

# **Dragon's Egg**

## **Lena Austin**

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## Chapter One

Jack Draper locked his hands behind his head and leaned back in his chair for a few minutes of much needed rest. He hadn't been sleeping well lately -- worse than usual. Lack of enough hours in the day was common enough when you owned a real estate empire, but the past few months he'd been lucky to get three or four hours. His therapist had finally given up after the best drugs on the planet couldn't knock him out cold without getting into dangerous dosages.

Speaking of which, he had an appointment with a specialist. He glanced at his watch. Fortunately, he owned this building, and the specialist's office was on the third floor, just a short trip down his private elevator.

Jack chuckled to himself. Private elevators, penthouse suites on the top floor of a luxury office complex in Manassas, Virginia, just outside Washington, DC, were not bad for an abandoned orphan from South Wales. Getting a scholarship to an American college had been his smartest move. Now, at age thirty-five, he was on top of the world. Literally.

He buzzed his secretary. "Janine, I've got an appointment. Usual orders."

Her crisp voice answered immediately. "Yes, sir. Don't forget your meeting with the Board of Directors at three, Mr. Draper."

He grumbled for a moment. "Yeah, I remember. Feed me lots of coffee, as usual, or I'll go to sleep on them." What a waste of time. He couldn't sleep at night, but those old walruses on the BOD could put him to sleep in fifteen minutes, nit-picking over every detail just to justify their expensive salaries and perks.

Jack grabbed up his briefcase and left his suit jacket hanging in the closet. He'd be damned if he'd dress up just to go lay on some shrink's couch. He had his cell and

his Treo in the briefcase. That would do, if some emergency came up in the next two hours.

Dr. Lledrith was waiting for him in her office when her receptionist ushered him in. A formidable older woman with stone gray hair and a long nose, she stood and shook his hand in a firm grip. "Welcome, Mr. Draper."

Jack started. Her accent was as familiar as his own. "You're Welsh."

She assessed him with a cool eye. "Yes, I am. So are you, according to the file Dr. Bernstein sent. I understand you have few memories of your childhood."

Jack nodded and sat in the chair opposite her desk. "Correct. While I'm sure Dr. Bernstein provided you with his opinions, I'll say I can't agree with his theory that my childhood was so bad I've blocked the memory of it. It doesn't feel right to me."

She flipped through his file. "I tend to agree with you, Mr. Draper. What information I was able to gather beyond what Dr. Bernstein provided indicates a happy, well-rounded time until you left for college. It was in college that you began to have difficulties and showed antisocial patterns."

Jack bristled. "If you're referring to my being gay, I don't consider that antisocial."

Her thin lips quirked into a half-smile. "No, Mr. Draper. I'm referring to your wild behavior and disciplinary issues from your college record. Your homosexuality appears to be one of your few stabilities. You took some time to reconcile your sexuality, but that appears settled."

He subsided. Like so many gay men, he tended to be touchy about being homosexual in such a conservative town as Washington. "Sorry. It's a sore spot."

Dr. Lledrith gave him her first genuine smile, and it softened her whole face. "My apologies as well, Mr. Draper. I should have been specific. Your reputation for no nonsense conciseness is well known." She settled in her chair once more. "I believe your insomnia may stem from some event at college age, or perhaps just before you came to the US. How much do you remember of that time period?"

He shifted uncomfortably in the chair and longed for a cup of coffee. "Not much. That appears to be the blankest area in my memories. A space of about three months doesn't exist."

She steepled her fingers in front of her mouth, but the warm smile didn't fade. "I think we can work on that memory loss later. What concerns me presently is the insomnia. Tell me about it."

Jack sighed and suppressed a shudder. "It isn't truly insomnia where I can't sleep, but rather recurring dreams that awaken me after only a few hours." He paused, slightly uncomfortable. "Erotic dreams, at the end, though they start innocently enough."

Dr. Lledrith got up and poured them both a generous mug of coffee. She cocked an eyebrow at him as if to ask how he preferred to embellish his.

Jack shook his head and reached for the brew that had recently become his lifeline, despite what it was doing to the lining of his stomach.

Dr. Lledrith took her time adding a generous amount of creamer, and a generous dollop of what appeared to be honey. She returned to her seat, seemingly at ease. "Mr. Draper, I've been a therapist for quite a long time, and one of my sons is gay. I doubt seriously you could shock me. However, in the interests of your privacy, I shall not record the dream in any way. My memory will have to suffice. Does that ease your mind?"

"It does." Jack relaxed. He'd always been a man of great privacy. He hated the fetish pervading society to record every detail of life for posterity in online journals and websites.

The doctor sipped her coffee placidly, and even sniffed the aroma rising from the cup. "Glad to hear it. Please begin."

He drew breath, knowing it wasn't going to be easy to tell what he saw every night. Somehow, he trusted Dr. Lledrith much more than he'd trusted Dr. Bernstein. Perhaps it was hearing her accent. "Very well. As I said, the dream starts innocently. I'm a child. I'd say about ten years old. I'm playing on the cliffs not far from the

orphanage where I grew up in South Wales. It must be a holiday, because I was diligent in my schoolwork and rarely went out when I had homework."

Dr. Lledrith nodded. "Yes, your grades were exemplary. All right, we'll assume it was either a weekend or a holiday."

Jack closed his eyes and couldn't help the smile that chased across his face. "We weren't supposed to play on the cliffs, of course, but I seemed to know the way down the rocks well. It may have been my only rebellion to play where I wasn't supposed to go."

Her voice softened, and was not intrusive. "You played alone, then?"

"Quite alone. I get the impression from my feelings that it suited me to escape to this place." He frowned for a moment. "I'd never been sociable, and always felt like the outsider."

She hmphed. He heard her flip papers. "Understandable. You were placed in the orphanage after having been found wandering the streets for apparently days. You wouldn't speak for weeks. The director named you Jack Draper because she constantly found you hiding behind the drapes and staring out the window."

Jack's eyes flew open. He turned and stared with his mouth agape. "I didn't know that. I'd always wondered."

Dr. Lledrith raised an eyebrow. "And you never thought to ask, even after you became an adult?"

Jack writhed in his chair. "I preferred to forget those years and erase my past, thank you. I'd always assumed my parents didn't want me and tossed me away like a bit of rubbish." His voice grew steely. "If they didn't love me enough to keep track of me, then I'd make my own way in the world and damn them."

Her eyes shut for a moment, then opened to give him a sympathetic smile. "While your achievements are admirable, Mr. Draper, I think your past may provide the key to your present difficulties. Please continue."

Jack got up to pace around the generous office. "Here I must admit to a bit of embarrassment. I believe my ego supplied an answer to my childish needs to feel

important." He paused to admire the collection of books in the bookcase. "I supposed you've heard that children's song by Peter, Paul, and Mary?"

Dr. Lledrith chuckled. "You refer to 'Puff the Magic Dragon,' I believe. It's a natural leap for a child whose name is similar to the boy in the song to place himself in the story."

Jack winced as she hummed a few bars. "That's the one." He frowned and went back to sit down. He needed that cup of coffee like a man in the desert craved water. "I hate that song, strangely enough. I always have. The kid was a first class selfish heel. You don't desert your friends just because you grow up."

Dr. Lledrith's face was hidden by her coffee mug, but her shoulders stiffened. "Indeed they don't, if they're an honorable person, Mr. Draper. Usually, there's another unstated reason. Please continue with your dream. I assume there's a dragon in it."

Jack sucked in air gratefully. At least this therapist didn't consider him a nut and insist on analyzing the tiniest details of why his ego had superimposed his own face on that ridiculous song. "All right then. Yes, there's a cavern at the base of the cliffs. You have to step on a certain rock to see the entrance." He shrugged. "Magic, I suppose you'd call it in a child's lexicon."

She didn't bat an eyelash, much less smile. "Indeed. Go on."

He had to admire the lady's cool. "I have to jump a couple of spaces between boulders, but it's not that hard for an agile child. Once inside the entrance, the cave looks absurdly normal. Lichen, wet smooth walls from the water's action, the usual. I keep going into the dark interior, but the light behind me is enough to see by." He paused. "There's a dim light up ahead, too."

"Naturally. A child would need a light to see by to find his way." She got up and poured them both more coffee.

Jack was awed. "You're taking this all in stride. Dr. Bernstein had me analyzing every small illogical detail."

Dr. Lledrith raised one snowy eyebrow. "I'm not Dr. Bernstein. This is from the view of a child's mind. Therefore, things don't have to make logical sense. They simply

are. Children are so accepting, and don't question details. They might question why the sky is blue, but they don't need the science of it. Most of us should emulate the pure acceptance of a child."

"Thank you. I got rather exasperated by the nit picking. The child in me accepted it as right and proper." Jack shrugged. "Shall I continue?"

"Please do." She went back to placidly sipping her coffee, leaning comfortably back in her chair.

Jack gulped down his coffee despite the searing his tongue got. He needed the fortification. "As you might expect, yes, there was a dragon in the back cavern down a tunnel." He shut his eyes to better remember and relate. "An absolutely magnificent beast of purple and gold. Purple body, gold accents, I should say. His scales were iridescent, and glowed in the light. By the way, the light came from crystals embedded in the walls and ceiling of the cavern. Like a bloody rainbow."

"Sounds magnificent indeed. You should write, Mr. Draper. You have a way with words." Dr. Lledrith leaned forward and put her elbows on the desk. "You don't sound at all frightened of the dragon. Didn't you think he might like a snack of small boy?"

Jack laughed. "No, indeed! He was my friend, Puff."

"Puff is a child's name for something."

Jack nodded at her prompting. "I even supplied an answer for that, Dr. Lledrith. Puff had told me I couldn't pronounce his real name, so I'd been permitted to give him a name I could speak easily. I named him Puff because his nostrils would occasionally breathe a bit of smoke. I assume as an adult this means he was a fire-breathing dragon."

Again, Dr. Lledrith raised an eyebrow. "Is there any other kind?"

Jack laughed, even though he recognized the ploy to get him to talk about his personal obsession. "I find the subject of mythical creatures interesting, as you well know, Doctor. I have a hobby of cryptozoology, when I can afford the time to indulge." He grinned and winked. "When we are not on the clock, I can discourse about



dragonkind for well over two hours without my notes, and present a full day's seminar with them."

She spread her fingers in a conciliatory gesture. "Caught me. Dr. Bernstein did mention your hobby, but not any expertise you might have. I can see his notes have as many holes in them as your memory."

Jack tossed an errant curl out of his eyes. He needed a haircut again. "Dr. Bernstein wasn't interested in my last trip to Puerto Rico, where I participated in a study of *chupacabre* predations. For some reason he considered it macabre."

Dr. Lledrith's voice was sardonic. "Most people would consider looking at eviscerated and bloodless corpses of farm animals to be so."

Jack's mouth fell open. "Very good, Doctor. Most people ask me what a *chupacabre* is, much less know what the evidence of their predations look like."

She shrugged. "So I watch intelligent telly upon occasion. Let's get back to your dream, please."

Jack tensed. "There's not much more to tell of the innocent portion, really. I hug Puff's neck and tell him how much I missed him, as if I've been away for a long time." He swallowed hard. "Then the dream changes."

## Chapter Two

Jack shifted in his chair and crossed his legs to hide the erection that was sure to appear. "I'll admit it's difficult to discuss this."

Dr. Lledrith gave him a sympathetic glance, and then turned her chair around so he couldn't see her at all. "Is this better?"

He stared at the back of her butter-colored leather chair. Not one gray hair showed over the top. What the hell -- it might work to pretend she didn't exist. "I'm willing to have a go." He winced at his word choice.

She didn't speak, but one hand rose into view and waved languidly at him to continue. The implication was that she'd not speak or ask questions, merely absorb.

Jack sipped from his cooling coffee and glanced at his watch. Not much time remained before his PDA would beep, reminding him of his hated meeting.

"I'm hugging Puff's neck and I change. I'm now grown to late adolescence, I'd say. I'm taller, anyway, and I've a host of body aches I remember afflicted me then."

Her chair creaked as she changed position, but she still didn't speak.

Jack took that as a sign to continue. "Puff changes too. Instead of a dragon, I'm now holding and being held by a man. A finely formed one, with black hair. Only the eyes remain the same to let me know it's still Puff. Golden brown eyes like the finest whiskey." Jack drew a ragged breath. "We're both naked, suddenly."

No movement, no sound from Dr. Lledrith.

"I'm the one who initiates the kiss. I want that clear. This isn't some superimposed child sexual abuse. I want him as badly as he appears to want me."

Jack closed his eyes and struggled to remember. "This part is in bits and pieces. Very foggy. I have papers in my hand. One of them is my college acceptance letter. I recognize the letterhead when I break the kiss and look down for a moment.

"Then, I just don't care. Puff is leading me to the big stone he used as a dragon couch. It's got a hollow in the center, I suppose where his dragon body has rubbed a depression in the sandstone."

Dr. Lledrith's hand appeared, holding her coffee cup. He assumed she let him see it just to show him she still was listening.

He let out the breath he'd held. Her trick of "disappearing" from view was working. It was easier to say the words.

"Puff tugs on my hand, and I go willingly back into his arms. Part of me is shocked at my behavior, and part of me revels in it. I've never felt so alive as I do in this dream.

"Puff pulls us both into the center of his couch. It's clean and warm there, as if it has been freshly scrubbed just for the occasion. He lands on his back at the bottom, and just lays there."

A minute creak of the doctor's chair allowed Jack to assume she listened.

"'I won't force you, Jackie,' Puff says. 'You're in charge of this. When you say stop, we stop. I'll not have it said I seduced a boy.'

"I'm stung by this. I tell him, 'I'm eighteen, and I know my own mind. I love you, Puff, and this is the only way I have to prove it.' He might say something then, but I'm fierce and attack his... his..." Jack stopped and blushed, unwilling to use the usual word in his vocabulary.

Dr. Lledrith's voice floated softly over the back of the chair. "I believe the word is cock, isn't it, in the common vernacular? Or would you prefer to use something more crude or clinical?"

Jack choked for a moment. "Er, cock will do I think. Um, there are quite a few terms I could use."

"Then stop being squeamish, Mr. Draper. I assure you, I know what one looks, tastes, and feels like, though not from your perspective of course."

The inference was clear. She knew he was gay, but this was more intimate than anything he'd discussed with Dr. Bernstein. "Er, no, I suppose you do."

She didn't turn around, but he could hear the rich good humor in her voice. "Consider this, Mr. Draper. You and I both like the same things. I happen to be quite fond of fellatio, myself."

Jack started. He'd never considered that aspect of having a female therapist. They did have the same tastes in common when it came to sexual partners. "Well, I won't ask you if you enjoy flavored lotions or not, but that does put a new perspective on it."

"Like most females, I'm inordinately fond of chocolate sauce. Please continue, Mr. Draper."

"I didn't need to know that. Yes, ma'am. Yes, I perform fellatio on Puff." Jack swallowed another sip of cold coffee. "Er, suffice it to say I enjoy myself?"

"Only if you did," she replied briskly. "I do hope he returns the favor?"

Jack prevented himself from spattering his mouthful of coffee all over her elegant desk and his file scattered atop it. He blushed and was grateful she couldn't see him. "Er, well, yes."

"Excellent. Reciprocity indicates a feeling of equality. I'm pleased so far, and --"

Simultaneously, his PDA and her electronic timer on her desk beeped, ending their session.

Regretfully, Jack rose to his feet and hid his rock hard and aching erection with his briefcase.

The doctor turned her chair around. "We've begun very well, Mr. Draper. I'm pleased. Tonight, should you dream again, please try to remember details. I'd like to see you again, first thing in the morning. I shall be here as early as seven, if you wish." She offered her hand. "I have a theory formulating. Let me think on it, and I may have a simple but effective therapy we may try."

Jack shook her hand and fled. Sleep was now the last thing on his mind. Were it not for that damned board meeting, he'd be down at the local spa to find someone to ease the ache in his cock.

Jack slugged down the last of the warm milk his secretary had suggested that afternoon and crawled wearily into his bed. When not even the finest Egyptian cotton sheets and the most expensive mattress guaranteed a restful night, he doubted sixteen ounces of heated moo juice would improve things. Part of him hoped he'd dream again, and part of him prayed he didn't. "Something's got to give, and soon, or I'll be a candidate for the local Bedlam."

Not surprisingly, he tossed and turned, unable to get comfortable. He considered flipping on the television, but decided he didn't need to get angry over the real estate charlatans populating the late night channels, hawking incomplete information on how to get involved in foreclosures.

Jack grumbled and punched his pillow into a more comfortable shape. To the empty air and all those people who might be taken in by that scam, he muttered, "Reality check, people. If you could afford all the costs associated with buying and renovating, you'd be doing it on your own home. I ought to write a book myself."

His eyes flew open. That wasn't such a bad idea. He'd made a success of honest real estate entrepreneurship. Maybe he *should* write a book. He scribbled a few notes on his bedside tablet without bothering with the lamp.

Satisfied, he grinned and flopped back into the pillows. He fell asleep in the middle of outlining chapters in his head.

\* \* \*

He climbed over the rocks, clutching his precious letters. Joyously, he stamped extra hard on the flat granite rock that allowed him to see the cavern opening.

His worn trainers made no sound on the rocks, and only a slight whisper on the sand at the entrance to the dragon cave. He knew the way blindfolded to the back chambers, where he knew his dragon rested in the early morning hours.

"Puff! Puff! I've wonderful news!" His teenaged self skidded to a halt just inside the back entrance.

The great dragon opened his eyes and raised his head. "Indeed, Jackie? Well, come in and we'll have tea. You've been very busy of late, haven't you?"

Jackie strutted in, now assured of his welcome. "I'd love some tea, thanks."

Puff changed into a human man, dressed in medieval clothing that would have made a cat laugh under normal circumstances. His fine brocade gambeson, long dark hair, and leather trews fit his personality, but were woefully out of fashion. He strode over to a table and fireplace and filled a kettle from a small waterfall that fell into a stone basin. "Shall I heat it with my breath, or make do with the fireplace?"

Jackie walked over and laid his letter on the table near his accustomed place. "The fireplace, if you please. I'm not starving." For the first time, he felt a frisson of nerves. "I'd like to talk with you as a man, if you don't mind."

The dragon-man sighed with mock disappointment. "No flying today? What a shame." He knelt at the hearth and blew gently, starting a small fire with the wood Jackie brought him on a regular basis from his wandering in the forest.

Jackie guiltily noted the supply was low. "Sorry I've not been around to bring you fuel for your fire, Puff."

The kettle swung into place. Puff didn't turn around. "I've managed, Jackie. I knew you'd be busy until the summer holidays with school." He turned around and laughed. "If nothing else, I'll burn this old table. Then, the next time you visit you'll have to eat your meal on my couch."

Jackie eyed the great stone slab where the dragon's body slept. "That wouldn't be very comfortable. I'd imagine it's cold and hard."

Puff laughed and placed a bowl of fruit on the table. "Nonsense. I keep it quite warm. As you can imagine, I feel the cold much more than you humans do."

Jackie nodded. "Of course. I studied that in school. You're a reptile, and cold-blooded. I don't see how you keep warm in winter, though." The last had to be shouted over the whistle of the teakettle.

Puff presented him with a cup of tea and took one for himself. They sat in their chairs, sipping from the delicious brew. "I use my breath to warm my couch. I have to be careful, though. Too much, and I'll not have enough of the special air in my body I use to fly. Makes it difficult to hunt over the sea that way." He saluted Jackie with his

mug. "Did that once as a hatchling, and had to swim for my dinner. The cold of the sea made it very uncomfortable until I found a nice large school of fish. I was certain I'd freeze to death. Haven't repeated that mistake again."

Jackie put his chin in his hands. "Is that how you make the special flying air? Eating fish?"

Puff shrugged. "Well, I think so. When I don't eat, I don't fly. That's all I care to know. But I doubt you came here to find out how dragons fly."

Jackie picked at the corner of his letter. "No, but someday I do want to know how you make magic as well."

Puff's golden eyes turned stern and cool. "That's a dragon secret. Ask me again in a few years. I might tell you then. What's the paper?"

Jackie sighed for a moment, and hid his disappointment. "Next week, next year, ten years. Bloody hell, Puff. I'm eighteen as of last week, so they say."

Puff sipped his tea, completely unruffled. "That's merely the day the orphanage gave you to celebrate. We'll wait and be sure. One extra turn of the sun won't kill you. Now, what's the paper? I won't ask again."

In the mercurial way the young had, Jackie's face cleared. He picked up the paper and waved it. "I've been accepted into the American college! I shall have a full scholarship! An American church will sponsor me for everything the college doesn't provide. This is my college acceptance letter."

Puff rose stiffly from his chair and poured himself more tea. "So, you'll be leaving for America soon? When?"

The sadness in his voice made Jackie want to run and do something so unmanly as to hug him. He squelched it. He'd prove he was a man. "In a few weeks. Puff, this is my dream come true! I've worked so hard, hoping some college would overlook my humble state and give me a chance."

Jackie slammed back the chair and stood, suddenly in a rage at the hand the fates had dealt him. "I've always been 'that poor little orphan.' Well, I don't want to be him

anymore. If my parents didn't love me enough to keep me, then I've got to fight for myself." His fist pounded the table for emphasis.

A large hand covered Jackie's.

Jackie looked up into his friend's golden eyes, so full of pain and secrets.

The dragon's words came softly on a sigh. "I love you, and I always have."

Jackie's anger melted away, but not his defiance. "Yeah, my dragon friend? Prove it." He bent across the table and kissed Puff.

\* \* \*

Jack Draper sat up in bed, breathing hard. His clenched fist still rested on his own thigh, and the pain throbbed. He'd have a bruise in the morning from beating on his own flesh.

He scrubbed his face and glanced at the clock. Two o'clock in the morning. Five hours to go before he saw the doctor again. "Oh, geez. What does this mean? How in the bloody hell am I going to explain this?"



## Chapter Three

Dr. Lledrith sipped her coffee and pondered for what seemed like an eternity to Jack. The muted sounds of early morning traffic barely breached the silence of her office.

Jack fidgeted and wondered if he'd destroyed her theories and his chances of treatment. As long as the therapies she devised didn't involve needles or electricity, he was game.

"I think you should go to South Wales, Mr. Draper. In fact, as soon as possible." Dr. Lledrith's no-nonsense command broke Jack's reverie.

Jack shot from his chair. Fear tingled up his spine, but he channeled it into anger. "Just like that, Doc? I should simply forego all my business, cancel all my appointments, and fly to Wales? I thought I was the mental one here."

Dr. Lledrith held up a hand, though her smile never wavered. "The treatment is called aversion therapy, Mr. Draper. Simply put, it means the patient is exposed to situations or things that are related to their condition until the condition is reduced. For instance, a person who fears spiders might at first be exposed to pictures of arachnids until they no longer react with fear, then they are shown caged spiders, and finally they may actually hold a tarantula without fear. Aversion therapy is very effective in some cases."

Jack dismissed all this with a wave of his hand. He had visions of singing the song or having it sung to him for hours on end. "That's all well and good, Doctor, but what do you hope to accomplish with this trip for me? I don't fear anything."

Dr. Lledrith raised an eyebrow. "Then why are you sweating, Mr. Draper? My office is chilled to a balmy seventy-two degrees. Why do you awaken in the middle of the night from the simple imagery of making love with a man? Finally, why are there

gaping holes in your memory your dragon could fly through? Ponder that, Mr. Draper."

Jack snarled inwardly, but kept a reasonably neutral expression on his face as best he could. He was proud of his newly acquired American citizenship and had no desire to return to Wales. Beside all the emotional reasons, he had business appointments scheduled until the end of next week and a recently acquired apartment building to renovate in Georgetown. He wasn't about to let anyone screw up the lovely nineteenth century architecture without his oversight of the plans. "I have too much to do for me to simply drop all my work and hare off for however long it might take to get me some sleep. I'd rather be knocked out with a sledgehammer."

Dr. Lledrith's eyes narrowed and the fingers of her right hand twitched, as if she longed to take notes. "Mr. Draper, I beg you to consider this option. The bags under your eyes resemble a luggage factory. You're pale, and judging from the way that tailored Armani suit hangs on you, you've lost a significant amount of weight. I'm very concerned about your health." She paused and flipped open her PDA. "I'll make a deal with you. I can be free of my own appointments in a few days. If you fly out by Monday, I could join you on Wednesday."

Jack snatched up his briefcase and strode toward the door, despite their having fifteen more minutes of appointment time left. Over his shoulder, he tossed out his briskest tone of voice that made most of his employees quail with fear. "Impossible. I couldn't possibly leave before Monday next without annoying many business contacts. However, I'll ask my secretary to free up a large block of time next month for a bit of skiing or something. A vacation does sound like a good idea." He was out the door and entered the waiting elevator as if demons chased him. His demon just happened to be a mythical creature from a children's song. "Never let it be said I have ordinary neuroses." The doors closed. He leaned against the wall of the elevator and laughed at himself.

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Jack placed the brandy snifter on the coffee table with exaggerated care. The table wavered when his eyes unfocused. "Drinking yourself into unconsciousness is not smart, old boy."

He ran fingers through his hair and rubbed his aching head. "Neither is working yourself to exhaustion from before dawn until after dark."

The room swayed, and Jack lay back on the pillows of the monstrously large suede sofa he'd mockingly called his "napping sofa." The sofa easily accommodated his long frame when he didn't want to bother with his bed. Lately, the couch had seemed infinitely preferable.

He kicked off his shoes and threw his legs up on the sofa to stretch aching muscles. "God, I'm tired. A ski trip sounds like too much exercise. Perhaps I'll find a quiet beach and someone to serve me drinks under an umbrella instead."

Thoughts of the whoosh of the sea as the waves rushed to shore and the cries of gulls made him think of the cliffs of Wales. In the midst of chastising himself for memories or lack thereof, he fell asleep.

Instantly, he was back at the cave, standing barefoot in the clothes he'd worn that day, minus the tie and jacket he'd left on the back of his sofa. The sea spray spattered his Armani pants.

Jack shivered in the cold night air. "The subconscious mind has more ways of making me obey than I have ways of avoiding the message. Maybe the doctor is right. If I stop fighting the dreams, maybe some clue will appear as to why the visions haunt me. I might as well play along." Resigned to a short night, he stepped into the cavern and marched determinedly toward the back once more.

But this time, Puff barely raised his head. "Back again, are you? Well, flit about and be gone, you ghostly apparition. Leave me to die in peace, if you please."

The weak, tired voice was not the robust tones of old. The dragon's scales were dull and some gold and purple ones the size of dinner plates littered the ground around the stone bed.

The boy in Jack longed to run over and hug the dragon's neck. Who couldn't feel pity to see a dragon so bedraggled? "You look like hell, old man," Jack muttered.

"Oh, so now he speaks to me. I stand amazed. Okay, I lay amazed. What does a ghost want with a sick old dragon anyway? Answer me that." Puff shut his eyes, clearly not expecting an answer.

"Am I a ghost? I feel real to me." Jack looked down, and to his own eyes, he appeared as solid as the rock walls of the cavern. "In fact, it's cold in here. It's got to make your bones ache." In fact, he was positive a reptile as large as a dragon must be close to torpid and in severe pain, if Jack was shivering.

Puff's eyes remained shut. "Pain tells me I'm still alive, damn it. If you don't like the chill, you do something about warming the place up, then. And shut up. I'm trying to die in peace here."

Jack ground his teeth together and stormed back outside. "Irascible bastard. One breath, and he'd have a warm cave. No, he's got a martyr complex. He has to suffer before he dies. Idiot. Well, dammit, I'm cold and I don't feel like being a martyr."

He climbed the cliff wall, which seemed shorter than his memory supplied. He stomped into the woods at the top of the cliff and found a load of deadfall easily enough.

The climb down the cliffs in the tricky early morning light, carrying a huge pile of firewood, was more difficult than he cared to think about. His foot slipped on the wet rocks. He slid halfway down a boulder, straining and cursing at the scrape on his left anklebone.

Jack took a moment to examine the injury. The bleeding was minimal, but the whole ankle throbbed, warning him he'd probably twisted it a little. "Good thing this is a dream, or I'd be in trouble tomorrow," he snickered. He'd never felt any aftereffects from his dreams before, thank goodness.

Puff was still in the same position, and his sides moved indicating he breathed. The movement was the only sign of life.

Jack ignored the dragon just as Puff pretended to ignore him. He smiled to himself, and then threw the pile of sticks and small branches in the dusty fireplace. He pulled out a lighter attached to a Swiss Army knife he kept in his pocket for emergencies, and lit a few leaves. The fire flared to life.

The kettle sat in isolation nearby on the hearth. Jack blew off the dust and disturbed a spider's web. He filled the neglected iron kettle from the small waterfall and placed it on the hook to heat.

Proud and satisfied with himself, Jack turned and noticed the table and chairs were gone. So was the small cupboard where Puff had kept his teas and other human foods, if his dreams were accurate.

Jack put his hands on his hips, and for the first time since he'd returned, faced Puff fully. "Did you burn both the table set and the cupboard, Puff?"

"No, the cupboard is behind me, though it's a bit spare of..." The dragon's eyes flew open and he jumped as if his stone couch had become red hot. "Jackie? Are you my ghostly visitor? Is this why I'm dying? You're dead already?" He peered wildly at Jack, blinking.

Jack laughed to see the change in the great purple dragon. Something so big shouldn't be afraid of anything short of a nuclear bomb. "I'm not dead, you silly dragon. I'm dreaming in my home back in America."

The teakettle whistled sharply.

Jack shoved at Puff's tail until it moved and climbed behind him to find the cupboard, taking care not to put weight on his sore ankle. "Now change form and come have some tea, if you've any left."

Puff stared at his tail where Jack touched. "Feels real enough. All right then, I'll change. Maybe we're both dreaming."

The tail disappeared from Jack's path, so Jack crouched to rummage in the cupboard's contents. All he found was one red tin of tea and another of moldy biscuits. The teacups on their hooks were so filthy they'd have to be washed. He shook a beetle

carcass out of one of the two he took from their hooks. "Geez, Puff, don't you ever clean anymore?"

Puff, now in his human form, snorted. "What was the point? It's been just me in here since you left." He stood with his arms crossed, as querulous as an old man. Nothing could hide his beauty, though he was thinner than Jack remembered. His cheeks were sunken, and the rings under his eyes were darker than Jack's.

Jack limped up to him and clapped him on the arm briefly. It was his dream, and they'd been lovers many times before in slumber. Why not act as if they were great friends now? "Well, I'm here now. We may as well enjoy our dream together."

Puff gasped in shock. "For a dream, you're solid enough. All right then, I can play along as well. Give me the tea. You've been in America far too long and you'd ruin the brewing."

Jack laughed and handed over the red tin. He washed the mugs in the stream of water and took off his shirt to use as a towel to dry them now that the cavern was warming up nicely.

Puff stumbled to the kettle, and sat at the hearth. His fumbling movements were not like the old Puff of Jack's dreams.

Jack frowned and walked over to put the cups on the hearth. Then, he got a good look at Puff's face. More specifically, his eyes. "Good God, Puff. No wonder you think I'm a ghost. You've got cataracts!"

Puff lifted his golden eyes, which now resembled an odd mix of whiskey and cream. "I do?" His voice sounded resigned to what Jack considered a serious death threat to a large predator like a dragon.

While his studies told him most reptilians were scent hunters, sight could not be ignored. It would be damn hard to hunt fish in the sea without the ability to see the shimmer of shoals of fish.

Jack took a moment to throw a larger log on the fire and control his emotions. He wanted to be angry, and he wanted to kiss a dragon. He really was insane. "I'd say you're damn near blind, old friend."

## Chapter Four

Puff lowered his gaze and sat up ramrod straight. "I suppose it doesn't matter. I hunt fish by smell and hearing anyway, not by sight. Don't give it a second thought."

"Too late. I've already had lots of thoughts and discarded most of the options, like flying you to America in your human form and paying for the surgery." He waited until Puff finished snorting with laughter. "Yeah, I thought about the fact that, as soon as you were unconscious, you'd probably revert back to your natural form. That might be a bit disastrous."

Puff tossed back his black and silver hair. "To say the least."

Jack grabbed Puff's shirtfront. "Then it won't kill you to bend down here and let me have a closer look, will it?" The dragon remained stubbornly upright. He tugged harder.

Puff resisted every inch of the way, moving stiffly to bend down. "Am I allowed no pride?"

Jack studied the milky eyes as best he could in the dim light of the fire. "What's pride got to do with it? All I want is to have a look. Hold still." He lifted a hand to cup Puff's chin.

Puff jumped up and wobbled slightly from weakness. "Stop it, Jackie. It's not right."

Jack sat on the hearth, absorbing the dragon's wild mood swings. Then, it hit him. This Puff of his dreams was as gay as he was, and attracted to him. Jack stole a glance to Puff's pants. The tunic didn't hide the erection jutting through the fabric. "I see. My apologies, Puff. I didn't mean to tease."

Jack stood. He wanted Puff as much as the dragon wanted him, insanely enough. He cast about for a way to put Puff at ease. "The tea is undoubtedly ready. Are you warm enough?"

Puff raised a sardonic eyebrow, and his voice was heavy with irony. "Yes, I believe I am, if you refer to my body temperature." He squared his shoulders. "Yes, tea would be lovely."

Jack reached for the steaming kettle, but Puff batted his hand away. "You can't take the heat. Allow me."

Jack appreciated the double entendres flying back and forth between them. "I can so take the heat, but I'll allow you the privilege of being in charge, at least this time."

His drawled words had the desired effect. Puff shot him an unfocused look, and turned back to lift the hot kettle with his bare hands. He poured the tea into the cups with studious care. "So you say."

Jack picked up his cup and matched the dragon's ironic smile. "Indeed I do." He limped with deliberate steps to the dragon's stone pedestal and sat on the edge. He knew he now sat on Puff's bed wearing nothing but a pair of pants. He hoped the silent invitation was clear.

Puff gave Jack an opaque look. The only sound was the faint rush of the sea, the tinkle of the waterfall in the basin, and the hum between them that was purely mental. Puff's eyes narrowed. "Stop teasing, Jackie. It's not nice."

Knowing Puff could not possibly see facial expressions over the dimly lit distance between them, Jack snorted. "You seem to think I am. I'm not. Are you going to take me up on the invitation, or will you force me to be crude and blunt?"

One elegant silver and black eyebrow lifted toward Puff's hairline. "Yes. I want you to be crude and blunt. Tell me what you want, Jackie."

Jack sighed, making it deliberately loud. "Very well. One, could you manage to call me Jack? I've not been called Jackie since I left."



Puff sipped his tea. "I think I can manage that. Now that you're a fully grown man, can you manage my real name of Aneurin?"

Jack choked back laughter. "I can indeed, Aneurin. It fits you better, to call you the Welsh name for gold. Your golden eyes haunted my dreams for many a night."

The dragon put the cup down with deliberate care. "You've been dreaming of me?"

Jack took a sip of his tea, slurping deliberately. "Yes. Dreams of you and I making love, right here on this great bloody bed of yours."

Puff-Aneurin stared at the floor. "And you don't mind this dream?"

"At first, I minded. Only in that I didn't think it was right to be making love with a character from a children's song."

Puff chuckled. "Should have never gone to the pub and had a few pints. Told some idiot songster while I was in my cups, but retained enough sense to make it a tale." He shrugged. "Didn't expect the song to cross the pond."

"Puff, er, Aneurin... sorry. That song was sung in the 1960's before I was born." It had always bugged him that the song was older than he by nearly a decade.

"Oh. That. I went back in time to find some good ale, not that watered down piss they sell these days. I've heard in America they sell it cold, much to my horror." Aneurin grinned at his dig on Jack's adopted home.

Jack breathed a sigh of relief. Not only was Aneurin in a better mood, he actually looked like health and energy flowed back into him. "Not the same brews, you old-fashioned dragon. It's made to be served cold. Tastes horrid warm, I assure you."

"Oh. Well then. That's different. Are you going to finish telling me what you want? Or have you changed your mind?"

Jack gulped the rest of his tea, stood, and walked over to slap the empty cup beside Aneurin. He leaned forward until he was nose-to-nose with the man who'd haunted his dreams for months. "I want to drag you over to that stone couch, rip your clothes from your body, and start by tasting what lies beneath. What happens after that

is by mutual consent, but I'm hoping you and I will both not sit well tomorrow. Is that clear enough?"

Aneurin's whiskey eyes grew round. He swallowed. "Clear as rain water."

Jack drew one hand up from Aneurin's chest, sliding a finger up his neck until he cupped Aneurin's chin. "I know I'm home, sleeping in my bed. I don't care if this is a dream. I'm planning on seeing this through until the end." His lips hovered above Aneurin's. "Half of me hopes this isn't a dream, and that you're healthy enough for a little exercise."

Aneurin leaned into his lips, making the lightest of contact. "I think we're both dreaming, but it's the happiest dream I've had since you left. The joy alone gives me the strength to go on."

Jack closed his eyes to savor the soft brush of their lips. "You talk too much, dragon. Kiss me, and we'll pretend this isn't a dream."

"You've gotten pushy since you grew up. I like it." Aneurin leaned further, deepening the kiss, and pulling Jack down to sit next to him on the hearth.

Savoring the dance of their tongues, Jack gradually became aware Aneurin's tongue was forked. Only slightly, but different nonetheless. It served as a constant reminder Aneurin wasn't human.

Both of them reached up to remove each other's clothing. The laces of Aneurin's tunic snapped in their haste.

They were forced to break the kiss so Aneurin could stand and lift his tunic off. His erection jutted clearly from his drawstring pants, right in front of Jack's face.

Jack gave up resisting his impulses. He bent to nuzzle the tempting bulge.

Aneurin shuddered once, then his hands lifted and his fingers combed through Jack's hair. "You can't know how good that feels, Jackie. Er, Jack."

Jack felt around the waist of Aneurin's pants. "Yes, I can. You can show me in a minute." He fumbled a bit more, and then gave up. "Soon as you show me how to get you out of those pants."

Aneurin grinned. "Let's do this the easy way. I find I'm eager." His clothes disappeared.

Jack blinked to find he nuzzled flesh, but he recovered in two seconds to swallow the delight in front of him. There'd be time enough to savor the taste once he got Aneurin on his back.

Aneurin groaned and threw his head back. His fingers clutched Jack's hair more firmly.

Jack's hands rested on Aneurin's hips. He slid them around to grasp Aneurin's ass and hold him firmly while he used his tongue to slide up the shaft of his cock with teasingly tight suction.

Aneurin's fingers tightened in his hair. "Oh, no, my handsome human friend. This time is meant for tasting viands slowly, not gulping them down greedily. You are still dressed. This I cannot allow to continue."

Jack hummed his humor, but allowed Aneurin to pull out of his mouth. He looked up the smooth expanse of broad chest. "Really? Then how can we rectify this?"

Aneurin chuckled. One hand swept through Jack's hair. "Since you already wisely removed your shirt, then you can either finish by divesting yourself of your pants, or I will shred them from your body."

Jack pretended to consider this. "Since I've no wish to have you return to dragon form any time soon, I suppose I'll just have to suffer." He stood and removed his pants, kicking them to one side. "Do I need to build up the fire?"

Aneurin's "No" was as soft as his hesitant touch on Jack's chest. "I ask for a final time, Jack. Are you sure of this?"

Jack understood the tentative nature of the question. "While I think it possible you're older than I by a good bit, I don't consider this a May-December affair." He reached out and pulled Aneurin into his arms. "Do you need further proof?"

"Yes." Aneurin waved toward his stone couch. "A great deal."

Jack laughed, and led Aneurin to the bed. "Then you'll have all you can handle." He stopped for a moment. "I, uh, suppose we don't have to worry about diseases transmitted dragon to human, so we can go bareback?"

Aneurin looked puzzled. "Bareback? You wish to ride me naked like this? Wouldn't you get cold?"

Jack snickered. "Sorry, Aneurin. Bareback is an expression that means we won't need to use condoms or..." He searched his memory for a term Aneurin would know. "French purses or sheep's bladders?"

Surprisingly, Aneurin blushed. "Oh! No, we cannot harm one another. Though, if you wish it, there is cooking oil to ease our way with one another."

Jack nodded, relieved. Saliva was very inadequate as a lubricant. "Good. I don't have anything on me."

Aneurin leered. "I noticed." He sat on the edge of his couch and reached for Jack. "Where were we?"

Jack evaded his questing hands. "I was giving you a blow job, but I've a mind to give you more, if you allow."

Aneurin frowned in puzzlement. "Blow job? Is that what they call it now? More? What more would you like?"

Jack grinned and crawled into the very center of the depression in the middle of the couch. "Good thing your dragon body kept this thing warm all this time. I'll teach you all the new terms for what I want to do as we go." He lay on his back. "Come straddle my face, with your knees pointing in the direction of my feet."

Aneurin blinked, and then complied. "I can suckle you this way as well. I like this."

"That's called a sixty-nine, but I'd like you to remain upright, please." Jack's grin of devilment grew wider.

Aneurin's balls, perineum, and ass were displayed above him, all within easy access. He vowed to go slowly. "Prepare yourself, my friend." He licked carefully and sensually at the seam on Aneurin's scrotum.

The dragon-man gasped and held his breath. "But I cannot pleasure you."

Jack ignored the strangled and haltingly spoken protest. The sweet taste of clean flesh tempted him more than banter. He sucked one deliciously hairless ball into his mouth, and then the other.

Aneurin trembled above him, his breathing whooshing out before filling his lungs again. "By the eggs of my foremothers, you'll drive me to madness this way."

Jack released the warm globes one by one. "I'm not done." His tongue caressed with minimal pressure the perineum, just to give Aneurin time to adjust to the new sensation.

Aneurin cried out and shuddered once.

The gasping half-shout was all the encouragement Jack needed or wanted. He licked and buried his nose in the secret place between balls and ass, where he tasted the clean spicy smell of Aneurin's true form.

Aneurin was still, but moaning. His ass puckered and released, like a tempting beacon.

Jack gave up resisting. He lifted his face away from the tang of dragon flesh. "And this is a rim job. Hope you like it." He licked around Aneurin's anus.

Aneurin roared a long, gasping sound that should not have come from so human-seeming a being. He writhed, but did not remove himself. "That feels... incredible, Jack. Please stop or our pleasures will be much shortened."

After one, long slow nibble on the underside of a firm, smooth ass cheek, Jack let him go.

Panting as if he lifted a ton to move each limb, Aneurin crawled off and fell to one side on his back. His cock jutted toward the ceiling, so distended it was nearly as purple as his natural form. "By all the eggs, Jack. You amaze me."

Jack chuckled and rolled off the couch. His ankle twinged, and he fought to stay upright. "Good. I intend to do more. Where's that oil, again?"

Aneurin cracked one eye. "In the cabinet, in a red bottle. What will you do with it?"

The bottle was in the very back of the darkest corner. Jack brandished it triumphantly. "The better for you to fuck me with, my dear... dragon."

## Chapter Five

Jack gimped back to the couch and crawled across until he knelt beside Aneurin. He admired how the man before him was in shape despite a certain thinness. The black and silver hair fanned out beneath Aneurin's head like an aura. The whiskey and milk eyes beckoned to his soul. He didn't believe the confident statements of how Aneurin could live without sight. His dragon was starving, and it broke his heart. They'd discuss it later.

Grasping the jutting, hot cock, he watched the dragon's eyes haze. Jack dribbled the oil with care not to waste what little there was.

Aneurin shut his eyes and breathed deeply. "You cannot know how I've longed for your touch, Jack. I thought you'd never return." His breathing quickened as Jack stroked the oil lazily up and down, covering every inch. "If I am dreaming, I refuse to awaken. If I am awake, then I wish never to sleep again."

Jack put the bottle of oil over the side of the couch, and let it slide down to land on a pile of dragon scales. "Same goes for me. No matter what, we can enjoy the here and now." He oiled his own ass, and climbed atop Aneurin.

Aneurin held himself still and allowed Jack to inch his way down at his own pace. His breath hissed as the head of his cock pressed past the first sphincter, but other than that one sound, he spoke not a word. His hands crept up and grasped Jack's hips to steady him.

Jack shut his eyes and allowed the delicious sensation of being filled to course through him. The fit was perfect. Not enough to cause pain, and not so little that his insides weren't gently and sweetly caressed. He threw back his head and slid a bit further down until the second sphincter was breached.

Aneurin's hands trembled on Jack's hips. "You feel so marvelous, Jack. I cannot bear much more."

Shuddering, Jack slid the last few inches down until Aneurin's cock was buried deep. His own cock ached with need, but Jack vowed to savor what he could of the sensations. He didn't want conversation right now -- he wanted a good fucking and intended to have it.

He began the ascent at a much faster pace, but still not the pounding jolts he longed for. "Shut up and fuck me. We'll discuss how good it was after."

Aneurin's eyes shut, and a draconic purring growl rolled out of his mouth. His hands tightened on Jack's hips and assisted him in moving ever faster.

This was the way Jack liked things to be done, with rhythmic movements that caressed his prostate mercilessly. He lifted one hand and clamped down on his own cock to pump and ease the aching need for a spurting orgasm.

Each down stroke brought moans from Jack and another growl from Aneurin. They locked in a tangle of sensations neither wanted to end and yet both craved release.

Aneurin growl-purred softly, and his thrusts upward took on the force of hammer blows, pounding into Jack's ass.

The short, hard strokes drove Jack close to the edge, but not over, until Aneurin reached up with a hand to pinch and tweak Jack's right nipple.

Jack came with a force he'd not known was possible, spurting thickly with agonizingly sweet shots.

Aneurin followed, roaring out his pleasure and slamming Jack down until Jack felt every jerking movement as his ass filled.

His balls empty, Jack fell forward, panting. He could barely get a breath before the next wave of pleasure overtook him.

Jack wanted to shout in triumph. He hadn't awakened, and he'd gotten the full pleasure he'd desired from his dreams without a fearful jolt upright in a dark and lonely bed. If he could have gotten a lungful of air, he might have whooped. The best he could do was lean down to tenderly kiss Aneurin's equally heaving chest.



They lay still and fought for breath until Aneurin's cock softened and slid out with one final caress.

Jack could have whimpered at the loss. More. He craved more.

Aneurin pulled Jack off until they cradled each other in a loving embrace. The dragon leaned over and kissed Jack, lingering and savoring. "After we've rested for a time, it will be my turn. Agreed?"

Too spent to do more than nod, Jack smiled to show his willingness.

Aneurin pulled him closer. "Agreed then. Thank you, Jack." His words ended on a yawn.

With his arm across Aneurin's ribs, he could feel the bones protruding. His dragon had been ill or starving, and most likely it was the latter. What had Jack done but make him burn more fuel than he could afford? Would Aneurin have enough reserve resources to hunt? Guilt insinuated itself in Jack's consciousness, and he winced. He had to know. "Aneurin?"

The "Hmm?" was a sleepy, satisfied murmur.

"I haven't worn you out too much, have I? You'll still be able to fly and hunt, right? I know you said if you got too hungry, you couldn't fly." Jack heard the worry in his own voice and prayed he didn't sound like a whining kid.

Sleepily, Aneurin chuckled. "Remembered that too, did you?" He kissed Jack's forehead. "You did feed me. You just don't know it." His next breath was a cross between a snore and a rumble.

Jack chuckled. "You can explain that statement when we wake up." He sighed contentedly and watched the sunlight play on the walls of the outer cavern. It must be late afternoon for a cave to get this much light. He wondered what time it was back in America. Late morning? Ah, well. It was Saturday. He could sleep in.

Aneurin rolled a little closer and pulled Jack in tighter to his body, so they nestled like spoons. The irony of having a Saturday lie-in with a dragon sleeping plastered up to his back didn't escape Jack's humor.

Well, no matter. Jack fully intended to enjoy this dream or whatever it was until he was forced out of it. He grinned and fervently wished he'd get another round with Aneurin before it all came crashing down.

If he were lucky, he'd sleep until Monday morning. Aneurin's body warmed his back, he was safe and not all that concerned with anything other than sliding his cock into a certain dragon's willing ass. He cradled his head on Aneurin's biceps to watch the play of sunlight and listen to the bells.

Wait.

What bells? Dread filled Jack's heart. It wasn't church bells. It was the ringing of his cell phone. "Aww, shit."

Aneurin raised his head, his milky eyes seeking danger instantly. "What? Where? Oh, no!"

Jack felt himself being yanked by the navel back to reality. The cave faded into mist. "No!" he cried out, hearing his voice echo and a despairing draconic roar in response before the world faded to black.

The jangling bells of his cell blared in his ear from the coffee table in his penthouse when Jack opened his eyes. He snarled with hatred at the phone and flung it angrily across the living room. It landed in a big ficus his decorator had suggested and plopped down into the generous pot out of sight. The ringing stopped.

Jack scrubbed the tears falling down his face with the back of his left hand and wished whoever had called a short ride to hell.

His watch sat on the coffee table like a recrimination of time wasted, its display citing the late morning hour. He snarled at it, too.

The empty brandy snifter had the audacity to sparkle in the light. Jack reached for the bottle and glass, considering drinking himself back into oblivion and Aneurin's arms if he could make it happen again.

Instead, the snifter sailed in the same general direction as the cell, with more destructive results. The shattering tinkle gave small vent to Jack's frustrations.

He sat up, resigned to a day of drudgery and the pile of paper waiting in his briefcase. The slight chill of the morning air had him shivering, and he reached for his shirt. His hand stopped questing. It was nowhere in sight. His jacket and tie were draped on the back of the sofa, just where he'd left them. His shoes and socks were under the coffee table. "Shit. I must have been drunker than I thought."

The ache blooming between his eyebrows warned him he'd better be prepared to drink a gallon of coffee or he'd never get a thing done. "Coffee first. Then I hunt for the shirt."

Jack stood, his eye on the large black commercial coffeemaker he'd bought to satisfy his addiction to caffeine and his late night hours. He grinned to himself, remembering he had set the timer before beginning his binge last night. The coffee inside that carafe could probably melt a metal spoon by now. Just the way he liked it.

A sharp pain shot from his left ankle up his leg, and Jack sat down hard on the sofa.

Now he was awake enough to notice he was naked. He'd gone to sleep clothed. His left ankle sported a very impressive bruise and a scabbed but recent scrape.

Jack wet his lips with his tongue and did a final internal check. He swallowed long and deep when he noted his ass was a little tender, then he began to grin.

Carefully, he rose once more to his feet and limped with slow, deliberate steps the long distance to his coffee pot. Automatically reaching for a mug, his hand pulled down his favorite black ceramic one with a purple dragon on it.

Chuckling, then laughing maniacally, Jack poured himself a generous serving of the dark brew. He couldn't dance without falling on his ass, but his heart was doing a good job on its own.

"Real. It was real!" He limped over to pluck his phone from the planter. He couldn't wait to tell Dr. Lledrith.

He'd only punched the first three buttons when it dawned on him that the good doctor would surely lock him in a nice padded cell with an "I love me" jacket of his very own if he told the truth.

He erased the numbers and sat down at the dining table he normally used for a desk, shoving aside the litter of his latest project to make just enough room for his cup.

The memory of Aneurin's ribs sticking out like a horrific bas-relief made him grimace and slug more coffee down his throat. "What did you mean when you said I'd already fed you, Aneurin?"

He slammed his coffee down so hard the liquid sloshed over the rim and splattered onto one of the reports from his field supervisors on the Georgetown project. He idly brushed away the droplets and nodded thoughtfully. The project didn't seem so important anymore. Andy knew his wishes. One phone call, and Andy would be all over the project like white on rice.

Jack pulled a legal pad in front of him and began to make a list while he sipped from his rapidly cooling coffee. By the time the last drop made its icy way down his throat, Jack dialed the first call.

He drummed his fingers impatiently and waited. "Andy? Yeah, it's me, Jack Draper. Can you take over the Georgetown project? I have an emergency trip to make to Wales. Sick friend. No, I don't know how long I'll be. Thanks, Andy."

Smiling in satisfaction, Jack dialed his travel agent. He prayed he remembered the spellings. "Hey, Arlene. Jack Draper. I have a weird itinerary this time for you. Grab a pen. You'll need to write down some odd spellings. I'm going to Wales. Today."

## Chapter Six

Jack studied the cliff below him and hefted the heavy wicker basket of fresh fish in his left hand. The rocks looked even more treacherous than he remembered, and his twisted ankle still throbbed from his walk through the village of Llansanffraid. Most of his luggage sat on the bed of his private leased guesthouse, and he hoped like hell he'd never need to use that room.

Both his hands were encumbered so he couldn't even rub his aching forehead. The right hand held a small gym bag full of tea, a tin of biscuits, a bottle of lube, and a few small sundries. Getting down the pile of rocks with the sea waves making them slick and wet was treacherous, even with his hands free. "I'm crazy. I must be. Great. Now I'm talking to myself, and all I had for breakfast was tea."

His stomach rumbled audibly and his head pounded from the lack of adequate caffeine. Now he wished he'd stayed for the hearty fry-up breakfast the local inn advertised in the window. The traditional British fried eggs, sausage links, beans, a fine thick round slab of British bacon, half a grilled tomato, toast, and hot tea. His mouth watered even as he imagined his arteries slamming shut.

Briefly, he considered giving up this foolish notion of climbing down sea-soaked rocks in hopes of feeding a dying blind dragon inside a cave. Dammit, it sounded worse when he put it that way.

The memory of Aneurin's anguished cry of despair countered all his logic. Jack squared his shoulders. "Time to see if I'm insane enough for a rubber room, or if I'm... oh, hell, I don't know anymore." He clambered down awkwardly onto the first rock and began his descent. He just hoped it wasn't into madness.

The climb was full of heart-stopping moments where he was sure he and his burdens would plunge headlong into the water, but he made it to the bottom with no

further injuries. The pinkish granite boulder that allowed him to see the cavern entrance was there, just as he'd dreamed. He stomped on it, feeling somewhat like an idiot. Surely the greater weight of a fully-grown man stepping on it would be enough, but why take a risk?

He hadn't realized he was holding his breath until the air whooshed from his lungs at the appearance of the cavern entrance. The last hop over to the ledge caused his ankle to twinge, but at least he didn't fall on his ass and lose the fish back to the sea.

Everything was just as he'd dreamt so far, but he couldn't bring himself to call out like his heart demanded with ever-increasing volume. He felt like a fool enough as it was. The water-smoothed walls of the cavern glittered faintly, with the sun obscured by the cliff. Jack nodded, ticking off the list of dream memories. "Okay, maybe I'm not a complete lunatic. But is this just a cave from a child's memory of imaginary adventures, or is there really a dragon in here?" He drew a ragged breath. "One way to find out."

His feet felt like lead weights, reluctantly taking him to the darkened back of the cavern. The black maw of an opening was there, just out of sight of the main entrance. Jack swallowed a gulp of saliva to wet his dry throat. There was no beacon of sparkling lights to guide him. The unlit back cave was an unwelcoming pit of darkness.

He put down the stinking basket of fish and rummaged in the gym bag for the Mag-Lite he'd flown over in his suitcase. It had come in handy many a time to explore properties where no electricity worked, and this was another such case where he'd need its light to see what was hidden in the dark. Jack snorted to himself at the irony. Most of the time when he used the flashlight, he hoped he wouldn't find something. This time, he sincerely hoped he would.

The mere twisting of the handle and the comforting beam lighting the sandy cavern floor gave him courage.

He picked up the gym bag, but left the fish where they were. If he was wrong, he couldn't bear the thought of standing in an empty cave with nothing more than a basket of fish to catch his broken dreams.

With one deep breath to fortify himself, he stepped into the blackness and swept the beam around the room. The fireplace full of ashes with the rusty kettle still on the hook reassured him.

More, the light reflected off something that glittered darkly in the shadows to his left. Purple dragon scales at eye level. His hand trembled when no movement of breath reassured him of Aneurin's continued life.

The gym bag and flashlight hit the floor with a soft thud. Jack ran forward with his heart in his throat, ignoring the scream of his ankle at the abuse. A warm puff of air blew his sweater against his chest and ruffled his hair. It was laden with the smell of dead fish.

Jack choked and coughed. Relief suffused his whole being, even while his heart still pounded. "Whoa, you need a case of Tic-Tacs, carrion breath. Wake up, Aneurin."

One whiskey-gold eye opened and studied him. The other eye flew open, bathing Jack in a glittering light. "J-J-Jack?"

Laughing with happiness at this sign that his friend lived, Jack threw his arms wide. "The one and only. In the flesh. This is no dream." He walked over and kissed Aneurin on the nose, right between the two flaring nostrils.

Something long and thin wrapped around his waist.

Jack squirmed when something dipped down and tickled his crotch. "If that's your tongue, I've better uses for it."

"The better to taste you with, m'dear." Aneurin's mind voice was un-muffled by the forked appendage's occupation with caressing Jack's jeans.

Jack chuckled. "I've something better for you to taste than a gamy human." He deliberately changed his tone to insinuating. "At least for now."

"If that's the fish I smell, I'll take it. They smell marvelous." The forked tongue left Jack's waist.

Jack discreetly touched his sweater. Dry as a bone. He didn't fancy the slimy feeling of tongue saliva in that large amount, so he was grateful Aneurin was a reptile.

The lit outer cave was easy enough to find, since the Mag-Lite currently illuminated a small patch of sand and nothing more. Jack limped out and retrieved the basket.

When he turned around, the inner cavern was ablaze with illuminated crystals. He walked back in, breathing a sigh of relief to see everything just as he'd dreamt. "Someday, I'd love to find out how you light your cavern."

"I might tell you. Later. Is that a salmon I smell?" Aneurin hadn't moved off the couch, nor changed to human form, but his eyes were alight with interest.

Jack grinned and lifted the requested fish by the tail. "The largest I could purchase off the only fishmonger open at this early hour." He tossed it to Aneurin.

The dragon jaws snapped the fish in one gulp. "Delicious, and almost as fresh as I could catch myself. I'm as hungry as a hatchling suddenly. Hope that basket is full."

Jack picked up the next fish in the pile and threw it. "It is indeed, my friend. I hope you've a full belly of fire. I've a pile of firewood to be brought down later for our mutual comfort. The deliveryman thought me quite odd when I told him I wanted a full cord of wood above our heads on the cliff, until I lied and said I planned a bonfire with a few friends."

A small snort produced a trickle of flame from each nostril of Aneurin's snout. "I'll be more than full after this meal." He snapped the third offering Jack tossed. "We'll go up and get enough to last until dark, then we can load the rest on my back and bring the whole pile down at once. I've a net around here somewhere I can carry in my claws." His eyes half closed. "That's the best method for now."

Jack paused and bobbled the last fish, almost dropping it to the sands. He caught the stinking thing and put it directly in Aneurin's mouth. "That sounds like there's another way."

The dragon swallowed. "Well, yes, but I'd rather put off talking about it. Would you mind?"

Shrugging, Jack went to wash his hands free of the stench of fish at the fountain. "I've a thousand other questions. Seems only proper to ask them all at once." He turned



and found his shirt he'd left before. It made an adequate towel, and he doubted he'd wear it again. "Remind me to bring a few better linens when I next go back to the village, would you? I've leased a cottage for the week, so they won't think it odd of me to do a bit of shopping, even if I have to drive to Aberystwyth."

Aneurin's human voice now came from the couch. "I'll try. What's that torch thing on the floor?"

"The Mag-Lite." Jack picked up the flashlight and turned it off. He stuffed it back in the gym bag and found his PDA. "Let me see if I can make a list." He pulled out the stylus. "Towels, table, chairs, tins of food, can opener. Damn, I should have brought my camping gear. Ah, well, I'll pick up new. Anything else you can think of?" For the first time, he lifted his gaze and looked directly at Aneurin.

His friend lay naked in his human form upon the great couch, grinning. No blanket covered him. "More cooking oil?"

Jack matched the leer with one of his own. "Sure, but I've something much better in my bag for the purposes I intend."

His drawled insinuation had the desired effect. Aneurin's face lit with interest. "Something modern like that odd metal quill and parchment in your hand?"

Glancing down at the PDA, Jack chuckled and shut it off. "Yes. I'll show this to you later. I've much to show you, if you can keep your form for a long time." He stowed the PDA in the gym bag, then carried it over to sit next to Aneurin. "A great deal to show you, if you wish."

The dragon man tossed his hair out of the way and cupped Jack's face in his hand. "I can keep this form as long as I wish, only returning to my true state when unconscious or dead."

Jack leaned forward until his lips were inches from their goal of Aneurin's eagerly awaiting mouth. He was relieved to note there was no fish smell on Aneurin's breath now that he was human. "Then don't die anytime soon, please." He brushed his lips tenderly over his friend's. "However, I intend to fuck us both to near unconsciousness, if you're as willing as I am."

One of those sexy draconic purrs answered him. "We've time until sunset. I'm sure we can keep each other warm and occupied until then." However, instead of moving in closer, Aneurin pulled away and stood.

Surprised by the sudden movement, Jack let him go. He was unsure of himself, and didn't know how to proceed. "What's the matter? Aren't you interested?"

Awkwardly, Aneurin scuffed the sand. "I remember your promise, you see. Well, I have to return to dragon form for a moment. I do have a belly full of fire, and if I don't release some of the extra air, I might... well, scorch your tenderest parts."

Jack choked and tried not to laugh. The picture he conjured in his mind was too funny. "So, draconic digestion means the gas can come out fiery at either end, I take it."

Blushing, Aneurin looked a trifle offended. "Well, yes. The... gas, you called it... alights automatically when it comes outside my body. Works better coming out my mouth, though. We chew on certain rocks that make it catch fire. Very tasty, as a matter of fact. But they do pass out of the body eventually, and some might cause the other end to alight."

Jack snickered. He couldn't help it. Dragon farts that caught on fire were just too amusing. "Well, then, I suppose you'd better get on with it. Better out than remaining in your system."

"I'm so very glad you find it amusing. You wouldn't if I scorched your cock to a blackened sausage." Aneurin sniffed huffily and changed form.

His lips twitching, Jack waited attentively for what was likely to be a spectacular sight. "Long as you don't shit a rock anytime soon, I can deal with this little..." he choked down laughter, "... ceremonial moment."

Aneurin haughtily backed his ass up until his tail literally wound out the cavern entrance. The sound that followed reminded Jack of the old gas furnace at the orphanage catching on -- a rush of air, then a *whump* of ignition. The outraged shriek of a gull seemed the perfect ending.

That cry of a singed gull was the last straw for Jack. He collapsed on the dragon couch, guffawing at dragon farts.

An outraged dragon's roar startled him almost as much as the launch of Aneurin's full dragon body, which landed directly atop him. The only things that saved Jack from being crushed were the four claws scrabbling for a hold on the edges of the couch.

Jack held his breath, and stared into Aneurin's golden eyes.

"So, you think I'm funny. Am I so amusing now?" the angry dragon's voice rumbled in his mind.

## Chapter Seven

Blinking, Jack tried to make the adjustment from his loving friend to angry dragon. It just didn't compute. He stared into the milky gold eyes of Aneurin and thought he detected humor, though it was difficult to read any emotion from a dragon.

More to the point, something long and very firm lay on the inside of his right foot. He rubbed it with his sneaker-clad foot and felt the purr deep in Aneurin's belly.

Jack grinned in triumph and kissed the purple muzzle looming over him. He deliberately made his voice low and enticing, hoping for a bit of shock value. "Oh, baby. I love it when you're forceful." He rubbed again. "Give me some hot smutty dominance, big guy."

Aneurin blinked, and his jaw fell open a trifle. "Jack! I'm... surprised at you!"

Swallowing laughter at the success of his trick, Jack confined himself to caressing Aneurin's huge draconic cock with his foot. "So am I. I'm usually the one in charge of the show. Shut up and change back to human. I don't fancy trying to work around your tail to find what I want."

Haughtily, Aneurin snorted a trickle of flame. "We mate on the wing, and you're not equipped for that." He changed form, returning to his previous nude state and rolled to lie beside Jack, grinning. "So, what are you waiting for? Moonrise?"

Eagerly, Jack sat up. Aneurin's hands plucked at his sweater. Jack obligingly lifted his arms to help with the removal while he toed off his shoes. He yanked off his socks and dropped them off the edge of the couch to land on top of his Nikes.

"You humans certainly wear a lot of clothes." Aneurin casually tossed the sweater in the same general direction as the athletic shoes.

Jack laughed and stood. The sand was cool beneath his bare feet, and he shifted back and forth from one foot to another while he unbuckled his belt and dropped his

jeans around his ankles. He shivered in the cool air. "We feel the cold much more than you think, since we don't have scales and thick skin."

As soon as he tugged his turtleneck over his head and couldn't see, Aneurin attacked his underwear. "What is this bright red codpiece you're wearing, and where is the string to remove it?"

The turtleneck caught on Jack's ears, and muffled his chuckle. He fought himself free of the garment, and tossed it on the haphazard pile. He was both amazed and amused that Aneurin was so innocent of the changes in the world. Yes, it somehow was appropriate that a dragon remained so medieval in his outlook. "It's called a thong, my friend, and it will slide down."

Aneurin eyed the underwear dubiously. "Thong is right. It is little more than a scrap of cloth and string. Why do you bother?"

Wiggling his eyebrows, Jack guided Aneurin's hand to the thong. "For the pleasure it brings others, in both displaying and concealing at the same time. I wore this for you."

The dragon's hand caressed the silk holding Jack's erect cock, and his eyes hazed with unrestrained lust. "I see." He leaned forward for a kiss, and his hand traced the outline of Jack's raging hard on with more confidence.

Jack bent down to meet him halfway without a thought, pouring himself into the kiss he'd wanted -- no, needed! -- for so long. Not the kisses shared half-heartedly between fuck-buddies or to appease an appetite, but the sharing of two lovers.

A large, rough hand with long hard nails slid between Jack's thong and hip. Aneurin hummed deep in his throat without breaking the delightful warring of their tongues.

Jack let Aneurin fight with the spandex for a moment, and then helped him remove the thong's pouch from his hardened cock.

Aneurin broke the kiss and moved back, his hands still fighting to slide the thong off Jack's hips. He looked up at Jack's face, or at least in that general direction, since Jack wasn't sure how much he could see. "Not as easy as you made it seem."

Admiring his lover on the couch was easy for Jack. He doubted Aneurin truly understood how beautiful he was, with his purplish-veined cock jutting arrow-straight at Jack, like a compass needle. In his human form, Aneurin's body may have been sculpted out of a gay man's fantasy, virtually hairless and proud, but his draconic nature showed in small things, like the purple tint to nipples and cock. Unusual, but not cartoon-like. Jack definitely didn't want to make love to a human version of a certain purple dinosaur children's icon.

He straightened up and put his hands on his hips, knowing his erection displayed better that way, as an enticement. "If you weren't reclining there looking like something out of a fantasy, then you'd have less difficulty."

The dragon's eyes lit with mischief, and he chuckled. "I remind you I *am* something out of a fantasy."

His thong at his knees, Jack started to reach down and remove it. Aneurin's hand stopped him.

"I like the idea of you trapped in a red string and pouch. Come here." The dragon reached to catch one of his nails in the thong and pulled Jack forward until his toes contacted the edge of the stone couch. The tips of Aneurin's tongue flickered out, tasting the air and then licking his lips.

At first, Jack wasn't sure what to do. Part of him rebelled at being commanded, and part of him melted like wax. The part that favored finding out what a forked dragon tongue could do won out.

Aneurin's black and silver hair obscured his facial expression, but his tongue reached what for a human would be an impossible length and wrapped around Jack's balls. The tips tickled beneath, halfway to Jack's ass.

His eyes half closed with delight, Jack fisted his hand in Aneurin's hair to give himself a balance point. "I could get to like dragon tongue."

The aforementioned appendage unwrapped itself slowly, lingering to taste every inch before retracting completely. Aneurin's breath teased Jack's cock head. "Here's human flesh before me. Meat to taste but never to bite. Now I know why my ancestors

gained a fondness for humans." He growl-purred a sound that shouldn't have come from a human-like throat. "Delicious."

Shuddering, Jack felt the first scrape of sharp dragon teeth. He slid down Aneurin's throat, and felt the heat within. Intellectually, he knew it was the fires not yet lit in Aneurin's fire-breathing equipment, but the sensation was much more than the clinical analysis. He moaned on the end of a sigh, and let himself just experience.

Aneurin took his time, seeming to savor every moment of the in and out movement, using his teeth gently to cause pinpricks of pain while his tongue caressed or flicked out to give Jack a brief rim job.

Rimming was admittedly Jack's weakness, both giving and receiving. The sensation was so sensual, like an intimate invasion of the most sensitive and private area on the human body. A prelude of things to come that hinted of further pleasures.

Jack's breath caught in his throat with every downstroke until he was sure he'd lose control and cut his cock on Aneurin's razor teeth. "Heels in the air, dragon. You're due for this fucking."

Wordlessly and taking his time, Aneurin released him. He looked up at Jack triumphantly. His eyes glittered and the tips of his tongue licked his lips. He fell on his back slowly, purring, and pulled his knees under his chin.

Jack kept his eyes locked on his dragon's golden gaze. The gym bag was still open, and he found the bottle of lubricant by touch alone. The top popped open with a push of his thumb, and he warmed a few drops in his hand. It wouldn't be polite to slather the icy substance on anyone, much less a cold-sensitive creature.

He dipped his fingers into the puddle in his palm and gently applied it to Aneurin's exposed ass. His index finger teased until it slipped in with the superior slide of the lubricant, all the way to the second knuckle.

Aneurin's eyes half shut and his breathing hitched. The growling purr increased in volume.

The second finger worked its way in until it joined the first. Jack wondered at Aneurin's ease of acceptance. Humans had to work to open up so easily. His mind

supplied the insane image of dragon-sized butt plugs. This time, he choked down the laughter before even one sound escaped.

Aneurin moaned. "Don't stop, Jack. That feels so very good, I cannot describe it."

Obediently, Jack worked in a third finger. Good God, was it possible to fist a dragon? He didn't want to find out. Fisting wasn't one of his kinks, though he had plenty.

Aneurin writhed at the finger fucking and his purring increased in volume until Jack couldn't hear the surf outside the cavern. "Now, Jack. Now."

Now there was a command he'd happily obey. Jack removed his fingers as carefully as he'd inserted them, and used the remainder of the lubricant to cover his cock and coax it back to full hardness with a few strokes. Not that he needed much! The sight of Aneurin's beauty and willing body would turn gelatin rock solid, as far as Jack was concerned. He paused at the entrance to Aneurin's ass, for one second concerned about the very real danger of losing his most precious commodity. The idea of losing his cock and nuts to a dragon fart brought him close to the edge of laughter, but at the same time carried a real fear.

The dragon purr reached a new intensity. It had a hypnotic quality and yet conveyed urgency.

Jack gave in to that plea and thrust slowly forward, determined to be gentle if it meant taking the next hour for the first downstroke.

Accepting his cock effortlessly, Aneurin's body pulled him deeper.

God, it was like fucking a velvet-lined furnace, hot but not burning. Jack's instinct to shove in until he was buried to the balls multiplied. He fought the urge with all his will until Aneurin's body opened to him fully. Then, and only then, did he give vent to the need.

Aneurin's purr never wavered from the intense, pleading tone, even when Jack drove in with unrestrained lust. He growled one word around the vibration in his throat. "Morrre!"



The exhilaration overwhelmed Jack. He shoved and pounded until his rasping breaths drowned out even the loud purrs and growls from Aneurin. He could feel his balls rise in preparation for one hell of a screaming orgasm.

The tone of the purr changed, and the dragon's eyes glowed. Aneurin's long hard nails analogous to dragon claws scraped shallow furrows in the hard granite of the couch, with a screech that resembled nails on a chalkboard.

Jack shouted his growing need to blow his wad deep into that hot center of his dragon lover's being. He wanted them to come together, but he couldn't gather the strength to lift one hand from Aneurin's knees where he'd braced himself, no matter how much he wanted to tweak one purplish-brown nipple below him.

Maybe his wish to do so was enough, because Aneurin's growl crescendoed to a roar, and the dragon-man's jism spattered on his belly and chest like a fountain.

Hoping he wouldn't put out Aneurin's internal fire with the force of his own orgasm, Jack came. And came. With every thrust, he shuddered with a renewed wave and wondered if he'd just go ahead and turn inside out.

Now Aneurin's lower legs became all the support that held Jack upright. His own knees threatened to buckle and collapse. Both remained where they were, fighting for breaths into air-starved and overworked bodies. Aneurin was the first to move, even if it was nothing more than to lift his hand and grasp Jack's left palm.

Jack managed to get his voice to work, though it came out as a harsh rasp. "God, that was incredible. I felt like I could fly." He felt himself soften enough to withdraw with one gentle tug.

Aneurin's milky-gold eyes were half-lidded. He smiled gently and pulled Jack's willing body into his arms. "You can. I'll teach you when we awaken. Sleep now."

Jack sensed a commanding force. It rose up and snatched consciousness from him before he could ask what the hell Aneurin meant.

## Chapter Eight

Flying his Cessna always gave Jack a thrill like nothing else. The plane was small enough to feel the wind and react to it, for good or bad. He soared and felt the wind in his face.

Wait a minute. Wind? Inside a plane?

And what was that heavy weight across his hips?

Panicked, his heart racing, Jack sat up. The icy chill of a Welsh evening breeze slapped him fully to consciousness.

Aneurin slept peacefully beside him, a sweet smile of contentment creasing his face. His arm draped gracefully over Jack's hips.

Jack's bladder screamed for mercy. Like it or not, he was forced to leave the warmth of Aneurin's arms. "Hope you have a toilet, Aneurin."

One golden eye cracked open. The sleepy mumble sounded like "No. Use the sea."

A distant ache in his hip reminded Jack that he wasn't used to sleeping on stone. He shoved at Aneurin's arm until the dragon man rolled over, muttering.

Mischief made Jack want to bite the ass now on display, but his bladder screamed louder. "I'll get you, my pretty, and your round little ass too." A huge shiver hit him. He scrambled for his clothes and all but ran for the cavern entrance, praying the magic protecting the cave from casual visitors would ensure privacy, even if the sun were down.

A few minutes later, Jack sighed in relief and flexed his ankle. If he wanted a fire for a cup of tea, he'd have to climb the rocks and bring some wood for the fireplace down. Grumbling to himself, he wished fervently for a phone. He chuckled and imagined that kind of call. "Hello, pizza delivery? Yeah, I want two large five meats

with extra cheese. Just drop them over the side of this Welsh cliff southwest of Llansanffraid. Here's my credit card number and add twenty bucks for the sheer weirdness of this request."

With a resigned sigh, Jack went back in for the fish basket. Aneurin blinked sleepily at him, but the smile he gave Jack was so full of love, it made up for the seeming laziness.

Jack grinned and blew him a kiss. "I'm going to get us some firewood for tea. Be right back." He mockingly shook his finger at Aneurin. "Then, Lucy, you got some 'splaining to do."

Aneurin sat up. "Huh? My name's not Lucy. That's your mother's name."

Jack's jaw figuratively hit the floor while the basket did so literally. His emotions rolled and eddied like the sea crashing outside. Uppermost was a combination of anger and elation that defied description. Anger that Aneurin had kept a secret, and elation that somewhere Jack did have a mother. He choked out, "I'm going for the wood." He snatched up the basket and ran.

On the climb up, Jack's mind wrapped around the facts inherent in Aneurin's statement.

One, he'd used present tense, implying Jack's mother was alive.

Two, not only was she alive, but Aneurin knew her.

Three, her name was Lucy. Jack blinked as images of the famous American redhead, now long dead, flickered in his mind's eye.

Jack reached the top of the cliff and gathered a few cut logs. The new axe he'd paid for lay near the pile, so he spent a little of his excess of emotion chopping and shaving a bit of kindling. By the time he had a fair pile, his emotions made more sense.

"I'm angry because Aneurin knew about my mother and didn't tell me straight away, but not very. After all, I vowed I didn't need or want parents who didn't want me." He picked up the basket full of wood and kindling and made the descent.

Aneurin, now fully dressed with his hair tidily pulled back in a tail, waited with the kettle by the hearth. He kept his gaze fixed on the sand beneath his boots. "I've a great deal to explain, don't I?"

He looked so forlorn Jack's anger melted a bit more. Aneurin had always been an extremely forthright fellow, so there had to be a good explanation. "I'll assume I'll hear the reasons why along with the information, right?"

Aneurin glanced at Jack and seemed heartened. "You're not furious?"

Laying the kindling and logs out carefully, Jack shrugged. "I am a bit. There's no sense lying about it." He gestured to the small pyramid of kindling and sticks. "Would you mind?"

Aneurin started and bent forward. His breath came out in a controlled jet and ignited the pile effortlessly.

Jack threw on a larger log and waited for it to catch fire. "Look, this is awkward. You may as well spill it all."

Water splashed at his feet. Jack looked up to see Aneurin dumping the contents of the kettle on the sand, shrugging. "I don't see how this is going to help. I thought you wanted tea."

Jack slapped his hands on his forehead and tried not to laugh aloud. "No, Aneurin. To 'spill it' is an American expression that means to tell all one knows. I do want tea."

Looking nonplussed, Aneurin absorbed the definition. "Oh." He returned to the fountain and refilled the kettle. "I promise to tell all I know. No more secrets." He came back and put the kettle over the merrily burning fire. "I just don't know where to begin."

A gravelly feminine voice came from the outer cave. "Why not start at the beginning?"

Both males leapt to their feet.

Dr. Lledrith stepped into the lit cavern, smiling and carrying a large picnic basket. "Looks like I timed my entrance well. I've brought dinner."

Jack stood with his mouth agape. "Dr. Lledrith. What are you doing here?"

His voice was drowned out by Aneurin's joyous shout. "Mother!"

Aneurin ran to hug Dr. Lledrith and relieve her of the basket.

Dr. Lledrith looked around the cavern and sniffed her disapproval. "Aneurin, didn't I teach you to keep a few amenities around for our humans? Make a table this instant. I'll not sit on the sands like a barbarian."

The air stirred, and a slight tingling raced through Jack's feet. A large, intricately carved oak table appeared, complete with a black iron candelabra.

Dr. Lledrith put her picnic basket on the table, and unloaded a veritable feast, including a wine bottle and glasses.

Jack cleared his throat. His mind was whirling with information that refused to sort into logical order. Ironical that he, a successful entrepreneur, couldn't seem to add a few simple facts together. Most prominent was the fact that Dr. Lledrith was Aneurin's mother. That was the only thing that made logical sense in his mind, and it shouldn't. "What's the occasion, Dr. Lledrith?"

Dr. Lledrith turned on a sympathetic smile and handed him a glass of wine. "I'd ask you to call me by my real name of Draig, but we can keep to what you know for now. I'll spare my son the awkwardness of an explanation and tell you myself, since he appears struck dumb. Won't you sit down?"

"I'm not struck dumb, Mother. I'm annoyed. Why are you involving yourself?" Aneurin took the wine his mother set in front of him and drained it in one gulp.

A fire flashed in Dr. Lledrith's eyes. The crisp snap in her voice made Jack shudder and believe she really was an annoyed dragoness. "Because Jack was beginning to suffer from your ill-conceived spell and you were dying because of your pride, that's why! Lucynda and I are your mothers, and we won't stand idly by, scrying in the mirror while you two fools make a mess of it."

Jack blinked. Another piece of a very large puzzle. What ill-conceived spell? He had a feeling all would come out in the wash. He did agree that calling her Dr. Lledrith

was easier on his already overloaded brain. He had another question to ask first. One that seemed more important. "Uh, ma'am? I take it you know my mother?"

"She's your mother's dragon," Aneurin muttered. The dragon-man's hand clasped Jack's free hand. "Just as I'm yours."

Jack swallowed and absorbed the implication. "My mother is a lesbian?"

Dr. Lledrith snorted. "Do sit down, the pair of you! I'm getting a crick in my neck looking up at you. I'm bisexual, as most dragons are. Yes, your mother is lesbian, or I wouldn't have soul-bonded with her."

Jack and Aneurin sat as one, still holding hands.

Dr. Lledrith passed them each a sandwich and opened a bag of potato chips. "Aneurin, do you mind if I start the tale?"

Aneurin stood to dig into the basket for paper plates and loaded two with chips. "Go ahead, Mother. You know this part better than I."

Deciding he'd better keep his mouth shut, Jack bit into the roast beef and cheese. Maybe some of the questions whirling around in his brain would be answered before he asked.

Dr. Lledrith took a plate and a large handful of chips. "I do love these things. Can't get them in Honalee. I keep trying to persuade your mother, but she won't hear of it. They are very bad for us, and we don't need any more vices. So, I take them back with me whenever I visit this place." She grinned at Jack. "I'm a very spoiled dragon, and I know it."

Jack nodded. "Okay, you and my mother live in Honalee, and at least one of you can do magic like mirror scrying."

Dr. Lledrith beamed and shoved the ketchup toward Aneurin's questing hand. "I do love your ordered mind. Yes, your mother is the Red Sorceress of Honalee. Dragons can't scry. That's why Aneurin lost touch with you."

An unintelligible mumble around the sandwich in Aneurin's mouth sounded like, "That and other reasons."

"Who's telling this tale? You or me? You'll get your turn. And don't talk with your mouth full." She passed out paper napkins as if she sat down to picnics in seaside dragon caves all the time.

Maybe she did. Jack shrugged. "And my father? I assume I do or did have one."

She sniffed. "Of course you do. Lucy and I decided we wanted offspring and set out to hunt up our mates. I found mine first. You humans complicate matters, so it took her longer. I'd laid my egg before she could finish her negotiations with a minor mage named Cadell. Aneurin hatched the same month you were conceived." She frowned. "We never expected Cadell to go back on his word. He tried to steal you the night you were born."

Jack's sandwich stopped its progress to his mouth. "He tried to steal me? Why?"

Aneurin broke in. "Mage-born children are valuable. Blood mages use them in sacrifices to gain enormous power." He paused. "Cadell was a blood mage. He hid that very well from Lucynda."

Dr. Lledrith's smile was smug. "But not from her dragon. As you can well imagine, we can smell it on them. I'd not had a chance to meet him before Aneurin hatched, and I was occupied keeping him fed until the night of your birth." She shuddered. "If I hadn't been there, helping your mother, he might have stolen you with no one the wiser. I smelled something bloody where none should be and snapped out. I got his leg and broke his invisibility spell. Disgusting taste. I spat out that leg, and he flew out the window, screaming."

"Unfortunately, he lived." Aneurin's growl and clenched fist expressed his anger. "Now he wanted revenge more than he wanted you."

Dr. Lledrith reached across the table and patted Aneurin's hand. "Calm down, dear." She kept her hand on top of Aneurin's, but turned a bleak gaze on Jack. "We managed to keep you hidden until the age of five. Then you were a little boy with more mischief than a crate of gryphonettes. Cadell was going to succeed unless we found a better place to hide you. We chose this world."

Aneurin sighed. "I'm sorry to say I wasn't ready to soul bond with you. Dragons mature a little more slowly. They sent me back in time so I'd have the years I'd need to grow, learn to fly, and be a proper dragon guardian."

Jack blinked and cleared his throat. "So, I was put on this -- world. Alone?"

"Nonsense! Here, have another sandwich, and eat some chips. I've cakes and honey for dessert."

Aneurin perked up. "Honey?"

Jack dredged up the memory that dragons were often given honey as an offering when a sacrifice wasn't available. Legend had it dragons loved honey, and Aneurin's greedy interest seemed to confirm it. He remembered how Dr. Lledrith had ladled honey in her coffee. Wait. Coffee. Now his eyes lit up. "Um, ma'am? Did you happen to bring coffee for a caffeine-deprived human?"

"Oh, yes. Sorry, dear. It's freeze-dried, but this should do." She reached in the basket and tossed a jar of instant at him. A paper cup suitable for hot liquids followed.

Jack dropped his sandwich and managed to catch both. "Instant is better than nothing. Thank you." He gratefully made himself a cup at the hearth. "Please continue, Dr. Lledrith. I take it I was cared for, at least at first."

"Yes, by me. However, we hadn't counted on two things. One, the world here had changed so that the gold your mother sent me would be questioned by the authorities, and two that you had already achieved a light soul bond with Aneurin, your playmate. As soon as I was arrested for gold trafficking, you set off to find Aneurin. The fact that you were only five and couldn't speak a word of this world's languages didn't even dawn on you."

He could see it clearly. A small boy and a baby dragon, wandering a city at night, alone. He shuddered. "My God!"

Aneurin cleared his throat. "The humans found you three days later. Someone had fed you, but, well, there's no delicate way to put this. You'd been -- what do they call it now? -- sodomized?"



## Chapter Nine

Dr. Lledrith sobbed into her paper napkin. "I failed you, dear. They kept me in that tiny cell where I couldn't transform. Your mother's mirror was back at my flat, so she was frantic, and without me to transport her between the worlds, she was stuck in Honalee. They kept me many days, and by then you were gone."

A dark room and half-remembered terror flickered through Jack's mind. He looked down to see his fists clenched and white-knuckled. "I don't remember much of it, truthfully. Not consciously. I hope they caught whoever did it."

Aneurin snarled. "They buried the remains, anyway. I heard your pain through our soul bond. I shouldn't have, not from that distance in time, but I did. Then I did something no one thought possible for a fledgling. I came to you and shredded him." Aneurin flexed his claws, and shredded his sandwich to a mess of tatters. He shook his head. "Two younglings who shouldn't be alone, one injured and one a supposedly mythical beast. I couldn't change to human form then. We were lucky I fit through the door. I got you out, and that was the best I could do."

Dr. Lledrith lifted her face from her napkin. "Our two babies, alone in that horrid place. Aneurin had sense enough to hide in an alley in a trash bin come morning, but you cried when he went out of sight." She gulped down wine. "We were very lucky in a way. Your sobs brought a policeman. He took one look and scooped you up."

Aneurin sighed. "There was nothing I could do except watch. I knew humans must not discover me. I had to let him take you away, and pray the soul bond would help me find you again."

Jack dredged up a wisp of humor, though the horror of this revelation still had his heart pounding. He knew it was the truth, even without memory of the incident. "My dragon spent a night in a trash bin for me. No greater love than that."

Aneurin put down the remains of his sandwich and grimaced. "I spent a lot of nights in trash bins and ate so many rats I can't bear to look at one even now. It took me months to locate you. By then, Mother had found me, but not you. We had to depend on my thread-thin contact with you."

Jack frowned. "Why didn't Dr. Lledrith simply change to human and ask for the whereabouts of a missing boy of my description?"

Dr. Lledrith had regained some of her aplomb. "They wouldn't tell me. I had no proof you were mine, and you were already abused and in shock. I didn't even have an address anymore, much less a telephone."

He could see that. Jack shuddered. "No identification, no address, and a police record. To say the least, they wouldn't let you near me."

Aneurin's hand covered his. "Until your mind came back, I couldn't find you either. Mother took over my lessons, here in this cave. She brought your mother here several times, and together they constructed the protections that kept us safe. They didn't dare do it often, because Cadell watched them." He drew a long, sighing breath. "You awoke from your shock trance a few months later, and we rejoiced. You were right there at the orphanage, with a new name and new life. Cadell couldn't find you except through our mothers."

Dr. Lledrith picked up the tale, though there was a catch in her breath. "We had to leave you there. Cadell had shared sex with your mother, and through her could home in on me. Only Aneurin could guard you and keep you safe. We had to abandon you both to grow up in the human world together." She rubbed her forehead with shaking hands. "Meanwhile, I set about trying to establish a human identity. It took me a long time."

He could figure out the rest. He knew the human world, since he was one. "You chose the profession of therapist in hopes that I might need some counseling as a formerly abused orphan. But it took too long to get the degree and establish yourself, didn't it?"

"It wasn't tea and crumpets, but it was worth it in the end." Dr. Lledrith had a right to the pride in her voice. A dragoness who didn't speak English had managed to establish a full legal identity and get a degree in a difficult subject concerning a race other than her own.

The emotions he'd been expecting hit him like a tidal wave. Jack trembled and fought for some measure of control. The roaring in his ears wasn't the soft sounds of the surf, but the wind-shredded howl of a hurricane. He shut his eyes. Memories of a dark room, an industrial green emergency room, and the beige walls of the orphanage's dorm room skittered across his brain like a bad horror film. The disjointed images made little sense.

A warm hand closed over his, providing him with an anchor point. He seized the lifeline with gratitude, and the roaring ceased.

Aneurin's hazy eyes were full of concern and fear, so Jack dredged up a smile. "I'm all right. This is a great deal to absorb."

Aneurin shot one glance at his mother's stony face.

Dr. Lledrith waved her hand. "Get it over with, son. Jack can take one more bit of trauma before we take him home."

Jack's head shot up. Visions of going back to his penthouse alone to sort through this mess were too much to bear. And there was more? "Home? No, not yet."

He had yet to deal with the concept of having a mother. The very thought of meeting this Lucynda made him break out in a cold sweat, and yet made his heart yearn. He needed time to think, but not alone. At that very moment, all he wanted was to bury his face in Aneurin's chest and stop thinking for a few hours.

Her face remained cold. "Let's see how you feel when you hear the rest. Then we'll make some decisions."

Aneurin huffed out a breath. "How much of your eighteenth birthday do you remember, Jack?"

Ah. Here was the crux of the matter. Something had happened around that time. "I've been dreaming of coming to you here, holding my college acceptance letter. You were upset, but we made love I think. I challenged you into it, if the dream is accurate."

Dr. Lledrith stood and refilled all their wine glasses nearly to the brim, but remained silent. Her lips were firmly pinched together, as if she fought with herself to say more.

Jack took this as a sign that things were worse than his half-remembered dream indicated. He reached for his glass and drank half down. "Something happened, didn't it?"

Aneurin's face was beet red. He kept shooting pleading glances at both Jack and Dr. Lledrith. "Yes. We'd both forgotten by then that you'd been abused. When I entered you, the memory surfaced. You went mad, I would say, screaming about the darkness and pain. You begged me for your freedom." He shuddered and his eyes filled with tears. "It was heart wrenching to hear."

Jack held up his hand to forestall Dr. Lledrith drawing breath for a clinical analysis. "No need to say more. I can well guess. Add to that your guilt about making love with someone so young, even if technically you were the same age, and your guilt made you do something foolish?"

Aneurin bowed his head. "By then, I was older, Jack. While you were at school, I'd go back in time and age myself. I'd been doing it for years, because dragons age so slowly. By that day, I was fully in my prime, equal to the age you are now, I'd say. I should have known better than to touch a boy."

"But I wasn't a boy anymore, by human laws, Aneurin. I was eighteen."

Dr. Lledrith shrugged, her voice heavy with disapproval. "Not really. Your true birthday was a few weeks later. That's not the point. What Aneurin did about your trauma was much more a crime."

Jack looked down to where their hands remained locked. He made his voice soft and loving. No matter how stunning all this was, Aneurin was not guilty of any crime.

In fact, if anyone was guilty, it was Jack. He'd left his dragon because of a memory. Now Jack felt like a first class heel. "Was that the so-called ill-conceived spell?"

Nodding, Aneurin broke their contact and took a gulp of wine. "I broke our laws, Jack. Without your consent, I altered your mind and erased your memory of me, our times together, everything. For all intents, I ceased to exist for you."

Jack stood, clenching his wine glass until the stem shattered. Part of him was grateful for the absolution of guilt, and part of him didn't get it. The latter won, and spoke the question his heart screamed. "Why, Aneurin? Why? You were probably the one thing about my childhood that was pure love and innocent fun. Everything else was dutiful obedience in a drab world."

Aneurin stood, his golden eyes full of tears that fell unheeded down his sculpted cheeks. "I wasn't thinking. I just wanted your pain to end, and I believed I'd caused your distress. I thought it best if you didn't remember me at all."

Jack picked up his old shirt and wiped his hands. Thankfully, he'd not cut himself. "Your spell didn't work well. You gave me many nights of dreams."

Dr. Lledrith cut in. "More than that, Jack. He cut himself off from you. A soul-bonded dragon without their human half weakens and dies. If you hadn't dreamt of him, and fed him your life energy, he would have been a pile of bones by now. That's how we live, attached to a human."

Aneurin paced away from them both and stood facing the fireplace with his back to them. "I wanted to die, and wondered why I couldn't."

Dr. Lledrith slammed her wine glass on the table and shoved back her chair.

Jack quelled Dr. Lledrith with a look. He understood her anger, but this was for him to solve. He walked over to Aneurin and took the larger man in his arms. "Sorry, lover dragon, but you're not allowed. You and I have been like cuckoo's eggs."

Aneurin's body remained stiff as a board. "What's a cuckoo?"

"A bird that lays its egg in another bird's nest and the young are raised by a foster mother bird of another species." He stroked Aneurin's silky black hair, still

marveling at the length. "Our mothers couldn't raise us, so we survived on our own with only each other for company. Sorry, dragon. You're stuck with your human."

Aneurin relaxed in his arms. "You forgive me so easily for hurting you?"

Jack motioned behind his back, shooing Dr. Lledrith away. A small popping sound of displaced air told him she was gone. "You took care of me when I was unable. Now it's my turn. You're still blind as a bat."

A snort of warm air teased Jack's skin on his neck. "Bats see fine. I know, I had a few stay with me."

Jack snuck a glance over his shoulder. Yes, Dr. Lledrith was gone. "It's an expression. Just like cuckoo's egg. We need a new expression for us, though." He thought for a moment. "Dragon's eggs. Left to fend for ourselves, we took care of each other instead of being cared for by others. Once we get your eyes fixed, we have a mission to fulfill."

Aneurin lifted his head in alarm. "We can't fix my eyes, Jack. If I go unconscious, I'll revert to my reptilian form."

Jack still had hold of Aneurin's shoulders. He shook them slightly. "This time you'll have to trust human magic. There's something called laser surgery. You are awake during the whole thing. It's like --" He searched for a way to explain lasers. "-- like a light shining in your eye."

Aneurin's chin went up. "That doesn't sound so bad. Then what mission will we go on?"

Jack grinned. "I'm mage born, right? So, I need to learn magic. You promised to teach me to fly. Then, we're going to go find my -- Cadell."

"Why in the name of my foremothers would we do that?" Aneurin's horror at such a suggestion was clear.

"The dragon's eggs have hatched. Our mothers have put themselves in harm's way all these years, acting as bait to Cadell's revenge, to protect us. Time for a little payback."

Aneurin laughed. "That suits me very well indeed!" He sobered. "That means going to America, and dressing like you do. Will I have to wear the little string too?"

Jack chuckled. "Thong, Aneurin. Thong. No, you don't have to wear one of those. In fact, I fully intend to keep my dragon naked a great deal of the time." He paused and smiled. "There's more to this than just revenge, though, Aneurin. My memory is full of holes. I'm going to need your help to sort them out. When you're not teaching me magic and mayhem, that is."

Aneurin chuckled and nibbled on his neck. "I think we can combine a few of those activities."

"That sounds good to me." Jack laid his head on Aneurin's shoulder. Whoever, whatever, he was, they'd deal with it. The important thing was, he'd never be without his dragon again.

**The End... for now.**

**Who are we kidding? This ain't even CLOSE to over...**

## **Lena Austin**

Lena Austin is a “fallen” society wench with a checkered past. She’s been a licensed minister, hairdresser, Realtor, radio DJ, exotic dancer, telephone service tech, live-steel medievalist swordswoman, BDSM Mistress, and investment property manager. Not necessarily in that order. She never finished that degree in archaeology, but did learn to scuba. After a life like that, gardening is pretty restful. Of herself, Lena writes, “I’m tall, presently red-haired, and I look like an unholy mating between an Amazon and a librarian.”

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