

Chapter 10 – You Are Alive

Some time had passed in the real world. Cruise was back in Lance's bed again. He'd just been carrying him there. Evelina was there too, her face a picture of concern.

"I came as soon as I heard. Do you think he'll be okay?"

"I don't know Eve. He seemed better in the dream." Lance was lost for words.

"He's in shock, it's only natural. I think he's lucky though. With your abilities, there's an opportunity to work through this in the dreams you share."

"There may be... complications with that." Lance admitted. "We saw her, Lexi was in the dream with us." He remembered their encounter in the hospital, like it was a real memory. It was hard to tell whose nightmare she represented, his or Cruise's. Perhaps he was in shock too.

"Was it a nightmare?"

"Not quite. More like a tangent, really." The more he thought about it, the more he knew it was just the tip of the iceberg.

"It's late, I'd better go. But I'll see you in the morning. Will you be able to monitor his dreams from now on?"

"I'll try. In deep sleep however, it's much more difficult."

"Don't dragons have heightened senses and brain functions?"

"In normal dragons yes, and in mammalian dragons they also have the same capacity for REM sleep that other mammals do. However, he may not have learned to develop them, or there might be very little dragon biology in his brain."

"So, if he slips out of REM sleep, you lose contact with him like you would anyone else?"

"That's right. So, it's just a matter of getting my timing right and not falling into too deep a sleep myself."

"It sounds like that's not the biggest concern." Evelina noticed. Lance's nerves were starting to fail him, and she could tell.

"I've never done this before." He admitted. "Entering someone's dreams in such a troubled state. With what he's going through, I don't know what his mental landscape will be."

"If he does have nightmares, it'll be good to have someone there with him."

"I hope so." Lance wasn't sure of that. He was getting anxious thinking about it. He could sense the nightmares coming, whatever they were. Whatever horrors lay within that mind of his, he may have to experience them as well.

He didn't even notice Evelina leaving the room. "Well, goodnight!" She said as she passed through the door and closed it behind her, leaving them alone together.

Lance pulled up the chair from his desk and sat beside the bed, looking down at Cruise. He looked so peaceful, so adorable. His expression betrayed none of the torment that he had recently endured,

but he still looked as vulnerable as ever. *Sleeping soundly, at last,* he noted. He petted his hair, stroking it softly. Stealthily he caressed the green hairs on his pointed ear. It twitched reflexively.

"Rest." He wanted him to rest. He willed him to rest. "I hope you've found some peace at last."

Saying that aloud stung him, somehow. Tears welled up in his eyes, a rare reaction to anything. It took so much to even begin to cry, so more than he would have liked. But finally he was beginning to feel the strain of the past few days, made worse by their ordeal with Lexi outside, her attempted kidnapping.

He only caught her with him because of a fire alarm, and it hadn't taken him long to deduce who set it off. If it weren't for Cruise's own resourcefulness, he probably would have lost him forever. By the caprice of chance, he was still here and still alive. Here by the skin of his teeth.

He imagined that if his hair were any other colour, he'd start finding grey hairs there by now. The telltale sign of stress. It was lucky his hair was already grey to begin with.

"I'm not doing a very good job at this, am I?" he asked himself rhetorically. Like Cruise could answer him. He wished he could.

Cruise stood outside, in the snow. It fell gently around him, but he could sense that a blizzard was picking up. His natural dragon acuity told him so. His instincts told him where the wind was blowing from, and what it meant for the weather outside. He felt the cold chill him to the bone, but it didn't bother him. He didn't mind the cold; it was heat that he couldn't stand. Being rugged up in layers of sweaty clothing was worse than freezing.

The snow started falling faster, blowing up into a blizzard. He wondered what tomorrow would bring. He was tired of being so impatient, waiting for love. He just wanted tomorrow to come early, to be free of today. Time passed so slowly. He felt lonely, yet wherever he went it felt like there was somebody else there with him.

"At least you're alive." Somebody told him. "Most people aren't glad to be alive. But not you, not anymore."

He turned around and saw himself, like a reflection in the mirror. But it wasn't him. He was a Fritish fox boy, with reddish-brown hair, tied up in a ponytail. He'd never met this person before, but he knew that it was a part of him. He wondered if perhaps this is what he would have been without any of the dragon parts in his body.

Looking at him, he felt so lost within himself, so confused. Like he was just a messy patchwork of pain and dragon parts, like a cyborg. Like bits of him had been taken away and replaced with something else, in ways that ran right to the bone, into his soul. His very essence had been taken apart and put back together again.

"Tomorrow is another day." It said and walked away. It looked up in the white sky, and they could both see a green fuzzy dragon flying freely, flapping its wings and roaring with all the fury that nature had bestowed upon it. It seemed to be circling the sky above them, flying around them like it needed them. The fog passed and suddenly they could see the sun setting in the distance, casting its

golden glow upon the clouds around them.

“We are alive.” Cruise said. It didn’t make much sense, but it felt like the right thing to say. Neither pride nor shame crossed his mind. He was what he was, and that was all there was to it.