

Tides of Magic

Dragon Tears



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For a Love found
For a Love lost

The tingling in her body subsided, her transformation was complete. Upon opening her eyes she glanced down on several dozen humans standing below her. Her stomach began to growl and saliva covered her tongue almost immediately. They were all standing perfectly still, staring at her, she just had to lower her head, open her maw and...

She called herself back to order. She was not supposed to think like the beast that was deep within her, she had to control it. She closed her eyes, calmed herself with deep breaths and looked back down upon the monks.

Now she was beginning to notice all the changes. Her eyes could make out more details, seeing the stubbles of hair on freshly shaved heads. She even found her father standing in the back of the crowd. He was standing there proud, even though unshaved for about three days.

Her nostrils noticed smells that her human nose would have never smelled. Some were stinging strongly and now she knew that some of those monks were neglecting their hygiene. Knowledge she rather would have stayed without.

Her black scales on the other hand limited her feeling of the outside world. Only her leather wings seemed to catch the slightest changes within air movements. The wings were not the only additional limbs that gave her a strange feeling; the long tail was another thing she had to get used to, if she wanted to use that body efficiently.

As she tried to move her tail it swished from one side to another very fast and violent. Her mentors had to duck to not be smashed against one of the stone walls. It would take her days of practice to control every aspect of her dragon body... maybe even weeks or months.

She stayed for some unknown time in that body before she remembered why she had changed in the first place. Cheer and applause erupted as she transformed back into her human body, tightening the seal that was engraved into her very soul once again, sealing the body of the dragon away.

All the changes she experienced reverted to what she was used to, only the ghost feeling of wings and tail stayed behind for a few moments, causing her to look over her own body. Her frame was that of a typical monk, and only the seal, which covered the left side of her body, was out

of place, coloring her left eye red. She looked back upon her mentors as one brushed dust from his robe.

“We are proud to welcome a new dragon priest within our midst. Litius Dias has succeeded in controlling the dragon that was sealed within him six years ago. The first stage of his training is complete.” The abbot addressed her and the other monks, trainees and mentors alike, still hiding her true gender. Although it had been an accident, she was the first girl to survive with a dragon sealed within her. She did not know why other women in history had failed – which dictated that females were never to become dragon priests at all – but she had succeeded in surviving both the sealing and the transformation.

Still, she dared not to reveal her true self. There were enough dragon priests around that would like to perform the final sealing, in other words: they would kill the dragon within her by killing her.

“Brother Litius”, the abbot addressed her directly, “you have been faced with a harsh destiny. You are fighting a constant battle against the wild dragon sealed within you. You can never lose that battle or you will lose your free will, your body and ... your life. In exchange for that you have been granted an extended life and the powers of the dragon. But beware: Unleashing its power will make it harder to fight the dragon. Should you ever feel that you might start to lose the battle, come back to this monastery and one of your brothers will perform the final sealing.”

She had heard his speech before. There had been a long private debate between the abbot and her father, if she really should perform this test and she had to swear an oath to do just that. Otherwise they would have needed to kill her on the spot.

She agreed to the terms. She did not see any problems in that, after all she did not feel the presence of the dragon in her head since the day he was sealed. Then again, the abbot stated that it was normal as the dragon was sleeping but he could wake at any time.

“Thank you, abbot”, she inclined her head. “I will heed your words in my hours of weakness.” She then turned and left, ending the last ceremony of the day. She was the only dragon priest that was inaugurated that day, the only one in Andragat for ten years. Even if you counted the other three monasteries, there was only one dragon priest emerging every five years or so, always after a wild one had appeared. There were no more incidents after her accident ... and even that had been strange.

“I am proud of you”, she was greeted by her father as she found her way to him, as the rest of the crowd dispersed. He put a hand on her shoulder and embraced her in a hug for a moment. Then he put her at

arm's length and smiled. "Here, I have something for you." He reached into one of his pockets and produced a red shimmering gemstone, attached to a leatherband. "It belonged to your mother and ... it belongs to you now."

Lia reached for the stone, embracing it in her hand. It felt warm to the touch and she felt a slight tingling, as if an inner fire was burning within the stone. She felt tears rising up as she held it close to herself. It was something from her mother. He never told her anything about her, never uttered a single word. Even now she could read in his eyes that this was all she would get, for now.

She examined the stone a little closer, looking through the clear material, noticing the small golden ornament within, that looked like a small dragon, holding a bit slitted eye within his claws.

She had never before seen anything like this. But then again, she had never seen the outside world, not that she remembered.

"Congratulations, Litius!" She turned her head to look into the eyes of a young, tall man. Bright, blue eyes and black hair complimented his rather hard features. He was wearing a robe similar to her own, the emblem of the monastery embroidered on his back and a small one on his chest, though his was in blue, while hers was a deep crimson.

He had completed his education only shortly before her, becoming a dragon guard, trained in anti-dragon magic and a possible vessel for another sealing, if the need would ever arise. "Brother Janus", Lia put the stone on her neck, smiling slightly embarrassed at him.

"I knew you could do it", he told her. "And as your rival I now admit defeat." He bowed before her, mocking her playfully in doing so. He had tried to best her in many things and she did so in regards to him, making both of them the best of their class. Still, his compliment felt good.

"I am sure you could have done the same", she did not meet his eyes, feeling a slight blush on herself.

"Probably, though we probably will not find out. Where will you attempt your dragon training?"

Lia, sighed. "I am not sure." It was tradition to go into one of the other monasteries to learn from other dragon priests and obtain different techniques in suppressing the dragon and fighting one.

"Then come with me to Cerinsagath. It would be nice to travel home together."

"O... of course", came her immediate answer. She looked at him, her face feeling a lot warmer than usual. And somehow her whole body felt a lot lighter than before.

"I will set off in the first hour of the new day. I will see you then."

"I will be there", she promised without even thinking.

"I will be waiting", he smiled and turned around.

"There will be no need to wait", her father looked at Janus with a stern face. "We will be in time."

"I look forward to travelling with you", he turned, waved and left smiling.

Lia stared at his back before realizing what her father just stated.

"Wait a minute. You are coming with us?"

"Of course, I cannot let you be alone with him. Not in your current state!" He turned around, suddenly in a worse mood than before. "There are things that I still need to tell you. Follow me."

Was this about her mother? She looked back into the crowd, hoping to catch a last glimpse of his back, but he had left already.



The sun had still to rise as Lia and her father stood at the gates, waiting on Janus. All his explanations on love, the difference between man and woman and the implications had left her ears ringing and her face in a deep blush. She did not even find sleep as she kept pondering what could happen on the journey.

She asked him why he never told her anything before, getting the short answer that he never saw a reason to do so. But what exactly had changed? And how should she deal with all the things that could happen?

But before anything could start, she had to tell him, that she was a girl. Janus still saw her as a boy ... but what would he say? Would he even consider such a relationship with her? A closer relationship between boys was frowned upon within the monastery ... and then there was the problem that she was the impossible female dragon priest ...

"Do not even think of telling him", growled her father, apparently reading some of her thoughts. "I am serious about this", he whispered just as Janus came into view. He had stuffed his belongings into a bag that he was carrying over his shoulder, while hers were with her father.

He carried a few more smaller bags on a belt. They probably contained some ryu to buy meals on their long journey across the country.

Smiling he came to a halt before them, hugging her first and then shaking hands with her father. "Don't worry, I will not do anything to your daughter." He winked towards her, bringing another blush to her cheeks.

It took her a moment to realize that he knew her secret! But how? It frightened her, because if he knew, there were probably others that knew as well. Others that shouldn't know.

At least she would never have the problem to tell him personally and upset her father.

“And why do you think that I have a daughter?”

“I have seen fathers around their daughters before. They tend to get overly protective. The signs were there, I only had to see and interpret them.” He smiled broadly. “Oh and the abbot told me. He figured that she needed a dragon guardian at her side, whom she could trust. It all suddenly made sense.”

Her father turned around growling, leaving the monastery through the gate without looking back.

“Let’s go as well”, Janus set onto the path before him as well, treating her like he had all those times before.

Sighing, but also with a smile she followed them. So he was told by the abbot. Her sorrows subsided to the back of her mind. On the first few meters she looked back towards her the place that she had called home for all those years she could remember.

She felt like giving up some sort of comfort but at the same time the spirit of adventure got ahold of her. There were so many new things to discover! Her eyes fell on Janus back again, lifting her heart and almost her entire body. This journey would certainly be great.

With renewed energy she closed the distance towards the two men, who were walking in silence. The path slowly wound itself down the steep mountainside, stones slowly giving way to some grass and further down she could see some trees, their green leaves rustling in the wind.

“What is your real name?”, Janus suddenly asked her out of the blue. “I cannot imagine that someone would call their daughter Litius.”

She shook her head, smiling. “I am Lia. Lia Luxana Dias.”

“You got two names? That is unusual.”

“Luxana was my mother’s name”, her hand enclosed the stone hanging around her neck once again. “She died shortly after my birth.”

Janus fell silent. “I’m sorry”, he whispered after a moment.

“I never really got to know her. Would you”, she looked to the side, her voice becoming quieter, “tell me about yours?”

“I miss her”, he looked towards the horizon as if seeing something there that was hidden from Lias sight. “She died some time after I turned six. My father then sent me up to Andragat, to become a dragon guardian like him.”

“Sorry ... I didn’t want to ...”

“Don’t worry. It is long in the past, and I can understand why you asked.” His smile carried something else, something she had never seen in

his smiles before. It was ... warm ... sincere, not like the jesting ones, but one that came from the heart.

It made her smile as well, in the same manner and suddenly she felt a lot closer to him than before.

“So... how does it feel ... to see the world from the eyes of a dragon?” Janus shifted the bag on his shoulder, looking straight ahead once more, and his face got slightly red.

Lia cleared her throat, thankful for the change of topic, looking straight ahead and seeing how her father looked back at her. Was he suspicious of them? Or was there a speck of curiosity in them?

Of course he was curious. Who could not be curious? Everyone had to be curious, even she had been curious since the first time she had heard that one could take on the form of the dragon, but until yesterday she had not been allowed to do so. And out of fear she never did, even though the other boys had urged her to try. More than once.

“It was ... strange, but also ... natural.” She concentrated, letting the memory of it all wash over her again, feeling it again. “I felt the World below my Claws, knew that no one here could stand before my might. I felt the dragons flame deep within me and I smelled ... well, some of our brothers needed a bath. Urgent.” She had to smile at that. “Oh and I felt pretty hungry!” And then she remembered once again, that she had almost given into the instincts of the dragon. It was a reminder that she still had many things to learn. She shook her head and continued with her story. “It was exhilarating. I could feel the wind below my wings.”

“When you fly ... would you take me with you for a ride?” Janus was grinning from ear to ear. “I would like to see the world from your back.”

Her father cleared his throat very loud.

“High up in the sky, of course.”

Lia ignored that. “Of course, I would like to ... but ...” She looked to the side. “I still need to practice flying first. And I need to get accustomed to those wings and ...”

“I will be waiting until you are ready.” He draped an arm around her shoulders, making her feel special once again.

Once again her father started clearing his throat. Once, Twice, a few times more, but Janus ignored it completely.



They arrived in the small town on the base of the mountain as the sun was sinking over the horizon. Lia started taking in everything she could

see as they left the mountain trail. She felt like being in another world: Trees larger than houses, Children, women and girls with long hair. Houses built of stone and wood right next to each other, stone paved streets, wagons, horses, men with lots of muscles, men with lots of fat, men and women advertising things they wanted to sell, Men in strange black suits. Were these especially rich? Or from a different county? Perhaps they were just working for an especially rich person that had these suits tailored for them like some type of uniform, just like the robes she and all the dragon priests were wearing. Maybe they were members of a new faith that did not involve dragons ...

“Don’t stare”, her father pulled her into a doorway and a moment later they were standing within a room full of people. “It is getting late, we should find a room.” With these words he found his way past several tables, where people were either talking or drinking and everyone wanted to be louder than their neighbor, to get their point across. Nobody paid attention to her father, Janus or her.

Suddenly there was the smell of something nasty, stinging into her nose. Even worse than what she had smelled as a dragon, but she could not pinpoint exactly what this smell was. While she was still wondering, Janus found his way towards the bar and she followed him shortly after. At least all the noise seemed to be getting less intense the farther they got.

“So, a dragon priest, a dragon guardian and a mercenary go into a bar”, said the bartender smiling “sounds like the beginning of a bad joke.” He dried his fingers on a pretty dirty piece of cloth. His shoulders were broad and he had a massive physique, with strength that could probably hold up to any dragon priest or guardian she knew. A mustache hid the lower part of his face, while the short brown hair on his head thinned out already. “What can I do for you?”

“We need two rooms”, her father answered and gathered some ryu out of his pockets.

“150 ryu.” The bartender leaned forwards. “One hundred for you, fifty for the guardian and the priest goes free. I just need you to sign here”, he handed her a piece of paper and a quill.

Lia added her name on the paper, together with a stamp she had gotten before leaving. Janus did the same, although he had a slightly different symbol. The bartender would get the money for her and Janus’ stay at his inn later from the crown. It was a special arrangement for the “burden” the dragon priests had to bear for a long time by keeping the populace safe from wild dragons.

The bartender handed her the keys, as if she had asked for the rooms. As she took the keys, the Bartender called towards the back “Gertrud, please show our guests to their rooms!”

It took few moments until a woman entered the room from the side, her clothing only a bit cleaner than the bartenders and her physique not at all less imposing. “Do you like what you are seeing, your Grace?” She put her hand to her hips, pushing her ample bosom forwards a bit more.

“I ...” Lia was speechless. There were not any words in her repertoire that would have fitted this situation. Finally she averted her gaze as she realized that she was staring.

“Follow me please”, the woman said smiling, correcting her posture once more. “I am used to this already, so I know how to deal with our customers that are less polite. But I do not mind them coming back; it’s good for business after all.”

Lia followed her through a small staircase at the side of the room to the floor above. Suddenly she had a realization. Was it normal for women to have ... something like that? Would Janus want her to have those as well? And ... why was she thinking this all of a sudden? It shouldn’t bother her at all.

More than anything she wished her mother to her side. She couldn’t ask her father as he was strictly against her being with Janus. Maybe she could ask someone else? Maybe even the woman before her? But then she would admit to the world who she was, alerting some of the more strict priests – and a hunting expedition after a corrupted priest was the last thing she would need on her heels.

“Here is your room”, the woman pointed to a door at their side. A symbol akin to the number six had been carved into the door, as well as on one of the keys she had been given. She opened the door, threw the other one to her father and fled inside.

“Will you need anything else?” The woman’s voice penetrated the door with ease.

“No, thanks!” Lia turned around and locked the door. She looked about in her room, finding only a bed and nothing else. Sighing she sat down on the bed. Was there a way for her to hide the dragon sign on her body? Or was there a way to make all dragon priests accept her as one of them? After all she succeeded in all the tests that she was given. Why were the others not satisfied with that? Why, when the abbot, her mentors and her father were content with it?

A knock on the door disrupted her thoughts. “I need to talk to you.” It was her father.

"I don't want to talk right now", was her only answer, just barely loud enough to be heard on the other side.

Her father went silent and after a few moments she heard his steps as he left.

Lias thoughts returned to her predicament. Maybe she should really speak with that woman about her problems? Maybe she was able to help her. But then again, she had lied to her, albeit indirectly. How would she react if that dragon priest was really a girl? And then there were her vows to consider ...

It knocked once again. "Lia?" Janus' voice resounded through the door, his voice a lot softer and not commanding, unlike her fathers. Lia took a few deep breaths and after a few minutes of absolute silence and calming her thoughts, she opened the door. Janus had waited all that time until she had been ready. Her heart felt a bit warmer once again.

"What has happened to you?" He looked concerned. "Ever since we arrived here you started to behave strange. Is it the dragon within you?"

Lia looked towards the floor. "How should she tell him? This was not a Problem anyone has had before her. Sixteen years she had lived a lie, as a boy ... and suddenly she had feelings blossoming in her that did not tie in with the life she had lived. But she could not just change all that, she was bound to this lie by her accident in the past. But ... would he be able to understand that?

"Do you see me as a boy or as a girl?" she asked instead, looking straight into his face.

He owed her an answer for a very long time. Only then he answered. "I have known you for nine years as a boy and to be honest, I cannot change that view from one day to another. He scratched his own neck after admitting that.

Lia went back to the bed, sitting down. How could she have thought that he might answer something else?

"Is it that?" He stepped into the room, closing the door behind him.

Lia did not look at him, owing him an answer this time. How could she answer him at all? For her being seen as a girl was suddenly something that felt more important than she thought it would be and telling him that ... he would probably think of her as crazy.

"To be honest, this morning I have been playing with your father a bit, but ..." He let his hand sink down, a seriousness in his voice that she had not heard for a long time. "I have felt something more than friendship towards you for a while now. It was weird for me, admitting to myself, that I had feelings for another boy. And now ..." He sighed. "Just give me

some time.” He smiled. “Just, take it to heart, that I don’t care about your gender. I just want to be with you.”

Even though what he said were not the words she wanted to hear, they still warmed her heart. She returned his smile and nodded, embracing him in a hug, that he returned after hesitating for a moment.



The sun was barely rising over the horizon as Janus, Lia and her father left the inn. Lia felt a bit better than before, but there was still this nagging feeling that she had to do something at least. But she also knew that she should not try to push through things at the moment. Wise men observe first and decide after they got enough information. And she was lacking the latter. Some of her ideas included to hide the sign on her face that made it obvious that she was a dragon priest. And if she put down the robe and hid her red eye as well, then she could live as a normal human being.

Her father kept quiet. He didn’t talk about what happened the day before, didn’t pressure her. Maybe Janus told him something? She looked at them, shoving her own thoughts to the side. They had already left the buildings of the town behind. Janus had locked his eyes on her. She felt a blush creeping on her face.

Then she looked at her father. He had only eyes ... for the surroundings? And then he stood before them, holding his hands out to stop them from going further. He stared on the way ahead.

Lia looked past him, noticing the half dozen men in full armor suits stepping on the road. Lia had heard of thieves before – but with full armor suits? That was very unusual. But they did threaten them with their long, blank swords.

“Finally. I have waited for a long time to see you again, Barnett.” Shivers ran over Lias back. She turned towards the source of that scratchy voice.

“Well, I am really glad to see you again, too”, replied her father in a tone of voice that dripped of sarcasm. Metal scratched over metal as he pulled his sword out of its sheath.

Lia saw the man standing behind her: A black leather coat hid most of his features, his eyes seemed to be completely black, as well as his short hair. She could see his sword hanging at his side, still sheathed. His hard features told Lia that he was one of those, that rarely smiled, if at all.

His eyes looked over Janus and her alike, lingering on each only a few

moments. Lia put her right foot a bit in front of her, stabilizing herself for battle like her mentors had taught her. Janus did the same, raising his arms, ready to reply to any attack that was thrown his way.

"Three men? Phobos said you would never travel without your ... daughter." The black man looked at his fingernails. "So ... which one of these two boys is her?" A moment of silence ensued, before he unsheathed his sword, pointing it on Janus at first. "Is it you?" Then his sword pointed over to Lia, "or is it more likely that you are her?"

"My daughter isn't here. I am very sorry, that you came all this way for nothing."

"Don't lie to me!" The black one slashed through the air without hurting anyone. "I know that she is here. I am sure that I am looking at her." He raised his chin a bit. The ringing of armor from the six soldiers made it clear that they were coming closer. "Well, it should be easy to ascertain, who of these two is the girl and which one is a genuine boy. We just have to strip one of them."

"Be my guest. But I assure you, you won't find her." Her father seemed amused all of a sudden.

"It is treason to attack a dragon priest or their guards." Janus shifted both legs a bit forwards.

The sword that pointed on Lia sank towards the ground slowly. The black man looked at them questioningly, just before a creepy smile found its way to his lips. "I understand. Very clever, Barnett, very clever." He looked towards Janus raising his sword once again. His tone suddenly even more aggressive than before, shouting into his face: "Do I look like I give a shit about the crappy laws of this country?" Then he turned towards his soldiers shouting: "Take the priest alive, kill the guard. Barnett is mine!"

He lunged forwards with incredible speed, his blade meeting the blade of her father's sword mere inches next to her. Lia jumped to the side while both swung their swords once again, bringing some distance between herself and them. A moment later she was surrounded by three soldiers, the other three had surrounded Janus, raising their swords they charged at him, only to stagger back as flames surrounded the dragon guard in a circle. They kept their distance, but their swords were glowing deep red at their tips.

Lia didn't worry about Janus anymore – he was a very capable dragon guard, the best one they had this year, to be exact. Instead she looked at the soldiers before her, taking a deep breath and breathing fire against her attackers. Pale blue flames erupted from her, enveloping the soldier

before her in an inferno of flames. She heard a garbled scream before he sank to the ground, his armor glowing red-orange. She turned towards the next one. He made a few steps backwards, before stopping again. Someone grabbed her from behind an unusual warmth radiating from him, a red hot glowing sword only inches away from her neck. "If you don't want to be hurt, then hold still", whispered the man behind her, the remaining two soldiers standing in front of her, their swords pointed to her heart.

What was happening here? The soldier should have been roasted! She looked to Janus. Those three soldiers suddenly ignored the circle of fire, as if it wasn't there at all, their armors glowing red-orange as well, exactly like the one ... of the soldier ...

Suddenly she realized what was happening: The armor made these soldiers immune to fire! They knew exactly who their opponents were, they came prepared. Those soldiers around Janus slashed at him, their movements slow and strained. He had just enough time to jump out of the way. The flames around him died and as his shield evaporated the soldiers gained speed once again, they slashed at him, tearing through his robe, injuring him. They were given the order to kill him.

Her heart skipped a few beats. Instinct took over, her hand grasped the still glowing sword, her skin impervious to its heat. A strong pull janked the sword out of her attackers hand, the soldiers in front jumping to the side. Her other hand grabbed the hand that was still near her neck, throwing the soldier over her back and onto the ones before her. She climbed over the pile of soldiers, noticing how Janus duck below another blow. He punched the air before him and wind, amplified by magic, pushed an attacker far from him.

Lia breathed fire onto the remaining two soldiers, their armors glowing once again. The swords fell from their hands and they sank to their knees, as if suddenly drained of strength. Janus ran away, increasing the distance between him and his attackers. He used the breather to cast another spell, a more complex one.

The three soldiers that were assigned to her managed to get free from the pile, picking up their swords once again, charging at her. Lia concentrated for a while, a ball of flame gathering in her open palm. Heat radiated from it, draining the soldiers strength, slowing them down.

A sword almost grazed her side, impaling itself in the ground. She looked around. The black one had cornered her father, hitting him on the head with the pommel of his sword. He sank to the ground.

She threw the ball of flame at him, anger clouding her decisions, but

he swatted the ball away like a pesky fly. It exploded somewhere within the wood, setting dry wood on fire, the shockwave felling some of the weaker trees.

“Your stolen powers don’t impress me!” Raising a hand he started to chant a spell in a language that was unknown to her, his tone sending shivers down her back. “Aqure viara. Sa-Eio, pra olsa karpa sonos ...” Suddenly a gust of wind swept over her as if fleeing from the woods, from him, while he kept chanting. She couldn’t hear him anymore, she could only see that his lips were still moving.

As the wind swept up his cloak she could see the studded leather armor below it. Black fumes raised from the ground and she felt herself weaken. She sank on her knees, looking back over her shoulder, hoping that Janus finished his spell ...

Lightning connected his hands with the soldiers near to him, bringing them down, their silhouettes disappearing in the black mist. But the fumes found him faster than he could find a new target for his lightning bolts. He sank to his knees rather quickly, his spell drained of all its power.

Lia struggled against this dark power that threatened to overwhelm her consciousness. She noticed a soldier stepping towards Janus, seemingly unaffected by the dark mist, sword in hand. He was about ten steps away.

Nine.

Eight.

Lia panicked. She knew of one way she could probably save him. She sought out her seal, freeing the dragons essence within her to take on his form. The power that broke out from deep within overwhelmed her consciousness as a deep darkness washed over her ...

Second Seal



Janus closed his eyes for a moment. He couldn't escape anymore, he felt too weak to even lift a finger, the black mist draining his strength ... But then he heard a cry, close to a roar. He turned his head, seeing Lia change, her robe turning black, melting into her now black skin, arms and legs changing their form, Wings growing out of her back while her neck became longer and a tail shot out of her backside, swinging left and right while she increased in size rapidly.

The Dragon was much larger than any human, even taller than the trees. A roar escaped the dragons throat, a prank smashed the soldier that had been closing in on him. Then the dragon breathed fire, engulfing the remaining two soldiers in a pale blue flame. Janus could feel the burning heat even several dozen feet away.

He could see the magically enhanced armors melt, the smell of burning flesh and the pained cries of the soldiers. As the flames died down all that remained were statues of molten stone. The protection spell woven into the steel had gone awry. One soldier cried out of fear, stepping backwards, turning. As he tried to flee he was smashed into a tree by the dragons tail. The armor disfigured, the bark splintered and probably the bones of the soldiers broken beyond his capability to heal. Blood spilled out and onto the floor, vanishing into the ground.

Janus felt a shiver running down his spine. Was that still Lia or had the dragon assumed control, running wild, a beast only acting on instinct, seeing humans as nothing more than their next meal?

Another soldier charged at the dragon, his sword held high, crying in desperation. The dragon used another prank to hold that soldier down, the dragons maw lowering itself towards his head ...

Janus heard another cry beside him. He recognized the black one shoving a dagger into the remaining soldiers back, right through his armor. As he ripped the dagger from the soldiers back he started chanting another spell. The soldier staggered, tried to look back at his assailant and fell down, blood piling onto the floor. The black one rammed the dagger into the pool of blood.

As the last life left that soldiers body all the blood turned black in an instant, turning into some form of crystal as a black orb formed at the top of the daggers handle. Slowly one side opened, revealing a big, blood red eye. His heart skipped several beats as the eye looked at him and then

turned towards the dragon. The eye exploded. The shockwave caused a loose stone to strike him on the head. As his consciousness faded he noticed black veins trapping the dragons form.



Lia awoke to her own drumming heartbeat, feeling it pronounced within her right arm. She seemed to be laying on the hard ground, with something pressing into her back. It took several moments until she felt the rest of her body again.

The drumming heartbeat within her arm grew into excruciating pain, as if a needle was penetrating her skin. It stung and stung and stung again and again. Lia opened her eyes, tried to escape the pain, but something heavy pressed her down on the ground. She saw the face of the black man before her and a bloody needle in his right hand. His black eyes had locked on to hers and he stared at her for a moment, before his left hand curled around her neck.

As more adrenalin shot through her body once more she noticed that she was naked, several more needles had been pinned into her skin everywhere, as if pinning her dragons seal down. She could see them within her thighs, her breast and she felt even some on her neck.

“Don’t move!”

Lia couldn’t breathe or answer. The world started spinning around her as she tried to get free, flailing with her feet. She tried to grab his arm, to throw him down from her. It only made him press down on her harder.

“I told you not to move”, he growled.

She felt painful tingling within her body, paralyzing her muscles. She remembered vaguely that she had tried to transform into a dragon. She had to try again. To escape him and to ... What has happened to Janus? What to her father?

She had to try again ... but her seal didn’t follow her commands, it stuck to her skin, not retreating at all, really pinned down by the needles.

His Needle stung into her shoulder once gain. And then again and again and again. All the pain building and overwhelming her once more and she fell back into the darkness.



His head was pounding. Somehow he managed to open his eyes. The bright light seemed to be stinging into his head.

"Are you feeling better?" A woman came closer to him, looking slightly concerned. Janus remembered her as being the one from the inn. He didn't remember her name. "I am so glad that you got that wild rampaging dragon. But how did he appear in the forest just like that?" She tried to think of something. "Can they become invisible?" She looked at him questioningly. "I mean dragons have powerful magic."

Janus began to shiver. Lia had lost control before his eyes and she had just been inaugurated to priesthood. At least no one of the normal folk would know. He could only hope that the news would stay local. More and more of the memory flowed into his head. The smells ... the sights ... he couldn't hold the contents of his stomach anymore, plastering the floor beside the bed with them.

"Oh my goodness", the woman brought him some water and left through the door. He drank some of the water, regaining control over himself while the woman came back with a bucket of water and other tools to clean the floor.

"What happened?" She asked as she started to clean up his mess. "We found you and that mercenary in the woods, as well as some statues and three ... dead soldiers ... do you know where that dragon priest went to? I hope he is alright." Janus stared at her for a while, comprehending what happened slowly. Lia had vanished? "The mercenary left a while ago, mumbling something about a daughter he had to find." She leaned back, sighing. "Maybe the Dragon stole his long lost daughter that he met up with before leaving this village and the priest has followed him and now he needs to follow them as well ... it is kind of romantic."

And it couldn't be further from the truth. But Janus kept his thoughts to himself. Instead he got up, leaving her to her fantasies.

"Why are you all in such a hurry", she complained. "It is getting dark outside and you should eat something!"

"Thank you, but ... there is no time." He couldn't eat something nor wait any longer. It had been that black guy. He got Lia and his spells were probably why she had lost control. He had to find out what had happened to her, if she regained control. He had to know if she was still ... alive. And then he had to find her father. He seemed to know that stranger. If he found him first, then it would be a huge step towards finding her.



Lia was feeling cold. Her whole body was shivering as she regained

consciousness. She opened her eyes slowly. She was still lying on the floor, naked, but covered by her robe. Or the pieces that were left of it. She grabbed it, covering herself and got up slowly. Her left arm was still stinging and it got worse with every movement.

"Put it back on!" Her torturer sat a few meters away from her, leaning against a tree.

Anger shot through her. She took a deep breath and, instead of shouting at him, she tried to breathe her fire. But it failed to ignite. Instead she felt like a big spear was being shoved into her left shoulder, turning it in the wound to make it extra painful. She fell back to the floor, clutching it with her right hand, while she cried her pain out into the air above.

There was no spear, there was no blood, but the pain was excruciating.

It felt like an eternity has passed as the pain finally subsided, leaving her weak and gasping for air.

"The seal on your arm will deal you that pain every time you try to run or attack me." The black guy looked smug, content with himself. "You should do as I say and put that thing back on or would you like another dose of that pain?"

Lia growled into his general direction, watching at her left shoulder. A black mark had been drawn on ... no it had been drawn into her skin. What would happen if she tried to ...

"Yes, just try to transform into a dragon. I want to see the pain on your face!" The way he smiled made her throw up – almost. She walked behind a tree, putting the robe back on as best as she could.

"What did you do to my father? What happened to Janus?" Her shouting served only to get him angry.

"Be quiet!" He closed the distance between them, wrapping his hand around her neck once more. "You should thank me for stopping you. Otherwise you would have been the one killing them!"

Lia gulped. What did he say? She would have done ... what?

The black one shoved her to the ground, climbing above her. "You have cost me all six soldiers. I had to flee because of you. I will have you pay for that one day, trust me!" He growled at her before standing up and sitting back down at the place he had been before.

Lia shivered. She remembered that she had tried to transform ... did she succeed and lose control at the same time? She knew that she lost consciousness for a while ... Was that when the dragon had taken over? Had he been waiting all this time for just that moment? What should she

do? She would be hunted by dragon priests for sure, if word of that came out. If only her mother or her father were with her ... Her hand sought out her necklace only to find it missing. She shot up again. Panicked she looked around searching for it. Had she lost it as she transformed? Or did he steal it?

She stared at him, anger in her eyes. All of this was his fault. Only because of him she had tried to transform into a dragon. It was because of his dark mist that she lost consciousness and control. "So ... what will you do now?" She stood up once more.

"That is of no concern to you now! Got to sleep, we have a lot of ground to make tomorrow." He looked at her almost indifferently, as if she was nothing more than a stone lying there in front of him. "And don't try to flee while I sleep. You won't come far with that seal ... and I can promise you that I will find you again and then you would wish you had never been born!"

Lia sat back down, her eyes still searching the floor and his neck in hope of finding her necklace. She hugged her own legs to keep herself warm, thinking about how she could escape him. This night would be best.

She sat there, waiting for a long time. He didn't move at all. Did he fall asleep already? Or did he really not care if she just went and tried to flee now.

But ... was she really able to flee? Or was he right and she would feel that pain once again, if she got too far from him and that made him be at ease? She stood up, taking one step back ... then another. Slowly and quietly. His seal didn't react.

Suddenly a hand closed down over her mouth, obstructing her breathing. The black stranger leaned into her. He somehow vanished from the spot he was in only seconds ago. She could feel his breath in her neck. "You cannot escape me", he whispered. Then he pressed himself against a tree, her body close to his, his grasp on her mouth and nose becoming even stronger. "Be quiet, if you want to live", he whispered even quieter than before.

