

A purple-tinted photograph of a person's back, showing a detailed tattoo of a dragon on the right shoulder blade. The dragon is coiled, with its head facing upwards and its tail curving downwards. The person's skin is light, and the tattoo is dark. The background is dark and out of focus.

STEPHANIE BURKE

Dragon
Weir

Red Rose Publishing

Dragon's Weir

By

Stephanie

Burke



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ISBN: 978-1-60435-384-6

Cover Artist: Sheba Productions

Editor: Lea Schizas

Line Editor: WRFG

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Chapter One

“Star!” an exasperated voice called out. “Where are you, Star? We have things we need to do!”

“I don’t wanna go!”

Sure she sounded spoiled and petulant, but how would you sound if someone wanted to drag you...totally devoid of clothing, out where everyone could see you?

Zol spotted a few electric blue curls peeking out from under a pile of silks and furs.

“What objection do you have to getting clean?” he demanded, his golden eyes blazing as he slammed his fists on his hips. “The smell of sex is quite inviting when you are actually having it,” he sniffed insultingly. “But the moment it’s over with, the smell of sex is just rank!”

“I am not rank!” Star hissed, trying to squirm deeper into the pile of silks. Why couldn’t they invest in some real furniture? Hiding like this was ridiculous. She knew parts of her were sticking out, the rear parts...but, but...She refused to go down, or rather, out without a fight!

“You are rank!” Zol tossed hanks of his hair behind his head in exasperation, rolling his eyes up as if to pray to the Ghods for guidance. “Basin baths are not enough!”

“I used soap!” Star insisted, not giving one inch. “And I wash daily!”

“You need to sink your female ass into some water!” Zol was so frustrated that he was fairly dancing in place. “You need a total wash! I refuse to let this Quad become known as the house of stink because of some cracked female!”

Indignant, Star poked her head out of the silks, her brown eyes blazing. “What did you call me?”

“A cracked female!” Zol screamed, face turning quite red despite his dark complexion. “An egg that cracked before the whole brain could develop! A female who is not quite done! A female who’s thought processes are askew! A female....”

“Screw you, Zol!” Star screamed, her eyes narrowing more and more with each of his words. “Just who do you think you are?”

“A Second whose poor nose is being burned off by your stench while trying to breath in his own home!”

“I do not stink!”

“Well, then you tell me what that dark cloud following you is, cause it sure smells like the stink of unwashed body to me!”

“But I don’t smell anything!” Star wailed.

“Because your senses are retarded,” Zol’s eyes narrowed while glaring at his suddenly reticent charge. The night before it was spread those legs as wide as they would go. Today it was cower in fear. Females were ridiculous! “It’s from being reared with those strange humans! Trust me, anyone on this aerie can smell what you and Zen have been up to!”

That caused a flush of embarrassment to redden her checks, which clashed horribly with her hair. Star looked down at her bare body, sniffed, and shook her head. She could still smell nothing.

“Do I really stink?” she asked, pouting, her bottom lip quivering as she raised her head to stare with huge liquid eyes at the older dark haired dragon.

Zolamel huffed softly at seeing the hurt in her face as her eyes grew glassy with unshed tears. How could he put this in a way as not to damage her already fragile ego?

“Yes!”

He had no pity for the stinky and unwashed.

“Fine!” Star bellowed, anger moving her to toss aside the silks she had been hiding behind and rise to her feet. She chose to ignore the deep frown that slowly formed on Zol’s face like the harbinger of a bad storm to speak her mind. “So I stink! Big deal! You and Father are the ones responsible for that stink with your performance last night, Zol! And I did not hear you complaining about my smell

then, big man. I am not going to some damn bathhouse naked! You want me to go, you provide me with some clothing!”

She stomped her bare foot, emphasizing her point, not noticing that his frown turned into a leer as her breasts bounced in righteous indignation. “And as the one who will control this Quad should something happen to Kyo, I am stating my words as law! There will be no nude traveling! If you want me to leave this aerie,” she paused as another thought filled her head. They were always naked, the males. And that meant that any female could gaze upon what was hers! Oh no! No—no cracked-brain female was going to get a good look at what the Ghods gifted to her! This rampant nudity had to be stopped! “If any of us leave this aerie, we will leave it clothed! Are my words understood, Zolamel? Clothed!”

Five minutes later, a scowling Star was being flown quite naked in the arms of a huge black dragon to the bathing house, on her way for first contact with her new people.

Chapter Two

“This place is...huge,” Star pouted as Zol gently sat her on the warm marble panel that made up the floor of the bathhouse.

“Well, its not like the Dragonish are a small lot,” Zol pointed out, his large talons clicking on the polished floor as he moved around his female. “And we told you once that the human skin is our secondary form. We all much prefer to be in our natural state.”

“Well,” Star spoke softly, almost reverently as she studied the large columns and the domed ceiling painted with fantasy pictures of mystical animals and plants. The humans she grew up with never had anything like this, and if they did, it was sure to have been reserved as some sort of religious building, an homage to their Ghods. She doubted that the normal everyday folk would be allowed inside, except for special ceremonies. Only the ‘learned’ would have been allowed within these seemingly hallowed halls. “This sure is a pretty place. Where is the tub?”

With a puff of smoke, the large gold eyes dragon disappeared and the tall naked brown-skinned man took its place.

“Honestly, Star,” he sighed, gripping her hand in his large one and tugging her forward. “This is just the entrance hall. The bathing chambers are inside.”

“Oh,” she sniffed. “And just how was I supposed to know that? You never explained that to me.”

“Looks like I have a lot of work ahead of me to get you ready for the second mating and ritual,”

“But I am already mated,” she reminded him as they walked deeper into the amazingly light filled room.

“Remember my mate, your brother, Zel?”

“That was the first mating,” he spoke slowly as if he was speaking to an imbecile. “Now you have to have your second mating and the ritual which will enable us to bear.”

“Eggs,” Star sighed, wondering just how this whole laying thing was supposed to work.

“Well, eggs are better than trying to push out a full grown dragon,” Zol chuckled. “Though, as the one to bear a female, I would get the better side of this mating.”

“So I give birth to the males,” she sighed, shaking her head at the complexities of her new life.

“That is why your sex is so prized. Without you, there would be no male Dragonish left! Females are prized, as well, but one is dependant on the other. I

believe that it makes up for your inability to change shape. This balances out the sexes, no one sex is greater than the other. It makes for a peaceful life.”

“If you say so,” Star followed along, knowing there was a lot she had to get used to before she could consider this place her home.

She stepped forward, then froze, her eyes widening as she caught a glimpse of the vastness of the building. But it was not the high ceilings and multiple marble benches that caught her attention. It was the fact that almost every corner of this room was filled...with Dragonish, mostly in their primary form.

There were huge dragons all over the place, some lounging in massive tubs of steaming water, some in repose in corridors, some being massaged and oiled by smaller dragons. But all were huge massive lizards, darkly colored and glinting in the light of the place.

“My Ghod,” Star froze, never realizing how comfortable she had become in her own little aerie with her personal Quad. She had sunk into the mindset that she and her mates were totally isolated, that she had landed into her own personal paradise. The sheer about of Dragonish in this bathhouse reminded her suddenly of how narrow her thinking had been and acted like a brick of reality, slamming into the middle of her forehead.

They were not alone. They were not uncommon. There was a whole new world of these strange folk and suddenly, she was in the middle, up to her eyes in a new culture and a new way of life.

It made her want to go running back to her pile of silks and furs.

“We shower first, to get the bad stink of good sex off you,” Zol went on talking as he spoke, not realizing that his charge was not behind him until he didn’t get a sarcastic response for his thinly veiled insult. He froze, looking around to see what had happened to his female, and spotted her standing at the entrance, a shocked wild look upon her face.

“Star?” he called out, slowly backtracking towards her. “Star? What ever is the matter?”

“Too many,” she breathed, her pupils dilating as she stared around her. “They are everywhere!”

“Of course,” Zol was trying to understand her sudden fright. With the spirit she possessed, he expected her to take over the house, kicking out Quads who got in her way. She started to shake like she did at the mention of the dreaded Scab. “We are a whole race of people, not as prolific as humans, but hale and hearty, never the less.”

“But...but so many...”

“They won’t hurt you, Star,” he explained as she grew more skittish as the Dragonish in the room began to notice them, their jewel-toned eyes curious as they watched this new taboo unfolding.

“They are...looking at me.”

“You are a new entity here,” Zol smiled softly, garnering some insight to her issue. “But you are perfectly safe. No one will dare approach you without the permission of Father or Younger Brother.”

“But—”

“But nothing, Star. No one would dare harm you. You are special as one of our fertile females. And, of course, I am here.”

He preened, sticking out his chest and striking a suitably impressive and heroic pose.

That pulled Star out of her shock as she stared at him, an incredulous look on her face. “You?”

“Well, what is wrong with me?” he deflated, glaring balefully at her.

“Well,” Star thought of a way to coach her answer as to not bruise his obviously fragile ego. “Well, you are not the most...um...warrior-like individual...out there?” she finished on a questioning note and a shrug, hoping she would not have to expand on her reasoning.

“And that means what?” he snarled, smoke beginning to pour from his nostrils as his ire physically manifested itself.

“Well, Zol,” she looked around, hoping to find a magic personal eject from this situation string to pull, but the only thing she saw was an irate dragon expecting an answer.

“Well...” she decided to try and explain, though it may get her left behind and roasted. “You are so.... so maternal!” she decided, hoping she was on the right path. “You seem so nurturing, I mean, just look at the way you are taking care of me! I just can’t see you willing to harm someone...unless it was absolutely necessary,” she quickly assessed, remembering Zol was still male despite his ability to bear young.

He looked thoughtful for a moment as if assessing her words for hidden meanings, before he nodded in agreement.

“I suppose you are correct, Star. I would rather nurture than harm, but if it came to it, I would kill to defend you.”

“And that is why I feel so safe with you.” Star smiled.

“Then let us go and bathe.” He turned to walk towards the showers, and made it a few feet before he turned back to star at Star.

“What is it now, female?” He stalked back towards her, annoyance in his every move. “I thought we agreed that I would protect you?”

“Yeah, but...but... They are still staring at me!” Star all but wailed.

During her mental fight to determine just what to say to Zol to not hurt his feelings, Star had momentarily forgotten their Dragonish audience. But, with the return to peace in her own portion of her Quad, she began to notice all of those glittering eyes once again.

“Probably because you stink so much,” Zol sneered, reaching out to grasp her wrist, pulling her, despite her attempts to dig her bare heels into marble flooring and find some sort of traction. “Let us go! I think we have given our people enough entertainment for one day.”

“B—but,” Star stammered, stumbling along behind him. “They can’t hear us, can they?”

“Sure they can. More enhanced senses than humans,” he reminded her, pulling her through a set of columns towards the sound of rushing water. “Though they should have been polite enough not to listen. But you are new and word has spread that Zen, who is not considered a raving beauty, has managed to bring home a fertile female.”

“Zen is beautiful!” Star jerked helplessly in Zol’s grip, trying to defend her mate and let her anger show about this Dragonish ideal of beauty. “What is wrong with Zen?” she snarled, her free hand tearing at the strong dark fist that led her unerringly towards the sound of falling water.

“Nothing!” Zol snarled.

At the same time a light smooth voice called out, “Everything! Especially when it comes to that ugly red haired monster that....”

Zol and Star abruptly stopped their tug of war and turned to face the insulting voice, suddenly united, anger apparent on both of their faces.

“Oh.” Zol grinned, a smile that was anything but pleasant. “Why, if it is not the rejected one! And I thought that you would still be buried in the desert sands after Kyo damn near buried your head in a Scab Hill for what you did.”

“Who is this...thing?” Star hissed, baring her teeth and suddenly feeling very protective and territorial. “And what gives it the right to speak ill of my mate?”

The no longer smiling dragon in question was as tall as Zol, with skin a bit darker than his, the color of deep brown earth. Yet his skin lacked that creamy texture that made Zol seem to glow. His eyes were deep amber, his hair a light brown. However, the expression on his face detracted so much from his beauty.

“This thing?” Zol laughed. “Good name for a pile of Scab dung!”

The dragon stiffened more, steam rolling from his nostrils as he faced the united pair.

“I am not a thing!” he hissed, his eyes narrowing dangerously.

“This thing,” Zol went on as if he didn’t hear the protest, wrinkling his nose in disdain, “This thing wanted to mate into our Quad, and would have succeeded if Father hadn’t realized its true character and chose Zen instead.”

“I would have made a better Second in Command!” the angry dragon roared, its voice louder than the sound of the rushing water. “My family line is royal!”

“Anyway...” Zol cast a dismissing glance at the amber eyes dragon, “...that thing has been trying to make trouble for Zen ever since. It seems to think that it matches the ideal of Dragonish beauty.” Zol tossed his long hair and preened, purring lightly in his throat. “But unless the ideals of beauty have changed in the last millennia, it still has a long way to go to even match any of us.”

“Zen is an ugly pale dragon!” the belittled one screamed, losing some more of its composure. “He could never match me for strength and beauty!”

“So that thing,” Zol blithely continued, “decided to ambush Zen when he was just beginning his training with Father. But even half trained, Zen managed to send it fleeing back to his Blood Quad, crying to its sires. And when Zen returned, looking worse for the fight, but incredibly better than that thing over there, you could hear Father’s displeasure all over the Weir. Its punishment was legendary and I believe still held up as an extreme in discipline to warriors in training as what could happen to you if you displease Kyotype by attacking a younger untrained warrior.”

“What was done?” Star asked, ignoring the now quite red-in-the-face dragon. “Because obviously it didn’t work. It appears he is still arrogant and offensive.”

“Father had it de-clawed,” Zol spoke in a staged whisper that was almost louder than his speaking voice. “And had its front fangs pulled. No one ever attacks the Future Commander of the king’s army, and no one ever flaunts the Commander’s rules...”

“Enough!” the amber-eyed dragon roared, trying to cut off Zol, but was soundly ignored by both.

“And...” Zol grinned, speaking over the angry Dragonish, “its hair was sheered.”

“Song of the Scab!” the amber one screamed as it lashed out with its hand, trying to deliver a smack to Zol.

Star gasped, but before she could react, it pulled its blow. It looked around, noticing several pairs of eyes on it.

“And I thought I was going to have an excuse to get you sheered again.” Zol shook his head sadly. “Pity.”

“This is not over, Zol,” the angered one sneered, before turning to face Star. “And you, female without a blood-tie, remember my name. Belan will be seeking revenge for this outrage.”

“Only if your claws have grown back fully.” Zol laughed in Belan’s face. “Last I heard, they were still a bit...small.”

“Curses on your eggs!” Balan snarled, before turning in a huff and storming away.”

“Like you’ll ever fertilize any with those small claws and dull fangs!” Zol called back, laughter in his voice as his enemy retreated.

Star sniffed, then turned to look at her mate-partner. “I believe explanations are in order.”

“In the shower and while we bathe,” he reminded her, waving his hand before his face. “You still stink like a lazy pain pleasure-trader. And that is so not attractive.”

“Bitch,” Star mumbled under her breath as she allowed Zol to pull her towards the sounds of the rushing waters, a petulant pout on her face.”

Chapter Three

It was safe to say that Star had never bathed like this before.

Zol all but dragged her into a large steamy room where several columns appeared, shaped like waterfalls. Steamy hot water ran endlessly in clear sheets, draining into several large pools where some Dragonish sat, covering their bodies, human-skin and Dragonish primary forms alike, in rich fragrant foam.

“What are they doing?” Star asked, watching as several male forms assisted the Dragonish ones, scrubbing with long brushes, laughing and talking as they happily worked.

“Getting clean,” he drawled dryly. “Just what you are about to do”

That said, he gave her a mighty shove, and Star found herself flopping face first into a pool of water. She rose roaring, the burn of water invading her nostrils, making her hiss and cough as she tried to gain her feet.

She blinked her eyes to see Zol standing over her, his laughter echoing though the chambers.

“Bastard!” she tried to yell, but her coughing interfered, making it sound less than the intended shrill bellow.

“Now that you are in the water,” he laughed, “all we need to do is apply a thorough coating of bathing foam and scrub the smell away.”

But Star was staring at the water like she had never seen the like before in her life! She grew up in a desert settlement. Water was for drinking and cooking. Rarely was it used for full emersion bathing. One bathed if they crossed an oasis or a small river or if there was a sudden downpour from the skies. Water was just too dear a commodity to waste like this. Since coming to this place, she had never seen such a shameful waste of water.

She looked over at the columns, overflowing with their waterfall of liquid, and thought the water utilized could sustain her whole village for a year.

“Why do you waste it all?” she asked finally, beginning to enjoy the rarity of full submersion despite her frugal mindset. “Water is so hard to come by!” Her electric blue curls were now darker, sodden and hanging in her face. Her brown eyes glared up at Zol.

“Waste? Water? You do know that we are floating so high above the human population that we are not visible?”

“Huh?” She believed there was some kind of land...somewhere.

“We are in the clouds themselves.” He climbed into the warm water, a huge smile on his face. “I am sure you noticed that no one walked into this bathhouse.”

“But...But how?” she stammered.

“No one really knows,” he shrugged. “It is like how we exist in Quads. It has become such a part of us that no one questions it. Our aeries have been a part of this weir for generations. We just add onto them when we need to.”

“There...there are others on our aerie?”

“No, that is something different. As Father is the Commander of the Kings armies, we have a special aerie of our own. This one has been passed down to the Commanders of the Armies and is part of the benefits he receives for such diligent work. That is why neither Father nor Zen are with us now.”

“How often...I mean, I know Zen is training.... How long...?”

“Generations,” Zol laughed. “We live for generations, Star. And even when Father and I pass, there will be another pair found for you and Zen.”

“What?” she squeaked, completely forgetting about the clinging texture of the water or the fact that he looked almost Ghod-like when he was wet. The conversation turned rather disturbing for her.

“Not any time soon,” Zol laughed. “We have many generations left in us, but the fact remains that you and Zen are among the youngest Dragonish here. And when Father and I pass, Zen will take up the mantel of Father and another pair will be found for you. It is a cycle, completely balanced.”

“I don’t.... I don’t like talk of death,” Star finally admitted.

In the human settlement, death was something you had to face when it was time. Practically no one spoke of it and no one really openly discussed it.

“Then shall we discuss beauty?” he purred, preening as he flung waterlogged chunks of hair behind his shoulders.

“And shall we discuss what Balan found so horrid about Zen? Well?” She shook off the dark thoughts and moved closer to Zol. She was getting used to being in the water, but it still made her uncomfortable.

“Zen is pale.”

Star waved her hand as if urging him to continue, but he just stared at her.

“Well?” she asked. “What else?”

“That’s it,” Zolamel said, laughing.

Star blinked at him, then turned to stare at the other Dragonish in the shower room. Indeed, they were all varying degrees of brown, but that was it? That was the huge blemish of Zenxian’s perception of beauty? What was wrong with these people?

“Well, he is rather short,” Zol allowed, “but that will change as he matures.”

“Short and pale?”

“More like pale and short, in order of importance.”

“That’s it?” She couldn’t keep the incredulous look off her face.

“Basically,” he sighed, looking down at the water. “It’s so hard being different. And when I mated to such an imperfect Dragonish, it, too, took some time for me to accept him.”

“You, Zol?” she asked her eyes growing wide in disbelief.

“Yeah,” he sighed. “It took me a whole heartbeat to understand how special he really is.”

“You overcame your people’s ideals of beauty... in a minute?”

“Well, look at him?” Zol rolled his eyes as if she was blind. “Broad shoulders, perfect musculature, that red hair and endowed like Father...and that cock will grow with the rest of him,” Zol grinned.

“And it had nothing to do with his personality?” she had to ask.

“Well, you look before you speak! When Father brought him home, I thought that I would unfairly compare him to our elder pair in our previous Quad, but just looking at him.... Zen is perfection.”

“So his skin color makes him ugly to the Dragonish?”

“Not ugly, just wrong. And to some, wrong equates ugly.”

“So why is he pale? I think some of the humans I know make Zen look dark by comparison.”

“Well, there once was a war, as the legends tell. A war between the Dragonish of the Sky and the Dragonish of the Earth.”

“A war equals ideals of ugly and beauty?”

“Not just any war, Star.” He settled, reaching for the edge, presumably for balance. “There was a war that burned the forests and scorched the rivers. No one knows what started the wars and no one is quite sure how it ended, but the Earth Dragonish were very fierce warriors who relied on manipulation of the lands. They controlled the earth, but we controlled the skies. With sky supremacy, it was easy for our ancestors to drive the Earth Dragonish deep underground, and from what our past-tellers tell us, they began plotting to unleash a menace so great that it would drive us from the land forever.

“But in the midst of all this fighting, an Earth prince fell in love with a Sky princess. She saw him while flying low and was able to pick him out from the grass and trees because he was so pale. It is said that she fell so deeply in love that she brought this Earth Dragonish to our weirs in the sky, and they lived together as a pair, waiting for their Quad to be complete. But it was never to be. “

Zol shook his head in sadness and Star had to fight the urge to yell at him to continue.

“So what happened?” she finally asked, nearly bouncing in the waters. “What happened to them?”

“It is said,” Zol began solemnly, “that the princess so loved him that she let him roam where he would. Our Aries were not so high in the sky then, but closer

to the earth and its inhabitants. And it is also said that the pale prince had another motive besides love. He learned all of our defenses, all of our weaknesses, who is going to forbid the mated prince of the weir anything, even if he was of the enemies people? They were mated and along with mating comes trust and respect. But his trust was fake and his heart as barren as the deserts where you were reared.”

“He betrayed her,” Star breathed, wondering how anyone could toss away the feeling of family being in a Quad. Then again, maybe the pale prince had a family waiting for him elsewhere. Maybe he never felt what it was to be outcast, to be an unwanted burden.

“He opened the gates and let in the horde.”

“The horde?” Star shook her head, trying to shake the feeling of loss she remembered from before and trying to pay attention to the story.

“It is said that the Scab are the weakest of the Horde.”

Star shuddered at the name of her most feared nightmares. Even the name Scab evoked feelings of terror deep within her. And hearing there was an even greater monster than those she so feared... It was unthinkable!

“The Horde decimated nearly half of the warriors before they were driven back. And soon after, the Dragonish of the Sky launched an attack that scorched

the trees and the land, and dried up the rivers. When the land that the Earthen Dragonish so depended on was depleted of its life, they either died or moved on.”

“So your people just killed the lands?”

“They did what they had to do, Star. I am not even sure they were aware of the consequences of their actions. Anyhow, the Weirs moved higher and a way to build on the clouds using magic and water was devised. Then the dominance of humanity began. Well,” he added, “Humanity came out of hiding and took over where the Earthen Dragonish left off.”

“And the pale prince?”

“He was declared a traitor to his people and staked out for the mercy of the Horde.”

“But...but couldn't he fly away?”

“Earthen Dragonish have no wings, Star. They had short claws and fangs not as sharp as ours, which brings us to Father's punishment of Balan.”

“I don't get a connection,” she muttered, still digesting that horrible story.

“To make one like an Earthen Dragonish is of the worst things that could be done to a dragon. When Father blunted his teeth and took his claws, he in essence became like the cowardly pale prince, a thing to be ignored and despised.”

“So, Father publicly declared him a coward.” Star began to understand. Then she paled. “And because Zen is pale....”

“Born pale, people shy away from him, recalling what horrors the pale ones wrought.”

“But he was born of Dragonish, of Sky Dragonish people!”

“And who knows! Maybe there was a complete Quad and the Princess laid an egg before her prince was discovered to be a vile wretch. Maybe Zen is a descendent...Or maybe, which I think is more likely, Ghod laughs.”

“The complexities of you people astound me,” Star sighed, shaking her head at the stupidity of these Dragonish. So they had a bad history, but what good did condemning one male, based on his looks, something that he couldn’t control, do?

“And soap will clean you,” Zol sneered, reaching into a small well next to his claimed spot of wall. “Now let me show you how to scrub the stinky areas. Women have a lot of folds, I am told, and it’s apparent that you don’t know how to clean them all.”

“I do so!” Star snapped.

“Well if you do, please put your knowledge to good use. You still reek and it’s turning my breakfast.”

“Bitch,” she growled, reaching into the soap well and following Zol’s example.

The dragon was happily smearing the slick foaming soap over his body, between his toes, and under his arms. “Don’t forget the meeting of your thighs,” he laughed as he blushed. “You must clean thoroughly.”

That said, he bent over and unceremoniously jammed a finger up his rear aperture, swishing soap around and getting thoroughly clean.

“What?” he asked as he stood up and made his way towards the showering columns. Star was still standing there, her mouth open, never having seen such a wonton display of cleanliness!

“You—you....”

“Washed my ass,” he chuckled. “Stick around. I’ll wash my cock, too. You can gape. And if you don’t figure it out really soon, I’ll have to wash your female folds as well.”

He didn’t appear to be joking.

Star turned her back to the room as best she could and began to wash. She may have to sleep with the male, but having him scrub out her...female folds...was just a bit too intimate! She ignored his laughter and got as clean as humanly...dragon-ly possible.

Maybe after she fucked him a few times he could earn the right to scrub her in public. But for now, she was all for water immersion, as big of a waste that it

was, and soap, and for trying to pretend the rest of the Dragonish didn't exist in her bath!

Chapter Four

It was later when they were soaking in the tub room that she remembered to ask Zol about the hair.

“Well,” he began, settling himself comfortably in the communal baths, ignoring the curious stares they were garnering, “It’s all about the marks.”

“What about them?”

“Star, they are special, unique, and totally intimate,” he leaned close to her.

“But I see them all the time...”

“You are part of the Quad, Star. You are family. To expose such an intimate mark to others is considered rather—risqué.”

Star looked down at her own shoulder, noting that her blue hair really didn’t cover anything at all. It was too short.

“For the males,” he added, “showing one is scandalous. But after you reach a certain age and don’t have one to show at all... that is just tragic.” He shuddered, wrinkling his nose at the thought.

“And he...”

“Had none to show.”

Star's mouth opened in a perfect O, the face Zol usually saw when she was in the throes of a surprise orgasm.

"Needless to say, he was embarrassed as hell as he almost matches Father in age." There was smug satisfaction in Zol's voice. "It made him look kind of desperate."

Despite herself, Star broke out into gales of giggles, picturing the haughty looking dragon as a desperate mate-chaser. It almost made her forget the uncomfortable walk through the halls, butt naked, while Zol chattered about the latest gossip. It gave her compelling reasons to start growing her hair long, despite the teachings of her desert home.

But before more could be said, there was a cough and a strange golden dragon ambled over to them.

This one was not as frightening, but the sheer size of these people in their primary form was enough to make Star sidle closer to Zol.

"Zol," the voice intoned, partly amused and a whole lot curious. "Is she the one that the gossips are all in a rage over?"

Before Zol could answer, a giggling feminine voice chided him. "Zaz, where are your manners?"

Star watched as a petite female, one even shorter of stature than her, made her way forward. She had long purple hair and amber eyes.

“The same place as his talent,” Zol snickered. “Lost somewhere in the richness of time.”

“I am not that bad of an artist!” Zaz snorted, a puff of white smoke bellowing up from his cavernous-like nostrils.

“Zaz, as an artist, you should content yourself with building aeries.”

Even the put upon dragon had to laugh at that quip, and Star was pleased to see that Zol sharpened his dangerously humorous wit on more than the members of his Quad. The Dragonish had a tongue like a keen edged knife and everyone seemed to know it.

“So you have me figured out, do you, young one?”

“Young one,” the female laughed. “You are only a week earlier hatched than Zol!”

“And we both are being rude,” Zaz decided, ending the amusing give and take. “And you have yet to formally introduce us to you partner.”

“Star.” Zol stood up, totally ignoring his nude state, and nodded towards the two newcomers. “I would like you to meet Zazolm and his mate partner Keirie.”

“Oh...” she stammered for a moment, torn between covering her breasts with her hands or offering them in an open manner to show friendship. “Um...?”

“Churlish, Zol,” Zaz snorted while carefully resting his bulk along the edge of the bath. “Churlish to expect her to know our customs when she was reared by humans.”

Star blushed, and shot an evil glare at Zol.

“You need only rest your nose like this,” Keirie leaned forward and rested her chin on Star’s shoulder, burying her nose behind her ear for a moment, before pulling back. “And inhale deeply.”

Smiling at the friendly gesture, Star copied it all the while admitting that this was an effective way of showing trust. If someone wanted to do you harm, they only had to sink their teeth into your neck. And if you were attacked in this position, you could easily retaliate by gouging out delicate eyes or tearing at the vulnerable throat.

And the female smelled.... She smelled a lot like smoke and flowers and—and trust.

“We welcome you,” Zaz intoned, but did not repeat the gesture. Instead, he nodded gracefully, blowing a puff of air in her direction before inhaling it deeply.

“Um...”

“We rely on scents,” he added with a broad and toothy smile.

Zol noted her puzzled look and decided to explain the gentle gust of air. “Males scent. But it is disrespectful to touch another’s bonded mate in any form.

So we breathe them in as a sign of welcome, imprinting their scents in our brains. If you had intended harm, that, too, would have been noted by your scent. Unlike voices, scents don't lie."

"And your scent is vaguely familiar." Zaz closed his eyes and crossed his paws before him then appeared to lose himself in contemplation. But his words excited Star like never before. The implications were obvious.

"My parents?" she all but gushed, sitting up uncaring of her nudity as she stared at the large dragon. "Can you scent my parents?"

"You would be seeking your birth Quad," Kerie nodded, her expression bleak. "I cannot imagine not being around my blood-Quad, having them surrounding me with love and support. What a strong female you must be, Star. Our females never leave our aeries. It makes us too vulnerable to attack, as we do not have a secondary form."

"I...I don't think of myself as strong," Star stammered. "I just... I just lived the life the Ghods allowed me to have. But," she added, smiling wistfully at Zaz, "but I would at least like to know of my parents...my birth-Quad. I would like to know what happened to them, and why I was...abandoned."

"You can be sure that any abandonment was not of their choosing," Zaz assured her, huffing in her direction. "And I cannot fathom a reason, save for the most dire, to drive a Quad into the realm of our past enemies." He looked Star

directly in the eyes as he continued to speak. “Your Quad is dead, Star. Death is the only thing that would keep them away from you.”

Star stared for a moment, then her head lowered before she inhaled deeply. She looked up at the great Zaz and offered him a tremulous smile. “I think...I think I have always known.” She spoke softly as she settled back into the water, the little spark of hope that had begun to develop in her eyes snuffing out. “But...but I think that is good to have my suspicions confirmed. It makes me feel, worthy, maybe?” she added. “Worthy of not being abandoned, that maybe I was worth fighting for, worth loving.”

“Ghods, do you have self esteem issues,” Zol rolled his eyes, before splashing Star with a palm full of water.

Star's eyes widened in disbelief, and then sneezed at her bond mate. She didn't know how he did it, how he knew, but he had just said the perfect thing to keep her from dissolving into tears and really embarrassing herself.

“But, young Star,” Zaz mused, lumbering to his feet. “I will contemplate on what I know of the scents that I have stored in my mind. Maybe, just maybe, I can lead you to some answers about your Quad. It will just take some...time.”

“I think you, Zaz,” Star offered him a full smile, her happiness at his offer obvious. “And you, too, Keria,” she added.

“Well,” the female bond mate began, “our Quads are close enough to be family. And any hint of family is enough for us.”

With those words, the pair left, heading towards the washing areas and Star again settled beside Zol.

“They have accepted you,” Zol nodded. “This is a good thing.”

“Why?” she asked, settling down to absorb all the information offered to her so far.

“It is good because it is always good to have the ear of the Prince,”

“P—Prince?”

“Yes,” Zol rose to his feet, unmindful of his nakedness. “The Prince. And he will do as he says. He will find out about your scent and will let us know when he has unearthed something.”

“Prince?” She felt faint.

“Well, it’s time to go,” he stepped out of the water and shook himself, flinging droplets of water all around.

“Zol!” she moaned, wiping the streaming water beads from her face, glaring at her mate. “What does Father see in you?”

“You saw me wash it earlier,” Zol drawled, “Both sides. And I hoped you returned the favor?” he held out an imperious hand for her.

Rolling her eyes at his antics, she reached for his hand and allowed him to pull her from the water with much more dignity than he exercised.

She swiped the water away with her hands before turning to the exit and jerking to a halt. There was a most curious entourage entering, and they were drawing a lot of discrete attention.

“Who is that?” Star whispered, gesturing to a huge male with skin the color of the darkest sands and hair as black as the night sky. His body was heavily muscled and he was physically the size of Father, maybe even a bit larger, but two anxious males and a skittish female were supporting him.

“Oh,” Zol sighed, shaking his head sadly. “That is a tragedy.”

“Tragedy? What happened to him?” She tried not to stare, but the spectacle was so enthralling that she found it hard to look away. Was he injured in some battle, for the scars that covered his back and chest proved that he was of the warrior caste?

“He pumped when he should have pulled. And that’s something that we’re all taught at a young age. But mating mistakes happen, especially when you are dealing with a female.”

“Female...what?” Star asked, arching one eyebrow as she started at her mate-partner.

“Mating,” Zol explained. “For a receiving beta partner, like myself, mating can be dangerous if you slip up.”

“Slip up?”

“Or if you get confused and jerk at the wrong moment,” he mused softly, nibbling on his thumbnail. “Or if you climax too fast or if you don’t get your timing right... Or you pump when you need to pull,” he spoke a little louder, rolling his eyes. “But it never really killed a male, just his desire to have children, and sex well, the whole female sex thing let me tell you!” he chuckled.

“What does all of that have to do with mating?”

“Zen did explain this to you, yes?” he asked, turning to see what progress the injured dragon had made. “Poor, poor male,”

“Poor, poor male? Why poor, poor male!”

“Well...” they both paused as the huge male whimpered, drawing away from the concerned female when she reached out to touch him, nearly leaping to hide behind the slightly shorter male who supported them, obviously the father of that Quad. And if that was not scary enough, he whimpered cowering away from the near female touch.

“For the love of all the Ghods, tell me what happened?” Star gripped both of Zol’s shoulders, shaking him for emphasis.

What in the name of the horde that they apparently feared would cause such a huge warrior to behave like that?

“Female reproductive sex,” Zol glared at her hands until she released him, blushing slightly at her loss of control. “It can be dangerous stuff.”

“Sorry,” she muttered, stepping back, but still imploring him with her eyes.

“No offence taken.” He turned to watch as the female enfolded into a set of dark arms by her apparent mate. “And I guess it’s up to me to explain your part since no one has seen fit to inform you.”

“My part? Inform me of what?”

“Well, you remember that you and I are required to mate when the season is upon us? That both of us are made fertile by sexual congress with our mates?”

“Yes?”

“Well, how do you think you are going to knock me up? I mean, because as large as your pleasure seed is, honey, it’s just not big enough to do the penetration thing.”

“Zol!” she hissed, her eyes narrowing as she felt her cheeks heat up. “That...that....”

“Oh stop dithering,” he moved towards the exit. “You had no shame when you were demanding that Zen suck it and you had no complaints about watching

Father ream me out but good.” He paused and an evil smirk filled his face. “Butt good!” he elbowed her gently. “I made a joke!”

He grinned.

She frowned.

“No?” she shook her head slowly in a negative manner.

“Fine. Be un-humorous. See if I try to lighten your day.” He sniffed. “But anyway, you need to drop those...human strictures.”

“Will you leave my modesty and your insane lack of... of decorum out of this and explain how I am supposed to knock you up?”

Her eyes were growing wide as all sorts of wild scenarios ran through her mind. It was almost enough to make her vomit. How did one impregnate a male? It’s not like he had a vagina!

“Well, during reproductive sex, there is a spine that descends into the head of my cock. You are still in heat so it should have developed fine within you.”

“I have a what?” she shrieked, pausing as she stared down at her abdomen, as if she expected the thing to explode through her flesh.

“A spine,” Zol spoke carefully as if speaking to someone who could not comprehend standard language. “I’ll say this in the most simplest of terms. Are you ready?”

Nodding numbly, Star stared up at him, eyes wide in shock...terror... Ghods, she didn't know!

“At the moment of orgasm, our mutual orgasm, I have to be in as deep as possible. This is because at the moment of orgasm with a fertile second, a spine will descend. From what I hear it is not painful and can be quite pleasurable. Your spine will then send the life-force material from you and Zol into me, where I already have Father's life force making me fertile. My seed, combined with Father's essence will flood you at the same time, forcing your spine to suck me all in, my little absorbent one. And then you brood, and I'll brood, we'll brood together after we lay, and after that it is our Alpha's responsibility!”

He smiled.

“Descend where?” Star knew her voice sounded strangled, but this was unlike anything that she had ever heard before.

“What part of me will be deep inside you, Star?” he rolled his eyes. “I hope that the lack of bathing and the slow wits are not inherited traits.”

“Descend where?” This time she reached out and grabbed Zol by his hair, forcing his head towards her in her panic. “Descends where?” She shook him as much as she could, gratifying her in some small way.

“Okay, I'll spell it out.” He rolled his eyes. “Cease in your attempts to human-handle me.”

She stopped shaking long enough to get in his personal body space. “Spill!”

“Your spine descends into the head of my cock, Star. The medicals say that your muscle spasms will force the spine to descend and the muscles contracting from my orgasm will open the head of my cock fully so that said spine can be easily accepted. That is why I have to be positioned correctly and at the proper time. Unlike Father’s Second Commander of Weapons and Hand-to-Hand combat; poor, poor man.” Zol looked over his shoulder at the poor man in question and shuddered.

“You mean?” Star tore her gaze away from Zol and watched the wretched shell of a man lean into his mate as he tried to urge him into the water.

“It will help,” the obvious Father gently insisted, trying to ease him into the healing heat. “And then you will feel better.”

“No—nothing will m—make i—it better,” the man stuttered, and then winced as the female moved in again. “Ge—get it away!” he cried, burying his face into his Alpha Father’s chest, his eyes wide as he stared in open mouthed horror at her crotch. “No! Danger! Female...da—danger!”

“I mean,” Zol’s voice brought her eyes back to his face. “He’s been spiked.” Then he shrugged his shoulders and gripped a stunned Star’s wrist, urging her to the exit. “Oh well, enough gossip for now.”

“But..But...bu—bu—but...”

“Star, he will recover...eventually,” Zol drawled as the man broke down in tears, sobbing loudly as other males surrounded him, offering what comfort they could.

“I think I need to throw up,” Star whimpered, finally allowing Zol to lead her from the bathing aerie.

“Don’t worry about it,” Zol insisted. “Another ten or fifteen planetary cycles, I am sure he’ll be up for female sex again. Or they can disguise her somehow.... Maybe if he takes her from behind...with another male on top...and there are great drugs out there now...And then maybe he’ll learn what to do with his cock.”

Star was too shocked to notice Zol changing and hefting her into the sky, on their way back to their own aerie. It looked like being Dragonish was not as easy as it originally appeared.

Chapter Five

When Star woke up, it was too long, warm muscular limbs and a long lanky body wrapped around her.

She found herself covered in a blanket of warm silken hair and a scent that was not as powerful as her Zen's, but was just as similar and nearly as arousing.

But that's not what awakened her.

There were quiet muffled murmurs that drew her attention, a liquid caress, and the sounds of flesh rubbing against flesh.

She blinked, clearing her eyes and looked around her. She was cuddled on a mass of pillows with Zolamel. It was his body that supported hers, that surrounded her in a protective stance even as he slept deeply. His long black hair covered them both, offering protection from prying eyes.

Though he was semi-erect, his cock pressed to her backside, he made no effort to grind against her. He was deeply relaxed and for some strange reason, that relaxed her, as well.

But there was that sound again!

She lifted her head, ignoring Zol's whine of irritation as he tightened his arms around her waist, and looked in the direction of that noise... then she felt her arousal slam into her, once again reminding her that she was still in her first heat.

Father was there, reclining back against a mound of pillows, his red eyes staring down at the red head in his lap. There was her mate, her Zenxian, his face buried in Father's groin, moaning in every semblance of relief and excited arousal as he choked down that enormous cock.

"Yes," Father breathed, running his hands over his own thighs, his nails raking long furrows as he spread his legs wider. "Just like that."

His breathing was harsh and his body tensed, but he never pulled his eyes away from his Alpha-Second.

Zen was on his knees, his body more towards Father's head as one of his hands braced itself against Father's hip, the other buried between his thighs, cupping and tugging at his large rounded testacles.

Zen stared up at Father, his own golden eyes gleaming as he slowly pulled back, exposing inch after dark inch of cock that had been buried down his throat. He pulled off the plum colored tip and smiled as he ran his glans over his face, leaving a silvery trail of precum and salvia as he nuzzled Father's heavy cock.

“More?” he asked, his voice deep and low, his body fairly quivering with excitement as Father’s hands stopped wandering over his own body and instead began to pet his Alpha partner.

“A lot more,” Father growled, his red eyes flashing as he arched his hips nudging Zen with his erection as his own finger’s sought his counterparts.

Zen’s smirk melted into a slack-jawed look of ecstasy as father captured his hips and easily lifted him overhead.

Zen’s gasp of surprise melted into a long groan as Father’s lips engulfed his dangling cock, sucking it straight down his throat and holding him in place.

“Father...” Zen gasped, his whole body shuddering as a red flush ran from his face down his body until he glowed in his passion.

His toes curled as father hummed around the cock filling his throat before he lifted Zen again, pulling his pale cock from his throat, his reddened lips a contrast to the pale shaft that he happily slurped and lapped.

“You are not done,” Father paused to whisper to Zen, whose eyes squeezed shut as if he were in pain.

But no male ever made a male writhe like that, made his cock drool or his hips arch helplessly in the tight grasp of the dark skinned man and cry injury. Zen was enjoying every moment of his conquest, and as he tossed back his long red

hair, the growl that emerged from his throat sent sparks of desire down Star's spine.

"Father," Zen gasped. "Please...."

"Yes," Kyo breathed, his arms repositioning Zen over his mouth, his long tongue lashing out to wrap around the head, licking up the slick fluid that nearly flowed from his cock's head. "Soon."

With a twist, Father tightened his muscles and in a show of incredible strength, easily trudged to the side on the silks and furs, tossing his head back to get his long white hair out of the way before he settled them both comfortably, Zen's thighs surrounding his face as his younger lover gripped his rounded ass in surprise. He looked up at Kyo thought his fall of silken hair; his own eyes questioning even as he returned his grip to the thick cock before his face.

"Easier this way," Father explained. "And it gives our audience a better view."

"Audience?" he managed before Kyo lowered his head and engulfed the erection with a moan of pure enjoyment.

He arched his hips again, nudging the bottom of Zen's chin, and Zen was once again taken with the cock that was before him.

He reached up and gently ran his fingers over its shaft, licking and caressing as his tongue danced over the head. He closed his eyes and nuzzled it, inhaling the

rich male scent that even Star could smell from where she lay observing. He lapped up the slick moisture that beaded at its tip before gripping the base and licking up and down the sides.

He opened his eyes, their color darkening into a molten gold and slowly sank the length deep into his mouth.

He paused for a moment, swallowed deeply, and then the whole shaft disappeared down his throat.

Pink flashes of tongue could be seen as he slowly worked his head back up before descending with a vengeance. His hands were now gripping Father's ass, pulling him in deep and holding him in place.

"It took me a while to learn how to do that," a voice whispered in her ear and Star moaned in answer. Zol had awakened and was watching the coupling with some interest. The semi-hard shaft of his cock grew harder by the second, pressing into the small of her back.

The wet sounds of oral pleasure, moaning and wet suckling filled her ears.

"I've seen you," she whispered back. "It's still impressive."

"Well, you can practice on me all you wish."

She snorted, rolling her eyes before she brought her attention back to the couple in front of them.

Now they were moving together, a coordinated dance that was as erotic as it was beautiful. The color of their skins contrasted as they moved; the dark flesh of Father, the pale skin of Zenxian, their hair in an odd juxtaposition as it framed their faces, created a private place for the two of them even as it highlighted their differences.

And what were their differences now? Did it matter who was Father and who was the second? Did it matter that one was elder and one the younger? Did it matter that they came from two different ways of life and that one had suffered and endured for his craft while the other for things physical that he could not change?

It mattered not.

All Star saw was love and appreciation, the desire to give as well as to please the being they were loving, the willingness to share the experience to those who observed.

Star felt a slick wetness between her thighs, felt a gnawing hunger, an ache for something not clearly defined yet, but something that she knew would be offered to her the moment she was ready. In the meantime, with the moans and gasps of Father and Zen filling her ears, she arched herself backwards, demanding caresses and touches from Zol, from the male who understood this beautiful

dance, who had been a part of it, who had experienced it all, and who was ready to tutor her in this delight.

“They are beautiful” Zol whispered, pressing deeper into the softness of her ass, his palm dropping low to rest on her stomach, to pull her tighter to his body. “They are so beautiful, Star. And they belong to both of us.”

“Yes,” she breathed, her eyes closing, but only for a moment, not wanting to miss this exchange of love between the two powerful males.

“They belong to us, Star. And when the time is right, all four of us will share this dance.”

“Yes.”

His hands dipped lower now, parting the electric blue curls that shielded her throbbing labia, running through the moisture that freely flowed there.

“Zol,” she gasped as his fingers danced along her opening, his thumb caressing her clit while his fingers pressed and petted her sensitive skin.

“Soon, I will fill this place within you, Star. Soon with Father and with Zen watching, I will fill this place and I will share my soul.”

She whimpered, arching helplessly as his caresses became harder, deeper, more demanding.

“Do you like to watch?” he asked, pushing her forward so that she lay on her stomach and spreading her thighs wide to nestle between them. “Do you like to

see your mate-bound submitting to Father? Do you like to watch Kyo take Zen's gorgeous cock deep into his throat, nursing it?"

"Yes," she gasped, shifting her head not to miss a moment of what the Alphas were doing while her own submissive partner ministered to her needs.

"Do you like knowing they are performing for us, Star? Do you know that they do these things for our pleasure and our pleasure alone?"

"Yes,"

Her whole body was quivering, desperate to find a release that seemed to dance just out of her reach. Her nipples were tight and ached sweetly as she pressed her chest down into the pillows and furs that made up their bed. The muscles of her back burned as she moved, thrusting her ass against the hard pillar of flesh that Zol pressed into her, moaning at the feel of his heat and the soft caress of his own dark hair covering her.

Her fingers dug into the silk that cradled them, tearing at the material as a wildness deep within her core gave birth to wanton groans.

Her heart raced and her eyes burned as she stared at the males, stared at how they began to move together, to scratch at each other's skin, leaving welts and red marks in their passing.

“Do you want to come, Star?” he asked, leaning down to bite at the flesh of her back, her shoulders, to lick at the sensitive lobes of her ears. “Do you want to come?”

“Zol!” she stuttered, her breath hitching, choking her words. “Zol, make me come.”

His fingers were pinching her clit, tugging at it as if it were a miniature cock, his fingers pounding deep within her body, caressing several spots that sent fire racing through her veins, and white lights dancing across her eyes.

She closed them as a powerful wave of release washed over her, tearing screams from her throat. Her body jumped and writhed beneath Zol, feeling the wetness of his own release pour up her back.

This sent more spasms through her, her inner walls clutching at his fingers, her toes and fingers curling as her orgasm threatened to tear her body apart.

Then all too soon, it was over, fading away, leaving her to fall limp and sated against the now damp silks that gently caressed her skin.

“Watch them,” Zol whimpered, turning his head to face the Alpha’s just as Zen arched back, his voice groaning.

Pale drips of his seed escaped those reddened lips as Father struggled to keep up with the flow of Zen’s orgasm.

Zen's ass clenched rhythmically as he dove deeper into Father's willing throat, his own eyes open and boring into hers. Then he slowly closed them, his fingers tugging at Father's sacks and swallowing, moaning his approval as Father sent his own buildup shooting down his throat.

Slowly, both Alphas separated as if by mutual consent, licking their partner's shafts and heads clean of any remaining release, before Zen spun around to lap his own spilled seed from Father's face, sharing the taste in a deep slow kiss.

"Delicious," Kyo murmured, breaking their kiss to lap at his second' face. "No matter how many times I take you in, I marvel at your flavor."

"Better when the two of us are combined," Zen smiled and closed his eyes as he settled against Father's massive chest, his fingers stroking and caressing his dark nipples before resting sedately on his shoulders.

"I believe you are correct," Father chuckled, and then turned to Star and Zol. "Would you care to try it and come to your own conclusions?"

Before Star could even think of a response, Zol climbed off her, away from the mass of damp heat their bodies had generated, and crawled across the floor to the two in their own mounds of pillows.

Star watched as Zol seemed to flow up their bodies, caressing and touching them before he settled his mouth against Father's, allowing his mate-bound to

insert his tongue deep into his own mouth before breaking that kiss and forcing his own tongue into Zen's.

“Delicious,” he purred, bringing up a hand, the hand that had stroked and rubbed Star into climax and slowly lapping her essence off his fingers. “But better with our female.”

Father and Zen leaned in to lick and suck at his fingers before sliding into a torrid three-way kiss that was all pink flashes of tinge, parted lips, and wet sucking sounds.

“Star?”

Star jumped as her name was called, so invoiced in their visual display was she.

Zen's voice startled her, made her blink, then grin when she realized he was holding out a hand for her, that they were waiting for her to take her place amongst them.

At first, watching the tree of them interact, Star could not help but feel a little left out, like she really didn't belong, feeling like an intruder. But now, with all three sets of hungry and eager eyes watching her, she felt needed, desired, and wanted.

But sometimes, watching the beauty of all of them together left her feeling out of place.

But the feelings never lasted long.

As if they could read her emotions, the three reached out to her.

“Come and complete us,” Father’s voice rang out languid and deep, filled with exhaustion, but not at all long suffering.

“We await you,” Zen grinned. “Why are you still there?”

And in their private mental-bound voice, Zen added, “*Get over here where you belong!*”

With a grin, Star left the damp and lonely silks where they lay and made her way across the small distance to her men.

The three of them together were strong, a force to unite with, but she had a feeling that combined, all four of them would be a force of nature.

“They do put on a good show,” Zol breathed into her ear as she settled between Zen and Father. She groaned and ignored the laughter as Zen snuggled up behind her and she rested her head on Father’s rather large chest. The smell of them, of sex and sensuality overwhelmed her senses, but she did not want to pull away. Instead, she wanted to know what they would smell like with her own scent entwined with theirs.

“Not the time for us,” Zol whispered, leaning over Kyo to speak against her ear, “But as long as there is something I can do to relieve this tension, I will.”

Star grinned in embarrassment, wanting to hide, but Zol and his impudent comments would not leave her alone. “Soon I get to see what all the fuss is about,” he added, settling softly against Father’s chest, grinning at her over the muscular plane. “And are you not glad I made you wash?”

Any suitably insulting reply she could have made was drowned out in Zol’s scream of outrage as Father, having heard enough, delivered the flat of his hand to the round of his ass with great force.

“Leave off teasing, Zol,” he commanded. “I believe we have all had enough of your nonsense for one night.”

Zol sniffed, but Star could see the amusement in his eyes as he answered, “Yes, Father.”

“And that will last all of three heartbeats,” Star added, letting loose a small giggle when Zen gave her a squeeze.

“Yes, true,” he snickered into her ear. “But Zol is a part of our Quad, and we must endure as has Father for these many years.”

Zol sniffed in response, and Star felt a warm heat spread through her. This was different than the heat of arousal or of the need that seemed to take over her senses at times. This was...was this...Could this be love? Was this what it was like to have a home and a family?

She looked over her males, over Father who had closed his eyes after snuggling Zol closer to him, while Father rested on his back. And at Zol who contentedly closed his eyes though with a mischievous grin pulling at his lips. And then she looked at Zen, who curled around her, stroking her side softly with his large hands.

Yeah, she decided. Maybe this was like a family or better than family.

This was her Quad.

Chapter Six

“What is there to do around here?”

Star tapped her foot, her bare foot, as she stared down at Zol. “I mean, there has to be something for me to do.”

Star was not used to just simply existing day to day, not having any real responsibilities. Back when she lived in the village, there was always something for her to do from fetching water to tending the ill and infirm. Doing nothing was about to drive her out of her mind.

“What skills have you honed?” Zol asked from his spot on a set of huge pillows. In his lap was some sort of ornamentation...thing. It had a lot of beads and jewels, and the colors simulated the sky at sunset. It was obviously something that took a great time to learn and Zol was extremely skilled at it, but that left her feeling like a lazy interloper. What could she bring to the Quad other than her fertility and breeding capabilities?

“I can...I can... I can sew.”

This was true. She had spent many a cold desert night with a bale of material, sewing caftans and cloaks for her adoptive family. It was a skill she took some pride in.

“Well...” Zol looked around. “We do need more curtains, especially since you keep tearing them down.” He shot a pointed look at the pale blue swath of material that she immediately tore from the windows and wrapped around her body after cleaning up from her last sexual exploration with Zol.

“It’s self defense,” she retorted. “I still feel uncomfortable walking around without any covering.”

“Stupid human modesty.”

“Be that as it may,” she rolled her eyes, “I have to have something to cover my body. I hope you truly don’t expect me to just walk around in nothing.”

“I expect you to leave the aerie some type of decorations, Star. You have to get used to being Dragonish now that you are once again reunited with your people.”

“And that means that I have to do something, you know, help out.”

“And you want to sew.”

“I’m good at it.”

“Curtains.”

“Caftans.”

“Caft... what is a caftan, Star, and why would I need one?”

“It’s a robe, Zol. It covers the body.”

“Why would I want to cover such glory?” He motioned to his own bare form, naked save for the protective cloth on his lap that held many of his tools.

Her mouth went dry.

With his personal bits covered, there was nothing to distract for the nearly perfect lines of his body. Zol was not a muscular behemoth like Zen or Father, he was built along sleek lines that showed a delicate strength. With his long dark hair running along his back, he appeared as a sensual creature designed out of sensual dream... or a nightmare.

“What?” he asked when no response was forthcoming. “Oh,” he inhaled deeply, his golden eyes gleaming. And then he smiled.

“I...um—I...”

“Naked bodies make you wet!” he crowed, inhaling again.

“No...that is to say...”

“You can’t lie!” he cackled. “I can smell you! You want me!”

A fierce blush spread over her cheeks. “I don’t!”

“You do! You like looking at naked males!”

“I don’t!”

“You liked looking at Father and Zen!”

“Well...” she looked down, wondering if there was a hole she could crawl into.

“You loved looking and seeing what they were doing! You want to see Father plowing Zen!”

“I—I...”

“You want to see Zen scream and whine and lose control! You want to see him beg!”

“I...”

“You want to beg.” His gold eyes narrowed as he picked up his work and deposited it to the side. “You want to be bent over and filled, pounded until your back teeth rattle! You want it so hot and so hard that we’ll have to carry you around for the next cycle. You want to scream and cry, and curse, and let go of all control.” He paused and licked his lips as his eyes ran over her now trembling body. “It’s okay, Star. I want to beg, too.”

His erection sprang free, hot and hard, pointing towards his stomach. “I want to whine and beg and scream as they take me. I love to watch them pond each other. It’s so...so violent, Star. And when they take me, I know that all that violence, all that power is leashed just for me.”

Star nodded, inhaling and for once catching the teasing scent of heat that surrounded Zol when aroused.

“You and I are alike in that way, Star.” He took a step forward, reaching out to cup her hands in his large hands. “You and I are built along the same lines, built

the way the Ghods intended us to be. You want to control that fire, to ride on top of the storm.”

Again she nodded, finding it hard to look into his intense eyes.

“And do you want to know a secret?”

“W—what?” she managed, squirming under his touch, under his gaze.

“We are the ones with all the power, Star. We control all of that violence and energy. We harness all of that strength.” He leaned closer, breathing directly on her, sending shivers through her body. “And they have no choice but to accept it.”

“Oh Ghods...” she shivered, her arms reaching out to grasp his shoulders as her knees began to buckle.

She managed to hold her head up and gasped. His eyes were smoldering. He pulled her closer and she felt the wet head of his cock dampening the material of her makeshift dress, a scalding heat against her stomach.

He inhaled again, deeply, and ran his tongue along her neck, baring his fangs as her head tilted back. “Almost,” he whispered, “You are almost ripe, Star. You are nearly ready for me, ready to squeeze me with your sex, to pierce me with your spine, to take and control me as I ravage you. And then we will make them watch us as we burn.”

“Zol...”

“Shh,” he ordered, his fingers leaving her face to trail down over her neck to cup and caress her breasts.

“Zol!” Her knees gave way and he followed her to the ground, controlling her fall, placing her safely on the pillows he had just vacated.

“Soon, Star,” he purred, his voice trilling as his fingers ripped aside the curtain to touch her bare flesh.

Chapter Seven

Warm and safe.

Those were the impressions that filled Star's head as she slowly surfaced out of the deep sleep in which she had been languishing.

Her nose twitched as she inhaled the sleep warmed smell of masculine flesh that surrounded her. It made her want to snuggle into that scent and never leave.

Instead she moaned, a tiny sound of protest as wakefulness seemed to leap at her, dragging her from her comfort.

There was no help for it, she decided as she inhaled deeply, pulling in cool morning air. Once you start breathing normally, she mused, you were up and there wasn't a thing you could do about it.

A small scowl on her face, Star pulled herself upright, pouting slightly as a masculine arm dropped around her waist, pulling her back against a hard body. Looking down at the arm, she realized it was not the svelte form of Zol behind her. She was looking at the paler more muscular arm of her mate.

"Zen?" Her voice rusty from its nightly disuse.

“S—sleep,” he muttered, pulling her close, burying his face deep into her side, his tongue lazily lapping along her hip. Rolling her eyes, she turned her head to gaze about the room.

Father and Zol were across from them, in their very own nest of pillows. Kyo seemed to dominate the bed, stretched out flat on his back, his legs spread out wide, showcasing the thick buckles that made up those ridiculously sculpted appendages while Zol, as usual, was sprawled over Father’s broad chest. Father’s arms were wrapped around his mate, holding him in place while Zol appeared to be doing his best to crawl inside the dark body he was using as a pillow.

Star snorted as she looked away, already becoming used to seeing the two in all manners of what would be considered to the humans she grew up with, compromising positions.

But the love and regard between the two was obvious to anyone and it made observing their intimate acts a special joy whose memory she would always cherish.

And to think that soon she would be way more involved than just watching caused a low ache begin deep in her stomach. Grunting, she looked down at her own flesh, resisting the urge to curse at the reminder that she was still in heat. In heat and growing fertile, she amended as her mind went back to the conversation she had with Zol about reproduction.

Was there really a spine deep inside her? Why didn't she feel it now?

She shifted Zen's hand far enough to press her own palms against her lower stomach.

What was going on in there?

When she observed the women of the village in their gravid states, waddling around, and happily pressing fingers against their distended stomachs, she had always felt a pang of jealousy.

There were no prospects for a happy future with the Elder's son chasing her about, but still she yearned to have children, to have a family of her own that no one could take away.

But now...now maybe things would be different. Maybe now her stomach would swell with new life and in a few months, she would give birth to a....

"I'm gonna lay an egg," she muttered, the smile that was growing on her face sliding into a mouth of discontent. She was going to lay an egg, if what Zol had told her was the truth. How did one lay an egg anyway? How did it come out? And more importantly, what was she going to do with it when it was here? Her life was growing more difficult than she could have ever conceived.

"Egg, yes," was muttered at her hip and her eyes were drawn from her own form to that of her mate's.

Zen looked well rested and calm, something that she was suddenly envious of.

Some small demon in the back of her mind urged her to wake him. How dare he sleep when she was so disturbed? But she curtailed that selfish notion. It had to be the heat she was experiencing that was making her think in strange ways.

Yes, she was still in heat. The aching gnawing in her belly was different than it was before, less acute while by no means becoming less urgent.

She licked her lips and pressed her palm against her stomach again. Her life was about to change in strange and unusual ways and all she wanted to do was to scream for her mommy.

“If I had one,” she sighed, moving away from Zen, just a bit, trying to control these new depressing thoughts.

But her movement, no matter how slight, managed to awaken Zen. With one eye opened he yawned widely, exposing his sharp fangs that gleamed whitely against his black gums.

“Something troubles you, my Star?” he breathed; his voice soft enough not to disturb the sleeping pair across the room.

“No,” she answered just as softly, running a hand across her face.

“Do you hunger or thirst? I can retrieve something if you wish? How about a nice fruit?”

“I don’t want food, Zen.” She turned to stare out of the bare window, her unspoken words leaving a broad hint for him to easily decipher.

“Then, my heart, what is it that you desire?”

“Would,” her shoulders slumped a little, “would it be wrong of me to wish for my parents?”

“Star...”

“I know at this late date it hardly matters if they are here or not, but lately...I don’t know, Zen. Lately I have been longing—longing just to see them, I guess.”

She turned to look at him. “Does that make any sense?”

“There are changes in your life, my mate, and they are happening at an alarming rate. Of course it is normal to long for unconditional parental love and guidance.”

“But I never had before,” she mused. “I always took care of myself.”

“But now you are surrounded by family.”

“I was surrounded by family before, Zen, and that never assisted me at all.”

Zen sat up and pulled an unresisting Star into his lap. “Those humans were never your family, Star. They were your caretakers and your overlords, but they were never your family.”

“They took care of me, like the Quad—”

“They never loved you, Star. They never tried to give you what you needed most, what anyone needs to grow up happy and healthy. I am amazed that you are sane. Dragonish live for our family bonds.”

“And I never had that.”

“No, and for that, My Mate, am truly sorry.”

“It’s not your fault, Zen.” She forced a smile to her lips. “You give me so much. You saved me and you brought me here and gifted me with this wonderful family...”

As she trailed off, her fingers idly ran along one of the muscular arms that held her.

“What brought this on, Star,” he gently questioned. “What has your thoughts drifting to families? Is it the prospect of laying and brooding?”

“No, it’s...I met a Dragonish at the baths, Zen. He claimed that my scent smelled familiar.”

“Indeed,” Zen held her tighter. “Tell me more, please.”

“His name was Zaz,” she paid no attention to his quick inhalation of breath. “He and his female were entering the bathing rooms when Zol and I were soaking. We greeted each other and he said that my scent smelled familiar.”

“Zaz, Star? Are you sure?”

“Yes, I am not stupid nor hard of hearing,” she snapped a bit, before getting control of herself. “Sorry. This...this heat thing is costing me my temper. But yes, his name is Zaz.”

“Zaz is the prince, Star, and first successor to the throne.”

“Zol informed me.”

“The Prince scented you as familiar?” This seemed to cause some excitement in Zen. “Why?”

“Yes, he said we were practically family.” She shrugged. “He said he would think on the scent and then get back to me after he figured it out.”

“This is...this is interesting.”

“And he confirmed that my parents would have had to be dead in order for the humans to have me. He said that no Quad would ever abandon their child.”

“This is true, Star. This is something that you should know.”

“I knew.” She slumped, burrowing into his arms grateful for the heat he emanated. She needed it to counter the bit of cold and uncertainty that remained in her heart. “You know, I always wondered if you had made a mistake about me, Zen.”

“A mistake?”

“Yes that I was really not your mate and that one day you would realize that this all had been one big mistake. And then I would lose everything I have always dreamed of having.”

“Never, my heart. How could you think such a thing?”

“I don’t know.” She threw her hand up in the air, exasperated. “It’s just that everything that I always had, everything that I treasure, always seems to be lost with me. And the Prince’s words, Zaz’s words... I don’t know, Zen. They made me feel like I had worth.”

“You are more than worthy, my heart.” He bent to nuzzle her neck. “You are the one who completes me, who sees past my faults and shortcomings. You accept this ugly face and form when many others turn away in disgust.”

“You are not ugly!” she hissed, reaching out and pinching his arms, ignoring his flinch of pain. “Never criticize yourself to me, Zen! You are beautiful and perfect, no matter what some stupid legend says.”

“You...you have learned a lot in a day,” Zen’s lips quirked up into a wry smile.

“Well, I had to do something. You and Father abandoned me to Zol all day. That male loves to gossip!”

“Father and I decided that you needed some time to get to know your second, Star. WE would never abandon you.”

“I know that,” she stroked the abused skin. “I did not mean that the way it sounded.”

“Good.” Zen gave her a hug. “I know the heat still rides you, my Star. Soon it will be time for the joining, and I need you to be as comfortable around Zol as possible. You both have a lot of private moments to share.”

“And you don’t want me to spike him.”

“You learned of that, too?”

“Yes.” She pinched sharply at his arms again. “You could have told me!”

“I didn’t want to scare you!” he defended.

“It was not scary learning this by seeing a man who looked like he could lift you in dragon form cower from a female shorter than I. Oh, that just took all my fears away.”

“Oh,” Zen grunted, looking sheepish as he lowered his head.

“Do not be too hard on him, Star,” an amused voice interjected, and Star looked up and saw Father standing beside their pile of pillows.

“Did we awake you, Father?” Zen asked respectfully.

“I could feel Star’s distress.” Father blinked his red eyes before taking a seat beside the couple. “It worried me. Are you both well?”

“Just talking about...things.”

“Things?” Father arched one white eyebrow. “Share these thoughts with me.”

It was a request that Star felt comfortable following. Father’s presence always made her feel better.

“I met the prince who scented me as familiar.” She turned on her Zen chair to get a better view of the dark man called Father. “And I learned I will have to spike Zol to get him pregnant.”

At that, Father chuckled. “Then, indeed, you have had quite a day.”

She nodded and settled back into her mate’s arms.

“Well, if Prince Zaz has said that he scented you familiar, then your family no doubt has some connection with the royal family. Zaz rarely leaves the palace and then usually it is to take in the bath house gossip or to check on his aerie designs.”

“The prince designs aeries?”

“Yes,” Father nodded. “He tries to come up with improvements every year.”

“So even the royals work.”

“You want to work?” Zen asked, cocking his head to the side as he examined her closely.

“I need to feel useful.”

“And preparing for eggs is not useful?” he asked, as Father rolled his eyes. “We need to assess your skills, Star, and then we can find you a job that will make you feel helpful.”

“Something that doesn’t have to do with spiking or egg laying,” she insisted. “I worry about that enough as is.”

“Ah, you met the combat instructor,” Father shook his head sadly. “Maybe one day he can return to speaking of eggs, touching females...or walking upright again. But I believe it will take some time...”

“See?” Star explained, narrowing her eyes at Father. “This is what I am talking about! You all take this strange stuff and treat it as normal everyday things! Whoever heard of a female spiking a male?”

“That may be because it is all normal things to us, Star,” Father chided lightly. “These things are taught to us from our hatching. I understand that you have not had this training, and we will stumble as we endeavor to explain it all to you, Star. However, remember this situation is new to us, as well. We are all learning to cope.”

“And we will explain as needed,” Zen added hurriedly. “But if we are skinning out or you don’t understand something, please let us know. We can’t help you unless you tell us when you are lost or confused.”

Star nodded, yawning lightly.

“You understand copulation?” Father asked

“Yes, I believe Zol explained it to me.”

“And you are content to know that knowledge of your family and their strange disappearance?”

“Yes, Father.” She yawned again, wrapping Zen’s arms tighter around her.

“And you understand that we all love you, and will do whatever it is in our power to see you happy?” Zen placed a small kiss on her forehead as he finished speaking.

“Yes, Zen,” she answered her mate.

“Then off to sleep.” Father gracefully rose to his feet. “The sunrise is not far off and we have things that must be done on the morrow.”

Both Zen and Star nodded obediently and immediately positioned themselves comfortably on their pillows once again.

Father pulled their furs up, comfortably covering them before turning and joining his own mate.

And Star, well Star smiled. Her Quad cared. Their actions, rising up to comfort her in the middle of the night, spoke more to her than any words could have.

She was still unsure of herself and struggling to find her way, but inside her, the knowledge that her Quad would do anything to see her safe and happy, no matter how large or small, left a warm glowing place in her heart.

Chapter Eight

“I don’t think I feel too good.”

Star’s comment brought an immediate response from the males in the aerie. Almost at once, Zen swept her in his arms and before she could blink, she was deposited onto their pile of pillows. Then Father stood over her, running his hands over her body, making her stomach ache all the more.

There was something about Father.... Sure, Zen was her Alpha, but Father with his commanding presence and his demanding ways.... He was almost like a concentrated Zen!

That thought brought a moan to her hips and a knowing look to Father’s red eyes before he backed off. Immediately, Zol was there, and he was all-maternal as he gripped her hand and shouted questions at her. “Where does it hurt? DO you need a drink? How about some fruit? Would some fruit help? DO you need a healer? I can go and get a healer!”

“Good may not have been the right word...”

“Well, Ghods,” Zol snorted, tossing her arm aside as if it suddenly offended him. So much for maternal. “I thought something was wrong with you. Do all

females whine about noting? If they do, then I thank the Ghods that I was born a breeding male.”

“Are you sure?” Zen questioned, his eyes still anxious as they examined her.

“I think I just have a bad...feeling?” she questioned, trying to sit up.

“But it could be something more serious,” Zen insisted, but Father shook his head and backed away further.

“Females, sometimes,” he began, “Sometimes, the females are renowned for what they can feel.”

“Feel?” Zen asked. “Explain.”

“Intuition,” Father explained. “Our females are often prized for what they can feel about what has yet to come.”

“Really?” Zol asked, moving closer as if suddenly intrigued. “Do tell.”

“Well,” Father moved closer, sitting at the pile of pillows at Star’s feet, one hand reaching out to caress her leg. “In past times, our females were always consulted before we moved in battle. It is one of the reasons our females were so highly prized. It was also a sad point in the legend of the Earth Dragonish, that the wronged princess did not see that her mate did not have her best interest at heart.”

“Why was she expected to know?” Star asked, moving closer to the caresses of Father.

“She was expected to know because our females have always known the heart condition of their males. Why do you think, little one, that you adapted to our Quad so quickly?”

“I...” She really didn’t have an answer for that question.

“It is because the heart knows.” He moved closer to her as well, saying nothing as Zen gave way and allowed the intimacy. “The heart sees what the mind has yet to conceive.”

“Could it be that her mind was just clouded by what her heart desires?”

“It could be.” Father ran his hands further up her legs, caressing her thighs, watching as her legs spread just a little, welcoming the caress. “Just as right now, your heart is telling you something that your mind has yet to comprehend.”

Star blinked, trying to garner Father’s meanings while Zol snickered in the background.

Finally, it seemed to be too much for the tall thin Dragonish. He exploded in laughter, pointing at Star and gasping, “You don’t even realize that you are begging to have sex with father!”



Star closed her eyes, resting her head against Father’s chest, her body totally relaxed and her heart at ease. When she suddenly jerked upright, her eyes flashing in fury, the others in the warm pile of bodies looked around in alarm.

“Star?” Zen asked hesitantly, reaching out to caress her back. “What is it?”

“Someone’s here,” she breathed, her nose wrinkling as she scented the air.

Father and Zol were instantly alert, rising to their feet and moving to one of the larger windows of the aerie.

“Who...?”

“Someone who does not belong,” she hissed, rising to her knees, for once not concerned about her nudity. “They were there...watching.”

This time, Zen had rose to his feet and went to Zol, urging the dark haired man back to their nest of pillows.

“Stay with her,” he commanded, and for once Zol didn’t argue. He moved back to Star’s side, his eyes narrowed in anger.

“How dare they?” she hissed, looking more Dragonish by the second with her sparkling eyes and the snarl on her lips.

“They know nothing,” Zol snared in answer. “They have no idea who they are playing with.”

Before she could respond, Father was pointing to the rear window and with a small flash, where Zen once stood hovered a huge dragon, scales gleaming in the glowing moonlight, smoke rolling up from his nose. And in an even shorter time than his transformation, he was gone, out of the window and roaring in anger.

The next second, Father's bright red eyes were focused on the pair in their bedding. "You will remain," he commanded and both Zol and Star nodded before a huge red dragon took the place of Kyotype. Then he, too, was gone, flying off in a different direction than Zen, his eyes set on a goal that only he could see.

"So," Star began after a few moments of silence. "What do we do now?"

"We wait." He rolled his eyes as he settled back amongst the pillows.

To a casual observer, Zol may appear indolent, but because of the set of his shoulders, muscled slightly tensed beneath the skin and deceptively unaware, and the way his eyes constantly tracked from left to right, Star knew he was ready to pounce and rend in a moment's notice.

"Wait for what?"

"You tell me," he paused to roll his eyes at her. "You're the one who's suddenly sensing things."

"Hey." She crossed her arms over her chest.

"Well, first you felt the need to mate with Father."

"Jealous?"

"Only because I can't whine and cry for it like you can."

"Zol! I'm still in heat!"

"I wish I had that excuse," he sniggered, then leered at her. "It took some work to get Kyo to notice me enough to make *me* feel it was worth spreading my

legs to him. And well, you just kind of rolled over and wave your ass in the air.” He smirked when her mouth flopped open in shock. “So,” he added, as she remained silent. “You ready to fuck yet?”

Chapter Nine

Zen returned before she could even imagine a response to that comment and she eagerly turned away from her fellow secondary to find out what he had to say.

“Are you and Zol...”

“Not fighting,” Zol sniffed, rising to his feet and going to a far window, amusement fleeing from his face as he stared out into the darkening sky. “I am simply making her uncomfortable, as usual. Where is father?”

“I do not know.” Zen moved towards Star. “Kyo sent me to follow a scent trail.” He turned his attention to Star, dropping to the pillows beside her and raising one pale hand to caress her face. “How did you know it was there?”

“I—I just...felt it,” she sighed, closing her eyes and leaning into the caress. There was another ache gnawing at her now, and as much as she enjoyed his touch, her body craved something more.

“You are beginning to look.” He waved his free hand in the air as her eyes opened, a yellow fire banked within their depths. “You are....”

“Acting more Dragonish,” Zol allowed, moving back towards them and dropping down beside Star. “I noticed it in the bath house. You even bared fang at,” his words trailed off as he cut eyes at Zen before continuing, “at that

disagreeable person. You were really fierce,” he chuckled, running his hands through his hair. “You almost scared me. Almost.” He leaned forward and lapped at her nose, giggling as she wrinkled it and glared in his direction.

“You were fighting?” Zen sounded alarmed enough to take her attention from Zol and concentrate fully on him.

“I was not fighting.”

“More like defending,” Zol laughed. “Being among humans may have blunted her claws, but it by no means made her less Dragonish. She reacted appropriately, Zen, and you know I would not let anything happen to her.”

That said, Zol turned his attention back to the window, trying hard to disguise his worry, but even Star knew enough about the male to know he was trying to hide it.

“Father will return soon,” Star spoke softly, pulling away from Zen to reach out to her fellow secondary. She ran her fingers through his soft hair, her eyes filled with understanding as he sighed and leaned closer into her caress.

“Things are changing,” he replied softly, the usual condor in his voice missing. “And after what we learned about you, about your family...It seems too much of a coincidence, Star. First the Prince and the revelation that your family may have close ties to the Royal one. And that there had to be some kind of corruption or deceit to get your family to flee...and now this. If Zaz can remember

your scent, then I am positive that more Dragonish can. Maybe even the one who caused your family's downfall."

That gave Star a pause, her hand stilled in his hair and she turned her eyes to Zen. "Could that be true? Could someone still try and...and..."

"We don't know if that is true or not," Zen sighed, staring with a reproachful gaze at Zol. "We can only wait until the Prince remembers something."

"And the Prince is old, Zen," Zol pointed out. "He had more memories to search through. This corruption that befell Star's family had to have been fairly recent. And of all the families that have disappeared from our community, I can not recall one who had a child."

"I can recall nothing."

"I am older than you, cub," Zol rolled his eyes and gently pulled away from Star, rising to his feet. "Something is gathering here, Zen. Mark my words in your memory. Someone or something is now taking a lot of interest in our Quad. It disturbs me that someone would be so bold. And right now, when our female is developing...it is too much of a coincidence."

"Meaning?" Zen moved to take Star into his arms, holding her close as if some perceived danger was running right towards her.

“Meaning that if someone wanted her family to disappear, what makes you think that they will settle for any remnant of it remaining?”

“You are sure?” Zen asked, his eyes narrowed in anger.

“Why would you go through the trouble of making a family disappear and then allow some part of it back? That makes no sense, Zenaxion. And then to allow that one member, the most important member of that lost Quad, to return and restart their line and do it with one of the most powerful Quads in this realm? It would be sheer madness.”

“Sometimes I forget that you are intelligent,” Star breathed, a cornel of fear beginning to build in her heart.

“Yes, my intelligence astounds,” he rolled his eyes. “It’s amazing I have made it all of my years and no one is the wiser.” Sarcasm was thick.

“I didn’t mean to insult you,” Star allowed, sighing deeply. “But this is something I never considered. I was only thinking about finding the organs of my family...my Quad. I never thought that someone would want to harm me.”

“We don’t know if it’s harm,” Zol rolled his eyes. “They could be waiting for a chance to breed you.”

“What?” Both Star and Zen yelped at the same time.

“Well, if I wanted to get rid of a Quad and not cause a major issue with the royals, I would simply breed them out. Death is such a violent and public thing.”

“That makes sense,” Zen growled. “But Star is already marked.”

“And if you get her when her spine is ready to drop, she would fuck a Skab and not care, so long as the pain stops.”

“And you know this because...” Star was pushing out of Zen’s hold, trying to get closer to her fellow second.

“I am old,” he again repeated. “I have had my cycles many times, though none as great as what is building now.”

“And you did what?”

“I took relaxants that healers provided and tried my best to screw Father and Zen into powder.” There was no shame in his response. “And I know now that this Quad is nearly complete, the urge is growing so powerful that I am sure that even the strongest relaxants will not stop the urge. It is growing in me and it is growing in you.”

“How can you be so sure,” Star snipped. “I find it inconceivable that I would stoop so low as to sleep with someone who is trying to rid the world of my presence.”

“Sleep has nothing to do with it, Star,” Zol growled, his eyes flashing red as he turned towards her. “It has everything to do with the mating urge and the fact that you are more Dragonish than human now.” He moved closer to her, stalking, his hips swaying, his long dark hair shimmering around his naked body. “The urge

to mate is what keeps us united, Star, that desire to ensure that our bloodlines are not lost. It is what forged us into Quads, the desire to keep our offspring safe. It is what shapes us at the core, defines who we are as a people. You feel it when your eyes spark yellow, or when you sweetly submit to the Alphas, or when you nearly tear the throat out of a male who has offered you insult towards your Quad. You have always been more Dragonish than human, you just no longer have that weak polite façade to hide behind.”

“I..I...” Star stammered as her mind absorbed what Zol had said.

His eyes were glowing and she was unafraid. In fact, her mind added this new font of information to what Father had told her earlier. She, in her heart, trusted these creatures. Would a human so quickly fall into the bed furs with beings that could shift into the stuff of human nightmares? And yet here she was, unafraid and even delighting in their rough animalistic ways.

The spark of their eyes excited her, the feel of their rough skin dominating her...it thrilled her. The sight of them transforming was not abhorrent, but something to be looked on with a great amount of awe and a little envy.

“Be that as it may.” Zen inhaled deeply, making no move to pull Star closer. “That is not what is important at this moment, the amount of Dragonish Star is exhibiting. I am more concerned with her safety.”

“As am I.” Zol tore his eyes away from Star’s and turned back towards the window, seeking the horizon.

“Father will return.” Zen rose to his feet and enveloped the older Zol within his arms. “His job is to see to the safety of us all, and he is probably checking something out, something that he recently has thought of.” He gave his secondary a squeeze. “Father is among the oldest of us all, and I trust his instincts a far sight more than mine when it comes to staying alive as well as protecting us at the same time..”

“I know that, cub.” Zol again rolled his eyes, the redness fading, as he seemed to revert to his usual snarly self. “But it is a bonded mate’s prerogative to worry about their partner. As *you* should be worrying about our female.”

“I am worried.”

Star yelped, “I can take care of myself!”

“And,” Zen rolled his eyes, “You don’t have to worry alone, Zol. Come back to the pillows.”

“I am not a child seeking comfort.”

“But you are a worried mate,” Star pointed out. “And it is insane to worry alone, away from the arms of your Quad. I am still learning the Dragonish way and even *I* know where my safety and joy can be found.”

“Your words...they make sense,” Zol muttered, then allowed Zen to pull him back to Star and their comfortable sex-scented pillows.

“What a way to deny the afterglow,” he grumbled, but made himself comfortable beside Star once more.

“We can recreate it any time,” Zen snickered, walking around their aerie one more time before sinking into the pillows between the two, pulling them both to his body. “That is the wonder of having your own Quad.”

“Like you would know, cub.” Zol sniffed before squirming around until his head rested against Zen’s chest, his arms flung across his body to touch Star, his long dark hair blanketing them all.

“I know where my comfort and joy abound.” Zen snuggled them closer, making sure Star was roughly in the same position as Zol, watching as her breathing slowed and she began to succumb to sleep. “And I know where I am safest,” he grinned at Zol. “Between your sharp wit and her sharp tongue, only a fool would desire to invade his aerie.”

Star snorted and Zol rolled his eyes, but both were proud and amused to be seen as such formidable foes.

“Everything will work out,” he added, while keeping his mind and body in alert. “It has to. We have found our Quad and nothing,” his eyes glowed red before the bright color faded, “nothing will separate us.”

Chapter Ten

By the time Father returned, the sun was on the rise and both Star and Zol had calmed considerably, enough to succumb to a deep sleep.

Zen was still alert when Father made his entrance, his huge red form landing lightly on the tiled floor of their aerie. “Have you found the source?” he asked more calmly than he felt.

In an instant, Father’s tall dark secondary form had taken the place of his primary, and he faced his Alpha partner. “No, but it is familiar, very familiar,” he grouched as he walked over to the pair on the pillows. “How are they?”

“Worried, especially Zol. But he managed to put some things into perspective.”

“My bonded mate is wiser than he appears, Zen,” Kyo grinned.

“This I know, Father,” Zen smiled, ruefully. “But it appears that sometimes I need a reminder.”

“As does our female. She is a match for Zol, Zen, remember that. In order to mate successfully, they must be well matched. And it appears that they are.”

“And the scent?”

“Always one to cut to the point, Zen.”

“I find that cutting to the point makes life more bearable in my case.”

“In any case, Zen.” Father stood and observed the two, watching as Star moved into the spot that Zen once occupied, gravitating towards the heat of her secondary partner. He ran a hand over his face, his whole attitude screaming tired but content, as he watched Zol make room for her, holding her close.

“And the scent?”

“It almost appeared...royal,” Father sighed, moving away from the tempting warmth of their bodies, moving back towards the large windows of the aerie.

“Royal?”

“Nearly there, but not quite.”

“Nearly? Does such a blood line exist?”

“There have always been claims and rumors,” Kyo allowed “But what was once royal does not necessarily mean royal in this time.”

“True.”

“So. This scent that speaks of somewhat royal blood...and the one you followed—”

“There were two?” Zen looked shocked, his voice rising in his agitation.

“As if I would send you off alone without me to defend this Quad,” he scoffed. But it only showed in his voice. As usual, Kyo appeared to be a mountain.

“I apologize.” Zen bowed slightly, but stood to his full height and began to deliver his report. “The scent I followed was familiar as well. And I scented no royal blood in the taint. I believe you had caught the scent that I am ashamed to admit that I lost. It was almost as if the scent was left there—”

“As a decoy,” Father finished the sentence. “In this vulnerable time, this mating time we find ourselves in, most Quad leaders would not allow their secondary Alphas to go off at all. And if they did, they would expect the submissives to be scared and frightened. What scents were our submissives sending out?”

“Defensive anger.” Zen smiled.

“From the beginning, our submissives, especially our female, displayed none of the usual submissive traits. Star has been taught to fend for herself, my son. And Zol has never been unconventional. I believe that whoever planted that scent moved on when they could detect no fear here, only danger.”

“Star is beginning to behave as a brooding Dragonish,” Zen chuckled. “It is amazing to see.”

“She is displaying?”

“Not as if she were carrying,” Zen was quick to explain. “But she definitely has the eye flashes of yellow and the fang bearing attitudes.”

“Then our offspring will be exceptionally strong. I have never heard of another female displaying so soon, but it must be a product of her bloodline. And in my training and dedication to the King and the royal family, I never paid much attention to bloodlines. Maybe this is a clue that will assist Prince Zaz in discovering Star’s origins and explain the disappearance of her Quad.”

“Perhaps.”

Father smiled, his bright red eyes reflecting the rising blood red sun over the clouds and peaked roofs of the many areas that speckled throughout their territories. “The rest of the day will take care of itself, Zen. For now, let us bask in what the Ghods have seen fit to gift to us.”

Nodding, Zen followed as father turned and made his way to the tangle of bodies on their sleeping pillows, silently positioning his large body behind his secondary without separating the female and the dark haired submissive. Zen followed and soon they were both lost in a light sleep that would allow them to instantly awaken if the odd scent should return.

Someone was attacking their Quad, and until the culprit was caught, they would exercise extreme caution in all of their dealings.



“Zol?”

“What?”

Silence, then...

“Zol?”

“What Star?” Zol looked up from his beadwork, his eyes narrowing as he stared at his female. Then he sat back, one eyebrow raised as he took in her condition. He had never really seen her like this before, her eyes glowing yellow, her lips parted, her bare breasts quivering as she stared at him.

“I think...I think it’s time.”

“Sweet Ghods above,” Zol groaned. “It would be right in the middle of a commission!”

“Are you complaining?” she asked, her voice dropping into a low growl.

“Yes!” he retorted, his own eyes flaring yellow as he carefully placed the necklace he was working on aside. “I was seriously single- mindedly attempting to complete this commission, and now you have me all distracted with sex!”

“Like that is a hardship,” she snorted, rolling her eyes. “And it’s not like you haven’t been waiting for this.”

“I have been.” Zol frowned a little. “But I have a deadline and I was concentrating, and I know that when I start breeding with you,” he paused, his eyes narrowing, his nostrils flaring as he pulled in the scent of fertile ripe female. “This could last for days.”

“Days, huh?” Oddly enough, she didn’t sound too concerned.

“Days, Star. And this commission was a special piece.” He sighed heavily, but rose to his feet, running his hands through his hair. “Days of hot sweaty, biting, growing sex, Star. So much so that you won’t be able to move for days.”

“Days?” she berthed, moving in closer, running her fingers over his chest. “Can you handle it?” She smirked.

He broke. With a growl, he wrapped his hands around her waist and hefted her over his shoulder. “Handle this,” he all but snarled as he crossed over to their pile of pillows and tossed her deep into the center.

Before she could squirm away, he gripped both of her ankles and spread her legs wide. “I’ll start where I am most familiar.”

“But...”

“You are not ready, Star. If you were, there would be no way I could even think about completing that neck ornament and both Zen and Father would be beating down the door. You are getting closer, but the time is not right yet.”

“When will it be?” she snapped, narrowing her eyes at him while spreading her legs invitingly. So what if this wasn’t the big breeding heat. Her body was screaming out for completion and Zol was going to see those needs satisfied or she would do him some serious harm.

“Soon,” he insisted, his own eyes glazing over as her scent reached him. His cock pulsed as his nostrils flared, breathing her in. “But in the mean time...”



“This had better be fucking good!” he roared, his face wet with her cream, his chest heaving as her nails tore at his sweaty chest as he rose up from between her thighs.

Someone was about to die!



“Are we interrupting?”

Zol’s right eyebrow twitched as he absently swiped across his face with the arm holding Star in place.

“What the fuck do you think?” The response was growled by Star, but Zol totally agreed with her sentiments. He struggled to hold her on the pillows and not allow her to attack. It was bad when she didn’t even notice their nude bodies or their compromising position.

Zol was suddenly glad he had brought her to completion at least twice. If they had been interrupted before that release...he shuddered to think of what those blunt fangs and the new talons she had developed would do to someone.

“Oh, I think this is a bad time,” a familiar female voice chuckled, and Zol instantly pulled back the instinctive urge to give into his own desire to attack. “For them.”

“Damn, Kerie,” Zol groaned, dropping his head to rest against Star’s soft inner thigh. “Why are you here?” Zol looked over his shoulder and glared at the purple haired female. “And where is your keeper? Why isn’t he kicking your ass for interrupting?”

He looked back at Star then lunged upwards, wrapping his arms around her body as her eyes slipped into pure gold and a low rumble began low in her throat. Having another female here at this particular moment was not the best thing that could have happened to any female fighting with heat.

“Because,” Zaz’s voice was not as deep as usual, but the bass tones were still recognizable. “I was taking notes. You were being very creative, Zolamen, and I wish to make my female create such sounds.”

“Your fucking highness,” Zol sighed, and cautiously rose to his feet, ignoring the growls and snarling coming from his submissive secondary pair. That a male was here, and a male who had a scent claim on this female calmed her some, but he stayed close to her, just in case.

Zol turned to face Zazolm, noting that the royal was in his secondary human form, the gold of his skin matching the gold of the jewelry that encircled his neck. Suddenly, he wanted nothing more than to twist those ropes of gold until that pretty, golden face turned blue and those golden eyes popped out of the royal head. But he resisted the urge.

“A little more respect, if you will,” Zaz chuckled, raising gold tipped nails to tap at his bottom lip.

“Your Highness,” Zol mumbled. “If you came here seeking your latest commission, I am more than pleased to tell you that it is not complete and you will have to Scab-off and wait for another day.”

“This is serious,” Keria spoke, moving forward to stand beside the tall form of her mate-bound male. “Otherwise, we would not have interrupted.”

“Though what you are doing really requires your Alpha’s presence,” Zaz pointed out.

“Like you never heard of recreational sex,” Zol rolled his eyes. “This was just to take the edge off. It is not yet our time but indeed our time grows near and.... And why am I explaining myself to you two anyway?” he snarled, tossing his hair and glaring at the Prince. “You came to my aerie and interrupted. If you were not someone I consider a friend...”

“And your next ruling monarch...”

“Like I give a dying human!” Zol roared, his eyes flashing between yellow and gold, his hands clenched into fists. “What the fuck do you want?”

“If your blood wasn’t royal,” Keria began only to have Star cut her off.

“Royal?” she seemed to pull herself out of her sexual haze to ask. She rose up on one elbow to stare at the intruders, her eyes still sparking yellow.

“Gold eyes royal blood,” Zaz explained. “A trait of the new royal house.”

“And by new he means over the last thousand years,” Zol growled. “Now please tell us what is so important that you had to interrupt...that!”

“Information,” Keria spoke again, moving beside her mate and took his hand into her much smaller one, his large palm dwarfing hers.

“Well, it had better be good,” Zol grumbled, calmed somewhat. It really had to be something big for Zaz to disrespect the rules of common courtesy like this. He backed towards Star and took a seat beside her, wrapping his arms around her shoulders, soothing her as she sat up higher, paying attention to each word that Keria spoke.

“I believe that you will find it important enough to interrupt the festivities.” Keria took a step to the side and invited her bonded mate to speak.

“You will recall that I mentioned before that your female’s scent...”

“Star,” she interrupted. “My name is Star.... Your Highness.” She was being polite, but proving there was no way that she was going to allow herself to be disrespected in turn. Zol nodded in approval.

“Star,” he nodded, agreeing with her. “Star’s scent was so familiar to me.”

“Yes,” Zol agreed, now paying closer attention, his aggravation fleeing. “You mentioned that in the bathhouse.”

“You know that all legend is based on fact, yes?” Zaz tilted his head to the side, staring at Star quizzically before turning his attention back to Zol.

“Yes.”

“And you know that royal family keep extensive archives into our own past?”

“Yes,” Zol spoke slowly. “It is a way to keep bloodlines in order and avoid crossbreeding. It is also a way to keep aware of Quad ties and of our history.”

“The reason your female smells so familiar is that her scent is covering the hall of old legends.”

They both started at that, Zol growing pale while Star looking more confused. “What does that mean? How does my scent...”

“Your Quad scent, Star,” Zol struggled to explain. “The scent of your bloodline...”

“What of it? I thought that you would be able to tell me of my bloodlines with research. Have you discovered something?” she asked of the Prince.

“Your bloodlines are a close kept secret, Star. I have some idea why your family chose to run, but in essence, your blood may be more royal than mine.”

“What?” Now Zol was growing upset, stroking his hands through Star’s hair, his face twisting in concern. “What do you know?”

“Your scent permeates the whole of the Hall of Legends, Star. It is a place that I do not frequent; ghosts of the past are not my favorite companions.”

“Zaz, what does this mean?” Zol finally called out, tension making his boy as tight as a bowstring. “What legends? There are a thousand legends pertaining to bloodlines and histories of the Sly Dragonish. Tell us what you mean!”

“This means that your female is related to the family of old, the family who almost cost us our Aeries in the sky. Your Star is directly related to the traitor, Zol.” He paused as Zol’s golden eyes widened to fearful proportions and Star’s gaped mouth opened in shock. “She appears to be a near direct descend of the Dragonish female who took an Earth Dragon to mate.”

Chapter Eleven

“What does that mean for me?” Star finally managed to ask, feeling quite nauseous as she stared at the Dragonish in the room.

“Nothing, child,” Zaz calmed. “It means absolutely nothing for you to be immediately concerned about.”

“But...but my family...”

“Is dead, Star.” Zaz grinned at her, spreading his palms in an open manner, sending out the universal sign for peace. “The sins of the father are never visited on the son.”

“But if someone finds out?” Zol demanded.

“Then what will they do? Confirm that some of the legends are real?” Kerie smiled at Zol, hands on her hips. “Like that will harm your Quad.”

“But...”

“But,” she interrupted the black haired male. “This only means that the other aspects of the legends may be true as well.”

“Like?” Star questioned gently. She was still in shock and it showed as she paled slightly, her eyes losing more of their golden hue.

“Like the Princess refused to speak ill of her bond-mate because she was with child. That the child was born shortly after she went into seclusion with her mate. That someone else let the Scab into the cities and that she was too fearful for her child to speak the name of the true traitor. That she really was betrayed by someone other than the Dragonish Prince, whose death we are given to understand was not a pleasant one.”

“Oh Ghods,” Star gasped, her face losing what little color it had left. “I think I’m going to be sick.”

Instantly, Zol had her on her side, stroking her back, running his fingers through her hair, doing anything he could to comfort her.

“Star,” he said, “calm down, little one. Take deep breaths.”

“My family, my Quad is the cause of so many deaths, so many murders,” she hissed, closing her eyes and inhaling deeply. “How...how can you stand to touch me? Blood means all!”

“Only to the uninformed and humans,” Zaz soothed, moving closer, but not touching Star. “Only to the ill informed, the ignorant and the humans.”

“But...”

“But you are a piece of living history, Star,” Zaz smiled gently. “There is nothing wrong with your blood. Your line is ancient and secure. You have nothing to be ashamed of and everything to celebrate.” His faced became introspective

during the next moment, thoughtful and intense. “Your existence brings us new questions, though.”

“Questions?” Star’s head was reeling, her breath painful in it exploded through her chest. This...this could not be happening! She was related to traitors? Her family was the cause of so many deaths? They had perpetuated a crime so unimaginable and horrific that they were now infamous in legend. What did *their* past mean for her and her Quad? What questions could she answer? She...she knew nothing! Would she have to leave now? Despite what the Prince said, how would her Quad feel about her now?

“Like where has your family been hiding? Who assisted them in keeping this secret? What caused them to flee? Lots of questions, Star, and none of the answers I am coming up with fit the matrix that has been given to us. Perhaps there is more to the legend and the tales that spring up around it that is even known by the Royal Quad. It is an intriguing puzzle.”

“My life is not a puzzle!” Star lurched up, screaming.

Enough was enough! Her whole world was falling apart and he was comparing it to an evening of entertainment! How dare he?

“No,” Zaz muttered, moving back a little as Star leaned in closer to him, eyes blazing a fierce yellow again. Kerie stepped closer to Zaz, moving to his side in a protective manner, but the Prince waved her away. “Perhaps I have misspoken.”

“Then say what you mean!” she screamed, her eyes sparking before she slammed her fists into her eyes, pressing as if holding back a great pain, trying to gain some control.” Please,” she gasped, her voice rough with emotions that she fought to hold back. “Please, just give me a plain answer. Every time I feel that I have found a place to call my own family, it is threatened in some way. I don’t think I can take anymore!” She moaned, dropping her head as Zol embraced her, petting her hair, doing his best to calm her of the tension that held her body rigid and her mind on edge. “Please...” She was barely holding onto her tears, onto her sanity.

“I mean” Zaz began again, appearing confused at this flood of emotions before he calmly spoke, “that other than to those who ran your family out of seclusion and into the earth lands below, there is no purpose for this anger or fear.” He smiled serenely. The effect was like a sudden burst of sun through dark clouds. “No one will feel any different about you than they do now, Star. You remain the female who was reared by humans and finally brought home.”

“Home?”

“Home,” Zol interjected, his words outweighing anything that the Price of the Dragonish could ever say. “Don’t you know, Star? With us, with your Quad, you are home?”

And this time, when the tears threatened, they were filled with the beginnings of understanding and with joy.

Chapter Twelve

“Calm,” Kyotype urged his smaller Alpha as they streaked towards the Aerie in Dragon form. The morning had been spent tracking down that scent. The Dragonish form was more useful, with its heightened senses than the secondary human one. Their flight had lasted all morning, leaving their submissive parings safely in their aerie.

Father had made several good points about their protection. Zol was a submissive like no other and his influence paired with Star’s natural obstinacy ensured that no one would try anything with the two in broad daylight.

When the moons rose, however, that was another situation entirely.

They would have been out until near moonrise, but suddenly Zenxian was flooded with a mishmash of emotions from his mate. Star was sending out feelings of confusion, shattering the calm of their bond and sending the pale dragon into fits that ran the gamut from uncontrolled rage and fury to peaceful joy, to hot and bothered all within moments of each other.

Father had some idea of what was happening, and did his best to reassure Zen, but the younger Alpha would not be satisfied until he behold their submissives, both of them, with his own pale golden eyes.

They arrived just as the Prince was backing away from Star and Zol.

“What happened?” Zen demanded, taking his secondary form and racing to his mate’s side, lurching back as a taloned hand swatted out at him. “Star?”

“I brought news,” Zazolm spoke to Kyo, a small smile gracing his lips.

“Highness.” Zen snapped to, pulling his eyes away from his mate long enough to clasp his hand before him in acknowledgement of the Royal Dragonish’s position. “Keria.” He repeated the gesture to the purple haired female.

“We interrupted,” Keria went on to explain, “the bonding rush, the need to mate...I wish it were us,” she sighed sadly, but rallied and smiled at the large red-eyed male. “The information we brought...”

“What information?” Kyo shook his head at the strange sight of his Prince in his secondary guise and turned towards his female once more. “And what could have been important enough for you to take on your more vulnerable form to deliver it?”

“Peace, Lord Kyotype,” Zol shook his head, his eyes glinting in amusement. “I came in this form not because I have forgotten all of the lessons you have taught me. I came here merely because I thought it would be less frightening to your female.”

“Her Quad, her bloodlines?” Zen cut in, not paying any attention to protocol as he tried to get closer to his growling mate.

“You know something?”

“We know a lot,” Keria smiled. “We know her name, her history, her bloodlines...” She shook her head sadly, looking down at the marbled floors of the aerie. “We just don’t know why her people were forced to leave. It brings about a lot of new questions.”

“Well...who are her people?” Zen demanded, finally giving up being patient and waiting for Star to consent to be touched and just snatched his growing mate into his arms. He ignored the scratches and bites she delivered until she calmed a bit, taking in his scent, though it was obvious that his participation was not totally needed at this point. She needed to connect deeper to her submissive counterpart, and all of this disturbing news was getting in the way of her natural inclinations.

“The legends, Zen,” Zol rose to his feet, his reluctance at leaving his submissive partner obvious. He pressed his hands to his lower stomach, and strode to his mate, ignoring the bouncing erection that led the way. “The unnamed princess, her people, Star is a direct descendent.”

Kyo’s red eyes widened in shock as he looked over at their female, before a wide grin spread across his face. “It appears, My Prince, that my son and daughter will be more royal than you.”

“Father!” Zen gasped, looking away from his mate’s face to stare at his Alpha.

But the only response was Zaz breaking down in undignified giggles, something that neither Zol nor Zen had ever seen before.

“Now I will never hear the end of this,” Keria groaned, covering her eyes with her hands, shaking her head as her mate dissolved into childish giggles.

“But...but...Does this mean she has a claim?” Zen stuttered, and then he paled as he quickly went on to clarify his point. “Not that we want a claim. I am more afraid of what others will think.”

“I think,” the Prince sobered up enough to say, “That you are more afraid that her royal family will make a move against her than of the information you have just been given.”

“Or that those who drove her family out will try to destroy her in their quest to hide their involvement in her Quad’s disappearance.” Kyo’s tones were dark as he stared at the people gathered in his Aerie.

“My sire is aware,” Zaz reached out, but pulled back at the last moment, not touching Kyo even though it was apparent that he wanted to at least reassure the large male. “And he has no doubts about your loyalty, and by extension, the loyalties of your Quad.”

“And the others?”

“Protection is in place.” Zaz moved closer to Kyo. “No one even imagines any duplicity coming from this Quad. But those who would attempt to cause issues have already been silenced.”

“And you are certain that you have silenced them all?”

“No,” Zaz admitted, signing deeply. “And it shames me to say this.”

“The shame is not yours.”

“No, it is for what someone connected to my bloodline may possibly have done.”

“You cannot be sure that those in your bloodline have anything to do with this situation,” Kyo pointed out. “Your bloodline has been in the Royal House since the betrayal.”

“But what if someone moved to put my bloodline in power, Kyotype? What if we were not the toys of fate and circumstance? And what if those who played the game of intrigue and espionage want to cover their movements, even generations later?”

“Supposition and speculation,” Kyo snarled. “Those will get you nothing but trouble, Prince.”

“And the mere existence of your female states that there is more going on than we know...a lot more. Her Quad, according to legend, was cast out, her bloodline dying out with the Princess’s disappearance. If those are the facts,

honest as they have been presented, then there is a lot that we still do not know or understand. Where were her people hiding? How did they carry on the bloodline without another Dragonish Quad there for breeding purposes? What drove them out at a time when the Quad should have been in seclusion? And most importantly, how is it that she connected with Zenxian? As I have stated, My Lord, more questions than answers.”

“And we can add to those,” Zen growled from where he had subdued his mate, “Who is baiting us, wanting us to leave our submissives and why?”

“Baiting?” Zaz’s face finally showed shock as he stared at Kyo. “Who would dare such a thing? You are our Champion! An attack against you is to attack the royal house!”

“That we seek to discover.” Kyo smiled at the outrage that showed on the younger Prince’s face. “Our attacker is cunning. They laid several false trails and end-roads, almost like a seasoned tracker. But both Zenxian and I have his scent now, and it definitely is male. I have spent the day laying in traps and gathering information. As much as it displeases me, we have to wait and watch. Patience has never been a strong suit for the royal family nor for this Quad. But we will endure what we must.”

“I like this not,” Zaz sighed, but after his female tapped him on the arm, he bowed his head and stepped back.

“It is not for us to like,” Keria smiled as she ran her hands over his arm in a comforting manner. “And I believe that it is time for us to depart and let this Quad get on with the business of creating the future.”

“Yes,” Zazolm agreed, nodding slowly. “I have delivered my news and I shall take what I have learned here and inform those who have need of knowing.”

“I thank you for the news,” Father intoned gravely to the Prince. “I understand the trust and honor you give us by sharing this information and not hiding it away like apparently so many other secrets.”

“It is our place to see to the needs of all our people,” Zaz answered. “And how can I consider myself a leader if I keep important knowledge away from those who have the right to know? That is not at all what I have been taught and it is an affront to my very nature as Dragonish.”

“I thank you nevertheless,” Kyo smiled, then gave a small bow to both Zaz and Keria.

“And I believe that it is time for us to leave,” Keria noted, staring at the pile of pillows where Star was nuzzling Zol affectionately, a low growl purring up from her throat.

Without another word, Zaz took his primary form; the huge golden dragon dwarfing all before he gently lifted his female into his claws and took to the skies.

“Interesting,” Father drawled and Zen looked up from his mate to stare at his Alpha.

“What?” Zen asked, his own golden eyes filled with concern. “Star’s bloodline, the information that there may be betrayers amongst us?”

“That you and Star have a mental connection and something that Zaz did not mention.”

“What is that?”

“That your eyes are as golden as his.”

Chapter Thirteen

“What will happen now?” Star’s voice startled all the men in the room, breaking the silence that was beginning to grow oppressive as each man thought about what these revelations meant to their future.

When no one answered, she growled low in her throat before pushing her mate-bounded aside. “I want some answers!” she bellowed. “I need to know what this means. And why would the color of Zenxian’s eyes make you all so concerned? So he is related to the royal family....”

“He is not,” Father interrupted her ranting with his calm tones.

“But....”

“Zenxian’s bloodlines are proven. There is no connection to this royal house. The color of his eyes were thought to be an anomaly. But I am not so sure.”

“What are you saying, Father?” Zen demanded, staring in shock at the larger male. “What are you telling me?”

“It would seem odd that you would have a connection to the Quad that seemed to have forsaken our very way of life then disappeared. It seems very odd, indeed, that you heard your mate’s call when she is not supposed to exist.”

“So what are you saying?” Zen repeated, a growl in his tones. “What are you implying?”

“I am merely stating a fact, Zenxian. Are you not curious about your sudden and binding connection? It is almost like you were destined to be together, and the fates had a hand in arranging your meeting.”

“Soul mates, Kyo?” Zol rolled his eyes, his reaction weakening his erection still very engorged. “You believe this?”

“I believe that if two people are meant to be, no force in the skies can stop them.”

“Really?” Zol arched an eyebrow in open imitation of one of Father’s more familiar gestures. The red-eyed male smiled at this, leaning forward to blow a puff of air at his mate.

“We are together, are we not, young one?”

The blush that filled Zol’s face would have been amusing if the situation had not been so serious.

“So fate sealed us?” Star questioned.

“Fate and blood, perhaps,” Kyo allowed.

“Blood?” she asked, but the other two males were paying close attention to Father’s words.

“It is said that blood calls to blood. If your Quad had an agreement, a blood pact even generations ago, it would appear in future generations until the pact is sealed and fulfilled.”

“And my Quad would have to have had a pact with the Old Royal Quad?” Zen was staring agog at what father was telling them.

“Perhaps. Maybe a blood promise with the Old Royals,” Father ran his hand through his hair as if the motion would sooth him. “Perhaps Star’s family fled, but the pact was kept in place. Maybe...maybe someone interfered. If a blood pact had been in place, not even disgrace would separate that Quad from their aerie until the innocent child had been born and reared into adulthood.”

“So you are saying that maybe generations ago, the Old Royal Quad had a pact with his family?” Zol asked, and father nodded.

“But if that was the case, would they have not fought for the Princess? Would they have not kept them in their sights?”

“Not if they believed that they were all dead. This is just suppositions, but if the ones who assisted the Old Royal family by fair means or foul, decided that everyone should feel that the Royals were dead, even the failed Quad with whom they held a blood pact with, would it not solidify the belief of their deaths?”

“But...but...” Zol stammered, his erection wilting at the thought. “But that would be more than dishonorable! That would be tantamount to murder! The Soul Mates would perish!”

“More intrigue,” Zen sighed, shaking his head as he reached for his own bonded, cuddling her close and inhaling her scent, the familiar smell calming him.

“More mysteries,” Father agreed. “But the patterns are beginning to take shape.” He smiled at Star and then gave his own mate a small squeeze. “And I believe that you two have something left to accomplish.”

“Accomplish?” Star mused aloud, but Zol’s erection was leaping back into fullness.

“I believe that it is time to celebrate life,” Zol leered. “We let the invaders win if we don’t reproduce,” he nodded at Star.

“And why would you even think that I still want sex?” Star snapped, obviously incensed at Zol’s lack of sensitivity.

Before she could say more, Zol pulled from Father and casually strolled over to Star.

“Sex is not the answer to all of life’s issues, Zol! And you being older, I would...think...” She inhaled, bringing in his lush fertile scent to her nostrils. She shook her head and strained to carry on with her rant. “I would think that you...You of all...”

Her eyes began to spark yellow as her voice dipped low. The new talons slowly emerged from her fingertips as her head moved to follow each and every sway of his naked body.

“Just inconsiderate—incosiderate...” She stopped as her breathing turned to heavy panting and a rich wetness was once again flowed down her thighs. “Just stop.”

Zol rolled his eyes, one hand going to stroke his cock, rubbing the dripping fluid from the head around the shaft, using it as a lubricant to ease his motions. “Instincts will demand satisfaction and this is one step closer to fertility for you.”

“Practice making babies is nice,” she agreed, pushing away from her bond-mate and moving towards her fellow submissive.

“Practice is lovely,” Zol began, but left off on a gasp as Star slowly crawled across the pillows to kneel in front of him.

“Star?”

Before he could say more, her hot wet mouth engulfed him, bringing his voice to a stuttering halt as his knees began to shake as if they would give way completely.

“Oh Ghods,” He moaned as he felt the hot wet silk of Star’s mouth engulf him fully.

Star pulled back and carefully examined the thick cock in her hands. He was so large, the head red and leaking as his desire grew.

Something in her would slide into this?

She lapped at the leaking fluids and eyed the hole in the hard rounded head. It didn't look as if it could take anything inside it let alone some spike that was supposed to be within her.

Wouldn't it hurt?

She looked up at him with his hair flowing behind him and his eyes closed as small moans escaped his throat.

She didn't want to hurt him.

But maybe...maybe if he really was designed....

With that thought in mind, she lowered her head, her tongue circling the slit.

Instantly, his moans increased and his fingers found their way into her hair, tugging at her curls and massaging her scalp.

Encouraged by knowing that she was doing this intimate act correctly she increased her efforts, sucking harder, but she needed to know more.

As her tongue danced around the hole it began to vibrate and quiver, widening out until the tip of her tongue fit inside.

"Oh Ghods," Zol gasped, his body bowing over hers as her tongue forced its way deeper inside of him.

Fun, she thought as he reached up to caress his hanging sacs, giggling as he hissed and moaned.

“Suck,” he begged. “Suck me hard, Star!”

Eager to experience more, she hollowed out her cheeks and sucked strongly.

She was not a fool and refused to attempt to swallow like she had seen them do to each other. Instead, she fisted his base, using her own hand as a stopping point, and began to bon her head.

“Star, Star, Sta—Oh Ghods Star!” he began to chant, and Star felt a blossom of ride bloom within her.

Instinctively her own fingers dipped low to her own thatch of blue curls, her fingers seeking out her swollen clit and stroking it gently as her head bobbed.

Doing ot stho him had made her feel so hungry, so wonton, so needful. There was no time to wait for him to reciprocate! She would take care of her ache herself.

Slowly, she began to rock her hips in tandem with his fucking motions, teasing them both until the tension mounted in their bodies.

“I—I’m going...to...explode,” Zol pronounced finally, his fingers pulling in her hair to force her eyes up to his. “Do you undertand, Star? I am going to come in your mouth! Oh Ghods, just saying it....” His eyes closed as his hips sped up their thrusts.

Star moaned, her own aching pussy drenched with her essence as she rubbed the small kernel of her clit faster, harder, pressing absently against her swollen labia, small slick fingers as she stared up into Zol's golden eyes.

"I mean it, Star," he insisted, and she smiled.

"Oh...Oh...Oh Scab!" he shouted, his back arching back, his hair flailing around them as she fingered his hands in her curls.

And then he was groaning, filling her mouth with his hot seed, the creamy pulses filling her mouth fully.

The excitement of it all, the power she felt in doing that, in making him orgasm went straight to her clit.

Star pulled off, shuddering as her own orgasm tore through her.

She felt Zol drop to the ground to engulf her in his damp arms.

She smiled, swallowing his seed, licking her lips to get every drop.

"You," he panted, "Will be the death of me yet."

"But it is all for my education, Zol," she reminded him. "All for practice."

"Practice," he drawled.

"Your slip opened up."

"I told you it would."

"It was odd. I thought I had nearly my whole tongue in there...."

She stopped as he groaned again.

“Star, if you’re trying to kill me, there are easier methods.”

She snickered, pulling him closer.

“It's okay,” she soothed. “When I am queen, I’ll make sure that you don’t have to do anything this strenuous again.”

“I am not complaining,” he snipped, lifting his head and staring at her with one baleful eye. “An what do you mean when you are queen?”

“When the Alpha’s brood, I am in charge.” She sounded smug.

“And I suppose that you expect me to service you when the alpha’s are sitting on the eggs?”

“Well, are you complaining?”

Zol tilted his head to the side for a moment before answering.

“Not really. I just wanted to know where I stand. If you shove your tinge don’t eh head of my cock again, I’ll even let you spank me...maybe.”

“Spank?” Huh?

“Or I’ll let you tie me up.”

That was odd, but appealing.

“And then I can show you how Dragonish mate with their females in their primary form.”

That stopped her dead.

She looked at him, imagined him as a dragon, and then frowned, looking a bit pale.

“Zol?”

“Oh yeah, you’ll love it. I can show you what a tail is good for.”

Somehow the thought left her cold.

“How about we just practice making babies instead?” she offered, trying to remember if she ever checked them out, their cocks and...stuff when they were in dragon form.

“Scared” he asked and she rolled her eyes before squeaking as he lifted her high into his arms.

“Thinking about taking you in primary form as he hard all over again.

“You are not...”

“Don’t worry,” he soothed. “Now is not the time for that. Instead, I think I will get a taste of female—for now. I may need the practice too.”

And the last thought that went through her mind before Zol sank her into a sea of pleasure was that Dragons were a strange lot! She looked down as his long tongue poised to sink between her legs and moaned at the first hot touch. Strange, she thought again, but useful.

And then she was able to think no more.

Chapter Fourteen

She usually had an escort for this kind of thing. But part of being independent was the ability to make it to the waste disposal. To be blunt, Star needed to relieve her bladder in the worst type of way. And the room they used to waste disposal, and for general washing outside the bathhouses, was connected to their aerie by one thin bridge.

It was an ingenious system of pipes and tubes that created her personal toiletries room, a smaller circular room that contained a flushing commode, a huge tub for bathing, and something called a water stall that poured heated water over your skin, almost like the falls at the bath house, but smaller. Zen had tried to explain it all to her, how the pipes and levers worked, but she really wasn't in the mood for explanations at the time.

Now she still wasn't ready for a lesson in design engineering, as Zen had called it. She only wanted to go and relieve her bladder and then make her way back into the main aerie where her project was waiting.

Because everyone else had things to occupy their time and make them feel useful, she finally put her foot down and demanded a job as well. Father and Zen had discussed her disclosure of her talents with Zol and they came up with

something that would keep her bartering with other females for some time to come.

Star, knowing that females were comfortable in their nude state decided that dressmaking was not something she could force them to trade goods with her. Therefore, instead, she began weaving silken thread that Zen procured for her into something called a crèche. A crèche was a soft comfortable carrying pocket for an infant. It allowed for hands-free care of a baby at any age until they were too big to carry. But having the ability to carry your children around and still get minor household chores done had always been a major human creation that had strangely enough, not made its way into the upper reaches of the Dragonish aeries.

Her Quad was not too impressed with the idea of lugging children around; they had to walk and fall and learn to explore as to not develop an unnatural fear of heights. That was a small jab at her constant need for an escort when she went to their toiletries aerie or to the one they used for feedings. They could just not understand her fear of being up high when even the smallest Dragonish child enjoyed having the clouds to play through.

But when it came to protecting and brooding over their eggs, well suddenly the crèche took on a whole new meaning.

“You mean I can keep the egg warm on my body heat and still move around freely?” Zen had gasped, eyes goring wide as the other males moved in closer to hear what she had to say. Even Father’s red eyes had lit up at the prospect.

“A way to retrieve food for ourselves and use our facilities while keeping our eggs close?”

At her stunned look; Zol explained that although their body heat was higher than normal, submissive mate-pairs did not have the internal combustion of the Alphas. That is why after the laying was done the brooding was carried on by the Alphas.

Generally, they stayed together, protecting the egg, and eating in shifts in isolation. Zol had pointed to an aerie that connected to their main room by a thin ladder. This aerie was considerably higher than their main room, almost touching the sun it seemed. Zen explained that it was where they would go to deliver their eggs and where Zen and Kyo would stay until the eggs hatched. It took their constant supervision, in their main forms and at times in their secondary more human form, to see that the eggs were kept heated at the right temperature and nourished with the love the blood Quad bound would send to them.

But if they had these wonderful crèches to carry their eggs around in, it meant that there would be times when the Alpha’s could come out of total

isolation and do things like emit their wastes and take small short meals with their submissive partners while keeping their eggs close to their bodies.

Immediately, Star began creating plans, designing the shoulder straps for comfort as well as for the larger broader bodies of the Alpha males. Soon, the first crèche was complete, designed for Father's large bulk, and tested with a large round melon, a Klika, that the agri-growers grew that were roughly the size of a Dragonish egg.

After donning the crèche and stuffing it with the fruits, Kyo was able to run in place, jump, climb from one aerie to the next, and even dive from the upper aerie to the lower without any problems at all. Moreover, the way Star had sewn in the padding had helped stabilize the egg in comfort while providing an insulation that kept the fruit at a safe comfortable temperature.

Kyo and Zen had taken her design to the trade guild and to the palace, which Star had yet to visit, and it had garnered instant approval.

Every Alpha wanted a crèche, even the ones who had not yet bonded with their females. They all wanted one because it gave them a measure a freedom they lacked before, and it was something that had never occurred to them, sunk in tradition as they were.

"You can learn a few things from humans," Star smugly informed them as orders came pouring in.

So Star put even Zol to work designing intricate beadworks to sew onto the bags, making each one an individual and original piece of art.

Before too long, Star had a backlog of requests. It took time to weave the threads into color combinations pleasing to the eye as well as connect everything together so that the crèche pouches were safe and sturdy as well as pleasing to the eye.

Star refused to relax the quality of her work. In this way, she was just as demanding as Zol and dedicated as Kyo and Zen when it came to their daily training and patrols.

But that lead to situations, like this one, when Zol was gone for a few moments to retrieve more silken threads for weaving. Usually, Star would have accompanied them, but knowing she only had a set number of hours daily to work, Zen did not want her to exhaust herself, she decided to stay and work on a crèche commission while Zol retrieved her materials and delivered a commission of his own.

She swore to him that she would be fine and would stay in the main aerie for the few moments it took him to drop off a necklace of gold and retrieve her silks from the silk masters.

But after he left, Star realized that she had a powerful need to relieve her bladder. She was not a child needing an adult to hold her hand...but having Zol

there to escort her safely across the thin covered bridge would have been handy. They had bridges, but no hand railings. Why would they? The Dragonish, even the children, feared no heights and would traverse the short bridge within seconds.

Star had a habit of looking down to see where her feet were placed, and that unfittingly always sent her into a small panic seeing nothing but clouds where the land was supposed to be. It was a transition, embracing the full Dragonish side of herself, but the height adjustment she feared, she would never acclimate herself to.

She carefully made her way across the bridge, wishing that she could have held it longer so that Zol could return and assist her across so she would have a backup plan if she fell. She was staring so hard at that hard stone bridge that she never even noticed the thing swooping down at her...until she was tumbling backwards.

Her eyes widened in horror, her mouth opened in a scream that stuck in her throat, and her limbs flailed uselessly as she began to fall.

Her heart leapt into her throat and oddly enough, the only thing that filled her mind was sheer terror.

There was none of that life passing before your mind's eye thing that they had been warned about. And this was the second time she stared death in the face. Still, no regrets for the things she could have done or the things that had yet to happen...children, larger family circle, the sight of her loved ones' faces....

Instead, she felt fear; fear and anger.

And as she felt the cold wind pass by her naked body, felt the growing curls about her head whip her in the face, felt her need to pass water deflate, the fear began to lessen and the anger grew.

She could not even relieve her bladder in peace! What kind of sick monster knocked a woman off a bridge when she was trying to urinate?

Some things were just too much to take.

Her mouth, still opened in shock, began to emit some of the most disturbing noises she had ever made. The growl sounded unnatural and angry. It grew in volume until it became a roar, a roar that drowned out the sound of the wind rushing past her face, and killed what remained of the fear.

It was not the time to accept this fate! It was time to...to...act!

Her body flipped in mid-air, soaring downwards so she could look around and spot...there!

There was an overhanging arch of some kind. It would do.

Acting on pure instinct now, Star pulled her arms and legs in, twisting her body so that she no longer fought against the wind currents that flowed around her. Instead, she became one with them.

She stretched out her body, pointed her toes and angled her head so she was aiming for that stone arch. She felt her fingers and toes tingle as the now familiar

talons exploded from her flesh. She gritted her teeth in determination as she pulled in her stomach, tightening up her center of balance and willed herself towards that waiting arch of stone.

She landed, nearly perfectly, but just a bit off. Well, a lot off, but she got close enough to touch the stone and that was enough. Her arms swing out and her palms slapped against the warm rough stone. Immediately, her weight began to drag her down as she dropped out of the current she had been riding, but her other hand rose up and scrambled for stability.

She felt some stone tearing away at her talons, felt the chips fly down to strike her in the face, and yet she still scrambled, fighting against gravity. With toes pointed and her legs swinging in a counterbalance, she managed to slowly pull her body upwards.

Her arms were shaking by the time she had pulled herself up enough to rest her chin on the stone, her body dangling below, helplessly.

But her anger didn't dissipate. She opened her mouth and let out another roar, never even noticing the many nicks and cuts tearing along her skin.

She took a deep breath and tried to lift herself again, bending her arms at the elbows trying to get most of her torso onto the arch.

She had always considered herself a strong woman, but when trying to pull up her own dead weight, the progress she was making was discouraging,

But she refused to give up, She heaved and pulled again, her legs kicking as if trying to give her a boost up.

It was purely by accident that her foot struck stone, for the arch was thick, almost as thick as she was long, but her foot struck and again her instincts took over. Her still swinging foot slammed beside the one that had caressed the stone in passing, the talons in her toes digging into the stone and giving her the leverage she needed. Her body stopped swinging and she stopped slipping.

Now, she had pinned herself to the stone arch. Not where she wanted to be, but it beat the alternative.

“Still alive!”

The words were hissed as a shadow blocked the sunlight, darkening the bit of positive energy that had begun to fill her.

“You are so determined not to die. I am impressed.”

She began to slip again, but managed to stop her descent by slamming her hand talons into the stone closer to her upper body, giving her head the room it needed to tilt up and see who believed they had the right to kill her, or try to kill her anyway.

“They always said that females were disgustingly hard to kill....”

It was a Dragon. That much was clear, but beyond that, it was standing somewhat in the sun, creating its own shadow that hid its face from her.

“Why?” she managed, her own eyes sparkling as she tried to buy a little more time. There had to be a way out of this.

“Why indeed,” it snorted, a puff of smoke rising up from where it...it hovered. It was not touching the stone arch at all. It was hovering in the air currents and it would not take a secondary humanoid shape.

The only Dragonish she had spent a major portion of time around was her Quad. They still had a similar look to them that made it hard to distinguish characteristics. She had not been around them long enough to pick up on the subtle differences and distinguishing points among them. She knew that outside of her Quad one Dragonish shape looked much like another.

“What makes you so...special?” he hissed. Star could not see features, but something inside her told her that the thing was glaring at her with a hatred so hot and hard she could almost feel it caress her skin. “What is it about you and your blood?”

Then almost like magic, it was gone and another voice filled her head.

“Star! I will be there in a moment!”

Almost before it finished speaking, there was another shadow covering her, this one not filled with malevolence and hatred. This one emanated honest concern. And the arm that reached out for her...

“Zen!” she gasped as a massive claw wrapped around her body and plucked her from the stone archway.

“I was so worried,” her dragon lifted her up to the level of his eyes. A puff of warm air engulfed her as he breathed her in, checking, she assumed, for any injuries. Then a long forked tongue lapped along her body, from stomach to ear before the other hand cupped her tenderly.

“Zenxian,” she grimaced, wiping the spittle residue from her face. “I am fine!”

“You fell!”

“I was pushed!”

Then again he was sniffing at her, her curls ruffling as he ran his nose along her body. “I smell no other.”

“But I was still pushed off the bridge.” And then that pressing matter of the toiletries room managed to reassert itself now that the danger had passed. “I was going to, um,” she blushed a little, “relieve myself when something shot at me. Zen, it was another dragon. He spoke to me.”

“What?” Zen’s golden eyes burned red with anger as black smoke encircled his head. “Who dared?”

“Well, he didn’t introduce himself,” she rolled her eyes. “And from the shadows, one of you looks like the next to me.”

“He dared attack from the shadows?”

“That is how most villains behave,” she reached up and grabbed his muzzle, lowering his head once more. “But before we get into what he said, can you please take me to the toilet? I really have to...to go.”



“Are you sure you are okay? I will never forgive myself!”

Star was beginning to grow annoyed.

Her Quad had been encircling her since Zen brought her back from the hanging arch, as she now liked to call it.

It was scary and dangerous, but something good came out of it. She now knew why she had talons.

“Zol, you had to take care of your business. You were taking care of my business as well. No one knew that I would have to go and relieve my balder. Hell, that other dragon better be happy that I didn’t find a way up to spray him! You could have found him that way, yes?”

Zen stared at her in shock, and Zol just blinked at her. It was Father who exploded in laughter, turning the other males disbelieving eyes away from her and to rest on him. “That would, indeed, be an ingenious way of marking him, Star,” he roared. “It would be easier than trying to follow currents that have already past.”

“Well, there had to be a reason he didn’t land on the arch or just knock me off,” she nodded in satisfaction. At least Father recognized her intelligence.

“You are correct.” Father nodded. “And you know this because...?”

“I listened to the hunters. I was often the one sewing them up anyway. So I just paid attention to what they were saying. I mean, the other one could have pulled me from the arch and done whatever he wanted to me.”

“And I am assuming you never saw what pushed you off the arch?”

“No.”

“But your head is always down,” Zol pointed out, moving closer and running his hands over her one more time. “You would never see something coming at you.”

“Well, I thought I did look up and that’s when I felt the push.”

“The wind,” Zen nodded. “Our aerie’s buildings are close together. The only way he could get to you would be to use the wind to push you off. That would leave no scent.”

“Yes,” Father agreed. “One flap of a wing and you would be caught off guard and fall to your death.”

“But I didn’t fall,” Star pointed out. “I am not really sure what happened.”

“Our females do not change form or fly, Star, but they do have their own protections.”

“So that...that was normal?”

“Our children will have the ability to use the air currents to carry themselves, Star. They learn it first from their mothers. It takes some time before dragonish are able to shift forms.”

“Wait.” Something suddenly occurred to Star. “Our children...the females don’t change?”

“That is correct.” Zen grinned down at her, pulling her into his lap as he took a seat beside her on the mound of pillows where she rested.

“So she will be born in human form.”

“It is her only form, Star.”

“And my son? You said that this human form is secondary? They change to dragon and then stay that way for a time after they reach a certain age?”

“No,” Zol rolled his eyes. “This is a secondary form, Star. Secondary. Our males will be hatched Dragonish. They will take on their secondary form after spending a few turns of the moon in their primary form.”

“So...so um...” She felt really stupid for asking this. “What do they eat?”

“Dam’s milk, of course,” Zol smiled.

Father smiled, too. “It has been a while since I have tasted the sweetness of dam’s milk.”

“As have I,” Zen grinned down at her. “You are going to give us a taste, will you not?”

“Um,” Star began to pale a bit. “When you are in Dragonish form, you have teeth.”

“Fangs, Star,” Zol pointed out, though Father was once again trying to stifle his laughter; *damn that red-eyed white haired male.*

“And those grow in after they have survived a few seasons?”

“No,” Zen answered her. “We are born with our fangs.”

“So...so how do you nurse Dragonish children?”

“As lovely as these breasts are to look at,” Zen chuckled, “Pleasure or ecstasy is not their main function, Star. I thought you were around human damns?”

“Human babies don’t have fangs, Zen,” Star shuddered. “And infants do bite. I recall a story about a mother who was nursing her four year old and he bit her nipple off!”

“Off?” Zol gasped.

“Clean off her body! And those were just milk teeth! I don’t want to lose my nipples, Zol! You nurse him!”

Father lost it, laughing so hard, tears began to roll down his face as he bent over slapping the ground and nearly unseating himself.

“That is the dumbest thing I have ever heard!” Zol snorted, moving back from Star. “My sons will not be so churlish as to bite their dame! Besides, in case

you have forgotten, I am male. I can deliver an egg, but there is no way I can feed the child.”

“But...but how do you know it won’t happen?” Star ignored the laughter and demanded some answers. “How do you know it is all just a rumor or a legend? My existence proves that there is truth in legends!” She nodded her head sharply as if she had proven her point.

“But a missing nipple? I have never heard of such a thing.” Zol moved further away, moving to stand next to Father still bent over chuckling, his face hidden in a fall of white hair. “Our children will nurse side by side and according to tradition. Our males will take their human form after two moons and then I will take over chewing their meats for them. Your blunted teeth cannot chew the meat properly. They will come to you then only for nutrients and comfort. Our daughter will nurse as is proper for about five moons and then she will come to me for meat, as well. Your blunted teeth cannot chew the meat properly. Together we will feed our children and they will grow up to be beautiful and happy. But they will never *ever* turn to cannibalism for a meal, Star.” Zol was really insulted. “WE are not humans to resort to such.”

“I didn’t say that humans did that either, Zol, “ Star defended. “I was commenting on a rumor. And I have never been around a nursing child with teeth!

What else was I supposed to think? I was not born knowing these things! I was reared human!”

“And we will endeavor to explain as we come across these misunderstandings and knowledge breaks, Star,” Zen reassured her, glaring at the other members of the Quad.

“But it is amusing,” Father snickered before he stood up and tossed his hair behind his head.

“I don’t think so,” Star grumbled. “I wish I had never asked.”

“You have to ask,” Father assured her, smiling wildly. “If you don’t ask, misunderstandings would ensue. How do you think we would feel if you refuse to nurse our child because of this misunderstanding? Both our child and we would thing that you were rejecting him. And rejection from one so freshly hatched would cause death.”

“I—I don’t want our children to die.” Star’s eyes grew wide at the prospect. “I would never want to cause any harm to our children.”

“Then you have to ask your questions,” Zen soothed.

“And I apologize for laughing.” Father smiled again. “But the picture of a nippleless female was very amusing to me, Star. Can you imagine a mother offering the second because her child still hungered?”

“You are crazy,” Star snorted, forgiveness in her voice.

“But you will still allow us a taste?” he asked, his eyes going large as his bottom lip quivered.

“If I must,” she giggled, then laughed outright.

“And your humor?” Zen asked.

“My humor is at a Quad filled with adult males, warriors and artists, all kneeling at my feet waiting for the children to finish their meals so they can lick the plate clean.”

Chapter Fifteen

Laying on their pillows, her mate behind her, Star was unable to relax. The night air was filled with the heavy breathing of her males, but something was disturbing her, making it hard to concentrate.

Star was feeling restlessness.

It was not the usual restlessness that plagued her early in her time with the Dragonish and her Quad. This was more intense, more —just more.

Her whole body throbbed, it ached, it burned far more seriously than it ever had before.

She squirmed; twisting in her bonded's arms, unable to remain still.

His touch irritated her. That was strange.

Although she loved her mate and wanted to be near him, right now his presence was not what she desired or needed.

“What vexes you, My Mate?” His voice was whispered softly against her ear as he nuzzled softly at her fragrant skin.

She wanted to answer him, she really did, but when she opened her mouth, only a small moan emerged.

She closed her eyes, not knowing what to say. All she could do is feel.

It was so hot and the aching gnawing hunger was growing.

The day had been long and complicated, not to mention scary at times, but there was something about his whispered words.

Fire. His words were like liquid fire slinking slowly through her veins. But that fire was urging her towards something different, something yet unnamed.

Her head tilted back and a loud trill rolled from her throat.

“My Star?”

He pulled her closer, inhaling the new scent that surrounded the pillows in which they lay, returning her trill and creating a thrumming duet that drew an answering call from across the room.

At its sound, Star felt her body react. She pushed at her mate and lifted her head high, her eyes shining pure gold in the dim shadows of the room.

Her trill rolled out louder as she spied a set of golden eyes that throbbed and pulsed with the tones in its voice.

Yes, this is what she wanted. She trilled again, calling to that voice and those golden eyes.

Almost in a daze, she rose up to her knees and began to crawl towards that sound that had such a great hold on her body.

Her stomach warmed, her clitoris swelled, and all the nerves in her body leapt into life all at once.

She lifted her head, extending a neck that slowly glistened with sweat and chased that scent; a teasing smell of male warmth and musk filled her nostrils.

It was almost the same as her beloved mate's, but this scent was tinged with a need and hunger that called out to her blood, that screamed for attention.

She barely felt the tile floor beneath her knees as she moved closer to the heat and scent that the other male emitted.

His trilling became louder as she moved closer, pausing as the scent of a powerful male halted her progress.

She backed away, but only retreated a small step. She felt no more fear of this male than she did of her own bonded mate. But still, froze, body tense as she waited.

It seemed that she remained frozen for hours before the male shifted, his red eyes raking her body knowingly as the gold-eyed male crawled over him towards her.

She felt a presence behind her and relaxed as the scent of her own mate filled her nostrils. But it was an eager scent that urged her to move forward towards the other.

Likewise, the large red eyes male moved behind the golden one she wanted, both of their presence offering comfort and safety to her.

She knew that she wasn't thinking right, But it was just so hard to try and fight these instincts that clouded her mind with a haze that was making her want to bite, to scratch, and to fight until she had what was driving her forward.

And then she knew. He had what she wanted; he had everything she needed. And that wonderful musky scent was come from his groin and she had to be closer.

As the golden eyes male drew closer, she, growled low in her throat and then she pounced, her body lurching forward to tackle the male to the ground.

"Give me what is mine!" she demanded, her voice more like a hiss and she leaned over his body, staring straight into his eyes. "Give it to me now!"

She felt her talons emerge as she straddled the male, sniffing at him, running her tongue along his sweet flesh.

She felt her bonded move behind her, griping her wrists and she fought him.

Shrill cries left her throat and muscles tensed a she bucked and fought against the male who was holding her back from what she desired.

But the male beneath her was not silent either.

Low thrums escaped his throat as he fought to bring her back, his own talons scratching at the skin of her sides and back as he desperately tried to bring her back.

White smoke was rolling from his nostrils and his hair flew wildly around him as the male with the red eyes reached out and wrapped him in his arms stilling his movements.

“We have to get them together gently,” the red-eyed one was calling to her bonded. “This has been building for too long.”

“Her golden eyes male screamed and fought, his scent growing stringer as she became aware of his erect cock,

It was almost purple in color and dripping with his arousal, the thick veins and small black scales that ran up its side tantalizing her. She felt an answering pulsing in her clit and her swollen labia overflow with slick wetness that told of her hunger for possession.

She wanted to be taken and taken by this male.

She screamed again, struggling against the hold as her mate kept her back from what she needed.

“In me!” she screamed, her chest, arching, her breasts heaving as she sought to break Zen’s hold on her. “In me now!”

Tears ran down her face as she sought to gain some control over hr body, but to no avail.

“Please...”

“You will never have to beg for what you need here,”

The words were whispered into her ear by her bonded, but it had no effect on the mad heat that was running through her body.

She looked down at her prize, the male she had to have filling the void within her and noted that he too was bucking, teeth bared, defiant, trying to fight his way out of the arms of the larger male to get to her.

His eyes were wide and desperate, his breathing almost sounding pained as he arched his body towards hers, his large cock slapping against the skin of his stomach, sending a slick glistening precum droplets over his straining thighs and the floor.

No words passed his lips but inhuman grunts, growls and hisses poured freely from his straining throat. He was too far gone, lost in his own heat to form them.

His hair flew around his body framing the perfection of his form as each muscle strained against the power that held him in check.

With his fangs exposed and his overt hunger, he tore at her throat. Without him ever having to touch her she felt her inner walls spasm and clench, tearing her first orgasm from her body.

She howled, slamming her head back onto her bonded's shoulder as waves of release flowed over her. Her thighs trembled as her hot juices flowed down her thighs, painting them with her need.

But instead of relaxing her body, the release only made her hunger stringer.

She was pulled back onto her mate's chest, feeling his own large erection paint slick trails across her ass, and for a moment she helplessly began to grind against him, but that did not assuage the burning ache.

She strained and cried, eager to get to the male who could ease her erotic pain.

"Now," the red eyed man called out, "While she is calmer."

And then they were moving her.

Star threw her head back and trilled loudly! They were moving her closer to the source of that delicious smell.

She looked up to see the larger male wrestle the smaller gold-eyed one onto the ground, flat on his back.

He continued to buck and growl, his feral nature showing itself in his wild eyes and spastic movements, but the red eyes one commandingly held him fast.

Her bonded wrapped both arms around her waist, and in one heave, lifted her above her target. She trilled faster, happier now that the object of her need was once again almost within reach.

"I'll position him," the red eyed one called out, and then matched words to deeds. His large dark hand engulfed the stiff pillar of cock that visibly grew at his touch.

The gold-eyed one moaned, thrashing his head from side to side as...as....
Father. He was Father. Father would make it all better.

Stat watched as that large dark hand caressed the smaller male's cock, spreading his natural lubricant over the thick shaft, stimulating him while he prepared him.

The smaller male closed his eyes, his hands gripping the side of Father, his talons digging into the rich dark skin.

Star drooled, writhing in her mate's arms, needing that cock riding hard and fast between her swollen lower lips.

"Is she ready?" Red eyes again, she noted, hanging her head down, inhaling the smell of heat that was rolling off the smaller man.

Then her eyes widened as she felt the large hand of her bonded slip between her thighs and press against the swollen opening to her body.

She threw her head back and screamed; another orgasm roaring through her as his fingers manipulated her clit.

"More than," her mate answered as she sagged weakly in his arms, panting. Her eyes fell closed and her breathing calmed, but only for a moment. Already she could feel the hunger and need rising once more.

"Then let us begin."

Before she could even begin to build up the energy to fight again, her legs were being parted, her knees bent, and then solid warm flesh was pressing against her legs.

She forced her eyes open to see that muscular torso between her spread thighs.

His scent entranced her, made her once again fight and buck to be on him, to touch him, to taste him, to make him deliver what was rightfully hers.

And he was no better; his hips thrusting upwards, his cock rubbing against the hot flesh of her ass, searching for the portal that would bring them both what they so desired.

“Holding him,” Father muttered, “But hurry!”

‘Yes, hurry,’ she thought, straining against the strong hold that was now on her waist as well as holding her wrists captive.

She was on her knees above the male and being almost close to paradise and kept away by inches was driving her mad!

“How—?”

“Bring her down slowly,”

Then those fingers were on her labia again, spreading her wide as something hard, hot, and blunt pushed against her.

“Yes, yes, yes, oh yes,” she babbled, unable to stop herself as she felt the cock, the one that she needed, part her portal.

A long deep groan rolled out of her throat and she tried to push down fast, only to have it slip away.

“No!” she shrieked, tears running down her face. “Give it to me! I need it. Give it to me now!”

Father reached between her thighs again positioning the cock once more and this time her bonded spread out her swollen lips. She moaned softly as she felt her bonded ensure that the head made it inside of her body.

Slowly, inch by hard vibrating inch, she was lowered onto that perfect cock until she felt her whole pussy filled to overflowing, her ass setting on a pair of hard swollen sacs.

“Mmm.” She squirmed, trying to move, trying to rise up and slam down as hard as she could until the ache went away, but those hands stopped her again.

“How far gone are they?” her bonded asked above her head.

She could feel him pressed fully behind her, his hard cock riding between the cheeks of her ass.

“Nearly incoherent,” Father reached out and ran his hands over her face before reaching down to caress gold-eyes’ hair. “We have to ensure that he is not spiked.”

She felt her bonded nod before her arms were crossed before her and gently held at her sides.

He was holding her still; preventing the wild gyrations that she knew would bring about the climax to this whole affair.

She panted now, her mouth open as low gasps escaped her. She looked down and the gold-eyed male was grunting, his hips rocking from side to side, his head tossed back into Father's lap.

Zol, she thought. This was Zol between her, rocking softly in her body.

The haze began to clear from her mind as she settled more deeply onto the cock inside her, feeling it and him for the first time since starting this wild act of sex.

She could feel him throb inside of her. Her walls clenched around him in sympathy as more liquid head gushed from inside of her.

She was ready. She needed to move. Why would they not let her move?

"Slowly," her mate whispered. His back forcing her down far enough on Zol's chest that her breasts pressed into the sensitive skin.

It also shifted him within her so that he was now touching off a place that sent cool shivers up and down her spine.

"Take her," Father commanded. "It will help."

She looked down to see Zol had opened his eyes, his fangs still bared and smoke rolled up from his nostrils, but he seemed to be in a bit more control, like she was now feeling.

Then she gasped as she felt a finger at her rear aperture.

But instead of fearing it, she wanted to feel it press deep into her, to tease and burn the nerves alive throughout her body, to send sparks of fire so that her soul could be set free to fly.

“Zol,” she moaned and arced back, hissing as it shifted the huge cock inside of her, making her clench around Zol again.

“Easy,” her bonded soothed, adding a second finger and beginning to stretch her gently.

In response, Star lowered her head and lapped at the sweat rolling from Zol’s neck.

His purr was so loud it shook them both.

Star pressed into that sound, letting it roll around her like warm syrup as she felt her bonded pull his fingers free and release hands. Those very same hands now gripped the cheeks of her ass, spreading her wide.

“Beautiful,” Zen breathed, and Star bared her own small fangs.

“Star!”

Zol gasped his first word of the night as her small pointed teeth dove into his neck, piercing his tough skin and drawing fresh blood.

She moaned and suckled softly before the small wounds closed, tonguing the tiny set of teeth prints her actions left.

That got her a rolling thrust as Father released his grip on Zol's hips and the man groaned his relief.

He tried to buck up, but Father caught his thighs, holding them to the ground and preventing him from moving.

"Now, Zenxian." Father roared and Star gasped as she felt the rounded head of her mate's cock slide through the rings of muscles in her ass.

"Yes," she hissed again, jerking her hands free on his weak grasp and burying them in Zol's hair.

At Zen's first thrust, Star gasped feeling his cock press against Zol's deep within her body.

Fire roared through her veins and the need to push, to thrust increased.

Zol was screaming now, humming up and not getting much movement, the wild noises coming from his throat, making Star respond in kind.

She closed her eyes just as the sound abruptly cut off.

She opened them to see Father had risen above Zol and feeding his cock into his mate's mouth.

Zol greedily suckled at the offering, his own hands breaking free to grip Father's ass and greedily pull him deeper.

"Now," Father gasped, his eyes closing for a moment as he tossed back his long white hair in an obvious bid for control. "Now we can get them moving."

Zen pulled back, Star pushed up, Zol's hips thrust up, and the wildest fucking that Star ever had begun.

She pressed down and back, feeling both cocks reaming her, filling the void that had been plaguing her for longer than she could remember.

In and out, stretching both her ass and her pussy, Star began to move faster and faster, a new tension building deep within her abdomen.

Zen would only let her move so fast, his hands on her hips controlling her movements while Father kept Zol entranced on the cock sliding down his while he forced his hips to hold very still.

Slowly they all began to move faster, to pick up a little speed and the tension turned into a knot within Star.

She moaned and growled, hips slamming and winding, her breasts slinging along the slick skin of Zol's chest, her blue curls tangling with a few locks of wild black hair from Zol.

"Good," she panted, closing her eyes to feel the sensations deeper. "Oh Ghods, so good!"

She began to trill again, and Zol answered, this time the vibrations moving through both of their bodies, making them all move faster and faster, racing for completion.

Star felt it first, the stiffening of Zol's body, the wild look in his eyes, and Father paused in his mad thrusting.

"Zen," Father moaned and the second alpha paused in his shallow thrusts.

Before he could say more, Star let out a high-pitched wail.

Her eyes rolled in the back of her head, her inner walls, nearly overstimulated by the duel thrusting of her males, stiffened.

She felt something shifting deep within her.

It wasn't painful or odd, just differed.

Her stomach began to vibrate and stars danced behind her eyes.

Lighting streaked down her spine, her toes curled and her world began to tilt on its axis.

She cried out, her trill pausing as it suddenly felt as if another clit had exploded inside of her.

She felt it, long and thin, hard and spasming with joy as it descended from deep within.

She twitched, moving her hips as she braced her hands on Zol's chest.

Zol, for his part, froze, his eyes wide as his hips began a small circular thrusting grind.

Slowly, she felt his cock thicken, felt the head widen and knew that her spine would soon be buried into his tight hot heat.

She crooned, sitting straight up, bracing herself on her bonded behind her as she rose until only the head of his cock remained inside her.

Acting on pure instinct now, she shifted her hips a little and began to slide down as Zol's hips relaxed enough to thrust up.

She hissed as she felt the slit in his cock's head expand. She closed her lids, winding her own hips as she directed the spike into that greedy little mouth.

Zol let out a cry as she felt the spine find and then breach his opening.

She eagerly lowered her body, the feeling of penetrating while being penetrated stealing everything but one thought from her mind.

"More!"

She felt her mate's arms reach up and surround her, holding her steady as she begin to thrust.

She opened her eyes to see Father caressing Zol's face and chest, pinching at his swollen nipples, caressing his stomach.; easing him into the trusting upwards motion that caused his cock to engulf her spine fully.

"Star."

That single gasp left his lips before his eyes glazed over once more.

He slammed up sharply, filling Star to the fullest, making her growl as she felt herself sucked into the tightest hottest space she had ever felt.

Slowly they began, moving in shallow thrusts, their partners holding them steady as the new knot in her body started to twist and turn.

Tears ran down her face and her arm went backwards around Zen's neck, tangling in his dark red hair.

They moved, all four of them, together, sharing the feelings that zinged through them, strengthening their bond, creating a loving atmosphere for the eggs that would soon fertilize.

Star tried to move fast, to drown in the sensations, but Zen kept her controlled

They reached a faster rhythm that was wringing every drop of pleasure from both of their bodies.

Sweat poured off the Quad, straining their bodies as the tension grew and grew until a flash of red power flooded them.

“Zol! Zen! Ah!”

Star's head snapped back, Zol's name rumbled from her lips. Her body snapped, the tension unraveling in a flash of fire, her walls clenching down on the cock deep inside her pussy, milking the one within her ass.

Zol was thrashing beneath her, letting go of Father's cock and screaming as his hips slammed upwards.

Together, they exploded, sending powerful streams of energy through the bond, forcing the other pair to climax along with them.

Zen roared as he buried his fingers in Star's hair, his hips slamming like a piston finally as he exploded, sending his seed deep within her ass as she deposited her eggs deep within Zol.

Father pulled out, his bellow drowning them all out as his cock sent spurt after spurt of his white, hot seed over the bodies between them, branding both Zol and Star with his essence, marking them both as belonging to him.

Zol arched up, his body wiggling against the floor as his seed gushed from him, flooding Star and leaning down to run over his groin. His cock pulsed, the inner walls milking Star's spine.

Star moaned, shuddering as she felt her body being rent asunder by extreme force of her orgasm.

Her inner walls clenched, her ass tinged, her muscles stiffened until she thought they would snap, and then they plunged her into a sea of white-hot ecstasy.

After some moments, Zen slowly pulled out, his hands round Star's waist holding her steady.

Father pressed a hand to her stomach, smiling as he felt the tight muscles release.

“You can pull her off now, slowly,” he admonished as Zen very carefully lifted his bonded from the body of his secondary beta.

Star tried to lift her head, to move any part of her body, but all she could do was whine softly.

She looked over to see Father lovingly lift Zol and rise to his feet.

As if they came to some silent understanding, both Alpha’s moved their betas onto a shared pile of pillows, snuggling them together and crowding in behind them.

“Wash tomorrow.” Father sifted, closing his eyes and burying his face in Zol’s damp black hair. He pressed his palm to his mate’s stomach and smiled

“Tomorrow,” Zen agreed, as he snuggled in behind Star, ignoring his seed that leaked from her rear and pressing his own palm against her stomach.

Star snuggled closer to Zol, suddenly feeling very close to the contrary male.

They had just shared something beautiful, something that not everyone was blessed by the Ghods to experience.

A small smile crossed her lips as Zol leaned over and pressed a soft kiss to them.

“An egg.” He grinned. “Soon we will have an egg.”

“Babies,” Star whispered, yawning as the soreness in her body made her aware that this wasn’t a dream. “Little babies, Zol.”

Then sleep was taking her, sinking her into its warm soft depths.

Babies, she thought again. Her world was perfect...if it wasn’t for the idiot trying to kill her.

Chapter Sixteen

Star was glowing...literally. And it wasn't a look that she was too fond of.

Since the successful completion of her mating right, she and Zol had begun to emit a soft golden glow that encased their whole beings.

Zol strutted about now, running his fingers along his arms, smiling secretly as he stared at Father, enjoying every moment of the coddling offered from the big red-eyed male.

Star, on the other hand, was still quite a bit dazed and confused as to how it had all come about.

The shared sex with Zol, the resulting orgasm that had stolen her senses as well as her consciousness had been almost too much pleasure to bear.

And to wake up, cured and content in a huge pile of male flesh, well that was delightful and filled her with contentment that she had only dreamed of.

Yet now that the afterglow had begun to fade and the darkness of night had given way to the light of dawn, Star found that the joy was fading and she was incredibly frightened.

What did she know about being a mother anyway? She never had a mother of her own, so how would that affect their children? What if she was a bad

mother? What if something happened to the babies? What if she lost one? What if she injured them or misplaced one of them, or if they hated her? Would she get big and fat and unlovable? What if the male trying to kill her came back? What if...?

“We will never abandon you.”

Star gave a little lurch in her mate’s arms, his voice startling her out of her silent musings.

“You can hear that?”

“Our bond thrums with your anxiety,” Zen whispered, cuddling her closer, spooning his large body behind hers. “I can feel what you feel, Star, when our mate bond is fully open.”

“I never knew,” she answered, pulling his arms tighter around her before sighing deeply and closing her eyes, releasing some of her tension and settling closer to her love. “Does this mean that every moment of every day you can feel me?”

“No.” Zen buried his face in her electric blue curls. “I have the ability to manipulate the bond a little on my end. I partially close it during the days so that you won’t feel the pain I suffer when we train or the erratic emotions that goes with my occupation. I don’t want you to worry about me, so I try to keep my side under control.”

“But you can still feel me, hear me?”

“Yes, feel you and your emotions. I have been staying close to the Weir and not venturing out for hunting or patrol these past few weeks. I want to be able to get to you quickly if something should happen. But as for hearing you, I can only hear you if you directly project to me. You are good at projecting when you are scared or frightened, and I am grateful for that. I like being the first one you think of when you become uncertain.”

‘You like the ego boost?’ she chuckled mentally, wiggling her butt against the warm cock that lay neatly in her real cleft.

“No,” he sent back. “I like being the one you turn to for safety. I like being the one you need most. I like being needed by you, Star, as you are one of the few things in this life that gives this life meaning,” he finished aloud.

Star felt her eyes burn as his words flowed over her and settled deep within her heart.

“Do you not know that I love you, Star?” he asked, dropping small kisses along her neck, lapping at her ear. “How can you not know that you are akin to the very air I breathe?”

“I...I don’t know” she sniffed. “A lot has been happening, Zen. We’ve been mated and my family is dead, and someone wants me dead.... I think I’m scared.”

“You would be a fool not to be afraid.” He laid one more kiss on her neck before he shifted backwards and turned her to face him.

Her hands reached up to caress his face, her eyes wet with unshed tears. He cupped her face between his hands and drew her into a soft delicate kiss.

“It is just our nature to fear what we do not understand,” he explained softly, running his thumbs along her cheek before he pulled her into another small kiss. “And there is no shame in that, lover. And I, um, must confess that I find myself...Curse on it, Star, I am afraid, too.” A blush suffused his cheeks and he lowered his eyes, ashamed of his confession.

“You?” Star asked, eyes wide as she stared at her mate’s pale skin.

“Me,” he whispered softly before pulling her closer, burying her face in his neck and sinking his nose into her hair. “I keep thinking, what if I curse my son with my pale skin and odd red hair? What if I am not good enough to be a Sire? What if I never find the one who is threatening you? What if the Royals decide that you must be amongst them, or if the players in this game decide that you belong with someone who does not have tainted...? What if I never find the one seeking to harm you?” He paused, pulling back to look into her softly glowing eyes. “What if you stop loving me?”

Star’s mouth fell open as she stared at her bonded. How could he, such a beautiful and commanding male have these questions in his heart? For they were heartfelt; she could feel their sincerity through their bond, which was now wide open and receptive to her. He didn’t want her to have any doubts about how much

he cared for.... No, he didn't want her to have any doubts about how much he loved her.

Her fears melted a little.

"I could never stop wanting you," she whispered. "You are all and everything to me. You are what I needed even before I knew what it was that I hungered for. You are my heart, Zenxian. You rescued me; you saved me in more ways than I could count. You gave me a family, a Quad, and now you have given me a wonderful gift. If I am uncertain, I believe, that it is because I am afraid that I will fail *you*, that I will not live up to your expectations. After all, I was reared human and have no idea of how to behave or what to do.... I mean, Zen, it took me falling off an arch to get me to realize that I have talons for a reason. And I am still afraid of heights. Can you see me allowing any child of mine to go near an open window? And I know that they are in no danger in my head, but my heart...I fear that my heart will always be too human and that you will begin to despise me for it."

"I could never despise you, Star. It would be like despising my own arm, or my wings. You are a part of me. Nothing will ever destroy that. I would leave with you, descend to the earth and live amongst the humans for you. And I am sure that Father and Zol feel the same way. You may not have had a huge need of me these past few weeks while your body was developing to its fullest potential, but I know that I am first in your mind and in your thoughts, in your heart."

“How...how do you...How can you tell?”

“I may have my shields in place to prevent you from experiencing my most terrible emotions, Star. But you have no knowledge of how to manipulate the shields. Your emotions are strong and open to me.”

He had to have felt her every emotion from her anger to the humor she felt in baiting Zol, to the heart stopping fear she felt when she fell from the arch. And what was even more shocking, he not only felt them, but he had to have experienced them, as well.

“I’m so sorry,” she stammered. “You will teach me how to shut it down, Zen? You can’t go on feeling everything that I feel, every emotion...”

“No!”

His shout almost woke the other pair who rested not far from her. He closed his eyes, gaining control again and Star felt his flair of anxiety, and instantly understood the reason behind it.

“No,” he went on softer. “I live to experience what you do, Star. It keeps me connected to you in every way. I can monitor you and be assured of your happiness and your safety. I revel in your emotions. I want to experience them all. I love you! I want you and every part of you. I not only want the happy emotions that you send to me when all is well in your existence. I need to know the full you, to share in your sadness and your anger, as well. They sustain me, Star, when I cannot be by

your side. Please, please don't take that away from me." His eyes were piecing, that golden color almost molten.

"I...I didn't know." The fullness and complexity of his emotions flooded her at once.



The news got out after their first trip to the bathhouse. When the four entered, there was a hush that almost sent Star reeling to the safety of her mate's strong arms.

Zaz was the first to encounter them, and the Prince was all Dragonish grins.

"So you were successful," he purred, the bulk of his huge body nearly quivering with delight. He leaned down low, pressing his massive face close to her body, his golden eyes sparkling in excitement. "And your glow is beautiful!"

"It shows that the babe is healthy," Keria giggled as she moved beside her mate. "Your glow is strong and sure."

"I...uh, thank you," Star stammered as the talkative female moved closer.

"It will be a beautiful boy...despite...." She looked up at Zen and gave him a sickly grin.

"Despite?" Zol snapped, moving up beside his secondary partner. "Despite what? Despite being connected to both the old and new royal houses?" he

grumbled standing before Star, his glow nearly burning as bright as the noon day sun.

“Rein it in.” Father rolled his eyes, stepping up and touching his mate on the arm. “Keria meant no offense.”

“Of course I didn’t” Keria blushed as she stepped backwards, for once, nearly hiding behind the prince.

“Well you have a piss poor way of showing it,” Star grumbled, not wanting to let go of her sudden anger. It kind of felt good. She had felt the shaft of pain that Zen felt, felt the shame and the need to hide his emotions as her words cut him to the core. She also felt his depressed assessment of the situation. After years of hearing the same thing, he was nearly immune to the slurs, but they still hurt.

“And you have insulted me. Married to the Royal House or no, insult any member of my Quad again and I will have your ass strung out for the scab!” Zol was nearly red in the face with his anger. He felt Zen’s pain to a degree and was not amused.

“Zol!” Zen tried to sooth the black haired dragon. “That’s enough. I am sure that Keria didn’t even pay attention to the words she uttered. It is a common sentiment.”

“That don’t make it right!” Zol and Star bellowed together, looking like a pissed off pair of warriors who were being denied their target.

They turned to stare at each other, shock evident on their faces, before turning to glare at Keria.

“I humbly apologize,” Zaz spoke graciously, before there was a puff of smoke and the human Zazolm stood before them. “I can feel Keria’s emotions and she really had no intent to harm, especially not on this joyous occasion. What can the Royal House do to make up for this trespass?” He spoke to Father, but his eyes were on the carrying secondary pairs.

The whole bathhouse, as usual, seemed to be listening in and waited with baited breath to see and hear what would be demanded of the Royals.

Star sighed, shaking her head as the sincerity of the apology from the prince almost moved her to tears. From furious anger to sympathetic tears in seconds, Star thought, sighing deeply. *Damn mood swings.*

“There is nothing,” Father began, but Zol cut him off.

“Oh I don’t think so, cousin!” He moved closer to the golden haired, golden-eyed dragon and stuck his face right into the Royals. When standing next to each other so closely, the familiar resemblance was clear, though Zaz seemed to be larger and radiated more calmness and patience. “You owe me big for your mate’s loose teeth!”

“I didn’t mean...” Keria started, but Zol cut her off.

“Shut up! I mean it. I love you, Keria, like a sister, but if you open your mouth again, I will declare a feud that none since the original Sky Dragons took to the heavens to flee the Earthen Dragonish have seen!”

“Zol!” Father reprimanded him, stepping forward and wrapping his arms around his mate, pulling him back from Zaz. “That is quite enough.”

“No, it’s not!” Zol argued, tears welling up in his eyes. “It is never enough when family turns on family!”

“Zol,” Zen trilled softly. “No insult was intended. Keri was just repeating the ideals that have held our people true for so many years. I know my appearance is not considered attractive—”

“So it shows that at one time the Earth and the Sky Dragonish existed as one. Why is that lesson such a painful one to comprehend? We were one before the schism that separated us and your appearance only proves that! But enough is enough!” Zol was nearly screaming by this time, his glow blazing as he visibly struggled with his emotions.

“The female child is a strong protector,” Zaz nodded, reaching out to touch Zol on the face. He began to trill and instantly the glow lessened, and Zol sagged within his mate’s arms, closing his eyes and breathing deeply.

“As if we could breed anything other than strength, beauty, and intelligence.” Father rolled his eyes, seemingly board with the whole affair.

“Will you not reprimand us, Kyotype?” Zaz asked, pulling away and nodding at his cousin before taking his mate into his arms. “My mate’s words did cause you some harm. It is not acceptable and I will not have a feud within the houses.”

“I need nothing.” Father hugged Zol tightly, holding him against his size. “I have a healthy mate, a strong Quad, and beautiful children soon to be hatched. I cannot wait to brood, and that is a blessing that is far above any petty insults, perceived or intended.”

And that took the wind out of the offended parties sails.

“I look to what is most important.” Father hugged his mate again, then turned to Zen. He reached out and pulled his Alpha Secondary into his arms.

And before the whole bath house, a place where the stern icon Kyotype, the standard and archetype to which all warriors were held, leaned over and pressed his lips to his Alpha Second’s lips.

There was a hushed silence as the Greta Kyotype sank his tongue into his mate’s mouth, proving for once and for all that the icon found his mate irresistible.

Pink flashes of tongue were seen as he proceeded to devour Zen’s mouth, as if he were pulling life-sustaining sustenance from his very body. Kyo refreshed his very soul at the front of his alpha second.

When the kiss broke, he wasted no time in pulling his bonded into a similar kiss, leaving the pregnant young male panting and hanging onto his long white hair for balance.

Then finally, he reached out and pulled Star to him, his long white hair mingling with her eclectic blue curls. Her hair devoured her as he lifted her slightly, holding her to his chest.

After a few moments he set Star back on her feet next to her bonded, and turned to the Prince.

“Indeed, with so much beauty, my good fortune runs over to nurture even the dry human deserts below. I am content and I am proud. My Quad is everything to me. How could I desire anything else?”

There was silence as his words were digested, then with a small smile, Kyo directed his Quad to the nearest washing pool.

“You need nor lack nothing,” Zaz agreed, a flash of envy flaring in his eyes before he hugged his own bonded to his chest. “But I feel that this insult must be addressed.”

“It is over.” Kyo turned to smile at his Prince.

“No, there must be something—”

“If you feel so bad,” Zol recovered enough to stay, “Why don’t you give us a Belpith.”

“Belpith?” Star asked, moving beside her bonded as he made his way to the washing pool, the Prince and his bonded mate at his side.

“Wonderful idea,” Zaz smiled, the tension around him suddenly lightening.

“A conception celebration,” Zen explained as he assisted his mate into the pool.

The Royals followed, showing there was no conflict and that the issue had been resolved. It was important to show a united front and both Zaz and Father realized the implications of someone perceiving a rift in the family, a rift that could possibly be exploited and used to their advantage. There were still the unknown enemy out there, and he was clever. It was better not to give him any opening.

“Oh I would love to!” Keria rushed to say, wanting nothing more than to mend the breach her thoughtless words had caused. She slid into the pool next to Zaz who settled beside Kyo.

“Then in the next two risings, so be it,” Father stated, and the issue was dropped.

Star soaked in the pool for a moment before her mate was fetching soaps and a soft brush. He began to wash her body, rubbing in gentle circles, looking ecstatic to be able to touch her flesh. Her glow was fading to more acceptable levels and unknowingly she purred.

“A Belpith is a wonderful idea,” Star spoke, slipping her from her own soft hazy world.

Zol was being pampered himself, Father tenderly washing a leg, slowly running his hands up to his groins, before repeating the process and ending massaging his toes.

“What does it entail?” Star was curious and fought to hold her eyes open as Zen slowly washed her back.

“They,” he nodded to Zaz who was cuddling a still shaky Keria in his arms. “Will provide food and drink at our aerie. They will arrange for guests to visit, musicians to play, agri-growers to provide fine food and drink, and we sit on pillows while they shower us with presents. It is a way to show respect and happiness that our numbers are increasing. All children are a welcome blessing from the Ghods.”

“Oh.” Star shrugged. “The humans have a similar celebration when the child is near birth.” She never realized that she referred to the humans as a separate entity from herself. But the members of her Quad did, and they silently rejoiced. Star jumped at the sharp flash of intense happiness that flowed from her mate, before she settled back under his caressing hands again.

“What good is a gift when the child is near to birthing?” she asked, closing her eyes, trilling softly as Zen reached for her arms and hands. She never realized

how sore they were from all her work before he began to rub the tension from her muscles. “You need to know what you have to obtain before the child gets that close. It is hard to gather and hunt when burdened by a baby belly.”

And the dragonish within hearing distance froze.

“They make the expectant one gather and hunt?” Father asked, for the first time his patience seeming to flee before his sudden shock.

“While they are heavy with child?”

“Well, yeah,” Star looked confused at their anger. “The males hunt, but the females can leave their homes and gather. Exercise is good and the danger is minimal.”

“Animals!” Zaz hissed as Zen pulled her to his lap.

“I am so happy to have gotten you away from that...that place! To put an expectant one in such danger...” He was so appalled at his stuttering. His disbelief and anger rang through their bond.

“That is unthinkable!” Father hissed, moving closer as if to protect his Quad.

“Animals,” Keria repeated, burying her face in Zaz’s neck, shuddering.

“Makes me glad I’m not human,” Zol nodded, before closing his eyes and nudging Father to carry on with the washing. “Star is not there now, so the customs of others is no business of mine.” He turned his attention to Keria. “All I

know is that you bring lots of gifts to make up for your overly large mouth and some of the things that flow from it.”

“I apologize, Zol,” Keria looked down, nibbling at her bottom lip with her teeth. No insult was meant.”

“And Zen does not deserve it.” He arched one eyebrow, daring her to go against anything he said.

“And Zen does not deserve it,” she repeated, turning finally to look at the pale Dragonish. “You deserve nothing bad or negative, Zen. You are too much of a positive being to ever have anything bad visited upon you.”

“Accepted,” Zen smiled, chuckling as he felt the smug acceptance from his mate through their bond. “I know that you had no ill intent.”

Nodding, Keria settled back to enjoy her mate’s touch on her body.

“So...” Zol drawled. “Gifts?”

“What do you want, you vain creature?” Zaz chuckled, turning to face his cousin.

“Star and I will require bedding for the Hatching Aerie. We cannot allow our mates to have anything less than the best of comforts.”

“Of course,” Zaz again nodded but continued to soap his mate.

“And Star will require new skeins of silk clothing to create their crèches.”

“I will?” Star pulled herself out of her daze long enough to inquire.

“You will.” Zol sniffed. “They will be masterpieces of form and function. They will provide protecting and give our mates that ability to move about more freely. And with my beadwork and designs, they will truly be magnificent.”

“Magnificent. Yes.” she nodded to Zol. “Silks in red and white.”

“And I will need golden beads for the design. Golden beads of all sizes; I want my males to sparkle. When they feel wonderful, then my children will feel wonderful.”

“A good attitude,” Star spoke softly, a grin pulling at her lips.

“Means that the baby will have a good attitude. I want my baby to have a great attitude.”

“Then we must pamper the Alpha. A sad Alpha means a sad baby.” Zol leaned over to pat Star on the hand. “The attitude they have is based on the Alpha. That is why it is imperative that they handle the eggs, so that their contribution to the hatchling is accepted. If they lose close contact with the egg...” Zol shook his head. “If they lose close contact, then they start to behave like Keria, not knowing when to keep one’s mouth shut.”

“You accepted my apology!” Keria sniffed, leaning over to stare at the two plotting submissive. “Let my misspoken words dissipate!”

“They go when I have the gold in my hands,” Zol sang to her. “And not a moment sooner.”

“So that means your blood Alpha took every advantage to get what he wanted from those around him?” Keria snarked. “After all, as you say, the attitude of the Alpha shows in the child.”

“Damn right,” Zol laughed as Keria’s narrowed eyes changed to an expression of shock, then disbelief before settling into curls of amusement. “And it is what I used to get my hands on my Alpha.”

Everyone looked pointedly at Father, who still continued to wash his mate, ignoring the conversation going on around.

“He could not resist my charms,” Zol added, right before he was gently lifted then dumped into the water, his look of surprise sending them all into peals of laughter as his whole face disappeared beneath the bubbly water.

“A lesson,” Father spoke to the others as his bonded mate rose from the depths of the bathing pool sputtering and resembling a drowned sea creature. “Never harm your submissive when proving a point. Actions carry more weight than words. You take the correct action, then your bonded will be won over to your way of thinking without you having to utter a single word.”

“Kyotyte!” Zol sputtered, soapy water dripping from his eyes.

“Yes, love, I do believe it is time to rinse. Pardon us.”

And then Zol was lifted into his mate’s arms and carried, still sputtering, over to the waterfall that they used for rinsing.

As the water closed over their heads, Kyo was seen lowering his face and taking his mate's lips into another passionate kiss, one so fraught with need, want, and love that it again managed to silence all those watching.

Zol's arms lifted to wrap around the large body of his mate and all could feel the love that hummed between the two of them as his slender body rested against Father's much larger one.

Star's bond hummed in contentment as she observed. She turned to stare at her own dragon and the love she felt nearly brought tears to her eyes.

That gnawing aching feeling that had plagued her for so long was disappearing. And in its place she felt happiness, contentment, needed, respected, and wanted.

She felt like she was home.



It seemed that the whole Aerie was filled to capacity.

Everywhere Star looked, there were Dragonish and their bonded in all colors and hues of the sunset falling over the desert sands.

And there were so many names to remember, so many family lines and histories.

She had been sniffed countless times, returned happy greetings and had been greeted more in return by a people who generally wanted to see her happy.

She finally allowed Zol to manipulate her bonds so that the emotions she felt with him were less intense, but still present so that she could not feel the brunt of his anxiety at having this many Dragonish in their aeries.

The one who wished her dead had not been caught, and everyone was still cautious. It had been almost three weeks after the attack and still they had no clue as to who would want her dead. But Father and Zaz had many clues, clues that they refused to share. Zenxian had a few ideas, as well, and he spent many long hours with Father and the Prince in discussion on how to handle the situation.

But another attack did not happen and Star began to suspect that the killer was closer than any of them thought. The attacker was clever, yes. But his action seemed rather personal.

First he was spying, then he was attacking her... it seemed that he felt more like a jilted lover than someone who just wanted her dead.

No attacks had occurred since she had become pregnant, so maybe he wanted to kill her and not the child....

Did Zen leave a lover to bond with her?

It was a valid question and it made sense...in human terms.

She sighed and shook her head, remembering for the hundredth time that the humans and the Dragonish thought differently.

And those thoughts only led to her becoming upset and paranoid. Already she had Zen build waist-high hand holds along the bridges, and longer curtains were hung at the windows, but she would have to draw the line at making him discuss his past lovers.

If he had past lovers.

Maybe the culprit was someone who wanted to be a lover and lost the chance. Maybe she needed to look at people paying undue attention to her bonded mate!

Maybe...

“Dragonish are leaving.”

Zol’s words jerked her out of her musings. She looked around from where she had been ensconced on a huge pile of pillows and furs to see that, indeed, the Aerie was clearing out.

“You were brooding, so Father felt it was time you rested. And that was after Zen almost took the hand away from an eager submissive who wanted to touch your belly.”

It was amazing. The golden glow had faded days ago, and with its passing began the plumping of her belly. She was only about a month along in this pregnancy and already she was showing.

“It’s so big,” she complained, scowling down at what once used to be a flat plane of flesh.

“It’s normal.” Zol sniffed, rubbing at his own rounded belly. “And it means that they are healthy.”

Those words made Star smile. Happy and healthy, her babies would be perfect!

“Are you sure I am carrying the male?”

“You could not carry the female,” Zol scoffed. “The little slasher would cut your insides to thread. She has claws and you lack the ability to shift. I have that ability; therefore my internal organs are made to withstand a lot of damage. My son will just lie there and rest, waiting for the shell to develop. Males are more civilized than you crazy females.”

Star rolled her eyes. “Yeah, whatever you say, Zol.”

“Good,” he nodded sagely. “It is about time you learned that lesson.”

Further conversation was cut off as the last of their guests left and the Alpha’s returned to their side.

“That was fun,” Zen smiled, leaning down to kiss his mate. “I believe that we have very little hunting to do to ensure that the hatching aerie will be complete.

“And we have been given enough food,” father added, “so that any and all of your cravings will be met.”

“I want to open presents.” Zol grinned as he leapt from his pile of pillows, snagging Star’s arms almost as an afterthought. He dragged his submissive partner over to the huge mound of presents, laughing in eagerness. “Who doesn’t love presents?”

Star moved faster to keep up instead of being dragged, and soon stood before the waist-high pile of gifts.

“Some are directed specifically towards us as individuals and some are for the Quad to share.”

Star looked back and saw that Father and Zen had finally begun to relax. They were now seated on the huge pile of pillows and furs, and observed them with some amusement.

“Remember who runs this place when you are egg sitting,” Star called back, chuckling as they both frowned.

“Way to clip their wings,” Zol congratulated her, shoving a box in her hands. “This one is addressed to you.”

Star looked down and saw... She lifted the box and turned it sideways, then rotated it towards the front. “Huh?” There were some odd markings and scratches.

“That’s your name, Star! Honestly, can’t you read...Oh.”

“Oh?” She frowned at the box, twisting it from side to side, trying to make some semblance of order out of the scratches that danced across the wrapping.

“We never taught you to read. You have our language thanks to your bind with Zenxian, but we neglected to teach you how to read our written language.”

“So teach me,” she finally put the package down. “Because this all looks like badly rendered drawings, if you ask me.”

Zol rolled his eyes and handed her another package. “I will teach you starting tomorrow, I cannot abide ignorance of any sort.” He looked over as her face transformed into a scowl of vengeance and swiftly carried on with his statements. “Not saying that you are ignorant, that it is time to fill in the gaps in your education.”

“Nice save,” Father called from across the room and they all laughed as a rare blush reddened Zol’s cheeks.

While they were laughing and teasing Zol, Star began to unravel the ribbons that held the stone gift box gift closed. Something gently knocked against the side of the box when she gave it a shake, so she knew whatever was inside was hard.

Ignoring the rest and intent on her present, Star lifted the lid and saw... “An egg?”

“A Klika melon,” Zol corrected her. “They are delicious. They are also a sign of good fortune for hatching. I suspect that we will receive a lot of them.”

“Oh. That’s nice, I suppose.”

She went on opening whatever Zol thrust in her hands until she had a huge pile of silks, beads, strange containers and platters, and jewelry.

They had made some headway into the pile of presents, laughing and joking all the while, when she ran into another box like the first one she opened, what she recognized as her name scribbled along the top.

“Another melon,” she supposed, and Zol paused in ribbing Father about how sexy he would look carrying an egg crèche to smile at her.

“Good, then there will be enough to share. Father and Zen love those things and this will make the second one. They are rare, you know.”

“I didn’t.”

But Zol turned to tease the Alphas and didn’t see as the color bled from Star’s face.

Truly, there was a Klicka melon in the box. But it was odd.

Star reached in and shifted it around, noting that it didn’t roll as easily as the first one had.

Then she noted the deep red liquid pooling in the bottom of the box.

Her sense of unease grew as she began to turn the melon.

“Scab!” she hissed as she dropped the box, watching as its contents splattered over the stone floor and her feet.

“Oh, you dropped it,” Zol complained, before rushing over to start the clean up. “You don’t look so good,” he added. “I think you should lie down.”

Almost as he finished speaking, both Father and Zen were beside her, lifting her up and wiping her legs free of the pink and red guts of the fruit.

“You must be overly tired,” Zen murmured, lifting her closer to his chest. ‘I felt a shaft of...fear? It’s okay, Star. We can get other melons.’

“I...” she sighed, closing her eyes and for the first time actively seeking to manipulate their bond. She breathed deeply until the cold shock of fear filling her eased into concern and exhaustion. Neither were false feelings, she just pushed the fear and anger down until they were hardly noticeable. “Maybe you are right.”

“Off to sleep,” Kyo said, bending down to help his bonded with the clean up. “When you awaken, we can open the rest of these presents.”

“Yes,” Star agreed, smiling from Zen’s arms.

“Rest well,” Zol rose on his toes to brush a soft kiss against her lips. “I fear I will be joining you soon.”

“Sleep,” Father intoned, walking over to her and nuzzling her cheek softly before taking her lips in a gentle kiss. “Zen and I will see to it that you rest undisturbed.”

In no time, her mate placed her down in the middle of their sleeping pillows, pulling a warm fur covering over her suddenly chilled naked body.

“Rest, Star. All will be well. I love you, my bonded mate.” A gentle kiss he placed across each eye, her nose, and then finally her bottom then upper lip. “You are my shining Star, my hope for the future, my heart and my life.”

Then he, too, withdrew to aid in the clean up, his love and desire for her humming through their bond.

Star closed her eyes, trying to control her breathing and keep her fears at bay. They had not seen what she had, and she refused to send them into a panic. The killer had been in her home, her sanctuary from the world that had so hurt her, and it made her afraid.

That melon, the last one she had...It had been split down the middle, its guts intentionally pulled out to resemble the garish and grisly remains of a child rolling around in its own blood.

Star forced her body not to shiver and thanked every Ghod she could think of that the grotesque fruit carving had exploded upon contact with the ground. Her mates would never know, and she wanted it that way. If that bastard thought that she would go screaming to the Alpha's he had better learn to think again!

She was raised human, tough, strong, and fighting.

That bastard had just declared war; and it was a war that she was more than ready to win.

Her fear turned to anger as she began to make fierce plans.

She had her home and no one or no thing would tear her sanctuary apart. She had been challenged, and she would meet that challenge with more force and anger than her would-be killer had ever imagined.

There was one thing that he managed to overlook.

She had been reared human, true, but it was the human who managed to eek out a way of life in the harsh planes below with stubbornness, adaptability, and the sheer will to live and succeed, traits that Star held in abundance.

He didn't know what he had started. He threatened her child, now he must die.

So it was war, and as a fierce smile spread across Star's lips, she knew it was a war that in the end, she would be declaring victory.

To Be Concluded....

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Author Bio:

Stephanie was born and reared in Baltimore, MD. At the age of six she wrote her first poem and has yet to stop. Since the age of six she has won several speech writing competitions and written several plays and skits for the local NAACP youth group. While she was attending college at Seton Hill a teacher suggested she put her talents to good work and write a book. This came after a disastrous semester in Engineering Math, definitely not one of Steph's strong suits. After six years of marriage and motherhood Stephanie finally got up the courage to show someone her work.

Since then her biggest supporters have been her husband and sister. Stephanie, writes contemporary, paranormal, futuristic, and erotic romances, often with interracial and alien characters. Her biggest asset is her huge imagination. In addition to writing Stephanie is an amateur artist and a voracious reader.

The following books are available by Stephanie Burke:

Red Rose Publishing

Her Dragon Series

Dragon Star Available Now in ebook and print

Dragon Ware

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Cherry Crush

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More Than Skin Deep

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Threshold Volume 2

Hidden Passions Volume 1

Hidden Passion Volume 2

Seascape

Merlins Kiss

The Slayer

The Slayer 2 (Coming Soon)

Lucavarious
Lucavarion (Coming Soon)
Wicked Wishes
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