Chapter 10

Dreams came to Leon, of a bleak landscape of filth and spires of clay. There he strode, his limbs absolutely cacked in the off-brown residue. The air was tainted with the smell of decay, forcing him to endure the nose wrinkling aroma or be unwilling to breathe. Nothing dwelled around him except this bleak landscape that stretched out for as far as he could see. Above faired him no better; just a sky inundated with lead grey clouds, each crackling with lightning.

He blinked, rubbing at his eyes, certain he could see shapes and figures within the cloud’s ever shifting form. Faces that he knew would press against their prison, bleak, eyeless copies shrouded in despair. When he turned from them, unwilling to face them, they instead called to him. Their voices were raspy and lingered, seeming to grasp and claw at his ears.

“You’ll die alone Leon.” Grunted Losanas, “Reaching out for something a backstabbing dog like you could never understand.”

“Should have never left me.” Whispered another voice, ending with the familiar snort of a ceullus, “Weakness has invaded every pore of you, corrupted the *fine* piece that you were. With me you would have been strong, respected, honored beyond measure, and most importantly of all, mine.”

Leon collapsed, the earthy, seductive smell of that particular ceullus coming to him. It was overpowering, shameful, he was everywhere, permeating every breath, sinking his hoof like fingers into the half-elf’s flesh. Memories came of those salacious nights, where nothing mattered but doing whatever that beast had wanted.

The ceullus chuckled, “You can run as far as you like, you’ll always want to be in my arms, riding my dick.”

“No.” He cried, his voice but a whisper as he dragged himself through the ground. Muscles ached as the mud sloshed around him, clung to his flesh, threatening to drag him down. As his muscles ached the voices continued to taunt him, reciting every failure that he’d ever endured.

“Do the gryphons know Leon? That you got your first adventuring group killed? All because you’re *stupid* decisions. Melted away into a bubbling pool of acid, all screaming for you come. You ran.”

Don’t listen. The mercenary clenched shut his eyes, unsure how long that he could keep this up. They were certainly toying with him. The answer came as a shaft of brilliant light broke through the clouds above.

It put a calm to the chaos and despair that was on display around it. Pristine, ivory stairs rose from the mud, glowing with a faint angelic light. They were gilded with gold and jewels, the air smelling thick of vanilla and spice. There was freedom, escape, it whispered for Leon to come and embrace what would be his salvation. At it’s highest point was a gryphon he knew all too well, Olas sitting in attire befitting that of a king.

“Come here Leo.” The gryphon cooed, gesturing with a hand for the merc to obey.

The mercenary hesitated, turning to face the landscape of despair behind him. One filled with mud monsters and moaning voices, each clawing away at his spirit. Back to Olas brought a sense of order, a feeling of certainty. He’d be this gryphon’s plaything, a toy, but in that fact there would be peace, serenity. There was no denying it.

Like a siren he complied, dragging his weary body to the safety that was alluded. With his first step, what mass of mud that had caked onto him was whisked away, replaced with vest and trousers of the finest silk. He was groomed, his hair combed back, not a speck of dirt upon him. What weariness had afflicted him had vanished, replaced with the need to ascend. He blushed, looking into the hungry of his gryphon lord, his master.

“That’s right my dear. Come to me…Be mine.”

The next step came without his prompting, the gryphon practically beauty incarnate. From his ears to his tail, every inch of him was captivating to the eye. He was speechless, stunned, wishing to hear more come from this gryphon’s beak. One after the other he drew closer, paying no mind as a golden collar sealed around his neck. This is where he belonged after all, collar chained up, held by this handsome beast.

“Right where you belong dear.” Olas chuckled, tugging on Leon’s chain until the man was held ever tightly within his grip. With a predatory smirk on his beak he kissed the man, invading his mouth with his sinful tongue. Eyes hooded as his wings grew to twice their size, soon wrapping them both and enveloping them in a choking darkness.

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Consciousness returned to Leon, tugging him back from the tormented darkness of his nightmares. Instead of a bleak landscape, he instead found his vision being dominated by onyx fur. His face was mashed up against it, a great weight resting upon him. Not enough to be in pain, but enough to prevent escape. Every breath was musky and warm, and by his second breath he knew *just* where he was. Cheeks flushed as his blood burned.

“Krantor? I assume this is you?” He growled, shifting his palms to press against the gryphon’s belly. He was face first in the gryphon’s sheath!

“Oh, Leon you’re awake.” The onyx gryphon shifted, lifting his thigh so that he could gaze upon the half-elf’s face currently being held in his musky prison. With the way his beak was parted, ears perked, eyes gleaming with mischief, he was more than pleased with himself.

“Pray tell me. Why is my face being ground into your sheath?”

The gryphon shrugged, “I figured you were used to this sort of thing. Might feel right at home when you woke from whatever nightmare you were having.”

As the gryphon chortled at his *hilarious* prank, the man could only grit his teeth, glaring daggers upon him, “You have six seconds before I’m going to turn your balls into my personal punching bag.”

“That does sound amusing. Better hope I don’t like it though, or else you have an entire *new* problem on your hands…Or well-“ Krantor smirked with a lewd chirp, “Your face.”

“Care to test it?” He formed a fist, aiming it straight back to where the gryphon’s jewels would rest.

Tension lingered in the air for several seconds, both unwilling to avert their gaze from their stare. It was the gryphon however who was the first to break, sliding free of Leon with a heavy sigh. Though to add to his cheekiness, he made sure to drag the entire length of it, complete with his balls across Leon’s face.

“Hope you’re sure about this, the view doesn’t get better than my shaft and balls.”

He spat and wiped his face, knowing that it burned brighter than a red dragon’s scales. “I’ve seen better.” As Krantor responded with an indignant squawk at such an affront, the half-elf sat up, holding his head. He shivered, hating to admit it, the gryphon had been at least a warm blanket compared to the cold that now bit through his attire.

Around him was the bleak confines of a jail cell, with bars thicker than his arms. It smelled of oil and steel, with only a solitary exit across from them. It appeared to be made for multiple gryphons, of which there were three others reclining in the far corners. Each was either preening or watching them with mild interest, their tails flicking against the grassy ground.

Outside the jail was yet another tent, this one’s surface a bright blue and adorned with moons and stars. Torches were spread out to give light to this place, where the trio of Leonin guards from before were reclining. They were playing a game of cards, smirking and laughing as they exchanged barbs at one another’s expense.

“Welcome to our new home.” Krantor said, flopping to his belly at the man’s side. “At least for now. Guess they got *really* upset about you turning that minotaur into cheese.”

Right, the battle with the Losanas. Leon held his throbbing head, “Don’t worry, it’s not my first time in one of these places. We’ll be out of here in no time.”

“Doubt that very much.” Laughed one of the leonine. “Loosing off a weapon in a crowded area? Brutally murdering not one but *two* guests of the bosses circus? They’re going to have a *wonderful* time with you human.”

“Half-elf.” Krantor squawked, gesturing to Leon’s ears, “Are you blind?”

“Whatever.” Replied the guard, “All the fleshy pink humans look the same to me. Point still rings true, boss is going to have your ass.” He licked his teeth with a predatory growl, “Can’t wait to see that happen.”

He groaned and rolled his eyes, his type was a silver a dozen. He put his back to them, eying the other gryphons. “Need I ask why you were laying on me?”

“Protecting you.” Krantor chirped with pride, raising his head.

“You don’t expect me-“

“I had to say that you were my hen to claim you. That way these boys didn’t take advantage of you while you slept.” He gave the half-elf a beak parted smile, “No hard feelings?”

To that he groaned, “Alright, don’t get any ideas between your ears though.” He thumbed his chest, raising his voice to draw all the other gryphon’s attentions, “If anyone in here is a hen, it’s this one. Got it?”

The trio exchanged apathetic looks.

“Good, glad that’s settled.” He rounded on the ear splayed Krantor, “Now for you. Since you came to rescue me, where in the world is Olas?”

“Back with Hekate.” Replied the onyx gryphon before leaving his beak open and touching his chin, “Maybe.”

“What do you mean maybe?”

“I mean, we got separated. She went wherever *he* was flying off to, and I came to rescue you. Which, good thing, cause that minotaur was *tough*.”

“He always was.” He punched Krantor’s flank, getting a clack of the beak and a hiss, “Thanks. You did good.”

“Oh.” His reply was soft, uncertain how to continue. He gave a nod, “Hope to do it again. Sadly the ring he had was taken off me by those thieves.”

As the gryphon proceeded to thrust out his wing to insist the leonine get mounted, Leon was left to stew. If Olas had not retrieved them swiftly that probably meant he was in danger or was busy, or hadn’t cared that he and Krantor wound up in this jail cell. He leaned against the bars, figuring it was the second one. After all, the gryphon might be whimsically and oblivious at times, but he was *vastly* powerful.

“I’d be letting us out if I were you!” Krantor thrashed his tail, “We’re being employed by Lord Olas Mysticfeather. Wait until your boss finds out your keeping his friends captive.”

“You’re full of shit.” The larger guard scoffed, “No way the fancy gryph hires you two gruff looking losers.”

The second guard laughed, lightning a pipe, “He’d hire someone *actually* important.”

Krantor rolled his eyes, “Suit yourself kitties, just don’t go blaming us when the gryphon comes and gets your head over the situation.” The gryphon shook his head whispered to Leon, “Think Olas will come? I mean, I’d rather not spend my days doing manual labor.”

“Thought you’d be used to working hard, back on the farm and all.” Leon scoffed.

“Raising horses is not the same as cracking rocks. I’m much too pretty for that.”

“You and *every* gryphon under the Fureen sun.”

“It’s true! Come by they darling fire, listen to my father, eat from my dinner table.” The gryphon gave a wistful sigh, picturing his home. “You’ll have the best horse you’ve ever tasted, and see, its nothing like hard labor.”

“I’d rather not see your fuck hole of a place.” Leon shouted as the gryphon leaned onto him.

“Aw, you’re still mad they eat horse? Come now Leon, hot do you know you don’t like it if you don’t try it?”

To that he eyed the gryhon’s balls and formed a fist, prompting Krantor to shift away.

“Does Lord olas know you’re so obsessed with my balls? Leon if you want to touch them that badly you can, I’d not say no.” His teasing chirp made mercenaries eye roll.

“You wish gryphon. Keep your lewd comments to yourself. I won’t be fucking you.”

“It’s cause I don’t have enough money right?” Ears pinned his voice feigning injury, “You wound me.”

“Piss off.” He turned away to the guard, “How much do I need to pay to get me removed from this cell?”

“Let you go?” The leonine laughed, standing tall, imposing over the man.

“Just out of this cell with black beauty here.”

The guard eyed the second with a flick of his tail, “My people hear tales of humans and their lips.”

Figures, what was he expecting? Leon groaned and turned away.

“Suit yourself elf, figure that was a great deal. Swallow down a few loads of cat cream and go free.”

“Guess you’d rather spend time with me?” Chuckled Krantor, sitting beside the stoic half-elf. “Always hated the waiting game myself.”

As the gryphon rambled on and chorped about his sister or something other fancy talk of his life, Leon’s thoughts went to Losanas, and how just how strange it had been to see him here, alone, he *always* worked in a group. Then why go after Olas? Did the minotaur not realize that if not for Leon, the mage could have easily dispatched him with a mental spell? He rubbed his brow, of course there were plenty of reasons, one being that simply Olas was a noble, but surely that couldn’t be enough?

“And that Minotaur huh?” Krantor sighed, “Kind of hot in a muscular way. Shame that sex with his people typically results in broken bones eh? Did you know him?”

“Yes.” He replied without looking, his voice flat.

“What? You’ve got to be kidding me, *how* did you know him.”

“Does it matter?”

Krantor chuckled, deep in his throat, “Of *course* it matters! Come now, I know little about you as it is. To think we meet someone from your past? Wow, color me interested.”

The gryphon would keep bugging him, so he relented and admitted that he and the minotaur had been a couple a decade or so back. That seemed to astonish the gryphon further, pulling his beak back with a surprised gasp.

“But…Why? Look at the size of him! Why would you subject yourself to such…*rough* intimacy?”

He shrugged, “Who knows back then. Maybe it was the strength, maybe he was there, perhaps it was someone I thought I could trust.”

“Could you?”

“What do you think?” His gaze narrowed, pinning the gryphon’s ears.

“Point taken.”

He sighed as Krantor started to dig through the dirt with a talon, averting his gaze. Perhaps his curiosity had been felled?

“So how did you two meet?”

“Are you going to ask for my entire life story?”

“What else do we have to do?” Krantor searched him, cocking his head.

“Met him bout twenty years back, was young and stupid.” He recounted the beginning of his journey, a small town of Kent. “When the drinks were nice, the people not so much, got robbed first day there. Got taken into a group, the murderous hobos. Wasn’t the best group but was solid.”

“Real descriptive.”

“Oi, I’m not an open book for ya, be glad for the table scraps will ya? You going to keep interrupting?”

No response from the gryhon, if you discounted his squawk.

The half elf was pulled back to the dark day of their falling out. How the minotaur had stood before a family home, demanding they leave sacred ground or face the business end of his ax. “Minotaur had some sacred bullshit, told these humans to leave, respect his elders and all that. They of course didn’t want to leave, but Losanas didn’t care.”

“Doesn’t sound too honorable. Isn’t that supposed to be there thing?”

“Minotaur honor can be a quirky thing. He did what was required of him, *they* challenged him by remaining. I thought I knew him up until that point, the whole lot of them.” Leon sighed as he pictured that hardened look, the muzzle that he had been so infatuated with, wrinkled and filled with hate. “I voiced my opinion on the whole affair, he of course had other plans, stabbing me right in the fucking back.”

Onyx feathers drooped as Leon described in grim detail how he’d came to further blows with the minotaur. How the family had been wounded, brutalized, but the minotaur had ended up getting his face getting utterly pulverized into a slab of bloody meat.

Leon shrugged off the coming onyx wing, “Split from the group following that travesty. Bastards actually sided with *him* over what happened. Now why the bull was here on his own? That is a mystery.”

“Maybe your friends finally saw the light and kicked out your former boyfriend?”

He gave him a steeled stare.

“It was only a suggestion. I’m sorry that happened to you. Must be hard to be backstabbed by someone you trusted.”

“No doubt about it.”

“So, assuming that he’s not taken on the weight of being a solo act, who would send him against Olas? I mean that must be the best scenario for us. Everyone knows all across white dell that the Lord isn’t one to be faced in the magical arts. No offense to big and muscles though, he didn’t seem that strong in the willpower department. I bet he would have been perfect prey for one of Hekate’s hold person spells.”

“Just cause he has power in his little fingers and tail doesn’t mean he can’t be caught off guard.” His heart sunk at the idea, “And should they succeed, our meal ticket will be gone.”

“Careful Leon, don’t want your boyfriend hearing you say that. Bad for business.”

He didn’t get to shout to Krantor, as Olas soon came through the ten’s exit, all puffed up and filled with purpose.

Eyes sparkled with fire, his tail thrshed spoke of no playing. He dismissed the leonine guards as they stood to ask who he was.

“Release that man and his gryphon this instant!” Chirped the rust colored Lord.

“We can’t do that gryph!” One of the guards protested, “That one killed a minotaur in the middle of the ring!”

“Really Leon?” Groaned Olas.

“I was protecting you from having your pretty face murdered.” Said Leon.

“Pretty am I?” The gyph sighed, “I don’t care what he’s done, if it was in the name of protecting myself, it will be *me* whom you deal with.”

“And who are you to order us about mate?” The second guard sneered, “Just another gryphon whore?”

Here it came, Leon smirked as Olas’ chest swelled with power, his wings trembling before he let these kitties have it.

“I am *Olas Mysticfeather!”* Roared the gryphon, his voice like a storm as it shook the tent, “And if this man claims to have protected my life, then so be it. I am the sole reason that this little circus was even allowed onto these lands.” He gestured to Leon with a wing, “Now release my friends this instant before I lose my temper and turn the three of you to newts!”

With a final chirp, the guards that had been mountains crumbled into little more than frightened kittens. One began to apologize, his voice stuttering as the others dug out their keys and began fumbling through them.

“What did I end up telling you?” Krantor mused with a beak filled with smug satisfaction, “Should have let us go kitties.”

With a click and reserved growl, the cell was thrust open, Leon released. He’d not taken a step before Olas was upon him in , pulling him up off the ground and pulling the man into his chest with a vice like grip.

“Leon, oh thank the stars. You had me worried!” Olas wailed, “Are you alright?” His beak shot to the man’s chest, searching for any signs of wear or tear, “Dd they hurt you? Oh if they’ve hurt you, my *wrath* will be legendary.”

“They havn’t hurt me.” Chortled the half-elf, trying to hide the way his insides flipped at such a display of concern. “Keep all of that concern there on a leash lest it go flying away.”

“Now what were you thinking back there…Murdering a minotaur? What got into that cute little head of yours?” He placed a wing around the man as the Leonin were gathering their things. “You might as well have burned down the entire tent while you were at it. Here I thought you and your friends were *careful* in their adventurous exploits.”

“Course I’m careful. Can’t expect a minotaur assassin to come knocking.” He grunted, beginning to search through his armor and weapons that were being brought to him.

“Assassin?” The mage’s head perked up, ears tall. As Leon described just *how* the minotaur had gone about it the gryphon laughed it off. “Oh Leo that sort of thing happens all the time! You think I’d be worried about something so mundane? It keeps the life thrilling you know.” His wing moved to caress theman’s chin as he held the gryphon in a look of disbelief. His voice was a pleased coo.

“But there you are, being my knight in shining armor. You went through all that for me?” He gave a pleased trill, “That’s rather romantic when you think about it.”

He blushedat the hungry look now being laid upon him, knowing that this was no doubt rousing the gryphon up. He’d seen this look before, the one that wished to drag him to bed this instant and engage in more *carnal* acts. “It was just my job Olas, nothing more.”

“Was it now? That doesn’t seem right. I can see it in your eye, below that frown dear. That concern for me Leo, oh it’s so delightful. I think that deserves a reward don’t you?”

“You don’t need to-“He began, only to be cut off with a possessive grab of the gryphon’s talons, dragging him up to be inches from his beak. Everything narrowed save the gryphon’s hungry gleam in his eye.

“A pardon is a valuable thing my Leo. Don’t you believe that I am deserving of some reward for coming to your rescue?”

This close, wrapped up in the gryphon, it was hard to not be swayed with his desires. What the hell, he told himself, resting a hand on Olas’ cheek. He’d bested an assassin, gotten rescued from prison, he might as well relax and enjoy himself this night. “Alright, but we’re going to be tying you up tonight, and I want to hear you squawk when I’m pounding that cat ass of yours.”

Olas’ ears splayed at the words, only getting out a weak, “Yes please.” Before parting his beak and subjecting the mercenary to a tongue jousting, passion filled kiss.

Leon sighed and returned it, there were worse ways to spend the evening after all.

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Chapter 11

Morning came far too swiftly for Olas’ liking, the sun bringing with it its enchanting warmth that sought to seduce the those still in bed to remain.

The winds were soft and pleasant, perfect for gliding high upon feathery wings, or to take in the lush countryside of dazzling greens and browns, broken apart by the mountains. Gryphs young and old chirped above Whitedell, dancing around airships of Lumara that were passing through, great constructs of science and magic.

Olas was nestled up within his bed, just now finding the conscious world returned to him. His room was dark and quiet, only broken by the sounds of his heart and the snores of his half-elf still held within his forearms. He was still here? The gryphons heart could sing as he thumped his tail, frightened that the slightest bit of movement might jostle his smaller companion and scare him off.

Eyes closed as the gryphon let the novelty wash over him, a semblance of belonging. Nothing had ever graced him like this. He stilled his warble, as he delicately caressed the still naked man, laying on his side and nestled up against the lord’s belly. Delicately Olas ran his talons across Leon’s muscular form, amazed that while being quite capable, was also equally frail.

Leon was the picture of serenity, holding to one of Olas’ forelegs as a love, head buried into the gryphon’s chest fluff.

How long could they stay like this? Olas’ wished for it to not end, flying from the whispers of responsibility in the back of his mind. For now though, let him have this, Leon held close against him, cuddled close, nothing else mattering in the world. As the sea of content twirled around him, Olas wondered if everyday could be like this, should be like. All he had to do was be brave enough to give voice to it. Would Leon accept the offer though?

“Are you up yet?” Leon groaned softly as Olas’ talons made their way up his belly.

“That I am my little Leo.” He cooed, nibbling upon the man’s locks. “Did you enjoy your sleepover?” To punctuate his point he thrust his hips with a teasing chortle.

“Not like I had a choice.” The half-elf removed the lord’s forearm, taking a deep breath of the morning air. “Not when I told you to hold back your knot…But what did you do? You did it anyway.”

“I’m sorry that in my throes of passionate fornication that I couldn’t restrain myself from uttering filling that behind of yours!” Olas clicked his tongue in amusement, when the man sat up and did not reply he followed with a pleased coo, head on his shoulder, “Do you mean to tell me that last night your complaints were masked in moans of pleasure?”

“At least you performed adequately as a bed.”

“And you a snuggle buddy!” Olas sprang out of the bed, wings extending wide. Talons clenched, ears flicked, he did his best to stretch every bit of him, delay the day’s start as best he could. As it was he was taking long, drawn out poses so that Leon could eat up every seductive inch of him, though when he paid the man attention, he had rummaged through his belongings and was staring at a silver button between his fingers. There was a cloud of distress hanging about his features, turmoil in his eyes. “I do hope that being tied to yours truly was not *that* distressing.” He slid to Leon’s side, rubbing up against him. “I only wished to force a sleep over you know. I figured you’d find it hard to slip away with my knot buried deep into your backside.”

“It wasn’t that.” Leon replied, still focused on the button, “It was…nice being cuddled up with you.”

“Perhaps I should make such an event a requirement for our monthly meetings yes?” His beak drew close to the curio, a small silver dragon grinning from ear to ear. “What is that you have there?”

“Button I found on the minotaur, the one wanting to kill you.”

“Oh him? Is that still troubling you? Leon, I told you, that sort of thing happens in this environment. When you’re rich, powerful and delightfully handsome as I am, you draw in those miscreants.” He nuzzled his beak along the man’s face with a sensual rumble, “But it also draws in handsome half-elf’s to share my time.”

“And I don’t think that he was alone.” He growled, “Loasanas was typically never one to work alone. Assassination wasn’t his style. For the life of me, I can’t figure out why a horned bastard like him was trying to put you in the ground. All I could figure was this strange pin, he wasn’t one to collect such things.”

“Let me see it.” Olas rolled his eyes, plucking it from the man’s fingers. He rolled it over, it didn’t appear to be outwardly strange. It was made of metal, light weight, for all intents and purposes it was a normal button. “He was a minotaur right? Don’t his people take trophies off the dead of their enemies?” He handed it back with a chirp, “Maybe the bull had some magpie tendencies you didn’t know of?”

“You seem fairly laid back, considering.”

“He was a brute! At least what from what you told me, I could have dispatched him easily with spells for the mind!” Olas trotted to his desk, gathering his leather harness and spell books. “But I must admit, this protective nature of yours is quite adorable.”

“I suppose.” Leon stashed the button into his pouches with a grunt, “Speaking of him. I might need a few more items from your vault. We didn’t have an answer for something so…blunt.”

Olas paused as he laid down his book, Leon never made request such as this. The man was always happy with the gifts and treasures that the gryphon had laid upon his feet. He cocked his head with a chirp, “What sort of items were you thinking? My treasure vault is not a shop that I can simply hand out to anyone. Even if they are handsome knight.”

Red rushed to the man’s cheeks, “I know, but you weren’t there. I just needed a way to attack his willpower as you could.” He shrugged and began gathering up his clothing, currently scattered across the floor. “And maybe a trinket or two for Krantor, he’s complaining that I’m the one getting all the toys in our arrangement.”

Gifts for the others now? Isadora’s smug face appeared in his mind, insisting that the mercenary was using him. “Leon I-“

“Look, I know you don’t want to part with them alright? I wouldn’t be asking if I didn’t have a reason. If that brute had brought buddies or anyone else to that fight, your life might have been in actual danger. It didn’t occur to me that we had a hole in our abilities thus far. I’m just trying to do my job…for you.”

“Oh Leo!” He trilled, of course he was being silly. Leon wasn’t trying to rob or take advantage of him, this all came from a place of protection. Bounding to the still dressing man the gryphon wrapped him tight in his forearms and squished him against his chest as he reared up, wings spreading wide for balance.

“And I’m going to ask if I can get into the archives.”

“The archives? Whatever for?” He pulled his head back, head cocked. “That place is for historical records and mysteries.”

Leon sighed, his emerald pools still gripped by turmoil’s dirty claw. “Of which we still have.”

“Oh the minotaur? Dear, I do like the attitude of which has possessed you, but come now, you’re being silly now!” He relinquished Leon’s hold, padding his way back to his book, ready to prepare his spells for the day.

“Olas, I’m being serious.”

Brow furrowed, tone firm, Leon was truthful in what he said. Olas gave a knowing nod, “You’re not going to drop this are you?”

“No I am not.” Replied Leon, sliding into his trousers. “All my time in the voiceless mountains and beyond has taught me to not leave any stones untouched-“

“I’ll say.” Giggled Olas.

“And I want to make sure *this*-“ He pulled out the button to hold high, “Is nothing but a trinket as you say.”

Olas sighed, “The archives are for myself, any apprentices I have or servants that I possess. You are not any of those things.”

“You’re telling me that the Lord of the land cant-“

“However, with my seal of approval and your word, I’m sure that something can be arranged. Then you can follow this protective nature of yours to its natural end.”

At first, confusion seemed painted on the man’s face, as if he didn’t expect the gryphon to comply. With a nod he accepted and stashed the button back into his things. “Well, that’s good. I hope that it’s nothing…And about the other-“

“You can peruse the vault on your leisure.” Olas waggled a wing, “Just keep from any of the gem looking items, there *are* cursed items in there, but they are clearly marked with warning signs.”

“Yea, I’d rather not end up having two heads.”

“Oh, my dear, that’s the *best* outcome.”

As Olas continued to prepare his spells, Leon finished up his dressing. The gryphon gathered a bit of parchment, signing it with a quill and adding his flight’s seal with heated wax. He handed it over with an amused trill, meeting Leon’s stern demeanor. “There we are, one note and seal to get you to the archives. Do tell the Librarian there that I apologize for not coming in person, though it is the weekend, I do have quite a full docket.”

“Anything you’d wish to share?”

“Nothing so interesting that’s for sure.” He groaned, picturing the land agreements that he’d have to mediate, businesses that he was to visit, merchants to hammer out details. “Just the normal that I’ve come to expect.” He gave a wistful sigh and ran his body around the mercenary, “Till next we meet my delightful hero-“

“Olas.” Leon’s reply was soft as he laid a hand on the gryphon’s shoulder, then catching his chin. “I *will* get to the bottom of this. Even if it turns out to be nothing.”

“I know dearest. That’s why you’re my knight in shining armor.” With a talon he poked the man’s nose, before gracing him with a gentle kiss of his beak, “And it’s alright it ends up being nothing.” The gryphon’s hinds shifted, blood warming, “Your care of my safety is *quite* appreciated.” When Leon turned to leave the gryph swatted his behind with a hand, “Now run along, I do believe you know the way?”

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“So explain to me again why we had to rush off to this super secret library?” Krantor squawked, some crumbs from his morning pastery still upon his beak.

“I thought he did well enough explaining it.” Hekate chuckled, “How did you miss it?” She wiped a bit of jam from her husband’s beak before giving the half-elf an exasperated sigh, “Though you could have left us to finish our morning gathering at the temple. I know it might *look* like mere breakfast, we were preparing our spells.”

“Yea, I’m sure contacting your goddess *really* requires all the singing and blathering about like you do.” Leon grumbled.

The lavender and dove catbird was adorned in orange and brass garments that hung all the way to the ground. They hugged her body lovingly, intermixed with leathers, metals, and fine cloth. She clacked her beak to him, eyes narrowed, “Are *you* part of the order?”

“No.” He grunted.

“Then what do what do *you* know what we need or not?”

She had him there, killing any words that might have come. To that she gave a pleased trill, ruffling her feathers in her victory.

“That’s what I thought. Now Krantor back to the matter at wing, how could you miss what Leon said? Were you not listening?”

The black gryphon grumbled, scratching at his leather gear that he’d hastily donned. It was covered in pouches that he might easily access, of potions and other items that might prove useful for adventures they shared. “Some of us like to enjoy our breakfast in peace, instead of getting bombarded by theories and new adventueres.”

“Too bad.” Leon shrugged, jingling one of his pouches, “And after all the trouble that I went, getting about a trinket for you. Guess it’s just going to be *all* mine.”

“What?” Krantor perked up, eyes wide, “You never said anything about a trinket!”

Hekate rolled her eyes, “He mentioned going into Olas’ vault before he came to get us!”

“Then what did you end up getting me?” His beak shot to the man’s chest, following as Leon retreated, trying to keep him from revealing what lay in his pouches, “You can’t hide it forever.”

He fished out of his pouches a plain looking band, made of leather and adorned with an emerald that would fit in the man’s palm. “Here you needy bitch. Take it, don’t say I didn’t get anything for you.” He tossed the gryphon the band.

Crown feathers rose as Krantor rose to catch it between his hands, “What is it?”

“A magical trinket, obviously.” Hekate said.

Ears splayed, “Of course *that*. What does it *do*.”

Leon brushed his breastplate, unable to hide the pride in his smirk, “Just something figured we needed. That right there is a blinking band. Small touch from the wielder and you can blink to anywhere you can see within about one hundred feet or so.”

“How would that have helped with last night?” Krantor asked, fixing the band onto his forearm, it fit as if made for him. The jewel seemed to glow briefly as he held it before his eyes.

“You don’t think of being able to get within that whirlwind of spiked chain would have been good enough?”

“Point taken.”

“But the way the description mentioned, you can take another person with you in these short-range teleports. It only has four uses per day though, recharging at dawn.”

“Figure you saved the best for yourself?”

“Nothing too fancy.” He procured a stone figure that fit in his hand, it’s surface was a dark yellow with red spots. “Though when I roll this, don’t be looking at it.”

“Don’t tell me it has a low self-esteem?” Chuckled the gryphon.

“No, but it *does* release a ball of multicolored light. Let’s say that those that stare into it will be all too easy to subdue. Like when you had your ass up the other day.”

Krantor lashed his tail, eyes steeled as he pressed onward with a grumble, “Thanks for the band.”

“Anything for me in there?” Hekate slunk around Leon, dipping her beak to his pouches, nibbling at the leather.

“Got a request?” Leon half-heartily pressed her away, “Didn’t want to seem *too* needy to the fancy gryph.”

“Oh, nothing too special. Anything to help you two not be cut to pieces would be great.”

They came to be standing in front of what might be the largest library in all the lands. Unlike the dominating structures that Entis of Lumara and Struport of Drenedar however, it was only a single story tall. Grey, simple stone made up it’s construction, with oval windows spaced evenly around it’s perimeter. At every corner was a massive oak, reaching up to coat the entire almond colored roof in it’s shade. Who would have thought such a plain looking place would hold such knowledge?

“That’s funny…I was picturing something more…grand.” Leon’s hands went to his waist, searching around the hills that reached around them. “And maybe a few walls.”

“Why would we need walls?” Hekate rolled her eyes, “We’re in the heart of the land, just west of Whitedell.” She gestured to several airships in the distance, their propellers winking in the sunlight. “Who is going to attack such a place?”

“Ogres.” Krantor chirped, stretching his wings, “Trolls…no…dire orges.”

“Dire ogres?” Scoffed Leon, “You’re making that up.”

“There are dire boars, wolves, bears and other beasts! Why not ogres! Can you picture them, twice the size, hardened plates over their body!”

“Dire animals are just that *animals*.”

“We’re all animals.”

“Boys, boys, that’s enough.” Hekate separated the two with her wings and a resounding chirp. When silence came she gave each a hardened stare, “Now…I agree with Leon though, it could have used some more…decoration.”

“You’d just want to slather it with orange and brass, maybe some red.”

“You don’t know that.” Hetake’s ears splayed as her husband nuzzled up along her with a teasing warble.

“Yes I do, probably paint the sun and what not all over it. Maybe a tapestry of the countryside.”

She nibbled at his ear in response, “It would be better than plain stone.”

How was this place going to hold any books at all? Leon rolled open the map that Olas had given to him, following the path of the feather just as was required. No, this was the place. He furrowed his brow, perhaps there was more to this than met the eye.

“Think Draigo will be good with Olas?” Hekate slipped around Leon. “Aren’t you afraid of him getting eaten?”

“Olas loves many things, but eating my horse is not one of them.” He replied flatly as he approached the only door of this place, a dominating, crimson oval. The steps before it were not made for human kind, it required him to clamber up, one at a time as the gryphons easily strode along.

“I just don’t get why we’re looking after this stupid button.” Krantor grumbled, “So what? I like to collect shiny things to, no one thinks *I’m* in some sort of super secret club.”

“Krantor, if you don’t want to come to the library, no one is forcing you to be here. Just unfurl your wings and head off, your wife and I will be fine.”

“Mom and pa always said to stick to your family like glue. Sides, now I can use this on you to drag you to a play me and Hekate have been dying to see.”

“Squawkers on the roof?” Hektate squealed in delight, her crown feathers snapping tall.

“That’s the one!:

“You don’t need me to go to a romantic play like that.” Grumbled Leon as he placed a hand on the great door, it’s pristine wood surface cool to the touch. It wouldn’t budge as he shoved.

“Always stick together. Wasn’t that what your always saying though?” Chirped Krantor with smugness dripping in his voice?”

“He’s right Leon, never split the part, you remember all those times on the plains of the sword.” Hekate chuckled.

“Don’t remind me of those times.” Grunted Leon as he struggled with the door. It had to be stuck. He laid another hand on, putting all his strength. It still wouldn’t budge.

“Care for a hand?” Krantor strode to his side with a trill, rearing up to place his hands onto the door. Amusement flickered in his eyes.

“Be my guess. It’s stuck.” His jaw clamped shut as the gryphon’s muscles surged to life, pressing forward and opening the door with a shuttering crack.

The gryphon smirked, “Stuck huh?”

“Must have loosened it for you.”

“Or you’ve been neglecting to keep your strength up, like my darling Krantor.” Hekate mused, bouncing on her paws to their side as Krantor pressed forward, “Does he need to design a training plan for you?”

Leon rolled his eyes as the gryphon finished opening the door, “Him? Training for me?” He scoffed, “That I would *love* to see.”

They passed through the entryway, the air temtative, instantly dropping noticeable enough to make his skin shiver. Typically he was sue to the libraries of Entis, stuffy things that smelled of old parchment, shielded from the world, cramped. This was nothing of the sort.

Inside they descended a staircase of pristine stone, the way lit by turquoise torches of flickering flame. With every step the air grew heavier, smelling of salt and earth. At its base the path gave way to walkway able to fit three gryphons across, their wings outstretched. Support beams reached back towards the entrance, runes engraved and pulsating across their surface. On either side were openings, leading a sprawling chasm below, with numerous levels divided by separate floors of marble and granite. From top to bottom them were adorned with shelves upon shelves, filled to the brim with tombs of every color.

Every level below had a platform large enough to land without disturbing the tables and gryphon chairs that waited patiently for feather and fur covered bellies. The air between them was abuzz with activity, translucent mists carrying tomes, candles, lanterns, and various other equipment that winked in the light.

“So that explains the simple building above.” Hekate said softly, as she and Krantor kept close at Leon’s side.

Krantor whistled, peering over the walkway’s ledge. “Never figured the library would go *down*, who would have thought that?”

Leon ignored their amazement, keeping his own to himself. His attention instead was drawn to the end of the walkway. There a gryphoness with blue and white feathers did sit behind a desk covered in parchment and tomes. She stroked a globe as they approached, eyes flickering with interest.

“And what brings you three to the library of Ignosi?” Asked the gryphoness. “I apologize for all the activity with the magical servants, we’re undergoing renovations.”

“Renovations for what?” Leon asked.

She searched him from boot to head with a sigh, “For those of the flight impaired. As you can imagine, the construction of our archives can be quite…I’ll equipped for a two legger such as yourself.”

“Guess you’ll have to be riding with us Leon.” Krantor chirped with glee, rolling a hand to his chest as it swelled with pride.

The librarian’s black ears pinned, her eyes narrowed like swords as Leon was swiftly forgotten. She slunk around her desk, revealing the flowing purple and turquoise garments that hung off her body. “There will be *absolutely* none of that.” She was in the onyx gryphon’s beak as he splayed his ears, “There will be *silence* in the library.”

“Apologies.” Krantor bowed his head.

“Last chance to turn back now.” Leon shook his head with a sigh, “Asking *you* to be quiet?”

“It can be done.” Grumbled the gryphon.

“Just be sure that it does. Our *other* guests are trying to gather research for their lord and masters.” The library clacked her beak, slinking over to Leon. “Clearly by your more *relaxed* attire, it’s all your first times within the Library of Ignosi?” As they all nodded she let out an exasperated sigh before gesturing for them to follow her to her desk. She planted herself down with a dull thump, procuring a parchment and quill, “Name and your purpose here.”

“Leon.” He spoke with purpose, placing down the seal of Olas and his note for her to see. “On behalf of Lord Olas Mysticfeather. These are my associates, Hekate and Krantor.”

“Charming.” The librarian replied flatly as the pair gave nods and trills of acknowledgement. She rose the parchment with the seal to her critical eye, skepticism dwelling with. “Most peculiar, I was not aware that Olas employed assistance such as this. He’s always been such the *suspicious* one, doing his own research.”

“It’s a rather new arrangement.” Chuckled Leon, hoping to not draw too much attention to that fact. “Olas can’t be everywhere at once you know.”

“Quite.”

Krantor padded forward with a mischievous warble, “I can honestly say that Leon here is *thrilled* to be entrusted with such an *intimate* honor such as this. He was going on how he shared his *appreciation* for Lord Olas’ decisions for hours…hey!”

“And what might we call you dear?” Leon interrupted, elbowing the gryph in the ribs. “I’m sure she doesn’t want to hear about the minutia of our arrangement with our great lord.”

“Basila.” The librarian replied, “And what illuminating topic does your lord have demanded of you three?” She pressed back the seal. The question was still dripping with disbelief as she ran her talon across the table, “The fall of Aukromid? How to undo cryptic curses? History of Sethera? The myth of the Whispering Mists? Or perhaps another perusal of various gryphon lovemaking techniques?”

“Would you possibly believe the last one?” Krantor replied, only to get elbowed in the ribs once again. “Could you not?”

“Could you be serious for a single moment?” Grunted Leon as Basila silenced them both with a talon to her beak. He made sure to lower his voice as the male gryphon grumbled under his breath, “Guild seals, noble houses, and possibly sigils used by previous adventuring parties.” Leon said truthfully, pulling out the silver dragon pin and placing it on the desk.

The gryphoness plucked it up with a curious chirp, “Why isn’t that a curious curio.” Her eyes gleamed at the button, possibly envy some might say, stroking old bird tendencies in her veins. “I’ve never seen a symbol such as this.”

“That’s why we’re here.” He leaned forward, flicking one of her many scrolls, “And that’s why were looking for it. It would be rather embarrassing for one such as Olas to *not* to know of it’s origin. If you could help us keep that a little secret, it would be most appreciated.”

“Of course.” She cooed, handing It back. “It’s certainly well made for what it is.” Her brow rose, “Is it magical by chance?”

Everything paused, his heart skipped a beat. How could he not have thought to ask that? The half-elf groaned and held the bridge of his nose at his lapse of intelligence, he had *just* come from Olas’ estate. “In all the excitement in our Lord’s request we forgot.”

She waved a talon and swished her black tail, muttering words of her spell. Eyes lit up with red before them all as she plucked it back up and turned it over. The female warbled, crown feathers raising tall.

“I take it that is it?” His mind was racing, “A locating spell? One to spy upon us?”

“Oh, nothing like that, it’s just well made.”

Hopes dashed, the half-elf snatched it back, doing his best to hide his gritted teeth.

“Well, without it being magic, that hardly narrows it down.” She handed it back with a sigh, gesturing to the library below. “You’re free to peruse through our collections. I suggest looking to hastercowl symbols, noble symbols, possibly guild masters of the last age? Then if you can’t find stuff like we might have to go back further.” She gave an amused trill, “And that would really find if we have to go into that.”

“Hopefully, it doesn’t take that long.” Groaned Krantor, ears wilting.

Leon leaned over the edge to see that there was a clear way for him to get down. The only way to access the library it seemed was to take a plunge. Basila seemed to notice this and was quick to chirp, ears splaying.

“Oh of course. I forgot. We haven’t installed all the methods for the flight challenged.” She pointed to several ladders being affixed across the library’s layers, sized for human use. “So until those get finished we have these to hand out.” The female ducked below her desk, leaving only her tail to swish and bat back and forth for a moment or two. She emerged holding a bright orange harness of complete with runes to adorn it’s straps and leathers. It looked as if to go *over* a human’s clothes. “Now, these are typically for young gryphets that have yet learned to fly, but they can work for humans I imagine.”

Cheeks blushed as the harness was thrust into his hands, it was rather light weight.

“Curtesy of the lords, it acts like one of those flying broom contraptions. Not too fast mind you, but should you fall it *will* catch you.”

“And it will allow me to fly?” He held it up, turning it over to inspect the harness from every angle. “I don’t care for the speed, long as I’m not falling to my death.”

He slipped into the rest of the harness as Basila scratched down on a reinforced bit of parchment the locations of the sections that would contain their books. She did so by dipping her talons into ink, unfortunately the locations were scattered a bit around the library. Regardless he snatched up the parchment and flanked it over before thanking her, the gryphoness all too willing to go back to her catalogue.

“Just be wary of the books marked with a red note. They *do* bite when taunted, the extra dangerous ones over there are strapped together with belts.”

“Belts?” Hetake’s ears shot up in alarm, “How much danger are we exactly talking about.”

“Last one created a book tornado, had to fix up the place for a solid week.” She narrowed her gaze with a chirp, “So be careful.”

The purple gryphon tilted her head, “Why not seclude them so that-“

Leon closed her beak, better to just manage, go with whatever rules and logic this place had. She might have ruffled her feathers at him as he finished the last belt around him with a click. The leather before his eyes bubbled with orange and white stripes, bit by bit coming to prominence.

“All ready for safety two legger.” Came a cheery voice from the leather, speaking as if to a toddler, “Go out there and have fun!” At his raised brow, Basila chuckled.

“Again, apologies. Those were originally used for young gryphets, yet unable to fly.”

He groaned as he peered over the edge, the drop a bit daunting to say the least.

Krantor wasn’t making it easy as he came to the half-elf’s side with a bout of laughter, “Look at you Leon! All made up like a little gryphet!” Wheezed the onyx gryphon, “Little Leon ready for his flight! You look adorable!”

The gryphon continued in his mockery as Leon narrowed in on where they needed to go, three levels down. He decided to pay the gryphon back.