

Part 8

‘Stop! What’s going on?’ Katal bellowed down the narrow tunnel that led out of his cave.

Fray woke groggily from his slumber. In his dreams none of this had happened, he was free to run around all day in golden fields with wheat as high as his shoulders, with no fear of predators or humans capturing him. This was a world in which he could live his life in any way he wanted, the waking world had become his nightmare.

Katal’s deep growls shook the cavern walls. ‘You are going to regret this I swear it!’

Fray turned to see what the commotion was and found himself unable to turn his head around as far as he was used to, all the extra fat that blanketed his neck simply creased and bulged: allowing for only limited movement.

He had been trapped as a prisoner in Katal’s dark, damp and miserable cave for well over 2 months now, and in that time he had been stuffed so full of food that he was surprised that it had not killed him yet.

‘This is my territory, stop now or you will all burn!’ The dragon’s own flanks had not escaped his own unquenchable appetite and quivered as he bellowed and shook with rage, it really was quite impressive how much weight he had managed to put on in a matter of weeks.

Fray himself had been force-fed to the point of bursting daily. There was little that he could have done to resist it, and he himself had at least doubled his own body weight, but Katal seemed to revel in his new found wealth of food; gorging well beyond what Fray himself was possible of. When he stood, Katal’s belly seemed to have given up bulging sideways any more than half of what it already had, most of the extra weight he carried yielded to gravity and the paunch which strained his taut red hide hung almost low enough to dust the cave floor.

The only one who had failed to gain any noticeable amount of weight was the one who had been Fray’s sole comfort throughout the entire ordeal. For the first few nights Jared had done virtually nothing but glare; strongly resisting the corpulent dragon’s hypnotic compulsion. At first Katal had responded to this with a mixture of insults and sarcastic comments, then with threats against the kangaroo’s life, though after this Jared refused to even make eye contact and the dragon soon began to ignore him as he became preoccupied with gorging his ever expanding paunch and force feeding the helpless stallion.

Jared had failed to even acknowledge the dragon over the last few weeks, choosing instead to focus on comforting the bereaved stallion, and for this Fray was grateful, without Jared he would likely have lost his mind.

Katal finally lost his patience, and as the dragon began to inhale threateningly, ready to ignite the hapless villagers; Jared at once found his voice. ‘Stop you idiot! Those are explosives.’

‘What?!’ Fray gawped, he had not been paying attention to what the actual commotion in the entrance was. He had been so used to Katal being the only source of any real commotion that his attention had been purely fixed on the ranting dragon.

A glow of light flickered in Katal's mouth as he panicked and tried to choke back the fire that he had already begun to call up. He swung himself around and wheezed and spat a mixture of smoke and a kind of burning molten drool into the far side of the cave; his hide growing threatening taught as his belly heaved and bulged as the large dragon tried to catch his breath. Fray could only assume that whatever he was coughing up was the substance that fueled his fire, whatever it was it seemed to be causing him some distress as he spluttered and groaned.

Fray tried to back stand up and back away, but he was not used to the extra weight. Losing his balance he fell backwards onto his rump, barely moving a step by the time the dragon had finished heaving his chest.

'That is disgusting!' Jared commented, unhelpfully. 'I assume you don't want to blow us all up then?'

Katal cleared his throat and wiped the last of the glowing fiery drool from his maw. 'Are you trying to set my insides alight? Why didn't you tell me earlier?!' He turned to face the cave entrance. 'Why are you dropping off gunpowder barrels?'

After ducking for cover, the men simply went back to work and continued attaching wiring to the barrels that they had lined the walls of the tunnel in; completely ignoring Katal in cold contempt as Jared had done for the last few weeks. They had likely been working for hours while Katal slept in his latest food induced coma, as they appeared to be making adjustments rather than placing any new barrels.

The horse forced himself onto his feet with some difficulty, his paunch threatening to pull him off balance again as he lifted it off the ground; once he stood he regained his centre of gravity.

'I'm not going to eat that, take it away now!' Once again the fuming dragon got no response.

Fray turned to Jared. 'Can he eat that?' He asked curiously, he had eaten things equally as strange, going as far to request oddities like gravel, which he had certainly eaten happily, and even bars of iron, which he had melted down with his fiery breath and gulped down gluttonously.

'I bet you can eat that can't you? You are just in denial you stupid reptile!' Jared shouted angrily.

'Mind your tongue Roo, I am no reptile.'

Jared stepped closer to the heavily fattened 'reptile'. 'Surely you can't be that stupid, can't you see what's happening?'

Katal stared coldly at Jared. 'Perhaps I could just eat you, and all of those hapless humans and just be done with all of this nonsense.'

Jared stood his ground unyieldingly. 'They have been fattening you to trap you in here forever you arrogant fool!'

The dragon roared deafeningly in a fit of rage and charged at the last humans in the tunnel, knocking Jared violently aside. Katal dove into the tunnel at speed and forced himself into the narrow gap, but he did not get far. His bloated midsection stuck fast in the narrow gap. The fat around his paunch bulged as he squirmed and kicked his hind legs.

'Jared!' Fray clumsily ran towards the stricken kangaroo, his over-fed paunch bulging and twisting awkwardly as he went, sending his centre of gravity all over the place.

The roo murmured and then groaned as Fray nudged him with his nose. 'Are you alright?'

'I'm fine Fray.' He pushed himself up off the ground to reveal a bloodied nose. 'We need to look for a way out right now.'

'I can't!' Fray said, his heart sinking. 'I'm still under his... Spell or compulsion, whatever it is I can't even make a step towards freedom!'

'It's been getting better for me Fray, I think together we can beat this.' Jared said defiantly. 'We just need to focus!'

Fray tried his best to force himself to make a move, he wanted to; he needed to get moving, but just couldn't make that first step. 'I can't do it!'

'Yes you can, just put one hoof in front of the other!'

Jared went behind Fray and pushed at his rump, but it was no use. 'Just get out by yourself, I've told you I can't move!'

The stranded stallion turned towards the dragon, his corpulent paunch bulged so widely at the back that his rear legs were forced sideways to compensate for the huge bulge of blubber, the already round rump that he had sported has grown even wider and rounder, the fat at the top of his rear curving back in on itself to meet his back and tail base to form a bulging apple shape; even his tail had not escaped the extra padding, dragging behind him as it had become far too heavy to lift.

'He has me, please just go.' Fray pleaded, he did not want to stay imprisoned with the greedy dragon a minute longer, but he had no choice and Jared did not need to needlessly remain imprisoned with him.

Before Jared could reply Katal managed to gain some traction with his rear claws and forced himself backwards out of the narrow gap. Practically tripping over his own fat engorged tail he backed himself out of the gap and lined himself up for another charge.

With a deafening crack the gunpowder in the entrance ignited and the cave around Katal rumbled and collapsed and took him with it, in a mere moment the huge dragon had vanished under the rocks. A plume of hot smoke, embers and dust engulfed Fray and Jared, blinding them both.

'I can't breathe!' Fray cried. 'Jared where are you?'

A hand clasped the mane on his neck and a rag was held against his muzzle. 'Breathe through this, it'll help.'

The dust gradually settled to reveal the devastation; the entire front half of the cavern had completely collapsed, a small mountain of rocks led a gentle slope to the ceiling over the top of the former entrance.

'Come on Fray, we have to try and dig ourselves out.' Jared ushered the horse forward.

'Is he... Is he under that?' Fray asked tentatively.

'What's left of him is.'

As the kangaroo nudged him forward, Fray quickly realised something. 'Jared!'

'What is it?' Jared asked.

'I can move, I can leave!' Fray trotted around Jared excitedly, barely noticing the extra padding that made movement such a chore.

'No time like the present.' Jared urged.

The kangaroo brushed the worst of the dust out of his fur and clothes and began to climb up the fallen rocks to look for a way through.

No sooner did Fray take a step to follow him the rubble began to shift.

'No, please no!' Fray prayed.

Jared quickly slid back down the slope. 'Move back Fray, there are tunnels at the back of the cavern, we can find a way out through there.'

'We don't even know if there is a way out, we will just get lost in there!'

'Better than being stuck with him, what do you think he will try and eat now he is trapped in here?' Jared spoke, with urgency in his voice. 'Us! If he is even in one piece, but I'm not taking that chance so let's go Fray!'

The rubble continued to shift and grind. Fray simply panicked. 'No, no no no!'

A large rock came loose in the middle of the rubble and slid down the scree to reveal Katal's battered head, he was bloodied and minus a horn, but still alive.

'Yes I am afraid so Fray.' He spluttered.

Jared moved defensively in front of Fray. 'Let us go!' He bellowed. 'Eating us will only postpone your suffering down here.'

'Well honestly I never thought of eating you both, but thanks for the idea.' He grinned a bloodied toothy grin.

'Please just let us go.' Fray pleaded

'As strong as I am, I would say that I am fairly well pinned under all of his.' He appeared to try to twist himself against the rubble, to no avail. 'I think the rocks have pierced my belly.'

'We are hardly going to dig you out are we?' Jared stubbornly stated.

'Quite.' The stricken dragon responded. 'Yes... You may as well go.'

Fray could hardly believe what he was hearing, was the dragon offering freedom? 'So you aren't going to eat me?' He asked in disbelief.

'I don't think I could if I wanted to. Over these past few months I think I've come to enjoy cattle a bit more anyway, I've found myself a bit bored of horse I think.' He chuckled half-heartedly. 'Besides, you have at least been good company and I can't say I haven't enjoyed stuffing you; I've never fattened my own horse before.'

Jared pulled at Fray's mane. 'Come on Fray lets go.'

'Head through the tunnel at the back of the cavern and take the right at the end; I believe there may well be a way out through there. I could never...' Katal stopped to cough weakly. 'I could never fit through there myself of course, but I may have lost the odd human down there.'

'Let's Fray.' Jared gestured to the tunnel.

'Yes you run along now, I think I'll just... Rest my head for a bit.' Katal settled his great head his down on the rubble and the light slowly went out from his eyes.

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Epilogue

Jared finished work at his new job early some afternoons, and he was glad to have free time to spend with Fray. Today was one of those days, and as the bell on the shop door tinkled gently as he closed it behind him, the sun beat down lovingly and his dark fur quickly soaked up the warmth as he headed down the smoothly cobbled street with a baguette under-arm.

It was good to be back home safe and sound with the rest of his kind, nobody treated him with undeserved disrespect, and the weather was certainly nothing to complain about. The streets were clean and he could walk barefoot, far more comfortable than the hard leather footwear he had to suffer to avoid cutting the pads of his feet on bits of glass and litter in Askolov.

The food was as good as ever, he had put some weight on during the month he had been back and aside from some button adjustments to stop his tan belly poking through his shirts it did not bother him one bit.

Fray was a different matter. It was hard helping the heavily obese stallion lose weight with so much cheap food and grazing available to him. It helped that he could now spend most of his time with other horses, whom after being allowed to freely graze as they pleased all year around were certainly far fatter than any that the humans used as riding horses, but still Fray stood out among his new friends in terms of sheer weight.

The Andalusian stallion spotted Jared as he came to the fence at the edge of his field and came trotting over happily. He had quickly gotten used to moving around in the open with his extra weight, and his prance had become almost graceful. The flesh on his middle swayed heavily as he cantered towards the fence and licked the defenceless roo square in the middle of his face.

'Jared! You brought me more bread?' Fray asked excitedly.

‘Well I don’t know, you sound quite out of breath. Have you not been working on your fitness?’ Jared asked.

‘How come I have to? The other horses get to eat all they want without exercising.’ Fray complained.

‘Because you are nearly twice as fat as the other horses Fray, exercising will help slim you down a bit; especially if you are unwilling to curb your eating.’

‘You have gotten fatter since we got back.’ Fray responded, poking the porky kangaroo’s belly with his nose.

Helping the horse shed the excess pounds was nothing if not a losing battle, at least he hadn’t gained any weight since he had arrived. As far as he knew, Fray did not even mind being as fat as he was and besides, the other horses seemed to keep his mind off of any troubles that he had.

‘Alright you win for today.’ Jared said, pulling the baguette back before he could take a chomp out of it. ‘But tomorrow, you are going to take me for a good long ride through the countryside!’

‘Okay deal. Bread now please?’ Fray demanded.

Just as Jared handed over the baguette and it was hungrily chomped from his hand, his co-worker from the bakery came jogging down the lane towards him.

‘Jared have you seen this?’ The grey roo held out a greasy newspaper that had likely been left in the shop by a customer.

Jared studied the front cover, ‘Human settlement burnt to the ground!’

The grey kangaroo panted, he had obviously run from the bakery after seeing the cover. ‘Isn’t that where you went to work for a while, Askolov?’

Fray stopped crunching away at the baguette and his face dropped.

‘Jared you don’t think... He can’t be can he?’

He snatched the paper hastily from his co-worker and read out aloud. ‘Human settlement ‘Askolov’ razed to the ground, large dragon spotted in area!’

The End