

Draconic Mischief

By Dragonien

The side of the mountain was steep and treacherous, the kind of terrain one typically wouldn't dare scale without taking time and consideration for each step. Neither party had that luxury, though. For the knight, years of training and practice gave him enough experience to scale the mountain trail without falling to his death during his pursuit. For her, on the other hand, years not of training but of familiarity with the trail were the only thing that kept her ahead of the knight; his superior physical ability and intuitive footwork just barely overshadowed by her ease of movement along the long-familiar paths. Despite the desperation of her situation, though, the fiery red-haired woman showed no signs of visible distress. By all rights she should have been terrified; pursued by knights and soldiers intent upon capture of her to use as a bargaining chip against the beast. This wasn't the first time they had tried this, though and she knew she would be fine. After all...

She was the Dragon Maiden. HE wouldn't let anything happen to her.

By the time she reached the top of the cliff the knight had fallen a good thirty paces behind. His superior physical conditioning foiled by the long chase in his heavy chain-mail armor. Winded as she was, the Dragon Maiden made an effort to show as little of her own breathless exhaustion as she could. She stood atop the cliff's edge with her back straight and her chin held high, looking down her nose at the approaching knight as the wind whipped at the pale green of her homespun dress. She was no noble woman nor queen nor anyone of real import, yet she held herself as if she was the most important person in the vale. She needed no title or lands to tell her of her importance. All she needed was his word that she was important to him.

By the time the knight reached the summit, both could already hear echoing footsteps coming from the dark cavern set into the mountain's face behind them. The knight's drawn sword turned away from the woman and towards the cavern entrance instead. For a split second a look of fear flowered across his helmet-clad face before washing away when he recognized the sound as human footsteps. Human's weren't what this knight was scared of.

"Just come quietly and we won't have to get nasty, little girl." The knight growled between panting breaths. "Be a good dear and we might even let you go once you're done being bait for the beast."

The demand held little sway with her, though. Even if she were willing to surrender, she wasn't stupid enough to think she'd be let free. At least, not let free without being passed around like that evening's wine skin. Knights and Noblemen were all bastards like that; which is why she preferred more... unique men.

"You fools never listen and your lords never learn. How many times will you accost us before you finally give up. You can't best him. He's better than you, he's better than every lord in the duchy put together."

Before the knight could respond, a new voice spoke up from the direction of the cave and the approaching footsteps.

"I know you love the theatrics, my dear, but you're laying it on a bit thick."

For a moment, her heart fluttered at the sound of the familiar voice. A girlish tickle in her chest that left her weak in the knees like some fawning child over a handsome man; the voice alone rich and powerful enough to elicit feelings of love and adoration in her. She had to take a second to calm herself before she spoke again, doing her best not to let her infatuation make her seem weak or easy to conquer.

"You're one to talk. you could've swooped down and taken care of this already but you just sat yourself up here and waited so you could make a grand entrance." She accused without heat in her voice.

Behind her, the shadowy figure exiting the cave resolved itself into a rather non-descript man in his mid-twenties. he had dark black hair and skin tanned just enough to signal a life frequently spent outdoors. He was perfectly average in seemingly every way from his height to his build to even the simple, homespun clothes he wore. The only oddity that drew attention, though, was the sharp gleam of color from his eyes. His emerald-green eyes. Maybe it was a trick of the light but anyone looking at him would swear they seemed to glow just the faintest bit if you stared too long.

"Enough of your chatter." The knight snarled, brandishing his sword at them both. "Pretty boy here can go fuck off. You're coming with me, Dragon Maiden. We'll have you lure the beast out of his hole and slay him once and for all."

At that declaration the man raised one eyebrow at the knight before casually taking a few steps forward to interpose himself between her and the knight.

"You misunderstand, little knight. You need not lure anyone out. She has already served her purpose as bait quite well. But she was never your bait to lure the 'beast' out as you call him. She was my bait for you."

As he spoke, the man took another step towards the knight. His words held an ominous tone to them that left a strange sense of foreboding welling up in the knight that caused him to take a step back out of fear despite being fully armed and armored versus the seemingly unarmed man. It wasn't until the knight saw the man's hand; the man's very clearly inhuman, black scale-clad hand, that he finally started to catch on.

From there, the changes rolled quickly through the man. His fingers creaked and cracked as they reshaped into taloned toes each tipped with a claw sharp enough to rend steel. Scales rapidly flowed their way down from his wrist and across his arms like a swarm of gleaming, black scale-mail pieces settling atop his skin. The air filled with the sharp creak and crack of snapping and reshaping bones as his legs, arms, and back all convulsed and broke apart only to reform in new, clearly inhuman, shapes. His face elongated into a squared muzzle that lined itself with teeth each longer than a grown man's finger while horns longer than daggers sprouted from the back of his head as his hair seemed to recede back into his scalp. His shirt tore apart as a massive pair of bat-like wings ripped from his back while his pants faired similarly when a whip-like serpentine tail tore from the base of his spine.

The woman was forced to take several steps back as the man-turned-dragon's expanding form spread out across most of the plateau in front of the cave. His body thickened and swelled with more and more mass until his tail was thicker around than her waist at its base. His wings spread wide, each easily big enough to have doubled as a pavilion tent while his head swelled large enough that it could have swallowed a goat whole. When the changes were done the massive, wagon-sized beast lowered his head right in front of the now-terrified knight and let out a single, thunderous growl that shook pebbles loose from the cliff face below. The knight, in all his fear, took one last step backwards; all the movement he could muster in his sudden fear as his brain screamed at him to put distance between him and this monster. That single step sent him falling over the edge of the cliff to his doom below.

With a snort of amusement, the dragon briefly glanced over the cliff before swinging its head around towards her; the Dragon Maiden. Her chest fluttered again as she saw those now inhuman, reptilian eyes staring at her intently. She could feel his desire for her in that gaze. Not any kind of love or sexual desire, she had no illusions that he held that kind of love for her. Rather, it was the look someone gave a prized possession, a precious treasure. That is what made her weak in the knees. A loving husband might get drunk and hurt a wife in his rage or

cheat on her when he became bored. But a man would never let anything happen to his treasure. Especially not a dragon.

"There's a dozen or so more down in the village." She explained meekly, her voice going quiet more out of shyness than any kind of fear. That special kind of reluctance a person gets when speaking to someone they fancy making her suddenly nervous at the sound of her own voice. "All fully armored. No siege engines, though."

The dragon's lips pulled back, showing off rows of his teeth along one edge of his muzzle. To anyone else it would have been a terrifying show of aggression; but she recognized it as what passed for a draconic smirk. She knew what he wanted to do next, and the thought sent shivers down her spine. She loved powerful men. Not men of station or wealth, but men of real power. And he was about to show exactly that kind of power to everyone down in the valley below.

The knights camped in one of the fields outside town readied their weapons as soon as they heard the sound. It sounded like the dull rumble of an avalanche heard from far away. For a moment, the knights glanced around their surroundings, as if thinking it some oncoming Calvary charge preceded by the thunder of hooves. Then one had the bright idea to look up and his eyes went wide as he pointed and shouted.

Black, claw-tipped fingers gripped the top of the mountain off in the distance as if holding on for purchase. Even as the knights watched the fingers surged thicker, spreading out to cover more of the mountain-top with each passing second. Slowly, from around the edge of the mountain an enormous, black-scaled head rose into view. Brilliant green eyes stared down at them all, clearly visible even from miles away, as the beast stared down at them from its perch atop the mountain. His tail slithered around a good portion of the mountain's middle, like a snake constricting its prey. Wings bigger than the sails of any ship ever conceived spread wide and blocked out the sun; casting a dark shadow across the entire vale down below. And yet even as they did, the men down below could see them stretching wider and wider still; the shadow expanding across the landscape as they grew along with the rest of the beast. Any pretense of nobility or courage fled the knights all at once. Each and every one of them leapt for their horses and turned tail to run as fast as their mounts would carry them. They'd heard the stories of the beast but, like all the others, failed to believe their details.

Meanwhile, far up the mountain side, the dragon raised his free fore-paw up to stare down at his little Dragon Maiden, his little treasure carefully cradled within his palm. She grinned up at him like a little girl just given sweets. She showed no signs of being intimidated by the now two-hundred-foot-tall and still-growing dragon; who's muzzle could have swallowed an entire score of knights with ease. She knew he was about as much threat to her as those knights were to him; which was to say none at all. Hard to threaten a beast whose hide was too thick for anything short of a ballista to even be felt. Anyone else might have wondered why he didn't leap from the mountain and swoop down towards the escaping knights. He had no intention of chasing them down. If anything, he wanted them to escape, wanted them to spread more rumors of the massive beast hiding in the vale. After this he'd probably lay low for the next few visits, either pretend he wasn't here at all or only appear at a minuscule size to make them think the rumors were overblown again. It wasn't about his reputation or ego, nor about luring anyone particular here. He'd gotten bored with that centuries ago. At this point, he was just having fun with the rumors. That was part of why she was so infatuated with him. Safe for the times when someone actually threatened him or his possessions. At the end of the day he wasn't a violent or monstrous dragon.

He just liked messing with people.