Pallas landed heavily on the rocks, ungiving under her great weight. She pitched forward and fluttered her wings, allowing her forelimbs to take half of her weight. Her old bones creaked under the strain. Whatever, this should hopefully be a quick stop.

She crawled down the familiar path, the journey now took much longer than it did centuries ago. The escaping steam and gases blasted the salt off her amber scales, but she didn’t feel it. It was difficult to feel most of anything with the thickness of her hide, the slowness of her thoughts.

Once she crested the hill, the bone-white sands of the beach below greeted her. But her eyes were drawn to the black pebbles, so neatly arranged into a message that swallowed the sun’s heat, leaving it a glowing picture, even into the night.

*LOOKING FOR DRAGONESS WITH BLUE SCALES I saw you across the atoll, you kept glancing my way. I wanted to stare at you more, but the pack of dolphins wasn’t going to stay long, and I was pretty hungry. By the time I surfaced, you were gone. Would love to meet up and get a bite to eat. Hopefully something not as rubbery.*

Pallas only noticed her extended exhale when the smoke obscured her vision. It was always these dragonets with more eggs than sense, leaving messages that would never reach their intended recipient. She settles down and draws upon her magic, getting the crabs to work. They start tugging at the stones, dismantling the words one by one.

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The crashing of waves upon the shore almost muffled the sounds of Rhox’s crash-landing, but only just. Aer snout popped above the water, allowing the dragon a gulp of breath; renewed, ae pulled aerself ashore. The bright sun dried out aer cerulean wings as ae rested.

The island was supposed to be a quick jaunt from the archipelago, a prime meeting place for dragons across the vast sea. Rhox listened, felt, but there were no signs of anyone else. Maybe they were elsewhere, also taking a nap in the sun.

Ae turned to the wind and then jumped, allowing the breeze to catch aer wings and buoy aer aloft. Ae circled the island several times, looking for movement, noise, some sign that anyone else was there. But the only other living things seemed to be the crabs chasing after aer shadow.

After the fourth pass did ae finally notice. Stones in the sand laid out in a way too organized to be by chance. It took another circle or two to find the right angle to recognize the shapes were letters in that language all dragons knew.

*MATURE DRAGON LOOKING FOR COMPANION New to area and want to meet new dragons. Open to all types but must be able to handle a dragoness of my age. Not looking for anything serious, but would be open to the right someone. Must NOT have hatchlings in the nest! Been there, done that, ready to enjoy my golden years distraction-free.*

Rhox shook aer head. Ae did not want to think whose mother—or, stars forbid, grandmother—it could be. Or what ae would do if ae found out it was aer mother. Or grandmother. Jump in a volcano, probably.

So, to save anyone else from such a fate, ae got to work directing the crabs to erase that message. It would give aer plenty of time to figure out how ae would word aer own message as well.

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Every day, Baloryx would check on the island, to see if his dragoness was there. And every day, his message was left unanswered, nor was anyone waiting for him. He knew it was a long shot, but it was difficult to meet anyone, out here on the islands. Besides, he really couldn’t go asking around if anyone had seen such a dragon. He’d look like a total creep.

All of that was sidetracked after a particular nasty storm. The fallen palm tree didn’t break or tear anything, but his wing was too damaged to fly any distance. He waited anxiously, praying his dragoness wasn’t waiting for him to arrive. The moment he felt up to it, he pushed himself to fly out to the island, hoping, praying, things would work out.

As he approached, his eyes locked onto the stones of the message. As he got closer, he recognized it wasn’t his own. It took several heart-wrenching minutes for him to get close enough to make out the shapes, for the letters to become legible.

*<<Aquaforce>> is a future 10 dragon raiding guild focused on clearing content, especially seasonal events. Looking for both PVE and social members. LF high-level culinarian and EXPERIENCED raid lead!!!*

Some *hatchling* had gone and erased his heartfelt message, searching for his soulmate, just to find some buddies to torch pirates and livestock! Ridiculous. But perhaps Baloryx hadn’t been specific enough, he didn’t say what he looked like. Maybe his dragoness was confusing him for some other male, with worse hunting skills, duller hide.

Patience was a virtue, his mother told him, and nothing of value was gained easily, he’d heard elsewhere. So once more he lands on the beach and directs the crabs. This time, there’d be no doubt to the intended recipient. As long as there were crabs on this beach, he *will* keep trying, until he gets his dragoness and his happily ever after.

Ugh, I can't get over how cute this is. Like, this is just such a well executed storylet! It doesn't need to be any longer - being longer would do it a disservice, I think - with a fantastic core conceit and means of execution. Having a framing device like this is a good, solid idea (this year's Hugo winner for short stories uses a related framing device).

The three characters each missing one another is a good way to approach it, and it's nice that we get a good sense of what each character is like. However, we get way more of Baloryx's desires than the other two. This is probably by design, as he's the only one we hear from twice (even if the first time is through his message), but something like this should be approached intentionally. That we get that much more about how he feels - his wing, his desire for a dragoness - than the other two makes his section feel a bit unbalanced. Adding a bit more to the other two characters might help; Pallas talks about how old she is, but not about her need for companionship and Rhox talks about aer response to the message but not about what ae wants (to the point where, with aer crash landing in the water, I thought ae'd written the original message chasing dolphins).

This was a pleasure to read, and I really enjoyed how self-contained it was. Thank you for sharing!