

Dragon's Stone

Lena Austin

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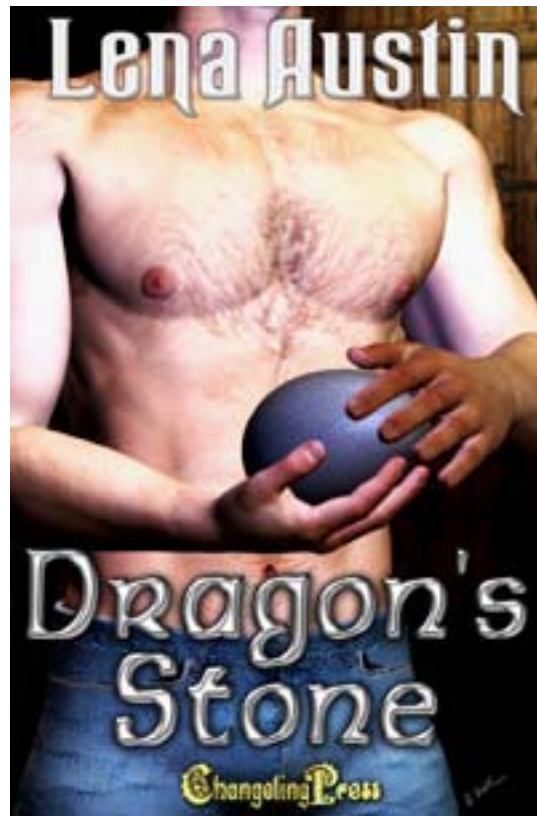
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Chapter One

It was a dark and stormy night...

Jack turned away from the window in disgust. Now he was thinking in clichés. Wasn't his life crazier than any novelist could dream up? Okay, so the thunderstorms had lasted four days already, cooping him in the apartment with his lover, Aneurin. Normally, this would not be a bad prospect. Normally being the operative word. Nothing in his life would ever be normal again. Not when his lover was a dragon and he was a wizard in the modern day Washington, DC area.

Aneurin's sleeping dragon form took up a large portion of Jack's generous penthouse living room. The large napping sofa Jack had previously owned hadn't lasted past the first time Aneurin took his pain pills. After the eye surgery to correct his cataracts two days ago, he'd needed them. Where one pain-wracked man had sat, a dragon lounged in rubble.

Jack shrugged, and a grin crept over his face. His heart lightened. Oh, well. What was the value of mere stuff when you had love? He crept over to lovingly rub his dragon's scaly muzzle.

Aneurin's contented sigh ruffled Jack's hair, and the gold-tipped tail ceased its restless movement.

Jack reached up and adjusted the blue silk bed sheet now serving as a draconic blindfold. They'd given up trying to keep Aneurin in human form when the pain pills made him so stoned he'd revert to his reptilian form as soon as he fell asleep.

Aneurin's voice crept softly into his head, still slurred with sleep and narcotic. "J-Jack? Is it Wednesday yet?"

His heart wrenching a little, Jack kissed the purple muzzle. "No, not quite. It's Tuesday evening. Tomorrow we take your bandages off, lover dragon. We'll have a

lovely time in the shower, washing away all that goo the doctor put on your eyes, and then you'll be able to see again. Tonight, you'll probably need just a mild analgesic instead of those little pills that make you sleep."

A draconic purr rumbled. "Good. I'm tired of sleeping all the time. I smell rain, though." The gigantic head sank slowly down to rest on his forepaws. "Guess we'll have to wait on your flying lessons again. Can't wait to go home and get a proper riding saddle for my aching back, anyway. You've got a bony ass."

Jack chuckled and hid his lurch of fear. He patted Aneurin's soft nose comfortingly. He didn't want to go to Honalee. Not yet. Ironically, all those years he'd thought himself an orphan, he'd dreamt of his parents. Now he practically quaked in terror at the thought of making the dimensional leap and meeting his mother at last. "Liar. My weight is insignificant, and my bony ass sits between two of your ridge scales. I'm the one with his balls divided by a hard plate of dragon hide, and I'm the one who about froze to death in that cold mountain air."

The trip to the Rockies and a secluded mountain cabin while they waited for Aneurin's turn on the operating table had not gone well. Without anything to protect his privates from hard dragon spinal ridges, the first leap in the air had been painful and the situation hadn't improved. He also hadn't been able to change form. His magic was still very shaky and weak. The results had been messy. He'd managed to get as far as a very misshapen semi-humanoid form with scales and wings, and it had taken them hours to get the wings off his back and make him appear human again.

Snuggling again into his pillows, Aneurin mumbled something about "low ambient magic levels" and began to snore.

Jack stepped gingerly over the pile of blankets that made up Aneurin's improvised bed and went back to his dining room table where his laptop hummed patiently. The spreadsheet detailing the sales of all his investment properties seemed like his execution orders. All his wealth now resided in safe bonds, T-notes, and CDs, locked in several banks under the watchful supervision of lawyers and accountants

who eyed each other with suspicion. The sales were complete. Only this penthouse remained as his one property. Everything was in order for him to leave for Honalee.

He slugged down the cold remains of his coffee and strode toward the kitchen to brew a fresh pot. He was going to miss coffee in Honalee, but without one bit of electricity, there would be no way he could take his beloved professional coffeemaker with all the gadgets a coffee snob could want.

Lucynda's latest letter, written in her perfect calligraphy, lay like a recrimination beside the stove. He'd memorized the words her dragon, Draig, had read to him. He estimated the note was written at about the level of third grade in the language of Honalee, but his mother's dragon had been very pleased. He'd almost forgiven Draig for her deception at pretending to be his therapist.

Guilt twisted knife-sharp in his guts at the memory of her loving attempt to understand why he hadn't just hopped on Aneurin's back and come to her immediately once he'd known of her existence. "I don't understand half of what Draig tells me, son, but if you need to do these things before you can come for a visit, I must agree. What are a few more months after nearly thirty years? I will wait. With much love, Lucynda."

Jack rubbed his aching forehead and put the letter back down. How could this woman he didn't remember love him so? After being an orphan all his life, having a mother seemed impossible. He wanted to know her. He did. Yet he was so terrified of the prospect.

A warm hand covered his.

He gasped and snatched his hand back. His body straightened.

Draig's sympathetic blue eyes gazed back at him. His mother's dragon stood in her human form, in her guise of the therapist Dr. Lledrith. "I teleported in to check on Aneurin. Still zoned on codeine, isn't he?"

Jack jerked his chin in what might be interpreted as a nod. Embarrassment at being caught in an emotional state by his former therapist and also Aneurin's mother made him blush. If he didn't look at her, maybe her sharp eyes wouldn't catch on to his torn emotions. He turned to get Draig her coffee. He put the largest bottle of honey he

could buy beside the mug and rummaged for a spoon. "Yeah, he's going to still be a bit stoned for the next couple of hours. He'll be on Tylenol tonight, though."

She poured an obscene amount of honey into a large mug and then added coffee and cream. "Good. We can talk about you in relative peace then. Come on, Jack. You need a sympathetic ear right now." Her heels clicked on his dining room floor before she planted herself in a chair at the table and shoved aside his laptop.

Damn. He knew he was in for a lecture now. Draig would show him no mercy, pitilessly analyzing his psyche and laying his neuroses all out like bones to dry in the sun. "Draig, I..."

She snorted, but her eyes twinkled warmly. "You need a friend, not your therapist. Since my son is presently unfit to provide a shoulder --" Her gaze flicked for a moment to Aneurin when he snored hard enough to blow over a potted palm. "-- I'll just have to do. Besides, I have a message for you."

Jack's hands shook slightly while he poured a fresh mug of aromatic brew. He breathed in the scent to lock it in his memory, knowing he deliberately delayed hearing another plea from Lucynda. Maybe if he called her that, if they didn't like each other, the disappointment wouldn't hurt so much. *Coward*. Jack tried for cocky and nonchalant. "Yeah? How's Mother doing?"

His mother's lover and dragon wrapped her hands around her honey laced with a little coffee. Dragons had such a sweet tooth for the sticky stuff. "Lucynda is fine. This message doesn't come from her. I'm sorry to say this comes from the royal council. You've been discovered, Jack. Somehow."

He cocked his head to one side and sat down on the opposite side of the table. Her words were ominous, but he didn't get the problem. "Hey, don't make it sound like I've committed a crime or something. So the royal council knows Lucynda the Red Sorceress has a son. Big deal."

"Actually, this is a big deal." She sipped her coffee. "Honalee doesn't have many male wizards." She drew a parchment scroll out of her purse. "Jack, son of the Red

Sorceress, you have been invited to be tested and trained at the Royal Academy for Wizards." She tossed the scroll across the table with an air of contempt.

Jack's brows drew together into a puzzled frown. The fancy red seal, laced with little gold flecks, sparkled even in the light of the chandelier. The ink smelled funny now that he'd quit smoking and had a nose again. Something about that parchment made him nervous enough to want a cigarette. On the other hand, perhaps it was the way Draig seemed to treat this like a punishment. "Why do I get the feeling you don't approve of this?"

"I don't." She bit the words off like they were a bit of meat she chomped. "I'd rather Lucynda trained you, since you're too old to foster to another wizard. Your bond with Aneurin is strong enough to not need further improvement. You proved that by communicating with each other over a vast ocean, even if you did it in dreams. Flying is nothing, once you have the proper equipment. The rest can be taught by any competent mage, male or female. Special academy for males. Pah!" A tiny puff of flame spit briefly out of her mouth, emphasizing her contempt.

Jack jerked back from the sulfurous stench of dragon breath, not out of any real fear. He'd never seen fire appear out of a dragon's human form before, and his internal cryptozoologist made a note of the phenomenon. He'd have burned his lips.

Jack was of two minds on this academy thing. First, at thirty-two, he felt a little old to go to school. He had visions of sitting in some sort of dungeon classroom surrounded by teenagers, waving a wand and learning to levitate feathers in pidgin Latin. Not his idea of a good time. Then again, he'd really enjoyed college and did well in a structured learning environment. "Aren't I a little old to be going to school?"

She snorted. "In my opinion, yes. Nevertheless, there it is. Consider the invitation a royal command." She drank the rest of her coffee in one gulp and stood. "Your mentor might show up to give you the details. Be nice to her. She comes from the king of humans. I suggest you stop procrastinating and get to Honalee. You'll want a few days to acclimate and shop for your supplies. You certainly can't do without a wand, and a dragon saddle would be wise before you unman yourself." She grinned.

"Lucynda is looking forward to shopping in the village. She's already ordered a seamstress to make robes for you."

Stunned, Jack blurted the first thing that popped into his head. "Robes? I am not wearing a fucking dress!"

Draig stared, then laughed. "It's not a dress. Oh, this is going to be so amusing. I can't wait to see what Honalee makes of you!" She popped out of sight.

Rubbing his aching head, Jack stomped back into the kitchen for more brew. "Oh, that makes me want to go, definitely. I don't care what you say. It's a dress. Bad enough I have to do without coffee, electricity, email, and money."

"So take instant coffee, twit, and wear jeans underneath your robes."

Aneurin's voice in his head startled Jack enough to make him miss the cup as he poured. He grabbed a handful of paper towels to mop up the mess. Blech. Instant? Well, the fake coffee would be better than doing without. "Good points, carrion breath. How are you feeling?"

Aneurin raised his purple head from his forelegs. "Better. My eyes feel glued shut, but they don't hurt much now. Sorry I didn't defend you a little while my mother was here. I didn't feel like being cooed over like a hatchling."

Jack had to tease his friend. He pranced over and purred in the most syrupy voice he could manage. "How's my darling Aneurin? Feeling better? Let me adjust your bandages. Want me to spoon feed you some honey, my sweet love?"

Aneurin's tail whipped out and knocked Jack on his ass into the blankets. "Don't make me ill."

Jack laughed so hard he couldn't have dodged anyway. "Aww, no honey?"

One claw raked his clothes, shredding them to rags. Third set that month, gone. The open jar of honey floated from the kitchen and tipped over on him, covering Jack from neck to knees in a thin stream. Aneurin's forked tongue followed the stream, rasping like a cat's. "Don't mind if I do. The smell of the open jar was driving me to distraction."

Jack gasped. Dragon tongue on his body turned him on, and Aneurin knew this. Jack's cock twitched to life. It had been days since they'd made love, and he was hornier than a three-peckered billy goat. "How'd you know where to pour?"

Aneurin snickered and changed to naked human, falling on Jack to lick with a more human tongue, even if it was still slightly forked. The blanket that had been his mask changed into a neat blue bandage around his eyes only. "I'm still reptilian. My tongue tastes the air, my nose smells the scents, and I get a picture of sorts. Not as good as my eyes, but these other senses do the job. Now shut up. I want a snack of honey and my human's flesh." He attacked Jack's cock like a hungry dog went after a tasty bone.

His human shut up. Aneurin's teeth were sharp enough to enforce the command. Not that Jack minded. If his lover felt up to a little horizontal tango, then he was willing to go along. Short of a shower, a dragon tongue bath sounded like an excellent notion. "I'm not going to complain. You suck cock like a pro."

The dragon didn't bother to lift his head from swallowing all Jack's meat, just asked telepathically, "A pro what?"

Momentarily distracted by Aneurin's finger sliding toward his anus, Jack moaned. He should have known he'd have to explain. "A person who sells sexual favors for money."

Aneurin stopped to consider this. "Oh. Well, I suppose one who does this for a career would be very good. I'm complimented." His finger tickled, then slid in gently.

Jack gritted his teeth against the heat flooding his groin. His head whirled, probably from the lack of blood to his brain. "If you keep that up, I'm not going to last long."

Aneurin paused, and lifted his head. "Well, that might be a problem. Tell me what you see in this room. I heard clinking and splashing."

Jack turned his head and gasped. Every loose object in the room that weighed less than five pounds floated in some weird waltz above their heads. His favorite coffee cup was doing a dance with a vase of silk flowers. Jack's prized laptop bobbed along

near the ceiling next to some books. Then everything all came crashing down on their heads.

Chapter Two

Aneurin instinctively covered Jack's body with his own as soon as he heard the first impact of smashing glass and the low grunt from Jack. Crashes of metal and shattering dishes made it seem like the whole apartment tumbled from the sky. He shifted to dragon form, resolved to rip off the bandages and carry Jack away despite the consequences if he felt one shake of the floor beneath him.

Protected by Aneurin's head, Jack ceased movement and waited for the rain of destruction to stop. He muttered under his breath, but Aneurin heard his mind easily. After a stream of inventive word combinations Aneurin had learned were curses, Jack settled into orderly thoughts. "I thought you said there was low ambient magic here. Shit, Aneurin, you should see this mess." One last impact and tinkle emphasized his words.

Aneurin kept to dragon form, where he felt strongest. Despite the anxiety in Jack's voice, Aneurin detected no real fear or pain. Jack was all right, so he could relax somewhat. "What happened?"

A high-pitched female voice answered in the tongue of Honalee. "It appears Jack can levitate objects without the assist of a wand."

Jack scrambled to cover his body with a blanket and rested against Aneurin's scaly chest. Points for Jack -- he managed relative calm. "No shit, Sherlock. Who are you? And doesn't anyone from Honalee know the meaning of knocking?"

Aneurin's other senses showed him a human female shape standing near the doorway. She did not move, or seem threatening in any way, but he snarled just in case. Jack was nearly naked and between his foreclaws. A dragon would be his defense. If she made one move to harm him, Aneurin would dine on human for lunch and worry about getting the taste out of his mouth later.

The sorceress, for she could be nothing less to have arrived here without a dragon, sniffed contemptuously in the snarling dragon's direction. "Oh, do stop that, dragon. I do not intend to harm your bonded." She glided forward, clearly a lady of the human court, for they insisted ladies took only tiny steps instead of striding forth confidently. He remembered his mother telling him stories of Lucynda's deportment lessons when they were young.

Aneurin took an instant dislike to her -- to be called "Dragon" as if he were unintelligent was highly insulting -- and couldn't stop the hiss in his throat. He was surprised to smell a hint of blood on her. How odd. The hiss died unuttered. Blood? Fresh blood? On a lady who probably entered the kitchens of her castle but three times a year?

Jack stood, moving from under Aneurin's muzzle until he stood erect. He laid his hand casually on the dragon's cheek and gave his lover dragon a pat. "My dragon has a name, ma'am. It's Aneurin. Since you already know mine, the courtesy of an introduction might be the next order of business." His Honalean was full of mispronunciations, but clear enough.

Judging by the heat flare Aneurin sensed around the woman's face, he assumed she blushed beet red at Jack's naked state. Jack had not bothered to bring the blanket with him. The bright color belied her tart response. "The first order of business for you is clothing, if you please."

Aneurin swallowed a snicker, since he could easily read Jack's annoyance at her intrusion. He'd shredded Jack's clothes, so he probably stood there wearing nothing but his shoes and a smile of pure mischief.

Jack snorted and turned toward his bedroom, kicking debris out of his way as he went. "Next time, knock and you won't catch someone *in flagrante delicto*." He sauntered into the room, and Aneurin heard his closet door open.

The sorceress seemed nonplussed for a moment. "What do those words mean?"

The amused dragon answered. "He meant, if you knock first, you wouldn't catch someone fucking."

Jack called from the bedroom. "Yeah, we're gay. So lose the seductive pink dress, willya? I could care less what your tits look like."

Her gulp was clearly audible. "Oh." She stood silently for a moment. "We appear to have gotten off on the wrong footing. We shall start over. My name is Lady Tilda, and I'm sorry to have caused offense. I'll knock next time, but I shan't change my dress. It's the king's favorite."

Aneurin started using his tail to sweep the mess into one pile as a distraction to keep from laughing. Jack's cocky attitude kept Lady Tilda off balance, and Aneurin wasn't about to disturb his little play. Jack sent him an image of what this female looked like to human eyes, and Aneurin was forced to mask his laughter with a fit of coughing. He buried his nose in his blanket nest in case he coughed up a bit of gas and set it alight. The pink dress she wore made the blue-eyed blonde resemble a confection Jack had purchased for him called a cupcake. He'd been ready to defend Jack from that?

Jack came back into the room, and even through the blankets, his draconic nose could smell the leather. Two could play the game of keeping the other off balance by wearing seductive clothing. He was unaffected by her costume, but she liked males, that much was obvious. No doubt Jack wore the full outfit he knew Aneurin loved -- black leather pants, black silk shirt, and a long, black leather vest that swept around his booted ankles. Jack knew what that outfit did to Aneurin's cock, which hardened even at the thought.

From Lady Tilda's intake of breath, and the heat that suffused her whole body, Aneurin hazarded Jack's ploy had worked. She cleared her throat noisily and turned her head. "Excuse me. I'm unused to the way men dress here."

Aneurin kept his nose in the blankets. He could hear Jack's wicked response of, "Good. Two can play your sexual game," in his mind. Aneurin warned Jack to back off or he'd set the blankets on fire choking back laughter.

His voice was mild and courteous. "I'm sorry to cause offense." He paused and let his echo of her words sink in. "I assume you are the mentor I was told would be forthcoming? May I offer you a chair and a beverage, if I can find an unbroken glass?"

Her naturally high-pitched voice lowered from a squeak to something less painful. "Yes to all questions. Wine, if you have it."

"Let's see what I can salvage." His boots rang on the hardwood, and then on the tile in the kitchen. "It appears nothing was damaged in the cabinets. Ah, and I have some chilled champagne in the fridge."

She sat in a chair at the table, choosing the one to the right of the traditional head of the table. Aneurin found that interesting. She was used to authority positions, despite her ornamental appearance. "That would be excellent. I've never had chilled wine before. Let's start with what I intended to say, despite our inauspicious beginning. I see you do belong in the Royal Academy. You must get your magic under control, Lord Jack. You cannot permit such activity every time you have sex with your dragon. I can see why the Red Sorceress is sponsoring you."

"Spons... Really? Interesting." Jack brought back the glasses and handed one to Lady Tilda. "Why do you call me Lord?"

Her tinkling giggle might appeal to the king, but it made Aneurin nauseated. "Oh, the bubbles tickle. Why, you're Lucynda's sister's son, aren't you? That makes you son of the Duchess of Harrington, and a Lord. I'm sorry your mother felt it necessary to hide you in this non-magical world to protect you from her enemies. Rather drastic if you ask me, but no one did. Lucynda did tell me you were ignorant of Honalee, having lived here all your life."

She waved away Jack's answer. "No, don't worry your head about it. We'll soon have you all prepared to be a fine wizard, and that's much better than being a noble consort, isn't it? I'll expect you at the Academy testing in a fortnight. Do try to acquire proper clothing by then. Tah!" She popped out of sight before Jack could draw breath.

Aneurin groaned and burrowed deeper in the blankets. Now he was in trouble. He'd forgotten that one aspect of human culture in Honalee. Jack wasn't going to like this one bit. He counted three heartbeats until Jack exploded.

"Patronizing bitch! What the fuck was all that about? Why am I suddenly the son of some duchess instead of Lucynda?" Jack paced around the room, so full of anger

Aneurin could see magic vibrating objects around him, even without his eyes. Then he stopped dead in his tracks. "Oh, I get it. They can't let word get out that Lucynda's son has returned so my fath... Cadell can't find me. At least not until I get this weird-ass telekinesis of mine under control. I probably light up magically like a neon sign. Fine. I can see the necessity." He blew out a breath. "A fortnight? What is that in terms I can understand?"

His lover breathed a little easier. Aneurin did not want to explain why Lady Tilda spoke to Jack like he was a lesser being. Jack would find out soon enough, and Aneurin preferred his wrath focused on someone else when he did. "A fortnight is fourteen days, Jack."

His poor human wizard started like he'd been zapped by a mage bolt. "Oh, shit and shinola. I'd better go pack. Looks like we're leaving for Honalee in the morning. I'll be damned if I am rude enough to say, 'Hi Mom. Nice to meet you. I'm leaving for this dimwitted school tomorrow. Nice knowing you!' Even if we hate each other, I can always come back here to wait, right?"

* * *

Jack pulled the ropes tight, hopefully securing his luggage to Aneurin's back. They'd improvised a pad of sorts to protect his family jewels between Aneurin's spine ridges. He jumped down from the coffee table he'd used as an improvised ladder. "If my Samsonite can survive baggage handlers at the airports, I think it can weather a dimensional flight. How's that feel, pal?"

Aneurin tore his eyes away from the windows. Since the bandage had come off, he relished every view he could get, and Jack didn't begrudge keeping the large window curtains open for a panoramic display to please his friend's newly regained sight. A draconic shake rattled every one of the bags strapped to his body. "They seem secure. Hurry, Jack. It's late afternoon in Honalee. We're expected for dinner, and you'll want time to unpack."

Jack shrugged on his leather overcoat and pulled on gloves. He took one last look at the sprawl of Washington, DC sparkling like some giant's spilled treasure in the pre-

dawn darkness. Traffic would soon clog the beltway, and the noise of the ever-present mass of humanity would rise to deafening levels. Yet, it was what he knew. Could he really live without his cell phone, PDA, computer, and coffee in exchange for learning about all the creatures of myth and legend? Hell, he could try. No one said he couldn't come back and patronize a Starbucks if he got desperate. Jack used the coffee table one last time to climb up, and wrapped one rope securely across his thighs as a seatbelt of sorts. Feeling a little like a Blues Brother, he put on a pair of wraparound sunglasses and snapped the elastic around his head. "Okay, Aneurin. Let's get this show on the road."

Damn dragon must have been afraid he'd change his mind, because he wasted no time. He unfurled his wings as much as he could. "Hang tight. This may be uncomfortable."

"Now he tells me!"

The darkness of his apartment was replaced for an instant with pure black nothingness. Jack's stomach lurched. Then his eyes were blinded by afternoon sunlight, even with his sunglasses. Hey, they were falling. Shit, they were plummeting.

Aneurin's wings snapped out fully and caught the wind. Jack's guts were left behind, and they soared effortlessly high above the green valley below. Beneath him, Jack felt Aneurin's bones stretch until they popped audibly. "Ahh! I needed that," the dragon sighed gustily. "There's a thermal ahead. We'll use it to circle around until we find the castle with a red roof, just as Draig told us."

Even Jack felt the difference in the temperature when the dragon found the uplifting column of warm air, and they took a fast invisible elevator skyward. Jack whooped, beginning to enjoy himself. So what if he was getting windburn already? The view was spectacular, and the whole place shimmered with green. A village below looked so perfect he wanted a camera before he remembered there'd be no digital processing. He hung on to the ropes and tried to spot a castle with a red roof somewhere in the south of Honalee.

Aneurin roared, nearly deafening him. "There it is!"

Weren't wizards' castles supposed to be gray stone edifices lodged into the sides of craggy mountains? Instead, Lucynda's castle was a whitewashed or limestone home easily the size of a mansion, with a collection of smaller buildings nestled around it, like chicks around a mother hen. It looked a little like Neuschwanstein. No real fancy flower gardens, just small farm plots of maybe a half acre each, though the wide footpaths in between looked paved with cobblestones or something. Neat and orderly. He liked it. "Nice place!"

One of the larger buildings Jack thought was a barn more closely resembled an aircraft hangar. He laughed and pointed. "Hey, Aneurin! If that's not a dragon abode, I'll eat my boots!"

"Your boots are in no danger. There's Draig."

Sure enough, a lavender and silver dragon stepped out of the dragon hangar, unfurled her wings, and roared before leaping into the sky. She joined them in an aerial bout of soaring and aerobatics. "It's about time you got here! Welcome home!"

Jack clutched tightly to the ropes and hung on for his life while Aneurin and his mother apparently did what dragons do when they met in the air as friends -- fly their tails off. What the hell -- let them have their fun. He protested only when he felt the improvised saddle beneath him start to slip to one side. "Hey! Cut that out, you two! Remember there's a human held on only by ropes up here!"

Contritely, they both backwinged to land. No blanket could protect him from the jarring his nuts took from the impact. He groaned and bent over as soon as they were safely on the ground. Breathing hurt.

Aneurin snaked his head around. "Sorry about that. We'll get a saddle tomorrow, I promise. Get off and jump around until they settle. I'll kiss them in apology later." His nose whuffled at him and nudged.

Jack sat proudly up, determined to look semi-intelligent when he met his mother. Crossed eyes and moans of pain weren't going to help his image. He swung one leg over and slid down Aneurin's side until he hit the ground, barely containing his nausea.

He hoped he hadn't turned white. At least he managed to stay upright, despite the agonizing state of his balls.

Dignity, man, dignity. Jack discreetly did a few hops in place until his nuts decided it was safe to come out. He could live with the throbbing. He hoped. "I might let you, if the jewels aren't the size of grapefruits by nightfall. Yeah, let's get a saddle tomorrow, first thing."

Draig stepped around Aneurin's tail, furling her wings into place. "Nice suit, Jack. Not a bad compromise on what's closest to medieval garb without your feeling silly until you're used to it. By the way, speaking of leather, there's a leather worker in the village. DeAngelo should have a few saddles made, since he has royal patronage. He'll tool something lovely for you." Her eyes, still the same bright blue as they were in her human form, looked at something over his shoulder. "Oh, good. Here comes Lucynda."

Jack swallowed and fought down nerves. Worse, he desperately wanted a cigarette. One deep breath, and Jack did his best about face to meet the woman he'd thought for thirty years had abandoned him. Would he have the guts to say the words he'd rehearsed endlessly?

Chapter Three

Jack eyed the woman who hauled her skirts in a wad and made an undignified run down the steps. Brown hair, blue eyes. Younger looking than he'd expected, considering she had to be around fifty. Somewhere in there. Still, there was something comfortable about her. Maybe it was the laugh lines and the twinkle in her eyes. It didn't matter. He liked her, and that was enough for now.

She halted a few feet away from him and planted her fists on her hips. She studied him from the tips of his boots to the top of his head, craning her neck since the top of her head barely cleared his chest. "Well! The other world hasn't been overfeeding you, have they? We'll fix that. Welcome home, son. Draig tells me you're used to being called Jack."

"Yes, ma'am. Um. Hi, Mom. I'm home?" Jack's brain plagued him with images of a TV character shouting "Lucy! I'm home!" "Maybe over dinner you can tell me what my birth name was?"

The tiny sorceress' lips twitched, then she laughed. "Overwhelmed, aren't you? I do apologize. Let's get Aneurin settled, and then we'll let you unpack. Unless you'd prefer he slept with you?"

Jack blinked for a moment. His gaze flickered to the big wood and stone hangar structure. He guessed it was normal for a dragon to sleep in the hangar, or whatever it was called. Who knew? Aneurin might want to spend time with his own mother. Jack swallowed a childish need to cling to the one constant in all this and turned to Aneurin. "It's up to you, lover. What's your pleasure?"

Aneurin shifted to his human form and paced forward to caress Jack's jaw. "As if I'd leave you alone here. I promised, didn't I?" He brushed a quick kiss on Jack's lips.

Clearing his throat, Jack felt heat rush into his face like some fucking girl caught necking. Was getting a public kiss from your lover acceptable in Honalee? He stole a guilty glance at Lucynda and then breathed a sigh of relief. "Thanks, pal."

Draig had also changed form, and now cuddled her human in her arms. "See? Nothing to worry about, now, is there?"

Lucynda peeked at Jack, her eyes bright with unshed tears. She smiled tremulously at him, and her face was redder than his.

Jack's eyes widened. It took no brains to figure out Draig had told Lucynda of his anger and bitterness at his orphaned state, and now Lucynda had reason to fear he'd hate her. He cleared his throat. "I seem to remember some injudicious statements made about my parents before I found out I wasn't really an abandoned orphan." He paused and searched for words. "Nice to know I'm not, and I was wrong."

Hope shimmered in her eyes. "M... Jack... I..." She faltered and couldn't seem to go on.

He threw back his shoulders and steeled himself. This next step took more courage than he ever thought he had. He opened his arms. "Can I have a hug?"

Now her tears fell, but they were overshadowed by a glittering smile. Step by hesitant step, she left Draig's arms until she leapt the last two feet into his arms, sobbing. "Thank you! Thank you!"

Had he been overwhelmed before? The feelings in his chest threatened to choke him now. He coughed and held tight. *Say something, dummy. Anything.* "You know, I kind of figured you'd be a lot bigger."

She sniffled. "Is that so? Well, I remember you being a lot smaller. Funny how the mind plays tricks upon you, isn't it?" She wriggled out of his arms and smoothed her gown. Then she waved over two menservants. "I'll let you compose yourself and we'll meet for a simple feast in the great hall. I'm sorry it's so little. Only seven courses."

Because you really didn't believe I'd come, did you? Well, he didn't blame her for her doubts. Hadn't he been filled with uncertainty? "Sure, seven courses are fine." He'd have been happy with a pizza, but she didn't need to know that.

Jack followed his mother up the lawn and into his new home, with Aneurin's hand clasped in his.

* * *

Aneurin reluctantly allowed Jack to drag him from shop to shop in the wizard's village. The merchandise required by the school barely interested Jack, and he usually purchased whatever the shopkeeper said was good with no bargaining. Aneurin shook his head and tried another admonishment. "Jack, you really ought to shop more carefully. Don't you care about your wand, scales, cauldron and herbs? You could have been sold sticks, grass and leaves for all you know."

Jack stepped happily down off the modest stoop of the herb shop, his interested gaze darting around at all the shoppers clogging the dirt lane. He pulled Aneurin over to the side so a dwarf, so laden with packages you couldn't see his beard, could enter the shop. Jack courteously opened the door for the burdened fellow, and then closed the door after the astonished dwarf entered. "That's the point, old pal. I haven't a clue what I'm doing, and no way to know differently. Oh, wow! Look, Aneurin. Is that an Elf? Wow, they really are graceful, aren't they? Hey, is that a troll?"

Aneurin grabbed the back of Jack's leather trench coat before Jack could go charging over to talk to another "mythical being." Poor Lucynda had conceded the trench was the closest thing to the robes denoting a wizard Jack possessed and had reluctantly allowed him to wear it for the shopping excursion. "Jack, stop. You've accosted a werewolf already. Let's go buy my saddle before you indulge in any more conversations. I'm getting thirsty."

Jack laughed and shrugged, completely unrepentant. "Sorry, Aneurin. I don't mean to embarrass you. All right, where do we buy dragon saddles?"

Sighing, Aneurin shifted the basket containing their purchases and pointed to a sign that read *Fyne Leather and Saddlery*. "There, the big barn-like structure with the red shutters. Just try to keep in mind you're the son of a duchess. A little dignity, please?"

With a grimace, Jack nodded his agreement. "Bad enough my birth name was Mikalus. You're beginning to sound like Mother. That long tedious explanation over

dinner about her sister's status was enough to put me off that excellent food, even if I did freak to see a whole pig presented on the table. That was a little meal? I don't want to know what a feast is like, then." He opened the door to the shop and pushed Aneurin in first. "I'll be a good little student wizard, I promise."

That whispered comment didn't reassure Aneurin much. Jack had no concept of rank or class distinctions. To him, the whole world was his equal, even other races. To Aneurin, this was a point in Jack's favor, but the rigid social structure of Honalee would likely be less tolerant.

His lover happily crossed the street and marched up to a man sitting on a stool outside the huge red doors of the barn, his feet propped up on a barrel. Grizzled gray hair straggled out from what Aneurin would have called the oddest hat he'd ever seen to form a ponytail down the wizard's back. Only wizards had long hair in Honalee. The old man curiously studied Jack from the tips of his sneakers to the top of his head.

Jack grinned and nodded. "Hey, nice Stetson! Are you the owner of this place? I need a saddle, please."

The old wizard frowned at Jack's pronunciations of Honalean words. His thumb flicked his hat a trifle higher. "Nice set of Nikes. Why don't you try speaking English, Jack?"

Aneurin dropped the basket and his jaw simultaneously. The old wizard spoke perfect American English.

Breathing a gusty sigh of relief, Jack stuck out his hand. "Oh, man, someone who speaks my language! Wonderful. How'd you know my name? What's yours, by the way?"

Grinning, the wizard clasped Jack's hand and they moved their arms up and down in unison. "My name's DeAngelo, and I'll be your dragon riding instructor at the school. That's how I know about you. Come on in and meet my dragon, Watash. We'll have a beer." He kicked his feet off the barrel and stood, a short stocky man in a simple tunic and trews. Only his hat was oddly out of place in the world of Honalee.

Aneurin sheepishly picked up his basket and spent a moment gathering up the spilled contents from the hard packed soil. Relief flooded him. He knew Watash, and hoped he might have a few minutes with the old dragon for news of dragonkind his mother hadn't provided.

Jack moaned and licked his lips. "Beer? American or British? I'd kill for a beer, or better yet, coffee."

DeAngelo chuckled. "I was born in Michigan to a rebel wizard and his non-mage wife. Good cold American Michelob. Sorry, I polished off the last of my coffee this morning. I have to brew it in a camp stove percolator, so I don't keep much around. Watash and I will go back to Seattle and pick up a pound or two before school starts. Want me to grab you some, too?" He shoved open the barn door wide enough to admit them. "I'll pick up another percolator while I'm at it. You'll be able to brew a pot for yourself at the fire in your room at school. Better than that watered down piss they call tea here for a wake up in the morning."

Jack dug into his pouch. "You just became a very dear friend, DeAngelo. How much will I owe you for keeping me supplied with the elixir of life?" He caught the beer tossed his way and both humans plopped themselves in front of a circular raised fire pit for a chat.

Aneurin followed them inside. He spied Watash immediately. The huge silver and dark blue dragon was awake and reading a large tome in his nest stall. Aneurin put the basket by the door and quietly wandered over to Watash.

The old dragon winked and put down his book. "Good day to you, Aneurin! I've not seen you since you were fledged. How have you been? Flying well?"

"Not as much flying as I'd like, Watash." Aneurin kept to his human form and sat in a comfortable chair wedged in the stall area. There wasn't enough room for two dragons, unless Aneurin used the empty stall next to Watash. Besides, it was easier to have a private conversation this way. "So, what's the latest gossip from the mountains?"

The silver tip of Watash's tail lashed the ground for a moment, betraying his agitation. "Not good, I'm afraid. Being bonded has its disadvantages, and this is one of those times. We're not well trusted by the independent dragons. Even so, word filters down eventually." The dragon raised his head and stole a glance at the two laughing humans. "Don't tell our dear friends. This is none of their business yet. The Dragon's Stone is missing."

Aneurin bit his lower lip. He hated to admit his ignorance, so he pretended to be concerned. He'd ask Draig later what was the significance of the Stone. "That is bad news indeed. What's being done?"

Watash lowered his head and closed his eyes for a moment. "Nothing at present. A delegation of humans from the royal capital visited our queen at the time. Diplomatic relations are deteriorating rapidly between the non-humans and humans. The whole situation is like tinder in a dry forest. One small spark could set the whole thing ablaze, harming even the innocent. None of us wants that, no matter how much we hate King Cadell. We're putting a lot of hope into your..."

A crash of shattering glass cracked the air. "*King Cadell?*"

Aneurin started at the pure horror in Jack's voice. He jumped to his feet, guilt squirming in his stomach.

Jack stood at the entrance to the stall, his face white. In his hands were two beer bottles, one unopened and clearly for Aneurin. The remains of a third lay scattered at his feet, with beer soaking his white sneakers.

DeAngelo lit a cigarette, his eyes avoiding Jack's. "Yep. The bas... well, I don't think much of him, I'll say that, even though I work for him every winter, teaching."

Aneurin glanced at Watash, who gave him a warning glare. He got the message. Say nothing. Aneurin took the beer from Jack's hand. Under no circumstances should Jack be allowed to blurt out that Cadell was his father. "Thanks for the beer, Jack. Sorry you dropped one. Would you like a beer, Watash? I'll fetch another if you like."

The blue dragon picked up his tome. "No thank you, Aneurin. If you'll forgive me, I'd like to return to my reading, and DeAngelo needs to measure you for a saddle, I believe."

Dismissed, Aneurin took hold of Jack's arm and pulled his stunned friend back out to where DeAngelo waited, dragging on his smoke. Aneurin muttered under his breath, "Get hold of yourself, Jack. We'll talk later, privately."

Jack swallowed, and the shocked look left his eyes. "Your friend is right, Aneurin. It's getting late. Let's get this order for a saddle done." He took a long pull from the bottle. "I've still many questions to ask *Aunt* Lucynda tonight."

Aneurin winced. How Jack managed to keep it all straight that he must pretend Lucynda the Red Sorceress was supposed to be his aunt, not his mother, awed Aneurin. Even upset and angry, Jack maintained the lie. Dragons were too honest for fabrications, especially when it came to the complicated tales humans wove with ease.

DeAngelo stood and picked up a long cord. "You won't have much time, lad. You'll want to pack. We're leaving in a few days for the school. If you like, you can follow Watash and I so you don't get lost in the Troll Mountains. No fun, that. Colder than a witch's tit in an iron bra up there. The school has hot springs to keep it warm for our dragons, but outside of that limited area, Aneurin would die unless you know the way." He gestured to Aneurin. "Change form, would you?"

Aneurin meekly returned to dragon form and allowed DeAngelo to clamber up on one of his forelegs. He could feel the anger simmering just below Jack's cheerful mask. Jack was in for a shock when he realized the whole situation in Honalee, and Aneurin fervently wished he could be anywhere else that night when Jack found out the truth at dinner.

Chapter Four

Jack waited until they were all seated at the table in the hall and the menservants had dished out the first course. He barely glanced at it. "Mother, we need to talk."

The smile faded from Lucynda's face at his growling tone. Her blue eyes studied him for a full minute, at least. Then she sighed and put down her spoon next to her soup. "I was afraid of this. Go ahead. Ask your questions."

Out of the corner of his eye, Jack saw Aneurin share a telling and uncomfortable look with Draig. Too fucking bad if he made the dragons nervous tonight.

Jack ground his teeth and put a rein on his temper. The soup smelled savory, and his hungry stomach gurgled, but he'd be damned if he'd deal with this on a full stomach. He'd surely pay for it with a case of acid reflux if he took one bite given his level of frustration. "Why didn't you tell me Cadell was the king? Is that the reason for the lies about my being your sister's son?"

Lucynda looked down. "Yes, that's a large part of it. Forgive me. I'll have to use simple terms because you don't speak Honalean well. Draig and Aneurin will have to translate some of this." She turned and gabbled something to Draig he couldn't follow.

Draig cleared her throat. She dabbed her lips with the cloth napkin. "Keep in mind this is complicated and involves politics beyond your understanding, Jack."

Jack kept the irony out of his voice with difficulty. He could taste bile on the back of his tongue and wished for an antacid. "Yeah, I gathered that."

Aneurin ladled soup into his mouth with studied care and didn't meet his eyes. How much of this did the dragon already know? Why hadn't he said anything?

Jack's dear, conniving mother wrung and twisted her napkin in her hands until a rip developed along the edge. "My relationship with Cadell was only business. He'd provide me with a child in exchange for certain magic items I had in my possession at

the time. He was just another wizard then. Once you were conceived, our business deal terminated. I sent his payment." She shrugged. "I had what I wanted. He had what he wanted."

Draig waded in. "Shortly after your conception, the queen requested the same service from Cadell. He was handsome, of a noble line, and respectful of her crown. Or so we thought. Lady help us, we all thought well of him then. To our shame, we even suggested him when the queen asked what male Lucynda had used."

A servant came in with the second course. Silence reigned while he served what smelled like a fish casserole.

Jack's stomach lurched uncomfortably. The stench of fish was never his favorite scent, but that odor was particularly foul. "What is this dish, if you please?"

Lucynda sniffed with apparent relish. "Ah, eel. My favorite." She permitted the servant to give her a large portion.

Draig grinned at Aneurin. "We keep them in the pond. Makes for a fun hunt when we want something fresh."

Visions of swimming with snake-like fish things didn't thrill him. Jack shuddered. He leaned over to Aneurin and muttered under his breath, "Remind me never to go swimming in the pond, will you?" Jack waved away the servant when he offered him some of the eel casserole.

Lucynda waited until the room was clear of servants before continuing. "Cadell played his game well. He used the months spent negotiating his contract with the queen very well. By the time the ink was dry, the entire court was enthralled with him and gave him all he asked in the contract." She took a bite of her casserole and chewed thoughtfully.

Draig cleared her mouth and picked up where Lucynda left off. "Most telling was the clause where he was permitted to stay at court to help raise his offspring." She coughed uncomfortably. "Male wizards are so rare, they are not socially obligated to remain and rear the offspring. They are expected to service as many sorceresses as ask for them, if possible."

Jack grimaced, recognizing the implied warning. He felt like he'd been dipped in ice-cold water. While Jack wasn't one of his more fanatical gay brethren who insulted females and considered them repugnant, he didn't consider himself a good candidate for putting out to stud, either. He fumbled for a diplomatic answer. "Not my idea of a good time, thanks."

Lucynda shrugged and gave him an understanding smile. "We're simply warning you. You're even more handsome than Cadell was in his youth, well built, and likely to be powerful once trained. Every sorceress within a hundred leagues will offer you the moon and stars for the opportunity of a night in your arms." She opened her eyes wide until she resembled a calf, and mimed romantic infatuation with razor accuracy.

Aneurin snickered.

His lips twitched, and Jack swallowed a chuckle until he choked. The humor of the situation finally struck him. "They're doomed to disappointment. The latest stud on the farm likes other studs." He reached out and grasped Aneurin's free hand. "Particularly one."

Draig snorted and shook her fork at him. "You say that now, but the first time Aneurin gets a whiff of a dragoness in musk... well, we'll see how strong your resolve is then, won't we? You'll be involved, like it or not, and you'd better have a willing body handy to --" She flushed.

Aneurin's fork clattered to his plate. His mouth fell open in shock. "I will? And Jack will feel it, too?"

Lucynda laughed at his white face. "You're bonded, aren't you? Dragons can't help themselves when it's time to mate. Even if Aneurin succeeds in fighting the urge to sky-fight for the right to mate, he'll still broadcast all the sexual urges, and he'll be locked in dragon form until it's over. Unless you have a willing partner, you'd better lock yourself in your rooms with all breakables elsewhere."

Jack grimaced, imagining himself groaning and spanking the monkey while every loose object whirled around the room in a mad dance. "Enough. I get the picture."

Draig winked at his discomfort. "Well, back to the subject of Cadell's treachery. You need to know why we're hiding you." She patted Lucynda's hand. "Let me explain in his language. It would be faster."

His mother nodded. "Perhaps so, but I think it would be best to cast a language spell on him before the night is out." She smiled at him. "We'll do it after dinner so you have time to recover before leaving."

Jack sighed and shoved the now cold soup aside. Oh, fun. He'd read enough books to assume he'd have a screaming headache. However, he recognized the need to have the full Honalean language impressed in his brain. School would be hard enough without a communication barrier. "Thank you, Mother."

Aneurin squeezed his hand and let go in silent support. Through their shared bond, Jack shared his disquiet with the revelations of the evening. Somehow, Jack knew the worst was yet to come.

Draig took a sip of the excellent wine served with dinner. "I'll make this quick and to the point. By the time the royal princess Miranda was born, Cadell had set himself up as the perfect royal consort and father. The court adored him, and the queen hung on his every word. The queen didn't have an easy pregnancy, and a worse birthing. She weakened and continued to bleed for days, dying less than a fortnight after Miranda's birth."

Jack frowned and didn't remind her of his world's royal families, who were so inbred that hemophilia was a common genetic flaw for generations. If Cadell was noble, there were probably quite a few gene crosses, more than enough to cause problems. Magic couldn't cure a genetic disease like that one. Even he could figure that out. He could almost see the next part coming, and Draig didn't disappoint him.

"That's when we learned of another term in the contract between the queen and Cadell. If the queen died before the child was old enough to take the throne, then he

would be Regent for the child." Her lip curled. "He took the throne with unseemly haste, even before the queen was buried. Then Princess Miranda and her wet nurse went to the north tower. He trotted her out on state occasions for a few years, and then one day announced she was sick and asked the whole nation to pray. For weeks, healers and holy women filed in and out of the palace, to no avail. Princess Miranda was buried beside her mother in her sixth year. The wet nurse was never heard from again."

Jack huffed out a small, exasperated breath. Typical politics, just like Washington. It was five times as hard to unseat an incumbent who'd been in power just long enough for people to get used to him. As long as the politician caused no overt harm, his constituents would sit on their hands. "Cadell was by then the only ruler in town, and so firmly entrenched you couldn't remove him with dynamite, right?"

Lucynda, who'd frowned and listened intently, nodded. "I don't know what dyna -- what was it? -- is, but he's the closest legal thing we have to a ruler. Other than the fact that he's male, of course."

Aneurin and Draig both winced.

Jack's brow creased. "Okay, there's more to that statement than what's on the surface, isn't there?" He waited while the servants brought in the next course, mulling things over. This time, it looked and smelled like beef. He could live with that. Then it dawned on him. All the servants were male. All the shopkeepers he'd visited were female. Queen. He turned to Draig and spoke in English. "This is a matriarchal society and males are second class citizens?"

Draig shifted in her chair, and her chin jerked downward once.

Jack shuddered and cut up his dinner while he pondered the ramifications. He was the son of a hated usurper to the throne. However, no one knew that. No one but the people in this room, that was. Jack thoughtfully shoved in a forkful of meat. Whatever it was, it was tasty. Sort of like beef. He switched back to Honalean. "Okay, I'm not happy with being a second class citizen, but I'll live." He wasn't obligated to stay in Honalee. He could go back to Washington any time. No need to hurt Lucynda. At least he wasn't in line for the throne or some stupid patriarchal lineage shit.

Lucynda smiled in relief, and the dragons relaxed. His mother waggled her fork in his direction. "In truth, you are a wizard, and so in a unique position. You are outside the normal --" She looked at Draig and added a few words Jack didn't know.

Draig hurriedly swallowed and finished for her in English. "She means social strata. Wizards and sorceresses have their own hierarchy. This is one of the reasons why we are so insistent on the school, Jack. Your ability to control magic is determined by levels of tests to demonstrate your power. Without the royal seals, you're considered just above a peasant hedge wizard, and that status is only gifted to you by virtue of your birth and what little was witnessed by Lady Tilda. Such poor control is just what keeps most men in low status. You'll have to prove you're better than that, or you will be treated as most men are in Honalee." Her glance flicked to one of the servants, who arranged more serving dishes on the sideboard.

Aneurin's mind voice filtered in, though he kept shoveling in food with single-minded intensity. "Males are assumed to be lacking in self-control, Jack. Some even consider us less intelligent, with notable examples. Reverse everything you're used to. Males are the home keepers, child tenders, and service staff. Females hold all positions of power, and it's enforced by the laws."

Jack put down his fork slowly as the full weight of this revelation settled in his stomach like cold lead. He was used to being the object of prejudice because he was gay. That he could deal with, even if he didn't like it. Sexual orientation was not obvious unless you made it deliberately so. He'd seen even the worst raging queen "straighten up" when necessary. There was no disguising gender. Jack swallowed. Hard. Images of being black prior to the race riots of the 1960's fast-forwarded through his head. His left hand, thankfully out of sight in his lap, curled into a fist.

Aneurin jerked back, probably from the backlash of his rage. Plates and loose objects on the table rattled, as his anger translated into a magical manifestation.

He took a deep breath. "Excuse me. I need to take a walk." Jack forced himself to keep his voice calm, even though he could hear the icy sarcasm he couldn't disguise. He stood and threw his napkin on the table. One thing was clear. He had a mission beyond

learning magic to protect his mother from a king bent on revenge, even above keeping him from breaking small objects whenever his emotions were out of hand. He had to prove his own worth. Now he wasn't just some abandoned orphan, determined to show the world he had a right to a place in it. Now he was part of an elite group of men who had the chance to prove equality of the sexes, or some shit like that. His head hurt.

Lucynda managed a regal nod, though she kept a wary eye on the rattling candlesticks. Aneurin and Draig both gave him sympathetic looks.

Jack stalked out of the room and slammed out the front door into the cool night air. His thoughts were so chaotic Jack didn't care where he went. He marched in a straight line toward a copse of trees just beyond the tilled areas of the gardens. No one was outside, and Jack made his way into the concealment without anyone noticing.

Without a clue how he would do it, somehow Jack had to prove men were equal. He stared up at the stars. He'd never given equality of the sexes much thought. Equality was a part of his life. "Where are you, Susan B. Anthony? Billie Jean King? Any advice?"

He found a large tree, leaned up against it, and slid down until his backside hit the grass. "Let's see. Mission one: get my magic under control. Check. Mission two: protect Lucynda from Cadell. How I'm going to do that, I haven't a clue. Okay, one day at a time on that one. Mission three: prove men are equal to an entire medieval matriarchal society." He threw his head back against the tree and saw more stars than there were in the night sky. "Boy, am I out of my depth."

Chapter Five

Jack clamped his mouth shut to keep his teeth from chattering and hung on with grim determination to the odd iron loop that served in place of a saddle horn. He was more than grateful for DeAngelo's advice to wear gloves and his wraparound sunglasses. At least the saddle was the epitome of comfort and design, even if it was essentially a stuffed square cushion strapped to Aneurin's body. A secure buckled harness kept him firmly in his seat. Festooned with large decorative iron rings on the sides and behind, the saddle pad also served to hold the sturdy leather bags containing his clothes and wizard stuff.

In front and slightly to his left, DeAngelo waved and pointed down at a mountain lake any artist would give his left nut to paint. His black saddle, tooled with the familiar wings of Harley Davidson, had a set of motorcycle handlebars Jack eyed with envy. He even had black leather saddlebags hanging off the damn thing. Crazy old coot was a laugh and a half to hang with, and loyal to a fault.

Jack patted with satisfaction the brown leather bag containing his new camp percolator and six large bags of Seattle's best coffee, as well as the special travel mug DeAngelo had presented him with when they'd stopped by to pick up the saddle. Jack could survive anything as long as he had a coffee supply, even going to fucking school.

"Hang on. We're going to land." Aneurin's mind voice was excited.

Aneurin and Watash made a sharp turn to the left. Jack could now see what DeAngelo pointed at. It wasn't the lake, but a collection of stone buildings. Some were large and three stories high, others were squat single buildings, and one familiar dragon hangar. Extensive gardens, manicured and perfect, surrounded one building that also boasted a huge courtyard. Down by the lakeside, a gathering of people and dragons looked like some sort of medieval fair was in progress. He saw jugglers and an airborne

stream of flame like a fire breather from a circus. The dragons lounged outside the mayhem in the sun or swam in the steaming lake. From the look of the way it bubbled, the lake was formed from hot springs.

"Quite a party going on down there." Jack still wasn't used to the telepathy thing, but even if the wind whipped away his voice, Aneurin heard him just fine.

"That's not a party. Watash tells me that's where the prospective students gather before something called the Trial of Wizard's Choice. DeAngelo says to land there and wait. Soon you'll be called to the main building and tested to see if you do have mage ability." Aneurin backwinged, landing with only a small jolt outside the main circle of tents.

Jack dismounted. Trampled flat by the passage of both dragon and human feet, the meadow they'd landed in was bare of grass, and the steamy breeze from the lake was warm enough for him to shed his coat. Now that he was on the ground, the actions of the other students became clear. Some breathed fire like circus acts, some juggled objects by waving a wand, and others made things appear in mists. The crowd had the appearance of teenagers showing off. Meeting other student wizards wasn't appealing, and Jack seriously considered joining one fellow he saw lounging under the trees with a book in front of his nose. The solitary one had the right idea.

Instead, Jack turned his attention back to what Aneurin had said. "I'll be called? What about you?"

His pal laughed and changed form, shedding all his burdens in a heap where his back had been. He disentangled himself from the straps. "I'll probably hang around with Watash for a bit. I'm in school, too, so to speak. He's promised to tell me what to expect from the riding lessons." He gestured toward the pile of their belongings. "He did tell me servants would be along to get all this later, once you've passed the Trial."

Jack grimaced and studied this weird half-medieval world. The trees, grass, and mountains could have been anywhere in Europe, maybe the Alps or something, except for the steam rising from the lake. The word trial to him meant courts, lawyers, and

criminal charges. He was spooked enough with the gender segregation thing. "Couldn't they call it a test? What kind of test?"

Aneurin shrugged and grinned. "Stop worrying. You win either way, don't you? If you don't pass their test, then Lucynda teaches you to control your magic. If you succeed, you'll learn here." He bent and kissed Jack gently.

"Trying to distract me with kisses, lover dragon?" Jack's lips tingled and twitched into a smile. He hated feeling this insecure, and itched for a bit of action. "I wish they'd get this over with."

Over Aneurin's shoulder, Jack saw a man approach the guy reading in the shade of a large oak. Whoever the intruder was, he didn't seem friendly. When the reader looked up, the newcomer snatched the book from his hands. Jack knew what a school bully was, and the reader seemed much smaller than his attacker.

Maybe he overreacted, but Jack hated bullies. The little short guy didn't stand a chance, and Jack wasn't going to just stand by and watch. He raced over just in time to hear the bully snarl, "You don't belong here, Remo. Why don't you go home?" The bully snatched at the little guy's cap.

Jack gave the short skinny Remo marks for pluck. He evaded the bully's hand and slapped at it. "It's none of your business why I'm here, Quenton. Leave me alone."

They both turned as Jack moved to stand by Remo, Aneurin right behind him. Geez, the shrimp even wore thick, gold-rimmed glasses. Whoever picked on short, skinny nerds in glasses deserved a punch in the mouth, so Jack glared at the muscular brunet named Quenton. "Yeah, why don't you go back to bragging with the other wannabes? Go breathe fire or something to show off instead of picking on guys shorter and weaker than you."

Quenton's lip curled. "You defend his wish to be here? Who are you to claim that right?" He tossed his greasy dark curls like some queen from Georgetown.

Remo gaped at Aneurin for a moment as if he could tell what Aneurin was. However, he was not afraid of standing on Jack's other side with his chin lifted. Nerd or

not, the guy had balls. He pushed his glasses further upon his nose and spoke regally. "That's an impertinent question. You're no better than any other here, Quenton."

Jack curled his hands into fists, ready to knock this Quenton flat if it came down to brass tacks. Arrogant bastards like him Jack understood, especially when they were dressed in leather and silk. He caught on to the fact that Quenton might be noble, or at least rich. "Just call me Jack, and I don't give a damn about rank, privileges or other manure like that."

Quenton's eyes widened, and then narrowed speculatively. "We shall see." He reached over and snatched off Remo's cap.

White hair spilled out from the cap, obscuring Remo's face but not his ears. His pointed ears. He brushed his waist length hair out of his eyes and stood glaring defiantly at both Quenton and Jack. "Is there a law against an Elf wishing to learn human magic, now?"

Jack grinned, happy to finally meet an Elf. In fact, the cryptozoologist in him burned to talk to an Elf, but there were more important things at the moment. Jack shrugged cheerfully. "I wouldn't know, and I don't care. As far as I'm concerned, you can study any damn thing that interests you. Knowledge is never wasted."

Quenton threw the cap to Remo. "You've a great deal to learn, Jack. We'll see if you pass the Trial before continuing this conversation." He turned and stalked off.

Remo maintained dignity and bent to stuff his hair inside his cap before shoving it on his head. "So do you," he whispered to the retreating stiff back.

Jack put his hands on his hips and watched Quenton angrily shove between two tents and lose himself in the crowd. "Nice guy. Hope he doesn't end up as a classmate."

Aneurin tugged on Jack's sleeve to get his attention. "Now that's over, I'll take my leave and wait for word of your success. See you tonight." He kissed Jack once more before starting the long walk to the dragon hangar.

Remo's eyes followed him for a few moments. "Your dragon, Sir Jack?"

"Just Jack, thanks. Yeah. We've been together since I was born, more or less. His name is Aneurin." Jack walked over and picked up Remo's book, unsurprised to find it was written in an alphabet he couldn't hope to read. "Is this Elven?"

The Elf accepted the book and closed it. "Yes, of course." Then he smiled shyly. "Honalean isn't your primary language either, is it? You use words I do not know."

Jack gave Remo his best goofy grin. "You caught me. Hey, I'd rather hear about your people, if you don't mind. I've got coffee if we can get a fire going. You can tell me anything you want me to know."

Remo's grin grew wider and friendlier. "I do not know what this coffee is, and I would tell you many things, but I think the time of the Trial is at hand." He pointed to a gray-haired fellow resplendent in deep blue robes. It took Jack a few moments to recognize DeAngelo, walking purposely toward them.

They waited until DeAngelo came up to them, his robes swishing in the grass under the tree. Jack grinned to see the old biker looking like a storybook wizard.

DeAngelo winked at Jack and bowed formally to both of them. "As per the protocols, all noblemen and non-humans are requested to take the Trial first. Will you both follow me? Servants will attend to your luggage."

Remo's snowy eyebrow shot up, and he bowed gracefully. "Indeed? Well, then. Please lead us, good wizard."

Jack caught on, and did his best to bow, though he was sure he didn't do it as well. He stepped in to walk companionably by Remo's side, determined not to lose a chance for a chat with an Elf. From the surprised glance Remo shot him, he assumed he'd violated some protocol again. Screw their protocols.

DeAngelo snickered at Remo's shocked look. "I've no objections to you two coming in together, but you'll each face your Trial alone. Is that clear?"

Remo blinked and shot Jack an unfathomable look. "Of course."

Jack shrugged. He couldn't understand why Remo was acting like he'd been accorded some honor, but Jack really didn't care if he was breaking some sort of pecking order rule. "Clear as a bell, DeAngelo. Lead on."

The Elf smiled gently as they were led up the path through manicured gardens, but kept his thoughts to himself until they reached the gray granite steps of the largest building. Remo tugged on Jack's sleeve. "You'll want your wand, Jack."

Startled, Jack pulled his wand from the arm sheath DeAngelo had strapped to Jack's left forearm. "Why?"

DeAngelo chuckled and opened the door. "You may not need it, but we'll want to check it for mage properties. Here, give them to me."

Remo pulled his wand from the sleeves of his robe. For the first time, Jack noticed Remo wore a loose overcoat of a robe in blue silk, covered with silver embroidery. The front was open, and beneath he wore matching blue and white pants and shirt. Even his boots were blue. He handed his white wood wand over with a short, polite bow.

Jack gave the old biker wizard his simple brown wand, feeling strangely shabby in his jeans and tee shirt with the words "Lost in Thought. Please send a search party" emblazoned on the front in English. It was his private joke for DeAngelo and Aneurin. The old wizard had laughed like a loon this morning, but hadn't made Jack change into robes.

DeAngelo led them through the front entrance and through a large set of double doors to the right. Four other nervously fidgeting men sat in chairs, all dressed in robes heavily decorated with gold and silver embroidery. One of them was Quenton, who studiously ignored the newcomers and contemplated his fingernails. His ploy might have worked if his hands hadn't been shaking.

Odd objects like folded cloth, a candelabrum, a rock, and things Jack couldn't name covered a long table. Three thrones sat on the dais behind the table. Lady Tilda graced one, her baby pink robes covering her enormous chest. DeAngelo took one, and an old man who looked so frail a strong wind might blow him away occupied the other throne.

Remo and Jack looked at each other and shrugged. They crossed the floor and took two chairs where they'd have a clear view of what happened.

Lady Tilda stood and stepped regally over to stand behind the tables. "Good morning, my lords. This is the Trial of Wizard's Choice to determine if you have the necessary skills to learn from us. We will call your names one by one. At that time, please come forth and choose an object." She consulted a paper before her. "Lord Cale Aurelian, you are first."

A blond guy who would have fit every fairy tale description of the perfect Prince Charming rose from his chair and stepped confidently forward. He paced up and down the table for a few minutes, and then reached out to grab a fancy jeweled sword. He presented it to Lady Tilda with all the grace of a born courtier.

Lady Tilda tsked, and said coldly, "You failed. My apologies to your family, Lord Cale, when you return to them." She pointed airily out the door, and watched Prince Charming leave with his head bowed. She laid the sword aside and consulted her scroll. "Lord Quenton Beakmire."

Quenton marched forward defiantly, but took his time studying the contents of the table. Briefly, Jack caught a glimpse of his eyes. They were glazed and not really focused on any one object. Finally, he moved with deliberate care and touched a pile of yellow folded cloth. He seemed to nod to himself, and then took it to Lady Tilda as if he carried a treasure.

Lady Tilda accepted the cloth and laid it aside. "Pass." She pointed to a set of doors behind the thrones. "Go through those doors. Servants will show you to your rooms. You may spend the next few hours unpacking." DeAngelo handed him his wand as he passed by the thrones. The doors closed softly behind him.

Jack folded his arms across his chest and frowned. Great. Dipshit made it. What had he done that Prince Charming hadn't? Jack watched as two more noble lords tried their luck. Both chose objects after a quick study of the tables, but only Quenton hadn't looked at the objects themselves, but unfocused his eyes. Maybe he'd looked for something unseen? The two nobles each failed. What the hell had Quenton done? The spirit of competition was on Jack, and he couldn't let the slimy bastard win. Then it hit him. Something he'd read. What the hell -- he'd give it a shot when his turn came.

The two nobles took Lady Tilda's snotty attitude with more humility than Jack would have. She contemptuously dismissed them both with a sniff and pointed to the same doors Prince Charming had gone through. Once again, she consulted her paper. "Lord Jack Harringdon."

Jack jerked as he realized she meant him. He rose stiffly to his feet and ignored the sweat popping out on his forehead. One chance to be in a royal school where he might get one step closer to the man who had fathered him. One chance to make a success of himself in the land of his birth, or end up a stud stallion on the run from who knew how many women who wanted a one-night stand. And dammit, one chance to prove he was better than Dipshit Quenton. Jack glanced up and saw DeAngelo give him one wink. It helped to know he had a friend watching.

Remo leaned over and spoke quietly. "Good luck to you, Jack."

Okay, two friends. Time to see if his plan worked. Jack walked up to the tables, and pretended to take his time studying them. What he did was count how many paces it took to walk from one end of the tables to the other. Twelve steps. He turned and stalked back to the first end. Then Jack shut his eyes and held his hand out over the table. If his theory was correct, he'd know when he needed to stop.

Five paces, and his hand tingled for just a moment. Maybe, but it could have been just his hand going to sleep from being held in the same position. Jack hesitated, and then moved on. He could always go back.

Seven paces, and his hand tingled again. Stronger this time, but still not enough to be certain. Jack stopped for a moment to assess the sensation. If he moved his hand away, the tingling stopped.

He heard murmuring in the background, but ignored the sound. He refused to be distracted.

Just to be sure, Jack paced two more steps. This time, his hand was zapped. He snatched his hand back to his chest and sucked in his breath. "Damn, that hurt." Resolutely, Jack stuck his hand back out, prepared this time for the jolt of electricity like

he'd stuck his finger in a light socket. Whatever it was, he was grabbing that item. His hand grasped a cool, round surface.

A humming sounded between his ears, and he felt for a moment like the whole world vibrated. He had the sensation of being dropped down a well, then falling into cupped hands. Hands that cradled him like a baby chick. He didn't much care for that analogy, but that was how he felt -- like something powerful held him in its grip. Unlike when Aneurin talked in his head and he heard words, this time he "heard" emotions. First, a curiosity, and then, satisfaction. The humming and vibration stopped. Jack staggered for a moment as the world seemed to shudder, then move on like a DVD on pause for a second.

What the hell just happened? Jack peeked. He'd chosen the fucking rock.

Chapter Six

Warily, Jack studied the simple oval of river rock. It lay quiescent in his hand despite the shock it had delivered moments before. Magic objects were weird, anyway. He walked the few steps to where Lady Tilda waited with her blue eyes as round as the stone. Now what had he done?

DeAngelo sat back with a satisfied smile splitting his lips and a mischievous gleam in his eyes. He gave Jack a short approving nod.

Lady Tilda all but snatched the rock out of his hands.

A baby's cry rattled Jack's ears. No one else gave any indication they'd heard the sound. Did the rock protest being separated from him? Oh, yeah, right. Like a rock needed a friend.

The lady finished her little rehearsed speech congratulating Jack and repeating the command to go through the double doors where servants awaited. However, her bright smile was full of malice and her blue eyes narrowed with what Jack interpreted as speculation. Her hands greedily clutched the rock like it was a fancy Faberge egg.

Jack spun around to wink at Remo, hoping the Elf got the message that he hoped he'd see Remo later.

Those incredible eyes of his twinkled congratulations, and Remo gave him a nod.

DeAngelo casually held out Jack's wand and the newly certified wizard took it like a trophy as Jack made his triumphant march past him. The doors opened automatically when Jack approached, and closed behind him with a soft thud.

The bare stone corridor was devoid of servants and decoration, just lamps flickering with odd little globes of light inside of them. To his left, the corridor stretched off into shadow, but Jack thought he saw a big grand staircase. To his right was a big window seat with a soft cushion, perfect for reading and storm watching on a winter

night. Glass windows seemed incongruous in the medieval atmosphere of Honalee, but Jack wasn't about to argue.

A soft voice whispered in Jack's ears. "Go up the stairs."

He jumped and turned a full one-eighty. His heart thumped wildly, and Jack wondered if he'd ever get over his case of nerves. A servant in gray stood subserviently at his elbow.

"My apologies. I didn't mean to startle you." The man's voice never rose above a whisper. "Permit me to show you to your room, please." The man glided silently to the stairs down the corridor.

"Uh, okay. Thanks." Belatedly, Jack caught up with him. "Do you have a name?"

The man bowed. "My name is Casper, my lord wizard."

Jack followed Casper up two flights and down a series of more bare corridors. Within two turns, Jack was lost. "I hope you'll be kind to a new guy and show me around."

Casper paused in front of one open door. "I care for your room, my lord. However, I have access to the entire castle and grounds. Please step inside."

With some trepidation, Jack stepped into his bedroom. He didn't know what to expect, but two giant four-poster beds with curtains wasn't it. The fireplace wasn't lit, but a pile of wood stacked inside indicated it could be. Three chairs placed comfortably around the fireplace each boasted one of the odd little lamps hanging from the ceiling above a carved oak end table. "Cozy. I like it."

"Thank you. Goodbye for now, my lord." Casper bowed as he backed out, and the door swung shut silently.

"Jack!" Aneurin leaned over the arm of a chair Jack had thought empty. He stood and gave his bonded a spine-cracking hug. "I knew you could do it. Watash brought me up here to wait. Your Trial didn't take long."

Relief washed over Jack, and he returned the hug with a grin. He was in. He, the guy from the mundane world, was a wizard in a school for magecraft. "Yeah, it was easier than I thought. Just pick out a magical object off a table."

Aneurin raised one black eyebrow, his golden eyes flashing in the lamplight. "What did you choose?"

Jack chuckled. "A fucking rock." He stowed his wand in its sheath and rubbed his right hand. "Zapped me a good one, too." He opened his mouth to tell his dearest friend about the stone, but something stopped him. He coughed. What was it he was supposed to say? Dammit, he was slipping a groove. It had been important, too.

His dragon rubbed his chin and smiled. "To feel the energy in a stone is a rare skill. I am proud I bonded with a wizard powerful enough to feel the magic in rocks." Aneurin bent and kissed Jack. "Very proud."

Stone? Something about a stone flittered in his head for a moment, and then was gone. Giddy with relief and triumph, Jack batted his eyelashes and flirted like a drag queen. "Really, handsome? Do I get a reward for being a good boy and passing my Trial?"

The draconic purr Jack loved rumbled from Aneurin's chest. A distant thunder rumbling in the distance, warning of a storm to come, mingled with the sound of his anticipation. "I'm sure I can think of a suitable gift." His hand slipped between them to slide around Jack's waist and pull him fully against Aneurin's body.

His beautiful Aneurin, with his long, elegant fingers and heated whiskey-gold eyes, could fire Jack's blood like no other. Caressing his tight, sculpted buttocks through his thin cotton pants was pure pleasure for every one of his fingertips. "You speak with a forked tongue, dragon. How about kissing me with it instead?"

The two tips of Aneurin's tongue flickered out to tease Jack. He swooped down and hovered just above Jack's lips. "I think I shall."

"Shut up and do it." The room darkened, and the stout glass of the window behind Aneurin rattled. Jack didn't care what they did, as long as they celebrated Jack's success with a hot, sweaty, sexual romp. "A little less talk and a lot more action, lover." Jack reached up and grasped Aneurin's long dark hair in his fist, forcing the dragon man's head down.

Their lips met, accompanied by a loud crash of thunder. The sound of rain pattering on the glass heralded a storm both inside their room and out on the grounds. Jack shuddered and pulled Aneurin closer until it would take a crowbar to separate them. Jack doubted anyone would have the gall to try.

Aneurin threw an annoyed glance at the storm for interrupting. Those powerful hands that could and had shredded Jack's clothes from his body on previous occasions now lifted Jack's tee shirt from his waistband and slid beneath to rub his lower back, the long claw-like nails lightly scratching his skin.

Jack's back arched, just as Aneurin intended, and they broke apart. Jack's gaze locked on Aneurin's, breaking only while his lover whisked the shirt over his head and flung it across the room to land on the bed closest to the door. Jack nodded approval. Not that he cared. He'd have laid Aneurin's ass on the cold stone floor if necessary.

Aneurin reached for Jack's jeans, nearly snapping the buckle in his haste to undo his belt. "I find myself growing anxious."

Jack squirmed away from his hands, smiling evilly. His jeans rode around his hips, barely held up by his purple boxers. So they had a certain cartoon dinosaur on them. Ever try to get dragons on silk underwear? It was as close as he could come. Speaking of coming, Jack had things to do. He yanked at the long string holding Aneurin's tunic closed, and the lacing parted to reveal his chest almost to his navel. "Yum, yum. Dragon flesh to nibble on." Jack attacked his breastbone to another drum roll of thunder, and shoved Aneurin's shirt down his arms to pin them to his side. He tossed the string between the beds, out of reach.

His dragon drew a long, slow breath. "You omnivores will eat anything, won't you?"

He was too busy unknotting the drawstring holding Aneurin's britches up and filling his mouth with dragon nipple to answer, so he just hummed to drive Aneurin crazy. Aneurin couldn't hum. Purr, yes, hum, no. Something to do with the attachment of his tongue to his throat. Jack had never figured it out.

With his pants dropped around his ankles, Aneurin was gloriously naked except for the shirt holding his arms back to better display a massive chest as muscular as a television wrestler's. With six-pack abs to kill for, his lover was a sex crime waiting for a spot marked X. Aneurin waited with love in his eyes and his engorged cock at full attention.

Jack's cock twitched, anticipating burying itself between those firm globes of ass. He told it silently to wait. They'd get to see how sturdy the bed was soon enough. "Acres and acres, and it's all mine," Jack murmured to himself.

"Yes, I am. Just as you're my bonded." Aneurin struggled for a moment, unable to disentangle himself from the cotton shirt. "Help me out of this thing, would you? I'm stuck."

Jack's groin tightened, knowing something so strong as a dragon was momentarily trapped. What would a little light bondage hurt? They had a four-poster bed with square columns made from a single tree each. Jack wondered if Aneurin would like being tied to those posts. Jack shook his head. "I kind of like seeing something as strong as you temporarily helpless. I want to fuck you like that."

Aneurin's eyes flew open wide and a fire lit behind them. Conflicted emotions played across his face. "You like having power over a dragon?"

Jack was startled by the fear in his eyes. Perhaps dragonkind had a thing against any sort of servitude. God knew, Aneurin had an independent streak a mile wide. Jack hurried to caress his chest reassuringly. "Easy, Aneurin. I know you could flex those chest muscles or change form, and be out of it in a heartbeat. It's just a game, that's all. I know in many ways I'm smaller and weaker than you, so pretending to turn the tables excites me. That's all."

Aneurin studied his face for a moment, and then relaxed. "Oh. Well, then. Since we're just pretending I'm helpless, I suppose that's all right."

Jack's hand slid over to tweak one of his nipples. Aneurin's eyelids half-lidded, and that huge purple cock Jack intended to swallow later bumped his thigh, they were

standing so close together. "As long as you're willing, we'll play this way. The second you're uncomfortable, say something and I'll help you out of that tangle. I promise."

Aneurin's tongue flickered out of his mouth. He knew what that thing did to Jack in either form his dragon lover was in. "Are you going to stand there with your jeans hanging off your butt and your purple underwear showing, or are you going to do something?"

Jack looked down at his pants riding his hips and threatening a slow slide down. "You could remove them for me, you know, if they bother you so much." Jack shook his finger at Aneurin's long nose. "No magic."

Aneurin was still for a moment. "How? With no magic and my hands unavailable to caress you?"

Jack arched one eyebrow and kept his face serious, enjoying this little role-play. Yeah, Aneurin could kick his ass with one buffet of his wings or a sweep of his tail if he wanted, but his dragon chose to be weakened temporarily. The thought made all the blood rush to Jack's groin, and his head swam for a moment. "Use your imagination, or better yet, use your tongue."

Those golden eyes glittered as he figured it out. Aneurin smiled wickedly and knelt, his face and that mobile tongue inches from Jack's full yearning cock. Aneurin leaned over to pull one side of Jack's jeans by the belt loop until the whole thing fell around his ankles.

A cool breeze assaulted Jack's silk boxers, and a peal of thunder announced a spatter of hard rain on the window. Castles were notoriously drafty structures, and Jack paid with a chill wind on his silk-covered ass. He shivered, partially from the cold and partially from anticipation. Jack playfully tugged on Aneurin's hair. "Evil dragon. Stop teasing. I'm freezing."

"And I'm not? I remind you I'm the naked reptilian." Swiftly Aneurin turned and spat a long gout of flame into the fireplace, igniting it with one breath. A taper candle on one of the tables slowly bent, melting in the heat. The chair next to it smoked, but didn't catch fire.

Jack yelped and leapt back. His heart thumped in his chest at having his jewels that close to something so incredibly hot. Jack liked danger, but the reminder that his most treasured possessions were about to be swallowed by something that had a furnace inside was both exhilarating and terrifying all at once.

Aneurin batted those long black lashes at Jack innocently, and gave him a toothy smile. "Just a reminder this is only a game."

Swallowing hard, Jack put his hand to his chest and took a deep breath. "Dragons are so unpredictable. Okay, I get the message." Jack stepped back into position, but braced one leg against the arm of the nearest chair. He knew how easily Aneurin could make his knees weak.

Moving with all the speed of his reptilian nature, Aneurin took Jack's aching cock into his mouth and sucked. Hard. His forked tongue slipped beneath to tickle and caress Jack's balls.

Jack moaned, threw his head back, and gave himself to Aneurin's not so tender mercies. "Let's move this little party to the bed, shall we?"

Chapter Seven

Cold air hit Jack's cock. Aneurin's warm mouth was gone, and the fire wasn't doing a damn thing to improve the stone-cold temperature of the room compared to the furnace inside his dragon. Love filled his heart for the one constant in his changed life. Aneurin was more than sex partner and transportation in this crazy circumstance. He was his friend, his sanity, and the other half of his soul. Jack reached down and helped him off the floor.

Aneurin's whiskey gold eyes looked at him with love and trust. He wobbled a bit, and his skin was icy cold. His draconic nature made him more susceptible to temperature, and apparently, the fire wasn't warming him, either. "Thank you."

Those two slurred words told Jack how close he was to torpor. Jack brushed Aneurin's long dark hair out of his face, feeling very guilty. Somehow, his knowledge of dragonkind had been increased. He knew much more than Aneurin had ever told him. "Come on, lover dragon. Let's get your body as warm as the furnace in your gut."

His dragon allowed Jack to lead him to the bed, and Aneurin tumbled bonelessly on the burgundy velvet bedspread. He gave Jack a sleepy smile. "You'll heat me up. You always do."

"Yeah, I will." With Aneurin's arms still tangled in his shirt behind him, he was Jack's fantasy come to life. Aneurin's wing muscles translated into a broad chest with firm pectorals the size of small dinner plates when he was in human form. The rest of him was long, lean, and languid like his lizard relations, though Jack doubted Aneurin would appreciate the comparison. His proud dragon lay displayed before him, a feast for the taking. Hunger to taste Aneurin overwhelmed him, and Jack bent to sample his dragon's mouth.

Aneurin willingly opened his lips and allowed Jack's tongue entry. Their tongues tangled, not like a battle to see who dominated, but more an exploration of taste and texture. Aneurin's eyes shut halfway, and he gave himself to Jack's will.

Nothing could have aroused Jack more. Fevered lust rocked him, and the human sucked in a breath to maintain control before taking his lover with primal need. Gently, gently, Jack told himself. He wanted to show Aneurin his love and gratitude for the dragon's trust and friendship. Jack owed him more than he could say for leaving Aneurin behind all those years, and wondered if he'd ever make it up to the dragon. Jack moved to lick and kiss those still-hollow cheeks from years of starving without him and vowed to take better care of his dragon. "Such a skinny dragon, you are," he teased. "You need to eat more."

Aneurin rewarded his joke with a chuckle. "I'll hunt with Watash and the other dragons while you're in class tomorrow. They tell me there's fine fat deer within the safe zone and fish in the lake to dive for."

Visions of graceful dragons diving from the air like cormorants flickered in front of Jack's eyes. Where had that vision come from? He could see it clear as day, like a scene from a movie. He sat on the edge of the bed and moved Aneurin's silky black hair aside with his left hand so he could nibble on Aneurin's ears and neck. "Dry off in the sun before we have flying lessons, will you? I don't fancy a wet ass."

Aneurin moaned and turned his head to allow Jack better access. "Saddle. You'll have a saddle." He writhed in his bonds. "Dammit, Jack, get up here and fuck me."

Jack chuckled and reached into his bags beside the bed. The dark brown one held his lube, condoms, and a special present he'd saved for just such an occasion as this. "Not yet, Aneurin, but I will. First, a little gift from me." His hand closed around the distinctive bullet-shaped bottle. He brandished it in front of his dragon's curious face.

Frowning, Aneurin read the label without comprehension. "What's a warming liquid?"

"A special substance with properties you're going to like, I hope." Grinning, Jack flipped the cap. The scent of blackberries filled the air, and he allowed one drop to fall on his fingertip. Lazily, he rubbed it on Aneurin's right nipple, nearest to him.

The nipple hardened immediately beneath his fingertip. Aneurin squirmed. "By my foremothers, that feels good."

Wickedly, Jack leaned forward until his lips hovered inches above the gooey delight. Oh, this was going to be a pleasant surprise. "Just wait and see what happens next." He blew a hot breath of air across the nipple.

Aneurin's back arched as he tried to lift himself off the bed with an inarticulate cry of pleasure. "Hot! It got hot!"

His hand still resting on the dragon's chest, Jack pushed him back down on the mattress. Aneurin's reaction was even better than Jack had dared hope for. "So you like my version of dragon breath? There's more."

Gasping for air, Aneurin was helpless to stop Jack. "More? Shards, I can't take much more."

"Yes, you can." Jack bent to lick a tasty mouthful of blackberry-flavored nipple before sucking it in. Where Aneurin couldn't see, Jack dribbled more of the tasty liquid into his right hand, and slid it toward Aneurin's rigid cock.

Moans escaped Aneurin's throat, and changed to draconic purrs when Jack's slippery hand encased his cock and stroked the fluid up and down the entire length. Quickly, Aneurin matched his movements to Jack's, timing his thrusts into Jack's hand to increase the pleasurable sensation of the slick liquid. "Ja -- ah -- ack!"

Aneurin's shirt snarled as it ripped in two, unable to contain a dragon in the throes of passion. Oh, well, bondage on a dragon was always going to be a fragile thing. Jack still had Aneurin at his mercy, sort of.

Jack released Aneurin's nipple and licked his way down the dragon man's flat, hairless belly. He reached his goal of Aneurin's thick, appropriately purplish cock. After all, his dragon body was purple. Aneurin's fingers tightened in Jack's hair, begging for his mouth.

Jack winced and withdrew teasingly. His mouth watered to taste a blackberry flavored dragon dick, but Jack would be damned if he'd end the game by giving his dragon any control. The word *control* echoed back to him in his mind. This wizard shit was getting to him.

"Dammit, Jack, stop tormenting me." However, Aneurin released his grip on Jack's hair.

Jack chuckled. His eager lips wrapped around the head of Aneurin's cock and his taste buds exploded with blackberry-sweet meat. Now Jack lay fully upon the bed between Aneurin's legs, and ground his dick into the velvety bedspread.

Aneurin yelped and thrust upward, shoving his cock deep down Jack's throat in a convulsive movement. Had Jack not been prepared, he might have gagged.

Jack's right hand, still sticky with the warming solution, crept down to play with Aneurin's tightening balls. Already the dragon's body prepared to pop off a load, and Jack wanted Aneurin to come first. Jack's other toys could wait for another day, another opportunity. Deliberately, his middle finger played with Aneurin's ass. He thought hard at his dragon, "I love you, Fireball Butt."

Bless those thick stone walls for absorbing the sound of a dragon's ecstatic shriek. Jack's ears rang, his throat filled, and he swallowed in a big hurry to keep from choking. Hungrily, Jack took it all in. His own need pulsed in time to his attempts to drill a hole in the mattress beneath him.

His dragon lover convulsed like an epileptic in full seizure before collapsing limply into the center of the bed. Aneurin's one long roar subsided into harsh, growling pants. When he could stand no more, Aneurin grabbed Jack's ears and tugged until Jack lifted his head.

Jack licked his lips and gulped down the last tasty drops. "How does a dragon hold his liquor?" Jack paused. "By the ears."

Aneurin stared for a full three heartbeats before his eyes flew open wide as he caught the joke. He could barely laugh around his gasps, but at least he let go of Jack's

ears before his claw-like nails gave his human new places for earrings Jack didn't want. "Shut up and fuck me, you damned wizard."

The "damned wizard" snickered and knelt on the bed to grab Aneurin's ankles, enjoying how the dragon's toes curled in anticipation. With one hand, Jack slathered his cock with some of the solution, foregoing the condom since Aneurin wasn't susceptible to disease like a human partner. Besides, Jack was too anxious to wait.

Still in the throes of passion, Aneurin lifted his legs and did his reptilian best to bend himself in half. He was a damn sight better at it than a human would be, since his spine was twice as flexible. "Hard, Jack. Give it to me hard."

Too pent up to wait any longer, Jack slammed into Aneurin's ass with as much force as he dared. Getting past the first barrier was easy enough, but he refused to cause his dragon internal damage by shoving all the way in without giving Aneurin time to adjust. Jack didn't give a rat's ass that Aneurin's insides were built to withstand an internal furnace.

Heated dragon tissue closed around Jack's cock. Warm oven mitts, straight from delivering a pizza to the counter, had about the same barely tolerable temperature. Aneurin threw his arms around his legs to hold them steady, his whiskey eyes hazed with lust.

Now Jack wished he could roar with pleasure, but all that came out was a long groan. Heat and pressure enveloped his over-stimulated cock in pure sensation. The scent of their play combined with the aroma of blackberries, as much a taste as a smell. A reverent "Bloody hell!" fell from his mouth without passing through his brain. Jack tightened his buttocks and slid home as soon as the barrier allowed.

Aneurin sucked in a breath, his head thrown back and his mouth open in a silent roar. He grasped his hands over Jack's and pulled his ankles in tighter, wordlessly begging for more.

Unable to maintain any sort of control, Jack pounded into Aneurin like a jackhammer. There was no stopping his thrusts, and Jack didn't want to in any case. Every inch of him screamed with need for release with his nerve endings burning,

maybe literally, inside the fiery insides of his love. Not lover. Love. No one else came close to fulfilling all Jack's needs, no one else had almost died for him. Jack poured all that love into every stroke, waiting for the final giving his heart demanded.

His wonderful dragon smiled ecstatically. Aneurin must have sensed this extra dollop of emotion on top of their physical play through their bond. Nothing else could explain why he suddenly roared and came again all over Jack's chest in great gouts of white cream.

Now Jack screamed. His poor human vocal cords were unable to match the draconic expression of pleasure and happiness, but they gave vent to the closest thing Jack could manage. Something he couldn't name reached out and seized him, but he could sense it meant no harm.

Aneurin's orgasm soared up their bond, a few seconds of disorientation, and an electric shock that sent Jack straight over the cliff edge and into flight. In that moment of shared pleasure, Jack could have sworn they were both dragons, mating on the wing high above the mountains where the air was so cold Jack could see his breath as they roared and fucked mindlessly in shared passion. In the sane back of Jack's mind, something celebrated and he knew his dragon body was real.

Neither of them cared they could not even soar, but rather plummeted toward the earth. The rush of adrenaline coursed through Jack's body, heightening every sensation. They careened to certain death, uncaring and unwilling to stop.

At the last possible moment, Aneurin's wings snapped open and his forearms wrapped around Jack to glide them gently to the lakeside opposite where the humans still partied wildly. Their bonfires winked and lit the lake water with beautiful colors of flame, and the sweet aroma of smoke scented the air.

They chuckled indulgently as if watching children's antics, and rested their entwined bodies atop a delightfully cushioned meadow of bushes that creaked and snapped like firecrackers as they settled.

Somehow, Jack knew their bodies could not part yet, and he was content to remain locked in Aneurin's embrace. Jack sighed, and purred, surprising himself. "Aneurin?"

A sleepy golden eye opened and looked down his purple snout at Jack. "Hmm?"

"What color am I?" Out of his subconscious popped that weird question instead of asking Aneurin if dragon love was like this all the time. Somehow, Jack knew the answer to both.

Aneurin's tongue flickered out to caress Jack's muzzle. "Black, Jack. Black as the night. Go to sleep. You have class tomorrow." His huge purple wing settled over his bonded like a blanket.

Jack snuggled and twined his long neck around Aneurin. His last conscious thought was stupid, but Jack couldn't help wondering, didn't black dragons breathe sulfuric acid? "That might explain my acid reflux."

Another voice laughed with Aneurin's chuckles at the joke. An image formed in Jack's mind. The stone. That damned stone he'd touched. What the hell was it? For a brief moment, an image of the rock, just as he'd held it in his hands at the Trial, appeared. Then the stone morphed into a tiny golden dragon. Seconds later the images were gone, and with it, the memory of the stone's special nature. *Later*, it promised. *Later*. Sleep stole over Jack before he could ask any more questions.

Chapter Eight

Aneurin opened one sleepy eye when the first birdsong of the morning began from a lark on their windowsill. The first rays of a pink dawn speared up on the horizon, but hadn't completely chased away the darkness yet. He let the bird finish its song and flutter away, considering it a victory tune in celebration of not only Jack's acceptance into the Royal Academy, but also Jack's unprecedented transformation into a dragon. His bonded was truly remarkable, and completely unaware of how gifted he was.

Jack snuffled and rolled over on his back, losing a large portion of the blanket in the process. He lay with his cock pointing at the canopy above them, displayed in all his glory with his right hand under his head in an unconsciously erotic pose.

The dragon in man form eased away from his lover wizard and quietly rose from the bed. A washstand nearby probably contained water, since a small stack of folded towels sat next to it. The idea of washing Jack clean and continuing their play until breakfast brought a sly smile to Aneurin's lips.

The room was a mess of clothing tossed haphazardly aside, leather bags scattered on the floor, and the fireplace gone cold and ashy in the soft gray light of dawn. Even the other empty bed had lumpy piles stacked on it, though Aneurin couldn't remember putting anything there the night before. The dragon stepped gingerly over the detritus of their play and poured water from the pitcher as quietly as he could into a kettle from the hearth.

Rather than waste time starting a fire and chance waking Jack, Aneurin set the kettle on the hook in the firebox and blew gently on it with his fiery breath until steam rose from the neck.

Mixing cold and warm water together in the provided bowl took only a few moments, and shortly Aneurin squeezed out a soft linen square he found on the shelf of the washstand. He washed himself, enjoying the familiar scratch of linen on his sensitive cock. It was nice to be back among simple things he understood instead of the crazy world Jack had come from. Aneurin would never completely understand “civilization” where noise was a part of everyday life and humans reacted to the sounds of bells, alarms, and horns like well-trained animals.

Since coming to Honalee, Jack had alternated between discomfort and fascination, sometimes clenching his jaw with determination to learn the world of his birth. At other times he acted like a child on holiday, eager to learn and oblivious of danger.

Aneurin despaired of protecting Jack from all who would harm the son of the king when Jack romped about happily learning all he could of the different races inhabiting Honalee. Worse, Aneurin himself had not grown to maturity in Honalee either, and lived in fear he'd miss some detail that could spell Jack's death. Aneurin shook his head, sighed, and began washing his bonded.

Jack's eyes flew open at the first touch of the cloth, and he jerked as if he'd been shot with an arrow. His deep green eyes focused on Aneurin and softened with love. He chuckled softly. “Insatiable dragon.”

Love slid up their bond and made Aneurin tremble with the depth of emotion. Food for his soul, more important than meat, filled him. Since regaining his sight and strength, Aneurin feasted as much on the excess energy pouring from his wizard's body as he did on the excellent food fed to him by his loving human. He grinned and winked at Jack. “You know what a carnivore I am. How can I resist such a tasty feast before me?” He knelt beside the bed to take in Jack's now rock hard phallus.

Jack groaned and relaxed, trustingly giving himself to his dragon.

A rustle came from the other bed. The lumps that Aneurin had thought were their luggage moved, and a grass green eye curtained by white hair appeared from under a blanket. “Yum, yum. Will you share?”

At the soft question from the other bed, Aneurin stopped sucking and peered over Jack's hip without releasing the tasty delicacy in his mouth. In his eagerness to celebrate Jack's victory, he'd forgotten Watash's warning that they would share their room with another of the adult male students.

Startled, Jack looked over his shoulder, flushing bright red. Jack cleared his throat, but didn't remove his cock from Aneurin's slackened mouth. "Uh, hi Remo. What did you say?" Jack fumbled with the bedclothes in an attempt to cover himself and Aneurin, but was thoroughly tangled.

Aneurin blushed and winced guiltily. He'd forgotten to even taste the air for unfamiliar scents in his eagerness to further cement his bond with Jack. The handsome Elf could easily have been an assassin instead of a fellow student.

Remo rose from the bed, and knelt next to Aneurin. His large, grass colored gaze focused on the dragon man, and Aneurin saw the plea in his eyes. "Please, will you share?" He colored as brightly as they. "I've never had a dragon and a human before. I hope I don't offend by my request."

Aneurin's jaw dropped in surprise, and Jack's softening cock fell out of his mouth. Conflicting emotions surged around his head and heart. One was an unreasoning jealousy. Another was the lust for the Elf he'd kept hidden since Aneurin first laid eyes on his graceful beauty. Third was self-disgust for feeling these things at all.

Several emotions flittered across Jack's face, and his heated cock twitched, brushing Aneurin's cheek. Through their bond -- at this distance, Aneurin easily sensed everything his bonded felt -- the same emotions coursing through him roiled in Jack. "Uh, not exactly what I meant when I said I'd see you again, Remo. Aneurin? What do you want?"

Bless Jack for being polite enough to emphasize his dragon's wishes were paramount. Aneurin could smell the arousal coming from them both, and squelched the jealousy firmly. There was no harm in allowing the Elf to play with them. In fact, it might be a good thing, since Remo was to share their room. He smiled at Remo.

"Certainly you may join me for my unusual breakfast. Jack has tangled himself in the linens and is at our mercy."

Remo squirmed on his heels for a moment, lust darkening his eyes to the color of moss. He clapped his two fists together in front of Aneurin's face. "Oh, yes. Bind me, too, then. I love this game, and have played it many times."

Jack sat upright in the bed. For the first time, Aneurin could not read what was in Jack's mind. A barrier had been erected within his heart, as if he closed off something he did not want to feel. He reached down to the floor and picked up the lacing that had held Aneurin's tunic together. With the air of a ceremony, he wound it loosely around Remo's hands and put the ends where the Elf could grasp them. "It seems symbolic that I tie you with Aneurin's lacing, and give you the same right of freedom whenever you want it." He grasped the tops of Remo's hands. "Aneurin and I both bind you until you wish to be free. Fair deal?"

Remo nodded happily, with a dazzling smile.

The jealousy in Aneurin's heart melted away at Jack's proclamation. His bonded included him in permitting the Elf to join their play and made Remo his equal in the temporary and voluntary confinement. With the jealousy gone, lust returned full force to life within his body. "Enough wasting time." Aneurin removed Remo's tunic and soft pants with magic, and placed them neatly on the other bed.

Jack rose from the bed to his feet, and offered his cock to Aneurin with one hand and crooked his finger at Remo with the other. "Come here, sexy Elf."

Remo stood and shook the shining mass of silvery hair out of his eyes. His body was pale, but lightly tanned from the sun, except where a loincloth might fall to give his tenderest parts some protection. There, his skin gleamed like milk in moonlight.

For a brief moment, Aneurin wondered what that milky flesh would taste like. Would it be as sweet as it looked? He'd soon find out, but for now he was offered meat he knew well and wanted. He sucked down Jack's cock happily.

Twisting his upper body without disturbing what Aneurin did, Jack put his arms around Remo and drew him closer. "I have to ask. Is it true Elf ears are very sensitive?"

Remo swallowed hard, strangling inarticulately for a moment on his words, and then whispered, "Yes."

Aroused by the byplay above him, Aneurin felt his own cock heat and engorge. From his position on the floor, the dragon could see little, but he had better things to do while he listened. The sweet taste of man flesh filled his mouth, and he nursed the head of Jack's tasty cock with relish. Soon, they'd have the human on his back again where the Elf and dragon could roam before pleasing themselves. Aneurin had never played with anyone else, and the uncertainty of how to include another filled his mind with many exciting possibilities. Aneurin devoutly hoped it would be his cock in the Elf's ass while Jack filled his, but who knew what would happen? The dragon sucked harder, so filled with arousal he feared he'd burst.

Jack hoisted the lightweight Elf high in the air, until Remo's bare feet brushed Aneurin's shoulder. Knowing Jack's preferences for a mouthful of nipple, Aneurin assumed Jack tasted the white flesh and berry brown buds.

Remo moaned, and his toes curled, so Aneurin could safely think the Elf found as much pleasure in Jack's tongue and teeth as his dragon did.

The room crackled and snapped with mage energy as the two untrained wizards vented their excess energies. The power moved around and along his body, as if Aneurin had stepped in a nest of ants that investigated the new structure without stinging. Dragons could not be harmed by ordinary magic, and certainly neither of these two could command -- yet -- the greater magic that could affect him, so he could merely watch for flying objects without fear. He could probably contain the energies, if it came down to it.

Aneurin heard the slide of flesh on flesh, and Remo's body twitched. The lusty dragon looked up to see the Elf now riding a wave of energy, completely unaware he did so. Remo's head was thrown back until his long hair fell to brush his hips, while Jack's hand supported the milky ass and delved into the crack to tickle and tease.

Jack was aware he levitated the Elf, it seemed, for he kept one arm firmly wrapped around Remo's waist, holding his play "victim" steady while his mouth sank lower to tease the firm slender belly.

Aneurin chose to lick and nibble down to Jack's balls, and found them rising steadily upward as well, in preparation for an explosion of pleasure. This would not do, for the mage energy pulsing in the room warned Aneurin an explosion of another sort was a real possibility. Whether it came from Jack alone or the Elf did not matter. Aneurin didn't feel like watching them immolate themselves in their passion. Aneurin released Jack's cock from his attentions. "I suggest we continue this while lying upon the bed."

Remo was the first to hear his words. His head snapped upright, and he looked around. The Elf's blue bag whizzed by his head, doing a mad dance with an unlit candle. "Oh, dear. Perhaps we should."

Aneurin's bonded raised his head from Remo's flesh, his eyes glazed and unseeing. Jack grunted when a small table collided with his back. Awareness returned to his moody dark eyes. "Ouch. Damn. Forgot about that." In that instant, all objects stopped their movement and fell to the floor.

That included Remo, and Jack's grip on his ass and waist was insufficient to hold him. An undignified squeak of alarm heralded his plummet to the floor.

Aneurin cushioned Remo before real damage could ensure the end of their play, though they ended up in a tangled heap on the icy flagstones of the floor. Oh, yes, Aneurin could see the Elf was sweet to hold, with firm long muscles beneath that moonlit flesh. His arousal was such the images of impaling that sweet body on his cock sprang to Aneurin's mind before he could consider the unworthiness of the thought.

For his part, Remo took the indignity with grace. He used his bound hands to push himself off Aneurin's chest, and sat upon the dragon's cock until he rubbed his cock with the dragon's, creating sweet agony. Remo's bright eyes twinkled, and he bent to give Aneurin a short kiss. "Thanks for breaking my fall, dragon. You are most kind."

Jack lifted Remo off Aneurin with a worried frown. "Are you both okay? Nothing broken? Let's get off this floor before Aneurin goes into a reptilian torpor." He set Remo gently on the floor next to Aneurin, and then Jack put both hands out to aid his dragon in rising.

Remo rushed to assist, and Aneurin was soon off the achingly cold floor. Now the Elf took command, his maidenly shyness a thing of the past. He addressed Aneurin. "I think Jack should fuck you first, do you not, Aneurin? If you will see to his pleasure, I shall cast a shield spell around the bed so we'll be safe from flying furnishings. I've ability enough for that, I think."

Aneurin had no doubt an Elf could do more than that, but he nodded his agreement. Aneurin's eyes narrowed a trifle as he remembered Elves learned magic from the cradle, though non-Elven eyes rarely saw it. Why would an Elf wish to present himself to learn human wizardry, anyway? Aneurin would ask Remo privately later.

Jack kissed his dragon, then Remo. "I'll leave myself in capable hands, then." He eyed Remo's bonds. "Or should I say, other appendages?" He laughed and sat down on their bed, reaching onto the nightstand for the equipment he felt essential to play -- condoms and lubricant.

Remo met Aneurin's appraisal blandly, batting his eyes like a flirting wench. "The morning flies by, and today we plunge into a whirlwind of new knowledge. Let's enjoy while we can. There will be time enough for conversation as the days pass, I am sure." He leaned forward to whisper, "I am anxious to be beneath a dragon. Hurry."

Aneurin controlled his laughter with difficulty and told his treacherous body to resist for a moment longer. His cock developed a mind of its own and yearned toward Remo. His anus puckered at the sound of his rider's groans as Jack anointed himself with lubricant for their mutual pleasure. Aneurin reminded himself to borrow some for Remo's sweet ass. The devious Elf was up to something, and Aneurin vowed to keep that firmly in mind to discuss with Jack at the first opportunity. Such thoughts did not wither his desire for the graceful being before him, but the dragon would remain wary.

For now, he would play the game. Aneurin turned to Jack. "May I borrow some of your lubricant?"

Unaware of his concerns, Jack raised one dark eyebrow and slathered Aneurin's heated cock generously with the warm, slick liquid. Jack's chameleon eyes weren't dark moody green now, but nearly as blazing gold as Aneurin's own with lust. His lazy grin was full of promise. "Going to be the fulcrum between us, Aneurin?"

"That is a plan I like!" Remo slipped to the other side of the generous bed and laid his head upon the velvet coverlet. His shining length of hair spilled over the pillows like silken embroidery. He crooked an enticing finger at Aneurin despite his bound wrists. "Come inside and play, dragon. Be the full crumb, whatever that is."

While Jack roared with laughter, Aneurin clambered awkwardly on the bed and between Remo's knees. Despite his earlier lust, things were moving just a bit quickly for his taste.

Remo helpfully put his ankles in the air, amazingly almost touching his nose. "I am stronger and more flexible than I look. Do not think you will harm me."

Jack stifled his chuckles and shoved gently at Aneurin's back. "Have at Remo, and once you're firmly planted, I'll enter you." He kissed Aneurin's shoulder. "I think you'll have to be the one to move between us for this to work."

The thought of stroking in and out of the Elf while impaling himself on Jack's thick cock was more than Aneurin's lust could bear. Aneurin took his aching penis in both hands and began his gradual journey into Remo's willing depths.

Jack left their bed for a moment and returned with Remo's glasses in his hands. He slid them on the Elf's astonished face with a sheepish grin. "Hope you don't mind, but I think they're sexy."

Blushing furiously, Remo blinked at Jack. Then, as if he could no longer contain himself, his eyelids fluttered half shut. "As you --" He stopped and moaned. "-- wish."

Aneurin slid completely within the Elf and echoed his incoherent moans of appreciation. Remo's body throttled his cock with sweet agony. Aneurin's balls ground against his firm ass cheeks, begging for release. The dragon silently agreed with Jack

that their new friend was twice as enticing with the lenses magnifying his luminous eyes. Aneurin grasped Remo's cock to give the Elf release with his hand and waited for Jack's assault on his own receptive body.

Jack wasted no time, impaling Aneurin as quickly as he could without damage. The human's breath hissed behind Aneurin. "This feels fantastic. I'm not going to last worth a shit, guys."

They did not prolong their pleasures. For a few minutes the room echoed with their harsh gasps and collective cries of pleasure. Vaguely Aneurin noted there were no crashes of crockery hitting the walls. He assumed Remo's shielding of the bed had worked, though Aneurin had not seen him cast a spell.

Only a few short thrusts, and Aneurin felt his balls scream with release. He buried himself in Remo's body and roared his pleasure. The dragon's clawed hand mindlessly stroked Remo to match his own cries of pleasure.

Jack followed them both into ecstasy, pounding into Aneurin's body and digging his fingers into Aneurin's hips with every downstroke. Jack filled his body, grunting and seemingly seeking depths he'd never plumbed.

They stayed where they were, panting and recovering, until one by one they separated. Aneurin blessed the generous width of the bed that held them all, though there was little room to spare.

Remo cuddled beside Aneurin on his right, and Jack wearily took his dragon into his arms on Aneurin's left. Aneurin sighed contentedly, grateful to be in the middle where he'd be warmest.

Jack's sleepy and irreverent voice sounded unnaturally loud in the silence. "Welcome to the Royal Academy, gentlemen."

To Be Continued in *Dragon's Quest*

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.” Visit Lena’s website at <http://lena.realmsoflove.com/>.