

Chapter 56: A Daughter Harmed

Drake and Bolz landed at the front of Minerva's house. The electric knelt down so that the blonde can get off. She climbed off and said to herself, "Well that sure was an interesting day." Minerva looked to Bolz and said, "Hopefully, we can get to show you more of Windfall tomorrow. I'm thinking going to the City Hall would be a good place. They're teaching different kinds of magic classes over there like fire, ice and light. I took a water magic class over there." Ronan patted Drake's shoulder before the humans headed to the house. Drake went to lead Bolz to the backyard.

Ronan sighed and asked the girl, unsure of himself, "You think we can handle it? Running a school? I've never taught anyone how to do what I can do."

Minerva answered, "Well we won't know for sure until we try it." Thinking he might be nervous about this, she assured him with a smile, "Try to be confident, Ronan. I'm sure you'll do a good job at this. Even if we don't succeed at first, we can always try again." Though she imagined they would have to get more loans to get their business running again. But successful businesses took risks to be the best, right?

Ronan smirked at her, "I hope you're right."

The woman replied, "Me too. Come on, let's go inside and rest." They went inside the house and they washed the dishes, keeping the sink clean so that roaches will not be attracted to the smells of unwashed plates and utensils. With that done, she went to the couch and watched the evening news, while Ronan went to his room.

On the way back to the camp, the halfling started to stir. She was heard moaning a bit before asking weakly, "Kathia, what happened?"

Kathia stopped and dropped the halfling, relieving her neck and shoulders of the weight that tired them. Her anger rose as her brown eyes glared with heat and strain, eyeing the woman like she had committed a crime, which Kathia would compare the halfling's escape from Sundown to considering the troubles she caused. As the halfling was on her knees, the mage yelled, "What happened?! I'll tell you what happened! After you fought Azera, some winged bastard showed up and started a fight with him. Azera told me to get you away from here, but then that half-breed sent his guys after us. They're dead now thankfully; I killed them with magic. But they costed me a horse, which I paid a lot of pounds for. It's lying on the ground dead for animals to eat." She continued to blame the halfling, "This is all your fault! If you hadn't left the camp, none of us would be in danger! I'd still have my horse, I wouldn't get scared over a hungry dragon and some guys trying to kill us, that ghost I summoned would still be in one piece, and Azera wouldn't be in the fight of his life with that damn half-breed!" With her mouth getting tired of ranting, she took a couple of breaths to regain the energy. It didn't make her anger go away

however. "And most importantly, we wouldn't be out here in these woods with the sky going dark and the mosquitoes out wherever they are biting!" Then in the next comical second, not in her opinion, she felt an itch on her right arm and looked at it to see a red bump on it. She cried out her annoyance, "Oh that's just great! Now I'm going to itching all night!" She scratched the mosquito bite and asked, "Why did you leave the camp? Answer me!"

The woman said, "I.... I don't know why. It was like I was somehow commanded to do so, and I can't explain h-" Then she stopped and gasped in pain as she put her hands on the ground. As she went to push herself off the ground, she painfully said, "Azera." Kathia was skeptical about the halfling claiming to be commanded and she was too mad to care about her suffering. These feelings went away when she heard a thud and looked behind her to see Azera on the ground. With him was the gold halfling, who held a bloodied pike in one hand. He started to turn and walked away from the two girls, soon disappearing into thin air.

The mercenary has been defeated in battle. "No..." Kathia murmured in shock, believing the man to be dead. That is until the female halfling quickly went over to him and checked him. He had only one cut on his arm.

"He passed out from exhaustion," the woman said as she looked back up to Kathia.

The girl gave out a sigh of relief and said, "Talk about lucky..."

"Also that's my answer; I do not know why I did."

Kathia replied skeptically, "Likely story, but whatever I'll take it for now. Now let's take Azera back to the camp, I don't want to be out here in these woods any longer." She took the man by the arms and hung them over her shoulder. She waited for the halfling to take the legs. The woman grabbed them in a fashion that was easy for her to move and with quickness. The two girls resumed their way back to Sundown.

During their stay at the warehouse, Atlas woke up to her tracking spell alerting her about Axle being attacked by Aeolus and a few horde dragons. She was confused about this at first, wondering why her friends were fighting each other and why the horde had been back at the lake's forest after Juna told them to leave, but the fight between them soon ended when a large silver dragon showed up. The tracking spell's alert went off as soon as the horde began to protect Axle. Atlas went back to sleep after this, knowing that Aeolus would do the job for her. But then after a while, Atlas woke to the sound of a loud metallic crash that came from one of the walls. She threw her head up and asked, "What the hell was that?!" She looked around the room, seeing that the whole place was now darker than when she had seen before her rest. The only light keeping the place from looking pitch black was from the moonlight outside shining in through the gap of the nearly closed door. The magi heard sounds of

fighting; someone has invaded this place. Why did Akil not wake her up about this? Atlas provided herself more light by casting a light ball to act as her torch. She looked around the room and saw a blue dragon standing before Akil's wounded and bleeding body. Atlas felt as if a claw tore through her chest at the sight of terrible sight of her daughter. Her shock quickly turned into anger when she looked to the attacker next. "You bastard!" she roared at him. Then she began to cast light lasers at the blue dragon, each spell being like a moving beacon in the darkness until they disappeared hitting something.

The blue dragon turned into a man with white hair and dark skin. He spun his damaged scythe around and each light that was cast at him hit the blade and disbursed into the air from its energy source. All the remained of the light barrage hit the ground around the warehouse. Some had come close to hitting Akil, but something seemed a bit off when the blue dragon was blocking those light beams, almost as if he took extra care in blocking stray that would potentially hit her. The man pointed his scythe towards Atlas, but in seconds his hand shook a bit before the scythe's blade hit the ground as he panted a bit before he coughed up blood. The magi was almost sickened by the sight as she felt whatever pain the coughs had. The man muttered something under his breath before he recollected himself and spoke, "Atlas, I cannot let either you or Akil leave this area. And as long as Akil is in that magic circle she's not going anywhere magically or physically either for that fact." Atlas realized that this means teleporting her daughter out was impossible. He picked up his scythe and readied it as he said, "And you're on a short time limit now after casting that light spell of yours without any protection."

The magi clenched her teeth in anger at herself for blindly making this mistake. She had been so furious about this scum threatening her daughter's life that she forgot Juna's warning of this city, which was to not cast magic here. And she forgot to wear the collar which would have allowed her free reign to use magic without trouble. Thinking of the collar, where was it anyway? She found it next to herself and put it on her tail. She hoped wearing it like this would be okay. Atlas looked back to the man and snarled, "Then I'll just have to hurry up and take you out!" This would probably end fast since the man seems to have suffered some internal injuries or something as evident by the blood he coughed out. The magi cast a stream of fire at the man and let it swirl around him before enclosing to burn him.

As the fire stream completely closed around him, looking like a cylinder at this point, the blue wings of the dragon came bursting out of the flames. The blue came walking out of the fire, but not unscathed. He had some burn marks on his body. "Interesting, you used fire as a vortex to try and roast my body. Sadly Atlas, I cannot die, not without my contract with them being up. Trust me, I have already tried several times," he said as proceeded to walk closer to the magi, but keeping close to the circle.

Atlas's eyes widened in surprise and her teeth were gritted. '*What?!*' she thought.

The dragon said, "Here's the deal Atlas, you can cast as many spells as you want at me; but in the end, I will just be rehealed, even if that healing is against my will and wishes. Trust me, Atlas Firestar. I do not wish to bring you harm or even for the fact of Akil. I only do this because I have no choice in that matter." He started to vanish into the air, but his voice ranged in the room. "I am forced to stall you till they arrive, and that will be in a short time." The magi looked around the room for him as she tried to

pinpoint his voice's location. Then there were two of him in the room as he said, "So Atlas, what path will you do as two paths alone will lead to Akil's death, but one will save her and the other will let you both escape?" More of his clones kept on filling the room, doubling each time as he said, "Three will lead to your capture, however Atlas. The choice is yours, now choose."

Atlas was unnerved by the repeating appearances of the clones. He has her trapped in a hard place with Akil's life on the line and there seemed to be no way out. The magi clenched her teeth, feeling sore about her defeat and feeling pretty bad for causing this situation she was now in. The mission of finding Luco was now most likely a failure and she knew Akil and Juna were going to be upset with her for the mission going badly. The only thing she had to do know was to help preserve her daughter's lifespan. She made herself look strong in front of the clones, as she did not want to appear distraught in front of any of them. Then she asked, "So what's this path that will save her?"

The dragon appeared next to Atlas as well looking over Akil. In his talon before Atlas was a collar, the same as what her daughter was wearing. It was an anti-magic collar that would prevent anyone from using magic while it was on. From the looks of it, it was not coming off without help either. There was no keyhole, no locks or any physical way, minus cutting this collar off of removing it. With what looks like sorrow in his eyes, he said, "Make your choice, because once this is on there is no going back. No means of escape, no means of rescue, or a means of contacting anyone else. I'm sorry but that is two of the four options. Either way with her death or not, this was going to have to go on your neck either way. Before you do make your choice though, I would highly recommend contacting any love ones and telling them you will not be seeing them for a while. Make it quick though, time is not on your side." It looks like he did not want to be putting the magi in this position.

Atlas looked at the collar uneasy and felt a depressing sickness in her stomach. Since she needed to tell everyone she knew about the bad news about her capture, the magi started with her nieces first. She decided to make this as light as she could so as not to horrify them. She said, *'Danielle, Kylie, I'm going to be gone for a long time, something came up that I need to do. You two take care of yourselves and be good, okay?'*

She heard the whiptail reply, *'Okay, we will!'*

The balloon hatchling said, *'Alright! So what are you doing, Aunt Atlas?'*

The magi gritted her teeth, wondering how she was going to answer Kylie's question. She lied, *'It's an undercover mission. I'll be back whenever.'* She broke the telepathic link and thought, *'Hopefully.'* She was not sure if she was ever going to come back out of Shadow Wind and even see anyone she cares about ever again. For all she knew, she could be trapped her for all eternity. The next dragon she formed a telepathic link was Juna, she told her, *'Juna, we've failed the mission. I accidentally used magic after I got mad trying to blast the dragon who hurt Akil. She's on the verge of death and I don't know if she's going to live or not.'*

Juna did not respond to Atlas immediately; the silver must have either been really disappointed with the result. The magi could not blame her; it was her fault after all. So the magi contacted a certain lumina and told her, *'Ohimia, I just got captured by Shadow Wind. I had to turn myself in in order to save Akil.'*

Ohimia sounded worry, *'What?! Can't you just teleport you and her out?'*

'I can't,' Atlas replied. *'They got this magic circle thing that keeps her from getting out by any means. Listen, I don't know how long I'm going to be there as I can't teleport after this, but please take care of my nieces, alright?'* Then she roared as she was tackled to the ground by the blue dragon. He tried to get the collar on her, but the magi stopped the collar with her talon from getting to her neck, pushing back against it. She was not done hearing from Juna yet. Then she noticed from the angle in her view someone, a young female in black and red, coming into the scene. She slashed at the circle and stepped next to Akil before vanishing from sight. The magic circle's spell became ruined, which means that this was Akil's chance to get out of here.

Then she hears Juna screaming in her head, *'Atlas, get out of there now and run.'*

Getting confident that her daughter can both escape and live, Atlas replied, *'That's what I'm going to do now!'* She kicked the blue dragon off and went over to Akil's body. Since she cannot go back to the horde or to Axle for help, Atlas needed to go to another dragon who can heal her daughter. She needed to go to the first one she can think of, even if it was in Windfall, where the damn hybrids live. She thought of one of her old friends who was her fellow slave back when Atlas was made to fight in the dragon tournaments. She always healed Atlas after training for combat against their fellow slave, Qoogie the black dragon. The magi pictured the white in mind and teleported herself and Akil over to her.

Aeolus's team found themselves inside one of the ground-constructed buildings of the sector replica. They saw Juna speaking to Corona who was just outside by the room's door. Mekarth was laying behind his sister. The silver said loudly, "Phoenix dragoness, mind coming here for a moment so I may have a word with you? And bring your group with you, well what's left of them."

Corona replied, "Alright." Then she contacted her team and told them, *'This is Corona, Juna wants to meet with us, Group 4. I'll be waiting by the window of the building she's at. Look out for my flaming tail tip, okay?'* Then she came inside the room, passing the watching team, and hung her tail out of the window for her group to find.

Juna turned her head slightly towards Aeolus's group and said, "You look a bit more battered for wear. What happen to you? I was starting to get a bit concern."

Aeolus explained, "Axle got attacked by some dragons and humans from Shadow Wind. He killed most of them by the time we got there. But then a large silver dragon in armor appeared and defeated him."

We tried to fight him off to protect Axle, but his fire magic was too powerful against our powers. Then Axle regained his strength and told us to leave, which we did. So here we are." The silver made no response before she started to look like she has just heard something bothersome. She clenched her fist hard as her nails dug into her skin. The horde leader asked in concern, "Juna?"

Then she sighed a bit in relief as the dread pretty quickly disappear off her. She turned towards the leader and told, "Aeolus, go ahead and find a place to rest for the night, you and your party."

Aeolus decided not to press the issue and replied, "Very well, we shall go back to the village. Kekul, Cirrus, Albina, let's go." He turned and left the room as the three dragons followed him out.

As they went, they heard Juna addressing Corona, "When your group arrives, phoenix, tell them to wait here for me to come back. It won't be long."

The phoenix dragoness responded to Juna, "Alright, I will."

When Aeolus's group approached the stairway, they saw Pyro sitting there on the side of it. The leader asked him, "Tell me, has Group 3 won yet?"

The cassare answered, "No, Group 1 did actually. I almost had them, but I wasn't fast enough."

"How unfortunate," said Aeolus, knowing that the winning team would get the best pick of the food stash tonight and not his group. "Very well, come join us back at the village. Hopefully, there will be enough leftovers for us all. Anyway, I assume everyone has heard the news?"

Pyro replied, "We did, Hewey told us while going around fixing everyone's wounds and telling them to bring the sleeping dragons to the village."

"Good for him," said the leader as he commended the healer for getting things done without told by him. "I suppose Cirrus should go help him out too to get things done faster." He looked to the gray and told him, "Cirrus, go and aid Hewey with the recovery now."

Cirrus replied, "I'm on it." The gray went down the stairs to get started on his task.

Aeolus told the other remaining dragons, "Let's go." They all went down the stairs to get to the bottom floor to leave the building. As they went, Aeolus thought about Juna's dread and wondered what had gotten her uneasy.

Atlas found herself inside a building with stone walls and floors. This place almost reminded her of a cave, except it has windows and a door, making it look a bit more like a human house. Then the magi

heard a soft voice behind her, "Atlas, is that you?"

Atlas turned to look behind her and saw the golden-bellied white dragoness with gold feather tips. She answered, "Yes, it's me, Roquette." She moved Akil's body in front of her to show her friend, who gasped in shock at the sight of the deep chest wound. The magi said urgently, "Listen, I need you to heal Akil quickly. She's dying as we speak!"

Roquette replied, "Okay, I'll get to it." She began to use her healing magic on Akil to restore the flesh and close the wound. Atlas looked at her daughter to check her for signs of life.

Suddenly, she heard the blue dragon speak to her, *'At least you have time now, Atlas Firestar. Your mission for Luco is not over, for the dragon you are looking for was never here to start with. Find a person named Azera, then you will know how to find Luco.'*

The magi replied, *'Azera, who's that and where am I supposed to find him?'* Lucian did not reply back in words. What came instead was an illusion of floating letters. It was only one word though: Sundown. But unfortunately, she was not aware of this place as this was her first time hearing it. She felt troubled and asked, "Sundown? Where am the heck am I supposed to find that place?" She looked to the white and asked, "Roquette, do you know where Sundown is?"

Roquette answered, "No, I've never heard of it before. It's probably someplace far away."

Atlas asked Lucian, *'Where is this Sundown?'* The blue dragon would know more about this mysterious place than she or her friend do. But no answer came from him this time. He was probably busy dealing with his superiors right now.

Then the magi looked down at her daughter to check on her. There was still life in Akil, and not as faint as one would think with her wounds, but not as strong as a healthy normal dragon either, kind of in between the two. She opened her eyes briefly and looked at her mother for a second before she passed out again. Atlas smiled in relief; Akil is still alive for now, but now all she needs is rest. Hopefully she will be better by the start of tomorrow's morning so that they can both find Azera. Seconds pass before the magi heard a woman's voice echoing a bit, "Her wounds are not fatal, Atlas. Just hit with a bit of sleep poison from Lucian's talons. It will clear out of her system in a few hours."

The dragonesses turned their heads towards the direction of the sound as Roquette gasped in surprise. Atlas asked, "Who's there?"

Then someone came stepping out of the shadows across the room. It was the same woman in black and red clothing from Shadow Wind. She explained, "Before you do ask how I got here and how I found you, I used her blood to simply track you and followed your spell trail you left behind when you came here. I sealed that part off and right now masking your magic trail as best as I can before you go and try and up and blast me with a light spell."

The magi replied, "I wasn't going to hurt you. In fact, I would thank you for saving our hides. Akil probably would've been gone if not for you." She was grateful for the woman helping them back there.

Roquette asked the stranger, "So who are you anyway? Normally one doesn't have visitors showing up out of nowhere like this."

The woman kept hidden behind her cloak as she replied, "My name is really not of importance; and the person, well dragon, you should be thanking, Atlas, is Lucian. He planned most of this behind the backs of red necromancer cult that controls him. The main plan was to capture you Atlas, but remove Akil from farther harm. However, you had different plans; simply put you went with his Plan B, which means I'm stuck with you until otherwise told." She stepped back into the shadow. She spoke something in a sharp tongue. It was so sharp that she could be mistaken for a dragon speaking. Immediately she was gone; but clearly, she was lingering around in the shadows. Something flicked among the shadow and it looked like a dragon tail that flicked around in the shadow, even if it was a small shadow.

Atlas looks back to the white and said, "So Roquette, how's life in this city treating you?"

Roquette answered with a frown, "Better than my slave life I can tell you, but the humans are still just as mean as ever. Just this afternoon, a man shoved me out of his way to let his family get by and told me 'Move you filthy lizard.' Then later, some teenager spit on me and gave me the finger. He was nasty and rude."

Atlas was not surprised by this at all; she knew the humans in Windfall would not change their attitude towards dragons this quickly. "I knew this place wasn't going to be good here. Why the hell haven't you left this dump yet? No human here wants to be buddies with us dragons. You should go live in the woods where it's nice and fresh without any of these damn apes."

Roquette pointed out, "I could, but it'll be dangerous with the war between dragons and humans going on. I could very well find myself killed in my own cave by some hunter. That's why Windfall is safer for me. Killing dragons here is now against the law."

The magi understood her friend's reasons and glanced away, saying, "Well I guess I can't blame you for wanting to stay here. Better to have your feelings hurt than to be murdered or overworked."

The white nodded slowly, "Yes, I can deal with that better than the latter." Then she made a small smile, "At least we'll have friends like us here, who'll always understand us." She was not just referring to their fellow slaves, but also other dragons in this city.

"Yeah," Atlas agreed. Then she thought about food and knew that she had not eaten breakfast today and she has yet to eat dinner. Having only 1 meal a day was not good for the body; she needed to eat before sleep. She asked, "So Roquette, where can a dragoness like me get some food?"

Roquette told her, "Out in the woods obviously, but I hear there hasn't been much prey running around today. In fact, we got this severe shortage of them going on. And if you want to get some meat from the humans, you'll need to pay them in gold."

The magi frowned at the news, "Well shit, I don't have any cash on me. I guess I'll just have to teleport somewhere else and hunt there." Then she thought that the white probably hasn't had anything to eat, too. So she asked, "Hey Roquette, you hungry?"

The white looked at her friend with hope lighting her blue eyes and answered, "Why yes I am."

Atlas looked to the woman-now-dragoness hidden in the shadows and asked, "What about you? Are you hungry, too?"

The female in the shadow replied in a bit of a harsh tone, snarling, "No, I am not." Atlas and Roquette were surprised by her tone. The mysterious stranger snared out of the shadow before fully disappearing, but it is clear she was lingering somewhere nearby, watching. She also was agitated about something, but the words disgusting vermin was could be heard from somewhere.

The magi stared at her and thought puzzled, '*What's gotten into her?*' It seems like that insult was directed at her. What the heck did Atlas do to get on the female's nerves? The magi looked back to the white and said, "Right then, let's go look for some food together. Maybe we'll find some apples or berries out there for you."

"I would love that," approved Roquette. The magi decided to choose the woods around the Castle of Fire as tonight's hunting ground and warped herself and her friend over there. With the sky dark, she cast a floating ball of light to use as a beacon to see her place in the darkness. With the light brightening the place, she saw that the castle that once stood tall in the hole was now in ruins from the destruction that crumbled it, thanks to Marc and his pals. Debris lie upon debris and dusts were in places on the ruins and the ground they touched. Roquette looked around at the ruins and the soil walls of the hole, wondering why they are not in a place that looks like where food can be found. She asked, "Atlas, where are we?"

"The Castle of Fire," the magi answered. "Well at least it used to be. But that's not where the food is. That's just a hole we're in." Spreading her wings to take flight, she told the white, "Come on, the food's out in the woods. We should go together since I'm the only one that can use light."

Roquette spread her wings and replied, "I'm right with you." The two dragonesses flew up out of the hole and landed on the ground above. The two walked side by side as they went to look for plants and animals to eat.

As Aeolus, Rainstorm, Kekul and Pyro were making their way over to the village. The horde leader heard a telepathic alert from Ohimia in her worrying tone, *'Aeolus, I just heard from Atlas. She told me that she's been captured by Shadow Wind.'*

'What?!' cried Aeolus in alarm. He thought back to the look of dread that Juna had on her face. Did Atlas tell her of her situation?

Ohimia continued, *'She can't teleport out, because the bad guys were trapping Akil in a magic circle and she had to turn herself in to save her.'*

The leader realized, *'Then this means that they've failed the mission. Juna needs to be alerted about this right now.'* He thought of Juna's relieved sigh shortly after her distress, but he cannot say for sure if Atlas told her of her situation and then quickly found a way out. For all he knew, it could be one of her other allies from Shadow Wind.

'I agree,' she concurred. *'I'll go tell her.'* The team continued on their way to the village and eventually got there.

They saw the Group 1 dragons taking their picks from the food pile and eating them. Rainstorm the only member of the team from Group 1 said, "I'll get some food for us and Cirrus when he gets back."

Aeolus appreciated, "Thanks Rainstorm! We will be waiting in that cave over there." He looked to one of the caves that he slept in last night. This was where they will be resting for tonight until Juna needed them. Aeolus led his team there, while Albina went to get some prey from the food pile.

After the three males entered the cave and laid down, they waited for Rainstorm to meet them here with their food. Pretty soon, she came carrying two gray foxes, some lizards and some bats. She dropped the prey right before the team and told them, "Alright guys, dig in!" The dragons ate their dinner before they went to sleep.