

Chapter 2: The Party

The door chimes rang as Stephen walked through the shop door of “Mystic Curiosities”. He was surprised as he walked in that there was a handful of customers browsing Jergo's wares. It had only been a couple weeks since the shop opened and already word was spreading around quickly about the new store being run by a mage. He still felt the name of the store could use a little work but then he wasn't any better at naming things himself so who was he to judge. Still it was nice to see Jergo getting some business despite the fears some people may have about the magical folk they were just starting to learn about. He even saw a couple people asking the mage at the counter about Jergo's costumes. Stephen smirked as he remembered his first time wearing one. He quietly wondered if the guy and gal asking about them knew what they were getting into, quietly chuckling at the thought of the two being surprised by the effects of the suits they tried on if they hadn't done so already. Stephen waited off to the side beside Gygax who looked up at the young man and woofed quietly as if to say hello. The big dog had started to grow comfortable around him after a few more visits, though not enough to let Stephen pet him which he resisted the temptation to. After dealing with a couple of costumers who decided to purchase the two werewolf costumes they were asking about Jergo started to politely usher people out the door so he could take a lunch break. Once everyone had left Jergo put up an 'out to lunch' sign and locked the door.

“Glad you made it Stephen. Shall we go downstairs and have some tea?” Jergo asked, turning to Stephen and smiling calmly.

“Water for me thanks. I'm not really a coffee or tea drinker. Just glad to be out of the house today.” Stephen said, smiling softly himself though there was a little unease on his face.

“Troubles at home?” Jergo asked, stroking his beard lightly. Stephen swore it was bigger then last time he saw him.

“Just butting heads a little with my dad... well, step-dad. He's not too trusting of mystics even though he has never met one personally. And when he caught wind of my last visit here we got into a bit of an argument about whether or not it was safe to come here or not. Needless to say I'm pretending to be having lunch with friends right now at the mall.” Stephen said with a bit of a frown. “Granted he can't control me since I'm an adult but I still live under his roof and I rather not have him making my life any harder then it is.”

Jergo simply nods in response. “Well, I can guess how he might feel. We mages and other mystics are completely foreign beings to someone like him. Many of us are quite strong and some of us have talents that are hard for “normals”, as you so eloquently put it the other day, to understand. It is only natural to fear what one doesn't understand. However...” Jergo smiled at Stephen “I do hold hope that there will be those that won't judge without first learning more. People like you who are willing to try on magical costumes made by crazy old mages without knowing the consequences.” He grinned and chuckled.

Stephen rolled his eyes and smirked. “Are you gonna keep teasing me about that old man. Starting to make me regret ever trying that costume on in the first place.” Of course he was only joking around as since then he had been allowed to try on a few more costumes including an armadillo, a crocodile, and a peacock.

“Well, I'm just saying that you might be a bit too trusting sometimes. One can't be too careful in this day and age. Not every mage is as kind or as experienced as I am.”

“I know that. I'm not one to just put on some magic accessory or chug some potion given to me by someone I just met. The only reason why I put that bird costume on when we first met is cause... well I felt I could trust you. I have a bit of a sense for these sort of things.” Stephen said, rubbing the back of his head lightly.

Jergo softly stroked his beard and smiled softly. “Hmm... sounds like you have a gift of empathy, the ability to psychically sense the emotions of others and to sense their aura on an emotional level.”

“Oh, I wouldn't say that. I am just observant and usually have a good sense of these sort of things.” Stephen said, smiling bashfully. “I wouldn't say I have any special talents. I'm just a boring average guy.”

“Perhaps you are right but don't go selling yourself short. I wouldn't call you boring in the slightest.” Jergo said and softly patted the young man on the shoulder. “You are too modest with yourself sometimes. We all have our own special talents. Just some are harder to recognize than others.”

“Kinda generic advice to be giving for a wizard.” Stephen said with a smirk. “Come on. Lets go downstairs and have that tea already.”

After tea Stephen helped Jergo clean the table and placed the dishes by the sink. Though he insisted on just having water Jergo did manage to convince him to drink some of his

tea and to the old man's credit the tea was good. He never used to drink tea before but whatever Jergo put into his homemade blend was more than good enough for the young man to enjoy having it with the kindly old wizard. However there were thoughts burning in the young man's mind. He had read about veil since the emergence and that it was used to transform them into humans temporarily as a form of disguise. It made him wonder... if veil was used to make mystics into humans for a short time could it do something to humans as well? He turned to Jergo who was busily wiping the table clean of any crumbs left behind from the biscuits they had.

“Hey Jergo... I was wondering... is there any form of veil that could transform a human into something else?” He asked.

“Why in fact there is other forms of veil beyond the ones used for human disguises. Such magic is the foundation of my costume work in fact. Why do you ask?”

“I'm curious as transformation is something of an interest of mine.” Stephen said a bit shyly. “Just the thought of becoming another creature fascinates me. Sure your costumes are great at capturing that but I want to truly become another being. At least for a while anyways. Is it possible?”

Jergo stroked his beard. “It is possible though I'm gonna prune that fantasy of yours a wee bit and warn ya that a full on physical transformation is not a pleasant one. In fact it is a painful experience though there are veil makers such as myself that have found a way to reduce or numb the pain induced by changing forms. Still, if you manage to get past that then experiencing life in the shoes or paws of another species can be a thrilling experience. I myself have divulged in transforming myself in my younger years. Definitely not ready to experience the discomfort of shifting again anytime soon though.” He chuckled and gave the table one last swipe of the cloth.

Stephen nodded quietly as he took note about the pain aspect of transforming. Such still wasn't quite enough to deter him. “So if I wanted to become... say... a dragon for instance all I'll need is a veil potion tailored to that?”

Jergo looked up at Stephen looking like he almost ate part of his bushy beard before frowning slightly. “I'm sorry, Stephen, but I'm afraid such a veil is beyond my talents and most others. Such a transformation is dangerous for almost all humans and even many mystics to undertake.”

“How come? What makes becoming a dragon different from becoming any other species?”

“It is a dragon's innate magical nature that makes such a transformation a very difficult task. Dragons have a very unique physiology what with their ability to breath fire, their incredible lifespans, and the fact that they never stop growing as they age. Or at least no one has been around to record a definitive end to their growth. They aren't exactly the easiest species to study nor the most willing to divulge such information. Anyways cause of their magical nature that allows them to breath fire and even fly at the grand sizes they can reach such a transformation can prove fatal.”

“So becoming a dragon is impossible then?” Stephen said in a disappointed tone.

“I wouldn't say impossible as it has been done in the past. It is just difficult as it isn't the end result of the change but the transition that is problematic. Getting the body to produce the magic required to sustain such a form too soon or too late is deadly. Course it is easier to cause such a change in already innately magical beings. Again it has been done before with mages and even some normal humans back in the old times of magic and myth but it is something that I cannot do. Hpwever if you are willing to wait I would come up with a dragon costume for you. Much easier and safer way to become a dragon I assure you.”

“No, it is alright. No need to trouble yourself over me.” Stephen said and smiled even though on the inside he was greatly disappointed that there was no way for Jergo to change him into a dragon except for making him a costume, and even that would only be an illusion. Even if it wasn't the dragon form he believed himself to be on the inside just truly being one in general would be a dream come true. Still, Jergo did say it was still possible. “Do you know of any other mages that can make such a veil?”

“No I do not and I strongly urge you not to go looking for such.” Jergo said with a stern tone. “Many have sought for such a potion and were deceived by con artists who gave them vials of essentially nothing. Others were tricked by malevolent mages who gave them potions that transformed their victims into something less desirable or even killed them. Many a mage have also used others with such desires secretly as guinea pigs to test their dragon veil formula to see if it worked, offering such a potion to beings desiring such a form only to watch them parish as the potion failed. I know you are a smart lad so I strongly urge you to take my advice and at least do not go searching for mages who can create dragon veil without running them through me first. I can help you rule out any deception and IF a competent mage is found then we can arrange a safe environment for such to be tested and used.”

“Alright I won't go and do anything without your approval first.” Stephen said and smiled. Perhaps there was hope to become a dragon after all. Hen then glanced at his watch to check the time. “Well I should get going. I did tell my folks I was just out for

lunch and I do wish to check with my friends online if any events are happening for Halloween.”

“Ah, good Ol' Hallows Eve. You know I was growing my beard out for the holiday. Going as Gandalf The Grey. Think I look the part?” Jergo chuckled as he lightly stroked his beard.

Stephen couldn't help but chuckle too. “I think you fit the part of any wizard character. Though one would think you would try something more original. I mean you are a wizard who wants to go out as another wizard.”

“Honestly just couldn't think of other costume ideas this year. Plus Gandalf is my favorite wizard from literature. Very wise and even capable of taking on beasts greater than himself at such an age. Truly a grand wizard to be sure.”

“Well as long as you don't expect me to be Frodo you can be whoever you want for Halloween.” Stephen smirks and they both had a laugh at that. Shortly after they finished cleaning the area they said their goodbyes and Stephen left the shop as Jergo opened it back up again.

Once home Stephen locked the door behind him only to turn around and find his step-dad looking down at him from upstairs.

“So, where did you go son?” he asked calmly with a stern look on his face.

“I just went to the mall and had something at the food court there with my friends. Why do you want to know.”

“Really? Cause your brother said he saw you walk into that shop I told you to avoid.” His voice grew more stern and his gaze was almost strong enough to bore through Stephen's head.

Stephen nearly swore out loud. He should have known one of his younger brothers would do something to get him in trouble. It was clear that there was no point in lying so he simply stood tall and looked his step-dad straight in the eye with a stern look of his own. “Fine! I was at Jergo's store. But I wasn't lying when I said I was with a friend.”

“You just met the man. You don't know anything about him. He could be dangerous. That is why I want you to stay away from him.”

“You're right, I don't know anything about him. And I won't know unless I try to learn more about him from him. And from what I've learned from him so far is that he is a

kind wizard who wants to make the lives of others more enjoyable and magical. Is that a crime?" Stephen crossed his arms, returning his father's glare.

"He could be dangerous. For all you know he could be using people for experiments or changing people into monsters in his spare time."

"First, you are being overly dramatic which is certainly not fitting of you 'dad'. Second, the most transforming he does is selling potions which lets mystics be human for a while so they can better live among us and sell costumes which gives the ILLUSSION of transformation." Stephen replied, making sure his step-dad got the emphasis on 'illusion'. "May I also add that I've tried some of those costumes on and they are awesome. It feels wonderful to feel like you are something else for a while. Honestly, you should drop by the store yourself if only to put your ridiculous fears to rest."

"You let yourself be transformed?!?" His step-dad gasped, eyes growing wide.

"Not transformed. The costumes make you look and feel like you are the costume without actually transforming you. Jergo can better explain it than I can but in simplest terms I am still human underneath the costume. Now if I drank a potion designed to change me..."

"I've heard quite enough from you, young man!" His step-dad shouted, face turning slightly red. "I don't want to hear anymore about Jergo or transformation or anything of the sort in this house again! And if I catch you going to his shop again or if you DARE come to my house as anything other than human you can go live with that old loon down the street as you won't be welcome in this house anymore!" And with that he turned away and went out of sight into the living room.

Stephen was fuming at this point, his hands clenched into fists and cheeks feeling hot with anger. "FINE! If that is how it is then perhaps I will live with him! Better than living with an ignorant old fart like you!" He shouted upstairs before storming off to his room and slamming his door, not giving his step-dad a chance to respond. He leaned against the door for a bit as he tried to calm himself down. "Why does he have to be such an ass? I should just show up at the door as a dragon or something just to give him a good piece of my mind." He said to himself as he fumed. He then turned his attention to his PC which he walked over towards and turned on. He decided to hit up facebook and check to see if any events have been posted. That should help him get his mind of family problems for the moment.

After Stephen logged in he noticed he had a message from one of the local furs. It was an invite to a Halloween party this coming weekend. He smiled as he was waiting for an event like this to pop up and was amused by the title of the event, "Furs Made Real".

Course when he started reading the description of the event his amusement shifting into surprise at the mention that a mage would be involved in the event and that she would be providing potions for as many that wants them to become whatever creature they desire. Stephen was skeptical about all this but he soon noticed a video was attached to the event description and gave it a watch. It showed the person who posted the vid drinking back a potion and unbelievable becoming an anthropomorphic armadillo right before the camera. It certainly wasn't an easy thing to watch what with the man's body morphing into grotesque shapes during the transformation as well as his groans and cries of pain before the changes ceased. He was convinced at least that whoever this mage was she certainly had the power to transform others as there was no movie or computer effect on earth that could have matched what he had just saw on screen.

Stephen's heart started to beat a little faster. If she could develop potions that could turn people into whatever they desired, even anthropomorphic creatures of their own creation, then perhaps it wasn't too far fetched that she could make him and his friends into their more feral draconic selves too. He furiously wrote a private message to the poster of the event to get more details about this mage and her potions while also opening up skype to let his friends know about the party. Stephen was so excited about the whole thing that he forgot about his conversation with Jergo to talk to him before getting himself into trouble. After talking with his friends and managing to convince them to come he began his own preparations for the party. One he was sure he wasn't gonna forget anytime soon.

“Are you sure about this, Mehl? I mean we've role played transforming into our dragon selves online but this... I'm not sure if this. It is kind of a big thing to go through.” Said Rav as they found a spot to park. Stephen, Dav, and Rav had finally arrived to their destination after a good hours drive away from the city. The party was taking place at an old abandoned farm in the outskirts of town. It was a great spot to have such a party since here they would be able to get away with drinking transformation potions without worry about bumping into people who would freak out if they saw people changing before their eyes. Not to mention that if Stephen and his friends were going to become dragons they would need all the space they could get.

“Hey, if you are uncomfortable drinking some TF potion then no one will force you too. But I for one am not gonna miss my chance to truly become 'Mehl'. If I don't do this I'll end up spending the rest of my life regretting going not through with this.” Stephen said as he opened the door to his side and hopped out. He smiled with amazement as he looked over the field full of party goers. There was already a large group of people who looked like they had taken the plunge as there was a lot of anthro creatures of various

species dancing to the heavy beat blaring across the field from the barn. It was like he stepped into a dream and didn't want to wake up from it.

"Mrrmm... I still don't like the fact that you said it was painful. But I wouldn't mind being my dragon self as long as it didn't hurt that much." Dav said as he looked around. "Geeze, I thought I'd recognize at least one of these people but none of them look familiar like this."

"I'm sure we'll find someone we know among them all. Not everyone transformed so there should be a familiar face in the crowd. " Stephen said, looking around for anyone they knew amongst the party goers.

The three began to mingle with the crowd, eventually finding friends among the transformed partiers. Each of them asked how was the transformation and how their bodies felt now. Each person they asked giving them relatively the same response of that it was pretty painful at first but once the transformation was complete it was the best experience in the world. Stephen was going to ask where the mage who was behind the transformations when he felt a light tap on the shoulder from a long nailed finger which made him jump in surprise.

"I believe you boys must be the 'dragons three' I've heard so much about. I have been looking for you."

All three of them turned towards the source of the voice. The woman standing before them stood at about 6 feet in height and had flowing raven hair. She wore what Stephen perceived to be a traditional gypsy garb, her body covered in dark violet silks and what first appeared to be gold jewels and chains but inspecting the outfit a little longer showed it all to be plastic. Stephen guessed the outfit was just a costume. Still, the woman had an unearthly air about her. She didn't appear threatening but something about her was creeping him out.

"Yes, we are the dragon trio." Rav said, finally breaking the silence. "I'm Rav and this is Dav and Mehl. Who are you?"

"My name is Eris. A pleasure to meet you three." Eris said with a smile. " I'm sure you have been told that there was going to be a mage at this event correct?"

"Yes we were. You telling us you are that mage?" Stephen asked.

"Why yes I am. And I've been hoping to meet you three. From what I've been told you three have a strong interest in dragons. Have I heard correctly?"

Stephen nodded, "Yes you have. And we heard you had the talent to change us into dragons. Is this true? I've heard it couldn't be done."

Eris chuckled and smiled softly. "Such takes a mage of grand skill and knowledge of arts long forgotten due to years of hiding. And I am such a sorceress. I have delved into the magics of old and dared to perform magics most are afraid to learn. But now I am boasting and that isn't proper of me now is it?"

"So you can do it? Change us into dragons I mean?" Stephen asked. His heart was pounding in excitement but he tried his best to keep calm and collected.

"But of course. I have the potions all ready. Your host graciously informed me about you three in advance and... well, I was so excited for such a request. Such hasn't been done in ages. I was more than happy to create such potions. And for free as well. The fame I'll most surely receive after this event will more than make up for the cost of materials for sure." Eris said sounding very sure of herself. As if pulling them out of thin air, the sorceress produced three vials filled with a red liquid. "These are your keys to dragonhood, my dears. Use them well. Now, if you'll excuse me I must get ready for the excitement to come soon." She smiled at them and passes them the vials before walking off into the crowd.

The three friends glanced at one another and then at the vials in their hands. They knew once they drank the liquid inside there would be no turning back but at the same time they were told over the Facebook post the effects should only last a couple hours. Still it was a big decision to make.

"You guys sure about going through with this?" Rav asked, his nervousness very apparent.

They stood there in silence for about a minute until Stephen finally spoke up. "Look, I won't blame you if you want to back out of this but I'm going through with it. As I said earlier I'll regret it for the rest of my life if I backed out now."

Rav looked at his vial once more and then smiled softly. "If we're going to do this we should do this together. Besides, can't have my mate have all the fun." He playfully nudged Stephen causing both of them to giggle.

"I'm going to change too. Just hope these potions change us into our dragon selves. Even if anthro. Though I'd rather be non-anthro or at least something in-between." Dav said.

"Doubt they will, Dav, since looking around no one else seems to have taken on the form of their personal fursona or anything." Stephen said as he looked around at the

crowd. Besides being anthros there was no one in the crowd that had any markings or anything that made them truly stand out like most of the local furs' sonas would have. "Not to mention everyone in the party seems to have gone anthro. I do hope we become full quadrupedal dragons but we may end up anthro like everyone else. Still, the chance to be any type of dragon is better then not being one at all. So, you guys ready?" He asked as he pulled the stopper off the vial he was holding.

"Ready as I'll ever be."

"Mmm... ready."

"Ok... down the hatch!" All three of them quickly poured the potion down their throats and gagged a little. The liquid tasted vile going down, like drinking rotten tomato juice. Stephen was starting to regret not asking how the potion tasted when he started to feel oddly warm and tingly all over. "Guys... I think it is working. Any of you feel anything?"

"I'm feeling a little warm. Dav, you feel weird at all?"

"I'm starting to feel warm too. I just hope this doesn't hurt too much."

"Yah, I hope so toARGH!" Stephen cried out in pain and clutched his sides. The warmth he felt had built up into a fiery heat. It felt like his body was burning up. His friends' cries of agony soon followed as they crumpled to the ground. Their skin started to smoke as they seemed to be burning up from the inside. Something was horribly wrong. Stephen knew this was going to be painful but it shouldn't have felt like this. He looked up from the ground and tried to call for help when screams erupted from the crowd and the music abruptly stopped. His vision was a little hazy but he could make out the transformed anthros beginning to go wild. They were attacking each other and the non-transformed party goers, acting like feral beasts. Why was this happening? Stephen looked around more as he writhed in burning pain in an attempt to find Eris but she was no where in sight. Was this all a trick? Was Eris only here to cause them pain? And if so why? Why was this happening to them? More and more he regretted not talking to Jergo beforehand. And now all his friends are either burning up from the inside or tearing each other apart like rabid animals. He closed his eyes, wishing this was all just a bad dream. That everything would just stop.

"Please...make it stop..."

A new feeling welled up inside Stephen. It was different from the burning. Like a pressure building up in his chest.

"Make it stop....make it stop...."

The pressure increased, growing stronger, making him feel like he was about to burst.

"MAKE IT STOP!"

He felt like his entire body burst as the world turned white for a few moments before fading slowly to black.