight.

The sun began to set, and its light was being taken with it. As the two stopped to make camp, the woman was glad to have a rest. Not used to walking such distances for so long, her muscles were sore. Only slightly paying attention to what the dragon was mumbling about while cooking a yak he had spotted nearby. Although she usually listened to him closely, her mind was off into that story he shared earlier that day.

As the dark clouds began to shadow them overhead, Elexus began to feel a little cold. Placing her hands in the pockets of her jacket, she found the amulet once again. Staring deeply into it, much like he was earlier, she couldn't help but wonder what he could possibly see within it. And how it made his eyes morph like that. "Are you listening to me?" Atlas asked, grumbling while he turned his head to her and now noticing the gem himself.

"S-sorry." He sighed to himself as he looked away from it before he was captivated by the stone. "I think I'm just getting a little tired."

"We both are." He mumbled. Starting to feel the sprinkles of rain overhead. "Looks like I'll have to make our shelter early." Changing into a bronze, he made walls of solid rock, along with an angled roof. A crude stove that went over the small fire that was already made within the center of the rocky building, along with a flue.

Looking over the walls, the woman spoke up. "There... Isn't..."

"Hmm?" The beast looked at her, and then studied the walls. Noticing now that it lacked a door. Tossing his snout, he looked back at her. "I'll make one when we leave. I don't want the winds to come in. And by the look of those clouds, it's going to be a rather harsh storm." A loud exhale through his nostrils. "Means my wings are going to ache."

She looked at him sadly, and then completely lit up. Forgetting the small bottle in her pocket. Pulling it out to look at it, trying to read what it was saying. "What is that?" The dragon caught her.

"Oh, it's nothing." She tried to hide it, but could feel his gaze on her. "It was suppose to be a surprise for you." That got his ears to perk up. "Your second gift."

"Second gift?"

"Yes. I'll show it to you later." She smiled at his interest in it, and his half grumbling state in making him wait. As he changed to a green to make the beds once again on opposite sides of the fire, it half made her a bit sad.

"What's wrong now?" He grumbled.

"I..." She sighed. "I just wanted to sleep with you." That got his ears to turn a bit purple for a moment.

"You mean sleep next to me." He said awkwardly. Getting the woman to nod at him. "Often enough, to sleep with someone means to bed them."

"To bed them?"

"As in, to give them your consent." It got the woman to blush a bit and giggle. "What's so funny?"

"You." She laughed again at his curled neck. "You just seem to know so many ways of saying that."

Atlas snorted. "Don't blame me. It's your species that created such innuendo. Nearly every phrase in your language now means sex in one way or another."

"Well, what about dragons?"

"What about dragons?"

Elexus giggled again. "How do dragons... Consent?"

"We use body language for the most part. A few licks here and there. Usually in the places which we desire to play with." Another giggle. "Oh stop that. It's better than your species: beating around the bush so often that no one knows exactly what you want. I would rather have a kiss on the lips, or a stroke on the sheath than to constantly hide what I want through mixed words."

"So you want someone to come out and touch you?" She said, getting up. He gave out an embarrassed whimper.

"Sit back down." He grumbled, only to have her laugh again. "I meant another dragon. I'm not sure what I'd do if a human were to do that."

"Well, you didn't seem to mind this morning." His ears seemed to glow purple. "You looked rather satisfied. Like you enjoyed yourself."

"And let me guess, this gift that you have in store for me is just that." She just smiled at him and shook her head. Her brown hair, though stiff, flowed side to side.

"Although, I wonder what would happen if it was used on your horn." It made the beast growl. "It's likely it'll feel good on you. Don't worry."

"Likely. The last time someone gave me something to make me feel good ended up giving me a heart attack." She tried not to smile at that. "What is this gift?"

"Curious, aren't you?" Another growl. "I'll show you after supper."

"Stones, girl. Stones..." The woman tilted her head at him. "Meaning, you're really starting to grow a pair." He made some plates for them, and started cutting off strips of meat. "You shouldn't tease the paw that feeds you."

"I know I shouldn't, but I thought it's what people like. To be surprised and teased."

"People as in humans, no doubt." Another giggle. After the two finished eating, the dragon stared at her. When she caught him, she laughed out loud, almost choking on her meal. "What is it." It was more of a demand than a question.

"You'll see." Another growl. "I never knew you to be so curious. I should look into getting you more gifts if I ever need something."

"Manipulative witch." He grumbled.

"Lay on your back for now." A glare at her. "It'll feel good. And it's the only way it'll work. I can't reach you when you're lying down like this." A toss of his snout and Atlas obeyed. Laying on his back, and grunting a bit on his sore wing. As she finished up, she took the bottle out of the coat and walked over to his side of the room. The black one following her every movement got her to laugh again. "Relax. Now close your eyes." He stared at her for a few moments, getting her to giggle out loud again. "Do it, you."

He snorted and grumbled a bit, but he did. Trying to follow her every footstep in the room. Leading her to the dragon's left shoulder. "This better not be poisonous." He muttered, hearing her screw the top off the bottle. As she placed a little bit in her hands, they felt like they began to glow with warmth. The beast sniffed the air several times, then grumbled at not being able to identify the substance. Setting the bottle on the leafy bed, she knelt down and softly began to touch the branch of his wing. He growled a bit at her, but soon began to feel it. A nice warmth the strange liquid seemed to contain, along with a cinnamon aroma. Smearing it closer to the joint and being very careful with her strokes, she listened to Atlas breathe. Getting slower and deeper.

"It feels good, right?" She got a strange murmur for a reply that put a smile on her face. As the woman added more and more to the large wing, she gently tried to lift it up a bit so she could get under it. As the male grunted a bit, he tried not to fight against it. The warmth soon overpowering the slight sting it brought. As she set the wing back down, Elexus could start to hear him purr a bit. But it sounded like he was trying to hide it.

She used this opportunity well to start petting certain areas of his body. She stayed away from the wing and the left side for now. Taking the oil up to the creature's shoulder caused him to look at her. "What are you doing?"

"Just relax." She softly told him, but he gave her a worried, almost hurt look.

"Elexus..."

"It's alright." The woman assured him as she stroked around his joint and bicep. As the large one whimpered quietly and turned his head away, she could tell that he was fighting with himself. "What's wrong?"

"...I can't... Let you." He tried to place his right paw on her hands, but she ended up meeting it. "I can't go through it again. And if you do this..."

"I don't understand..." She almost whispered.

"...There's... Many ways into a dragon's heart. And what you're searching for is... One of them." She rubbed his paw a bit. "Dragons live a long time, and... I'm no exception. I'm tired of losing people that I learn to love. I'm tired of starting over again and again. I can't let you do this, because if I lose you... Or you lose me..."

"But I thought it was worth it." It got him to look at the woman. "I've heard many stories growing up." She sat down near his neck. "Ones about love lasting forever, and never lost. Even if it ever was, it's suppose to be worth it to fall in love, isn't it?" Though Atlas wasn't looking directly at her, she could still see pain in his eyes until he closed them.

"Elexus... Go to sleep." He whispered, as his head turned away. It hurt her to hear it, even if the tone wasn't harsh. And for a few moments, she just stroked his neck in silence.

After a bit of thought, she got up and grabbed the bottle. Looking at it, she huffed. Poured a large amount of it on her hands, and went straight for the back of his neck, around the shoulders. "What are you doing-?" He half hissed which instantly turned into a groan of pleasure that he was fighting against.

"I'm acting like a dragon."

"What?"

"You're wrong." A little bit of a growl could be felt in his neck. "I believe that it's worth it, regardless of how much it pains you. I know that if you were to go back, you'd do every one of those things again. Fall in love with every person again, because you know that the pain of losing them is worth it in the end."

"You're crazy, you know that?" He snorted, feeling her hands climb up his neck. (Not the jaw, not the jaw, not the JAW!) And when she got to the jaw, he was completely helpless. Purring loudly at the harsh strokes of her warm hands.

"Crazy?" She questioned a bit harshly. "I'm a slave girl that was nearly taken by a bandit. Then somehow, a miracle to be honest, was saved by a large black being whom I actually believe is a god from another planet. Not only does he have power that I've never even heard of from the tallest of tales, but when I first found him I was sure that he was dead!" He whimpered slightly at that, barely being able to tell within his loud purrs as she only went at his jawline harder. However, due to the massive vibrations of them, she couldn't help but smile at how they tickled her, and how submissive he was. "He then gave me a name, gave me clothing, food, warmth. Then gave me the courage to start a new life. Only to be randomly kidnapped by him soon after we left! All because no one else is able to tell what he's saying, yet somehow I can. And now he's trying to push me away, in the middle of giving him a massage which will probably lead into him getting stroked off. And you are calling *Me* crazy?"

"That... sounds... pretty... Crazy to... me." Atlas barely spoke through his purrs. As Elexus

retreated her hands to get more oil on them, his chin did it's best to follow them. "Don't stop..." He whimpered, getting her to laugh at his sudden change of heart. Continuing once she got enough on her hands. His purrs grew louder and louder the closer she got to his chin.

"Change your mind?" He whimpered at that, but couldn't respond. "Now I want this. I want to give you the same pleasure as before, and you're no longer going to push me away from it, alright?" Another whimper. "You deserve to have someone in your life. And you invited me in once. Don't start pushing me out now."

"Elex..."

"Atlas." She mocked him.

"...A little higher." It put a smile on her face, so she scratched him a little higher. His purrs seemed to get louder and louder. Getting almost thunderous, to the point where it started to worry the woman. Until she seen his paws, almost clawing at the air slowly. As he got deeper into it, the dragon started to move with her hands. And soon enough...

"Atlas." She giggled, knowing he was unable to grunt. "Your lower horn is showing."

That it was. Though hard to really make out the red coloring on it. The obsidian scales seemed to reflect the many warm colors the fire illuminated. The thick weapon slowly coming out of the shiney sheath in pulses. Moving around his head to the dragon's right side, she stopped tending to him for a moment. Getting him to follow her with his chin and nudge her several times to continue scratching him. "Just a little more..." He whimpered, getting her to laugh. The woman did was she was asked, rubbing him softly and giving him time to come back to his original focus.

"I never knew a purr to be so loud before." She said, as it began to slow down. As Atlas looked at the woman a bit sadly. "Would you like me to continue?"

The beast sighed and looked away. "I can't ask-"

"You can. And you will." There was sadness in his eyes. "Atlas, I'm yours now. And I've made up my mind. But I will only pleasure you when you ask me to." She stroked the area around his right eye. "Don't be afraid to." He nodded slightly. "Now, do you wish for me to continue?"

"Elexus..."

"Atlas." She mocked him again smiling.

He sighed through his nostrils. "You have no idea how hard this is for a dragon." She giggled at that. With a breath, he cleared his throat. "Yes. I would like you to... Continue, Elexus. Please." He grunted awkwardly. Trying to hide his purple ears in the darkness.

"Alright then." The woman carefully walked over his wing while unscrewing the bottle once again.

"Wait, you're not planning..."

"You're not curious?" The dragon whimpered at that. "I'm sure it will feel wonderful. So lets try it."

"Easy for you to say, you're not setting your lower horn on fire." He grumbled, feeling the woman sit on the base of his tail. His sack suddenly felt two cold hands that soon began to warm up quickly. A sharp breath turned into a few moans as the obsidian pouch felt like it was glowing with a warmth. Making it expand slightly more with it.

With this opportunity, Elexus took the time to actually study it with her hands. The way it moved, it felt like a large leather bag filled with water. Feeling around it, she could almost catch something floating inside. Squeezing it a bit to see if she could get a hold of it caused the dragon to jerk and hiss loudly. "Don't do that!" He grumbled.

"S-sorry!" She went back to petting it softly. "It's just... There's something in there."

"Of course there's something in there, you're holding onto my stones."

"Your... Stones?" She looked at them again. "As in rocks?"

"They're not actual rocks. It's just a name for them." He grunted awkwardly again. "They're hard, round, but extremely sensitive."

"And these are the same stones that you say I'm getting?" An awkward whimper that time. "I have these stones too?"

"Females don't have stones like this." He could feel her puzzled gaze. "I say it as a figure of speech. The larger the stones are on a male, the braver and more masculine." The dragon sighed. "Meaning bigger, tougher, egotistical."

"So... Yours would be very big then?" She laughed at how loud he snorted.

"Of course they are! You can't even hold them in your hands properly."

"And inside this pouch is your seed. What do the rocks do?"

"They... Make the Seed."

"But..." He lifted his head to look at her. "If you release, the pouch gets smaller."

"Only for a little while. The stones will make more."

"But if you don't release, doesn't the pouch get... Bigger?"

He grunted again, resting his head on the leaves. "There seems to be a natural... Limit to it's size. Besides, no male wants to have massive stones."

"Why not?"

"Must you ask?" He tossed his head, whimpering. Getting the woman to giggle at the beast. "If they're too big, we wouldn't be able to walk right. They'd constantly ache, and be a huge target for anyone seeking to harm them." He moaned at the warmth again.

"I guess that would make sense. But I like it." Smoothly rubbing the oils across the shiney sack, she noticed his breathing didn't change too much. "Does it not feel good?"

"It feels... Alright." Atlas said, awkwardly. "But that area isn't made for pleasure."

"Oh, I thought it all was." Sitting back and getting the bottle once again, she tried to pour some of it on her hands, but a bit leaked between her fingers. The dragon then panted heavily, startling the woman into thinking something hurt him. Until she heard the deep breaths and whimpers like before. The ones of pleasure from her first session with him. Looking down at what she'd done differently, she seen a bit of the oil around another hole, between the pouch and the tail. "Is this...?" She poked at it a little, and the dragon squirmed a bit. "Does that feel good?"

After a few breaths. "In a very unprideful way, yes."

"Unprideful?"

"As in, a way I don't like, but my body does." She giggled at him.

"This is where males..."

"Place their lower horn yes."

"And you don't like it?"

"I'm... Not attracted to those males. But they seem to be attracted to me." He grumbled.

"So, are you alright with me...?"

"You can do what you want. Just don't stick your hand in there or something." Another giggle from Elexus as she continued. A slight touch made the dragon whimper loudly again as she slowly traced around the outside of the hole. Outlining it with a thin sheet of the warming oil. Then covering the hole entirely with it sent the beast breathing heavily again while squirming. Almost like he was going to sneeze. With another loud whimper, the woman seen a jolt of pre shoot out of the horn.

"I thought you didn't like this area." The woman teased.

"I don't." He whimpered.

"It looks like you're enjoying yourself." She giggled at him.

"Call it a guilty pleasure." The dragon muttered. "Are you almost-" Another whimper interrupted him, getting her to smile while she teased the area.

"But it's kinda fun to watch you wiggle. I almost wonder if I keep doing it, would you release?"

"Perhaps in an hour or something. Now can you move to the next area?"

"Oh, fine. But one more question?"

"Yes?"

"A male's horn enters here, right? Have you ever... Made one?"

"Made one?"

"Out of rock or something. So you could..."

"You're talking about making a toy to pleasure myself with?"

"I think so. Toy sounds like it's for children, but maybe?"

"I'm not answering that." Another serious answer. A laugh from her echo'd in the room.

"We'll have to try that sometime then."

"No, we will not." Atlas argued. Getting her to continue laughing until he moved her up with his tail.

"Okay, okay. I'll move on." She grabbed the bottle and walked to the side of the horn. Lightly pouring the oils onto the red weapon that seemed to be pulsing, which shot the dragon into heavy breaths almost instantly. As the woman began to rub it softly around the dragon's horn, a little bit more of that foggy liquid started to come out. Just focusing on the top half for now, it seemed like every full stroke sent a pulse through the shaft. As well as louder and louder whimpers from the black beast. "Feels nice?"

His only reply was a loud moan and constant body shifts. Looking like he was trying to fight against the massive amount of pleasure the warming oil brought him. As Elexus began to tend to the lower half, adding a little more oil to the base of the red shaft. As soon as it went between the ridges, Atlas' breaths became much more rapid. It was only one soft stroke against them that pushed the dragon over the edge. Almost thrusting in place and arching his back a bit. With a very loud long moan, a lot of the white seed leaked out of the weapon. But it wasn't shot out like before. Adding to the small puddle that was being formed on his belly. Slowly leaking down his right side.

For a while, she just stopped. Almost wondering if she did something wrong, or if the oil had some kind of effect. But the black one's breaths were still deep. "Keep... Going..." He huffed. Getting her to at least feel comfortable about it again. Another soft stroke and his moans returned. Along with the purring. But for the time being, she focused on the top half.

A few more strokes of the oil made the weapon shine from the light of the warm fire. Though it was darker than the last time she got to examine the weapon, Elexus did her best to once again study it

with her hands. Washing it with the oil and making sure that no spot was left dry. Between each one of the large spines at its bottom, to the smaller, thinner ones at the top of the flare. Until all that was left was the bottom half and the very tip of the horn.

Ringling around the flare and the head got the dragon into loud growls once again. Getting a bit closer with every circle. Sliding over the sensitive tip made him shoot out a jolt of pre onto her finger. Surprised by the amount of force it actually had.

As much as she wanted to keep going, the woman could tell he wouldn't be able to take much more. So she went back down to the ridges, adding a bit more oil to them then carefully rubbing them in. The instant the oil touched made him whimper with nearly every breath. The dragon fighting just to hold on a bit longer. But with every touch and stroke sent pulses throughout the horn, along with more small loads of the foggy substance.

But enough was enough. Elexus decided not to delay him much longer. With a soft grasp, she focused both hands on the sides of the ridges and went the full length up and down at a medium pace. The constant squirms and thrusts of Atlas left a smile on her face, as well as his climatic roar, barely being held back. With a series of rapid breaths and many shots coming out of the horn, the woman seen the pouch began to deflate slowly. A bit faster with her hands as the horn seemed to grow a bit more in size and thicken up.

With one last mix between a roar and a moan, the dragon arched his back as the first white torrent was shot through the air. Reaching up past his head and on the grounds. The second and third on his face and chin, and the several rest residing on his chest. But still his breaths remained a bit rapid, and his haunches still tried to thrust a bit more. "Want me to keep going?" She asked him, but wasn't able to get a good reply. Judging by his actions, and how the horn almost seemed to pulse at her. Yes, she carefully kept going. Getting the black one back into that rhythm. His loud purrs filled the room as his breaths began to climb faster and faster, meeting the same speed as her hands. Then what almost sounded like a silent whimper, the red weapon pulsed again.

Though they were not completely shot out like before, the second load did reach up to his upper belly. Painting his obsidian underside with several white streams once again, then completely knocking the dragon out.

She let go of him, almost wondering if he was somehow harmed during the session. But soon enough, the dragon's breaths began to normalize to a loud purr. It put a smile on Elexus' face to see him brightly smile while sound asleep. However, when she found the several streaks of white on his muzzle, she couldn't help but laugh. Grabbing a leaf from the bed, she wiped it off, as well as her hands of the warming oils.

Getting snuggled in his right neck and shoulder area, she rested on him. Slowly stroking the armored scales on his body and feeling that large vibration from his purrs, she couldn't help but feel something for him. She mentioned before that the creature seemed to bring her strength, ever since she met him. But there was something else about it. Elexus noticed it whenever she seen the dragon smile

like he was. It was like her heart was fluttering.

With a bit of a yawn, and the realization of how sore her body was, the woman laid down. Her back to his neck and feeling both the warmth of him as well as the fire. "Good night, Master Atlas." She said to him, as she closed her eyes and fell asleep.

"...He's over here somewhere." Vanitos said, trying to point down at the outskirts of the damaged land. Though it was hard for the female to see where he was pointing when the man was on her back. The dusk sun wasn't helping either.

"Alright, hold on." And a few tugs onto her spines meant he was ready. A swoop down always gave the man butterflies in his stomach, but she landed rather softly. Almost feeling a slight gust of air rise from below. As she started to walk towards the long grass, she seen something black in the fields. It made her heart sink a bit. "Do you mind giving me...?"

"Of course." He dismounted her as soon as she laid down. "I'll be over here, helping these people with supplies." She gave him a nod and started to slowly walk towards the body of her dead mate.

The human described Shroud as being crushed by a large rock, but overlooking his body, it wasn't as flat than she thought it would be. But the black one was not breathing. Regardless, it made her both sad, yet happy. As she laid down beside his limp head and neck, she licked it a bit. Nuzzling it, she couldn't feel any pulse or breaths. "...Looks like you were wrong." She softly said to him.

"You always told me the stories. I've even heard the legends myself before I met you. You said that often enough, something would happen to you that would end your life. Yet, somehow you would get back up. They claimed you to be immortal. Indestructable. Undying, and vicious. But you were also... Thoughtful. At least to me." Nitaka gave him another lick on the ears. Something that would always cause it to flicker, but this time it did not. "You're with my love now, at least. Soon enough, I will join you. Please, Death, hold onto him for just a bit longer. So we can both go together." One last long embrace with him, and a long kiss. "I love you, Shroud. Don't forget about me-"

A sudden gasp from the black dragon got her to yelp very loudly and spring up to her feet. Jumping a few yards back. As Shroud coughed a few times and cleared his throat, removing some kinks and snaps from his body. "That... Giant... Did not just throw a rock at me!" He growled loudly. Trying to get up, but his lower half didn't seem to want to move.

"S-Shroud?" The female asked, getting his black head to attempt to look at her. "You..."

"Nitaka? What are you doing here?" He asked, shaking his head from the fog. "How did it get so dark?"

"You... Really are..." She whispered.

"What?" He didn't quite make out what she said, only to have the purple female dive at him and hug him tightly. Showering him with licks and kisses. "What's gotten into you?"

"You really are immortal! Just like you said-"

"Hence the reason why I said it." He grumbled. "I'm guessing the rock killed me then." He growled.

"Yes, you were..." She took a deep breath and kissed him again. "You didn't leave me." She whispered several times during kisses.

"I can't..." He muttered. "Nikata." She made a noise in question. "I can't move my lower legs." She looked at them, and looked at him sadly. "Do me a favor, lay on my lower half."

"Why?" She asked, only to get him to toss his snout and motion for her to just do it. As she did, he began twisting his upper body back and forth a bit. And with a few heavy whips to the side, a loud snap and crack omitted from his spine. Allowing him to once again move his feet.

"There we go." He could tell the sound of it concerned her. "You can get off me now." He teased. As she did, Shroud sat up with a bit of flinching. "I got most of it, but might be a couple of days before I can move it normally-" She hugged him again tightly.

"Tell me I'm not dreaming." It made him chuckle a bit. "Did he... Send you back to me?"

"Probably. I'm a bit foggy on the details." A few footsteps could be heard coming through the grass, a quick look and he seen the man's face. Grunting at his headache, the dragon tried to remember his name. "...Van?"

"Vanitos, yes." She answered him.

"You... Are...?" The man looked at him with awe. "How? That rock-"

"I'm a dragon. It takes more than a rock to kill me, no matter how big." The black one snorted. "I hope that didn't scare you too much, human."

"I... Was just..." The dragon grumbled at him staring.

"You're going to have to get used to death. Because we're starting war."
