

Wrong Side Of Heaven Act 3 - Only Inhuman

By Bartan Tirix

Chapter 0

The Black Dragon landed on the soft grass under the night, overcast sky. Taking a deep breath of that warm summer air, he exhaled in relaxation. It's been a long while since he felt like he had a breath of fresh air, but the strict grasp on his spines were ruining the moment. "You can let go of me anytime now. We've landed." He smirked, trying his best to look at the woman on his back.

"Sorry." She whispered, with a bit of a panic. "That was..."

"Thrilling? It feels so good to fly-"

"More like terrifying." She said, getting the dragon to attempt to double take at her while the woman did her best to straighten her blonde hair. "I'm not sure if I'll endure the way back."

"Nonsense. You did fine, Tia." He snorted, lying down and feeling her brace him once again. "...That's okay, take your time getting off me." He grumbled sarcastically, as the woman half giggled at him.

"I'm not sure if I want to." Another attempt at a look from the large one. "If I do, I'm not sure if I'll get back on."

"Oh please, it wasn't that bad. Wait until I fly you around the entire world in two minutes." A chuckle came out of him when the woman held on tighter. "Seriously, get off me. I'll go easier on the way home, deal?"

"Deal." She tried to position herself a bit, but taking too long got the dragon to get impatient. Turning Bronze, he lifted a section of the earth beside him. "Atlas?"

"Stand on it." He grumbled, and she did so. Carefully, he lowered it to grass level. "Happy?"

"Yes, thank you." She stroked his muzzle a bit, aiming for the chin. And though his ears were a bit backwards, he didn't resist. Purring loudly knowing that no one was around. "It's too bad you have to go..."

The black one sighed. "About that..." He was quiet for a moment. "Tia... He won't be able to send me back in time."

"Don't say that." She tapped his nose. "You need to have faith in him."

"There's no such thing as a Happy Ending. There will be some kind of catch to it all..."

"Like what?" She walked towards his chest and sat on his forearm. Stroking his neck.

"Like... Me coming back and you're already dead or something. Maybe finding your tombstone in one of the graveyards. Or your memory constantly haunting me, pushing me to do good and better for those I meet." He snorted, getting annoyed by the thought. But it made her laugh, and with that Atlas smiled a little.

"Just... Trust him, okay? And trust me as well. We'll meet again, I know we will." The dragon grumbled a bit, lying his head down in the grass. "Besides, When Two Rivers Run Together..."

He sighed, revealing more of that growing smirk. "They Can Never Be Distinct Again. Not until I rid you of your infectious kindness." He snorted playfully, getting the woman to laugh at him.

"I'm not that bad for you. I think you could actually learn a thing or two from me to be honest." The dragon lightly tossed his snout. "...I wish I could see them." The blonde said, looking up at the sky. "They've always given me comfort when I feel down."

"You forget who you're talking to." Atlas tried to give her a sly smirk. Turning purple and looking at the sky. Slowly, the clouds began to part away and reveal the stars above. "There."

"Yes... They are beautiful." A few moments with her stroking the dragon's neck. "Just think, you'll be on one of those. Helping others."

"On a Star?" He snorted loudly. "Nothing lives on a star, Tia. It's just a far away sun." She giggled at him. "Believe me, they're not as pleasant as they look."

"You've been on one, I assume?"

"Yes, and burned alive painfully. I wouldn't advise such a thing." He grumbled.

"Of course not." She chuckled lightly. Feeling the dragon rest his head on the ground and remain silent. Still stroking him, he sighed once again. "...Where did that come from, Atlas? That saying about the rivers."

His ear flickered towards her for a moment, and he sighed. "The first part was an old draconic saying. More or less how every being we let into our lives tends to change and affect us. Be it for the better or

for the worse. The second line, however..." He chuckled. "You're not going to believe this."

Chapter 1

The loud buzzing from an alarm woke the young woman up. Though it was still very dark outside, the light from her phone lit quite well. The cold air was taking over her apartment, one of the perks of the winter season. Even in the city, the cold still came like it did back home.

Shutting it off revealed the loud grumbling of the creature in her bed. Adjusting to cover himself once again through the blankets to escape the cold. As the woman got up, it left a large gap for the chilling air to attack, and the creature to growl loudly.

Though she couldn't help but laugh at it. It almost made him sound very angry, but with his size, it was more on the adorable side. "I'm sorry." She said, covering up the small critter with blankets. "But I have to get to class in an hour." It mumbled something she couldn't understand, and she left it at that.

After turning on the heat and getting a nice shower, it helped in getting her awake. Turning on the lights made him groan, and once again made the woman smile. "You'll live. Now come on, I'll make us some breakfast." She gave a few small shoves and strokes to the bulge in her bed.

Exiting out of her room led to a living space, attached to a kitchen and a doorway. It was very small, but affordable. And living alone, it had its perks. Like being able to pick up strays and sneaking them in.

Speaking of which, the woman looked towards the dark doorway of her room. Being able to hear the claws of the critter on her wooden floor. Squinting against the lights of the room. "I thought that would wake you up. It actually used to work on my cat."

The black creature snorted. "Are you implying that I'm like a cat?"

"Exactly. To be honest, you kinda are."

"Dragons are not like cats." He grumbled. Fluttering his wings to stretch them, and getting tiny clicks out of his glossy black scales.

"Yes they are." She teased. Getting him to growl again and head towards the couch. "Well, they're almost better than cats. Better company really. Pretty to look at-"

"Pretty..." Another grumble.

"But not as comfortable."

"Neither is a statue or a gemstone." Another snort. "We're made to be admired, not rested upon." Once again, the woman chuckled. Tending to the popping toast and cutting up some apples for breakfast.

"They also like to purr when they're happy-"

"Dragons don't purr." He stated a bit sternly. But due to his small size, it sounded so much like a child that was being stubborn.

"Dragons do purr. And I've heard you do it in your sleep before. It tends to vibrate through the sheets a bit too." She set the breakfast on two plates and brought them over. Expecting a glare as he often did during these arguments. But instead, he was on top of the couch, looking out the window. Many of the street lights were still on, and just faintly the skyline could be seen in the far distance. "You okay, Pseudo?" {Sue-Doe}

He didn't seem to answer. But she started to recognize the signs that were bothering him. Actually, many of the books on creatures that she studied were very close. With his ears hung a bit low, she could tell he was sad. "Leslie..." He mumbled, getting a noise in question with her mouth full. "...Why did you pick me up?"

"Would you rather me not have?" She teased again.

"That's not what I..." He drifted off. "Your world is strange. Many people just walked by me, almost afraid. But... You were not." He still didn't look at her, but the woman could see his purple eyes through the reflection.

"I know what you are." She shrugged. "Everyone else doesn't." Leslie noticed a pain in his expression, as his wings and head lowered. Getting up to sit beside him, she pet his back a bit. "Pseudo... I know you've been depressed about something lately. I'm not sure if it's because you lost your world or your family, but... I'm here for you, if you want to talk. There's probably not a lot I can do, but... You never know until you try." No response from him. A few knocks on the door got their attentions. "That's probably Erin." A loud groan came from the small one, once again making Leslie smile. "Oh please. You like her and you know it."

"Every one of you are pests." He grumbled. Getting down and curling up on the seat.

As the dark teal haired woman opened the door, another one with faint pink greeted her. "Almost ready to go?"

"Just a few more minutes. Come in though." She nodded as Leslie finished her breakfast.

"And how's the little squirt this morning?" Erin teased the small black critter.

"Mother of Bahamut, what did I do to deserve having this harpy pester me?" He growled at her. But not resisting her pets.

"He's still grumpy, huh?"

"As expected, really. It's only been about a week since he's been here."

"Feels longer." Erin giggled at the dragon's growl again. "Did you ever figure out what he is?"

"What do you mean by that!?" He curled his neck. "I'm a-"

"He's a Pseudodragon."

The other two stared at Leslie for a moment in silence. "...A what?" They both asked.

"Think... Midget dragon." It made Pseudo's jaw drop.

"He's a midget?" Erin asked, giggling.

"I'm a Hatchling!" He hissed at them both.

"Oh please, you're like two feet long. Dragons are supposed to be huge sizes." The two women laughed as the dragon looked back and forth between them.

"Witches." He grumbled. Laying his head back down. "Just leave already so I can get some decent sleep."

"Oh fine." Erin once again teased him. "But I'll-"

"No."

"Come back-"

"No."

"After class-"

"No."

"To keep you company." The dragon gave the woman a sharp look in order to stare her down. "He's so

cute when he's grumpy." He whimpered in defeat and just gave up.

"We'll be back later, Pseudo."

"Don't rush."

"Do you want anything while I'm out?" Leslie asked him while scratching his neck. Trying to get a purr out of him. He just tried to push her hand out of the way, but didn't reply. "Alright. See you later then."

As the two women left the apartment and closed the door, he heard Erin speak up rather loudly. "I wonder if we can find him a cute holiday suit for him while we're out." Only to have the dragon hiss at the door as loud as he could. As the two voices giggled once again, they started to fade away down the hall.

Letting out another loud sigh, and a groan, Psuedo's attention went to the opposite wall where the sunlight was breaking through. Eventually, he climbed back up to the window sill, once again looking down to the streets below. Seeing many cars and people beginning to walk the concrete sidewalks and across the roads. Remembering, what seemed to be a few days ago, that he was out on those streets. Starving to death several times. Getting hit by cars. Only to have been picked up by this strange woman who showed more excitement than fear. "I don't understand it." He mumbled. "I don't understand her..."

The roaring of flames filled in the silence between the black dragon and the blonde woman. Still trying to recover from the thick fog in his mind. "...Charmed?" He asked, repeating what she said. "How?"

"Oracles can persuade all living creatures to do what they want. Sometimes it takes more time or a stern voice. Sometimes even gestures like touches and gifts." The woman explained. Getting a strange exhale from the dragon. "Atlas..." Her attention turned towards the burning town they were in.

"...I did...?" She stroked his neck a bit as he overlooked the town. He let out a low growl as he changed his scale color white, though much of the soot still showed on him. Soon, the flames started to die out, and the woman in white began to feel a little cold. "Tia... I'm..."

"It's okay. You were being controlled. But I don't know of what else you've done." It ached Atlas' heart. "I want to see how much we can get you to remember though. Sometimes it will return over time, but for now I just want you to relax." She cupped his chin, leading it closer to her as a few people began to approach them.

"Are you alright Oracle?"

"Yes, I'm fine."

"And the beast is... Tamed?"

"He's no longer a threat. He was under someone else's control, someone who wanted to hurt these people." She looked at him, as his purple eyes were trying to predict what the other side of the conversation was saying. Whereas the dragon could not understand others, just like no one could understand him. "Is everyone safe?"

"Yes, we managed to get out. But there's still quite a few that are missing. We can only assume they're in the buildings."

"The fire is no longer a threat. It's out." The man looked at her. "He is able to control such things." It made the white one's ears drop and wings lower a bit, as Tia pet him between the eyes. "Try to find them before anything collapses, but breathe through a rag or clothing. The soot and ashes will only make you sick."

"Yes ma'am." And the man withdrew.

"...It's-"

"Don't blame yourself, Atlas. This is why Oracles are sometimes feared. We used to be hunted, until we came under the discipline of the church." She lifted his head up a bit. "This isn't your fault. But..."

"I can fix it. Maybe not completely, but I can..." She nodded at him. Giving the dragon permission to begin cleaning up the mess he had made.

After making a large shelter for the survivors out of rock, the dragon worked on the buildings that needed repair, while Tia tended to the wounded. Though many of the people there were still afraid of the black creature, they were told that he was in control once again. The Oracle explained how they had met before, and how she took care of him.

But it didn't stop most of the folk to avoid the dragon, or give him angry looks. For the most part, Atlas just remained out of their way. Remaking the last building out of stone, and trying to reclaim his memories of what happened, little by little. From when he returned to this planet, to just recently. "Any luck?" Tia asked him. He just studied her for a few moments. "You're not the first to go through this, Atlas. It's happened more often than you think."

He just sighed. "Nothing yet. I detest this." He resumed what he was creating. Sculpting the rock to make a sturdy home. "Not only losing memories, but feeling-"

"Responsible for something you didn't do. Yet you did do." Another look from the bronze one. "You're not the first." He grumbled a bit sadly at that. "But we'll find out, together." The woman smiled. "And when we do, then we can begin fixing what happened."

"Considering it can be fixed. I've never been able to bring the dead back to life."

"No one can do that. And that's not something that can be changed. But you've lost many, have you not? You know the signs and phases people tend to go through from loss." She stroked his side, under his wings after he laid down for a break. "You just need to let them be angry with you for a while. Eventually it will pass."

"Or I can let them take revenge on me every three or so hours." The woman smiled, but shook her head.

"It won't make it go away. It never does." She made her way to his arms and neck.

"...I remember a little. Being in that barn, time and time again." Atlas sighed. "You were talking to me... Yelling at me." She giggled quietly at that.

"Yelling about what?"

"For me to stop." She nodded. "And trying to get me to concentrate... To do something with that River saying. I'm still not making much sense out of it."

"When people are often controlled or hypnotized, they've often remembered being confined. Sometimes with others, and feeling the need to escape. Quite often, they think they're in a prison cell or something."

"That barn felt like a Cell." He snorted, getting her to giggle again. "But I remember it being hot. And waking up there over and over again... Not even falling asleep, just... Waking up."

"Shh..." He took a deep breath. "Don't rush it. You'll only strain yourself. I know it's hard to think about something else, but try to. Just relax, and let it come to you." He nodded. Leaning his muzzle into her.

"...I'm sorry, Tia." He whispered. "I'm sorry for being gone. I'm sorry for taking too long to find you. And I'm sorry for-"

"It's okay. Atlas, it's okay. You did what you could." The woman pet him. "You came back to me, that's what matters. I only expected trouble to follow." He sadly smiled at that, making her as well. "Do you want me to stay here with you?"

"...Yes. Please."

"Okay." And the dragon made a comfortable plant chair for her, as he worked on repairing the rest of the town.

The light of the sun reflected on the several shiny objects on the walls. From glass photo frames to pots and pans that were hung to save room. The darn things irked the small dragon, trying to get his rest before the harpies returned. Though the apartment was beginning to feel too cold for his body. Constantly shivering in his sleep only drove him to get more awake.

Eventually, Pseudo sighed and got up. As much as he wanted to stagger back into the bedroom and curl up into the blankets, something odd with the sunlight got his attention. Drawing him to climb back up onto the back of the couch and examine through the window.

Though it was shining in the far distance, the rest of the sky was covered by clouds above the sun. Allowing its rays to illuminate through the light snowfall onto the city. As for the city itself... Being up several stories high depressed the dragon. He had gotten so used to flying, that going without it felt like imprisonment. This entire world felt like a prison to him.

His gaze slowly fell to his own wings. Small, and immature. Definitely far from being ready to attempt to fly. Even so, where would he go? What would he do? He was still helpless. A lone species within a world run by beings that only reminded him of...

Once again, he sighed heavily. Looking down towards the streets and wondering where all the mechanical beasts were herding off to. They honestly reminded him of a form of wagon, the wooden carriages that were pulled by horses. Except these were much louder, and somehow smelled worse to him. Staining the entire city walls with that stench.

"We're pretty high up." A male voice said. Causing the hatchling to yelp very loudly and fall off the couch. Only to be caught before hitting the ground by a large paw, and then brought to a white, warm, furry chest. "Don't worry, I got you."

"Don't scare me like that!" The young one hissed, trying to paw his way out of the forest of white and see what startled him. Looking up to a large polar bear's muzzle and brown eyes.

"You're as cute as Lexar is. Much smaller than he was though." The bear gave him a few licks.

"H-hey! Quit that!" The black one swatted the other in the snout, only to have him chuckle. "Who are you? What are you?"

"That's a common question, but a difficult answer. Eventually I'll tell you. But you can call me Bartan."

"What do you want?" Pseudo half demanded, jumping his way back onto the couch's back.

"I believe that's not a question for me, but for you." The large bear said, looking out the window and half squinting. "Wow, that's bright." A faint downward wave of his paw and the light of the sun dimmed

as a few clouds seemed to move into its way. "Much better."

It was easier for the hatchling to study the large one's figure this way. Six legs, multiple sets of ears and tails. Large white coat with several black markings on the neck and back. Studying him made the dragon's neck curl when they met eye to eye once again. This creature wasn't anything he had seen before. "The First Snowfall Is Always The Whitest." Bartan said with a smile.

"What?"

"You are called Pseudo in this world, yes?" Another strange look from the younger one. "What do you want?"

"Please do not tell me that you're some sort of holiday spirit that these witches have been prattling on about." It got the bear to laugh loudly, but shook his head nonetheless. Regardless, the question began to ache the dragon's heart when he started to think about it. Drifting his purple eyes back outside.

"Freedom? There's many forms of it." The black one didn't respond. "Perhaps another chance at the past?" That time the critter looked at him. "But I've seen that desire a thousand times. In the end, it didn't make a difference. Even when given the opportunity. If anything they just made it worse."

"...What are you?"

"I'll get to that. But not here. Before I can get to that, I need to take you somewhere." A bit of a sad look from those purple eyes made the bear smile sadly at him. "Only for a little while. We'll be back before they return."

"Great." Pseudo tossed his snout.

"Come." The large beast grabbed him into his chest once again, but not without a loud yelp from the dragon. Climbing over the couch, the beast seemed to walk straight through the wall and window, onto the deck below. Turning around and climbing the vertical wall to the top of the building, Bartan placed the little one on top of his head.

"What are you doing!?" He hiss at the white one. Trying his best to instinctively claw his way into the mane for dear life. "I can't fly yet!"

"For someone who's already died about twelve times in this form already, you're quite frightened." The bear chuckled. "No need to use claws, you're fine." For a few moments, the small one studied him, and began to feel something a bit out of place. More like the pull of gravity was no longer towards the ground, but to the beast instead. "Almost there."

"Almost where?" The dragon grumbled. Feeling the cool winds from the top of the tall building and being. Once the creature reached it, the smaller one's heart began to flutter a bit. Overlooking the city

with the winds in his face once again. It was like a dream he longed for.

"It's kinda nice. But no countryside or large fields of meadows. Cities tend to be rid of all that feels natural." Bartan said, slowly moving his head and the hatchling on it. Moving it up and down as if giving the impression of flight. "Ready to take off?"

"Wait-what!?" The black one double taked. Only to have the beast jump into the air and glide. Seeing several of the black markings on his back fade into ethereal ribbons and be used as wings. Though they did not seem to follow the same physics that Pseudo knew of.

"What are you waiting for?"

"Waiting for?" The dragon curled his neck.

"Yeah, fly." Another large push sent the critter into the air a bit, only to paw at it frantically and grab back a hold of the furry beast.

"What do you mean 'Fly'!?"

"You already know how. You've done it a thousand times. So, fly."

"Do I really need to explain what it means to mature!?" He grumbled. Feeling the bear tilt his head. "Meaning, these twigs are not developed to hold my weight!"

"And that's stopping you now?"

"Considering it stopped me a lot the last time I was this age, I'd just assume it would!"

"Well, assumptions make an ass of you." The bear chuckled. Grabbing the smaller one with a paw and tossing him into the air. With a loud frantic yelp, and many clawing into the air, the dragon flapped his wings in panic. But to his surprise, it was taking. Being able to fly as normal. "Granted, I'm helping you, but don't let it stop you from enjoying yourself."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, go nuts!" And the bear pushed him away. Just before the two would hit a building and go around it. The small one easily corrected himself like instinct. Doing Ailerons and Barrel Rolls with a large smile on his muzzle. It felt just like the little one remembered: Free. After several minutes, the beast spoke up. "Alright, follow me." Bartan led on, allowing the hatchling to catch up to his speeds freely.

"Where are we going?" Looking ahead, there was a strange hole in the sky. One that almost looked like a Bubble of Night throughout it. "What is that?"

"Home." Bartan smiled at him. Flying straight into it.

Chapter 2

The small one woke up on what felt like a large pelt. Eventually he became aware that it was moving, and made the dragon shoot up in a bit of a yelp. "Relax. You're fine." The white one said, walking along the long grassy meadows. "Most tend to pass out going through there. It's not easy on the body, mind, or soul really."

"M'what was...?" He grumbled. Getting a soft chuckle from the large one.

"It was called a Time Storm. Basically a portal from one area to another. I say area loosely. Could be another time, another place, another planet, or another universe entirely." Bartan stopped, sitting down and letting the dragon climb to his shoulder. "Do you know where we are?"

Overlooking the large meadows felt familiar, but the several large trenches that lead to the coastline did not. There were ruins to the south of what almost seemed to be an old city, but to the far southwest was a city in the distance. Farther south, what seemed to be deserts and mountains. Almost dead looking areas. "I'm not sure." He returned to the bear to see a bit of a sad look on his face, looking out into the sea.

"...They call this the Draconian's Claw. The last mark of a so-called legend in this world. Distraught about losing nearly everything in his last battle: from his mate, his comrades, his enemy, and his friend, he ended up carrying them back home. Only to destroy that as well." The dragon's heart ached. "On his final attempt to take his own life, he detonated his home, sending fissures through the lands and fire into the sky."

"...Draconian..." Pseudo mumbled. "That's a word often used for a Tyrant."

"You forget. You may have not ruled over them through laws and social status. But you did rule the world. It was yours. And the people within it feared you." A bit of silence between the two. "This is five hundred years since that legend disappeared. The nest migrated away to the west, worried that he might have cursed the land. The city was eventually taken out by the next threat, but they did well to defend themselves. Many of them got out and built a stronger stronghold. Which turned into that city."

"And this... Hero?"

"...Could not die. Even when his body was thrown to the heavens and incinerated, he was reborn in another dragon's womb. Only to lose that egg by a thief and then to a time storm. Throwing it into the streets of a city. Hatching and attempting to survive on its own. Until a young woman picked him up." Pseudo whimpered. Lowering his head.

"Only to remember everything he's gone through and lose everything he had."

"Lose?" The bear tilted his head.

"My Atonements. I can't use them anymore."

"Why couldn't wyrmlings use them?"

"Do you really have to ask?" He curled his neck. "It's because they're idiots."

"Is it? Or do they just need to be a certain age in order to let magic develop in their blood?" Bartan smiled at Pseudo's blank stare. Then the black one sighed heavily.

"So I gotta wait for a hundred and fifty years in order to use them?" He whined.

"Well, you'll mature faster than normal. Your body still keeps a lot of its memories, the same way your mind does. Though it still needs to develop, it knows what to do now. It's just a matter of letting it." Another smile. "Granted, dying will slow it down about a week or two. That's probably why you're still a hatchling right now."

Another whine. "Ugh. But getting hit by a metal wagon beats starving to death."

"You mean a Car?"

"Is that what it's called?" The white one nodded. "Darn things smell worse than horses. And they don't taste good either."

"They're not made to be eaten." He chuckled. "But you'll learn the ways of that world, and many others." Another sad look from those purple eyes. "No matter what you attempt to do, you can't stop this Pseudo. You're only going to move forward, willing or not."

The dragon sighed. "Is that why you're here?"

"Not exactly. I was asked to see you about something else."

"What?"

"I'll show you. And on the way there, I'll tell you what I am." Bartan said, motioning the hatchling to move on his head as he began to walk south.

The sun eventually woke the black one up. Loving the warm feeling his scales seemed to absorb, but there was always that time where it got into his eyes. Though he shifted around to find a spot where it didn't affect him, it was too late. By the time he found it, Atlas was already awake.

Yawning loudly and snapping his jaws a few times, he looked at the remains of a bonfire he lit last night to keep them warm. Though he felt the woman move in his sleep, he didn't really remember it until now. Getting off his belly, he stretched his legs and wings. Shaking the dew off his scales, he began walking towards the people of the town. Assuming that Tia was with them.

Approaching the townsfolk continued their untrustworthy glares at the beast. He couldn't blame them though. For the most part he just avoided eye contact with them and attempted to ignore them. Not like they were any use to him anyway, a creature he could not understand. Looking around, he did spy a few women in white gowns, but not the specific one that the Blonde would normally wear.

Sitting there within the town limits, but a bit outside of it, he scouted the streets. Until one young man came up to the dragon and tried talking to it. Atlas tilted his head at him, perking his ears a bit trying to understand what he was saying, but it was no real use. He could tell that the tone was not aggressive or angry. It honestly reminded the dragon of asking him of a favor. Slightly higher pitched than normal to attempt to appeal to another.

In the end, the dragon shrugged his wings and shook his head. Until the man started motioning the black one to follow him. Grumbling, but thinking perhaps he might lead him to Tia, he started to follow. Leading him to a stone house on the other side of town. Looking at it, Atlas began to wonder if this was more of a complaint than a favor. Which honestly irked him.

Being brought to the other side of the home, a few children scurried by. The man calling out to them in a pleasant tone. And of course they would gawk at the large one walking by. Grunting at that look, but noticing a bit of fear still within that stare. It's likely they didn't understand what exactly happened. One moment the dragon was a threat, destroying their home along with everyone else's. The next, he was fixing it. Making repairs and helping them reclaim what he had the power to do so. It was probably confusing to them, and a bit frightening, not knowing when the creature would switch back into attack mode and once again start tearing up their lives.

Atlas shook his head, trying not to be reminded of such things for now, and just see what this man wanted. Leading the large one to the back of the home, he started talking again. Pointing to large lines

on the ground that almost looked like a rectangle. Perhaps asking for an extension for his home. The dragon nodded, but the big question to him was where he wanted the door. "Where do you want the door?" He attempted to ask. Of course not getting a great response from the man. Grumbling, he went to the closest stone wall and turned bronze. Making a doorway and getting the man to wave his arms and stop the beast. Along with a surprised scream of who Atlas assumed was his wife on the inside of the building.

"Relax. The door." He motioned to it and circled his paws around it. "Which wall?" Moving to the drawings and pointing to each one of them. The man looked at him for a moment and pointed to the new doorway. Shaking his head. "That's just an example! Of course you don't actually want one there!" The bronze one tossed his snout. Removing that doorway to shut the man up about it, the dragon once again pointed to the walls on the drawings. Looking at it, he pointed to the one already built onto the home. Motioning where he would like it, and the dragon did so. "Now you might want to move outside of the building zone." Once again, that dumb look from him, and the dragon just didn't bother going about it further. Stepping outside himself, Atlas rose the four stone walls and made a roof to assist it. Half locking the man inside.

Expecting some sort of panic or screaming, the dragon was surprised to hear the man cheer for joy. Then go to his mate and do the same again. As the two came out to greet the large one again, they came closer to him and gave the bronze one a hug. "N-no. Don't touch me. Stop. Stop." Shuttering in discomfort, he heard a familiar giggle from the far side.

"Appealing to the people, are you?" Tia asked him. Getting the dragon's ears to turn purple and start squirming out of the embrace. As the man and woman let go, they began speaking to the Oracle. "They're very thankful for your favor."

"They say that now, but I didn't put in a floor. They'll feel that when it comes closer to winter." He snorted. Still getting the woman to smile. As the other woman came closer to the dragon for another hug, the large one took a few steps back. Actually feeling the new wall behind him.

"He doesn't like to be touched much. But he does like children." A loud hiss came from the creature, only making Tia laugh loudly.

"That voice of yours is a double edged sword. Don't forget that." He grumbled. "I will not be used as a plaything for your spawn."

"Oh relax. Thank you Mr. Johnlen for coming to ask him yourself. Hopefully it will get others less afraid of him. Yes, he is quite helpful, just grumpy most of the time."

"You try living in my claws for a day and see how you like it." The dragon snorted again. Walking up to the woman and picking her up softly with his jaws. "Naow ets gea oovin." He attempted to say. Only getting a loud yelp and a trail of giggles out of the blonde one. Until the dragon turned corner and seen several bags of luggage. "Wooat es aw iss?"

"What?" She said through her giggles. The now black one tossed his snout and set her down.

"What is all this?"

"Oh." Tia attempted to control her laughter. "We're heading to the east a bit. I want to find out how many other towns and cities you might have destroyed." It made the dragon's ears drop and head lower as the woman caught it. "Hey, it's okay. But I want to see how much of it we can restore."

"Clearly you don't understand how I work." He mumbled. "You're only lucky you caught me in the beginning of this town. Odds are there's nothing left to the others."

"But either way, I need to report this to the church. Not only of your rampages, but of a rogue Oracle that is behind it. I also want to clear your name of this." He was silent about it, but nodded nonetheless. "Besides, it'd be nice to do some traveling with you. As long as it isn't flying."

"Oh please. You expect me to walk there?"

"Yes. At a slow relaxing pace. Unless you think there are others under the Oracle's control." Atlas shrugged his wings and shook his head.

"Not that I remember right now. And if there is?"

"It can wait a day. At least we're close to a large church." She looked at the baggage. "Are you okay with carrying this?"

Atlas curled his neck. "This is all yours? I expected you to travel light." He grumbled, but didn't argue. Grabbing the woman surprised her while he placed her on his back. Then passing the large bags one by one. "You'll have to keep an eye on them though. Unless you can somehow attach them to my spines."

"I'm surprised you're not arguing over this more." He snorted at that, getting her to chuckle.

"Believe me, I've already thought it through. I would state several reasons why you should carry it instead, and eventually you would just use your manipulative hands to get me to do what you want."

"And you're saying no to a chin scratching-?"

"Shhh! Keep your voice down, witch! Or else you're going to let everyone know my only weakness." He hissed silently. "Why do you think I didn't argue in the first place!?" Tia just giggled at him.

"Alright. I just need to do a few more things first with the new mayor. Then we'll leave. Okay?" He nodded, laying down and raising a platform for her.

"Just don't take too long. I don't want anyone else Pestering me for favors." He grumbled, following her at a distance while many of the children came up to her to say their goodbyes. Though he could only

understand half of the conversation, he could almost fill in what they were saying. ("Goodbye" "We'll Miss You" "Come Back And Play With Us Again") It made him wonder how someone with such power was so loved, yet he was often feared by everyone.

Though that answer was self explanatory: Atlas often used his powers for self convenience or destruction. Weaponizing nearly everything in his arsenal with the purpose to harm. Tia only healed. From her ability to understand nearly every creature that was alive, to diplomacy and empathy.

But at one point, he tried to do things her way. Not under her lead, but to be more kind and caring. He often remembered how devastating it was to lose those people close to him. This woman, though he could tell for being so young that she had many bad experiences... Tia still smiled. Something he could not bring himself to do.

As the woman went into the new Town Hall, Atlas waited outside. Instinctively almost sitting, until he felt something on his back slide. Carefully laying down instead, he couldn't shake the feeling of being stared at once again by people. Though many of them were still trying to go about their daily stuff or just socializing, the dragon detested the feeling. Almost being blamed for something he had no control over.

Yet that phrase puzzled him. Wondering how he could become so manipulated by someone so easily. All because he tried to help out a young woman. That's all he could really remember. But it was coming back to him, and he could almost picture her face. As well as say her name. At least a nickname that he had given her. It was on the tip of his red tongue.

As Tia exited the building with a few other people, it got the dragon's attention. Though still talking to him, she was waving to people, actually motioning them forward. "People of Ebonhoath." She spoke to them. "I'm sorry, but I must take my leave early. The circumstances have changed, though I'll try to be back to visit you all again sometime. The injuries that lie with your friends and family are only minor now, and will recover normally with time."

She continued. "Though it is tragic what happened to the town, I am obligated to tell you: Because of how he was manipulated by another Oracle, you cannot blame Atlas for what he has done." Once again, that feeling of being watched. "No one here is allowed to hold a grudge, or attempt any other aggressive acts towards him because of this situation. He is as much as a victim as you were. Though they are often suggested to help pay dues to losses like this; I'm sure you can all agree that he's done more to make things right than he needed to. Now let's put this behind us, and move on." And many of the townspeople nodded.

As Tia walked towards the dragon, Atlas couldn't look at her. He hated being treated like a victim. Being used as a symbol for sympathy. To the point where he almost wanted to say that he was in control. It was easier for him to deal with fear than this. As the woman stroked his neck a bit, he changed bronze and raised a platform for her. Feeling her get settled in, she pointed to a path and whispered for him to take it. With a faint nod, he rose. Walking towards it and finally leaving the heavy place behind.

Chapter 3

"So... You're a God of Gods." The hatchling stared blankly into the space ahead, trying to make sense of what he just heard.

"Well... Yes and no. I'm not the Counterweight of this universe, so I don't command over the Forces here. But I do have final word within my own universe that I made."

"...So, God of Gods?" The bear chuckled again. "What are you doing with me then?" Suddenly, the black one sucked in a breath. "Taath. I finally pissed someone off above me and now you're here to remove me, aren't you? Is it because of the Giants? Because they had it coming."

"Yes, they threw a rock at you. I've heard." Another chuckle.

"They threw a rock at me."

"But I'm not here to remove you or take away something of yours. But I need to talk to you about something."

"...My immortality? Do you know what caused it?"

"Yes. But-"

"What is it?"

"I can't tell you."

"Why?" The little one grumbled.

"Because you're not supposed to know." Bartan smiled at him, just barely being able to see the hatchling toss his head.

"What kind of reason is that?"

"Reason enough to keep me from telling you. But it's not about your immortality-"

"Is it natural?"

"We're not talking about it-"

"Is it inherited?"

"We're not talking about it-"

"Is it because of my Atonements?"

"Pseudo-"

"Come onnnn!" The dragon sat on the bear's muzzle. "I have to know. Is there a way I can die?"

"...I can't tell you that. You'll have to find out for yourself." The black one sighed at the answer, his head and ears low. "We're here though." Pseudo looked around at the middle of a large flat area of nothing.

"...What is here?"

"What I want to discuss. Do you recognize it? It's the right area, but the wrong time."

"Wrong time...?" Looking around, he seen two large craters in the distance. And it began to come back to him. "The battle with the giants?" The bear nodded, getting the dragon to yelp and hang on for dear life once again.

"Let's rewind a bit shall we?" And just like that, the sun began to set in the east. Rapidly flipping through the sky like a large strobe light. As many storms and creatures came and went in reverse to the point where it was too hard to keep track of for the young one. Closing his eyes for a few moments made him feel dizzy, as Bartan began to take a few more steps ahead. "And right here."

The dragon looked up and yelped at a large sand giant that had totems around his neck. As well as another adult dragon that seemed to be shifting in colors. The iridescent essence of raw power was flaking off of him and fading like small tongues of flame. Though the two were completely frozen in time, the dragon was baring his fangs at the giant, almost being able to hear his roar. "Is that...?"

"That is you, fighting your last enemy here. If you want to call it fighting, that is. This was kinda a one sided battle once you went berserk."

"What the hell's wrong with me? Is this how I lost my Atonements?" The small one asked, trying his best to lean in for a closer look.

"It's difficult to tell, but I'm pretty sure you're just too young. However, this... State could possibly disable them due to exhaustion."

"State?"

"This is what I wanted to talk to you about. It's called an Outbreak."

"Outbreak?" He double took at the white one. "Like a disease?"

"Not quite. It's not contagious by normal means." The dragon tilted his head. "I'll explain that later, but this... For lack of a better description, is the power of emotion. Often one involving anger or determination. Assertiveness or Aggressiveness. It's kinda like an Adrenaline Rush, but thrown into overdrive."

"Adrenaline?"

"It's a gland within your system that gives you energy in times of need. It makes you very strong and powerful for a short period of time." Bartan explained, slowly walking around the two creatures and studying the large dragon on display.

"And... I did this?" Another nod with a loud yelp. The small one climbed back onto the bear's head. "How?"

"When you lost... Her." He motioned towards a direction, and the dragon didn't have to look to know what he was talking about. "Pain is often a large cause of anger, as well as Loss. And because of your immortality, the Forces don't have a firm grip on your limitations. Allowing you to reach levels that you, nor they even knew existed. Which is a bit bad."

"Bad?"

"Yes. Do you see the sky up there?" Looking up, there seemed to be several barely visible cracks almost floating in the air. When the Counterweight began walking around it, the cracks looked much more third dimensional.

"What is...?"

"This is a break in reality. Quite literally a crack into the fabric of your world and the universe itself. If it's opened up too much, there's a good chance that you're going to create a large wound within it."

"Meaning what?"

"Think... A black hole. A portal to outside the universe, and quite often the Terrasque's lair."

"That being that feeds off of negativity?" Another nod. "And... I did this?"

"Because of how these universes rely on the Terrasque for power, they're often built around it. Though, by normal means the universe is stable. But when you throw in a game breaker like an

Outbreak..."

"Which is the power of emotion. Mostly Anger, which is negative and what the Terrasque feeds off of..." The dragon thought out loud, and the bear nodded again.

"It feels it from the other side, and demands to get closer to it. While on this side, the reality is not isolated enough to support such raw power in one area."

"Like putting too much pressure into a glass tank. It eventually will crack and break apart."

"And hurt the Forces trying to keep it together. Often enough it will cause them Aneurysms, and sometimes even death."

Pseudo swallowed loudly. "Did... I?"

"You hurt them, but they remained alive and recovered. However, they didn't understand the state enough to approach it."

"But you do." Another nod.

"It's complex, but I was in a universe where these Outbreaks were rather common. And the universe itself was very well insulated. Able to support a tremendous amount of them in one area." He took a breath. "Anyway, there's a few things I more or less wanted to warn you about when using this ability. Once you get back to your regular self."

"If I'm ever able to do it again." He grumbled. "I don't know how many more mates I can handle losing."

"Trust me, it's much easier to do it a second time. But you really should avoid using it to begin with. Now, all Outbreaks are usually symbolic of some sort of power. And often revolve around that form. Yours is the Atonements, and is much easier to use them in combination with one another without having to Atonement to a specific one."

"So, I'm in all Atonements at once?"

"Yes. It's been often said while in an Outbreak that your mind is Fogless and Clear. You probably didn't really notice while you were in this state because you were acting on instinct." The dragon lowered his head. "Hey, it happens to everyone the first time. But going berserk like this is a hazard to everyone. Even those who are not even around you. I believe you've already noticed that after looking five hundred years from now in the future that there is nothing left in this area."

"...Yes."

"The less control you have with yourself, the more dangerous you are to everything around you. But

like I said, it gets easier the more you do it. Being able to control your limits and energy, let alone the abilities given from the Outbreak while out of it."

"Abilities given?"

"You won't feel it right now, but once you start getting your Atonements back, you'll feel it's easier to use manipulations outside of Atonements. Consider it a gift of the Outbreak itself." Bartan said, still studying the Iridescent dragon, inch by inch.

"Gift? As in, you learn to use a small amount of it without actually being in it?"

"Now you're understanding. They all come with different forms. Some are based on Elemental effects like yours or a single one. Some are based on Momentum, or the power of the Sun. There was even one that would quickly heal the user if they were to be incapacitated or die from an attack."

"And along with that, there would be ones that would cause something like Sickness or Disease." The bear nodded at the small one. "And that's what you meant by it being Contagious. They can't harm anyone outside of the Outbreak other than that?"

"That depends solely on the control of the user. You can easily hurt someone with your abilities who are just bystanders or comrades."

"Which is why I need discipline for it." The Counterweight nodded again.

"Just like the way your Atonements worked. You need to learn how to use it."

"But without an Insulated area, how can I even practice it?" The bear didn't quite answer, looking distracted. As the hatchling began to trace the brown eyes to its sights, it led to under the large dragon's tail. "Bartan. Hey!" Pseudo gave him a swat, and the white one shook his head.

"You'll have to find one. And you will." The black one grumbled. Not really sure what was worse between the vague answer or the Counterweight looking under his tail. "To make it easier though, I have taken the liberty to develop a sense in you that helps you detect the well isolated areas-

"Wait, you toyed with my brain!?" The little one whimpered.

"Oh relax. I know what I'm doing. And they know of it too."

Pseudo groaned. "Why do I always feel like I'm being manipulated?"

"That's because you are, yet you aren't at the same time." The hatchling gave out a noise in question. "Pseudo, you ever wonder why you were able to do this? Forces are often around to stop disasters like this by putting on a cap or a limit on people. They didn't just forget about you, they can't control you that well. And when they try, well... You often put up a fight, willing or not."

"So you're saying I should be a good little wyrmling?" He grumbled, tapping the bear on the head.

"By all means, do what you want. You may be a wild horse in their stable, but they're the ones that need to plan around it. You have the option to make a difference, decide a choice that isn't part of their script. And I'm not just going to remove you because it would make their lives easier. Being a Force is hard work, they need to know how to deal with situations like you."

"So... Be a bad little wyrmling?" The dragon's head tilted.

"Do what you feel is best. It's your life, they just no longer have a say in it."

"And what about you?"

"What about me?" Bartan teased.

"What's going to happen if I get completely out of hand? Outbreaking everywhere and trashing this entire universe?"

"Well, if you keep breaking it, you're going to find yourself with the Terrasque. Otherwise, if I feel the need to step in, I will if asked. But I'm not a babysitter or a law enforcer. I'll help you if I feel like a friend of mine is in need. Otherwise, you and they are on your own."

The small one couldn't help but look around and try to find the dark purple dragon in the distance. Doing so made his heart ache a bit. "...So what do I do now?"

"Whatever you feel like, Pseudo." He didn't reply to that. "If you feel you need guidance, I will gladly give it. But you need to ask first."

The smaller one growled at that. "You really have to make this difficult for me, don't you?" The bear chuckled. "...Where should I go next then, Bartan? What should I do?"

"I've already told you." Another noise in question. "The First Snowfall Is Always The Whitest. That's your hint. Find that, and it will lead you to where you want to go."

"Find snow? Like back in the city?"

"Not quite. But yes." Another growl. "It's amusing to be vague, forgive me."

"Says you. It's frustrating on my part." The black one curled his neck and sighed. "...Can you... Tell me what happened to her?"

"Nitaka? She found Death, if that's what you mean. As in her beloved. Though, she does miss you too."

"And... Will I ever be able to see her again?"

"...Yes. You will. But... It will be a while. A very long time." Another sigh from the smaller one. "But don't give up Pseudo. You've got a lot to do ahead of you." A bit of silence. "Do you wish to go back?"

"...I think so."

"Alright." The bear opened up another Time Storm and walked through. The sights once again hurt the little one's head, but he remained conscious. Getting the scent of the woman's living quarters once again. "I'll have to go pretty soon. But I'll try to come back to visit you. Hopefully at a time when you are more grown and mature."

"So you can teach me a bit more about this Outbreak?" The little one jumped back onto the couch, looking at the Counterweight who was staring at him for a moment.

"...Yes."

"You paused there for a moment." Bartan shyly looked away from the hatchling. "...Why?" The little one glared at him.

"N-no reason." A grumble at that answer. "Another time, Pseudo. We'll have some fun then."

"I don't like the sound of that." The black one placed a paw over his eyes, and when he looked around, the white one was gone. "Goodbye to you too." He snorted. Getting up and laying in the dark room with the blankets. Finding it a bit easier for him to sleep.

The two walked the calm roads in silence for a while. Long after the town was no longer visible. "Is everything okay?" Tia asked, stroking the dragon's neck while he carried her.

He half looked back at her in silence, and straight forward again. "...Yes." He sighed through his nostrils. "I just dislike being treated like a victim."

"Not many do. They often feel Vulnerable. It's one reason why I wanted to get you out of there." His head lowered a little bit.

"It feels... Different, honestly. Being on this side of things." The woman made a noise in question. "I'm so used to being the one that people fear. That creatures fear. Being the cause and blame of the destruction. I can't say I like it over here."

"Really? I mean, I know you don't like the attention of others, but you would rather have the negative

attention instead?"

"Yes. I know how to deal with being Feared. But with Sympathy... I don't know what I'm supposed to do." His scales clicked. "It honestly gives me shivers."

"I can hear that." She chuckled. "I'll try not to feel sorry for you then. I just didn't want the townspeople to blame you for what wasn't your fault." He nodded. "We're required to tell that to people by the church."

"You speak rather highly of it."

"The church is for the people, Atlas. And it's for you at the moment as well. Try not to think of it as sympathy." Another stroke on his neck.

The black one grumbled. "Fine. But I'm not becoming part of this Church because of it."

"Not many do. If anything, they volunteer. But Oracles are required to come to the church for training and discipline. Or else..."

"Things like this happen." Another grumble and a bit of silence.

Tia shifted a bit on his back. "Do you mind stopping for a moment, I'd like to walk for a while." And the dragon did so. Laying down and creating a platform for her. But of a stroke on his chin, and he tried to nuzzle her without pushing the woman off her feet.

Getting back up, he had to slow his pace. "...I've been remembering more." It got her attention. "She was a slave. Been one all her life. Never really having a friend or one to lean on. Not even close to animals."

"She wasn't? Perhaps she just never heard them."

"She was working at a ranch until the owner of it died. His son got everything he had, including the slaves. On their way there, that wagon was attacked by bandits, and this young one tried to run to escape them."

"Until she ran into you?"

"Until I *accidentally* landed on him." He snorted, getting her to chuckle at his reaction. "You don't look the type to find death amusing."

"Forgive me. But it's just how you said it." He smirked a bit at that. "And from there?"

"I was killed during the landing, but was still warm for most of the night. She ended up sleeping on my leg until morning, when I revived."

"And from there, you got to know her."

"I suppose you could say I took her under my wing. But it was only until the next town." The dragon exhaled. "I was going to get her to start a new life. Find a new master so I would be rid of her. But after getting there..."

"You got attached to her?" Atlas double taked, then snorted very loudly while curling his neck. Sending the woman into giggles.

"N-no!" He hissed. "I tried to talk to someone and forgot that I couldn't understand their gibberish." Another giggle. "But she could understand me, as well as them."

"So she was an Oracle? It's a wonder you didn't piece that together then."

"I couldn't remember why at the time. Sometimes... Information escapes me when I die, and it takes a while to get it back." Another exhale. "So I went back and retrieved her so she could translate."

"What were you looking for?"

"You." He snorted. "But I needed her help, it was embarrassing."

"Oh please. We can't be the first few people you've asked for help." Another snort, but no answer. "What happened next?"

"I made her some money, and got her some more clothing. She also bought me a few gifts."

"Gifts? How sweet." Tia still couldn't help but giggle at his groan. "What were they?"

"One was a gemmed amulet, which is a horrible thing to give a dragon that has an attraction to shiny things."

"I'll keep that in mind."

"Keep which part in mind?" The black one grumbled, getting another giggle and a motion to carry on. His ears went back, but he continued. "Anyway, the other was some Massage Oil for my sore wing at the time. As well as for-" The dragon stopped in place, his ears turning a deep purple.

"Atlas? What's wrong?"

"N-nothing!" He tried not to look at her, but the woman spotted his ears.

"What's wrong with your ears? Are they hurt?"

"N-no..." He cleared his throat. "She then wanted me to tell a story about how Bartan cured me of my

addiction to shiny things by-" Another loud groan, and the dragon covered his face with a paw. "N-nevermind."

"There it is again. Are you blushing?" Tia asked, getting a cross between a grumble and a whimper for a response. Stroking his arm, she looked at him. "You are. And you are... Slightly aroused?"

The dragon jumped a bit backwards from her. "H-how did you...?"

"I can read people when I touch them. But usually when you think of Bartan, you're angry. Unless..." Her gaze turned a bit cross. "Atlas. Did you do anything to this Oracle?"

"N-no! I-I didn't do anything!" She stared him down, and his head and ears lowered.

"You're lying to me."

"I did nothing but help her. And... Well..." He swallowed loudly.

"Atlas." She said sternly, putting her hands on her hips.

"She wanted to... Reward me. So I... Let her." He half whimpered. Then snorted at her while removing his own gaze. "I don't see why you're looking at me like that. It's not like-" A large clamp on his ear made him yelp really loudly, as Tia pulled his head down.

"Did you seriously let her pleasure you sexually!?" She roared at the whimpering dragon as it tried its best to struggle free. "Atlas! Did you?"

"It was her idea to begin with! She wanted to give her consent to me and so-" Another loud yelp as the woman twisted the ear. Making the dragon attempt to lay down sideways to relieve the pain, causing the luggage on his back to fall off. "It's like a damn vice!"

"You took advantage of an innocent young woman!? With Massage Oil!?" Eventually, the dragon pushed Tia too far to hold onto his ear. Whimpering loudly as he tried to hold onto it, the woman just walked onto the other side of his head and grabbed the other ear. "How many times?"

"Please don't make me answer that!"

"So more than once?" A whimper, then a louder one when she started twisting the ear.

"Maybe four times?" A fierce twist sent Atlas into loud yelps and almost to tears. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Just either rip it off or let go already!" The woman tried to imitate his growl, letting go and causing the black one to collapse. Tending to his hurting ears. "Seriously, you couldn't resort to just punching me in the snout again? You had to go for the ears?" Another whimper as Tia walked on the other side. Immediately covering that ear once again.

"I can't believe you." She mumbled, heading to her luggage.

"I was under her spell! It's not like I had sex with her or anything." A glare from the woman.

"Did you?"

"N-no!" He curled his neck. "I mean it! Besides, I wouldn't be able to fit. Why does everyone think that?"

"So, what did she do?" He whimpered at her again. "I'm judging whether or not to rip them off in your sleep." The black one's head lowered.

"She... Just stroked me off a few times. That's it. And found my secret... Spot for purring." Tia studied him for a bit, then placed a hand on his side. Though he whimpered, the dragon let her.

"...You're telling the truth." He nodded. "Geez, Atlas... How could you?"

"It's not like as soon as she mentioned it I lifted my tail. She kept talking about it, and well... I started dreaming about it." He admitted. Raising a platform where the luggage had fallen, and let Tia place it on his back once again. "You were in those dreams."

"Me?"

"Yes... I was back in the Barn, and you... Wanted me to let her get to know me. Get her closer to me as a friend or companion... I actually thought it was you contacting me somehow through my dreams, and well..." He shrugged his wings. "I only went with it because you wanted me to. Otherwise I would've just snuck off into the woods and just-"

"Enough." The woman covered her face, trying so hard to stay mad and not laugh at him.

"...I didn't do anything to her. Well, actually... I did let her sit on my neck while she scratched my chin. The vibrations pleased her at the same time she was doing it. That's the closest thing I did to 'Take Advantage' of her." She studied Atlas again for a bit, until he moved his haunches to her. To the point where it was touching her. "It's just how... Dragons do things. And I told her that she should act more like a dragon."

"You mean mount the first thing you see?" She smiled at him, and he shrugged again.

"It's a gift to us. I wanted her to see that there was more that she had to give than her value as a physical being." He sighed. "Want to keep beating me until it's out of your system? Just don't go after the ears." He whimpered, getting her to chuckle lightly.

"No... I'm not supposed to punish my patients." She walked up to him. "How are they?"

"They feel like a pair of horses bit them for dear life while I was flying." He grumbled, releasing his paw slowly and flicking them a bit. "I can't even feel them."

"They're fine." She tapped his nose.

"Why would you go after the ears out of all places?"

"It worked on children, and the last time I punched you, you barely flinched. So I thought it might work. It's rather effective really."

He growled at her. "Well, if you keep getting to know me, you'll be ripping these things off before I'm even through. They're very sensitive."

"I can see that. How on earth did you take out an army of Ettins, but were brought down single handedly by a young girl?" She giggled at his snort.

"First the Ears, now the Ego. Some healer you are." He grumbled.

Chapter 4

The hatchling woke up in silence, other than the traffic that could barely be heard from outside. Meaning the two women have not returned yet, and he was getting hungry. Clawing his way out of the mess of blankets, Pseudo returned to the bright room once again. Waiting for his eyes to adjust to the harsh glare.

Going to the kitchen, he studied how Leslie used some of the contraptions before. One seemed to be a storage device that would constantly produce cold and frost for storing food. While another was able to conjure heat without flames. Though the red lines within it almost looked like it was metal that was getting an electrical current through it.

What puzzled the smaller one is how to command such a device. Climbing onto the cupboards, he attempted to look at the dials of it. Unable to understand most of the characters, but four dials seemed to have a picture of four circles beside each one. With a different circle filled in, while the others remained hollow. Shrugging, the black one turned one, feeling a large warmth under his tail made him yelp in surprise and scamper off of it.

Though it was not the heat for the large door, there was a fair amount of it coming off of the top. And only getting more over the bright red circle that was beginning to illuminate. Shrugging, he didn't complain. So far he's got a source of heat. Enough to cook with, now he just needed to find food.

It was a struggle to open the doors to the cold device, and then a bigger one to attempt to climb it without being squished or locked inside. Then to attempt to make sense out of the packages. Frustrated, Pseudo just began opening and sniffing whatever was inside. The only thing he could really make out were some eggs, but it appealed enough. Swinging with the carton of eggs from the door to the cupboard, he looked at the burner once again. Cooking on that probably wouldn't be the best idea. Seeing a nearby frying pan would do the job. Knocking on it sounded more like steel than iron, but it would work.

Cracking a few eggs and placing them on the pan instantly got them to start sizzling. Only to then remember handling food like this usually required a tool of some sort. The hatchling began searching the area for such things, but it was nowhere to be found in plain sight. Grumbling, the dragon remembered seeing Leslie open these hidden containers under the cupboard's surface. Clawing at the nob below without falling would prove to be a challenge for him.

Some scurrying could be heard at the door as it began to unlock. "Damnit, the witches are back." The small one grumbled, still struggling with the drawer. As the large door opened, so did the one that the dragon was struggling with, causing it to fly open and the hatchling landed inside it. Yelping loudly and startling the woman entering the room.

"Pseudo?" Leslie asked, seeing him squirm out of a drawer of utensils. "Are you okay?" She chuckled.

"Been better." He grumbled.

"What are you doing?" She asked, taking off her coat and bag. Noticing the eggs beginning to fry. "Are you cooking?"

He snorted, kicking off the eggbeater his tail got caught in. "Attempting to, yes. Now where did you keep that tool?"

"Tool?"

"The flat one you used a few days ago."

"You mean the Spatula? Should be in the drawer below you." He hung his head over the side of the drawer, looking below and whimpering loudly.

"I couldn't reach that far." He sighed in defeat. "I can't do anything in this fragile, weak body."

"Hey... It's okay." The woman picked up the hatchling and set him back on the counter. "I guess you

were right about being older than you looked." He just lowered his head and ears, closing his eyes to hide them from her. "It's alright to ask others for help, you know." The black one remained silent, but his breathing told her that he was struggling to hold himself together. Looking at the frying pan, she gave a soft smile. "I had no idea you could cook."

"...A late friend got me into it." He swallowed. "After trying some of his, I couldn't stand eating things unprepared anymore." Leslie opened a draw below him and took out the spatchula. Holding the handle to him.

"Want to make me some eggs too? I'm actually quite hungry." He studied her a little bit, and she almost seen a bit of a smile on his muzzle. Doing his best to grasp the tool that was about half his length. Though he was still struggling with it, he managed to flip the eggs a bit, but it seemed a little sticky. "Did you spray the pan first?"

"Spray it with what exactly?" He grunted, wrestling with the awkward tool.

"Cooking spray? It stops food from sticking so much." Pseudo looked at her strangely. "The pans here are a bit old."

"Where is it?" The woman reached above the stove in another cabinet, pulling out a yellow bottle. The dragon's ears went back. "How did you expect me to get up there!?" He hissed loudly, getting her to burst into giggles. "And now you're laughing at me again." The black one grumbled. "Speaking of cackling like a witch, where's the other one?"

"Erin?" The little one shuttered, making Leslie giggle at him again. "She had another class to go to. You'll see her later." His reply was a series of grumbles. "You don't like her?" She asked, still half giggling.

"She's an absolute pest, much like all of humanity is to me." Still struggling with the spatula, the woman held onto the pan to help him. He glared at her, but didn't say anything for a while. Not until he once again sighed. "I detest being helpless."

"It's okay-"

"It's not." He whispered. "...I haven't relied on someone for over a thousand years. I died before I asked someone for help. Now I'm reduced to being absolutely helpless. I can't even cook without assistance."

"There's nothing wrong with asking for help-"

"Maybe for a human. But for a grown Dragon..." He just sighed in defeat again. "I've never felt so humiliated..."

"Pseudo. There's nothing wrong with asking for help-Even for a grown Dragon. Let alone a grown one

that's been reverted into a Pseudodragon."

"Hatchling." He grumbled sadly, looking up to see the woman smile at him.

"Either or. You can't be expected to get by alone." He just lowered his head again, while Leslie took the pan off the burner.

"And the more I die, the less progress I make in getting back what I had..." The small one shook his head. "I just can't bring myself to rely on your kind..."

"Why though?" He didn't reply. "Pseudo, you haven't really said anything about your past since you got here. But you've been trying to struggle with it alone, when you really shouldn't. All I've really gotten was that you're older than you seem and you can cook. You won't even tell me your real name." He sighed again, but didn't reply. She just pet his mane while placing his eggs on a plate. "Why do you hate humans so much?"

The dragon looked at her sadly with those purple eyes. "I... Don't hate them. I Failed them."

"And that's how it went." The black one stated, managing to get through his tale with his ears completely purple.

"Yes... In such detail, at that." Tia chuckled awkwardly.

"Any more arguments about doing right or wrong on my part?"

"N-no. Sorry for jumping to conclusions, Atlas." He snorted at her playfully.

"Want to hear about the second one? It's when we used the oil-"

"No! No. Thanks, but... No." They both chuckled at that. "You're quite the story teller."

"I've had years of practice. Besides, I like talking about times that I've enjoyed." He sighed, looking off into the country land. "It just often leads to..." The dragon trailed off, feeling stroked in his mane told him that it was okay not to finish.

"So, are all dragons that... Opened?"

"For the most part. I've met quite a few who almost seemed Asexual, but." He shrugged his wings.

"But what?"

"They were horribly boring and uninteresting." She giggled at that. "If they didn't care about sex, they cared about food. And I don't mean cooking either. And as a result: They were terrible entertainment." Another snort.

"Your interests are just too limited, I'm sure." The woman giggled, getting him to toss his snout. "Going by that logic, would I be considered boring as well?"

"Halfly. At least you can cook well. But otherwise you're rather boring. I would've been far away from you if you were not the only one I could understand." He looked behind him with a smirk on his face, to let her know that the dragon was joking.

"You're just asking to get your ears grabbed again, aren't you?"

"Don't start using that as a threat. It's like being kicked in the stones to dragons." He grumbled.

"Which is worse?"

"With you? I'm not so sure. Possibly the ears."

"Maybe we should find out." A hiss came from the large one while his spines raised. It didn't help that she started giggling at him.

"You just want an excuse to either harm me, or touch me like whatshername." Atlas could hear something different in her laughter, almost muffled like she had her hand over her mouth. "I'm not hearing a No."

"Atlas, stop." Tia said, still laughing.

"Admit it, you'd like to stroke me off as well." The black one held his head high.

"Atlas, stop." That time it was a bit more serious.

"We could make an entire night out of it-"

"Atlas, stop!" He could barely see her pointing to the side of the road. In the ditch. Within it, a body of an older looking man in a colorful purple robe facing down. The two observed at a distance for a bit, until she tapped the black one.

"Is that...?" The dragon whispered to himself, as he laid down and brought up a chunk of land for Tia to stand on. Lowering it, he approached the body, sniffing it a bit. The woman came beside him with a small pack.

"Do you know him?" She asked, as Atlas began to turn the body face up. Revealing a bright red long beard on the man's face. Going down to his bellybutton. Though it was dirty and quite messy, he hardly

seemed old. Though the dragon didn't answer, the woman began checking his vitals. "He's alive. Still breathing." Carefully opening the man's eyes got her to silently gasp. Looking himself, the black one let out a faint whimper.

His iris was that of the color wheel. A rainbow going completely around the eye in a full circle, changing from one hue to the next. "We need to go." Atlas stated, turning around and walking a bit quickly away.

"Why?" The woman asked, just looking at him.

"Less talking, more walking. You'll thank me later! Now let's go before he wakes up!" He hissed silently.

"Atlas, I cannot just leave a person on the side of the road."

"Then we agree on something. It's not a person."

"He's not?"

"It's a damn Nuisance." The dragon grumbled. The man lightly coughed. "Last chance, let's go!"

"I can't believe you! We can't just leave him here."

"It's easier than you think-" The man wheezed, grabbing the woman by her arm. Though she yelped a bit, she leaned in closer to listen to what he was trying to say. A few whispers caught Atlas' ear and it flickered as he grumbled a bit.

"...I'm sorry, what?" The woman asked, getting a few more whispers. Hearing the dragon sit and groan in frustration, sending the luggage on the road in the process. The large one finally picking up what he was saying. "I don't understand."

"She doesn't know what a refrigerator is!" The black one hissed. Only to have the man raise up quickly and gasp at the dragon. Startling Tia in the process, then disappearing in a bamf of light purple smoke.

Reappearing just beside the dragon's muzzle, the man grabbed a nostril and pulled it. Getting the large one to yelp. "You know of the refrigerators!? Who do you work for!?" Atlas growled loudly at him as they gave each other the stinkeye. Sticking the other hand in the dragon's mouth, pulling out the long red tongue, as well as a large magnifying glass. "Ah-ha! I knew it! The Mark of the Les Languettes!"

"The what?" The woman asked, looking at the two strangely. "What mark?"

"Is wench wore weh hungueh." The large one attempted to say, getting a strange look from both of them. Getting his ears to flatten against his head and his spines raised even higher.

"...What?" She asked again, getting up to see for herself. "What mark?"

"He has a tongue." The man bluntly said. Letting go of the red appendage as it retreated back into the muzzle with a loud snap. Getting the black one to shake his head and snap his jaws a few times. Raising the Spy glass to the woman and twiddling his fingers. "What about you, Miss? Are you working for the-AHHH!" He jumped back just before the dragon bit him.

"Atlas!" He growled loudly at the man while the woman scolded him. "Don't try to eat him!"

"You're right." Atlas grumbled. "You never know what he'll do to my Physique. But that doesn't mean I can't bite him."

"Do you know him?"

"Regrettably so. And now you'll have the displeasure of knowing-"

"Dr. Banjo, The Great!" The man interrupted him, causing the other two to almost tilt their heads in confusion.

"...What?" The dragon curled his neck. "No it's not-"

"I think I know who I am, Mr... Uh..." The strange man studied the dragon. "Have we met?"

Another loud hiss came from the dragon. "Atlas!" The woman pet him on the arm.

"You forgot me last time too! And the time before that!" He growled.

"Atlas, calm down."

"He forgot me! No one can forget me!" The large one grumbled in frustration.

"I'm sorry about him, Dr... Banno, was it?"

"Banjo. Like the Guitar, not the musical instrument."

"A Guitar IS a musical instrument." The large one covered his eyes with a paw.

"Nuh-Uh! But he's right." Tia giggled at the man with the messy hair. As the dragon let out a frustrated whimper, she stroked his arm again.

"That's not your name. You told me last time that it was Rex something."

"So you two know each other?"

"He does look familiar." Banjo said, playing with his beard while studying the dragon. And the black one gave him another frustrated growl.

"You just said thirty seconds ago you didn't know me!"

"That was thirty seconds ago me, that guy was an idiot."

"That guy is still an Idiot." He grumbled under his breath. Snorting afterwards. Now glaring at the giggling woman. "What's so funny?"

"I'm sorry. It just seems every one of your friends tends to irritate you."

"We're not F-"

"We're Friends!?" The doctor asked enthusiastically.

"No, We're not! You're nothing more than a thorn in my-" The man scampered on top of the dragon's shoulders, and the beast hissed at him in surprise.

"Yay, we're friends!"

"Get off me!"

"We're friends now, does that mean I can ride you?"

"No!"

"I've always wanted to ride a giant lizard." Another loud hiss.

"That's it!" Atlas hopped away into the grass to the side of the road. What was first cheers of excitement turned into a frightful scream as the dragon flipped and landed on his back. Tia sucked in a breath and looked at the black one a bit horrified, until Atlas snorted at her and attempted to toss his snout. "Oh, please. I wish he was that easy to get rid of. He's Irritatingly Indestructible."

Banjo's lips stretched out from under the dragon and wheezed. "Friends are heavy." Once again, the woman giggled at the two, getting another glare at the dragon.

"Are you still thirsty, Doctor? I still have some water we can spare."

His entire head plopped out. "Depends. Does it have Dihydrogen Monoxide in it?" Another growl from the large one, the dragon batted the man on the head.

"Atlas." The woman scolded while trying to hold back her laughter.

"Of course it has that, it's water!" With a frustrated growl, the large one got up. Letting the now near two-dimensional man with the dark purple robe raise and dust himself off. "I'm not that heavy." The dragon grunted through a paw.

Walking oddly in his new form, the man took the bottle and thanked the woman as if nothing was wrong with him. Still getting a bright smile from Tia. "It's always a pleasure to meet some of Atlas' friends."

"Tia..." The black one grumbled.

"At-who now?" The doctor double taked. Then looking at the dragon. "Oh him! Waitamminute, his name is Atlas? I swear it was something else."

"More than likely it was-"

"David something." The large one tilted his head at the man.

"David? That sounds like a human name, not a dragon one."

"My name isn't David!" Atlas hissed.

"Really? You look like a David. A David..." Banjo studied him from afar, enlarging one of his eyeballs. "Hayter."

The dragon's neck curled, and his ears started to turn purple. "Atlas? Are you okay?" The woman noticed how speechless it made the dragon.

"That's not my name." He bluntly stated and snorted, walking down the road once again. "Now let's get moving."

"Ooo, where are we going-?"

"Directly away from you." The black one hissed at the man.

"Come on, now." Tia gave a motion of shoving the dragon. "We're heading to the Church in the Imperial City: Cetadore. You're welcome to travel with us." She gave a bit of a yelp as the man's body popped back into the third dimension.

"Welcomed is a very distasteful choice of word."

"It Is Decided Then!" The man trusted a fist to the air. "ONWARDS!" And started walking the wrong way down the road.

"Um... Doctor-?"

"Tia..." Atlas grumbled in a whisper. "Do not. I Repeat: Do not say anything." Gathering the luggage then proceeded to walk the correct path to the City. Hearing the woman giggle, noticing two large white stripes going down the dragon's back. As well as a small tag that fell off one of the tailspines, reading: Skunkified by Dr. Banjo.

"So, you locked him into a room, and almost dropped him off a cliff?" Leslie asked, enjoying the pseudo dragon's reaction.

"Is that all you've gotten out of that story? Besides, you wanted to know how I learned how to cook." He grumbled, attempting to enjoy his now cold eggs. Looking at them and sighing. "I don't remember the last time I had cold food that wasn't out of a large can. I have always been able to heat them with my..."

"We have a little contraption for situations just like this." It got the dragon's ears to perk up, as the woman took his plate and placed it into what almost looked like a small oven. A few button presses and strange high-pitched noises came from it before a loud humming. "It's called a microwave."

"A what?" Then something clicked in, causing the dragon to place a paw over his eyes. "Please tell me there aren't any Kou-toans around here. I remember them using such a term."

She just giggled. "No, and Kou-toa usually live in the waters. A place where electricity doesn't mix."

"I know that from experience." He grumbled. Almost ducking at the high-pitched noises once again. As she took out the plate and closed the device once again, he sniffed at the eggs, which came off as once again warm. "...How?" To then the woman shrugged.

"Some scientific bull that I don't understand."

Once again, the Pseudo looked at the microwave. "There's a Bull in there?" That sent the girl into giggles. "Why am I eating eggs when I could be eating that instead?"

"That's not what I meant, you little squirt!" He hissed at her playfully, then went back to eating the eggs. Making a bit of a face. "Something wrong with them?"

"They almost taste like metal. It's been a while since I had eggs, I guess I never got used to them."

"How about some ketchup then?" A tilted head and another set of perked ears got her to smile. "It's made from tomatoes."

A snort at her. "I think I'll stick with this. I never enjoyed the taste of vegetables."

"A tomato is a fruit." She giggled at him again, getting out the bottle. "And it really doesn't taste like tomatoes. It's more of a sauce than a juice."

"What's the difference?" He curled his neck, as the woman squeezed the red stream over the scrambled eggs. He tried sniffing it while it was coming out, and she flicked a little on his muzzle. Getting him to hiss back and paw it off quickly.

"It won't hurt you." Leslie laughed. "And a sauce is thicker." A few more sniffs at the red substance, and he gave it a slow lick. Letting it rest in his mouth for a little bit. "Like it?"

"...It's not terrible."

Another smile. "Not like tomatoes, though?" He half glared at her, knowing that she was trying to get him to admit that he was wrong. A low chuckle, and she pushed the plate to him. "Try them now." She said, putting away the bottle. A few more bites out of it got the dragon's tail to lightly sway back and forth. But stopped when the black one caught her looking at it.

"Stop that." He grumbled, getting the woman to chuckle again.

"I'm sorry. I just find it funny." Another grumble and she let the dragon resume eating while she started getting something herself: some canned soup for now. "Mostly how much they got right."

"Who?"

"The people who wrote or made up dragons." Another glare from the small one. "They often said that dragons don't like to admit that they are wrong. They also said that they do specific things when they feel happy, sad, etc."

"Like what?" He snorted.

"Like that." She giggled at him. "That noise, when you're feeling insulted or assertive about something. How your head and ears hang low when you're sad, or when your tail wags when you're enjoying, say, your food." Leslie explained, once again looking at the tail, and getting caught by him. Another low growl, and he curled it up and placed the end of it under a back paw. "How's the eggs?"

"It no longer tastes like eggs. It takes like..."

"Ketchup?"

"Yes."

"That's ketchup for you." Another chuckle. "You get enough?" He wasn't sure how to answer that, though licking the plate clean was a sign that he was still hungry. Getting her own soup out, She poured a

little bit of it into a smaller bowl, and the rest into a bigger one. Crushing some crackers and pulling apart some bread into the soup, she handed him the smaller bowl. The black one looking at her a bit sadly. "Don't feel ashamed to ask, okay Pseudo? There's nothing wrong with it."

He sighed, and nodded. Sniffing his own bowl and trying to study what exactly she put into it. A large sea of red with several blobs of more red rested in it. What almost looked like white sponges, soaking up and turning red with a series of jagged pale yellow rocks within it. Some turned into a flakey powder, while others a large section of was once a shape. Now reduced into a strange jigsaw puzzle piece.

He raised his head, once again looking at her, and receiving a smile. "What is it?"

"I'm not telling you." She got a growl for a reply. "If I do, then you probably won't eat it. So, try it first."

A few moments of studying her, and watching her eat the soup with a spoon, he looked at his bowl again. A few more sniffs and a brave lick got his tail wagging once again under that paw. Just drinking the red liquid, having a bit of resemblance to the red sauce that was on the eggs. Though a bit creamier. And though the clumps of bread gave the warm liquid a strange texture, they were very soft and almost juicy. Giving up more of the soup that it collected with a soft press of the tongue. A soft purr omitted while the comforting warmth glided down his throat, getting the woman to chuckle again. In turn getting him to attempt to hold it back in embarrassment. Clearing his throat awkwardly, he stared at her for a few moments. "What is it?"

"Did you enjoy it?" Another grumble. "Okay, okay. It's tomato soup."

"Again with Tomatoes?" He curled his neck, looking at the substance.

"It doesn't taste like it, does it?" He didn't answer, but also didn't argue. The look in those purple eyes were trying to understand how a simple fruit could taste so differently. "How often did you try to cook?"

A few moments of silence, and a little bit of pain shown through his eyes. "Nearly every meal I had since then. Before I came here, that is. I couldn't stand it otherwise." he sighed through his nostrils as he finished his meal. The woman knew he really didn't want to talk about it, but something was bothering him. Cleaning up the dishes, he eventually spoke up. "Leslie...?"

"Hmm?" She made the noise in question, but didn't remove her concentration on cleaning.

"...Why did you pick me up?"

She smiled at the question. "This again?"

"The real reason. Why were you not afraid of me?" He studied his reflection on a nearby metal toaster. Though it was warped, he really couldn't identify who the black dragon was on the other end. Considering it's been thousands of years since he was this young.

"Pseudo..." She stopped for a moment, then finished putting the dishes up to dry. "You want the truth?" That broke his sights from the reflection as she came closer to him with a sad smile, and pet him. "Quite a few years ago, I was attacked by something in the streets. Something I still can't really describe. I was saved by a much larger black creature." A little scratch under his chin, and they looked into each other's eyes. "His eyes were a different color than yours, and he was a different species altogether. But he was still... Humane. Much more than anyone ever thought he was." A breath. "He saved my life, and when I saw you..."

"You thought maybe I was...?" She shook her head.

"I wanted to repay the same kindness as he did to me."

"...Who was he-?" Pseudo's ears perked up hearing something in the hallway. "Something evil is coming..." Which gave the woman a very odd expression at him.

Chapter 5

"That's so freaking adorable!" The woman shouted, petting the little one rather roughly while he gave Leslie a look of raw, undiluted hate.

"You just had to tell her, didn't you?" He grumbled, and the two others giggled at him.

"I had no idea you knew how to cook! You should've taken pictures, Leslie!"

"Relax Erin. He'll have to do it again eventually. Especially if I stop making food for him." Another rotten look from the dragon.

"You wouldn't!" He hissed, both at Leslie and the harpy messing with his mane. Trying to push her hands away.

"You already told me several times that you can't die, so." She shrugged. "Besides, it's only a few pictures."

"Paintings you're going to gift to this one. What happens when she demands more?" He grumbled. "I only enjoy standing still for several hours when I'm sleeping."

"Oh, speaking of gifts." Erin got up, heading to her bags. "I got you something squirt." The small one double taked at her, half insulted and half curious. It must've shown, because one look at him sent her into giggles.

"This better not be a trick." He growled, walking across the kitchen counter to get a better view. Taking the object out of the box and setting it close to him. It was a large wire, shaped to an upright Arc'd doorway on a flat piece of wood. On the wire were a series of small flexible needles that stuck out far from the main wire. Both Pseudo and Leslie gave the thing an odd look. "...What is it?" He eventually asked.

"It's a self grooming post." The two looked at her. "My last cat loved this thing."

"Are you assuming that dragons are like cats?" The black one curled his neck.

"Aren't they? Leslie told me they were." Another harsh look from the smaller one to the dark teal haired one.

"Don't look at me like that, you've got Cat written all over you. The only difference is that you use the toilet, can speak clear sentences, and can cook without burning down the apartment."

"We're not having this argument again. Now what is this?"

"Think of it as a thing that will scratch you if you rub against it. You just rub against the little needles, and it replaces other people scratching you."

"Other people? Isn't that your job, Leslie?"

"My job is to stop you from jumping in front of cars again. Scratching you and making you purr are bonuses." Half a grumble that time.

"Does this thing make noise?" The black one studied the construct.

"No digital noises, no." The word puzzled the dragon. But as he flicked a few of the needles with a paw, they did not make any sounds.

"So it's better than you two." Another chuckle from the women.

"But it's only to be used when we're too busy to keep you company. But like that will ever happen."

Erin scooped up the pseudo dragon and held it in her arms. Even though he struggled to break free. "Oh, that reminds me, Leslie. The second part of Loveless is finally on DVD. I wonder if it's on the TV now."

The rooms felt massive and empty to her. Unable to shake the thought of worry from her mind. Wondering what was keeping him, and why the other two seemed to be rather calm towards the subject whenever it was brought up.

Speaking of which, the woman wondered where the Kveldulf had run off to. Probably exploring the island again. Something that she enjoyed doing as well, but better as a group. Once again, she felt ignorant. The other two knew so much more about survival than she did. It was no wonder that she felt more safe with them. So, instead she remained inside. Sitting at what almost was designed as a Throne of some sort. The woman knew that she asked to live in a castle, but it wasn't what she imagined it would be like. It felt... Lonely.

The echoing of claws on stone floors tapped through the halls, breaking her thoughts. Their casual steps revealed who it was, even though she wished they were someone else. A white wolfish head looked through the doorway, with a second one peering above it. "We thought we'd find you here." The right one said.

"Hey guys." She smiled sadly at them. They gave a sad look back.

"Is something wrong?" The other head asked, coming in and studying their surroundings. Though the building was still fairly new, it was very bare. It was so large to accommodate the dragon that built it. But as a result, it often made it feel very empty.

"You miss him, don't you?" Feyris, the right head asked. After taking too long to reply, it showed that the woman really did miss him. A faint nod confirmed the answer to them, and they sighed. Coming closer to her and nuzzling under her wrist for it to lift up. Letting her rest her hands on the beast's head. Elexus then turned to them, stroking each mane with her fingers.

"I do. I know he can take care of himself, but I can't help but worry about him. I don't trust that..."

"Immortality?" She nodded. "By the sounds of it, he's relied on it for some time now."

"I'm sure he will be fine. Though it has been several days." Feyon looked towards the window. Seeing a few of the clouds partially block the sun.

"He's been through worse, Elexus. Try not to worry about him too much. He at least left us plenty of supplies, and your cooking has gotten better over the past few days." It made the woman chuckle and blush a bit. "Soon, you can cook for him once in a while."

"You've learned alot from watching and assisting him."

"Yes, I really have. But I still don't know nearly as much as he does. When it comes to using what spices, or if something's missing within a test taste..."

The two heads shrugged, tilting at opposite angles and blinking slowly. "Experience comes from both time and trial." She gave them a look in question.

"You need to make mistakes in order to get results sometimes." The left head explained. "It's going to be daylight for a while longer. Would you like to take a walk, Elexus?"

"We found a quick path towards a nearby beach yesterday. It has some great views along it."

She smiled at them. "I would like that. Lead the way, please."

"No." The dragon grumbled bluntly. His ears flat against his head and spines raised. They've been like that so long, it half worried him that they would remain that way forever. But the man was getting on his nerves.

"Oh, come on! If you won't say it for me, say it for her!" The black one grumpily looked at the woman who was trying to hold in her chuckle. At least she was enjoying their new company.

She met the muzzle with her hands, giving the large one a smile. "You would enjoy him a lot more if you played along." He sighed slowly through his nostrils, trying to hide a small growl within it.

"...Huggbees." Atlas gumbled.

"Huggbees!" Several voices that came from their surroundings cheered, clapping in celebration. Though it did surprise the three, it got Tia to release her chuckle.

"Happy?" The grumpy one asked, rhetorically. Getting the woman to nod and pet under his chin. As he pushed the woman's hands away from revealing his weakness, he felt a tight grip around his neck.

"Wasn't that fun?" The man asked, hugging the large one around the neck with his full body and somehow defying gravity.

"Fun is hardly the word I would use."

"Fantastic?" Tia let out a chuckle at the eye's purple glare.

"More like Foolish." He grumbled as they got over the top of the hill. Able to see the entire city in front of them. "About time we made it."

"It's only been a few hours, Atlas."

"A few painfully long hours." The large one shook his head and neck to get the Doctor off. "Get off me!"

"You need more hugs in your diet." The red headed one said. "Trust me, I'm a Doctor."

"You're as much of a doctor as you are normal, now let go." Atlas growled, prying him off the man's unusually strong grip. Then changing to Golden scales, beginning to walk again.

"Atlas, maybe you should wait outside." Tia suggested, as they got closer to the town's walls. "Most people are probably very worried about dragons right now."

"And the last thing they want to see is one casually walking through their roads." He muttered in reply.

"Wait. Why would they be worried about a large, color changing lizard?" Dr. Banjo asked, as a growl came from the dragon's throat. Causing the man to lean back and away from the beast. "Besides the fact that he's grumpy."

"Probably because I-"

"He's large and grumpy. That's why, Doctor." Tia interrupted him. Getting the large one to look at her for a moment. "He also doesn't like people too well. And this city is full of them. Unless we could find a way to reduce his size so he doesn't accidentally step-"

"Say no more!" The man shouted, taking a few skips ahead and then turning to face them, making the other two stop for a moment and wonder what he was up to. As the man made a rectangle with his index fingers and thumbs, looking through them like a camera or a screen. He made a shrinking sound with his mouth as he moved his hands together. All the while, the large dragon began to get smaller before the woman's eyes. He yelped a bit in surprise as the world around him began to grow, until he was about the size of a kitten.

"Atlas?" Tia asked, kneeling down to touch him with a finger.

"What the hell did you do to me!?" He hissed at the man.

"Now you can come in with us! Oh, Ma'am? You might want to take a step back."

"Why?" She asked, as he pointed above her. Not noticing the shadow of her hovering luggage over the

dragon, like a personal stormcloud. As she took a step back, the bags suddenly fell on top of the dragon, getting him to release a loud yelp and get lost in the mountain of leather and cases. "I'm sorry!" She said, trying not to laugh at him. "Are you okay?"

All she could hear was an angry muffle and a growl of some sort. "I heard something about waffles." The man said, studying the pile. As they dug through the luggage to find the small golden creature, he shoved his hand in and a loud chomp could be heard. The doctor let out a whimper, and whispered to the woman. "I think I found him." Letting out a faint giggle.

Slowly pulling out his hand, the kitten sized dragon was biting heavily onto Banjo's finger. Making the end of it swell and red. Shaking his hand rapidly, he tried to get the small one to let go, only to have him fly off to Tia and catch him in her arms. Turning to him and hissing loudly. "What did you do to me!?"

"I made you portable! And... Sneakable! You didn't have to bite me for it." He said, still shaking the throbbing appendage.

"Change me back immediately!"

"No, wait. This could actually work." The dragon hissed at Tia. "Atlas, just put up with it for a little while, okay? It would be easier for you to talk to the Bishop this way and clear your name. It's unlikely he would meet with you otherwise."

"Besides, I don't remember how to change you back-"

"WHAT!?" Atlas shouted. Trying to struggle out of the woman's grip. "Let go of me! I want to rip his face off!"

"Atlas, calm down." She fought to keep hold of the small golden one, to the point where she held his muzzle for a moment. "Atlas, shhh... Shhh. Calm down." She said a bit sternly, hearing the dragon's breaths slow down, even though he was fighting against it. "Just for a little while, okay? I'm sure Mr. Banjo can restore your size."

"Doctor." The strange man corrected her, bandaging up his finger. "And if you rip my face off, it might just make it harder for me to remember."

"What about his Femur? His memory can function without a leg." Atlas grumbled.

"Yes, but then he wouldn't be able to carry the bags."

"Carry the what-now?" The red haired one asked, looking at the woman along with the dragon. Then the small one got an idea, turning bronze. Lifting up the grounds where the luggage remained on a steep slant towards the man, making it slide off onto him with an overdramatic shriek.

"Feel better?" Tia asked the little one with a smile.

"...Yes, actually. I do." A small scratch on the chin, and they continued down the path.

The next morning, the small one was purring loudly at the self grooming post. Rubbing his neck and spines against it thoroughly. Even after hearing Leslie chuckle and giggle several times while trying to make breakfast. "If you... Ever tell... That Harpy about this..." He tried to grumble, but was too immersed in the post. "Mother of Bahamut, it even gets inbetween the scales...!"

"Don't worry. I won't have to tell her." The woman said, taking a picture of him with her phone and sending it to Erin. Almost being able to hear the woman squeal in both awe and excitement from several blocks away. "I'm glad you like it though."

"Like is... A strong..." A loud murr interrupted him, as he stood upright to scratch his back with it.

"Alright you, stop it or you're going to scratch those scales off of you." She came over to him with two plates of food, and nudged him a few times with her foot. Knocking him off balance, and out of his trance. Shaking a few times, and getting his scales to click together loudly.

"It's just like that witch to gift me something manipulative." He half grumbled at it, but just couldn't hate it. Climbing up on the glass coffee table, he walked over to his toast with something brown and red on top. Making a curled and tilted expression at it.

Another giggle. "Just try it." It sent the dragon's ears flat against his head. After a few sniffs in studying it, something familiar clicked in his head.

"Could this be...?" He almost whispered, licking the creamy brown spread a few times, and almost immediately purring. "What is this substance?" He asked, a bit seriously.

"It's Peanut Butter." She smiled at him, only to see him look at the bread sadly.

"That's definitely it..." He mumbled, noticing her look in question. He sighed, still looking at the food. "His wife used to make me these... Treats. Cake things that tasted just like this. I never thought I'd ever..." The woman gave him a few strokes, trying not to mess with his spines too much, regardless of how much of a mess sleeping in the blankets and rubbing against the post did.

"It's okay, Pseudo."

"...And he foolishly wondered why I never wanted any friends." The small one sighed heavily, gnawing away at his breakfast.

"Did you want me to skip classes today?" He looked at her, not understanding what Leslie ment. "Stay home with you?"

"...No. I'll be fine." He stated. But she knew what it was like to be alone after something tragic happening in their life. How cold it almost felt. But something helped her through it. Getting up, she headed into her room. "Leslie?" The small one asked. Waiting for her to return with a portable CD player.

"The batteries should still be good in it. And should last until I get home." She set it on the table, along with a pair of headphones.

"...What is it?" He looked at it with curiosity.

"It's a CD player. A bit old, but it still works fine." The explanation didn't help the dragon, as he stared her down and made her chuckle again. "It plays music."

"Like some kind of instrument?" He curled his neck.

"Not quite. But I'll show you how to work it." The woman opened the lid to the device and within it was a disc with a strange image on it. One that took several moments of studying for the dragon to actually decipher what it was: A being, almost of undead or tainted origins, breathing onto a flame that it was holding in their hand. On it, there were writings that the small one could not read. "Eden Fire. It'll work for today. I'll try to find you something more to your tastes later."

"My tastes?" He looked at her, puzzled. "As long as it isn't raw, I'm alright. But I do like this... Peanut butter, was it?"

Leslie giggled at him again, closing the lid. "That's not what I meant by tastes. I mean, tastes in music." Another puzzled look, and she pet him on the head a bit. Taking a bite of her own breakfast. "Probably back where you lived, there was only a few types of music. Here, there's hundreds."

Pseudo grumbled. "You'd think that they could only string so many notes or hit a drum in a limited number of different ways." A chuckle from her, as she motioned for him to leave it alone for now. "How do you work this... Thing?"

Chapter 6

Leslie entered her apartment building. Though she was a bit later than usual, getting coffee with Erin again, she felt relaxed that she could make it back home and take the rest of the night off. Though she did have a few reports due in five days, she would tend to them later.

The weather was cool. Just cold enough for a small amount of snow to breeze down and send a chill through her coat. It was the perfect night to make some hot chocolate, just like she often did when she was living with her parents during the holiday seasons. Though the question came that made her wonder if the Pseudo dragons were allergic to chocolate like many other pets were. The good thing about Pseudo himself is that he might suffer for a few hours, but would possibly never completely die from it. Or at least stay dead.

The thought of it half worried her. The thought of losing another exotic being in her life. After all the possible gruesome deaths the poor black one had gone through, to be finally killed off by drinking some chocolate? As dark as it was to think of it, it did have some sort of comedic flare to it.

Taking the elevator up once again to the eighth floor, and walking down the halls to her door. Number 805, all she heard from inside was silence. Leslie was almost certain the dragon would've attempted to fiddle with the TV, now that he knew what the device did from last night. Unlocking the door, she opened it in darkness and still silence. A flick of the lights, she saw the black one curled up on the couch, with his head between the headphones. However, the light began to wake him from his sleep, and he stretched a bit. Mumbling something while he yawned. "Good evening." She chuckled at him. Watching his jaws snap together a few times, while she took off her footwear. "Fell asleep?"

"You could say that." He mumbled. Stretching his front legs and shoulders, as well as wings out. Then to his hind legs and tail. Pawing at the couch and almost digging his claws into it.

"Don't ruin that couch." She playfully scolded him.

"I can't help it. The claws are pestering me to maul something lately."

"We should get you a scratching post then." The small one looked at her for an explanation. "It's a thing for cats to claw at."

A low growl. "Dragons are not cats."

Leslie worked around the kitchen, prepping her drink that urged her earlier. "We've been over this, Pseudo. And every time we have this argument, you lose."

"I never lose. We just have a stalemate." He thumped his tail on the cushion and snorted.

"Sure we do. I'm making some hot chocolate, do you want some?" Another strange look from him. "It's a hot drink to help keep warm in the colder seasons. A bit festive, but..."

"But?"

"I'm not going to lie, many animals tend to get sick or even die from Chocolate. So it's up to you if you want to suffer from it."

"I'll pass for now."

"I'll make you something else then." She spent a few minutes in the kitchen area, then noticed him staring outside the window again. The dark of night seemed to creep in faster and faster every day. "You okay?"

"...Yes." He answered. Still not removing his gaze. "...She loved Black." He mumbled to himself, not noticing the woman come closer to him and stroke his back. He looked at her for a moment, and within his purple eyes were a mix of longing and heartache.

She gave the little one a sad smile, but knew Pseudo probably didn't want to talk about it. "What did you think of Sonic Syndicate?" She asked, looking at the CD player. It got the black one to look at it as well, and then look back at her with his ears a little low.

"I... Couldn't understand them." She chuckled at that. "I cannot believe how that could be considered singing in your world."

"A lot of people would agree with you. My parents would be some of them."

"But... Something sounded familiar on the first one. I kept listening to it, but couldn't catch it." He fiddled with the buttons on the device and got to play it. She turned up the volume so that they could both hear it faintly. "Doesn't help that I can't understand this first part."

"It's their first album. It's a bit hard to hear." She waited until the first vocals started. "You Are The Reason, Why I Despire The World. You're Still The Only Reason, Why I'm Still In It."

"How can you possibly understand that?" The woman giggled at his expression. Shaking her head.

"It's just something you get used to." It got him to look at the headphones again. Listening to the chorus approaching.

"This right here." He pointed out. While the clean(er) vocals came to the microphone, followed by more harsher ones, his ears flickered and tried their best to make out what was being said. "I know it, but I just..."

"Oh... Um..." She thought for a moment. "It's something like... Rivers. When Two Rivers-"

"Run Together... They Can Never Be Distinct Again..." He said a bit sadly, as the dragon's mind flashed back.

"Yes. See? It's just a matter of getting used..." A faint whimper came from him, as he tried to bury it into the couch's creases. "Pseudo?" A sniff and a sob came from him, and a whistle from the kitchen called for the woman. "Shh. Pseudo, it's okay." She wrapped him up in a nearby blanket and carried him out to the kitchen. Taking the heated kettle off the stove and shutting it off. Giving off a few more sobs and shaky breaths, Leslie carried him off into the windowless bedroom and shut the door. She left the lights off, as she laid on her back, resting the small one on her chest. "It's okay, Pseudo. You're not being watched or judged. Let it out, okay? Let it out."

And the small one did. Burying his head and tears within the blanket and the woman's shirt. All the pain he went through the past two years since he came to that nest and found his mate, all released and transformed into loud whimpers and weeps that lasted for nearly two hours. With one last shaky breath, he asked. "...What... What else did he say?"

"The next line you mean?" She felt him nod. "...Locked In A Dream, To Filter Out..."

"This is humiliating." The small, still gold one grumbled. Being held under Tia's breasts within a winter coat that itched the dragon.

"I know it is, but just stay still for now. I'll let you out in the Church."

"This coat itches. And it smells funny." The woman giggled at him.

"It smells funny because it's been locked away for a long time. And I don't wear it much because it itches on bare skin."

"And scales." He wiggled a bit, trying to scratch himself. "Where did you get this thing?"

"An elder woman gave it to me last time I went up north. After I nursed her son back to health." The gold one tried to look at her, but the lumps were in the way. Pawing at them to meet her blue eyes tickled her and sent her into giggles. "Atlas."

"What happened to him?" He snorted at the barrier, unable to compete against it.

"He had hypothermia. Fell into the ice while hunting something." She said a bit quietly. "The animal... It fell in and got trapped under the frozen river."

"But he got lucky." Atlas murmured.

"Yes. His clothing got caught in one of the rocks below. It saved him, but it kept him underwater too long and caused his sickness." She sighed, still keeping a smile on her face. "I haven't really been in the cold much since then. Once in a while I get a request to head back up north, but I've been lucky enough to do it in the warmer seasons."

"I can't imagine why you would say such a thing." The sarcastic statement made the woman chuckle. Still squirming to get comfortable.

"Yes, the itchiness is a bit of an issue, but when you're cold you don't notice it. The coat is actually quite comfortable otherwise."

"I'll take your word for it. For now, just get to that Church. How much longer?"

"Just a few more minutes. Longer if you don't stand still. People are staring at me." Another giggle from the girl.

"The coat isn't why they're staring." The little one grumbled. Getting an awl from the woman. "That's not what I meant either!"

"Keep it down, you." She scolded him with a smile. "Actually, I know what will keep you behaving. I can't say quiet, but..."

"Don't you dare! Not out in public!" He hissed in whispers.

"Then be silent until we get there." Tia giggled again. After a small pause, she chuckled.

"What now?"

"I just noticed that you're acting like a child." Atlas snorted at her. "Is being small reverting you to your hatchling ways?"

"It is not."

"Oh, that's right. Of course it isn't. You've always been a little childish." She covered her mouth to keep herself from laughing at him out loud at the dragon's hiss.

"Careful witch. I'm not going to stay small forever."

"I can't see why not. Perhaps a different perspective is just what you need to respect life a bit more." The small one grumbled as the Oracle entered a building. Atlas felt the coat's strap release, and immediately started squirming down the woman's body. Falling to the floor from her hips with a bit of a thud. Shaking himself off and scratching various places of his body sent the woman into giggles once again, as she set her coat on a nearby bench. Another woman in robes came over and looked cautiously at the creature. "Don't worry, he's a friend of mine."

"Okay, Tia. Welcome back darling." And she gave the younger woman a hug. "Where are your bags my dear?"

"Oh..." She looked at the dragon, who looked at her with perked ears. Then they looked back at the door. "Oh dear."

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A little ways into the gate of the city, a large pile of luggage was slowly moving inch by inch. A horse stopped in front of the pile, attached to a wagon. As it sniffed and snorted at the luggage, a pair of lips came out from under it. "Excuse me, kind sir. Would you help an old man with his bags?" The horse huffed, getting the tell to move forward and started trotting off. "Hey-hey! Get back here! I know where you live! ...Somewhere in this city, right?" The lips sighed, and retreated hastily into the baggage once again with a loud snap. Slowly moving the pile bit by bit.

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"I'm sure he's fine." The dragon snorted, lackadaisically. Getting the older woman to look at him.

"Nevermind him. We had someone help carry our bags, but I'm afraid they might've been too much for him. Could you send a few boys to help him?"

"Of course dear. What did he look like?"

"Red hair and beard. A very strange looking fellow, but nice really."

"When he isn't shrinking dragons that don't deserve it." The gold one grumbled. Getting Tia to giggle at him.

"Alright, let's get you cleaned up. Then I'll see if I can get a meeting with the Bishop." The woman scooped up Atlas in her arms and he let out a loud yelp. Moving to a small barrel with some water in it, and grabbing a towel nearby, she set him on a bench and soaked the towel a bit. Trying to wash the itchy feeling from him.

"I better not have mites from that dreaded thing. They're the absolute worst when they get into the scales." Another chuckle from her.

"I'm sure you'll be fine. And the water will make you feel better." He snorted at her, his ears flat against his head.

"I'm going to flatten him when I get back my original size."

"You don't think it'll be a good idea to stay like this? Perhaps you might learn something."

"Doubtful."

"Oh?" Tia nudged the little one a bit. "I know you don't like being small, but why is it? You're often reborn when you die, so what's that like?"

He stared at her for a few moments with his purple eyes. "...It's like a rebirth. Starting from the egg and growing up really fast. But after a few days, I start to regain my memories... Most of them anyway." He sighed, turning around so she could get his back easier. "It's a constant form of torture to have to depend on others. I'd rather just die over and over again, than to rely on them."

"Is relying on people so bad?"

"When they're weaker than you, yes. A God doesn't ask Insects for help." The woman went a bit quiet and he exhaled. "...Sorry."

"It's alright. I know what you mean." She pet him, getting behind his ears a bit. Chuckling at the faint whimper he made when her hands connected to the vulnerable area. "But what's so wrong about needing others?"

"It's humiliating."

"That's not what Humility means." Another nudge, as he looked at her and grumbled.

"Someone like me shouldn't need the help of others." He studied the underside of his paw, making some of the light around it dance above it. Flickering and making different shapes, glyphs that were multiple colors. "I can do nearly everything, but I just can't stay dead. I honestly don't think I've ever wanted anything more."

"Besides bake a cake." He turned to growl at her, and Tia laughed at him.

"I said nearly everything!" He hissed quietly. "And even then, I've made a few that were edible. I count that as a success."

"How long has it been since you relied on someone?" He went quiet, staring into space for a while. Sighing after a few minutes, when she stroked his messy spines again. Shaking his head he tried to remain still while she started tending to his wings. "That's saying a lot actually."

"It depends on what you mean. This, for instance, I can control water. So I don't need you to do this." She nodded with a smile on her face. "You..."

"Just enjoy helping you. Even if you were at your normal size, I would be doing it."

"But just knowing that I can do it myself. Knowing that I can do it alone, I can accept your..."

"Help?"

"Manipulative demanding. Yes." Another chuckle. "But if it's something I just can't do..."

"Like asking me to...?" He nodded. "That's why it was so hard for you, in that barn."

"That's... Not the only reason why it's hard-" A few footsteps got him insecure. Even though he couldn't understand the man that came to talk to Tia, meaning that he couldn't understand the dragon, he remained silent until they were done. After a few words, the man left. Atlas looked at the woman for a few minutes. "Everything okay?"

"Yes. The Bishop is just in a meeting right now. We'll be next." She dried off the gold one with another towel and set them in the sunlight to dry. "You want to know what I think?"

"...Maybe."

"I think you're looking at this whole thing backwards." He stared into the woman's blue eyes for a bit. "You're looking at it as if it should shame you to ask for help. But really... It makes others feel better. More important. Valued."

"It... Makes you...?" He whispered, still looking at her when she nodded.

Letting his gaze fall, she began to pick him up. Carrying him to a bench and held onto him for a few moments. "...I've always wanted to do this."

"Do what?" He tried to look at her, but only got a snout-full of blonde hair.

"Hold you like this. It's hard when you're so big." He was quiet for a few moments, and just sighed. Holding onto her a little tighter as well.

"Tia..." The dragon whispered to her. "If you keep holding onto me like this... You're going to have a hard time to let go."

"I know..." The woman took a deep breath, getting the scent of his mane in memory. "And we're not supposed to fall in love with our patients."

The gold one just held on a little tighter, nuzzling her a bit as he took a deep breath himself. (...I knew

it...) "...And they're not supposed to fall in love with you..."

The room remained quiet for a long time, to the point where she thought the little one had fallen asleep. Eventually nature called to her. Slowly and carefully she rolled him onto the bed and went to her bathroom closeby. Coming back out and laying down, she tried to move him back into place. Feeling him climb and get comfortable on his own, she knew he was still conscious. "...I'm... Sorry." He muttered quietly to her, still trying to face away as if she could see his eyes.

"It's alright, Pseudo." She stroked him a bit. "I've been waiting for you to do that for a while now anyway." He sighed heavily at that, remaining silent.

"...I'm so pathetic." He whispered. "Within a week of living here, I'm already predictable..."

"It's not that." Getting a bit cold herself, she covered the two up with a blanket. "I knew what you were going to do because I went through the same thing." Still no response. "I know it sounds like a terrible idea. I know it makes you feel vulnerable. But if you talk about what happened... It's easier to get up from it." His breathing was all that could be heard. Almost on the verge of sobs once again, she could tell that. Stroking from the back of his head to his limp tail, she understood how hard it was for him to confide in others. Placing a hand under him, she moved the hatchling off of her body for the moment. "Give me a minute, I'll make you a drink."

He didn't argue or fight. Laying like a ragdoll wherever she left him on the mess of blankets. A few moments later, she came out with two cups. Turning on the light just a little to see where he was, Pseudo faced away from it until Leslie moved him. She knew he didn't want her to look into his eyes, so she made sure he was always facing away. "It's just water." She said to him, giving the black one some time before drinking very subtly.

For a few moments, she drank herself, and waited for him to finish. Taking the cup to the nightstand, she shut off the light once again, and rested the dragon on top of her gently. More minutes of quiet darkness made the room stand still. "...You knew the words." She said, feeling his head move slightly, then rest on her chest once again. Nodding.

"...It was something my great grandwyrn used to say." A few more strokes. "...It meant that all of our experiences mattered. The good. The bad. As well as the Tragic..."

"...It's a wonder really." Another movement of his head. "How you can understand the language. How we can even understand each other."

His wings lifted up the blankets a bit, shrugging. "...You're just speaking a simple form of Draconic to me. It's the same one the humans I knew used. It's crude, but..." She chuckled at that.

"I know Draconic." He looked at her. "Well, more 'Know Of' than actually know the language. It has a lot to do with the vibrations in your throats and neck, right?" She felt a nod, and then more silence. "...Pseudo? What was her name?"

The small one took a few breaths. "...Nitaka."

"...What happened to her?" He let out a faint whimper, and a shaky breath. "Start from the beginning if you like. But trust me, you will feel better." She heard him swallow, and take a deep breath.

"...I was lying in the sun within a new nest..."

Chapter 7

The apartment door closed, and the dragon let out a large sigh of relief once the footsteps led out of range. After a tough night of emotionally gutting himself in front of her, and a very awkward morning after, he was still trying to get comfortable with what he had done.

"Honestly..." Pseudo whispered to himself. "I could've mounted her last night and had the morning be less awkward." Pausing for a moment and staring at the ceiling, he suddenly questioned where such a thought came from. Shaking his muzzle and snorting loudly, he got up to look for the CD player he used yesterday. Only to find it on the kitchen counter.

Climbing up to retrieve it, he found a few cases nearby. One with the same 'Fallen Angel' that the first disc had printed on it. Holding some kind of heart or rotten apple within her hands. The other, a large insect that was half mechanical. A Fly that was exchanging parts of its body with that of an airplane or

jet. The image half disturbed the little one, but he just looked away from it for now.

Opening the lid revealed the same image of the Fly. Leslie's voice seemed to echo in his head for a moment. "I put in another cd for you to listen to. Same band, but you might enjoy it and understand it a bit more." All he could do was just silently nod at her at the time. With a heavy sigh, Pseudo closed the lid and did his best to carry the electronic back to the couch. Balancing it on his back and wings.

Placing the headphones in a comfortable position, and then laying on his back, with his head in between them, he stared at the window and the sky. Though the morning was a bit brisk, the sky was nearly clear and blue. A faint mist of clouds were brushed on the horizon in the distance, just floating at the bottom of the window sill for him to see. One more heavy sigh, and he reached for the play button.

The machine made its faint noises as normal, and the music began to play a bit. Beginning with the very tail end of a song that was fading away. Now remembering that he could faintly hear it on the counter this morning, the woman must've been listening to it a bit while making breakfast.

The next one started with harsh vocals, but something was different about it. It was more... Clear. "I Recognize Your Scars, Because I Have Them Too..." Pseudo made out, but not the second set of lyrics. "I Can't Deny That You Were, A Substitute Of A Greater Loss. But After All You Reminded Me Of..."

Then some Clean vocals. "You're Someone To The World, And You're The World For Someone."

"You Really Think You Have A Future Without Me?"

"There's A Place Not Far Away, Where I Want To Take You."

"The ###st Sno##all Is ##ways ### ##ites#" The dragon shot upward as his heart fluttered for a moment. Staring at the machine for a few minutes as it continued playing. After a few breaths, he restarted the song to listen more closely.

Tia slowly walked down the hall where the Bishop's study resided. Looking at the old paintings of some of the late ones, as well as a few famous Oracles. The dragon still in her arms, and maintaining its valuable look, the two browsed in silence. Stopping in front of a portrait of an Oracle. "This one is Raychelle." She said quietly, gazing at the old piece of a strawberry blonde woman. "She was the one who removed all the borders of the land. Making it one entire nation." She sighed. "I remember looking at this one when I was younger, hoping someday I could inflict such peace upon the world."

"What makes you think she did?" The small one asked, a bit grumpy. "In order to remove borders across lands, their leaders must give a greater effort to adjust to such requests. Where are their paintings?" He snorted, getting the woman to chuckle.

"They're in their own country's capitals. Possibly in their churches as well." She stroked the dragon's neck a bit. "I've always wanted a spot in this hallway. As childish as it may seem."

"Why don't you have one?" He curled his neck, as she gave the dragon a puzzled look. "You've done things. Possibly greater than a few of these other people."

"Not really. I just healed the injured for the most part."

"Says you. You've stood up against a rampaging dragon and got it to turn down. Let alone repair the village he totaled." She chuckled shyly at him. "Not many people are brave enough to stand up to me like that."

"You were being controlled. Someone had to stop you."

"But someone didn't. You did." He nudged her.

"Because I knew you." Tia smiled.

"Because you're-" He whispered, getting interrupted by the Study's door opening and seeing an elder woman walk out. Double taking at the golden creature. "I swear, if this one calls me cute..." He muttered.

"Oh, he's adorable!" The woman leaned in to pet the small one with a large smile on her face. Though he tried to resist, leaning into Tia's chest didn't do well for an evasive plan.

"He is, isn't he?" The younger one replied, getting the dragon to look at her with his ears back.

"Where on earth did you find him?"

"A bit to the northwest. It's possible he's the last of his species here."

"I hope not. I used to love tales of dragons when I was younger. It's nice to see one's still around." A few more pets, and the little one pawed her hand away. Letting out a small chuckle, she wished the younger woman a good day and carried on.

"Must you display me to the elderly?" He grumbled, getting the blonde woman to laugh.

"You'll live. You've survived through worse."

"I have been mauled to death before. It wasn't pretty." Atlas snorted as they walked into the room. Getting the middle aged man to turn around and look at the Golden one in shock for a moment.

"Don't worry. It's not what you think." Tia said softly, setting the dragon on a chair. "How do you fair Father?"

"Quite well, Oracle Tia. You were stationed in the East? In Ebonhoath?"

"Yes. I was there until..."

"People heard of troubles that way. I'm glad you made it here safely." The brown haired man gave her a hug. "There have been a few sightings of a Black Beast flying in the skies at a distance..." He looked at the dragon again. "Are you sure...?"

"Father Handon, this is Atlas. He's... Been under another Oracle's control to destroy cities." He gave the woman a strange look. "His size is reduced temporarily, but..." She nodded at the dragon, and his scales returned to the natural Obsidian.

"Remarkable... But a Rogue Oracle? Are you sure?"

"Atlas was in someone else's command. Somehow he locked away his consciousness, and kept it separate from the other Oracle's control. I ended up breaking him out, even though I know it's taboo to use our-"

"You did well Tia. It's alright. But still, how were you able to?"

"I met him before. Nearly a year ago, in the villages to the southwest. He fought off a large group of ettins before the villagers risked their lives to fend them off. Atlas took out most of them, but was badly injured in the process."

"And you took care of him. So he knew your voice, which was probably why you were able to stop his trance." The man thought, looking on a map on the wall. "Ebonhoath was attacked. How are the damages?"

"They... Lost a few people. But Atlas has extraordinary powers. He was able to repair the structural damage he had caused." The Bishop looked at her. "He's able to do many things. Whoever thought to control him knew of his destructive powers."

"I detest thinking one of our own could have done this..." The man sighed.

"Father... I want to clear his name. I don't want people to fear Atlas anymore. And I want to help him redeem what he has done." She looked on the map as well. "Do you know of anywhere else that was hit?"

He sighed and nodded. "The northern kingdom, I suspect. But that's impossible. Their defenses are absolute. Lavendour has dealt with Hydras at the gates before."

"Atlas... Has many ways of getting through such defenses. He could even remove the walls themselves." She placed a hand on his shoulder. "Why do you suspect it?"

"A few nights ago, we heard loud roars to the north at night. Even the sky lighting up like dawn from time to time." The Bishop shook his head. "They woke the entire city from their beds."

"The entire city? But that Kingdom is three days away by wagon. How could you possibly hear his roars from there?" It got the dragon's attention, and she looked at him with a bit of worry. Seeing his sigh and hung his head low didn't help ease her. "Was it you, Atlas?"

"...I think so." He mumbled. "But I don't remember it."

"He says he doesn't remember, but he believes it was him. Was there no word back from there?"

"Not yet, I was hoping to hear from a merchant soon, but none have come that way."

"Then that will be our first destination for now. We'll see what we can do, who we can save." Tia walked over to the dragon, lifting him. Getting the feeling that he's gotten a bit bigger since she last put him down.

"Tia... You just got here. Please stay a while and rest."

"I'm alright, my Lord. If I need to rest, Atlas can carry me." The dragon grumbled at her, and she just smiled at him.

"What about supplies? I would like to send any survivors some food and water."

"He can create them. Though I should bring an extra Aid kit, just to be sure."

"They're at the entrance." She whispered her thanks. "Take care of yourself, my Lady. And I can only hope that the people there are safe."

"Me too. I'll see you in a couple of days. Even if I have to fly back." She shuddered at the thought of it.

"Oh come on. You can't still be afraid of that one trip we took."

"Two trips. The flight there, and the flight back." She corrected him. Getting a loud snort in response.

"You liked it." He mumbled. As the woman sent her goodbyes to him, she walked down to the entrance of the church, seeing several people bring in her bags.

"I'm sorry about the mess. They really had a lot they wanted me to bring back."

"It's alright dear. Your bag is right over there." The woman from before pointed to a small case to the side.

"Thanks. Can you get me a few Aid kits? I'm heading north to Lavendour."

"Already? You just got here, Tia."

"I know, but they might need our help." They looked strangely at the golden dragon in her arms. "The rest of the bags are for the church, and for the shelters. They might be a bit of a mess though." Looking around, she didn't spot the strange Doctor anywhere. "Did you not find the red bearded man anywhere?"

"Nowhere. We just found these at the gate." A young man said.

"Hmm." The blonde woman pondered.

"We don't need him." The small one grumbled. Getting her to smile. "Odds are he'll find a way to haunt us anyway. Enjoy the peace while you can." That got a chuckle out of her. Accepting the two extra kits, she strapped them around her waist and grabbed her suitcase. Heading out the door.

Soon after, the people were still going through the luggage. Unzipping one, the younger man was startled and took a step back. Seeing an older fellow in a purple robe and bright red hair pretzeled inside. "Ocupado!" He shouted, zipping the bag back up and leaving the younger one stunned. Raising his hands, he left it alone and carried on to the next one.

"You sure you want to do this?" Atlas asked, as the two walked through the northern gate. "You can take a day of rest."

"I'm fine, Atlas. I'm used to walking a lot, and you carried me through half of that earlier trip." She studied him a bit, until he double taked. Letting out a low growl at her staring.

"What?" He grumbled.

"I think... You're getting bigger."

He stopped for a moment, looking at himself. "Possibly. His magic doesn't last forever sometimes. So it might just be slowly wearing off." He snorted at the thought of Banjo making him small again. "I detest that Nuisance."

"But he did make it easier for the Bishop to believe me. He's usually open minded enough, but it's for safety that he remains inside the city for the most part. Trying to lead him out into the woods, let alone to a large beast like you is like asking to be titled a Heretic."

"I suppose you have a point. But still. Never again."

"Oh come on. It's not so bad. You're cute when you're this size." He hissed at the woman.

"Dragons are not cute! Which reminds me, I forgot to bite that elder one in the hallway."

"That's awful!"

"She called me cute!"

"She said you're adorable. And you are at that size." He snorted at her, making the woman laugh at him. "She thought you were a child."

"I'm not a hatchling." The gold one grumbled. "I'm still a grown wyrm. Just one tenth the size of one."

"Still, she wouldn't know that. And I can't imagine the difference really."

"Smaller claws, smaller spines, lack of dropped stones. And a more glossy scale color. Not to mention an attitude problem."

"That's not missing." She giggled at his glare. "But can we both agree that you're handsome?"

"You flirt." Atlas teased.

"Would you rather me go with Pretty?" He curled his neck. "Didn't think so." Tia smiled at him tossing his muzzle. "So, what were you going to say about me in that hallway?" The dragon double taked.

"What?"

"About me stopping you at Ebonhoath." He thought for a moment, still looking at her. Then it came back, getting his ears to turn purple. "Are you okay Atlas?"

"Y-yes." He looked straight forward. "It was nothing. Nevermind-" The small one felt her hand on the side of his head.

"...Oh right, that's what that is." He lowered his head and ears. "You turn purple when you're... Not afraid. Embarrassed? Blushing?"

A sigh in defeat came from him. "Yes. Damn ears seem to telegraph our feelings." He grumbled. Feeling Tia pet him a bit, he noticed her blushing a bit as well. "Fine. I was going to say, Because you're brave. That's why you stood up to me there." Another sigh as he looked away, awkwardly. "Anyone else... Everyone else would've run for their lives..." A few pets on his head and neck, and then her hand went to his chin. "Not this again-nagh..." He purred, leaning into it a bit.

"Thank you, Atlas. It really means a lot, coming from you." The woman smiled. Leading him a bit closer to her for a small hug.

The young woman opened the door to her apartment, finding it only illuminated by a few lights from electronics. From the digital clocks on the stove and microwave, to the standby lights on the TV and home theater system. Turning on the main lights showed the black critter, laying on his back and asleep with his head between the two headphones. The image made her smile, so much so that she took a picture of it before closing the door. In case of it waking him up.

But it didn't. Even after the door shut, and Leslie taking off her footwear, the dragon remained asleep. Placing her bags on the counter, where she left the two cd cases, the young woman was a bit curious. Opening up the one with the Fly on it; Only Inhuman, showed no claw marks or creases on the booklet or the case. No new ones anyway. After the move, a few of the cases got damaged, but at least the album remained intact.

Setting it down, and grabbing a small box from the plastic bag, Leslie kneeled down to the couch. Watching the small black creature slumber was adorable, but he must've been hungry. All it took was the slightest touch to get Pseudo to start purring a bit. Petting him a bit harder to get him more awake, the dragon began to blink a bit. The amethyst iris circling around a bit and his pupil thinning and widening to focus on the woman's face.

All at once, the little one yelped loudly and scampered back. Sending the woman into giggles. "Sorry, sorry. I was trying to wake you gently." Breathing heavily, he looked around the room, studying it for a few moments, with an almost scared look on his face. "Are you okay?"

"...Yeah." He exhaled. Finally resting and laying back down.

"Were you dreaming?"

"...Yes. I thought I was..." He didn't finish, but got a few strokes from her and a nod. "Is it evening already?"

"Yep. I brought you home something." She reached around and grabbed the box. The smell of food inside even got her hungry, but she heard the dragon's stomach growl. "I think you need it more than me right now." She chuckled.

A few sniffs at the box got his tongue to lick at his muzzle. "What is it?" She lifted up the box to find large peppered fries that were shaped a little funny. "...What is it?" He perked his ears, getting the woman to giggle a bit.

"You know the rules." He grumbled a bit, but didn't hesitate to take a bite. Almost purring the instant

it touched his tongue. "Wedges." He made a noise in question. "It's a style of Potato fries. I looked at them, and they remind me of you."

"How can I possibly remind you of a potato?" She giggled at him. "And if you say it's because I'm small, I'm going to bite you." That one sent her on the floor laughing. "Out with it, you." He half said, stuffing another one of the addictive fries in his muzzle.

"Actually, it's because they have the same shape as your head." He stared at her in shock for a few moments. "It's kinda wedge shaped." She tried so hard not to laugh, but the sight of his spines slowly rising up broke her.

He looked at the box of fries and hissed with his mouth full. Raising a paw to swat it, he stopped for a moment, and hit the cushion instead. "You're lucky you're so damn tasty." He grumbled at the fries. Eating them until the woman got the giggles out of her system. Several minutes later, she got up and composed herself. At least until the dragon stared her down.

"Don't you start again." She said, still half laughing.

"I should be the one saying that. What was so funny anyway?" He swallowed the mouthful.

"If I talk about it, I won't stop." A few breaths to resist the urge to think about the look on his face. "So, how did you like Only Inhuman?" He glanced at her for a moment in question. "The cd." She pointed at the player.

"It was..." He paused for a moment. "Easier to understand. But I still couldn't get all of it."

"Yeah, they did this album and the next one very well."

"...What was the name of the first one?"

"On here? Aftermath. But I played the first two songs in the morning. The first one you probably listened to was Psychic Suicide." The dragon tilted his head, and she smiled at him. "Love Is Nothing But A Psychic Suicide."

"What does that mean?" He curled his neck at the machine.

She half shrugged, getting her own mean and sitting down across from him. "Probably how loving someone tends to make you illogical. Irrational at times, perhaps even-"

"Insane. Or Berserk." He interrupted her sadly. Leslie gave him a look asking if he was okay, and the little one nodded. "Can I... Ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Is this place haunted?" She chuckled at him.

"Shouldn't be. Why?"

"...A few days ago, something appeared in this room. A large, white beast with multiple legs. Went by the name of Bartan."

The woman shook her head, not knowing the name or the description. Seeing that, the dragon sighed. "I know of Kveldulves or Twilight Wolves. They're sometimes white and have multiple heads. But legs? Nothing comes to mind."

"He said that he was a creator of a universe or something. I honestly found it hard to follow, but he took me back... There."

"You mean...?" He nodded, then the woman motioned him to go on.

"He explained a few things to me. Some... very complicated things." The little one shook his head quickly. "But he said I should look for something."

"What?"

"The First Snowfall Is Always The Whitest." She looked into space within thought for a few moments, knowing it sounded familiar. Then to the cd player. "That is what he said, right? I didn't just hear that because I wanted to?"

"Yes, that's an actual lyric in Psychic Suicide. If you want to check, you can always look at the booklet in the case." He looked at her puzzled, getting a smile from her. "I didn't think you were listening too well this morning. You seemed to be a bit shy about last night." The dragon looked away, his ears back but turning a little purple. "Hey, it's alright."

"You keep saying that."

"Because it is." She got up, giving him a pet before retrieving the case with the Fly on it. Looking at it still half disturbed the wyrmling. "It's a bit odd, isn't it? The next album tends to explain it a bit better."

"It just reminds me of... Something." She nudged him to spill it out. Then nudged him again, getting a hiss from her. "The first time I died, I was fighting these frog people called Kuo-toa."

She nodded, looking at the booklet a bit. "Mhmm. I know of them."

"Yeah. Well... They eventually got technology to the point where they were replacing their limbs with... Metal."

"Like a cyborg?" He looked at her, not knowing the word. "Nevermind. But I understand why it tends

to make you uncomfortable. I never liked bugs myself, to be honest."

"That's a very big bug." He muttered, looking at the cover of the booklet before she put it down. Looking at the small text, he didn't recognize any of the characters in it.

"Here's Psychic Suicide. And right here: The First Snowfall Is Always The Whitest." She looked at him, and noticed some insecurity in his eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing." He muttered. Getting a few strokes from her.

"You can't read it, can you?" His head sank a bit. "It's alright-"

"Stop saying that." He exhaled loudly through his nostrils. Leslie was quiet for a few moments, then closed the booklet and put it back in its protective case.

"Tomorrow, I have the morning off, and Erin is working. I'll take you over there."

"What? Why?" He hissed, getting up and chasing after her in the kitchen. "Just because I don't like it when you say that?"

"No." She said, with a bit of a sly smile on her face. "We're going to teach you how to read."

Chapter 8

"You are just the most adorable little thing!" The pink haired woman shouted while she squeezed the dragon in a tight hug. Regardless of how much he struggled before, it didn't make any difference. The best thing to do was to just let the harpy have her way with him for the time being. At least until he got big enough to defend himself.

"Are you done?" He growled through her hair. Finally releasing the grip, but still holding the small one face to face.

"I'm so glad you love my grooming post!" Pseudo whimpered a little bit, his ears turning purple before

glaring at Leslie with a hateful stare.

"You told her!?"

"I didn't say anything." She raised her hands, giggling.

"She took a picture on her phone of you and it having some alone time." The black one grumbled, covering his eyes with his paws.

"Erin, I have a bit of a favor to ask you." It got her attention. "Pseudo should learn how to read."

"He can't?" The pink one looked at him closely, trying to see his eyes, but only noticed his ears turning purple. Looking at it in question, and then to Leslie for an explanation. The Teal one motioned to just leave it, that it was normal.

"He's not from here. Odds are they had a different language for humans there. Let alone a separate one for dragons."

"I guess that makes sense. I have a few things to do as a TA [Teacher Assistant], but after that I got the rest of the afternoon off. He can stay with the class if he wants to-"

"You will not put me in there with these spawn!" He hissed quietly.

"Relax Pseudo. But he's right. It wouldn't be a good idea to do that. Odds are they won't leave him alone, and well... He doesn't seem to be the type to like children."

"I suppose that makes sense. We have another room you can use. I'll get a few spread sheets and a box of letters to help you out at first. Then we can do it together when I'm off."

"That is if you can keep your hands off me." He grumbled.

"That's just because you're just too cute!" Erin hugged him again.

"Stop! Let go of me! Ugh..." He gave up. Feeling Leslie pet the back of his mane while he endured.

The sun was setting when the two decided to stop and make camp. Doing his usual 'Rock Dome Home' Atlas made it much bigger than the two would possibly take up. Getting their dinner ready, she kept looking at it. "What is it?" He caught her, tracking her eyesight.

"It's awfully large, isn't it?" She smiled at him, nudging his side as the two worked on a table made from plants and leaves. Still amazed at the creativity of the dragon. "Are you expecting guests?" She

teased as she cut up some potatoes that they asked for while passing a farm. In return, she got the dragon to repair a fence that seemed to have better days.

"Says you. There's no telling how big I'll be by morning." He smirked. Nudging the woman back while he tended to chunks of meat for the stew. "Go on. He grabbed you from behind, and then what?"

"Well... I don't like telling people this, but it's okay with you because odds are it won't work." It got him curious, perking his ears a little. "I was always told to sing when we were being held like that."

He snorted. "How could Singing possibly help?"

"Not with your voice." She giggled. Seeing him toss his snout and motion for her to get on with it. She motioned for him to step back and stand upright. moving her back into him and wrapping his arms around her like the man in the story. "Sing: Solar-plexus," She motioned an elbow in the gut. "Instep," Tapping her heel on the dragon's hind paw. "Nose," An easy touch with a single finger. "Groin." A step to the side with a motion of her hand down below. Followed by a soft stroke on his neck while she went back to the table.

"And you were taught this?" She made a noise in confirmation. "I didn't think..."

"The church taught Oracles many things. You'd be surprised about a few of them." She smiled at him staring at her, then looked away awkwardly.

"I'm..." He cleared his throat. "I'm sure I would be." She giggled at the black one's response.

"Something wrong?"

"N-no. I just always thought..."

"That we were just damsels in distress?" His ears, though a purple tint, went a bit low. And she pet them once again. Still getting a kick out of how he faintly whimpers at the slightest touch. "Many people would like an Oracle to assist them. A willing one, or not. As you can see, one of them can bring distraught if they persuade the right person."

"Yeah..." He sighed quietly. Still seeing some guilt in his eyes, she traced her hands around his head and through his mane. Just now realizing that Atlas was about her size now. Just a little smaller. At this rate he was right, he would probably be back to his large self by the morning. The thought of it almost saddened her, knowing he'd be too big for Tia to hold in her arms. "Are the potatoes ready?" He snapped her out of thought.

"Yes. Which reminds me." She went to her bags, pulling out several little containers. "It's not much, but I would like to use them."

"What are they?" He looked at them closer, but being a solid color, there wasn't much to see. As the woman opened one, he carefully sniffed it, and the smell of Sage filled the air. "Spices?" He said, a bit happily.

"Rather fresh too. I got them in Ebonhoath."

"Are you sure...?" The dragon didn't finish. Distracted by her smile and her nod. "Throw it in. What else do you have?"

"I can't recall all of them. You might have to browse yourself. The meats were ready, correct?"

"Yes." A bit strangely, then sneezed after smelling another. Getting the woman to laugh. "Just got too close." Feeling the faint sprinkles of rain on his wings. Turning Bronze, he covered the entire area with rock, along with a flue for the fire.

"Why did...?" She started to ask, just now hearing the rain begin to pour on the stone home. "Nice catch." She smiled at him. "That would've really ruined the meal."

"And the spices, let alone the evening." He said, just now realizing it was a tad awkward. "At least we're turning in for the night." Passing a few of the chosen containers to her, he walked over and made a very large bed out of plants and leaves. Making another fire towards the other end to keep warm.

Tia then walked over to him, tickling his wings a bit to get them to raise up. "Only one bed?" She asked, teasing the now red one.

"Oh... Did you want a separate one? I just thought..." He trailed off, getting submersed in her chin scratching.

"One will do. Just try not to roll over on me or anything." She giggled.

The two ate the delicious meal, and listened to the rain and the fires for a bit. Laying down in the comfortable leaves, resting their bodies from a long journey. "Tia..." Atlas mumbled, getting a noise in question from her. "What will you do after this is all over? What will we do?"

"I haven't really thought about it too much yet. You never know what's going to happen in the future."

"...What do you want to happen?" He said, rather calmly while yawning. "If you could choose a path, what would it be?"

"Honestly?" He nodded. "...It would be with you. Perhaps traveling the world, even if it means by flight." The black one chuckled at that. "Seeing the lands, and then maybe settle down somewhere."

"No longer being an Oracle?"

She half sighed and shrugged. "Being one is almost like being born poor. You're just stuck with it for the rest of your life. No matter what you do to try to change that, you're always walking one path for good, or several for bad." She reached over and stroked his other arm, while the dragon held her with the other. "I'd gladly give up that life for you, Atlas."

"Are you asking to be kidnapped by a dragon, like in your tales?" He chuckled.

"Maybe. But maybe I'm asking to be rescued." The black one smiled at that. For a few moments, they just laid in silence.

"...Tia?" She looked at him for a moment. "...Haytre. My real name is Haytre." She smiled brightly at him, moving up to kiss the space between his nostrils, as he licked under her chin a bit.

For a few seconds time stood still, until he pressed his lips to hers and they both took a deep breath. Lapping his tongue into her mouth, even though he was not used to the lack of space. He still tried to make it more enjoyable for her. However it was a bit hard to do with Tia's position. With a slight motion of his arm, she climbed on top of his belly and chestplates. Still not breaking the kiss for several minutes, the black one began purring loudly. Their breaths got heavier and heavier, moving their bodies in motion. As she stroked the back of the dragon's neck and chin, while he carefully rubbed her upper and lower back.

Grinding on top of him for a while, she felt something below stiffen. Knowing exactly what it was. Still rubbing against it made the dragon's breath shake a bit, as she let go of his neck and started unbuttoning her gown. Taking the shoulder straps off with one hand was a bit difficult, but she managed to do it. However, the gown itself was a single piece.

Eventually she broke the kiss, but went in for a quick one before sliding off of him. "Tia...?" She just smiled at him, as she reached back and undid the small zipper. Sliding off the white dress and stepping out from it. Climbing back onto him, she showed no shyness. No fear or embarrassment to her naked figure. Facing him, looking directly into those Amethyst eyes, she smiled. Just like she always did. "Are you...?" Haytre whispered.

Looking directly into those blue eyes, she needed no words to answer him. They themselves said that she was sure. That she was ready, willing, Gifting herself to the dragon. The one she cared for. The one he had seen in his dreams. The one who promised him Salvation. With another deep kiss, he accepted her Gift.

Once again purring loudly and breathing deeply together as one, she grinding once again on the fleshy weapon just under her. Tia stroked his chin thoroughly, until they overpowered the sound of the heavy rain clashing against the building with the dragon's purrs. She kept at it for several minutes. Until he let out a faint whimper and felt a warm wetness below.

Breaking the kiss for just a moment, the woman still smiled at him. Retreating one hand from his chin, she reached down and felt for the red tool. The soft touch made him gasp for a moment. Then feeling its tip press against her lower lips, already separating them with its design. "Tia..." He whispered again, just now retreating her other hand to brace herself on the floor. Her main hand went back to his head, this time the side of it. Looking into each other's eyes once again, he began feeling something different. Almost like an echo within the pleasure. Like a second wave that went through his body. And judging by her breaths, Tia felt the same.

Slowly, the woman began to ease the dragon's shaft into herself. Sending the pleasure that she felt into him, as well as feeling his own with her touch. The waves seemed to thrash between the two as the red tower slowly slipped inside. Haytre's breaths got a bit faster for a moment, and she felt a warm squirt inside. Feeling the wave herself made her squeeze him, giving the black one a whimper of both pleasure and a bit of pain.

After a few breaths and moments of just enjoying it, the woman started slipping it in and out slowly. Sending the waves between them, as well as the warm liquid a place to drain. Covering the tool made it much easier to slip inside, just thankful that he wasn't any bigger. If the dragon was, odds are it might do some damage to her.

After getting used to it a bit, the two went back into locking lips for a while. Letting the process proceed for a bit longer. Pretty soon the dragon was purring once again without the secret spot. Overpowering the storm that demanded to be heard with a few thunders. Letting the tool slip in a bit deeper every so often and then back to the head a few times. Feeling the spines the dragon described in his story earlier that day, the flare, it was unbelievable. And the feeling itself could not be described in words.

Breaking the kiss for a moment, Haytre licked at the woman's neck and breasts as they slowly moved towards his snout. Breathing a warm breath over the nipple and lightly grazing it with his fangs. Not nearly enough to pierce it, but to stimulate the pleasure it gave off. Feeling it for himself let him know he was doing it correctly the whole time. Occasionally sucking on it, half wondering if such fleshy bags were even worth having at times. But the pleasure it omitted, the softness it felt over the tongue and muzzle, it all seemed worth it for these moments.

Going slightly too deep, Tia reached the first dragon's ridge. Getting him to lean forward for a moment, and let the pleasure echo between the two. Feeling it herself made the woman squeeze him, and that in turn shot another load of pre inside her. The warmth that it gave off was amazing. Like in a hot bath of soothing soaps. A silky liquid that washed within and over the lower horn. Yet, somehow did not dull the design of the tool.

The woman remembered how sensitive the ridges were, and remained careful for the time being. Only going down to them every so often, but feeling a jolt of the dragon's seed release upon every touch. The whimpers were almost a constant form of Haytre's breathing now. Even after slipping the

flare out to drain the white liquid, he was still feeling the buildup get closer and closer. As well as a puddle being made on his lower belly.

With one more kiss, Tia slowly began taking his full length. Slipping it inside while the dragon whimpered in her mouth. It was hard to tell if he was following her lips, or if he was leaning forward due to the pleasure. But seeing a slight shadow of his tail curling as well made her almost chuckle. Going over his first ridge sent the beast into squirms. The second one scrunched up his muzzle, and the third almost hissing. The final one touched what felt like a wall inside the woman. Far deeper than she really thought possible. Feeling the dragon's rapid breaths and oncoming waves was thrown into her as well, to the point where she squeezed and felt the dragon squirt a large load inside her. Farther inside than the others have gotten and it remained in there even after she retreated the horn outside of her.

Feeling Haytre still squirm a bit, using his tail to thrust inside her while on his back was almost sending him into spasms. But he could only get as far as just above the first ridge. The dragon groaned a bit, trying to fight off the constant barrage of waves for a bit longer, but it wasn't going to happen. Instead, he grabbed the woman and rolled on all fours. Still holding her against his belly while the bed of plants began to grow to support Tia's new height. Carefully letting go of her to make sure she didn't fall, he struggled to speak to her. Nuzzling her neck and chest with his muzzle and whimpering for permission. "Go ahead, Atlas." She said, Feeling him step forward and giving her the full length as soon as she said it. Roaring in pleasure loudly, and feeling the strength of it within herself as well. Normally, she would fear such a thing if it was heard. But the sheer power of what it Had. What it Held. What it Meant...

The dragon slammed his tail on the ground a few times, almost digging a hole in the ground with his tailspines and sending chunks of grass flailing into the air. He began thrusting into the woman. Trying to be gentle, but was overpowered by instincts. The waves thrashed between them over and over, sending more and more of the silky seed inside and letting it rush out with every thrust. With every seven or so thrusts she gave into him and squeezed the lower horn with her lower lips. Which only drove him harder and harder. Her breasts bounced and rotated like clockwork. One clockwise while the other counter. With so many areas, it was hard to focus on just one. It was a flood of stimulants, with a very big one on the horizon.

With another step forward, he locked the woman down into place. Hearing him growl at something approaching, as his stones began to shrink about halfway. Grabbing a hold of his bicep and his jaw, Tia tried to brace herself while it came to her as well. The large wave sent her squeezing his final ridge and squirting herself, and then echoed it back the the Black one. Getting him to almost collapse and roar as the rest of his sack was drained dry. Feeling the pressure inside of his lower area on herself, she half wondered if Haytre was in pain. "Are you-?"

He roared loudly once again, feeling that empowerment within herself. As well as the shaft thicken and release a steady stream of the white at a high pressure. It almost hurt her, feeling it go directly into the uterus and force it to expand. After the third torrent, she could almost see a bulge, and feel the discomfort. Which in turn was reflected on the dragon, who exhaled sharply and took a step back before

she was going to call to him. Though the tower was still inside the woman, the extra room it gave was soon filled up. The pressure returned, and he took another step back. Repeating the process, until she was completely filled and the horn was out. Spraying a bit on her pelvis, until she motioned him to come forward and rub the rest of it against her. A few more torrents covered her with a white warmth, and the orgasm of the beast was enough to make Tia go through several of her own.

But even after that, still hanging onto him, she could tell that Haytre wasn't done. That there was still something inside him that felt like it was building pressure. His breaths were still rapid and still fighting against instincts, and forcing him to relax wouldn't make it go away. "Lay on your back again." She told him as he tried to look her in the eyes. He didn't argue, even when he rolled onto the colder ground. Laying there, he kept thrusting his haunches and thumping his tail a bit.

As the woman made her way to his tail and haunches, she touched the horn softly. Beginning to stroke it. The loud whimpers that came from the black one still told her that something was wrong, and the Oracle looked into it. Her hands were not quite soft enough to stimulate the mating tool anymore. It was still quite sore and throbbing with sensitivity. Looking around for a leaf or a blanket that might be softer, but that wouldn't quite work. Putting a finger on her chin to think, she felt her breast, giving her an idea.

Carefully leaning over the tool, the woman rested her breasts around it. Stroking it lightly thought them, and hearing the dragon's whimpers turn into purrs of pleasure once again. She smiled, as she began using them to pleasure the dragon. Really trying to focus on the ridges more than the rest of it, and feeling the buildup arrive much quicker this time, as well as through herself again. Haytre began to breathe heavily while raising his head and neck. His tail began to curl much like the same way from under Tia. A few slow deep breaths and then a final roar that was actually more of a groan of relief. Cueing the first torrent to spray the woman in the face for a moment as she had her own releases on the dragon's tail. Several sprays didn't seem to make it that far up his body, but still painted his underside with streaks of white. Jerking through the orgasm, he slowly laid back down. Catching his breath.

Before he passed out, he made the area under him much more comfortable, leaving lots of room for her as well. Barely being able to keep his eyes open to look into her blue ones, they read Thank You, then passed out. Getting his breaths to normalize. Chuckling at his large smile, a bit of the seed made its way onto her tongue. Though the smell of it and even the taste of it felt familiar, she could not quite place it. Wiping off her face with a leaf, and doing what she could to clean up his belly, she climbed back onto him. Feeling his arms instinctively wrap around her. As Tia stroked him, feeling the afterglow like a radiant light, she also felt his fatigue after such an act. A nice, calming, restful feeling that put her at peace. Hearing his wings cover the two up, they went to sleep in the warmth of the fires and scales.

The castle was dark. Unusually dark for a hunter's moon. Everywhere one would look there were shadows. Often dancing with the cool breeze that ran through the building freely. But once in a while,

there was a quick one that was out of place. Not making a single sound.

The bed was comfortable. There was no denying that. The creator did it for a living, and he knew his trade well. The woman could still remember the man, and how shocked he looked when the dragon decided to take off with it after she paid for the large thing. Though it wasn't big enough for Atlas to sleep on, barely big enough for the Kveldulf, Elexus had it to herself. Though its craftsmanship was possibly the best thing she's ever slept on, that kept her awake. The idea of sleeping alone.

(It's been several days.) She thought, turning once again towards the window with the moonlight shining through. (And he's still not back yet. It worries me to death.) Once again, her thoughts began to run wild with many situations or excuses that would revolve around the dragon's disappearance. Stressed, she took a deep breath, only to see something move in the night. Laying still to try to hear anything, she tried to call to him, but a hand cover her mouth before she could scream.

The room remained almost empty. Rather vast and spacious except for a large bed where the woman was sound asleep. Finding the structure of the thing strangely made without support beams above, the shadow quietly made his way inside. Walking up to the bed and holding the woman on the mouth, getting her awake and stare at him with wide eyes. Trying to scream through his hand, she seen the shine from his blade and tried to struggle against it as he stabbed her in the heart.

The sudden impact seemed to break the woman like glass and sting the man's mind with pain. As her body shattered into fragments of light, it rose up and faded away, leaving the assassin disoriented. Bursting out of a wardrobe, the Kveldulf teared down the halls with the real woman on his back. Grunting loudly, the shadow chased after it.

The halls were made for running. Thanks to their large size and amount of space, Feyon Feyris could navigate easily without worrying about running into objects. Loud clacks from his paws and hoofs echoed through the castle as he took a right turn. Leaving a type of clone of them running straight into another direction. As frightened as Elexus was, she just held onto what she hoped was the real Kveldulf.

Taking the long way to the main exit, the two ran through the halls. With every turn, he left a phantasm of himself to go a different direction. Sending the sounds of hooves and running all over the castle and very hard to track. Upon getting to the exit, the shadow jumped down in front of it. Getting the beast to slide to a halt.

There were no words between them. Just a faint silence from the man dressed in a dark navy. A low growl came from the Kveldulf and the man quickly pulled out several small knives for throwing. But distracted by the faint sounds of hooves coming from the halls above and around. Throwing them at the woman, got her to hold on a bit tighter to the creature that didn't move. Only to have one of the clones jump over them and deflect them away with his claws.

Another white beast lept from the archway above. And two more from another side. The shadow

turned to retreat, but was blocked off by three more. Several others joined the pack, surrounding the assassin. Almost in a panic, he drew one last set of knives. All the beasts around him arched their backs and roared loudly, shattering all at once and fading away with the shadow's scream of pain. Kneeling down, then falling to his side.

For a moment, all were still. Until a small black pool leaked out of the man's mask, the Kveldulf exhaled in relief. "He's dead." Feyris said, a bit sadly.

"But they know where we are." The other stated, trying to look at the woman getting off them and walking towards the body of the man.

"Elexus..."

"What was that?" She asked them. "How...?"

"There's a reason why we've been alive all this time." Feyon explained. "We've found ways to use the minds of others to our advantage."

"They see things, they believe they exist. Even if they can't quite put it into logic." The right head nudged her.

"...Why were they after us?" She pet their heads a bit.

"They're not after us. They're after you." The woman looked at them with a bit of fright and confusion. As Feyon sighed, looking at his partner, he nodded.

"Elexus... We know why Atlas has grown unusually attached to you."

"And why he's been acting... Strangely protective."

"Why?" She asked them worryingly.

"This is tedious." The hatchling grumbled. "And foolish. How exactly is this supposed to help me read?"

Leslie giggled at him. "I know it's a bit silly. It's for children, so give it some slack. Next page." She motioned for him to go on.

Flipping the booklet for him, she pointed out where to start. "The... Dog... Can... Ride... A Bike. That doesn't even make any sense!" He hissed, getting another flabbergasted reaction out of the woman. "It's doubtful that any canine even has the balance for such things. Let alone the body structure for such a device!" Pseudo tossed his snout and covered his eyes with his paw in frustration. Waiting for the woman to stop her cackle fit.

"Okay, okay. We'll try something a bit more serious then. I should actually think of a way to bribe you actually."

"Witch." He grumbled.

"I meant as in a reward system. Just for getting things correct."

"Sounds like a bad system." She looked at him a bit puzzled while digging through her bag. "You promote your young and reward them for getting something correct, yet punish them for failure. That only raises them to be afraid of failure, not to accept it and try again. Instead of giving them encouragement to try once more, you're teaching them to completely avoid failure to begin with." The black one snorted and remained quiet for a few moments. "I never understood how humans raised their young."

"How did you do it?" He looked at her for a moment. Still seeing that smirk of hers, letting him know that she didn't take the statement poorly. The little one sighed.

"We teach them how to become better. Not how to become right to begin with. It's not the answer that matters, is how you get the answer. The journey and experience that ensures that the wyrmling knows and understands what's correct. Be it morally or physically. It may sound harsh, as I've heard one of your kind say, but our children seem to grow up much faster."

"So, what do you suggest we do then?" She asked, placing the album cases on the table while looking for her phone. "Or at least until we get some food. I've eaten at the cafeteria in this school before, but it's not... Great."

Looking at the cases, he searched for the one with the Fly on it once again. Opening it and taking out the little booklet inside. "You said the words to the songs are in this, right?"

"The lyrics, yes. Do you want anything special on your pizza?"

"On my what?" He curled his neck.

"Nevermind." He grumbled at her with his ears back. "What are you planning?"

"Planning on getting some progress done while learning how to read." Pseudo muttered, flipping through the book. "Whitest is spelled 'Double V', H-"

"You mean 'Double U'."

"It's not two **Us** side by side, it's two **Vs**. So therefore, Double V."

"But that's the way the language works. Double U." A loud growl came from the black one's throat.

"Stupid language!" He hissed at the box of letter magnets and swatted them onto the floor. Just when Erin entered the room.

"Having difficulties?" She giggled.

"Just letting him have a tantrum."

"It's not a tantrum. It's releasing frustration." The small one thumped his tail on the table. "And your language is stupid."

"He's somehow even cuter when he's mad." A loud hiss broke the two into giggles.

"Dragons are not cute!" He grunted, looking back through the booklet. "Now which song was it?"

"Oh, by the way Erin. I ordered a pizza for us all. Requested marshmallows for you."

The dragon perked up an ear. "What's a marshmallow?"

"It's like a sugary little puffball that's fun to snack on." He glared at the pink haired one, unable to tell if she was either joking or insulting him in some way. "Actually, you kinda look like--"

"Don't." He demanded. "Just... Don't." A snicker escaped her mouth and she pet him a little bit. While Leslie pointed out where he was searching for, then word for word. "Alone. Again... In. My. Broken. Dream. What. Is. Love. If. Not a... Pi-chick?" He tilted his head.

"Psychic." He glared at Leslie for a moment. "The P is silent."

"Then why is it even there?" He grumbled, only to see her shrug. Covering his eyes with his paws again, the small one grunted in frustration.

"Maybe it's time we took a break."

"No." He placed a heavy paw on the booklet. Exhaling a bit loudly. "...He wanted me to find something in this... Disc. I'm going to find it."

"Who?" Erin asked, getting the two to look at her for a moment. Then the little one sighed.

Chapter 9

He was drifting in the air, through the clouds or a thick fog. Hearing the waves below him crash against the loud rocks like he always fell asleep to. Whenever he was dreaming of her while she was away during her Season. Seeing the fog spread away and avoid him, his black wings began to flutter, almost being able to see the grass below him. Landing heavier than he expected, it felt so familiar to him. To the point where he looked at his black paw and noticed it was much larger. More mature...

A large gust of wind began blowing in his face, casting away the thick fog behind him. Allowing the black dragon to see himself standing between two fissures within the Draconian's Claw. Shroud's heart sank, no wonder this felt familiar to him. The scent, sound, even the warmth of the winds. Even though it was no longer his home, it was still much the same as it used to be.

A few pawsteps could be heard behind the black one, but he barely flicked an ear towards it. Feeling another's snout nuzzle him from the base of his neck to under his jaw, he sighed heavily. Wanting to lean towards it so badly. "It almost looks the same."

"...Yes. Regardless of how long it's been." He swallowed, feeling several licks on his neck. "...I'm So-" A sharp clamp on his ear interrupted him.

"Don't you dare say it." She half hissed, now letting go of his ear. "Now look at me, Shroud." He slowly did. Seeing the dark purple scales that covered her paws slowly morph to a dulled black as they got closer towards her midsection. Mostly on her back along her spine. And lastly, those aqua blue eyes, sending a pain in his heart.

The black one's muzzle lowered and she caught it. "Nitaka..." He whispered, and the female kissed him. Everything from her lips to her tongue pawing against his felt so real. After a few moments, she broke the kiss. "I'm sorry-"

She immediately shoved him. "Damnit Shroud!" She chuckled at him, making the male smirk sadly.

"I tried to-"

"Stop." She placed a paw over his nostrils. "Please. I know already... You don't need to say it. Let's just... Enjoy this, okay?" She felt him exhale, then nod. She leaned into him, slowly knocking him off balance and laying down, while she rested on him a bit. "So you know where we are then?"

"Some... Thing showed me. I can't quite describe it." She nodded, licking his neck again. And Shroud began to slowly do the same for a bit. "...How are you?"

The purple one looked at him for a moment, smiling a bit sadly. "I'm doing fine, Shroud... I'm with First Place now. I'm... Happy. Don't worry about me." He faintly nodded. "What about you?"

"...Living with two harpies in a mechanical hell run by humans." She laughed at that. Even though the black one's ears were back, he couldn't help but smile at the sound of her chuckles. "Maybe it's not as bad as I think it is, but..." Another kiss. "...I miss you. And-"

"I know. I miss you too. But..." She looked away from his purple eyes, gazing upon the fields of green grass that the fog once hid. Seeing it all blow in the wind, and the lack of a dragon's nest in the distance. "Shroud... You need to stop living here."

"I..." An exhale from him. "I know I shouldn't. But I felt... Happy with you." A few moments of silence, as she rested her head on his neck. "What if I can't find that again? What if I can't find you?"

"You can't find me. Even if you knew exactly where I was... Shroud, I don't need rescuing. You do. But... You need to rescue yourself, with the help of others." He tried to look at her. As she tossed her snout, she got up. Pulling on his arm to get him up too, and face him to the fields of green. After a few licks, she spoke up. "Burn it."

"What?" He double taked. Only looking into her eyes and understanding. After a few moments of silence, he nodded. Overlooking the area once more, he turned Crimson like it was so natural.

"If you need a spark, I'm sure I can help you with that." She smirked, getting one from him as well. Touching his claws together in a single paw and separating them got several sparks of red lightning to arch from their tips. Making a flame in the center where they were joined. Stomping that paw on the ground sent the flames in four opposing directions and form a circle of flame around the two. It waited until the dragons were done with one more small kiss, before rampaging outwards in a wave of fire. Combusting everything it touched, turning the meadow into flames dancing in the winds.

As his old home began to burn to nothing, something began to slowly fall from the sky. Several flakes of white soon turn to thousands. Resting on the fires and disappearing. "The first snowfall of our home." The red one looked at her for a moment, reverting to his natural color and covering her with a wing. As

she leaned into him once again, nuzzling into his neck, she whispered. "Don't forget me. Forget this place, but don't forget me."

"I can't forget either. I never will, even if I wanted to." She smiled at him, as the two watched the remains of their old home break down into fragments. "...How is Death, by the way?"

Nitaka looked at him for a moment, then smiled. "He's everything I thought he would be."

"That's not exactly what I meant."

"Oh. Well, you're bigger, but he's... Ice Cold." The black one groaned loudly, tossing his muzzle and covering his eyes with a paw. Shuttering at the thought while the female laughed until she couldn't stand.

The room remained dark and silent. The embers that were left from the two fires were no longer glowing or alive, but the stone home kept warm for the night. Shifting a bit and growling to a purr, the dragon felt something on his chest. Now being his full size once again, he felt the smaller thing move a bit. Rubbing his chestplates with a faint sticky mess. "M'orning..." He mumbled, trying to reach it carefully and touch the woman with a single paw. Feeling the shape, it started to come back to him. "M'y Elexus..."

Still getting up herself, she made a noise in question that he didn't respond to. "What does Elexus mean?"

"M'Draconic for Nirvana." Haytre said, yawning and snapping his jaws. Opening his eyes and getting them adjusted for the dark, she could see the woman smile at him, and he smiled back. "M'you cold?"

"A little. More just messy from last night. You were not exaggerating from your stories."

"M'Of course not. Imagine how much there would be if I was this size. By the way, that little trick of yours was wonderful."

"Thank you." She said, moving up to pet his chin. He didn't resist, but leaned into Tia's hands as soon as they came close. However, to reach such an area, she needed to almost sit on his neck. The vibrations the deep purrs began to cause sent her breathing deeply. Sending the pleasure that she felt back to the dragon and causing him to do the same for a few moments.

"Tia..." He gasped. "Not... So..." She eased up a bit, letting him talk. "Not so soon. Or else I'll be sleeping half the day."

"You sure?" He nodded. "Alright. Tonight maybe then. Though..." She looked down towards his lower side, unable to see through the darkness. "It's too bad you weren't still smaller."

"Enjoyed yourself that much?" He chuckled, a large smile over his muzzle as he shifted colors. Opening a large section of the roof on the opposite side of the room. Though the daylight was a bit bright on her eyes, she could start to make out the mess the two made during the night. Especially on the bronze dragon with the erect tool. Smiling at it, Tia gave the dragon a small kiss under the jaw.

As a large bowl of rock began to shape under the hole in the ceiling, the dragon carefully grabbed the woman and slid her down to his chest for a moment. Rolling over to get up and holding her there as she yelped. Hobbling towards the bowl and changing to a blue, water started to come down from the hole and fill the large tub, while a few flames began burning under it. "A bathtub?" She asked, still looking at it upside-down.

"Mhmm." He mumbled, as he climbed inside and laid on his back. Getting the water to rise up above him and soak the naked woman as well. To her surprise, the water was already quite warm. And with the sun beating down, it was going to stay that way.

"This is really nice." She said, curling up next to his head and feeling him nod. Starting to wash the white mess from him. "Your name... It was Heytor?"

"Haytre. Think a Tray of horse Hay." He smiled at her, slipping them both down to jaw height in the water. "You should feel honored. Not very many people know of my real name."

"It is an honor. Thank you." The woman kissed his muzzle, still washing herself with her hands. As a paw of his resurfaced, a plant from below unfolded a bit of a leaf that he plucked from it. Handing it to Tia. "Thanks." She took it, washing off herself and then his body.

"...That was her name." He mumbled, getting the woman to look at him. "I called her Elexus, because she didn't have one."

"Most slaves don't usually get names in this world." She said a bit sadly.

"Not just a name though..." The black one sighed through his nostrils. "I gave her an identity. Told her how to act, how to be stronger. I changed her so she could survive."

"Sounds like you really did take her under your wing." Tia smiled at him. "Haytre?" He made a noise in question. "Can you be honest with me? How did you feel about her? Do you remember?"

"...Halfly. I wanted to protect her. Keep her away from the dangers of the world."

"So the things she did... The things we did?"

"Elexus got the idea in my head and let it swim until I submitted to it. Last night... I... Wanted to. With you." He looked away, his ears beginning to tint once again. As the woman finished, she swam back up to his muzzle and embraced it. Feeling his tongue began to lick her lower belly and between her legs a bit, sending a few waves through her and making her gasp. "Mmm... Black Liquorice. I still can't believe you let me do this."

"Do what?" She giggled, feeling the silky red appendage tickle her a bit.

"Penetrate you. I would've expected the church would have some sort of rules against it."

"They... Do." It got the dragon's eyes to focus on her for a moment. "But you were the same size as me, and... Well..."

"You didn't think there would be a better opportunity." He mumbled, getting a few strokes around the eyes and side of the muzzle. In turn, he gave the woman's chest a few licks.

"That too." It flickered a black ear. "Haytre... I L-"

"Ah HAH!" A makeshift door burst open from the other side of the stone house with Dr. Banjo's Silhouette. Causing both the dragon and the woman to yelp loudly in surprise and flap his wings to cover them both. Splashing the water into the air, and getting the man to yell himself from all the loud noises.

"Rex!?" The black one hissed. "What are you doing here!?"

"You guys thought you could leave me behind at castle Whatshisface? Well, you're wrong!"

"We left you at the church, at least we tried to." Tia explained. "What happened to you?"

"The bags were heavy, and when a horse wouldn't help me carry them, I took a nap."

"Wait, why would you ask a horse to carry them?" The dragon asked.

"Because that's what horses do. They carry stuff on wagons."

"They pull wagons that have stuff on them. They don't carry stuff."

"Actually, when people are on them, they do carry the people." The woman shrugged, getting the black one to look at her.

"Who's side are you on?" He curled his neck.

"Yours." Giggling at his snout tossing. "Sorry we left you, Doctor. But can you give us a few minutes? Alone?"

"For your pool party that I wasn't invited to?" He crossed his arms. "I think not."

"We're hiding in here from staplers." Atlas said, getting a rather surprised expression from the man. "They ambushed us last night and we hid in here for safety."

"Staplers?" The blonde woman whispered to him in question. Getting nudged by the large creature to play along. "Oh, yes! Can you patrol for us to make sure that they're gone?"

"You can count on me, Ma'am!" He gave four different salutes then ran off into the bushes. The dragon sighed, turning bronze and replacing the large hole in the wall. Then double taked at the woman staring at him.

"...Staplers?" Giggling at him tossing his head again. "What are...?"

"Long story. He screamed at a paperclip once and now he's at war with them. Been so for years."

"What's a paperclip?" The dragon turned silver and quickly made a small one for her size.

"That's one for humans to use as well."

"And he... Screamed at it?" She giggled. "He is some strange."

"He's annoying." The large one sighed through his nostrils. Relaxing his wings and shifting back into a more comfortable position. Getting a bit embarrassed about where the conversation was going before it was rudely interrupted, he didn't want to pressure her to finish it.

Instead, Tia just smiled at him. Petting the ears that have adopted a color like his eyes, and getting those gems to slowly look at her blue ones. "I love you." The statement fluttered his heart, and it made her smile brighter. As the woman leaned up to kiss him between the eyes, the black one licked her again. Getting the female to try to lick him and try it his way. Letting out a loud chuckle and a few purrs, he nuzzled into her body gently.

"...I love you too, Tia."

Tearing down the stone house, the two exited the camp grounds they claimed for the night. With the dressed woman and her bags on the dragon's back, she looked around. "I don't see him anywhere."

Then a rustling in the bushes. "You just had to say something, didn't you?" The large one grumbled, as the man jumped out with a pair of binoculars in one hand and the other behind his back. "Report." The dragon stated, getting the woman to giggle a bit.

"Sir! No signs of the Snappy Ouchies, Sir! But we did uncover this." He revealed his other hand. Displaying a muffin. "Do you speak muffin, sir?" Again, getting the woman to laugh.

Atlas smelled it a bit, and heard a strange ticking within. "Discard that at once, and scout ahead. We're to make it to castle so-and-so in four hours. Understood?"

"Sir, yes sir!" He gave three different salutes than before and tossed the muffin to the side of the road. Running off ahead while humming the theme to Mission Impossible.

The dragon sighed heavily. "There there." Tia rubbed the back of his neck. "I'm glad to see you're playing along with him."

"Yeah, yeah. It's so ridiculous, it's embarrassing." He started walking along. Seeing the doctor do poor somersaults and appearing in random trees in the forests.

"Why don't you like him?"

The dragon tried to double take. "Must you really ask? Have you paid any attention to him?"

"I have. I find him amusing. You just have a poor sense of humor." The woman giggled.

"Besides that." He exhaled through his nostrils. Licking the space between them. "You want the honest truth?"

"I'm testing you as we speak." It made the black one grumble a bit.

"He's... Bigger than me."

"Bigger than you?" Tia tried to mimic the dragon's head tilting. "Oh..."

"Of course you would go straight to that. But I'm not completely sure about his lower horn. But in every other way he is. Rex is taller, harder to... Damage." The woman giggled loudly. "I was going to say damage!" A snort. "And he's more powerful than I could ever be. And look at him." Atlas tossed his head forward, pointing out a moving cardboard box the Doctor was sneaking around in. Sticking out like a sore thumb. "He acts like a complete smart aleck."

"So, you're jealous?" A faint growl made her laugh again. "You don't find him fun?"

"I'd hardly describe it as fun. What we did last night was fun. Flying is fun-"

"Flying is not fun." Tia giggled at his reaction.

"You just need to do it more, is all." The black one snorted. "Reminds me, remember what I told you about dragon names?"

"Private. Don't worry. Your secret identity is safe with me." Another few pets as they came up to a top of a hill.

"Good. Now hold on tight."

"Atlas, we're not flying."

"Nope, just stay low and cover your ears a bit." She was puzzled but when he started to lay down, she got as close to his body as possible. Seeing a large flash from the camp and a thunderous noise. A cheezy, black & white mushroom cloud that was clearly a series of still-frame shots erupted from there. Feeling a warm wind and the smell of raisins rush past them. After the wind was gone, she looked at the dragon strangely, chuckling as he tossed his snout again. "I ate it last time. Tasted like butter and pecans." Shaking his muzzle from side to side while rising and walking forward. "I hate pecans." Another chuckle from the woman.

Leslie opened the door to her apartment again. As much as she really didn't like to leave the small one at home alone, she can't ditch every afternoon and evening class she has. To her surprise though, the lights were on, and the dragon was sitting at the couch. Looking down at the booklet. "Getting any better at it?" He just nodded at her, not removing his gaze. "You've learned it really fast, I'm impressed. Three days, and you're not even asking for help anymore." After taking off her shoes and getting closer, she could see his sorrowful expression. "What's wrong?"

He looked at her a bit sadly, then back at the book. "...I figured it out."

"Figured what out?" She lifted the book a little to see it was the one to Only Inhuman. The one with the Fly on the cover. "Still listening to this one, huh?" She rubbed his neck a little. Noticing how much bigger he's gotten the last week.

"The... Album?" He looked to ask if that was the correct word, and she nodded. "It's named after a song in the... List. Only Inhuman."

"You read that one, did you?" He nodded. "...Read it to me."

Pseudo leaned forward and studied it for a moment. "Will I Ever Find My Refuge Now? Ever Know Myself Again? Will I Ever Learn To Treasure The Ones I Care For? Everyone Leaves In The End, It Doesn't Matter How Hard You Hold On. Doesn't Matter How Much You Drain Your Heart For." He finished, almost leaning into her.

The woman smiled at him. "You've done amazing for yourself, you know that?" He still remained quiet. "Does it bother you?"

"...The song. It matches the picture with the... Bug." He muttered. "I know why it's replacing its bodyparts with something cold like metal. I understand..."

"Pseudo..." She picked him up and placed the black creature on her lap. "I know what you're thinking, to a degree. Depression does strange things to people. Makes them question-"

"I dreamt about her last night." The dragon interrupted. "...We were back in the fields, after I... Destroyed our home. She told me that... She didn't need rescuing. That I need it. And in order to do that, I needed the aid of others." He sighed. "I-I don't know if this is what..."

"That thing you saw a few days ago? Something about a god?"

"Yeah, if that's what he wanted me to see in here. But..."

"...Come to think of it, maybe it was." She looked at him. "Pseudo, did you ever notice that those questions in that stanza-" He tilted his head. "Section of several lyrics, kinda like a paragraph." He nodded, motioning her to go on. "They're after he... Gave up. And started replacing his body with emotionless parts. Maybe he's warning you." Looking at the booklet and reading it herself for a moment. "I always thought it should've been: Doesn't Matter How Much You Train Your Heart For."

"What?"

"You know, Train. To prepare as if to know it's coming. I mean, yes, eventually it will happen. Probably many times over. But... Isn't that a reason to do as much as you can with the ones you love? Instead of just shutting it all out and becoming cold?" The little one didn't answer. "Just something to think about. Who knows, this Snowfall business might be something else entirely." A few more pets to see if she could get a reaction out of him, but nothing. "Alright, I got us some dinner. Are you hungry now?"

"...Yeah." He muttered, getting off her legs so she could get up. Looking at the Fly on the booklet, regardless of how much it disturbed him, Pseudo began to feel a strange connection to it. Knowing that such creatures are often very frail, perhaps instead it was making itself immortal? Many thoughts went through his head, but those questions remained.

Looking once again at the woman who helped save him from an endless loop of death and starvation. To the living quarters she invited him into... A refuge, if you will. The people around him that really did care for him. Treasured his existence, even when he was grumpy, depressed, or bad company. Eventually they would all leave him. That was the harsh truth about his existence. That Haytre would be alone.

Regardless of how much he wanted to be alone right now. Regardless of how much he wanted to just fly away into a cave and just spend a lifetime in darkness... Pseudo owed this woman his current existence. As Leslie passed him a small bowl with fried wedges and some chicken fries, he smiled at her and accepted it. Leaning against her body once she sat down. As much as he wanted to be alone, he would find a way to repay Leslie first. Before he was even Haytre, he was a dragon. And that's what

dragons do.

Chapter 10

"I don't quite understand." Tia said, walking beside the large dragon while speaking to the red haired man on the other side. "Why would you scream at it?"

"Why not?" The man asked, a bit confused himself why she did not understand.

"I told you this is meaningless. There's no logic to this man and what he does." Grumbled the black one. Wishing he could get some more alone time with the blonde one. Though he was patient with them, that patience was wearing thin.

"Let me see if I can put it in terms you might understand. Have you ever wanted to just poke something, even though you know it might get mad and hold a fifty year grudge on you for doing so?"

Another grumble. "You've been at war for more than fifty years."

"Besides that."

"I still don't quite understand."

"I don't think you're able to. I don't think I'm able to. Or even him."

"Your black donkey is correct." A loud hiss from the beast. "And is very unfriendly." It made the woman giggle a bit, petting the dragon and keeping the two separated.

"But that does somehow remind me. Are you able to shrink him again?"

"Tia-"

"I shrunk him before?" The very serious question sent her into chuckles. "I don't recall this one ever being small. Let alone me doing it."

"You did it just before we entered the city. And well... I was wondering if you could maybe teach him to change his size." Atlas looked at her with a bit of worry. "It would make it much easier to hide him or carry him if he needed-"

"Better idea!" The man interrupted her very cheerily, worrying the dragon.

"Uh oh."

"What?" Tia looked back and forth at the two.

"What if I gave *you* the power to control his size?" He stroked his beard, accidentally pulling it off and having it stick to his hand without noticing.

"The power to control his...? Erm, doctor?"

"Not right now! I'm pondering."

"I have the feeling this is going to end very badly for me." The large one whimpered as the woman stroked his side for a moment. Looking back to find Banjo, he had disappeared in a puff of smoke again. Reappearing just in front of the walking dragon and right when his snout returned forward.

"Stop!" He placed the bearded hand in front of the dragon, and Atlas ran into it. Getting the hairy thing to stick to his muzzle and struggle frantically to get it off. Hissing and cursing at the thing, Banjo pulled Tia off to the side quite a ways. "Just place your hands like I did before..." He set her hands in the rectangle shape like a camera. "And just aim it at him... Perfect! Now just either pull them apart for bigger, or closer together for smaller!" He demonstrated with the woman's hands while the black one still battled with the beard. Too distracted to even notice his change.

"How is this even...?"

"You just need to believe! Oh, and also, don't do this:" He grabbed her arms and flung them in opposite directions, making the dragon over 250 feet tall. This time, noticing the change of the scenery around him, Atlas whimpered a bit and stood perfectly still. "Whatever you do, do not do that-did it just get dark in here?"

"Um... Doctor?" She pointed up and the man screeched as a brick fell out of the bottom of his robe.

Looking around a bit, the dragon's head was creating large winds. When he started to look behind him, his tail instinctively started to move as well. Accidentally leveling a large chunk of a forest. "Tia?" He whimpered. Wondering if maybe he stepped on her.

"Atlas! Can you hear me? Doctor, what do I do?"

"You're a Nun, aren't you?" She looked at him strangely. "I'm a personal accountant myself. Boring job, you'd hate it."

"That's not what I meant. How do I put him back?"

"Back where?"

She sighed heavily. "This is getting nowhere. Atlas!? I'm going to try something!" Tia took a step back. Lifting her arms side to side, she made the rectangle thing with her hands and began pushing them closer together. To her surprise, the black one was getting smaller. A bit slower to the point where she had it do it several times, but it was working. Because of that, the dragon got a look at the kingdom ahead, and his heart sank.

After getting back to normal size, the black one and blonde sighed in relief. Giggling at the red beard on the dragon's muzzle still. Growling at it, he struggled to get it off once again. "That's where I put that!" The man said, tearing it off like a strip of duct tape and getting the dragon to whimper.

"Sorry about that." She pet him on the neck. "But it works at least."

"For you maybe. Just another leash you can control me with." He snorted. She chuckled, but noticed something was a bit off with him.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. This kingdom is fine. Let's head back to the church and find out what other places I may have hit." He cut them off and started nudging her to go south.

"Atlas? No, it's better if we just make sure."

"I see walls and a castle. Just because I was two hundred feet tall for a moment doesn't mean my eyesight went terrible. Let's get moving." He picked the woman up with his jaws, and she yelped.

"Atlas." She giggled. "What's wrong with you all of a sudden?" Seeing something strange in the distance with the new height, she tapped him on the snout. "What is...?"

Looking back, he could see it too. The very tip of the castle, but it was sideways on an angle. He sighed in defeat through his nostrils, and held the woman with a paw. Placing her on his back, but keeping his head and ears lowered. "...I don't want you to see this, Tia."

"Atlas... There could still be people-"

"There isn't. Can we please...?"

"...Atlas." She stroked his neck a bit, feeling her hand getting closer to his ear. Another sigh and he turned around, walking north slowly. Climbing up the hill revealed more of the castle that seemed higher up than it should've been. Several dark spots in the sky started to come to view, and a series of electrical flashes omitted faintly. Being able to see about half the castle now confirmed that it was almost floating in the air. Though much of it was still damaged, pieces of wall broken off and some black spots here and there, much of it remained intact. But it was still angled, and slightly rotating.

"Tia..." The black one muttered. "Are you sure you want to see this?"

"...Yes. Keep going." She said a bit coldly. But the dragon didn't argue. Creeping up to the top of the hill revealed only fractions of the citadel wall remained. The rest were scattered along the grounds, or still floating in the air. The surface where the city once remained was now replaced with a large crater a good hundred feet deep. There were no signs of life to be found, and the remains of the cityfolk were scattered across the fields. From possessions, to fractions of armor and weapons. And of course, the castle; somehow still in one large piece. Still resting on a large cone of earth and rock, but constantly being tied to several streams of lightning that seemed to be coming from dark holes in the air. "What monster could've ordered you to do this?" The woman whispered, but not getting any response from the beast. "Atlas, what are those?" She pointed at the black spots.

"...Those are tears in reality. Much like wounds in your existance."

"And... You...?"

He sighed, and stayed silent for a few moments. Then heard a strange sound that almost resembled mechanical insect wings. "Get down!" He whispered, flattening himself on the ground and turning Gold. Making the two invisible. "Don't move." Atlas whispered gently.

Barely being able to see the wings flutter at first, a strange creature that almost looked like a thin, black beetle with a green outline climbed up from the crater and rested on the level the dragon was on. Scanning the area with a series of clicks, it looked directly at the two for a few moments. Then turned around and went back in. After a few minutes, the dragon began to rise up and look into the large hole. Seeing several of them on the lowest ground level guarding some tunnels underground. As well as a few around one large black spot being held open by four gem-like beacons in a diamond formation. "What are they doing?"

"I'm not sure." He whispered. "But I've seen them before. They're spawns of a Terrasque."

"A what?"

He tried to look at her and toss his snout. "I'll explain later. For now, you'll have to get off me."

"Why?" The woman asked, getting a bit worried.

"If they're here, then odds are they came through those tears. Probably the one they have anchored open." He raised a platform for her to stand on. "I don't want you getting hurt. So you're staying back here-"

"Atlas."

"There's nothing you can do against these things. They are beyond reasoning, more like drones." A sigh through his nostrils. "I don't want to lose you, so you're staying back here. I'm just going to close that tear."

"How though?" She grabbed the bags the dragon was carrying, and stepped on the platform. Carefully lowering it down, she stroked him on the neck.

"Those colored things in the distance, can you see them?" She looked and vaguely did. "If I can break all of those, the portal should close. Providing a damn Force is paying attention to it."

"Why are we whispering?" The man said silently. Finally catching up to them. Seeing a few of the patrols in the distance. "Ohhhh."

"You're staying here too, understood? Last thing I need is you somehow getting her in danger. So..." He studied the two for a moment. "Tia, take care of him."

"You can count on me!" The man saluted. "...Wait-"

"Just be careful, Atlas." She hugged his snout for a few moments.

"I'll be fine. Even if I die, do not come out there. Head back to the city. Hopefully I'll remember by the time I wake up." He grumbled, nuzzling her body a bit before taking off.

Carefully circling around into the air, the Gold one studied his advantages. He knew these creatures well enough; they could sense negative emotions if they were nearby. Merely flying up to the anchors, even while invisible via sight, wouldn't work. He needed to distract them. Give them a threat that would be valued of their attention. Softly landing in the courtyard of the castle, Atlas studied it for a moment. Though the area itself felt almost broken in physics, some still remained. This building however, it felt like it still had a form of gravity still attached to it as normal, regardless of its current angle.

Carefully tilting the large monument a bit, he started to aim the very bottom, the cone-like earth, towards the main portal. Upkeeping his invisibility was difficult, and took a lot of concentration outside of the Atonement. As risky as it was, he changed to Air, forming several large doughnuts that were between the castle and the portal. Just thankful that the air was hard to see. Let alone lacked emotion.

With a quiet sigh, he suddenly heard another patrol fly above him. Getting him to freeze in place. The

dragon hated these damn things. For even being drones, they were a pain in the ass to kill, and armed to the teeth. He recalled Bartan talking about such creatures that worshiped a Terrasque, calling themselves the Unborn. Wrapped in a thin, black exoskeleton, much like these creatures. Just more humanoid instead of insect. They even imitated the weapons of such spawn.

It was a mistake for the dragon to start thinking about Bartan. Getting annoyed and irritated by the bear got the attention of the drone. Looking directly at the invisible dragon and clicking loudly as if to warn the others. "Taath!" Atlas cursed, slamming the ground and ditching his cloak. A large cube of the courtyard shot out from the ground directly under the Drone, sending the bug outwards a bit, then the cube returned to place forcefully. Ramming the entire castle much harder than it seemed, and pushing it through the first air doughnut. Which only accelerated it more.

Quickly making a Yellow-gemmed Claymore from the light and the rocky grounds, the Black one took off to the skies. Hearing many of the drones flying towards the large castle to put a stop to it was his chance to take out at least one of the gems. Flying above, and then nose diving towards the portal still got some attention, even with the meteor heading towards their doorway. And a few of the bugs to chase after him.

With a quick flip forward to gain momentum, Atlas slammed the blade down onto the top beacon. Expecting a struggle to disable it. To his surprise, the gem shattered easily, allowing him to keep cutting through until the bottom one. Landing heavily, it was unwise to remain in one place. Bolting to his right, one of the Drones landed in front of him a ways. Enough for the dragon to swing the gemmed weapon upward at it, but the slash was deflected and sundered by the creature's bladed arm. Breaking the conjured weapon's blade about the halfway point. However, it knocked the bug off balanced enough for the black one to pass it freely. Not risking the opportunity, Atlas did so. Hearing the broken piece shatter and explode into light and hoping it distracted or even blinded a few of the creatures on his tail end.

But it didn't. He could hear the beated wings approach him closer and the ringing of his unstable weapon, the dragon chucked the remains in a Hail Mary fashion. Not even looking to see if he hit any of them. But returning his sight to ahead of him nearly made the dragon run into a Drone's blade. Almost completely dodging the one coming straight for him, but felt a large gash at the end of his tail.

It stun heavily, thrusting his mind into instincts to go faster and get away. Changing to Gold once again, he turned invisible and sent a clone in another direction, while he banked hard to a wider space. Though the tactic did fool one or two of them, the bug directly behind him was locked on the dragon. And that sharp turn caused him to lose a large chunk of the end of his tail.

Trying to ignore the pain, Atlas kept trying to stay in the air. But losing that appendage was hard to navigate. He had lost the air advantage, his best bet was to maybe take them on the ground. Another cut at the end of his tail made him flinch, not noticing one of the drones come out from the upper right side of the dragon. Ramming into him and sending him into the dirt.

Landing face down was one of the worse ways to land, getting his head to ring and shot the beast's

awareness. Hearing a beetle land to his left side, then immediately strike the prone dragon. Sending him rolling on his back and feel the dirt sting the fresh cut on his arm. A stab into the membrane of his wing, and tear through it meant the end of flying for a while, as the bug slashed him across the muzzle as well with another appendage. Going for a coup de grace, the Drone tried to stab Atlas into the brain, but the blade was caught with the dragon's paws. Though they were being cut into, they held for the time being.

Struggling for a few moments, Atlas seen another Drone flying straight towards the two. Roaring at the one in front of him, a large torrent of earth slammed hard into the bug pinning him. Knocking it off balance enough for the black one to use it's body as a shield against the incoming Drone. Hearing the blade pierce through the thick shell, and the front Drone hiss in pain, Atlas rotated it. Getting the second bug's weaponized appendage snared inside the body of its comrade.

Now being able to free a paw, the dragon turned white. Grabbing the unwounded beetle's head and freezing it harshly. Then slamming on it with the other paw to shatter a large chunk of it. Taking a short breath to recover, and get the bugs off him, Atlas tried standing up for a moment. Getting knocked off balance by a quake that got his attention.

The busy Drones managed to drive the castle into the ground and away from the portal, and now no longer have a distraction from the dragon. Cursing again, several of them started to block off exits Atlas might take, while a few others started towards him in formation.

"We have to help him!" Tia said worryingly. "Doctor-" She noticed him looking through a strange pair of toy-like binoculars. Among the appearance of a ViewMaster. "What are you doing?"

"What he wants us to do." He sounded a bit serious, pulling a small lever on the device. "Mhmm... I see."

"See what?" The man handed her the toy, still looking straight forward at the battle. Though a bit worried about the dragon, she slowly looked into the toy. The first slide was the Lavendour gate, the way Tia remembered it. The next; large sections of the walls were missing, while the guards struggled to take out a large black figure. The image sank her heart.

The next one, the dragon was dead. Being carried in the streets as a victory parade with a large flatbed. Then, one of the dragon becoming awake during the parade, and taking the guards by surprise. Finally, one where the dragon was a series of several colors. Ripping the city apart with several Atonements. "He's doing this alone for a reason."

"Because he..." As much as the woman didn't want to believe it, she didn't want to just sit quietly either. Hearing him roar in pain in the distance was a call of help to her, but one that she could not answer. "Is there anything we can do for him?" And the man looked at her, pondering.

He fought swarms like this before. A type of single, Hive Mind where they all have each other's awareness and strategy in fractions of seconds. Their formations were great, and even with the Diamond Scales, Atlas was still taking more damage than he was giving. The only thing that would end him completely would be reinforcements from the portal.

The portal... Two anchors still remained, and he needed to refocus back on those targets. What little damage he did to a few of these drones wasn't worth it. And the many scrapes and new gashes he obtained, even with the armor was too harsh on his body. His wings were shot, now having several new tears in them, and possibly one dislocated or broken. His tail, still bleeding out and making it hard for him to concentrate. His heart raced, but was getting weaker with every attack. If the Diamond one didn't do something soon, they would probably go for Tia next.

A bit of blood got into his lung, and he coughed it out. Forcing him to stagger forward, and drop the Sonic Naginata he was using for a range advantage. Giving the Drones an opening that he hoped they would take. Hearing a few of them lunge forward, the dragon disappeared in a flash of lightning. The sudden disappearance was confusion enough for the weapon to explode and send a stunning noise and vibration in a condensed area.

Teleporting to the complete other side of the crater. Still leaning down, he dug a paw into the ground, making six explosive arrows while constructing a bow made of glass and wind. It was a zerk tactic, but as long as he could break those beacons it would be worth it. Though his aim was a little off, the arcing ability of the bow gave a bit of a honing flare to the ammunition. Firing four shots; two on the left side of the Castle's cone, and two on the right, Atlas heard the loud explosions, and barely seen the outline of the portal dissipate.

Upon doing that though, the Drones instantly discovered where he ran off to. Flying in two flanking swarms, the Diamond one constructed another power onto the last two arrows; Volcanic Arcing. Keeping one in his jaws for the time being, he shot one arrow at the left group, then the other on the right. Though the beetles did try to evade the projectile, the bow curved sharply to insure a direct hit. Exploding on impact, the red electricity from the explosion arched to several closer Drones and exploded again. Then a third time to nearly get rid of both entire waves with two arrows.

Knocked by the explosion, one of the bugs crashed into the dragon. Knocking the ranged weapon out of his grip. Recovering faster, the Drone managed to stab him in the side, and pin him on his back. Trying to knock it off with another earth torrent, a slam to the head made Atlas miss. Snarling, he pulled the insect tight against his chest, then sent a sharp spike through his lower body. Piercing the Drone in the heart and ceasing it to move. Retreating the spike, the dragon tossed off the beetle and struggled to get the ringing weapon off the ground.

The remaining creatures either fell to the ground, or were still up in the air. Tossing the bow to the sky, the weapon shattered and blew a large gust of force down on the flying insects. Causing them to crash into the ground like the others did. Even grounds with the dragon. After a few breaths, Atlas raged one

last time. Outbreaking for just a moment. Digging his claws into the grounds and using all his strength to rip out a long chain of metal and ice. Pulling on it sideways gave it a bit more slack, as it started to release through the wall of the crater.

As the remaining Drones got up, attracted to the iridescent creature before them, the small quake from the wall got their attention. With one last hard yank, a very large glowing Axe head shot out from the wall. Connected by the chain, it swung in an arch in front of the dragon, and passed through the Drones in a few seconds. Causing them to stand still for a moment.

As the axe reached the other wall, Atlas' Outbreak was released, and he fell down. Slowly looking at the bugs sliding apart, cut by what almost looked like plasma, they ceased moving after falling to the ground. Giving the dragon a sigh of relief, as he let his guard completely down.

Chapter 11

"Are you sure about this?" The woman asked, looking at the catapults.

"You wanted to do something for him. Time to play field medics once he's done down there!" The man said, climbing into one and strapping on a backpack. "You might want to put this on. Then pull this string when you start to fall down." Tia looked nervously at the bag. "Get in the catapult!" The doctor ordered, hearing the dragon's final roar. "And that means he's done! For Pocahontas!" Banjo pulled a lever that sent a loud snap through the air, launching the man into the crater.

Strapping on the bag and getting in, the woman took a breath. "Oh... The things I do for your scaly black-" Pulling the lever made her scream loudly going through the air. Already not enjoying the idea of flying, but without a dragon to be in control was worse. As she started to descend, she pulled the cord and a little umbrella unfolded out of the pack. Halting her descent tremendously, regardless of its small size.

As the doctor pulled his, a comically large fork came out instead, providing no counter support for his

Velocity. "Oh, Right! This one's for when the giant salads attack-" He fell into the ground with a loud crash, making his own crater the shape of his body. Then the giant fork landed inside it, pointy end first.

"Atlas!? Atlas!" Slowly floating down towards the collapsed dragon, Tia took off the pack when she was a few feet from the ground. Rushing towards the black dragon breathing heavily. "Atlas, are you conscious? Say something to me if you can. Anything, come on!" She looked into his eyes and saw the purple gems slightly focus on her. A bit dilated, but responsive. "You're alive at least." She muttered, seeing the large wound on his muzzle. "I won't have enough stitches for that. Let alone for any of your wounds." Almost whimpering like he would. "Doctor!"

The man's arm raised out of his hole. "Where there is no more room in Hell; Michigan, Dr. Banjo will rise! With a giant salad fork in his head." And the Doc climbed out with a giant salad fork in the back of his head. Walking as if nothing was out of place, he looked at the dragon. "Oh wow. What happened to you?"

"Can you help him? And are you okay?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about."

"M're... Idiot..." Atlas mumbled.

"Atlas! Stay with me, okay? We're going to get you out of here."

"No... Barns." It put a small smile on her face.

"Banjo, please. Can you help him? Even if it's to stop him from feeling any pain."

"Hmm..." He pondered for a bit, then stepped out of his shoe. A trail of toxic green air rose from his sock.

"No..." The dragon muttered, somehow being able to focus on what he's doing.

"You might want to hold his head up a bit." The man said, digging into his shoe and pulled out the sole. As the woman tried her best to hold up the dragon's head, he half growled at them.

"No...!"

"This is going to hurt you a lot more than it's going to hurt me!" He spun the sole over his head a few times, getting the momentum up and then slapped the black one across the muzzle with it. Making a loud impact, and replaying the slap several times at different camera angles. With one last one having Chinese fireworks saying 'Marry Christmas' in Dutch. "Awwh, Geez! I told them it was spelled M-E-R-R-Y."

"Tell who?" Tia asked, accidently dropping the dragon's head and flinching at the loud thump.

"My eyebrows. Unless they're telling me to actually Marry Christmas. Which is just odd, even for them." Banjo stated, going back to his pondering ways while the woman struggled to get Atlas' head to stay up. Only to get the doctor to turn around and slap the black one in the muzzle with the very end of the giant fork, making him whimper and fall out of Tia's hands once again.

"Atlas? Are you okay?" She tried to get a response from him, but only got murmurs. Witnessing the deep wound on his muzzle begin to heal up very quickly. "I think it worked!"

"Says you." Another whimper. "Words cannot describe the smell on my muzzle right now." The woman giggled and hugged the dragon tightly. "Not so hard. Still tender." He reached a paw to do his best to embrace her.

"You need to stop being so reckless." Tia sniffed.

"Call it a force of habit. How's the tail?"

"Seems to be fine, even regrowing the missing part."

"That idiot has some magical feet then." The two chuckled a bit, and the dragon grunted to get up.

"Atlas, don't push yourself-"

"I need to." He grunted, holding his side where he shot a spike of earth through him.

"You need to rest-" The blonde one tried to hold him down.

"I remember." He took a few breaths while Tia studied him. "I remember where she is. I remember how to get there."

"Atlas..." She stroked him a bit, getting the large one to relax. The dragon exhaled through his nostrils, nodding.

"A few hours of rest. Then we move, alright?"

"Deal." She hugged him again. "Do you remember anything else?"

"Ballistas hurt." It made her chuckle a bit. "Not much. I think there was something else... Something white with multiple... Something."

"Bartan?" Atlas grunted at that. "He's the only one I..." She trailed off, shrugging.

"I hope not." He looked at the Doctor in the distance and tried to motion him to come over. Once he did, the dragon started raising a large platform of earth below them, as well as made a bridge for them to cross.

"A hidden elevator. Neato!" The man studied it.

"Nap time." The dragon grumbled, resting his head down and falling asleep shortly.

"You want to do the honors?" He motioned compressing the black one, and she nodded shyly. Taking just a single step back, Tia was testing to see if she really needed to see him through the rectangle in order to shrink him. But slowly the dragon began to grow smaller. Stopping at around house cat size.

"Yay! A+"

"I didn't know I was being graded." The woman chuckled a bit, picking up the slumbering creature and holding him tight for a few moments. "Thank you."

"It was all you, Ma'am." A salute as they started walking.

"I mean... For giving me the power to do that. Even though I don't think Atlas would approve too much." She smiled at him, and the man blushed.

"Awh, shucks. You had the power in you all alone kiddo. But you're welcome. Just use the power for good and good fun. And don't try to hide him in something like an easter egg or a paper bag. And don't give him away at birthday parties. He won't like that." A giggle from her.

"You sound like you know from experience."

"If I remember correctly, it was his birthday. But that was a long time ago."

"How long have you known each other?"

The man made thinking noises for a minute. "About three days ago."

Another soft chuckle from her, as Tia leaned up against a comfortable tree. "Now I know that is a lie. We just met you yesterday."

"Oh, fine. You caught me. But I really can't remember." Banjo pulled out two, lay-back lawn chairs and a large umbrella out of his chest pocket. Handing one to the woman. "Now for some lemonade!" He pulled out a large watermelon and whacked it with a mallet. Making a large pink and green mess over everyone and making the dragon mumble something in his sleep.

"Out of...?"

"Made from Watermelons, yes." As all the pink chunks and wetness got sucked into a tiny, upside down blender, it spun in high gear for a few moments, then coughed out two glasses that rested easily on a small table that wasn't there before. Another cough and a pair of straws landed in each one. "Oooo, bonus straw!" The doctor drank out of his and let out a relaxing sigh.

"Quite the imagination on you, is there?" Another giggle as she tried her offered drink. "That is good."

"Made from the best watermelons out of my pocket. And somehow lint free!"

The woman smiled at him. "Can I ask you a serious question?"

"You may." He sipped his drink, extending his pinky finger.

"You have... Unreal magics. Done things I can't even imagine. Why do you use it for this?"

He raised an eyebrow at her for a moment. "You mean for giggles?"

"Yes. Most wizards in tales tend to go insane with power and use it to harm others."

"I just slapped your dragon with a smelly underside of my shoe." It sent the woman into giggles again. "You don't think that stuns like a bee?"

"Yes, but he survived. And you healed his wounds in the process. That saved him a lot of pain in the end." She stroked the little one, as it nuzzled her chest in his sleep. "But instead of just performing miracles, you perform them with... Oddness? Maybe that's not the correct word."

"Ah, I see what you mean. You're asking about the blender." He pointed to the small device in the sky.

"Kind of."

"Well, I was told by a very smart dragon a long time ago that my powers should be used for good. To make people feel good." He let out a relaxing sigh, looking out to the distance. "I never felt a better feeling than laughter."

"So you use your powers to make people laugh?"

"Even if they don't do it out loud. I know it brightens their day up a little bit."

"Perhaps that's why he gets so frustrated with you." She chuckled.

"Him? Naw. He got caught in a crossfire war that lasted for eleven days. Got his tail stapled to his you-know-where." She looked at him with wide eyes. "Such a shame. He was only trying to get some Eggs for us, but the staplers thought he was a messenger."

"Are you... Serious?"

"Ever since then, he's never walked straight. Always limped. Until he died again getting crushed by a large building. And I thought I had magic powers!" He whistled.

"So Atlas holds this against you?" The doctor shrugged. "He told me earlier that it's because you're bigger than him."

"Bigger?" He looked at the black one. "Well, now maybe."

Another chuckle. "Something about you being more powerful than him, but you act like... Yourself." She shrugged. "I don't see any issue with the reason you act. It's playful, like a child."

"And you like children?"

"I love children-"

"OMG Me too!"

"O..M...G?" She questioned him.

"Oh My God. Get with the times, Tia. The Future is com- Battery Power Low." The man suddenly fell asleep.

"Are you... Okay?" She checked his vitals quickly, and they seemed fine. "Well, I guess we could all use a little rest." And she relaxed herself.

"Crapbaskets, not again!" The dragon's whimper woke the woman up.

"Atlas? What's wrong?" She looked at him burying his snout in her chest. "Hey, what's wrong?"

"He made me small again, didn't he? How are we going to get to Elexus like this?" He grumbled.

"Actually... I did it."

The small one looked at her with sad purple eyes. "Really? I thought he was joking about letting you do that."

"I was too, but..." She rubbed him under the chin a bit, getting him to purr a bit. "Don't worry, I won't abuse it. I've been trained to not let power go to my head."

"Fine." He snorted in sulk. "But tell me you can reverse it."

"Should be able to." She carefully tested it, making him just a little bit bigger. "Yes. It's still working fine."

"Alright, ready to go then? I need to make sure she's still there."

"Okay."

The three took flight for about an hour, even though it terrified the Oracle, she endured. Seeing a large castle on the middle of an island to the far southwest in the distance. "This is where she lives?"

"Where... We lived." He said. The woman could tell that he was feeling guilty about this. But not able to tell if maybe the dragon still had feelings for this Rogue or not. The thought of her using Atlas infuriated Tia, and she felt like she was prepared for this.

Upon landing, the black one took a moment to study the large structure. It looked just like his cracked memories. Even much of the greenery looked the same, from the many tropical forests and trees, to the smell of the ocean nearby. "Atlas?" Tia's voice interrupted his thoughts. "Is everything okay?" He could feel a bit of anger in her voice, even though she was holding back. He lightly nodded, laying down and raising a platform that was completely cut out for constant use.

"She should be here. There was still a small boat for emergencies around the docks, so..." He mumbled, getting a pet on the neck by the woman as the platform lowered. Feeling something on the other side slip off, the Doctor brushed himself off quickly and looked at them like it didn't happen.

"I'm okay." He stated. Overlooking the castle and pondering. "This place hides evil within-Wow! A Tree!" And he ran into the forest. Atlas placed a paw over his eyes in frustration.

"I would've left him there if I didn't need him."

"Need him?" The woman questioned him while petting his black neck.

"Nevermind." The dragon started up the small stairway to the courtyard. Still studying the silent island that only blew a gentle warm breeze. He remembered why he chose such a place, besides the fact that nothing else lived on the island other than a large herd of goats and a few types of birds. There were no humans around. No cities to pick fights with, no small children to pester him, and no large children to plot against him.

Although that came with some drawbacks; he would still need to find some way to do trades for a few things. Food and spices mostly, and just the seeds. Currency wasn't a horrible issue, even if he could just counterfeit the money needed and get away with it. It was supposed to be an island of peace and quiet. The world that Elexus desired, where nothing else would cast them out and they could be themselves. But what was that, exactly?

The dragon was so deep into thought that he didn't notice Tia go ahead of him. The main doors were obviously placed, and wide open. He didn't design any traps, and the most threatening thing in there was the Kveldulf, a being who seemed to value Reason over violence. But that was before he caught the smell of blood in the air. Faint, and a bit old. But blood that was spilled.

Picking up the pace a bit, he started to hear footsteps within the building. Walking into a large entryway with two sets of curled stairs leading to another level of the castle. The stairs went right over a large hallway, leading to almost a Throne-like room. Where the footsteps were coming from.

Getting a strong scent of blood under him, Atlas stopped and looked at his paw. Though it was washed up well, it was here. Something lost a lot of blood in this spot. "Atlas?" Elexus' voice fluttered his heart for a moment. "You're back!" She gave a sigh of relief. "I was so worried..." She then noticed the blonde woman.

"You! Are you Elexus?" Tia shouted. "What do you have against the Church? What did you do to Lavendour!?"

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"What did he say to you?" The dragon asked sternly.

The brown haired woman looked back at the guard. "He doesn't want us anywhere near this city. He doesn't want you near it either-"

"He Threatened You!?" The black one growled loudly at the guard. "Did you threaten her!?" Getting several of them around the large gate and walls to arm themselves.

"Atlas... Let's just leave, okay?" The woman said, pulling on his arm a bit.

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"Tia..." The dragon muttered, trying to get her to stop.

"Do you have any idea what you put him through-!?" A loud growl came from a floor above, as a white, two-headed beast jumped down in front of the blonde, protecting Elexus. "What is...?"

"You must be Tia." The left head said, after the two took several moments to study her.

"That's an Oracle gown. Unless you're another."

"...I am Tia, yes. Are you under her control as well?"

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"I remember my master saying he was a rotten old man that lived to the far west. He wanted to buy us for... Something." Elexus said, eating dinner while leaning against the dragon.

"Something sexual? Perhaps whoring."

"...Worse than that, I'm afraid." The woman whispered.

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"Tia..." The black one muttered again.

"Control?" Elexus asked, suddenly looking a bit guilty. "Oh... They warned me about that recently." Sucking in a breath, she looked directly into the dragon's eyes. "Atlas... Where have you been?"

"Been?" Tia quoted her, looking back and forth between the black one and the brown. "What do you mean? You sent him to attack a Castle!" The shocked look in the other woman's eyes was not faulty, and Tia realized that. "You...?"

"Atlas?" Elexus whispered. "Is that where you went?"

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"Let's just go away! Far away from everything! From everyone! Make a place to call our own, where we don't have to be treated as slaves or hunted like animals! Atlas, please! Don't make me lose you again!"

~~~~~

"...Atlas?" Tia asked him, noticing his ears a bit low and staring at the floor. "Did you...?"

"...I attacked them. Out of instinct, I destroyed them. I remembered it when I saw the destruction of the castle." He sighed through his nostrils. "There is no Rogue Oracle responsible for this, Tia."

"He is correct, Ma'am." Feyris stated.

"Lady Elexus did not come to know of her powers. She did not mean to use Atlas, even on purpose." Feyon said, now letting their guard down and leaning a bit into Elexus.

"Atlas." The brown haired woman whimpered, feeling a tear run down her face. "Did you really?"

"They threatened you. They all threatened you at one point. I couldn't rest knowing that. And so, a week ago I told you I was going out to find a few species of plants. Herbs, spices, whatever, and that I wouldn't be back for a couple of days." Another sigh. "...All I wanted to do was protect you. And the best way to do that was to completely remove any enemy you've ever had. So... I hunted them down. Didn't even hold back against those in the crossfire." As the brown haired woman collapsed against a wall, the dragon's heart sank. Wanting to comfort her, but he was afraid to pass Tia, knowing she would probably rip his ears off.

Instead he muttered across the room. "Elexus... This is why I wanted to find Tia. This is why I wanted her to..." Another breath. "Someone like me shouldn't exist. I can't exist. Not in a world like yours. I'm just... Too much of a threat. And because of my instincts... Your world is in constant danger." Looking behind him, he seen the doctor finally come back through the doorway. Possibly feeling the tension in the air, he remained silent. "Tia, I know you probably want to rip my ears off, but it needs to wait."

"Why?" She asked rather sternly, getting the dragon to whimper and lower his head.

"Those creatures, the Drones we seen at... Errm."

"Lavendour?"

"Sure. Floating castle." The black one muttered. "They were digging tunnels underground. And I think I know what they're after."

"Tunnels?" Feyon questioned.

"What creatures?" The right head asked the blonde woman.

"There's probably no time to explain, but... I need to go again."

"Atlas. Please don't-"

"If I don't, you might not have a planet left soon. And..." He sighed, looking back at the doctor. "I need to do something that is going to be harder for me than to willingly accept my punishment to The Jaws Of Life over there." Tia folded her arms, and Atlas swallowed loudly. Clearing his throat awkwardly. "Rex?"

"Sup?"

"I..." A deep breath. "I Need... Your... Haaaa..."

"My Haaaaaat?"

"Your... Haaaaaaa..."

"Haaaaam and cheese sandwich that I won bobbing for apples four years ago that's still in my other pants?"

The dragon grunted, his entire face purple while everyone stared at him for a few moments. Another loud swallow. "Haaaaeelp. I need your... Haaa-"

"Kelp-?"

"Sure." Atlas grumbled. "But we need to go now."

"Roger!" He saluted, jumping on the dragon's shoulders.

"Atlas." Tia said strictly, another faint whimper from him, and she exhaled. "Come back to us."

He nodded. "...I will... Feyon Feyris? Take care of them." And he turned around to take off.

Chapter 12

As dusk was settling in, the winds were picking up in the grassy fields. Just outside the edge of the large crater, the Black one stared down into it. It seemed quiet. Lifeless like the way he left it. Even the remains of his enemies faded away, but only on the surface. Those tunnels lead down to something destructive. Something the dragon fought before.

"Are you sure about this?" A loud, deep voice asked behind Haytre. Making the dragon slowly look back and exhale slowly at the four hundred foot behemoth. It was humanoid, a thick purple hide that had a short fur coat covering it. Though it was wearing rather modern clothing; baggy green cargo pants with no shoes, and a dark blue T-shirt, it's muscle build did seem to bulge through it. As it crouched down to study the dragon closer, its canine-like head and muzzle looked rather serious.

Its red mane, a large brush that resembled a mohawk and railed down to the very tip of its tail, blew shaggily in the winds. Following the creature's spine to the very vertebrae, inbetween the several black spikes and horns that protected the behemoth's body. Not that it really needed anymore protection. As the black one looked directly at those rainbow iris', he nodded slowly.

He hated these creatures. The hardest thing Haytre's ever fought and killed. The damn creature was powerful, armed with abilities much like the dragon was, just better. No Atonements. No limitations. This thing was a weapon, a last resort for the world to have. It's only purpose was to destroy without holding back. And no matter what the dragon threw at it during that time... Little of it had any effect. A creature Bartan called a Cryomithorus {Cry-oh-myth-or-us}.

"If I don't do this..." The dragon muttered, getting the beast's ear to flick upward. "Then we might have another one of you to deal with. I don't want to take those chances."

"And?"

Haytre looked back down at the holes. "They're probably too deep down there for me to take out easily. I can't handle the pressure like this, but with Iridescence I might." The creature stared at him. "But I can't use that here. The fabric is too thin, and I might tear an even bigger hole in it if I try."

"Then what will you have me do?" The Cryo asked, getting the dragon to look at it again.

"I just need you to hold it together. Just until I kill them and make sure it stays asleep. Can you do that?" The beast slowly nodded. Raising up to its full height. As it stretched its arms and chest out a bit, it slammed its fists together. Causing a small pulse to emit in a large area around them, and a spark between the creature's five-fingered hands. Holding it together with a white plasma that came from its claws.

"Go slow." It stated, relaxed and concentrated.

"I plan to. The longer it takes, the longer I can remain in it." A deep breath from the black one as he tensed his muscles. Concentrating on a feeling in his chest, around his heart. It felt like a special energy that seemed to spin around in a circle. As the dragon began to switch Atonements, the energy spun a little bit faster and faster. Getting more and more intense and powerful like a generator. After about a full minute it was at top speed, but Haytre let it rev for a few more moments before unleashing the power into the Outbreak.

It was still raw, just like the first time he ever used it. Pushing him to just go on instinct and wreck his enemies. But the Iridescent one held back for a few moments. Making sure the world was still being held together, and checking on the Cryo. The behemoth gave a slow nod, and the dragon took off to the skies, diving straight for one of the holes.

Getting maybe a foot away from the dirt, Haytre pushed it away from himself. Allowing him to continue with his speed and follow the tunnel with an excellent agility like his flight, in this state at least. Deeper down in, the dragon could feel the pressure building. It was going to be very harsh to remain in a place like this for too long, so he had to make this quick.

It took several minutes of tunneling to find the driller Drone for this hole. Clawing at the dirt, Haytre made a quick Falchion, but the pressure made it very sensitive. A single surprise cut at the drone's back was enough to make the weapon explode into heavy shards of diamond and metal, but executing the creature nonetheless.

Returning to the surface and entering another hole would take too long. Instead, the dragon started separating the earth to make his own. Returning the earth to the tunnel the Drone made. It was much slower than flying through a previous one, but eventually the dragon made it to another hole with a Drone nearby. Charging up to it got the bug's attention, but it hardly mattered. The dragon grabbed its head and hit it heavily in the back, hearing several parts of its exoskeleton crack loudly. Bending it

backward caused the insect to screech until the Iridescent one pulled it apart. Seeing the beetle's blood almost crystalize as it leaked out.

The smell of sulfur was very close, along with a massive heat to this tunnel. Odds are, Haytre was close to the core. His best bet was to head there and take out any Drones that might've made their way in. As well as sealing any holes.

Continuing where the last Drone left off, the dragon began burrowing until a hot white substance began to leak out of the walls. Turning yellow as it started to touch the air. Forcing his way a bit more, and the beast broke the barrier. Sealing it immediately as he got through.

It was difficult to see, but with a constant heat resistance aiding his body, Haytre could probably survive down here for a little while. As his eyes adjusted to the area, he started to see an outline to a familiar beast. A red Cryomithorus, smaller and curled up into a ball within the core of the planet. Clearly asleep, and it was the dragon's intention to keep it that way. If this creature awoke, it would destroy all forms of life on the surface. So the planet could begin anew.

A few spots came into view in the distance, swimming towards the sleeping behemoth. Drones, trying to awaken the creature in its womb. But using his casual weapons down here in this pressure wouldn't work. Possibly last enough for a single use, like the previous one, but the more commotion within this core, the greater possibility that this creature would be born. Instead, the dragon swam towards them. Breaking them apart and letting the massive amount of heat deal with the remains.

Starting to see the holes in the walls, Haytre did his best to seal them from within. Only to see a few more bugs get through via separate tunnels. Ripping them apart before they could do any damage was getting harder for him. He could feel his stamina begin to drain quickly, like running out of air. The pressure was getting harder to withstand, and the heat harder to resist.

After dealing with the new holes, the Iridescent one remained inside for a few minutes. He could feel that circle of energy in his chest struggling to keep going, and his heart began to slow down due to exhaustion. (...The Outbreak will only last a few more moments before it's used up, and this body will be crushed in an instant... It'll be quick. Painless. But they'll get to live.)

(They'll be sad at first. Share stories about me while they live in that castle for a while. Possibly get Elexus to join that church. Teach her how to control her powers and start to follow in Tia's footsteps.) Floating on his back, he just waited for the time to expire. (...They won't need me. Not to survive. And they won't need to know what happened. But Tia... She's gotten too close to carry out her promise. I...) He felt his body struggle a bit and jerk instinctively. Slowly smothering as it fought to stay alive. (Even after all this time. All these deaths... It still struggles to stay alive. Just stop already.) Drawing on the last few seconds of power always felt the slowest. Feeling it completely run dry, and that circle came to a complete stop.

"HOT-hot-hot-hot-hot-hot!" The behemoth whimpering was the next thing the dragon heard. Then a loud sizzling after placing the creature's sore paw in the water. As Haytre started to move, he felt like he was stuck in a plastic bag. All of his scales melted together into one big sticky, skin-like mess, and stung harshly whenever he moved. Still breathing heavily like he was exhausted caused him so much pain, but he fought against it to stand up and open his eyes. "What!? No-no-no-no! Don't move you! You want me to slap you with the inside of my shoe again?"

"Why!?" The dragon hissed loudly, his throat dry and hoarse. Grunting at every little movement that his body made. Including the raising of each spine in irritation, all melded together against his neck.

"Well, to restore you for one. I'm surprised it worked honestly. Who knew?"

"Did you do that!?" He hissed again, finishing his sentence. "I was fine where I was!"

"You were unconscious and drowning in hot magma." The beast raised an eyebrow. "Far from fine, if you ask me."

"I had it!" Another loud grunt that morphed into a whimper as the dragon collapsed in pain.

Crown The Empire - Lead Me Out Of The Dark

"...You were dying-"

"Which was my exact intention!" A growl of frustration. "But that's something you never understood, isn't it!? Something you could never accept!"

"Hey, nobody dies under my watch, Buddy!" The Cryo took the large bucket of water and dumped it on the dragon. Refreshing it and getting it to breathe easier. A slap on the bottom of the pail made a

colossal rubber ducky fall onto the black one, squeaking loudly as it bounced off and rolled away. But leaving the dragon healed.

Still exhausted, Haytre glared at the creature. "Do you have any idea how much pain she's going to put me through when I get back? I might as well just die and never return."

"And do you have any idea how much pain she's going to go through when you don't come back?" The beast growled back, making the dragon grunt and look away. "You're weak sometimes, Haytre. You've always been when it comes to other people's feelings."

"She's better off with someone else-!"

"She's better off with you! The others are better off with you! Why can't you accept that?" A few minutes of silence, and the Cryo slowly picked up the black one. Not getting any resistance. Placing him on the very end of his brushy mane, only to have the dragon slip off and onto its purple muzzle. "Close enough. You comfy?" No response, and the large one shrugged. Walking away from the crater.

"...You're going the wrong way." Haytre grumbled. Getting the creature to stop and look around. Making the dragon dig his claws into the purple hide and brace frantically.

"It all looks the same to me, but I like this way."

"It's the wrong way."

"There is no wrong way. There's just a shorter way, and many many many long ways." A growl in frustration from the black one. "Besides, gives us time to talk."

"About what?" He asked harshly.

"About you and your fear of actually having a normal life."

"I don't have Plutophobia."

"That's wealth. I suppose it works, but not exactly what I meant. Every time you can finally settle down with someone, you end up being as reckless as you can. Even when you can easily save yourself." Another grumble. "I was watching you. You had plenty of time to escape that, but you choose to die."

"That choice was no longer in my hands, was it?" A sharp glare of his purple eyes. "Why bother trying to save someone who doesn't even want to live?"

"Because it hurts more people in the end. And you know that if you just off yourself, you'll end up coming back. Once again running away from any commitment you've ever made for yourself." The black one stared at him. "Bartan keeps a blog of your life."

"Of course he does." The dragon sighed in defeat. Resting his head on the side of the creature's snout. Looking down at the massive pawprints that the behemoth should've been making, but instead did no harm to the grounds. Even when stepping over villages of people, they didn't seem to notice him.

"But why?"

"...To break a promise."

"Promise?"

"Blog?" The black one hissed.

"Forgetful." The beast muttered, pointing at itself. "What promise?"

Haytre sighed, looking down again. "Tia... Promised me to help me find a way to die. Permanently."

"So, her promise?"

"But she's..." He went quiet for a moment. "She's fallen for me. She can't keep that promise any longer without her feeling that pain of loss any longer."

"And you think by just disappearing, you'll make it any better? That you'll make it somehow better?"

"What exactly do you think is going to go through her head every morning that she wakes up in my arms? When she looks at me, or anything black? The constant reminder that she's been instructed to find a way to end the life of the one creature that she loves."

"And that loves her back." The dragon's head and ears lowered. "I know you do."

"...I can't ask her to do that. No one could, and I was selfish to do such a thing a year ago, in that god damn barn. I thought I could do it after I did Bartan's request. Rush that damn thing until it's done then bolt for Tia. But when I seen her again..." A moment of silence. "After searching for her so desperately, and actually finding her. Reminding her over and over again that she needs to End me... Yet somehow she still smiles. Regardless if I threw my actual heart into her arms, she would be strong enough to still smile. And if she found out that I died... Even permanently..."

"You don't think she'll be sad?"

"She would be. But she would still smile... The only thing staying here would do is slowly taint that smile. Make it fade away until the day she could no longer take her own breath. She'll die an old maiden, and I'll be... The same as I always am." The two were silent for a few moments. "How many more times must I be beside the deathbed of someone I loved. How many times must I see someone who's fallen in love with me die struggling to keep hold, Rex? ...I'm tired. And this Plan... It's just easier on everyone."

"It's not on the messenger." The large one mumbled.

"You say one line: 'I'm Sorry.' That's it. Something else I've done a thousand times..."

A low growl omitted from the Cryo's throat. "Fine. You want to leave so badly?" He reached out and grabbed a hold of the sky, creating a timestorm in front of them and leaned his head towards it. "Go. I'll give you the choice back, and I'll tell them that you died. If your heart is really that black, then leave to a new life where you'll endlessly follow the same pattern again and again." The dragon looked at him for a few moments. "Go!"

"...I know now why you're often so damn foolish. It's because you're a bastard naturally." Haytre snorted. "...Let them down easy." The dragon stood up, feeling the creature growl under his feet before he took to the air and went through the starry portal. Expecting to fly through it and get half nauseated still. Instead, feel flat on his head against a very hard surface, and then on his back.

Grumbling against the pain, he took a deep breath of fresh ocean air. Grunting to roll over and study the tropical forests and short stairway to a large castle. Several trees were painted with black letters, spelling out: TOO BAD! Which instantly irked the dragon. "Dirty Rotten-!" Hearing a few footsteps come his way. Looking towards the castle and seeing a blonde woman rush towards him in the distance, he sighed heavily.

Will I Ever Find My Refuge Now?

"Atlas!" Tia shouted, jumping the stairs and holding onto the black one tightly around the neck. Her grasp made his heart ache and almost afraid to look her in the eyes.

"Tia..." He muttered, knowing he couldn't hide it for too much longer before she found out. He whimpered a bit when her hand started stroking up his neck. "Before you tear my ears off, can I make a defensive argument?"

It made her chuckle. "Don't bother. You'll get this one free. I just wanted to see you again, I don't care if you destroyed the rest of the world." Once again, it ached his heart. "Everything okay?"

He still didn't look at her, but held her back with a paw. "...Yeah. Just... I almost didn't come back." Spotting a metal ornament that reflected his face, the black one couldn't help but stare at it.

Ever Know Myself Again?

"I'm glad you did." She smiled at him, moving his chin to meet her eyes. As painful as it was for the dragon, he gave a sad smile back. Noticing at the corner of his sight another walking towards them.

As Elexus stopped to see the two holding each other, Haytre motioned for her to join them. Giving a smile back, she rushed in like he's been away for years. Holding the two in his chest for a few moments.

It was going to be hard on them to accept the truth. Too hard for them to ever take.

Will I Ever Learn To Treasure The Ones I Care For?

Seeing the Kveldulf come over and give its two smiles at the dragon made him sigh through his nostrils and shake his head. Holding the two women closer to his chest, he picked them up and walked bi-pedal towards them. Getting the beast to be accepted within the moment.

Everyone Leaves In The End, Doesn't Matter How Hard You Hold On.

(It will hurt. A lot. When they finally pass, I'll be stuck here with nothing to gain from this.) They all looked at him, told the black one how much they missed him, how lonely it was here with him gone. What they would like to do for the next couple of days. What changed. (Maybe... I can try something different this time...)

Doesn't Matter How Much You Train Your Heart For.

"Atlas?" Tia's voice snapped him out of thought. "Where's Banjo?" The other three looked at her. As the dragon exhaled quietly, he half looked away. Feeling everyone move back into the large one's chest. "Is that why you hurt?"

"Is that what that is?" Elexus whispered. Feeling the blonde one nod.

"...Yes. He's gone... I'm not sure where." The dragon murmured. Though it technically was not a lie, the Oracles accepted it. After a few more moments of silence, Tia spoke up.

"I'm sure we'll see him again someday."

"You'd like that wouldn't you?" Haytre muttered. The four chuckling at his tone. With a deep sigh, he let go. Looking at each one of them, eye to eye. When he got to Elexus, she saw something wrong in him. "Who bled on my new floor?" Almost hearing the woman and the Kveldulf whimper.

"Um..." The three looked at each other for a moment, irritating the dragon. "Okay, promise me you won't suddenly leave during the night and attack another city." Haytre tossed his snout.

A large exhale, one more stone wall, and the dragon was done. At least for today. Working on restoring this village was taking a lot out of him. Even after having a week of recovery, the bronze one's body still felt sore. Working all day didn't help, but at least he didn't have villagers in his way. Possibly prodding him with pitchforks or torches and calling him a Devil.

Yes, it's been a long time since anyone's called him that word, at least since the dragon could understand it. The human's gibberish was still tedious to him, and not worthy enough for the dragon to even bother learning. Besides, one of his two Oracles would most likely assist him if something was of importance.

"Atlas!" Speak of the devil, the brown haired one walked towards him with a basket in her hands. "You must try these apples, they are delightful!"

"Sure thing, Elexus. I could use a break anyway."

"Didn't you just have one a few minutes ago?" She asked, still handing him the fruit and placing it in his mouth without fear. Even after he snorted.

"Nevermind that. What I'm doing is hard work, and I still need to recover my stamina." He said with the apple still in his mouth. Crunching down on it filled his jaws with refreshing juices, making him purr silently. "Delicious. But these are sweet pears. Were called Sadi Fruits on another planet I was on."

"I'm glad you like them. We've been given a few baskets to take home with us. I wonder what we can make with them." She pondered, getting the large one to smile. It was contagious. "What?"

"Nothing. I'm just glad to have another chef in the house, that's all." He began walking to another remains of a building.

"Well, I learned from someone very special. Even when they were gone for a week." Elexus walked with him, waving at a few people in the distance to let them know he was pleased with the fruits.

"Still holding that against me, are you?" The dragon sighed through his nostrils. Looking towards the people with his muzzle a bit cross.

"Still don't like them?"

"It's not... Quite that."

"They know that you're not a monster, or an animal." He faintly nodded. Turning his attention to making another wall. "It was all a misunderstanding. For everyone really."

"Tia explained that to the church?"

"And just about everyone we meet. I guess it's for the better." She gave him a sad smile. "I'm... You know."

"I know." Another sigh. "It's no one's fault. Not yours, not mine. Just no more toying with my brain."

"I know, I know. Tia's helping me control it."

"So you two have been getting along then?"

"Yes, she's quite fascinating. Traveling all over the land and seeing so many things. I almost envy her." The dragon looked at her a bit sadly. "Don't look at me like that. Besides, I'm traveling too, with you guys. Seeing and learning so much..." Elexus smiled at him and hugged the large one. "All because of you. Thank you Atlas."

"You're welcome." He chuckled. "But what about..."

"She's told me about you two."

"And you're...?"

Another honest smile. "I'm okay with it. I mean, I love you too, but... You don't have to-"

"Elexus... There's room in my heart for two. I'm sure Tia would agree as well." It made the woman smile brighter. "You can even teach her a few things as well."

"Oh? Like what?"

"Like stroking a dragon off, for example." She giggled, blushing. "I still remember how good you've gotten in that department."

"Okay, so tonight we'll stroke you empty. It's a date."

He whimpered loudly. "That's not what..." His ears tinted as she walked away waving. Seeing the blonde one walking towards them. As the two women talked a bit, Haytre sighed. Finishing up the stone home. Hearing the soft footsteps get closer to him. "Everything okay?"

"Yes. They're excited for their new homes and starting over again."

"I'll help make the fields, but it's their job to plant the seeds." The dragon looked at Tia, noticing her looking a bit unwell. "Are you okay?"

"Yes. Just a little off today. Don't worry." He studied her for a moment, then walked towards her. Licking at her face a bit. "Oh stop."

"You're not warm. At least it's not a fever." A few more licks, and he stuck his tongue down her shirt. Cupping the breast with the silky appendage.

"Atlas." She giggled, trying to push him away. "Not in public, you."

"Who cares if they know. They only have people to look up to around here. Well, except the Fey twins. They're only about chest height. But even then." Another giggle.

"How is this coming along?" She pointed at the house.

"Well, I got several more homes to finish, and a few barns to make. Then the fields. Odds are I'll be done tomorrow."

"Two days earlier than you expected."

"An old friend used to tell me to make estimations much more than you think they should be. That way no one's disappointed. If anything, they're happier." Another lick, and she kissed his lips. "I'm going to be sore tonight though."

"Yes, Elexus already made plans for the two of us."

"...What do you think of her?"

"Elexus?" He nodded, getting back to work. "She's almost like a little sister to me. Just without the immaturity. I kinda always wanted someone under my wing."

"She likes you alot."

The blonde one chuckled. "I like her alot too. I can see why you fell for her so easily."

"Speaking of that..." He cleared his throat uncomfortably. "What do you think of her... Being with us?"

"She's already living in the same home as us-"

"Think... Closer." The woman looked at him puzzled. Seeing the tint in his ears, she began to understand. "I..."

"Just one question:" His ears perked. "Are you doing it because you feel sorry for her? That she's... Excluded?"

He thought for a moment, looking towards the woman far across the fields. A faint smile was seen before he walked and laid closer to the Blonde. Placing her hand on his chest, she studied it for a moment. Feeling a bit of a flutter of love within it. It faded once he looked away, then returned when he looked at Elexus. "You feel it too?"

"...Bartan." The flutter immediately faded as the dragon looked at her irked. Ears flat against his head, she laughed out loud. "Okay, okay. I was just testing."

"You have to mention him and ruin a good moment, don't you?" He snorted, getting back to work. "So...?"

"I'll accept her as I did you, Haytre. I'm pretty sure I can love another woman before I can love a dragon."

"What's wrong with dragons?"

"They're like cats. I'm more of a dog girl." A hiss from the dragon as he finished up the home. Walking with the woman, she looked under his belly and saw the evening's playthings. "I still can't believe it..."

"Believe what?" He looked at her, then tossed his head. "Save it for tonight, will you?" He grumbled, getting another giggle from her. "But seriously, believe what?"

"The Doctor, he said that you got your tail stapled to your... Stones." The black one double took at her.

"What!?" Getting the woman to laugh at him as he tried to recall such a thing. "My tail stapled...? What!?"

"He said that's why you don't like him. You were some kind of messenger for him at one point but got caught."

"Well... That's kinda what happened, but not my stones. They stapled my tail under my tail." Tia looked at him puzzled. "Kinda like this." And he folded his tail under, the tip almost touching his tailhole.

"What's so wrong with that?"

"Well... Oh, forget it. You're going to find out later tonight anyway. One of my most ticklish spots is around the tailhole. It's a guilty pleasure." A chuckle from her. "So during the time my tail was like that, the tip was closer to the hole and well... I couldn't get rid of my stiff horn. Every little movement kept throwing waves of pleasure through me and I couldn't concentrate on anything-Stop Laughing!" He hissed at the woman rolling on the ground. "And don't abuse that spot of mine like you do under my chin!" After a few minutes, Tia composed herself. "Done?"

"Yes. But start looking at me like that and I won't be able to help myself."

"Fair enough." He returned to his work for a moment. "Dusk is settling in. Want to call it a night?"

"If you feel like it, sure."

"You've got the idea in my head now. So I might as well submit to it." He snorted.

"Who knows, maybe we can convince the Feys to join as well?" A low growl from the large one sent the woman into giggles. "They don't have to mount you!"

"Says you. Odds are Elexus will want to see them nail me to the floor."

"Then you can nail her. It's only fair if you want her as a mate." She half joked, but something slipped in her voice that the dragon caught.

"Tia? Something wrong?" She shook her head, and he nudged her a few times. "Come on, out with it you."

Tia sighed, giving him a sad smile. "Atlas... I'm sorry." He curled his neck. "I'm pregnant."