

Duty

I shall start my story by telling you who I am. I am Jeremy Miras. My identity number is 7406214 of Nellsworth Nutritional Center and I am a member of the rebellion. I was first introduced to the rebellion by Ian Thirn. I can't remember his ID, I'm not really good with numbers but I've memorized my own. I also remember the day Ian tried to escape.

I was in the exercise courts at the time. Mostly just looking forward to the end of the session so I could return to my dorm. The proclamation came over the speakers that all members of block N were to report to the Central Hall for an unscheduled announcement by the head of staff. It would have been welcome news were it not for the fact that we would simply have the time of the announcement added to the exercise session. Still it was nothing out of the ordinary, one of these would happen every few months and were almost without exception tediously boring.

It was only once I entered the Central Hall that I noticed anything unusual. Mandarath, the massive old dragon who ran the Center, stood on a raised platform at the middle of the hall as usual. The difference was Ian Thirn standing besides him, eyes fixed on the floor. I took my usual seat in the room and waited as the rest of the block N filed in. It took a long time, there were over two thousand members of block N and worse my seat was directly next to Ian's and the constant glances from those who had recognized him made me uncomfortable.

Eventually everyone was accounted for and the announcement began. "Good evening block N" Mandarath's dry voice, aided by a microphone, filled the Central Hall. "I have called you away from your daily schedule to remind you all of your purpose within this center and indeed your very duty to society itself. There are many responsibilities that come with being a member of society and many roles that must be fulfilled in order for civilization to thrive..." Mandarath's monotonous voice continued but I found my self unable to listen to the words. Instead I looked at Ian, this was exactly the kind of speech that would get him angry and he usually spent most of it whispering sarcastic comments to those around him. Today, however, he just stared at the floorboards in silence.

"... and the forsaking of that duty can only lead to ruinous corruption and self centered hedonism." Mandarath glared down at Ian. "Ian Thirn. Do you admit to such an abandonment of you responsibilities?"

There was a pause. "Yes. I'm sorry." He didn't sound sorry. He didn't sound angry or fearful either, his voice lacked any hint of emotion and his eyes never left the floor.

"Duty and commitment above all are our most important contributions to society, and society in return provides many things to her members. One of those is the act of forgiveness. Ian Thirn are you willing to make your contribution to

society?"

Again no emotion. "Yes, I am."

"Then please undress."

One of the guards from the edge of the room came forward as Ian dutifully removed his clothing. A brief flash of the guard's tongue and Ian was gone. We all watched as the ripple ran slowly down the guards neck till it settled in his midsection.

The guard returned to his position and Mandarath's speech continued. "It is the duty of this station and of all those in it to see that no one here strays from society and that if they should they are restored to their proper place with the minimum of fuss. Civilization supports us, feeds us and protects us from that which might cause harm and when eventually the time comes to support it in turn, it is a duty that should be welcomed with the greatest joy." he paused to let his word sink in then ended the announcement, "Thank you, you may now return to your previous activities and I wish you all a good day." Standing up I join the rest of the block as we filed out of the hall and then returned to the exercise courts.

Jyleena, the dragon who supervised the exercise courts was waiting for us as we returned. "Everyone continue from where you left off." she instructed. "Except 7406662, 7406214, 7405993 and 7406184, I need to speak with you." recognizing my number in the list I obediently, albeit a little nervously headed towards her.

"Sorry to pull you guys away like that." she told us. "But I know the four of you knew Ian and wanted to speak with you about it. Please follow me." We followed her into a small room next to the courts. "Please sit down." she nodded to a few chairs. Once we were seated she gave us an apologetic look, "The reason I needed to speak with you was to check if Ian said anything to you that might have suggested what he was going to do." she asked.

The girl sitting to my left was the first to answer. "He was always being disrespectful about stuff." she responded "But he never actually said he was going to break any of the rules." the rest of us nodded. The fact that Ian had tried to escape surprised me as much as anyone, he had always struck me as more likely to talk about things than to ever do anything.

"And he didn't ask any of you to go with him?" Jyleena asked. We shook our heads. "Did he even give any reasons he might want to leave?" she asked.

Again the girl on my left answered first. "Why would he? What's so great about the outside that he would go to such lengths to get there?" She gave a confused shrug. "Mandarath implied that he did it to avoid be eaten. But that makes no sense, what's the point in doing anything if you don't have a purpose in life?"

Jyleena nodded. "Well if he didn't mention anything important then you can all go back your exercises. But if any of you do want to talk to me about anything just ask." She gave a slightly suspicious look at the girl on my left as we got up to go. Just as we were leaving she added, "Oh, and whoever sleeps nearest to Ian's bed, could you please make it ready for the new arrivals." The other three glanced at me and I mentally filed the task for later.

Another half hour of exercises and our group was allowed to return to the dormitories. The room was large and dark, row after row of mattresses stretched from one end to the other. Even in the darkness I could find my bed with ease. Two steps past it was Ian's. I folded up the sheet and checked the cabinet that lay beside it. A toothbrush, a change of clothes, a thin bar of soap. Everything was in the proper place. I wondered vaguely who the new owner would be and what they would be like. Then dismissed those thoughts, there was no way of knowing who it would be, all I could do was make the bed ready for them and hope we would get off to a good start. Closing the cabinet I picked up Ian's pillow to place it on the folded sheet... and felt something sharp dig into my hand.

The razor was about two inches long, with another two inches of handle and had been folded inside the fabric of the pillow. I stared at it for a moment, then quickly dropped it onto the bed. The ban of all weapons was one of those rules that you could only break once. Had anyone seen me holding it I would be guaranteed a quick trip into someone's stomach. I put the pillow in its place then quickly glanced around. No one was looking in my direction, the changing of an old bed was an activity most preferred to ignore. I walked back to my bed, lay down and tried to sleep.

Almost immediately I realized the mistake I had made. The razor was still lying beside Ian's bed. Come morning someone would find it and I would have to explain why I had not handed the item in. Getting out of bed I picked up the razor then paused. Who was I supposed to deliver the razor to? How could I deliver it when merely possessing the item was banned? After weighing my options I decided to hand it in to Jyleena tomorrow. Of all the guards she seemed the least likely to simply gulp me down without giving me a chance to explain myself.

To prevent it from being discovered in the mean time, I slid it through the collar of my shirt, keeping the blade concealed while still allowing me to carry it. The thought of what I had done kept me from sleeping well that night.

Morning came. Everyone in the dorm got up, and entered the bathing area. We washed, we cleaned our teeth. We returned to the dormitory and dressed, The cold metal blade pressed against my skin as I pulled my shirt on. Suddenly more awake I joined my fellows as we headed to the dining area. I just needed to keep the blade concealed until I saw Jyleena, then the whole mess would be taken care of.

The dining area was a long hall, with three wooden tables running its length. Huge pots of pea soup were placed intermittently on each one, along with several piles of sourdough bread and smaller pots of boiled rice. Taking a bowl from a pile at the entrance I joined one of the queues for food.

Meal times were one of the less structured parts of the day, we were given half an hour to do as we wanted before the tasks of the day began and were encouraged to eat as much as we wanted. After all, a well fed and nicely muscled body was best when the time came to 'perform your duty to society'.

Normally I would sit and talk with Ian, that no longer an option I joined a table at random and tried to join in the conversation. The thought of the knife hidden in my collar nagged at me and in the end I gave up trying to talk and sat in silence for the rest of the mealtime.

Eventually a bell rang to signal the end of breakfast and the atmosphere in the room became suddenly tense. At the end of the hall one of the guards stood up and began to read out a list of ID numbers. Everyone was quiet as twelve numbers were listed. "... will report for kitchen duty. The rest of you already know your tasks for the day and may go."

There was a burst of noise as everyone but the named few stood up and left. Following them out I glanced back at the remaining faces, but only vaguely recognized a few of them. Leaving the dining area I focused myself on the tasks of the day.

Two more meals passed and sixteen more were assigned to kitchen duty. Then we headed to the exercise courts.

Jyleena stood in the center of the court, calling out instructions and organizing everyone into groups as I entered. I joined one of the groups and waited to begin, nervously touching my hand to my neck and feeling the cold metal. Again I debated what to do. If I kept the razor and was caught, I would certainly be eaten. If I turned the razor over to Jyleena, I would still probably be eaten. If I kept the razor secret it would only be a matter of time before someone found it. Either way I would be eaten but there was a big difference between being eaten in disgrace for breaking the rules and being eaten as part of my duty to the town.

Maybe Jyleena was not the best choice. While she was certainly one of the friendliest guards, she was also one of the strictest about the rules. I had no problem seeing her rapidly gulping me down if she found I was breaking one of the more important ones. I couldn't quite see her letting me go. I lowered my hand from the blade and started the first exercise. Maybe a better solution would be to simply drop the razor somewhere, then it would be someone else's problem.

An hour later the exercises finished and we returned to our dorm to sleep. The next day I spent the time looking for a place I could inconspicuously discard the

unwanted weapon. The problem was that for no part of the day was I ever unattended. There was always someone, a dragon or a human close by. By the second night I resolved that I would hand the razor over to Jyleena regardless of the consequences.

The third day passed slowly, I desperately wanted to see Jyleena and get the whole thing over with but the minutes seemed to creep by. Then at lunch, I was assigned to kitchen duty.

At first I barely noticed as my number was read out. I was too concerned with what I was going to say to Jyleena. For a moment I wondered if I had misheard, but after finishing the list the dragon continued to announce the names and numbers of a dozen new arrivals and assign them to beds within the dorms. Both my bed and Ian's were assigned to a newcomer.

The list ended and the rest of the group left leaving me and six others still sitting at the tables. I saw a few people staring back at us as they left but again did not recognize any faces. Those of us that remained, sat and stared at each other for a few seconds then the guard repeated the list and we each nodded as our number was reached. "Good." he said after reaching the end, "Follow me."

We each stood up and followed the guard, soon entering parts of the building I had never been in before. As I walked I realized I had never really thought about being selected for kitchen duty before. I had no idea what would happen next and half expected a group of dragons to suddenly emerge and devour us on the spot. Instead we were lead into a white tiled room, with a large pool of water taking up most of the space.

Several other groups were already inside and standing around waiting. It was pretty rare that members of different blocks would meet each other and I did not recognize any of them. Several other groups were delivered one at a time until there were about forty of us standing by the pool.

A small dragon stood up and yawned, "Okay, you lot. Get undressed and get yourselves in the pool. And make sure you get properly clean."

Everyone began to undress. I noticed the dragon was collecting up the clothing and quickly pulled the razor out of my shirt, palming it as I removed the rest of my clothes and dropped them. The water was warm and only about waist deep. Dropping the razor to the bottom I placed my foot gently over it to conceal it, then grabbed a bar of soap from the side and began to wash.

"Hurry up. Just get yourselves clean, rinse the soap off and get out." The dragon complained.

Ducking my head under the surface I retrieved the razor and palmed it again. For a moment I considered leaving it, but a shiny object on the bottom of the pool would be quickly noticed and having carried it for so long I was a little

reluctant to let it go. Even though as a weapon it would be almost useless against a dragon, that fact that none of them had noticed that I had it meant something to me. They could control almost every aspect of my life with ease, yet had no idea that I was breaking one of their most important rules.

Climbing back out the water, I followed the others through another door. The next room was lined with benches. A bored looking dragon lay one corner. "Take a seat and wait for them to call you through." she told us, gesturing first at the benches and then at the far door.

"How long will that take?" Asked one of the girls.

"I don't know, a few hours probably. But don't worry, we'll have you all in someones belly before the evening lot arrive. Unlike me, who's going to have to sit here and watch you all for the rest of the day"

We each picked a space on the bench and waited. I ended up sitting next to the girl who had asked how long it would be. She gave me cheerful grin. "Excited?" she asked.

"Nervous." I replied.

"Don't be." she told me, "This is it. We have finally been chosen to do our duty."

At that moment she was interrupted. "3276419 and 7146021" shouted a voice from outside. Two of the group stood up and the dragon in the corner nodded towards the door. We caught a brief glimpse of the room beyond as the chosen two opened the door and when through.

"What do you think it's like?" The girl asked me after the door closed again.

"What?" I asked. I was still worried about keeping the razor hidden and what I was going to do with it when I was called.

"Being eaten, obviously." she replied, "Just imagine it. In a few minutes being called through, standing before the one that's going to eat you and completing your purpose." The room was silent as everyone listened to her. Some still looked doubtful or nervous, others seemed slightly reassured and others still were staring with obvious desire. I wasn't sure which category I fell under. "Then, gulp." she continues, "You slide down that long neck and into their waiting tummy. The feeling of your predator all around you. Nothing left to do or worry about, just by existing you are fulfilling your duty by satisfying their hunger. Nothing but you and your dragon as your body becomes a part of them and you merge into one being."

"Would you please shut up?" The dragon in the corner seemed unimpressed by the girl's speech. "Just wait until your number's called and preferably wait silently."

The girl looked shocked and said no more. Time passed slowly. Three more numbers were called. Then another two. Some time later a group of five was called through. Listening carefully I thought I could hear soft gulping sounds from the other room as each in turn was swallowed. A long pause followed before the voice called the number of the girl next to me, then two other numbers, then my own.

The woman next to me jumped up eagerly, another woman, a man and myself stood up more reluctantly and the four of us headed through the door.

Four dragons eyed us eagerly as we enter the room. A fifth, clearly the announcer, stood by a large list of numbers. Several others were stretched out on cushions around the room and from the slight curves of their bellies and the smug expressions, I could guess that they were busy sleeping off the last group. I could even make out a faint twitching coming from one. The dragon in question burped happily and the movement faded away.

It was a strange realization that I would soon be nothing more than that. A pleasant memory and a satisfied belch. A sudden movement caught my attention. The four, still-hungry dragons were not waiting for me to finish my introspection. Already the overly eager girl was disappearing down one of the throats and the other three were eyeing the rest of us to decide who would get who. With a toss of his head, the first dragon completed his meal and I could see the remaining bulges glide smoothly down his throat. Full, he moved to a vacant patch of pillows and collapsed. Already I could hear liquid gurgles coming from his tummy and judging by the erratic movements from within it looked like the girl was not enjoying being food anywhere near as much as she had expected.

By now the remaining three had finally made up their minds. With a quick flick of its head, one of the dragons began swallowing the remaining girl. Another lightning movement from the third and the last of my companions was quickly disappearing into a dragon. I did not get to watch them going down for long though. The remaining dragon stepped up to me. "Your turn now." he announced then drew back his head.

I realized that this would be a very good time to drop the razor. No one was likely notice and even if they did, what difference would it make? Any moment now I would be on my way to the dragon's belly, whether they saw the razor or not. Even as I thought this the dragon's jaws opened and its head lunged forward.

I stared up into the dragon's open maw. The saliva coated tongue stretching out from the pink inner cheeks. Further back I could see the dark tunnel of its esophagus, already widening to welcome me inside.

All I would have to do would be to let go of the razor. I would slide into that long dark tunnel, then down into the depths of the dragon, to be like all the other meals. Soft, squirmy and satisfying. A pleasant bulge in my predator's middle.

With a sharp twist, I plunged the razor deep into the dragon's left eye...

Chapter 2

Sharp teeth snapped shut a mere breath from my face. Ducking out the way I ran for the door as the dragon howled miserably. The door opened easily and I ran out of the building and into the streets. Fortunately the area was deserted as I darted quickly through the winding streets. I knew my luck could not last forever though and frantically searched for some kind of hiding place to avoid my pursuers. Spotting a small hole in a dark alley I veered towards it and squeezed quickly down.

The hole dropped into a long tunnel like passageway, in both directions the tube narrowed, with only a small section in which I could stand upright. Water and slime dripped from the walls and the entire thing reeked of decay. Peering back out into the relative light of the alley I looked for any sign of pursuit. Nothing. The alley was deserted. I had escaped.

Dropping to the grimy floor, I began to pant fearfully. My whole body was trembling and it took conscious effort too make my hand release its hold on the razor. I had done it. I had escaped. I was not going to be eaten. This was both the best and the worst thing that had ever happened to me.

Slowly getting my breathing back under control I began to plan my next step of action. Others must have escaped before me. There would be some kind of resistance I could join. Together we would help free others until we were strong enough to openly oppose the dragons. The first step would be to find the group. I doubted they would be hiding in the middle of some slime covered sewer, I turned back to the hole I had climbed through. I pair of violet reptilian eyes stared back at me.

Grabbing the razor I scrambled back as far from the hole as I could get, brandishing my makeshift weapon. "Hello. What you doing down there?" the dragon asked playfully.

"Get back." I shouted "Leave me alone." I realized with some relief that if the hole had been difficult for me to squeeze through, it should be completely impossible for the dragon.

These hopes were dashed almost immediately as she pushed her front legs through the hole and with a few dexterous twists, wriggled her entire body through. "Well that's not very friendly." she reprimanded. "I'm Ja, and you are?"

I tried to hold the tiny blade in the most threatening manner possible. "I said get back. I've already killed one of your kind today."

She suddenly looked a little worried "You mean in the dining hall?" she asked.

"The one that tried to eat me, I got him right in the eye. That's why you're all after me isn't it?"

She laughed. "You missed by at least an inch. You gave poor Dyrall a nasty scratch across his nose and it bled a lot but you didn't get his eye." She chuckled "Of course he cried like a hatchling when it happened but no real harm done. I bet if you went back in and apologized they'd laugh simply laugh and forgive you. Then find you a nice stomach to fill, of course."

I tried to back a little further away but the pipe was too narrow. "Not being eaten was the whole point of doing this." I snarled.

"Well okay, you don't have to go back." Ja told me. "I was just saying that if you did, I don't think anyone would be too angry with you. You panicked a little in the heat of the moment, but no one was really hurt and no harm was done. Still I think it might be best if you went back."

Ja's friendly attitude was making me uneasy, "I'm not going back and I'm never letting one of you eat me."

Ja shrugged "Okay, I'm not going to make you. That being said, you're probably going to have to accept that sooner or later you will get eaten." She noticed my terrified look. "Oh, not by me. I ate recently, so not for a while anyway and definitely not until you've had a bath. But think about it. Where are you going to stay? What are you going to eat? Where are you going to find clean water?" she waved a paw around the sludge filled pipe. "Or are you going to live off the vast natural bounty provided by this sewer pipe?"

I gave her an angry look. "I'll join the resistance then. They must have food."

She looked blank. "Resistance?"

"Don't pretend you don't know what I mean. I can't be the first to escape. There must be some kind of organization."

"I think they mostly ran into the same problems you are facing. No food, no supplies, no survival skills and a whole town full of hungry dragons."

I stared back defiantly "Then I'm starting one." I insisted.

She laughed. "Okay great leader. And what are my orders for today? Do we rally our troops? Raid the Armory? Or simply scrawl anti government graffiti on all the walls?"

"Just leave me alone." I snarl. I'd already had to deal with ravenous dragons, sarcastic dragons were more than I could bear. "If you're not going to eat me, not going to report me, and not going to help me, then please just go away."

"Alright, alright. I'm going." Turning her back she scrambled back out the hole and disappeared.

Alone at last I began to worry about what to do next. If there really was no resistance then the next few days were going to be very unpleasant indeed. I wondered if Ja was right and if I would soon be returning to my captors, defeated and willing to be eaten rather than try any longer to survive on my own.

Fearful and exhausted, I crawled into the darkest corner I could find to prevent anyone else noticing me and tried to fall asleep.

Loud, terrified quacking woke me the next day Ja dropped through the hole with a struggling duck in her mouth and a small cloth bag tied to her hips. Spitting it onto the floor she pinned it with one paw and grinned at me. "I've requisitioned food and supplies from the enemy, oh great leader." she announced.

I slowly uncurled from my sleeping space. The stone floor and the damp had left me stiff and aching all over. I stared at her in confusion.

"Sorry if I wasn't taking you seriously enough, yesterday." she offered. "I really do want to help you and I know you could definitely use some."

"Why?" I asked. "How do you benefit from this?"

"I don't really. I'm just bored." she smiled awkwardly. "Sorry if you were hoping that your desperate tale had moved me to champion your noble cause or something, but really, I'm just curious to see happens next."

I thought about that. An ally who actually cared if we won would be far better, but a bored dragon with access to most of the town was at least more than I had been expecting. "Okay." I said, "Whatever your reasons, I'm glad you're on my side."

"Thank you, great leader." She responded "Now what is our first goal?"

I sighed at her 'great leader' comment, but decided to ignore it. "I guess our ultimate goal would be shutting down that building, but our first goal should be just freeing a few. Then we..."

"Actually," She interrupted me, "I'm not going to help you do that." she caught my look. "I'm sorry, but I need the Nutritional Center to stay open. The whole town kind of needs it. In fact," she stepped a little closer, suddenly becoming very menacing. "If you want my help you are going to have to swear that nothing you do will cause physical harm to any dragon or do anything that would seriously disrupt our food supply."

I hesitated, there was no way I could lead the resistance under those terms. Ja

stepped took another step closer. "If you don't swear it I'm going to drag you back right now."

I stared in horror, my ally was turning out to be far less helpful than I had hoped. She took another step closer, growling softly. "Alright I swear it." I shouted.

Ja relaxed again. "Sorry I had to threaten you." she said "But none of us could survive without the Nutritional Center. I don't mind helping you let a few escape but only if we leave enough so that no one goes hungry." she gives you an apologetic look. "That's fair right? You get to help some of your kind escape and I make sure my kind don't go hungry."

Defeated, I gave her a reluctant nod.

"Great, I also brought you some food and some stuff to cook it with." she proudly dragged forward the struggling duck and handed it to me, then pulled out of her bag a large knife, a skewer, a piece of flint and a large pile of sticks.

Cooking for the other prisoners had been one of the daily tasks at the Nutritional Center. And while I had never cooked a wild duck before, I had cooked chickens before on a few occasions, although the tools available to me had been considerably better than Ja's makeshift offerings. Still after about half an hour with Ja's help I managed to get a small fire started on one of the dryer patches of stone. Soon after that I had some mangled pieces of duck roasting on the skewer.

"Smells good." said a voice "Or at least good considering that you're cooking it in a sewer." Cold dread seeped through me as I recognized the voice. Looking up I could see Jyleena peering in through the hole. "So you two, how's your revolution going?" with considerably more difficulty than Ja she wriggled through the hole.

"Hey Jyleena." Ja called. "You want to join?"

"Sorry Ja but I'm supposed to be bringing Jeremy back to the Nutritional Center."

Backing away I shot a pleading look at Ja but she simply shrugged. The game was clearly over as far as she was concerned.

"You're not seriously going to make me chase you?" Jyleena asked.

I shook my head, I had no chance of escape anymore. "How did you find me?" I asked, briefly wondering if Ja had betrayed me.

"You know the smell of smoke and burning duck is pretty distinctive, even when its coming from a sewer." Jyleena gave me a pitying look. "Come on, back up through the hole and we'll get you some proper food and a bath." she promised.

Obediently I climbed back out the sewer and allowed the two dragons to climb out after me. Both walked side by side as they lead me back to the Nutritional

Center. "You might as well come in too Ja." Jyleena offered, "After all that time in the sewers we could all do with a bath." Jyleena lead us both into the dining hall, through the waiting room where a few nervous humans were waiting to be called, and into the bathing area.

Slosh. Jyleena jumped into the pool, "Come on you two. You in particular Jeremy. We need to get you nice and clean and get a good meal in you before you'll be any good for eating."

Ja happily followed Jyleena and splashed playfully in the water. I stood on the edge looking nervous. "Couldn't I just go back to the Center?" I asked. "You've already got several waiting in there," I gestured to the waiting room, "so you don't really need me."

"No you can't." Jyleena insisted. "The last thing we need is you telling all the others about your little adventure. In fact, that's probably the only place you could cause more trouble than outside." Her tail wound around my waist and with a jerk pulled me into the water. "Fortunately this whole mess should sort itself out once we've got tucked away in someone's belly. After than you will be no more trouble to anybody and everything should go back to normal, so please just wash yourself clean and we can get on with it."

There really wasn't any way out this time. I had escaped once through pure luck, but I knew I wouldn't get a chance like that again. Reluctantly, I grabbed the soap and began to vigorously wash myself. The grit and slime washed off my exposed body as the two dragons playfully splashed about.

"Cheer up." Ja splashed a wave of water at me. "You might not get to be a dashing revolutionary, but you will make a very tasty meal and you did get to have some fun first."

I was about to respond when a third dragon entered the room and placed a steaming tray of food by the poolside. "Good to see you back, Jeremy." he commented, "Eat up." then left again. Despite knowing what would happen to me afterwards I moved to the edge of the pool and began to eat. After all, I was hungry, and refusing to eat wasn't going to improve my situation.

Having always lived in the Nutritional Center this was the first time I had missed so many meals in a row. After the first mouthful I abandoned any thoughts of self preservation and quickly wolfed down most of the food. My hunger finally satisfied, I licked my fingers clean. Despite myself, I couldn't deny that being prepared to be a dragon's lunch felt considerably better than being free.

"Aren't you going to finish it?" Ja asked, glancing at the few remaining scraps. "After all, It is the last meal you will get." Put like that I decided I might as well. Picking up tray I polished off the last few mouthfuls, then with a contented sigh sat down by the side of the pool, feeling almost too full to move.

Ja swam over grinning and placed a paw on my belly. "And of course you'll sit so much nicer inside someone's stomach now that you've been properly fattened up." I noticed she was drooling slightly and shuffled away from the poolside, getting out of reach.

"Come on Jeremy." Jyleena prompted, "You're both clean and fed now so you're ready to be eaten. You just need to go into the waiting room and you can rest there. It's always pretty slow at this time so you should have a chance to let your food settle before anyone calls you." I didn't move, still hoping she might relent and allow me to return to the dormitories.

She prodded at me with her nose. "See? This disobedient attitude is exactly why you can't go back. You need to accept that you are just food. Our village has invested a lot of effort into protecting you and preparing you for this purpose and now it's time for you to pay back that debt. Just do as I say for a little longer and everything will be back to normal." I climbed reluctantly to my feet, offering to eat me was hardly a good incentive, but following instructions was pretty habitual for me and there were few other options available.

"Actually, about that," Ja interrupted, "I know we're not supposed to be able to choose our meals by name but it has been a while since I last ate and so I was thinking I could save him the wait."

Jyleena hesitated for just a second "Sure, I guess that's okay."

I tried to back away but Jyleena was suddenly behind me, blocking my escape. "Oh no you don't." she muttered "A couple of hours digesting and you will be so much less trouble." She gave me a sharp prod in the back with her nose, and I fell forward into the pool with a splash. I struggled to the surface, spluttering and wiping the water from my face only to find that Ja's tail had wound its way round my waist. I fought to escape, but she dragged me closer then held me in place with her forepaws. Helpless, I watched as her long tongue ran once round her lips in preparation for the impending meal. Long strands of saliva drooled down her chin and splashed into the pool.

Her belly growled in anticipation as she opened her jaws and drew back her head. I recognized the movement from the previous day and knew she was about to lunge. Frantically, I tried to twist out of her grip, but she was too far strong. All I could do was wriggle feebly from side to side before her gaping maw suddenly engulfed me.

I got one brief glimpse of the dark widening passageway of the throat coming towards me before it cut out all light and I sank into the endless darkness of the dragon's gullet. Tight, saliva coated walls squeezed at my body as she noisily consumed me.

Gulp.

Her head jerked back as she swallowed my feet and I slid smoothly down her throat. With a final squelch her esophagus deposited me into her belly. The soft, muscular sack rippled around me, liquid groans coming from my surroundings and acrid smelling fluids trickling in. My exposed skin immediately began to itch and I struggled against the confining muscles.

The two dragons regarded the faint signs of movement from Ja's belly in amusement. "Good to see you in your proper place at last." Jyleena's voice was muffled but distinguishable. "Now Ja's belly is going to turn you into a nice, nutritious slush and you'll finally be of some use, instead of just causing trouble."

"Come on great leader." Ja teased. "Lets go find somewhere comfy and I'll get right on that." She gave her belly a satisfied pat, then turned and headed out the building.

Ja's stomach swayed gently from side to side as she contentedly carried me home. Inside her belly I writhed and screamed as her muscular walls and caustic fluids began to break me down. Beating against the inner walls I desperately searched for anything I could do to prevent myself from becoming a part of the dragon. But my struggles were getting weaker by the second and any chance of survival seemed gone.

Once home, Ja stretched out on a comfy mattress. As she lay down, the dragon's full weight settled on the contents of her belly. The change in pressure forced the last of the air from her stomach causing her to release a long and wet belch. She licked her lips as her meal's flavor returned, and sighed happily as the last few movements in her tummy faded away.