

((**Note:** The following sections take place between [chapters 10](#) and [11](#).)

Light filtered down from the canopy to Kat's spot in Dion's back yard. Her eyes opened slowly as she stretched out. The magi submitted to a fight of coughing that was followed by a tired yawn like she did every morning. Kat looked about a little confused about where she was, but as yesterday's events played through her mind, she put the pieces together. She had escaped from that wretched circus and their illegal dragon fighting operation when the Spell was cast. From there, she had gotten trapped under a burning house and was subsequently saved by Chi. *'Right, I was gonna bid her farewell and then head south.'* She yawned again and inspected herself for rotted scales. They had a tendency to crop up while she slept. Sure enough, there they were, green scales scattered about her body. Kat plucked the ones she could reach, but there were several on her back she couldn't get at. Giving up, she looked back to Dion's house. It was nice of the human to let her stay the night; she thought about thanking him, but decided against it and started walking in the direction of Chi's home.

Wind kicked up suddenly as three larger dragons flew over the forest. Katherine watched their passage; one of them was armored, a magi dragon like her. *'I hope that isn't trouble,'* she thought to herself. Then she looked back to the treehouse and watched its door swing open. Kat smiled when she saw Chi hopping down from the house. The hybrid fluttered her wings to soften the landing. The magi also noticed that Chi was accompanied by two others, both of them looking very human. One was a brown-haired boy with a gray-hooded cloak over a beige and black shirt; the other was a white-haired boy in an orange hood. Strangely, he had horns on his head.

The pink hybrid had taken notice of the magi and grinned. She waved at the boys and told them, "Oh you guys go on ahead then. I'll catch up." Then she skipped over to Kat.

The white-haired boy came down the ladder next, followed by the other male. "Hmph," he frowned and turned on his heel. Then the boys walked away and left as the brunette waved back at Chi.

Seeing that, Kat hurried up to reach the girl. "Hey Chi. I just thought I'd stop by and say thanks again before I leave," she said to the hybrid warmly.

Chi tipped her head to the side and pouted sheepishly, "Oh but why do you have to leave? They're rebuilding the city now, I think. It'd be fun to watch. It's hard to find people that accept hybrids for who and what they are."

Kat frowned at the ground listening to her. It was clear that the hybrid was upset. "Sorry, it's just that I've been away from home for so long that I just want to get back and see if my family is alright or even still alive," she explained, feeling guilty.

Chi frowned and looked at the ground, apologizing, "Oh, sorry."

"Still... it's a very long trip. Fate will not change if I miss one day," the magi added looking up at her with a warm smile. "Just today, I'll stay with you guys; but tomorrow, I really have to go. OK?" she asked with a warm dragonish grin.

The hybrid perked up and clasped her hands together as she exclaimed, "Oh great!" Then she jogged off towards the city, saying, "This way!" Kat chuckled a little as she followed after Chi, but she was feeling uneasy as she saw the city looming in the distance.

Jason was in a dour mood. True he had been in a bad mood since his family died on that chaotic night, but today was particularly bad. It wasn't because of anything grand, just a collection of small but frustrating inconveniences. He had cut himself three times sharpening his sword, he was just about out of arrows and was searching trees for branches that would make adequate shafts. He did have his hobby to be glad for, were it not for that he would not even have arrows. The sword he had was a family heirloom, albeit an indirect one. It belonged to an ancestor to his father that was in turn a brother to the man who sired Jason's own line. It was ancient and if not for the numerous restorations and constant care it would have rusted to dust long ago. *'Whoever said OCD was bad is probably dead now,'* he thought to himself. The morbid joke brought a small smile and slight chuckle to Jason's lips as he trudged on through the forest plucking the occasional branch deemed worthy of being an arrow. The man had loaded up his quiver with branches for arrows and was now standing before the gate of a large city. It was populated by humans, something he hadn't expected at all. As the man stepped into the street, he frowned almost instantly. Scattered here and there were dragons and by the way things looked they were not slaves. "Tch." His face had twisted into a disgusted scowl and Jason spat on the ground before he got moving again. He needed allies and supplies; somehow, he didn't think he would get the former. Still 1 out of 2 wasn't a total loss.

It was easy to see how big it was now. Chi had said the place was rebuilt, did that then mean humans were living there again? Dion had been... alright she guessed, but as they got closer to the city, Katherine felt a growing sense of unease. "Are you sure this is okay?" she asked the hybrid, feeling very nervous now that the gate was in view.

Chi looked at the magi with a tilt of her head. "OK?" she echoed. They moved inside the city gates, looking around. Humans and dragons roamed the streets. There was a definite feeling of tension in the air, but all appeared peaceful. "Think so. No collars at least," the hybrid mused.

Kat looked around; it was true, there wasn't a single collar in sight. "Well... I suppose so," she agreed somewhat reluctantly. Couldn't blame her though, it had been less than a week since she was a slave to these humans. Kat took a breath to bolster her courage. "Ok, well um... let's go do... what we came here to do," she said trying to sound more confident than she felt. Although that bravado practically drained

away, she caught sight of a black man glaring at her and Chi.

Jason looked away as he continued on. *'God, more dragons and even a half-breed. Parading around like they own the place,'* he thought bitterly. As much as he hated to admit it, he didn't know where anything in this city was. He would need fletching and a whetstone, the one he had was just about done. A good cloak was in order too. *'And here's me, not a dime to my name. I'll have to find a way to make some coin. City this big must have an underground of some kind,'* Jason thought to himself, looking around for any hint of said underground or any of its inhabitants.

The hybrid simply smiled and winked at the man before motioning the magi along. She assured, "Oh that's nothing new for my kind. I get that look all the time. No need to worry; they rarely act on it. They're just grumpy." She looked around and chuckled quietly, "Really cool looking around at the architecture when you're not a prisoner to the place, hmm?" The buildings were massive and the town seemed to stretch forever to one person, it was almost overwhelming.

"If you say so," Kat stated, still uncomfortable with the city.

"Any place you wanna see?" the hybrid asked, glancing up at the armored dragon guards that were perching on some buildings, watching the populace.

At first, Katherine was confused by the change in topic until she actually looked around at the city without judging it based on the humans themselves. Chi certainly wasn't wrong, but the scars ran too deep for Kat. Beautiful as the buildings were, the magi found it like a taint had settled on the place. A black ink in her mind had settled in the thinnest of layers across the structures. This place had to have years of torment and slavery as well as a night of blood and fire precede it before anyone would even, could even think of making it. It was that thought that marred the imagery for Katherine. But she shared none of this with Chi; the hybrid was too kind to have her own world darkened any farther than it already had been. The dragoness took a breath. "You're right, they are beautiful. Come on, let's go do what it was you came here for, then maybe you can show me around before we call it a day. I also wouldn't mind seeing the inside of your place. If that's OK with you," she said, tucking the darker thoughts away and instead trying to enjoy the moment.

"My house, hmm? Sure, though there's not much to see," the hybrid laughed quietly. "Oh, look over here." Chi wandered across the street to a shop with a large window display. Toys were stacked by the window and along the shelves inside. They were bright and colorful, obviously for children. "They're so shiny and bright... I wonder how they're made..." she mused.

Katherine followed after the very distracted-looking hybrid and peered into the window as well. There were many things to catch the eye, many things that glimmered and shined. All for young children; Kat had to wonder the same thing as Chi, how were they made? The escape was but a night or two ago, when did someone have the time to make all this? There was of course magic; but even then, it seemed rather rapid. The magi cast the thought from her mind and instead marveled at them. "Do you want to

go inside?" Kat asked, momentarily forgetting the dark stain on the city. "I bet there is even more inside for you to see. Maybe even some for you to have," she said cheerfully to her friend.

The hybrid looked at her and asked, "Go inside?... Hmm..." she looked at the colorful toys. "Well I guess, but," she laughed, "I have no money. That's OK, window shopping is fun. Some of the toys are really cool. Did you have much experience with human things before? Like toys and such? I never got to hang around them hardly. Slaves and humans driving us off and all. But... still nice to admire the... toy...things..." She moved to the side, walking through the door of the shop.

Kat followed Chi in as she started answering her question. "A little; when I was enslaved, I was shown off to children because I'm so small. So I got to see some toys. The infants really liked hitting me with their toys, but maybe I'm reading into that too much," she said with a light chuckle as the hybrid nodded along. Inside were many more toys as well as numerous children. Barring the infants, Kat found the scene... pleasant. Chi fiddled with different toys on the shelves. Humans in the store seemed to be steering clear of them either way. The girl looked distracted, so the magi teased her a bit, "You still with us, Chi?"

"Eh?" the hybrid paused. "Oh haha, yes. Just looking around. These are so cute..." she murmured, picking up a unicorn plushie. There were even dragon figurines. "Hn.... so you were displayed to children? What does that mean? Like a zoo?" she asked idly.

"No, a circus," Katherine said as they continued browsing.

"A circus," Chi echoed, poking at other plushie toys.

Looking at the plushie the hybrid held and the ones she touched, Kat said, "Have a thing for plushies, do we? Well, it does suite you."

The girl paused, "Plushies?... Oh yes, they're quite cute. And soft. I think they use... cotton or something in them." The dragoness turned her attention to the dragon figurines. Somehow, even though they weren't of her specifically, she felt uncomfortable with the idea of dragons being commercialized. But maybe she was just thinking like a drama queen, so the magi ignored them and went back to browsing the store.

The girl picked up a magi dragon figurine and pressed the "try me" button. It made an obnoxious roar, which was suitable for a child's toy. Chi flinched, grinned and then laughed, "Hey you got your own toy."

Kat laughed at the thought of that figurine being a toy of her. "I couldn't roar like that, even if I wanted too... well not entirely true, but still. Roaring isn't really my thing," she explained as she glanced over to some toy trains.

Chi looked at the figurine and said, "You don't say?... Can't roar..." She turned and set the toy dragon

back on the shelf.

"Never really had to, but I can fake one. Make it sound real, real enough to even make people believe they'd just had their eardrums burst if I want," the magi stated absentmindedly as she poked the train with her claw, accidentally knocking it over.

The hybrid picked up the train and asked, "So what? You were like the illusionist of the circus?" She set the toy back on the tracks.

"Something like that, more like a work horse. A man was the illusionist, but I did all the illusions," the magi huffed a little. "I was the star of the show in a way and not one person saw me in action," she stated with a hint of scorn in her voice. Clearly, she was not pleased with her role in life thus far.

Chi looked at her with a sense of pity. "Oh... what a shame," she murmured. Then she grinned and said, "I'm more of a doctor myself. I specialize in healing magic and herbal cures. I have a lot of white dragon in me. We may look human, well some of us anyway... but we're mostly dragon. To make us more battle ready. Though I suppose my case fails for that anyway."

"Doctor you say? Not bad at all. Healing is by far more useful than my illusions," Kat stated, noting a child staring rather intently at her swishing tail. The dragoness stopped swishing it immediately before returning to her conversation with Chi. "Better a failure that can help people than a success that hurts the-ah! Hey, let go!" The child who was still very young had pounced on her tail and was now gripping the scaly tail with intent. Kat tried wriggling free much to the young boy's amusement, which was demonstrated by his fitful giggling. Just like in the circus, there was always at least one child that found the magi's tail fascinating.

The hybrid smiled and assured, "Nonsense, my abilities may be more helping in immediate effects, but yours are more fun. They bring joy. While you were not the star of those shows, I'm sure everyone was awed by your illusions." Then she looked down at the child and laughed, "Oh, you've made a friend."

"Well..." Kat started, a little unsure if she agreed with Chi. But then she smiled and said, "I guess you're right about that. As for my 'new friend', can't say I really appreciate him crawling all over my tail." She gazed down at the overjoyed little boy as he continued to squeal with delight.

The hybrid shifted her weight to one side, hands coming to her hips in interest. She grinned and said, "Ah, little tyke can't hurt ya. Too small. But boy, do they love to slobber on things."

"Aaron! You leave his tail alone," cried the boy's mother as she just now noticed her son was missing. She stormed over to her giggling son and picked him up off the magi's tail. "I'm so sorry about this. He likes to play on dragons; he's still very young and doesn't know better," the woman started pouring out reasons as to why Kat shouldn't be upset.

"It's fine." As Kat spoke, the mother seemed to pale and choke on her own words with the realization that the magi was in fact a girl.

The woman apologized, "I'm sorry, I thought you were a boy; not that all dragons look the same. It's just... um..."

"It's fine."

"I'm going to go. Sorry again." Kat smiled as the woman left, her pale face flushing with embarrassment as she quietly berated her son about personal space.

The dragoness was barely able to keep from bursting out laughing as she spoke to Chi, "That woman's face was priceless." And then she did start laughing, but quietly.

The girl also laughed, "Well, I suppose that is an issue with humans. They can't smell gender pheromones like dragons. At least she wasn't creepy enough to check the under carriage."

"Er... yeah," Kat said, her tail wrapping close to her body in embarrassment at the memories Chi's comment brought up. Once their laughter settled, Kat asked, "Hey Chi, who were those guys with you this morning?"

The girl mused thoughtfully, "Guys?... Oh! You must mean Akuma and uhh, oh, Nick was his name. Friends. Akuma's another little hybrid; terrible temper though. Nick seems nice enough though, particularly for a human."

"Friends eh, I wouldn't mind meeting Nick. But I'll take a pass on Akuma if he's as bad as you say," Kat stated, forcing a small smile as she tried to get her head out of the past. "Until then though, let's find a book store or library. I could use a good look at an atlas to get an idea of where I need to go for my journey tomorrow," she stated quite ready to leave the toy store now.

Chi twirled on foot, facing the door as she tossed a toy back onto the shelf. "Yes, well I'm afraid they're a bit of a... oh how shall I say... package deal at the moment. I don't know what Nick sees in that boy, but he's hell bent on babying Akuma," she shrugged with a laugh. "Almost got torn up by Albel seeing to that. He's either brave or really stupid. Maybe both. Can't tell sometimes. But that's why I'm a healer. I sort of deal with the mess after, maybe because I'm everyone's mother during these squabbles," she said as they walked towards the door.

"Oh well, I'll just have to put up with him," Kat said with a smirk as they went out of the store.

The hybrid laughed and assured, "Ah, he's just a quiet tyke so as long as you don't bother him. He'll be fine."

Then the magi asked, "He sounds like a nice guy. But um... who's Albel? Another hybrid?"

Chi walked down the road, scanning the building with her eyes and said, "Ah yeah, Albel is another hybrid. I'd stand clear of him; nasty temper and a killjoy. Literally." Then she scanned the buildings and said, "Well there should still be a public library around here. Let's go, hmm?"

"A public library would be good," Kat stated, agreeing with Chi.

((**Note:** The following sections takes place during [chapter 11](#).)

Jason looking around absentmindedly at the stores scattered about the street. He was without doubt, completely lost. His frustration at the wink he had gotten from that damnable half-breed had sent his fanatics mind whirring in vicious little circles of ever increasing frustration as he found himself still unable to locate a store selling whetstones or fletching. As he was not paying attention to where he was going, a swift walking and very unhappy Jason practically slammed into a red-haired girl from behind. The impact caused the man to stumble a little before righting himself and turning on the girl furiously. "Hey watch it!" he snapped, unleashing the pent up frustration at her.

Soon, the dragoness and hybrid duo stopped outside a large building. "Ah here we are," said Chi, trotting up the stairs and opening the door. "It's important to keep a lowered voice in the library I should mention," she told the following magi.

They walked into the library and Kat said in a hushed voice, "I'll keep that in mind... both Albel and the thing about libraries." Although now that they were there, Kat found that she couldn't remember why they were looking for a library in the first place. "Errr.... Chi I forget why we came here," she said sheepishly to her friend.

Chi looked around at the vast library. "Well that's simple, you wanted to find the shortest route home, right?" she asked curiously. "This way I believe," said the hybrid as she walked off with the magi following her. She picked a row and ran her finger over the bindings of books, searching for something suitable. "Ah here, an atlas," said Chi, pulling the book and opening it, holding it up in Kat's face.

The magi looked into the book and looked at the map of the world. Her blue eyes scanned the continents and oceans as she looked for the continent of Rudvich. She found its name and pinpointed it on the top-left continent on the map. The northeast region was pretty easy to find since it was obvious where it would be on Rudvich. Kat pinpointed the starting location there and then went to look for the continent of Solomos, which she pretty soon found below Rudvich. After finding her home country on

Solomos, she traced her route from Rudvich's NE region to there and studied it for a bit to memorize it. "Okay, I'm done," she said.

Chi closed the book and put it back where she found it. Then she asked, "Well since we have a lot of time before tomorrow, want to go read some of the books with me?"

Kat smiled and nodded before responding, "Sure! I like to see what kind of books they have."

The hybrid giggled and said, "Oh you'll love what's in here." Then she picked up another book and went somewhere to read it.

((**Note:** The following sections take place during [chapter 14](#).)

Kat had kept poor Chi cooped up in the library for all day yesterday with barely any rest. The dragoness was entrenched behind piles of books. Because she had no thumbs of her own, she had counted quite heavily on Chi to help her with the books. It was only supposed to be for a little bit, but Kat just kept on reading and reading and reading, fascinated by the wealth of knowledge the library held. It wasn't until somebody nearby gagged verbally at the wreak that was wafting from their location that Kat realized what she had done. Both she and Chi stank, having failed to bathe last night. Feeling guilty about keeping the hybrid tethered to her for all day up to afternoon, Katherine peered around her mountain of books to see if the girl was still awake. "Er... Chi? You up?" she asked.

Chi poked her head around the corner and grinned, "Oh yes, for quite a while actually. It's lunch time." Then she asked, "Are you all finished here? I want to go take a dip in the lake." She laughed, "I can catch some fish out there too, while we're at it."

"Yeah I'm done here. Quite frankly I wouldn't mind taking a dip either," the magi stated, noting a greater number of rotting scales than usual due to the fact that she hadn't preened herself. "And I'll help with the fish. It's the least I can do after you stayed here with me." She hopped off the chair and stretched out like a cat. "Should I get a librarian to help put these away?" she asked, unsure if they were expected to put all of them away or if the library had people for that.

Chi shook her head. "Nah, it's the librarians' job to clean these things up. They're probably bored anyway. No one really here," she assured, moving for the door.

"Heh heh, you're probably right about that," Kat said, leaving the mountain of books, which were comprised mostly of atlases, behind for the librarians to clean up.

They walked to the front and went outside. For a moment it seemed like Chi was getting ready to fly

again as she hesitated before stating, "Ah... right, better start walking then." They turned and moved down the road towards the gates of Windfall.

It was a silent walk for a while before Kat spoke up again. "Thanks Chi, I appreciate you walking with me," she said, shyly to the hybrid as they made their way to the town gates. Although she couldn't deny that she had fun in the city, the magi was relieved to be leaving.

Chi smiled at her and pointed out, "Well it would be rude to leave you down here."

"Yes, it would," Kat confirmed with a grin.

Jason had been laying low both in Windfall and in the forest. He was able to sell off the metal for scrap. There was a slight rush for the stuff since firearms and the like could no longer be used. Stores were starting to buy and sell more primitive arms. With news of the horde rampaging through the countryside and destroying other settlements, people were getting nervous with the night of the Spell so fresh in their memories. Jason hoped to use this unease to his advantage, but not yet. Today like yesterday, he was out hunting small game, rabbits and the like. He needed to improve his ability with the bow if he was going to take down dragons. Plus, he sold his catch to a local butcher to help him pay of the rent of the inn he was staying at. A rustle to his right had Jason drop low and focus. A squirrel dashed out of the bushes and in his head, the man named a spot before loosing an arrow at his prey. The wooden missile hit the squirrel, killing it instantly, but missed Jason's intended target which was the leg. Cursing under his breath, the man stood up straight and collected both the dead rodent and his arrow.

Jason went on his way back to the city with the three rabbits and four squirrels he had caught, but the weight of his catch was weighing him down. The man found a nice spot in a clearing. He set his haul down and sat leaning against a tree. *'Wonder what Kathia is up to,'* he thought to himself, staring absentmindedly at the sky.

After a short walk, the river came into view. Chi ran forward and jumped in. "Ah! Cold," she whined before laughing, which made Kat chuckle as well. The girl rubbed the water on her arms and under her wings. "But it feels good. Just don't float off down the river," she grinned. Then the hybrid looked around at the water. Then she scrubbed herself until she was clean.

The magi slipped into the cool water as well sighing at the relief from her itching rotted scales. "I promise not to float away," she muttered as she spread out her wings. Most of the dirt, grime, and ink from the past two days washed away with little more than some light rubbing. A steady line of green scales also drifted down the river as Kat switched from cleaning to preening. "So... what's the plan after this?" Katherine asked between mouthfuls of scales.

Chi climbed up onto the grass and shook her wings, creating a gust of wind that partially dried her cloths as well. She turned, watching the rotting scales float downstream, until she smiled at Kat and said, "Whatever you like, I suppose. You said you had to go home, so you may as well tour what you want to see before you leave." Her face slacked back into curiosity and asked, "So what happens when all the scales rot? Are you just a fleshy dragon with no scales then? Or do they grow back?"

"I think it's just your home I haven't seen yet," Kat answered, having partially returned to washing. "As for these..." she stated, plucking another greenish scale and spitting it out into the river. "They grow back in time so long as there is room for them to grow. So I'm going to have a couple bald patches for a while after these past couple days," she explained.

"Oh yes, there's that," Chi mused as she moved a bit up the stream. She crouched down and scanned the water.

Kat looked herself over, satisfied with what she saw, climbed out of the river and shook herself off. "Although, there was one time when I messed up an illusion I was chained down and beaten for a week with next to nothing to eat or drink. I couldn't preen then, so a lot of my scales started rotting and even some of the flesh underneath started to change color. My owners ended up cutting the skin off to prevent it from spreading too much. I have a scar there now," the magi said, showing off one of her hind legs. A bunch of the scales near the thigh were growing in an irregular pattern. Just by looking, most would be able to tell that it wasn't a delicately preformed cut. In fact, it looked like someone had simply tried to gouge out a piece of Katherine with a cleaver.

Chi spared a look, frowning. "Well..." she paused, snatching her claws out and grabbing two fish from the river. "I can heal scars. If I can't do anything about your genetics, I can at least help cosmetics," she laughed. The hybrid started to walk further up river. "This way," she said. The magi followed after her away from the river.

Kat seemed shocked for a moment at the girl's statement about healing. "I didn't know you could do that," she stated with awe. "Would you? I would really appreciate it," she said, her tone was switching from reminiscent to hopeful.

Chi nodded and stated, "Oh certainly, I am mostly white and pink dragon. So I'm kind of centered around healing. Fascinating, a white dragon can heal anything short of death. Potentially anyway."

"Very cool," the magi said, absentmindedly.

Jason stretched out and stood up. Feeling rested and ready, he collected his haul and resumed his trek back to the city. He started whistling a jaunty tune since he was done hunting. Today, he saw the human

guards at the gate. They stopped him as usual to confirm what he was bringing into the city. Traffic at the gates was slow as usual since there really wasn't much of anywhere to go to or come from with the state of things as they were now. Once past the guards, Jason headed for the butcher, sold his catch and claimed a couple cuts of salted meat. On his way back to the inn, Jason made sure to scowl at every dragon he passed. Most retorted with an offended scowl of their own. Soon, the man was snapped out of his stupor by a voice calling his name, "Hi Jason!" He whirled around to see who had called out his name. Her voice seemed so familiar. It took him a moment to spot Kathia, since he certainly didn't expect her to be riding in on a horse. He smiled back and waved to the girl before walking out to her.