

Chapter 11

Salum

The eyes in Salum's dismembered head still glow faintly as they watch Gerard quickly pack away everything in the cave. Gerard shakes Ealyn's shoulder.

"We need to go now." Gerard says.

He turns his head around and accidentally catches Salum's eyes. Ealyn blinks then blearily open her eyes. When her eyes are slightly ajar, he pushes her out of the cave. Salum watches as Ealyn leaves and the borders of his vision darken. The darkness starts to close in. When it reaches the center, everything is black. Occasionally the errant feeling of something sharp breaks through the emptiness, but otherwise nothing. Then something.

The darkness recedes, revealing the blurriest outlines of shapes. They move about Salum's vision. A couple blinking lights of various color stand out amongst the noise. One blinks red another blinks green. With nothing else to do Salum times the blinks. The green light blinks a little before the red one. They are growing closer and closer together, imperceptibly. As the figures move about the room the blinks grow closer and closer in time. Eventually the blinks are exactly in time with one another, and Salum's vision starts to clear.

He is in a smooth stone room composed of unbroken grey rock. The ceiling is covered in long black tendrils, like roots spreading to metal boxes covered in glass panes and blinking lights. Salum looks down. His body is black and tattered. Large pieces of flesh are missing exposing bone and organ. Surrounding these gaping wounds are blackened flesh dripping dark red puss onto a pan below. The exposed organs are connected to clear tubes and black cable. One clear tube carrying blood to his chest runs to a black bladder. With the red blinks the bladder contracts. The blood is pushed in, and the blood returns to the bladder. Tears start to leak from the corner of Salum's eyes as he looks at the mess his body has become.

He contracts his hand, it collaborates. He pulls against the restraint. A red light at the top of the room starts flashing. The room is filled with color as the red-light flashes and Salum struggles against his restraints. Derk walks into the room, his black arm holding a needle filled with clear blue fluid. His eyes go wide as Salum starts railing against the restraints. Derk runs to Salum's side and injects the black bladder with the clear fluid. Salum's vision goes fuzzy, then dark. Muffled voices break the constant whirring of machines.

"Derk what did you do!" Bryden yells.

“He was dying.” Derk says.

Something crashes.

“Don’t please,” Derk says.

“He’s an inquisitor, he knows we exist. He will stop at nothing to kill us as soon as he can move that arm!” Bryden responds.

“He was a wizard once!” Derk yells.

“You can’t manipulate me. What you are doing is sick. This is just an excuse to test your vile machines.” Bryden says.

“These machines are bringing him back to life.” Derk says.

“That is too far Derk, you cannot play god, we are not wizards.” Bryden says.

“Don’t you understand, if we don’t try new things we will never be.” Derk says.

“Is that what this is about. You are on about that again.” Bryden says.

“Yes, wizards where once men Bryden, if we find out how they were made then we can become them.” Derk says.

“You are mad Derk! first that alchemist now this. We are going to die if you keeo gambling our lives so recklessly.” Bryden states.

“Ealyn was different, she helped me, and I owed her.” Derk says.

“Don’t you understand how rare we are Derk?” Bryden asks.

“Yes.” Derk responds.

“No, you clearly don’t. The sorcerers left on the face of this planet may number less than a hundred, and you want to gamble another inquisition just to test your theories.” Bryden asks.

“No, but we have tried to appeal to the black wizard to see our plight and he is blind. If we just had his power we could end the hunt. We could start a new golden age of knowledge and end the ignorant tyranny of the white order.” Derk says.

“You are young, I don’t want to fight, I want to live. Can’t that be enough for you.” Bryden asks.

“Yes, it can.” Derk grinds out.

“Well then, this is it. You may finish with the experiment, but if I see any more of this madness, I will end you. Understand this?” Bryden says.

“Yes.” Derk says.

“It's just us Derk, please, I can't lose you too.” Bryden says.

“I understand.” Derk says.

Footsteps, then a door closes. It's just darkness for a time. Every time the darkness starts to recede Derk comes in and injects the metal bladder, and the darkness comes back. The darkness recedes fuzzy but colorful shapes break the emptiness. The blinking lights are blinking in unison again. Salum's vision finally clears. He looks down, his body is not the monstrosity it was when he last opened his eyes. There is still a tube connecting from his chest to the metal bladder, but otherwise his body is normal. Salum looks down at the restraints. They are leather straps inlaid with a thick chain link. Salum looks at the metal door. It is shut closed.

He rattles the restraints. They start to buckle, then the left one snaps. The right one snaps quickly after. He uses his newly freed hands to unbuckle his feet. He reaches his hand to the tube in his chest. He pulls it out. The entire room is bathed in red light. An deafening screeching noise emanates from a small red box on the wall. Salum tumbles forward landing onto the seamless rock. He breathing becomes shallow and blackness starts to seep at the edges of his vision.

Derk crashes through the door. His eyes dart across the room landing on Salum bleeding on the floor. Derk runs to his side and picks him up easily. He deposits him back in the upright holding bed. He runs to a side table and grabs a tiny razor sharp knife. Salum screams when Derk peels open his chest. Sweat forms on Derk's brow as he moves the tissue to the side. In the center of Salum's chest is a mess of tubes connected to a central connector. Derk pulls out a couple of ripped tubes, then reaches into a small metal cabinet and retrieves more tubes. The darkness creeps to the center of Salum's vision.

Complete emptiness, one might say its cold, but its just not warm. Light explodes into Salum's vision and Derk laughs.

“That was a close one.” Derk says.

Salum glares at Derk.

“Don't look at me, you almost died there.” Derk says.

Salum continues glaring.

“This is not working inquisitor. You need me.” Derk says.

Salum raises his newly bound hands.

“You can sign, I understand.” Derk says.

“What vile sorceries keep me bound so.” Salum signs.

“This machine.” Derk points to the black bladder.

“Is keeping you alive. Your head was able to go into a sort of stasis. Filling with a suspension solution. Your body on the other hand did not. So your head was still mostly functional and would stay that way for some time, but your body rotted. Then I suspect an animal came by and ate your heart. Your other vital organs stayed mostly intact though. So when I plugged you into that. I was able to get your super healing started, but your healing can spontaneously create organs, so you'll need that for the rest of your life.” Derk says.

Salum stares blankly.

“That machine is replacing your heart currently. If you disconnect the tubes, your body will start to die.” Derk says.

“What is to say that you have not just casted a spell, and you are trying to use jargon as a smokescreen.” Salum says.

“I don't know if there is a way to convince you, but how about we make a trade. You don't try to break out, and I will not keep you asleep. Deal?” Derk offers.

Salum nods.

“Great, ill bring something for you to read or something. Your organs have mostly healed, but you'll need to rebuild lost muscle mass. You cannot stray farther than that tube goes, but that does not mean you can't exercise.” Derk says.

Salum nods.

“I'll return with a couple books.” Derk says.

Derk unlatches his restraints and walks out of the room, the metal door clinking closed behind him. Salum looks around the smooth grey room. There are many small metal implements. There are a couple black glass windows on metal blocks with small pieces of glass with characters on them. Some glass screens have glowing text moving behind them. There is a large table with a metal wash basin and spout inlaid into the counter. Salum sits on a small metal stool next to his upright holding cell. Derk walks into the room holding a small piles of books in his arms.

“Can you read pre bronic speech?” Derk asks.

“Yes” Salum signs.

“Okay great.” Derk says.

He lays the small pile of books on the metal cabinet, then goes to the other side of the room and grabs a stool that was in front of the counter. He drags the stool over to

the cabinet, and sits down careful to stay outside of the length of the tube. He picks up the top book.

“I really like this one. It is about the cosmology of the universe.” Derk says.

“I can’t read that.” Salum signs.

“Oh yeah,” Derk says.

Derk pulls the next book raises it. It is a picture of a small glass bottle. He opens his mouth then looks at the cover. His mouth closes. He shuffles through the rest of the pile. Occasionally he picks out a book, but then he looks at the cover, title or spine then shoves it back in.

“Ah, finally.” Derk says.

Derk pulls out a red book with a scaled beast on the front next to a man with a silver shield.

“It’s a book about a knight that is sent by his lord to fight a dragon.” Derk says.

“Lords don’t send random people to kill dragons. If they were still around, only beast kin could deal with them, and legions of beast kin would have to be sent to deal with them.” Salum signs.

“It’s a story, just give it a chance you might like it.” Derk says.

Salum nods. Derk lays the book on the cabinet.

“Well, I guess that’s it. Don’t run off on me.” Derk says.

Derk chuckles, then cringes.

“Sorry,” Derk says.

Derk takes the rest of the books beside the red book and leaves the room. Salum grabs hold of the red book and analyses the cover and back. The book has a glossy finish with the cover dimly reflecting the strong white lights overhead. Salum opens the book. The front page is of the knight from the cover standing at the foot of a black mountain with a tower at the top. Salum opens the first page.

Many years ago in a land far far away there is a kingdom. This kingdom was ruled by what many call a noble and just king. Before he ruled these lands there were no kings; only petty princes and warlords. The lands were in a constant state of turmoil. That was until the castle of our soon to be king was burnt to the ground. He ran from the smoking wreckage to the nearest castle with an army behind him. The prince fearing his army sent an envoy to meet him. The king told the envoy, “The dragons have left me without home nor family. I beseech thee to fetch your lord, so we may come to an accord

and unite to bring the dragons low. For I am only the first, and sure to be not the last.”. The lord agreed to send his armies and rally under his banner.

He repeated this speech at every castle, village, and group of hovels throughout the land. Not one was unmoved by his plea, and fearful that their futures would match his own, they gathered under his banner. He marched the united armies of men across the land to that of the dragons. When the army arrived at the threshold of the dragon’s land there was a small drake. Or a very large one depending on if you enlist dragon or human standards. The drake ran in fear from the army of men, but the men valiantly slayed the small drake. They cried victory, then the dragons answered.

Derk walks back into the room holding armfuls of bedding.

“I’m sorry I would have come earlier, but I completely forgot you had not a bed.” Derk says.

“How much time has passed?” Salum signs.

“The day has past entirely.” Derk says.

“The entire day?” Salum signs.

Derk looks down at Salum’s arms and smiles.

“Ah, I see.” Derk says.

Derk walks to his side and pulls a small lever on the side of the holding pod. He rotates it until it lays flat. He spreads the bedding over the entire pod.

“There, that should be fine.” Derk says.

Derk walks to the door.

“Lights on or off.” Derk asks.

“Off” Salum signs.

“Okay, see you tomorrow.” Derk says.

Salum nods.

Derk walks the the door and shuts off the harsh white lights. Salum stares at the door Derk left out of. He scowls then presses his fingers to the tube emanating from his chest. Then he gets up from the sool and walks to the bedded pod. He lays down, then an involuntary smile crawls up his face to his eyes. He quickly frowns, then snuggles into the bedding and falls soundly asleep.