

“Face it, we’re lost.”

“We’re not that lost,” Oakland said. He put his hand over his brow, turning in the blaring sunlight. “We’re just a little turned around. I know exactly where we are. This is the scenic route.”

“Uh huh,” Leaky laughed. She had tied her gold colored locks into two long braids that reached her waist. The end of each braid was tied closed with twine, but Leaky had put beads into her hair to make it more interesting.

Her brother Oakland was a trapper with heavy hands and thick fingers. Leaky was always surprised that he was as dexterous as he was with his trap work. Leaky hated seeing the animals he caught in pain but agreed to go with him in case any of them were too young for food.

Leaky had a deep love of animals, starting from when she saved a baby deer from death by raising it after an accident with one of her brother’s traps. The deer had been the first in a long line of rescues. It nearly broke Leaky’s heart when one of her brother’s catches was old enough to kill, but she couldn’t live with herself if one of the younger ones was left for Oakland to do with as he pleased. He saw the suffering as something that needed to be ended quickly. Healing them was a waste of time.

To Leaky’s pleasure, none of the traps had captured anything today. Her brother never trusted meat he didn’t kill himself, but the furs and bones were good for trading. Oakland had trouble seeing the glass half full as Leaky did.

“See!” Leaky pointed to the ground. “Those are our footprints!”

“They are not,” Oakland grumbled. “And I’m not lost! Besides, if these are my footprints, we’ll find our way back...not that they are mine!”

“Right,” Leaky snickered. “As long as we’re home before dark.”

Leaky turned quickly when she heard something chittering behind her. “Did you hear something?”

“Yeah...” Oakland said, turning his head slightly. “Over there...”

Stomping through the snow, Oakland approached a log that had fallen not far from where they were stopped. He cautiously peered over the log and reached down slowly.

“Hey, little guy...easy there. You’re OK.”

“Is it a deer? Or a raccoon?”

“No,” Oakland scooped up the little animal in his palm. In his hand was a tiny dragon with light blue scales. The beast was about the size of Oakland’s hand, fitting comfortably in his giant fingers. The creature had tiny wings with purple skin, barely the size of one of Oakland’s knuckles. The dragon had large black eyes and a rectangular head for burrowing in the snow. One of its back legs was bent in an awkward way, clearly broken.

“Poor little guy,” Leaky rushed forward and put her fingertips on the animal’s spine. “He must have gotten separated from his family.”

“That’s a shame,” Oakland said, pulling out his knife slowly. “Keep his attention away from me.”

“No, Oakland!” Leaky snatched the dragon from his hand, using both of her hands to cup the dragon in her palms. “He’s just a little guy. And he’s hurt...”

“Leaky, this isn’t some little deer with a broken leg,” Oakland said. “This is a dragon. He’s gonna get bigger...and hungry. You think he’s going to remember you healed his leg? If we don’t kill him while he’s little—”

“Don’t you dare finish that sentence!” Leaky snarled, folding her arms protectively around the dragon. “You can’t give me a reason to let you hurt him!”

“Leaky, think about it! Dragons eat cows in a single bite. When he’s all grown up? It’ll be harder to put him down...”

“You keep talking like he’s going to turn evil! He can’t be more than a few months old! If you think you can convince me that’s going to happen, you’re out of your mind!”

“By the gods, you’re stubborn! What do you think is going to happen? Father will let you keep him and you can teach it to be a good boy?”

“I’d like to!” Leaky said. “Just...let me take care of his leg, at least. He’s a baby.”

“Leaky, he’s not a baby deer. You have trouble letting go of your patients...that raccoon from last year still hangs around your window taking scraps when you feed him.”

“Bandit doesn’t know any better, he’s a lazy ass...”

“It’s for the best, Leaky...”

Leaky looked down at the dragon in her hands. The creature’s wide eyes blinked slowly, studying her breath clouding around his head. Purring, the beast rubbed it’s head against her wrist and nibbled at her fingertips. Leaky looked back at her brother, the knife still in his hand.

“No.”

“Leaky, it’s getting late and I’m tired of fighting...”

“No, Oakland!” Leaky shrieked. “If you lay a hand on him, I’ll run that knife through your chest!”

Oakland sighed and looked around the woods. “Two days,” Oakland said. “You have two days with him. After that, the little bugger is alone. If I see him again, I’ll snap his neck, quick and painless. I don’t care if it’s because I see him wander into the yard or if he’s snuggled up on your chest, I’ll end him.”

“One week.”

“Leaky...”

“One week!”

“Alright, fine! But that’s it. I swear to the gods if you get attached—”

“I probably will, but you won’t lay a hand on him until my week is up, understand?”

“Fine,” Oakland slipped his knife back into the sheath at his waist. “Let’s go. The house is this way.”

“You better be right,” Leaky said, wrapping her arms around the dragon. She smiled at the creature and rubbed his neck. “Now what are we gonna call him?”

“Why don’t you just call him Irksome?” Oakland grumbled. “That’s all he’s been for me.”

“Irk...I like it! You like that, Irk? Good name for my little man?”

“This is a bad idea. I feel it in my bones.”

“If that sense is as good as your sense of direction, I think we’ll be OK.”