

Chapter 1 – The Worst of Friends

It had been a rather boring raid that fateful morning. Not a single Viking had managed to scar my scales that day, and I was feeling...disappointed. Most unlike the other dragons, I viewed raids as an exciting and essential part of my life, even if they were brought upon by our Queen, who I hesitate to dwell on, for she herself is both uninteresting to talk about and a massive bitch, like I mentioned earlier. In any case, I had just finished feeding her the sheep I had carried from the human village when I ran into my old friend. And when I say ran into, I mean he smashed his burly ass right into me as I neared a lake, sending us both crashing into the water.

Now, I know what you're thinking; that who is this old friend I speak of, when earlier I had mentioned that before I met...him (trying really hard not to ramble again here), I had no friends. To be honest, that isn't entirely true. I did have one other dragon I acquainted with every now and again. A fat, unattractive, clumsy, which I emphasize to the fullest extent here, dragon who annoys me to no end...but a friend nonetheless.

"Oh, hi Sorlyn!" he said to me after I managed to surface. I laid eyes on the fat pimply green dragon that I believe humans call a Gronckle. "Where you been?"

"Harl!" I yelled back, paddling back towards shore. "What the hell?!"

"Yeah, sorry about that." he said, languishing in the water; how he could keep his weight afloat while I struggled to stay above the surface is something I have never found out. "I fell asleep while flying again."

"Well, that much is plain to me!" I yelled back at him. I crawled onto shore, shaking my body a bit to try and hasten my drying. I scowled as I saw a few of my scales drop onto the ground.

"I said I'm sorry. I promise won't do it again." he said, grinning at his own words. I glared at him, resisting the urge to tackle him and claw that stupid grin off his face. The fact that I was still a little worn out by the raid was the only thing that kept his face in one piece.

"You are forgiven." I spat, turning and walking away from him. I did not wish to grace myself with his presence any longer. Unfortunately, it appeared my acquaintance had other plans, for as soon as he was out of the lake, he flew up beside me.

"So, you find a mate for the season yet?" he asked me. I was startled by his question for two reasons; one, because I had expected him to stay behind me and languish uselessly like he always did, and two, it was one he had never asked me before that moment.

"Where do you find your curiousness?" I asked him accusingly. He stared at me, apparently puzzled.

"Find what now?" he asked dumbly. I sighed...of course he wouldn't understand the intricacies of the language we dragons had made for ourselves. To humans, they could hear and understand nothing we said, which gave us an advantage when organizing when, how, and what to attack during a raid. But of course, we dragons couldn't understand how humans communicated with those weird sounds they make, although admittedly, it wasn't that hard to pick up on once you got to know them, whereas our language was still undeciphered.

"Why do you ask?" I repeated.

"Oh, well uh..." he mumbled, his green cheeks turning a bit red. "...I found one."

"Congratulations." I said, feeling a pang of sympathy for whatever unlucky female had grown desperate enough to take this louse as a mate for the coming spring season. The majority of us dragons usually paired together for a year or so, then went our separate ways after the resulting hatchlings were born, with the females taking responsibility for the children. Males had no obligation to help raise them, nor stay faithful to the females they had been with. I have heard that some humans consider it honorable to stay only with the female they had mated with. I know, what a foolish stance to take, although I could understand it if it would keep dragons like Harl from...well, you'll see in a moment.

"Who did you find?" I asked politely.

"Her name's Kala...no, wait, that's not right. Um, I think it's actually...Jum? No..." he said, trailing off into incoherent mumblings to himself. I chuckled a bit at his struggle to remember his mate's name, shaking my head at the sad fact that his mate was entering into the long line of females Harl had...ugh, taken.

"Well, it doesn't matter." he eventually said. "What matters is, did you find one yet?"

"No." I replied bluntly. Harl sighed and shook his head at me, and I prepared myself for his incessant nagging.

"Sorlyn, you know you gotta get one soon. Not just for the nest, but for your own good." he said. I rolled my eyes, having heard this same line from him for practically every season that had come and gone.

"I have no interest." I stated, the same answer I gave each time. Harl rolled his eyes at me, and I narrowed my eyes at him.

"Come on, this is the...the...how long have we known each other?" he asked.

"Too long." I blurted, before I could stop myself. I saw that had been a little bit harsh, for he suddenly turned downtrodden; as dismissive as I act of him, Harl is a nice fellow to be around.

"Sorry." I muttered. Harl perked up instantly, despite my admittedly weak apology.

"It's alright...but seriously, just this once, can't you find someone to care about other than yourself?" he said. I became a little incensed at this assumption of my personality.

"I care about others." I defended.

"Oh really?" he said, clearly skeptical. "Who then?"

I opened my mouth to answer him. but unsurprisingly, nothing came out. I closed it again, thinking hard, but what could I say? I couldn't think of any other dragons that I knew on a personal level other than Harl, but I certainly didn't have that big of an ego. I did what I did for the nest, nothing more. I could lie, but I viewed myself as beyond that. Eventually I came up with the only honest answer I could.

"You." I said to Harl, who looked taken aback at my answer. I instantly regretted my answer when his expression turned into the sickest display of happiness I'd ever seen. His pupils grew big and round, his eyes becoming watery, and he sniffled as he smiled appreciatively.

"You really mean that?" he asked, sounding about ready to cry.

"Yes." I growled, wanting to drop the subject and move on to other things. Then without warning, he leapt forward and hugged me.

I repeat...he hugged me. As in threw himself with all his strength onto my unprepared form, digging his face into my side. I snarled and tried to shake him off, but he was too heavy and was hanging on too tightly, and I still too tired from the raid to put any real effort into pushing him off me.

"GET OFF!" I yelled. He sighed, pulling himself off of me.

"Sorry, it's just...I didn't think you cared all that much about little ol' me." he said. I chuckled as I thought of a few words that would describe the Gronkle much better than 'little'. For a few moments, we simply walked together through the forest.

"Where are we headed?" Harl asked.

"Someplace to rest." I answered.

Harl fell silent for a moment. Then he suddenly flew in front of me, stopping me in my

path. I narrowed my eyes at him, waiting for him to move, but he didn't, instead looking like he was working up the nerve to say something. When a moment had passed, and he still had yet to say anything, I began to grow angry.

"Harl..." I growled, "...you are in my way."

He didn't answer.

"Would you kindly move?" I said, my claws digging into the dirt.

"Um...sure..." he said. Although he didn't. I sighed...he clearly had something to say, even if he was much too afraid of my reaction to say it.

"Maybe today?" I said, getting ready to move him aside by force if I needed to.

He gulped and took a breath. "Sorlyn, I'm gonna help you find a mate." he said quickly, before closing his eyes and awaiting the impending explosion. My eyes widened in surprise...out of all the things I had expected him to say, that was probably the one that I had least expected.

"I'm sorry?" I said, although I already knew what he had said.

"You need a mate, and I'm just the dragon to help you." he said, reiterating his point. I cringed at the very thought.

"What would you know of what I desire in a mate?" I asked him, keeping myself calm. While a part of me wanted him to shut up and drop the whole adventure, I was curious as to how he would go about it.

"Well...um...it shouldn't be too hard." he said. Then he noticed me glaring at him, and shook his head fast. "I mean, I can help you find one. I always have plenty of luck getting myself a mate, so I must be doing something right."

I was again tempted to make some disparaging remark off of how it was less his luck than the combination of female desperation and lack of taste being responsible for his yearly spawn, but I thought better of it. I did care about the oaf's feelings...for now at least, anyway.

"Has it occurred to you that maybe I don't want a mate." I said bluntly.

"Oh, come on, every dragon needs a mate at some point in their life." Harl said. I scoffed and turned away from him, although he moved to continue being in front of me. "We just need to make you less...touchy."

"I'm pretty sure I don't want one." I said again.

"Couldn't you at least try?" he whined desperately.

I sighed. He wasn't going to drop this was he? Oh well, I might as well humor the poor

fellow.

"Very well." I said, admitting defeat. "Where to first?"

"Oh alright, I thought I'd just...wait, really?" he said, cutting himself off mid-sentence and perking up. I stared at him, kicking myself for not being stubborn in the face of his stupidity.

"Alright, follow me." he said, taking off into the sky. I hesitated for a moment, before shaking my head and chasing after him, wondering how things would go from here. I could only hope things would go badly, that way we could get this over with.

Little did I know that today would be the one where my spark was set.