Garrick winced as water ran over his bloodied fur, the once light grey now a vibrant red. The wounds underneath were not that deep, but he knew the blades would have been poisoned so he took care to clean them out thoroughly. His armour was in tatters too, great gouges carved into the leather here and there, straps sliced through and metal dented. He cupped his hands and splashed his face with the water, letting it drip down. As far as he knew he was the only survivor - their scouting party had been ambushed, most likely by the tribe to the north, and he had barely made it out with his life. His compatriots had all been run through, their bodies sliced into pieces and left as a warning near the northern border. It troubled him - he was sure they had been on the right side of the line, and yet there were 5 dead bodies saying that he wasn’t.

“Garrick?” Sahlin’s voice preceded the appearance of his head around the doorway, and Garrick cursed as he jumped and accidentally splashed water into his face again.

“Would it kill you to knock?” He grumbled, wiping his face down and reaching for a roll of bandages nearby.

“Council wants to see you. Dunno what for but they’re all there, so it can’t be anything good.” Sehlin’s black-furred face creased with concern as he stepped into the room, the wolf’s gait silent as always. “I heard your scouting party was ambushed near the north border, what happened?”

“Just that. Got jumped up near Kelvarr’Gol, they were waiting for us I think.”

“I thought Kelvarr’Gol was ours?”

“So did I.” Garrick winced again as he finished wrapping his arm in bandages, tying it off expertly. “Well, guess I better see what they want.”

Sahlin walked with him as they both went to the council’s chamber, the largest and grandest building in the tribe. It doubled as an amphitheatre of sorts, a gladiatorial battle ground where the strong proved their worth and the weak were stepped over; politics was less talking and more fighting around these parts. As he walked in he saw the five councilmembers all standing, waiting for him. Four of them were huge, muscular beasts, and despite being dressed in little more than casual loincloths and basic robes they all looked ready for a fight. The one exception was Elder Frack, who was old and decrepit, his once pure white fur now a slightly dull cream colour, marred by countless scars.

“You called?” Garrick stood in front of them and folded his arms, tilting his head in a challenging manner. One of the council wolves made to step forward, his paw reaching behind his back for a blade, but he was stopped when Frack placed a hand on his arm.

“Patience, Elder Vralis. Let us determine the truth first.”

“The truth is he’s a traitor, plain and simple.” Vralis glared at Garrick, his stare not just murderous but homicidal. Once again Garrick was reminded that despite his extensive combat experience, Vralis could probably tear him apart limb from limb should they fight. That wasn't an exaggeration either, he’d seen him do the same to one of the dire bears that had invaded the tribe once, a tale that was legendary by now. The wolf was 8 feet of hardened muscle and pure, bloodthirsty rage, two feet taller than Garrick and almost twice his weight.

“This is neither plain nor simple. It’s a web, one that we must untangle.” Frack sighed as he stepped forward, Vralis still seething behind him. “When we heard your scouting party was ambushed we sent out a few warriors to see if we could find any of the attackers. We brought one back, asked him a few questions. He told us he was given information on the scouting party.” Frack clasped his paws behind his back. “We have a spy in our midst, and that of course brings us to the pertinent question: why are you the one who lived?”

Garrick gulped. Frack’s stare was like cold ice - where Vralis was red-hot brutality, Frack was cold logic, the inevitable turn of the screw. He was a veteran warrior when he was younger, but now he was valued for the strength of his mind, to which none could compare.

“I don’t know Elder.” Garrick said, meeting Frack’s stare. He didn’t blink or turn away, instead he met the gaze. It felt like Frack was looking into his soul, peering through the contents of his mind, but he didn’t avert his eyes. Eventually the elder sighed and stepped back.

“Despite what it may look like, I don’t believe in talking. Words are like wind, bent and shaped to the will of others, used as a tool to obscure instead of reveal.”

“So let me fight then.” Garrick blurted out, and winced as the Elders all stared at him. Talking out of turn should have at least earned him a punch to the gut, but again Frack held them back. “Trial by combat, anyone you want. Let me prove my innocence through steel, not words.”

Frack thought for a second before turning to another Elder, a grizzled grey wolf with an eyepatch. “Elder Zinel, what would you say is his condition right now?”

Zinel walked up and did a quick examination, running his paws across Garrick’s fur, paying close attention to the wounds and peeling back the bandages. “Wounds are mostly superficial, few bruises. Bit of cleaning and he’ll be fine. I’d say 4 hours should be enough.”

“Thank you.” Frack straightened up. “Well, you heard Elder Zinel. Return here in four hours, and when you do we shall tell you who you will fight. Go.” He gestured at the exit, and Garrick turned and left, feeling Vralis’ gaze boring into his back as he did.

\*

“Me again.” Yet again Garrick jumped as Sahlin poked his head into Garrick’s quarters, this time not even waiting for the wolf to settle down before entering. “I’ve got some bad news.”

Garrick frowned. “It would have to be pretty awful news to make today any worse.”

“I know who you’re going to be fighting.”

Garrick’s frown deepened. Combat trials were usually supposed to be between two of equal size and skill, but in his case he didn’t know for certain. He wouldn’t put it past them to match him against one of the combat instructors, although he was still sure he could even beat them.

“Well? Who is it?”

“It’s Elder Vralis.” The colour drained from Garrick’s face as he heard this, and he took an involuntary step back. “He’s convinced you’re a traitor and he wants to deal with you himself.”

“Shit.” Garrick knew he didn’t stand a chance, not against Vralis. He wasn’t even worrying about the potential exile at the end of the trial anymore - he’d be lucky to walk out of that ring with his body in one piece. He needed strength, something to give him an edge, some kind of magic boost, something like…

“Sahlin, I need you to cover for me. I’m going out.”

The black wolf tilted his head. “Where?”

“North, an hour from here. Keep them off me till I get back.” Garrick stood, strapping on his armour with grim determination in his eyes. Without another word he stepped out, striding purposefully towards either death or glory - it was too early to tell which.

\*

The sun was merciless on his back as he trekked north, but he paid it little attention, for his mind was elsewhere. A long time ago he’d found something odd - whilst trekking up the mountain he’d come across a cave, deep and black and filled to the brim with magical artifacts. There were so many that they were spilling out from the mouth of the cave, but at the time he had left it alone. He’d had the distinct impression something was watching him, and at the time he’d been unwilling to find out whether his instincts were correct or not. Well after some questioning it turned out that the cave was the lair of a rather special dragon, an ancient blue beast known as Torvanskir. Rumour had it that you could obtain some of the cave’s magical power, but the dragon would ensure that you paid a price in order to do so. Right now he didn’t care what the price was, it couldn’t be worse than facing Vralis in the arena with no help.

It took longer than he expected to climb all the way back to the lair, but after two hours of climbing he found himself at a rock plateau, and at one end was the cave. This was far from the small notches that marked the mountain, this was a great chasm that spanned nearly 100ft of width, the back of it shrouded in darkness so that it appeared almost endless. Just like before it was filled to the brim with magical artifacts, the collective power making Garrick’s fur stand on end as he walked up. He wouldn’t even know where to begin if he wanted to just take something, but he just knew that he wouldn’t be allowed to anyway. He approached the cave, pulled out his hunting knife and threw it aside. It made a sharp clink that echoed through the mountain.

“I’m not here to fight.” He shouted into the darkness, feeling slightly foolish for doing so.

“Curious.” A pair of yellow eyes opened up in the darkness at his eye level, staring at him with a predatory gaze. It was different from Frack’s stare, he could feel the fierce intelligence behind it, the malevolence like a force all of its own. “An unarmed wolf turning up at my cave, just giving himself to me? Very curious.” The eyes began to rise upwards, and as they did the form of the dragon slowly came into view. He towered over Garrick, thick but not notably muscular, merely boasting the kind of mass and muscle befitting of a creature such as himself. Despite this Garrick was no less frightened - the beast was huge, and as it strode purposefully towards him he got the impression it was holding itself back.

“You’re Torvanskir?”

“That I am.” The dragon looked down at the wolf and slowly began to walk around him, his tail just touching Garrick here and there, winding sinuously around him but not quite coming into contact. “I wonder who would mourn your absence, little wolf? Should you vanish, would anyone come looking for you?”

“There would be a hunting party.” Garrick said, but the dragon pressed it’s face right against his, that gleaming yellow eye drowning him in its stare.

“Lies. I can *[i]smell[/i]* the fear on you, I can feel the trembles running through that fragile little body. You cannot hide weakness with words.” He grinned, leaning forwards and snorting a puff of hot air around Garrick. The sound of sizzling fur filled the air as a few grey strands blackened and burnt down an inch or two.

Garrick sighed. “You’re right. I’m here alone, no backup, no hope. I have nothing to offer, and should you refuse to help me then I would face death anyway. But I came here to bargain.”

“Oh?” Tor stepped away and folded his front paws in, settling down and leaning forward so that he and Garrick were eye level. “And what would you be bargaining for, precisely?”

“Strength. Temporary, but far more than I have now.”

“Interesting.” The dragon hummed, clicking razor-sharp claws against the stone floor. “Many of your kind come here seeking power to earn themselves glory. But you, you have desperate eyes. What do you want power for?”

“You don’t need to know.” Garrick reached for his hunting knife, putting it back in the holster. It wouldn’t make the slightest bit of difference should they fight, and they both knew it, but it still made him feel a little more comfortable.

“Oh but I believe otherwise.” The dragon grinned, but it wasn’t a cheerful smile, more like the kind of toothy grin a shark gives a small fish. “If we are to make a deal then there should be no secrets, hmm?” The dragon smiled at him, letting the silence hang in the air, seemingly unaffected by it as Garrick grew more and more nervous.

“I...I’ve got to fight someone.” Garrick stuttered, squirming under that unrelenting gaze.

“Yes, that’s it, doesn’t it feel better to let it out? And what happens should you lose?”

“I’ll be e-exiled. Or killed. Or worse.” The reality of the situation hit Garrick, his legs feeling like jelly as he stood there praying the dragon would hear him. He was just as ready for Tor to snap forward and swallow him in one big gulp, or skewer him with a single vicious claw, or perhaps just disappear once again. But instead the dragon smiled once more.

“There, that wasn’t so hard was it?” Tor stood up, light gleaming off his scales, and went back into the cave. Garrick could see him rummaging around for a few seconds before he returned with a glass orb. It was opaque, shimmering with an ethereal light that he couldn’t quite focus on, and about the size of a basketball. Tor set it down in front of him, returning to his previous sitting position and watching. Garrick went to grab it but a single claw moved it out of reach.

“Ah ah ah. I don’t do freebies.” Tor’s chuckle was like an earthquake, deep and menacing. “This is something I picked up from an emperor, the 5th king of Shakval. He sacrificed his own people, took their strength to use for himself, to rule as emperor over all. I did the same to him.”

“How does it work?” Garrick’s eyes widened as he looked at the orb. He could hear faint voices the longer he stared at it, pleas for help just slightly too quiet to hear properly.

“Desperation. It would yield all its strength to someone with nothing left to lose. There’s a reason I chose this one in particular.” The dragon winked. “I will not let you borrow this power without a sacrifice of your own though. Once you’ve won your little fight, you will return the strength you borrowed as well as half of your own.”

Garrick didn’t like the sound of that - as a warrior his strength was all he had, and losing half of it would be catastrophic. However if he did nothing he would be dead before the day was out.

“There must be something else you wish for. I could bring others here, give you their strength instead.” Garrick said, little trembles in his voice giving away his thoughts about this price.

“You misunderstand your situation, little wolf. I need nothing from such a pathetic creature as yourself. You are an ant, one that is buying the boot hovering over your head. Bargaining will not make that boot feel any softer should it land.” Tor’s voice took on a different note, and Garrick noticed the faint glow of fire in the back of the dragon’s throat, just visible past those grinning teeth. He could feel those words winding around him like honey, that voice alluring even though it was promising his death - he’d never had a choice in this matter. From the moment he arrived this was going to be the outcome, he had no choice but to go along with it.

The dragon’s eyes gleamed as he reached for the orb. “Yes, that’s it. Take your strength, little wolf. What is it your kind say, a deal is a deal?” The dragon’s chuckle made Garrick’s hackles rise, it was so hideously malevolent. He was starting to realise the dragon was toying with him, that he had no cards to play. He had never had a choice from the start, the dragon had just played around with him to make him believe otherwise. With a feeling like he was about to seal his fate, he reached forward and placed both hands on the orb.

It was like placing both hands onto an electrical cable. He could feel the power raging within the orb, crashing as if striving to free itself, and as he made contact he felt that power begin to siphon into his body. A sense of heat filled his veins as the power of hundreds of thousands of souls were compressed and forced into his frame, as he trembled and shook with energy before slowly beginning to swell with size. Garrick was already muscular, but the orb took his beefy build and maxed it all the way out, forcing power into him until his muscles were exploding with size. His eyes rolled back into his head as he felt himself grow far beyond any of the tribe, as he felt his body swell and harden all over. He paused to look down and see the changes, and his eyes widened. He looked like Vrasil now, bigger even: every last muscle group was massively swollen, his armour shearing off as his body evolved beyond the need for it, as he turned from a wolf into a massive, shredded beast. He laughed at the absurdity of it all, at how his former problems seemed to melt away in the face of such power, and as he did so he realised he’d barely scratched the surface of the orb’s power. Just a fraction had been enough to do all this, what would happen if he took the rest of it? Would he be even stronger than the dragon? A smile curled the corner of his mouth as a plan formed in his head, a way to turn the tables on Tor. He would take all the strength the orb had to offer, and when he did the dragon wouldn’t be able to force him to give it back. He would be massively powerful with no cost. All this time the dragon had mocked him, toyed with him, now it would be his turn to return the favour. He didn’t bother to hide the smile as he redoubled his efforts to pull power from the orb, now drawing it out as fast as he could. The energy flowed, a thick stream of it pulsing through his body, and with it came an increase in height and size. Garrick had arrived a mere 6ft tall, but now the orb pushed him past 10ft, then 12, then 14. All the while any available space was instantly filled with twitching muscle, great slabs of strength wrapping around his arms over and over again, his body swelling outwards as well as upwards. Tor watched patiently as the wolf began to eclipse him in size, as he went from looking down to looking up, as the sun was blocked out by the ever increasing wolf.

It took Garrick mere minutes before he was twice the size of the dragon. He felt the orb fully empty of power, felt the last of it curl through his veins with a delicious little spurt of heat. It was intoxicating, and it definitely went to Garrick’s head. He looked down at the dragon and laughed.

“You look a lot less threatening than you did a couple minutes ago.” Garrick said, reveling in his much deeper voice, in the way his body shook the ground with just the merest step. He flexed an arm and watched the bicep explode to enormous size, hundreds of pounds of muscle crammed together under the fur.

Annoyingly though that arrogant smile never left Tor’s face. The dragon cocked his head as he watched Garrick flex, as he almost *[i]felt [/i]*muscles crunching against each other.

“Seems my part of the bargain is fulfilled. Go and do as you wish, but remember. I’ll be waiting.” The dragon knew exactly what was going to happen but still he played along, giving Garrick a chance to prove him wrong.

“Oh, I don’t think so.” Garrick said, stopping his flexing and staring down menacingly. He felt invincible, all-powerful. “You’re not taking this strength back, and I’m gonna make sure of it.” He drew back a fist and sent it hurtling towards Tor’s face, the strength of a hundred thousand behind it.

It never reached its destination, stopping mere inches from Tor’s face. The dragon didn’t even blink, he just sighed.

“Dear me little wolf, reneging on our deal? That won’t do at all.” Tor stood, stretching luxuriously as Garrick tried desperately to move. He was frozen in place, all that muscle held effortlessly still.

“What...did you...do?”

“I told you, I killed the previous owner of that orb. He forced the power into that orb to stop me getting to it, but it is still mine to command. I control it as I please.” Tor held up a claw and Garrick felt himself slowly lower his fist, his body moving but not due to him. He wasn’t in control anymore, he was just a puppet with Torvanskir pulling the strings.

“You…..”

“You know, the funny thing is I was happy to lend you that power. I never could extract it myself - after all, it needs desperation.” Tor chuckled. “I doubt a creature like me could ever feel such a thing. But you, all those emotions over some petty, irrelevant little task, a wolf with nothing left to lose, you were perfect. I would thank you, but considering your actions I think a more… *[i]permanent [/i]*reward is in order, hmm?”

“What are….. you doing?” Garrick felt his body move of its own accord, forcing him onto his back as he lay down, palms against the floor.

“Your body is unstable, leaking power, unable to hold it. All I need to do is touch you and that power will come pouring out.” As if to demonstrate he trailed a claw along Garrick’s forearm, and just that tiny contact was enough to siphon a small amount of strength out, the wolf’s arm shrinking as the dragon’s arm grew, the size theft heralded by a thrumming purr of satisfaction. “I’m going to enjoy this.”

Garrick watched with horror as Tor slowly climbed onto his body. At his current size the dragon was the size of a medium-sized dog, easily able to fit on top of the wall of muscle that was the wolf’s chest, but of course the moment the contact began he felt ice thrum through his veins, and size began to leak out. An involuntary moan escaped his lips as he felt all that warmth leave him for another, all that strength slowly beginning to filter away. Muscle quivered and shrunk as his eyes rolled helplessly in their sockets - the sensation felt like his body was imploding, drawing in on itself until it would eventually turn into a tiny, compressed ice cube. Torvanskir on the other hand was the opposite, the dragon grunting in pleasure as his body swelled with stolen power. Initially the dragon’s paws were just about reaching around Garrick’s chest, but with every second that passed he felt them slowly slide around his body, covering more and more of his diminishing form.

“*[i]Hnghhh[/i]*, I can’t tell you how good this feels.” Tor looked down with a grin at Garrick’s horrified expression. The wolf definitely didn’t share the sentiment, feeling himself grow smaller and weaker without being able to do a thing about it. The weight on his chest had been negligible at first, but it was starting to get heavier and heavier as Tor’s frame filled out with muscle. Just like Garrick muscle was the first change, cords of steel wrapping around his body and fortifying it with immense power. Garrick could feel himself begin to sink a little deeper into the ground as Tor’s weight skyrocketed, hundreds of pounds of muscle repurposed to a more deserving owner.

The wolf tried to say something, but he could only manage a pained moan as yet more strength was sucked out. As Tor grew in size the contact between them increased, which meant the rate of growth increased as well. Garrick wanted to push him off, to swat the dragon away like a mosquito, to put his immense strength to use while he still had it. But he was powerless as the dragon slowly draped himself further over him, as he felt his body shrivel away. Despite the fact that the dragon had grown to almost the same size he currently was, he hadn’t shrunk that much. He could still feel muscle tightening all over his body, a welcome surprise considering he’d been expecting much worse. Tor noticed his change in mood.

“Oh, now isn’t that just adorable. You really think I would spare you out of the kindness of my heart?” Tor laughed, and Garrick noted with a tinge of fear that it was deeper and more powerful than before. He could feel that laugh reverberating through his chest now, bouncing around his body like an echo in a cave, rattling his very bones. Tor brought his face close, one paw held in the air to tighten the magic holding Garrick in place. The wolf found what little control he had pulled even tighter, his magical leash snapped back as his speech was halted. He could only move his eyes, and he felt them water as Tor brought his face close.

“Take a good, long look Garrick. Tell me if you can find the slightest scrap of mercy in there.” Tor held the position so long that a solitary tear ran from Garrick’s eye - he couldn’t even blink, let alone wipe it away. “You squander that power, you can’t use most of it and the rest burns off you. But I’m far more efficient. I’m going to squeeze every last drop of it out of you, and I’m going to take my time doing it.” The dragon stood, holding out a claw and widening his fingers. Garrick gasped as he felt the smallest scrap of control return - he could move his eyes, blink and talk, but nothing more.

“Fuck you!”

“Now now, that isn’t any way to address your superior is it?” Tor grinned as he forced Garrick to stand up, lazily flicking his claws in the wolf’s direction. The wolf couldn’t stand how easy Tor made it look, like it was no effort at all to keep a beast like him chained in place, obeying his every whim. “I suppose I should make your position clear. After all, you can’t obey if you think you’re the stronger of us two, can you?” Tor clicked his claws and Garrick growled as he felt himself walk forwards. The dragon lifted himself onto his hind legs, and for the first time Garrick was permitted to get a proper look at his new form. Muscle was exploding off him just as it had once done off the wolf, his body gnarled and knotted with strength. He looked stockier than before, although his height hadn’t changed much - it was just an illusion created by his new size, his body wider and thicker than before.

Garrick was forced to watch as Tor held his arms up, flexing the biceps there. He thought he was just going to be watching but to his displeasure he was forced to walk forward and place both hands on the dragon’s bicep. Up close he was still a tiny bit taller, their builds still uneven in favour of the wolf, but that was being remedied very quickly. Once again the moment contact was made he felt that dreadful cold again, only this time it was even worse because it felt like he was doing it himself. No matter how hard he strained he couldn’t make himself let go, he was forced to grip and feel the muscle swell under his paws, hear the pleasured moans of the dragon as he took the power he so desired.

“I imagine you fighters value your upper body strength quite a bit.” Tor said, his breath huffy with pleasure. “Let’s see if you still imagine yourself stronger when my bicep weighs more than you do.” Garrick’s eyes widened as his hands locked into place, and the drain increased in pace. Tor was literally draining him dry, the vicious grin never leaving his face as he literally ripped the strength from the wolf, ravaged his form and left it barren. He could only watch as his arms slowly shrunk, going from thick trunks to toned branches as the borrowed strength was ripped out. The feeling of the bicep pulsing larger under his paws was amazing, though he would never admit it. He loved how each second his grip was forced further apart, how he’d started by grabbing around it with both hands and now he was starting to slide down, he was starting to need more and more of his arms to get all the way around it.

Suddenly he felt himself be lifted into the air, and as he looked down he realised that his height had been taken as well. The dragon was towering over him now, his body thick with muscle, and he was being held aloft with what seemed like no effort whatsoever. The bicep that he had once been able to grip in his hands had morphed into a titanic mound of diamond, so hard that he couldn’t even make an indent if he had been able to attempt to. Now both his arms were occupied with wrapping around the largest, most powerful arm he had ever seen in his life, a masterpiece of strength and size, of power organised into massively swollen muscle groups. It was less an arm and more of a weapon, a nuclear bomb compared to the pistols he was now sporting. He felt a strange sensation under his fingers, like someone was snaking a thick rope beneath his grip, and he realised it was vein pulsing to the surface underneath the scales. It was thicker than his finger, throbbing hard as blood sprinted around the dragon’s body, hard enough that he felt his fingers go up and down slightly in time with the dragon’s heartbeat. It felt like a garden hose filled with tar, heavy and thick but still hard, pinned between scale and muscle. Tor lifted him higher and Garrick felt his paws slowly begin to separate. He was clinging to that arm like he was trying to carry a barrel, the muscle pressing into the crooks of his elbows and his chest, but it still wasn’t enough. Tor flexed harder, a snarl ripping through the air, and the bicep peak was so high that it was too much for him to hold onto. His grip was broken, and he fell to the floor painfully - Tor didn’t bother to let him break his fall or react in anyway. He cared little for the discomfort of what he regarded as his new battery, focused only on extracting the sweet power inside.

By now the size difference had begun to level out, and as Tor forced Garrick to his feet he was forced to look up to meet the dragon’s gaze. It wasn’t the size they had both started out as, but he was maybe half the size he had been before. Tor on the other hand was looking like a monster, his body so thick with muscle that he was cracking the ground just by standing there. He flexed wing muscles that looked like undersea cables, smooth masses of strength piled on. Garrick couldn’t even tell if the dragon could fly anymore - he looked far too heavy to even get off the ground. He wasn’t allowed to question it though as Tor pounced forward. The dragon hit him like a freight train, scooping him up with arms that were thicker than his torso, pinning him tightly to his chest. He struggled, and suddenly realised that he was being allowed to struggle again, that control had returned to his body.

“Hey! HEY!” He yelled at Tor, trying his hardest to escape the iron grip the dragon had on him. It was pointless, and as he felt the strength drain resume yet again he heard the dragon laugh.

“You know, it’s not quite the same if you don’t *[i]squirm[/i]* a little.” Tor’s voice was somehow even deeper, a bassy rumble that rattled his bones and made him squirm just from hearing it. His response however never came as the grip around his body tightened, and he felt the breath whoosh out of his lungs. The strength of the dragon was insane, he felt like he was being crushed underneath a mountain. He struggled as hard as he could, he shattered his teeth trying to bite into the dragon’s corded forearm, but nothing he did made even the tiniest millimetre of change. Tor’s strength was so far out of his league that it was in another galaxy, and that gap was only widening as the arms slowly slid further around him, as the grip became ever more crushing. He could feel the muscle underneath him swelling, feel veins pop up here and there as they pressed into his face, feel his body creak and groan as the very essence of what made him a warrior was taken, ripped from his still struggling form. He groaned with a voice that only grew higher in pitch as Tor’s voice deepened, as his own strength was turned against him.

“Yes, that’s it. Can you feel it?” Tor squeezed, muscle rippling all over his body as he surged with power. He pulsed with height and size, sinking slightly deeper into the ground, his tightening grip cracking a groan out of Garrick. “All that power seeping out of you, the strength of thousands, the power to shatter this world. It’s *[i]mine[/i]*.” Tor snarled those last words out, crushing Garrick against his body. He was trapped here, in this endless draining grasp, doomed to have his essence sucked out of his body until there was nothing left. Despite having control of his body there was nothing he could do to shift the titanic monstrosity of a dragon holding him, nothing he could say. He almost preferred it when he’d been held back, because it hid just how pathetic he was compared to Tor. As a warrior he prided himself on strength, on courage, but he had neither of those right now. He had given in to fear, but more than that he had given in to the dragon. Tor shook and moaned and grew, and he could do nothing but watch the dragon’s ascension, watch those scales pulse outwards as ton after ton of muscle forced them apart.

When Tor finally let him go, he fell a lot further than he was expecting. He hit the ground, hard, and looking up realised that the dragon towered over him now. He was still somehow muscular, his body clinging to the last vestiges of strength, but next to Torvanskir he looked like a matchstick. The dragon snorted, two enormous puffs of smoke enveloping Garrick’s body and temporarily blinding him.

“You’re a persistent little thing, aren’t you?” Tor rumbled from somewhere high above. Garrick felt fear course through him, and he scrambled to his feet and tried to run. He shouldn’t have even bothered - Tor’s claws came slamming down just inches in front of him, hard enough to crack the ground and send him tumbling back. He ran the other direction but another paw hit the ground in front of him, and this time he was actually lifted into the air by the force of the impact.

“Gaaahhh!”

“Poor little Garrick. Such high ambitions, left tragically unfulfilled.” Garrick watched in horror as the dragon’s tail encircled him, forming a perfect loop of muscular flesh. It wound around him like a living thing, all the while the dragon circled him, his footsteps deep, heavy thumps that made him bounce off the ground. “You really thought you could outsmart a dragon, didn’t you? Bless.” Garrick let out a squeak as the tail wound around him, but it faded into a pained groan as he felt the last drops of strength start to be drawn out. The power that he had borrowed was almost fully gone now, his body returning to the state it had been before this whole nightmare had begun. Unfortunately those last few drops were the hardest to extract, which meant that the wolf was wrapped tight in a cocoon of muscle, every available inch of his body in contact with the dragon. It felt like the last bit of strength was deep in his soul, and the dragon was pulling his very essence out along with it. All the while Tor’s grip tightened from every side, squeezed him for the very last dribble. Tor didn’t need all of it, in fact at this point it barely made a difference to his colossal body - no, he did it for the principle, he did it because he enjoyed feeling the wolf squirm against him. He enjoyed those feeble little whimpers as he grew into a monster, as he took the strength that he had sought for so long. It was the climax he had waited for, the moment he had planned and plotted and schemed for. Garrick’s body was just the catalyst, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t enjoy the moment, and oh how he did.

When there wasn’t an atom of strength left in Garrick’s body, Tor finally let him go. The wolf was his old size but he had never felt weaker, like he hadn’t slept in a week, whereas the dragon was literally burning with energy.

“Well, now that the rights have been wronged, I suppose it’s time for your payment.”

Garrick’s eyes widened. “B-but you didn’t give me the power?!”

“Justice is such a wonderful concept, don’t you think?” Tor’s grin only widened as he raised a paw and pinned Garrick to the floor. “You attempt to take from me, so it seems only fair that I attempt to take from you. Of course you can try and stop me, in fact I hope that you do. But we both know what’s going to happen here, don’t we?”

“N-no! PLEASE!”

Tor only grinned harder as he raised himself onto his rear legs, his wings stretching outwards in a show of dominance. “Ah, I was wondering when you would start begging. You lasted longer than most you know, something to be proud of. I’d cherish it if I were you, after all there won’t be much of yourself left to be proud of after this. Heh.” Garrick felt the hideous, cold sensation of his body losing strength, his once muscular form losing all the definition. He was small enough to fit underneath just one of Tor’s immense paws, and even though the dragon wasn’t pressing down on him or anything he found it impossible to move. He managed to free an arm somehow, his fist smacking on one of those thick toes repeatedly, but he might as well have been hitting solid rock. Tor didn’t even notice him, just roaring louder while Garrick’s blows weakened, his hand slowly trailing off as all the energy was ripped from him. It was just a couple of seconds of draining, and it made absolutely zero difference to Tor’s size, but Garrick went from muscular to skinny during that time, his body went from that of a fighter to a weakling, a runt that would have been kicked out of the tribe upon sight. The roar from above him was utterly dominating, echoing through the land in a ferocious display of strength. He finally finished his growth, lifting his paw and coming crashing down onto four paws again, grinning at how the mountain shook from the impact.

“Well now, was that as enjoyable for you as it was for me?” Tor laughed as Garrick groaned, his thin body twisted in awkward directions. He was lying in a claw-shaped crater, the result of Tor’s weight, feeling too weak to even lift himself up. “I must say, I haven’t felt this good in centuries. I’m tempted to feed you some more power just to do it once more. Although...” Tor gave a flex that was mind-blowing, his body exploding with size as muscles clashed for space all across his body. These were biceps like gigantic boulders, diamond-hard with veins pulsing across the surface, each one many times larger than Garrick. The dragon was a mountain of muscle, a literal wall that was so wide he couldn’t even see him entirely without turning his head. He was a tank, a living weapon of apocalyptic potential, a walking cataclysm just waiting to be unleashed upon this fragile world. And Garrick had been the one to make him this way. He was forced to watch the dragon’s evil grin widen, Torvanskir’s natural narcissism only being fed by possessing such a godly form.

“Now then, I wonder what you brought with you.” Tor’s claw was the size of Garricks’ body, lethally sharp and black as sin, and it was guided with small, precise movements over his belongings. Garrick watched as it hovered, and then delicately severed the chain of the necklace around his body. “What have we here then?” He lifted it up, the trinket laughably tiny trapped between his claws.

“S’mine.”

Tor didn’t even respond to him properly, he just waved a claw in his general direction, motioning for him to be quiet. The dragon inspected the necklace closely, giving it a sniff at one point. “A charm of sustenance. As disgustingly common as you are.” The dragon opened his maw and threw it in, a quick crunch signalling the end of it, and he sighed at the small influx of size the magical boost gave him before returning to his inspection. That same claw cut away his leather armour, his potions of healing, the knife strapped to his back. Tor looked at the armour with something close to disdain.

“Not even the faintest of magical enchantments. I didn’t think there existed something worth less than yourself.” Tor sneered down at Garrick before inhaling and blowing out a long stream of fire. It was so bright the wolf was forced to look away, and when he stopped shielding his eyes there was nothing but a pool of melted slop dripping between Tor’s claws, which he dropped to the floor with a disgusted sigh. He took more interest in the dagger though, holding it up to the light.

“Curious craftsmanship. Your blacksmith is rather skilled, perhaps I should enslave him.” Tor mused for a couple of seconds, but eventually his need to test out his power won out. This time he clenched his gut, squeezed the fire glands in the base of his neck, and breathed out the hottest fire he could muster. It wasn’t even fire at that point, more like a blinding spear of light that lit up the mountain, scorched the image into Garrick’s retinas even though he closed them in time. It was only half a second of fire again, but this time the heat was so intense that the wolf’s fur caught fire, the ground around him scorched as the sheer heat overwhelmed and cracked the stone. He rolled about for a few seconds in order to put it out, his cries of pain feeble and weak.

“Oh do shut up. Your pathetic little cries are most irritating.” Tor’s tone brooked no argument, and Garrick shut himself up immediately. He was just waiting for death to take him, whether due to dragon or wolf - he was bound for it all the same.

“Wh….what are you going to do?” Garrick managed to say, his body quivering with pain and weakness.

“Oh, I should think that was obvious. You can’t fight in your current state, which means you need a champion to fight for you. And who better than myself?” Tor slammed a claw on the ground and completely shattered the stone, cracks sinking deep into the rock until they reached the very base of the mountain, the world trembling and buckling under his strength.

“No….”

“I imagine there might be some...collateral damage.” Tor chuckled again, playing with the broken stone at his feet. “You mortals never did learn to make anything particularly sturdy after all, but you can always rebuild. I’ll at least try to hold back, avoid leaving it a scorched crater in the ground. No guarantees though.” The dragon winked as he reached down and picked up Garrick, placing him in the hollow at the back of his neck. The wolf could feel the wing muscles moving underneath him, like the movement of tectonic plates shifting and sliding.

“Please...you can’t…” Visions of his tribe in smoking ruins flashed before his eyes, nightmares of everyone he knew being trampled underneath a dragon the size of a mountain. But there was nothing he could do about it anymore.

“I hope you weren’t fond of your challenger. Not to be too graphic but he’s going to be a particularly crunchy paste when I’m done with him.” Tor’s chuckle started off slow, but as he spread his wings and began to flap it morphed into a monstrous roar that thundered through the land, causing every living creature for miles around to cower in fear. The world already trembled at his presence, but he would teach it to fear it. He would stamp his memory into the surface of this pathetic, fragile world.

And it would start with Garrick’s tribe.