

## Dragons.

When one spoke about the various races, dragons were both revered and feared worldwide. As they were famed for their overwhelming strength and ferocity, countless tales told of meeting dragons and experiencing grim ends. They were the ultimate lifeforms under the gods themselves. They were a race that stood below one and above thousands. If not taken down in their infancy, dragons were guaranteed to bring disasters wherever they went.

At least, those were the stories told. Even with civilizations that worshipped dragons, they agreed that one must do everything one can to appease them. Otherwise, what awaited them was a gaze into hell itself. There would be *no one* able to save them. Hearing such stories, one's first instinct when greeting even their shadow would be to run away. Even the brave would find their courage faltering when facing such intimidation.

Of course, the scholars, sages, and mages agreed that there were a few moments when one's chances of staying alive would increase. Those moments were also a near-guaranteed chance of *killing* dragons. And of those moments, the greatest was during a dragon's pregnancy. After all, even the mighty could fall in inopportune moments.

The weight of the young during pregnancy would encumber most mothers. Despite their nearly incomprehensible might, dragons were subject to the same law of the world. During their pregnancies, female dragons would encounter a long period of weakness due to energy spent developing their unborn young. Sufficient sustenance could offset this, but the female dragon would still feel lethargic. If one found a pregnant female dragon, their chances of surviving the encounter would increase drastically. That then increased further during childbirth.

It was also childbirth that allowed ambitious races the opportunity to kill a dragon. Their state of weakness was at its peak after they gave birth. Such tales of 'slaying dragons' came from attacking the laboring mother. Of course, to ensure the safety of their young, many female dragons would fight to the death in their weakened state.

Because of this, many would-be 'Dragon Slayers' do not live to tell their tales. Even when given such chances, many are incapable of achieving greatness.

For one female dragon, however, she had thought her time was ending. Her mate had died a few weeks after they became one with each other, and her pregnancy made it strenuous for her to walk. Flying

was out of the question due to her prodigiously progeny-packed paunch. Her pregnancy was particularly prominent. It caused her stomach to spill out from her sides, slightly scraping the ground with her scales. At least five young dragons were growing within her. Naturally, her movement was significantly sluggish. No matter how much she ate, it wasn't enough to offset her lethargy.

Because of this, she made a nest near an active volcano. The boiling magma would deter anyone daring to attack her. At the same time, the environment was great for her developing children. They would be more attuned to flames than she ever could. When she changed her home, the dragon thought she would be safe until her unborn young were finally born.

At the current moment, however, she was flooded with a sense of dread. Someone had found her lair. Normally, she would dispose of those who intruded on her territory. She knew a few spells to teleport others away. It didn't work when she tried it today, however. That meant their magic was far more powerful than hers. Within her territory, only a few races dared to approach her. Faced with their increasing aura, she thought of one race.

Demons.

Humans referred to them as the scourge of the world. Their longevity, magical prowess, and physical strength were on par with dragons. If caught in unfortunate situations, some demons could kill dragons. Such was rare but still possible. It felt like she would be another such case. Despite this, the dragon still wanted to try to defend herself. If there was a chance to live, she wanted to take it.

Because of this, the dragon tried to get up with much difficulty. Resting in the volcano would do her no good at this moment. She needed to take the chance to escape if there was one. Before she fully got out of the lava, however, she felt a deadly aura surrounding her nest. The few seconds were enough for the demon to arrive.

It stood before her, clad in red clothing. She had picked up names of things from various races she interacted with. It covered its face with a hood, but the aura was distinctive to demons. She could tell something else was present in it as well. Such was an aura the elder dragons told her to fear.

This demon had *killed* dragons before. Underneath its hood, its claws had touched draconic blood. Even more fear welled up inside. If the female dragon felt apprehensive before, now she was terrified. Any chance of escape became zero. She had no way to fight in her current state. Her command over flames wasn't as high as her late mate's. Such wouldn't matter against much weaker species. Demons

were a different matter altogether. Since it had resisted her teleportation spell, she wouldn't have a chance of defeating it.

Tears were welling up in her eyes as it walked closer and closer to her. Her voice wouldn't come out. She could almost feel its claws around her neck. Slipping back into the lava wouldn't save her. Nothing she could do would help her nor her children. Her mouth opened as she tried to use her draconic breath in vain. The demon blocked her flames with its magical barrier. On seeing this, tears began streaking down her eyes.

When she resigned herself to death, however, it didn't appear. For a minute, she had waited for *something* to happen that didn't. Surprisingly, the demon didn't attack her. Instead, she could feel her body moving with magic. Naturally, this was the demon's magic controlling her. Such proved its prowess. Softly, she got placed against the ground, close to the lava pool.

Her substantially stretched, significantly spawn-swollen stomach started shifting when she got placed on the ground. While she wondered why she didn't die, her colossal child-carrying core felt a claw against it. Slowly, the demon's hand rubbed her terrifically taut tummy. At first, she was still cautious of its actions.

After half an hour of it, however, her guard was lowered. She allowed the demon to rub her swollen, stretched womb. It soothed her significantly, even with her young kicking more intensely. Already, she could feel its magic coursing through her body. After going through her memories, she recognized the pattern the magic made.

"This is no place for you, young dragon."

While the voice was slightly unpleasant, she couldn't sense any malice. The demon already retracted its aura as well. After another half hour, the dragon had completely relaxed. She felt that he wouldn't harm her. If he wanted to, she would have perished already.

"Come with me."

"... Why should I?"

Even if he didn't harm her, her vigilance rose again due to his words. Surprisingly, he didn't attack her. After a few minutes, he slowly answered.

“I need you for a purpose. Of course, I will protect your children.”

“You... You will?”

More shock rolled through her body. She hadn't expected the demon to say that. When the demon nodded, she felt more surprised.

“On the name Erudynn.”

“... Okay. I will trust you.”

“Good.”

In saying this, the magic pattern around her body became visible. She was bound to the demon through her spirit. While this might have been foolish, she wanted the best for her children. With that finished, he then began walking out of her lair. Taking a deep breath, she followed him.

She chose to believe he told the truth. No matter what purpose he wanted her for, as long as it was for her children, she would do it. As such, the dragon's new life began.

From then on, she was Erudya.