

Tip the Scales

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(Night Fury TFTG)

SFW

[The following is a work of fiction, any resemblance of the characters depicted herein to individuals living or dead is purely coincidental]

Synopsis: A man finds himself transformed into an anthro female Night Fury and struggles to adjust.

“People always say getting up on the wrong side of the bed ruins your entire day, but what if I sleep in a hammock or on the floor?” Morning Host Herbert Mulgrave’s golden radio voice stirred Night from sleep, the college student’s digital alarm skipping past beeping in favor of smooth morning jazz and early news. “That’s funny folks, exactly what Jerry wrote down on my itinerary. That music cue isn’t my doing either. I don’t even like jazz.”

Tuesdays traditionally served as Night’s lazy days- when his lecture hall started late enough that he could sleep in without needing an alarm at all- but his New Years’ resolution called for *vigorous morning exercise* and he’d managed to keep to his schedule for the past 10 days. Proactive thinking, sure, but rubbing reddened tired eyes didn’t make him feel any healthier.

Unlocking his phone with his thumb, Night opened his athletic trainer app, free version because he wasn’t ready to *fully* commit until he hit 30 days, and quickly skimmed through to see what the morning’s damage would be.

Running and lunges. A *lot* of lunges. Some might say *too many* lunges.

Wonderful.

Night slipped into his workout clothes, cheap Adidas t-shirt and athletic

shorts with black New Balance sneakers. He fastened his watch around his wrist, the digital display set to timer mode. Sure he could cheat on his workout schedule, but then the guilt would settle in and he'd feel miserable the rest of the day.

Shuffling over to his apartment kitchen, Night quickly drew together a quick breakfast, wild berry Pop Tart thrown in the toaster and instant Keurig cup slammed down, 12oz chosen over 8. Today had all the hallmarks of the grueling *usual* fare, lecture and recitation, team marketing projects stacked atop marketing projects, and-

Night stared blankly at the glistening black scales crawling along the back of his hand. Flesh dipped in oil, a sheen that grew and expanded before his eyes. Patterns etched across his skin broke apart into alligator toughness. Each armored plate that formed along his elbows weighed down his limbs until his muscles adequately strengthened. Through all the pangs of wonder and horror that flashed across his mind, only one thought stayed concrete.

This is not happening.

The rending of his form continued, an unstoppable creep up his armored elbows to hunched shoulders that strained against his collared shirt, his bones thickening and expanding as he felt a pressure build at the base of his spine.

The sneakers he'd just slipped into burst and frayed, his toes longer, scallier, tipped with curled nails that melted and reformed as honed talons, twisted human keratin dipped in ink. Bones contorted and shifted, the shape of Night's sole distorted, widened for seizing lands both arboreal and along rocky seaside cliffs.

This is not happening.

Night's back arched with painless cracks and snaps, his torso elongating upward and hunching forward as he dragged himself from the kitchen back to his bedroom. The man fell upon his scaly hands, watch still clinging to his thickened wrists, a thought racing across his mind that being quadrupedal worked just as well as standing upright. Recoiling from the notion, he shot back up to his feet as his new tail yearned into life, sprouting outward with fresh vertebrae clinking together in lockstep with armored plates beneath brilliant midnight scales.

A new pressure built behind his shoulders, bumps rising up out of sight, but he could feel and hear the tearing of his athletic shirt. He knew exactly what the new appendages were even before the clawed tips drifted forward into his peripheral vision. Bat-like wings, as dark as the rest of his changing form, with an impressive span too. Night breathed a quick sigh of relief for the first time during the metamorphosis. He wouldn't have to involuntarily extend those great wings, tearing his apartment apart.

He took the emergence of another set at the base of his tail in stride, making sure that even as the secondary pair of wings extended outward that he stayed far away from his computer set-up or dresser covered with memorabilia. No accidents, nothing damaged or-

The explosion of a wide fan at the tip of his tail caught Night off guard and he instinctively jerked the limb to the side and knocked over a lamp with a crash and spark of electricity.

Dragon's wings to accompany a dragon's tail...

This is happening.

Cursing under his breath, Night rushed to his room's bathroom annex, nearly tripping over his swollen talon feet. Catching himself against the sink, he gazed up into the mirror to watch his nose flatten against his face, overtaken by the inky scales. Eyes, glowing green with a hint of sunset orange emanating from pupils that narrowed to slits, rested under bony plates that replaced the hair of his brow. In fact, as far as hair went, Night realized that he now had none to speak of, just smooth scales as far as he could see. He would have run his claws against his scaled scalp if he weren't precariously balancing against a sink, the likelihood of his altered gait collapsing him to the tile floor increasing by the minute.

Instead, he held firm in place and watched the continuing onslaught of changes.

But the longer Night stared at his stretching muzzle, seeing the draconic features continue to wash across his familiar form. Little bits of himself still lurked within the beastly visage, the icy numbness of his lengthening jaws heightened by the face that his tongue still pressed against and felt his sharpening, dagger-like teeth.

But within that familiarity lurked another harsh truth, another component to the change for as Night realized *which* dragon he greatly resembled, he also realized that he wasn't exactly a *he* anymore either.

No, the feminine bust, even with the heavy scales, and widened hips betrayed the subtler gender shift that hid within the draconic transformation.

Her new body, *her* new form, for even under heavy scale and plate, Night saw a distinct reflection that no longer could be considered male. Perception, too, impacted body and mind for each blink of her slitted eyes brought familiarity and comfort.

This alien life would be walked with all the necessary adjustments. One such required adjustment would be the alteration of her name... Night simply wouldn't do.

Niktsar was much preferable.

Cosmic joke or not, the threads of reality compensated for threads torn by metamorphosis. The ripped pieces of her athletic wear reformed as intact women's sports attire. Every piece in place.

"This is-" Niktsar paused upon hearing her new voice, a heightened pitch that veered into a female range coupled with a vibrato hiss that served as a reminder of her monstrous form.

When the world stopped making sense, sometimes the best thing to do was call a friend.

"Hey! Frankie! Yes! So-" Niktsar fumbled her smartphone, trying her hardest to find the best balance between her new earholes and the thin lips at the end of her blunt muzzle. Ultimately she settled on switching to speakerphone and dropping her phone on her desk.

"Dude why do you sound like a chick, is this some voice changer app or-" Frankie's wayward voice reminded Niktsar of Keanu Reeves from *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure*, though she'd never had the heart to tell him.

"Yeah so... about that... remember that movie *How to Train Your*

Dragon?” Niktsar shuddered, a pit forming in her stomach. These conversations were only going to get worse too, she still had to call her *parents*. As far as complete messes went, this situation called for an incinerator.

“Uh huh, yeah I do but what’s that-”

“So do you remember the dragon from that movie, *Toothless?* The *Night Fury*. Black scales with the concealed fangs?” Niktsar hated how he could immediately picture in his head the character, a character whose face Niktsar’s own greatly resembled sans for added feminine grace.

“Sure. Yeah.” Frankie’s tone didn’t sound so sure.

“Bear with me here. I kinda turned into a female bipedal version of that specific dragon. Just happened this morning actually, quite a shock to grow scales, a tail, and also become a girl but-”

“Are you punking me? Am I being pranked like on one of those YouTube videos? Oh! Wait! No, is this actually a reality show? Am I finally getting the MTV treatment? Should I get an agent or-”

“I’m not punking you, Frankie. I turned into a dragon today, and I don’t know what to do. My life could be over.” Niktsar felt her voice waver, emotions slipping through her reptilian facade. Her life very well could be over, everyone laughing or screaming at her. Federal agents getting involved to haul her off to some lab. Every nightmare transformation scenario mentioned across decades of media could very well happen to her now. She now lived a life stranger than fiction.

“Well assuming you’re being serious, that isn’t *exactly* an everyday occurrence-”

“Exactly!” Niktsar winced as her wings expanded, bumping against her kitchen counter. “What if I don’t turn back and I’m stuck like this? What if other people start changing too and I’m just the first? What if I’m contagious or something-”

“That’s a sizable amount of conjecture you know, in fact I-”

“Just please come over. Please. Everything will make a lot more sense in person.”

Ha, that might be the worst lie she'd ever told. No, everything would make *less* sense because then her friend would know that she wasn't pulling his leg. He'd see her in this beastly state and know that fiction and reality could blend, producing a living pop culture molded with the same consistency as an internet OC.

But even with Frankie weaving his way across campus, dipping through the morning lecture crowds bustling from hall to hall, Niktsar knew that she still had some time to kill. Sure she could mope a bit, worry more about how she was going to reveal this fresh madness to anyone else who could care.

Or she could just pick up the phone and get it done now.

A call back to the 'ol homestead' normally was an act Niktsar only did every couple of weeks or so, even at University his parents pried too hard into his grades. He'd try his hardest to steer the conversation toward sports, clubs, even internships... but talk would always swing back toward STEM grades and whether or not there was a reason he eluded telling them his actual GPA standing.

"Hey Mom, yeah my-"

"Your voice sounds a little off, are you alright?"

"Just caught something going around."

"Hmmm. Yeah your voice sounds higher, almost feminine... hmm..."

"I turned into a dragon."

"Hmmm... HMMMMMM... a dragoness?"

"Yeah mom, a *dragoness*. Scales, wings, the whole deal. Literally happened like an hour ago, I'm still trying to process everything."

"Well you know your father and I back any form your take as long as you work hard to support yourself-"

"What-" Where was this conversation heading? Niktsar had a few ideas.

"We're fine with you being a dragoness if that is a better representation

of who you are, but just please *please* promise us you're going to finish out your technical writing degree. So much money has gone over to that school already and with debt just rising and rising--"

Yeah. This was one of *those* conversations.

"You don't care about the fact that your adult son turned into a winged lizard woman? Suddenly? Completely randomly? No underlying reason for why I suddenly have scales, a snout, and a tail?"

"Life is full of surprises, we just care about you obtaining meaningful employment in a competitive STEM field so you aren't still living with us at 40--"

"I don't live with you right now--"

"But you could come back... We wouldn't turn you away, of course. We couldn't. But we *could* be awfully passive aggressive about it. You'd have chores again, you'd have to *take out the trash*. Your father is terrible at it, he always misses the can and throws the bags straight onto the neighbor's lawn."

Niktsar's eye twitched as she slammed her palm against the tip of her muzzle. Why was her family like this?

"Right, mom--"

"Call more, honey. Love you lots."

Niktsar slumped across her bed, clawed hands digging through her hair as her mind raced. Did whatever slip in the matrix that forced her into this new form also bend reality enough to make the rest of the world around her not care? Sure her mother being nonplussed about the whole affair wasn't *that* surprising considering her family's priorities, but her best friend not caring that she'd turned into a *dragon* did bother her. The external force twisting her life clearly dipped its fingers into her relationships too, and the growing fear in her stomach was that this process *wasn't finished*. Could more of reality break down? Was this transformation truly an excuse to quit on her New Year's Resolution to work out everyday?

Knocking ended up being anathema to Frankie, so he decided to kick Niktsar's door open with his foot.

"Helllo-- Oh." Frankie paused as he stared at the anthropomorphic Night Fury glaring back at him for bursting in so unceremoniously.

"You've got hands, Frankie. Not dragon paws. You can knock."

"You really are a Night Fury."

Yes. Yes she was.

At least Frankie could confirm the metamorphosis, no hallucinations overtaking her mind. She'd stepped into a draconic form.

"Yo this is-" Frankie started to back up out the door, his hands quivering.

Then reality broke again, a fracture in the universe that Niktsar could see out of the corner of her slitted eye. The tear enveloped the room in a flash of light, and when she turned to Frankie, he was no longer retreating into the hallway. The look of shock, completely wiped from his face, had been replaced by the casual dopey indifference familiar to Niktsar.

"So workout schedule--" Frankie cracked his neck and yawned.

"Did you just see that light?"

"Hmm? What light?"

"The light that just swept across my entire apartment, y-you didn't see that?" Niktsar craned her lengthened neck as she scanned her walls adorned with posters, her video game consoles stacked beside her TV, and even the shuttered windows to the outside. Lightning had to be the logical explanation, if not one of her electronic devices malfunctioning or-

"So earlier you mentioned a new workout schedule? Do you want my help or something?"

"Frankie. Does the fact that I'm a female anthropomorphic Night Fury from DreamWorks' *How to Train Your Dragon* frighten you?"

"Well, no... this happens occasionally. I mean if you're upset about the

shift, then I'm totally here for you. I'm just not frightened, that's all."

"So this isn't weird--"

"Well, the one weird thing is that the dragon is from an existing property, usually when people slip into new shapes those forms are based on existing animals. Like uh... Barry, remember him? Became a wolfman like a year ago--"

Niktsar felt the world around her spinning, but not because her mind or legs faltered. Instead, another reverberation across space and time wiped across her mind and she *did* remember Wolfman Barry who showed up at a Halloween party only to have a *howling* good time.

She even remembered making a few jokes at Barry's hairy expense... maybe karma had finally reared its head--

"If I'm understanding clearly, nobody will freak out about this transformation?"

"No."

"Cool."

But *was* that cool? Nobody caring meant that nobody would understand her mental plight, the cruel dichotomy of both feeling comfortable in her new skin and also distinctly aware that she used to be human.

No, the world kept marching on. Her mother thought this development only a slight surprise. Her father would probably call her later to relay the same sentiment. Niktsar stood now as a dragon, altered in form and slightly in mind, and she *still* had to go to a chemistry lecture.

"Frankie, I think I need to get to class."

"That's fine, I've got an English recitation too... speech writing shenanigans." Frankie already made his way over to the door.

Maybe some fresh air would do her some good... let her thoughts clear as she stepped beneath the curling oak trees strewn across campus.

Nobody stared at her on the way over, no looks of surprise or fear, no gasps or dropping of books, just the same glum mood of a crowded university hustling from lecture hall to lecture hall. A few of them, at least, might actually have interesting classes to attend.

Niktsar wasn't quite so lucky.

Rudimentary chemistry, a simple course, came with its own bland lecture format and interactive clickers. Niktsar found her scaly thumb pressing against her remote's rubber buttons. Answers graded not on accuracy, but on attendance... would she be pressing all **B** like last time... would she actually *try* to answer the questions--

The professor's voice instantly snapped her out of deep thought.

"Niktsar! Would you mind being my volunteer for this demonstration? I promise it won't take long, I forgot to bring matches and--" Dressed in a white lab coat, thick goggles resting on his forehead just below wiry gray hair, and heavy rubber gloves rubbing together with excitement, Niktsar's chemistry professor looked every bit the part.

She didn't have a firm enough grasp on the rules of this reality to tell if his get-up was out of place.

Niktsar's slitted eyes darted around the room, a few faces looking at her with intent, though the rest of the class were buried in either their notes, scrolling through random subreddits, or shopping.

"I'm sorry, Professor... what?"

"Can you breathe fire for the class? If we had another dragon I would ask." The expression on his face was one of pleading desperation.

"Breathe fire?" Niktsar's eyes narrowed. Sure the species in the movies could do that but-

"Yes! At these balloons! I need you to pop them for me." The professor clasped his hands, a pained smile across his face. "Please. I mean, you don't have to--"

"I'll try. No promises though. This might not work." By now Niktsar

stood before the entire lecture hall, roughly 75% of the faces present staring listlessly in her direction, the other 25% completely tuned out.

“Again, no pressure-”

Niktsar closed her eyes and concentrated. Fire, she needed to breathe *fire*. Not a lot of fire, for too much would burn the balloon *and* her professor. Just a spark, a little burst of flame to pierce the rubber and cause whatever party-trick explosion her professor needed in order to make a statement about rudimentary chemistry.

Most people here are just looking for an easy A. Myself included.

But easy A or not, Niktsar took a deep breath and opened her maw just a few centimeters. As she exhaled, she felt a central heat radiating from her lungs, moving upward as if churned from her draconic heart itself. Niktsar opened her mouth wider, wider, tongue pressed firmly against the floor of her mouth and--

Nothing.

A trickle of smoke trickled from her nostrils and between gaps in her fangs, but no pyrotechnics.

“I-” Niktsar coughed. “I’m so sorry, Professor.”

“Oh no! Don’t apologize! I’ll push the demonstration to the next lecture.”

Niktsar awkwardly stumbled back to her seat, though no snide looks or derisive laughter came her way. Just an awkward lecture that quickly slipped from her mind as the Night Fury fumbled through her phone, desperate to take her mind off an embarrassing display that 99% of the people in the room would forget within a day.

“Lunch?” Frankie texted her as soon as the lecture ended.

“Sure.”

“Awesome. I’ve got just the place in mind. Sal’s Subs. Here’s the address...”

Niktsar's slitted pupils narrowed as she tried to pull any stray memories about the sandwich shop Frankie named, but none came out of the haze. Just a brief vision of flight, high enough that she passed by waving helicopter pilots, the entire earth beneath her a sprawling mess of suburbia and cookie-cutter farmland.

A hard landing upon a city sidewalk greeted her, a split second decision as she realized that cars dotted the street directly outside her destination. Niktsar fell to a crouch, strengthened limbs taking the brunt of the effort. Swishing her tail, she looked up into the amused eyes of Frankie.

"Like a huntress descending on prey--"

"Yeah, Toothless in the movie was supposed to be cute *and* terrifying."

"Better than Toothless in the books--"

"We don't talk about that version." Niktsar shuddered. At least in this form she *had* teeth, even if most of the time her gums concealed her enamel.

"Good thing you aren't *that* toothless, because I am hungry for some delicious sandwiches."

Niktsar brushed off her coat, a few stray insects from her flight of fancy clinging to the fabric. Disgusting, in the future she'd have to wear a slicker to keep them off.

"Hey, are you sure this is a good place? Yelp says the owner is a piece of work--"

"Really? It has... oh wait the stars have to be glowing to count... yeah this isn't the 5 star hoagie shop that I thought it was."

"Well people say the food is good, only that the owner has quite a *personality*."

The interior of the shop, freshly mopped down, proved to be a challenge as Niktsar's claws slipped on the slick linoleum and she had to hang onto Frankie's shoulders to maintain her balance.

“Hey! See the sign!” The sandwich shop owner, face wrinkled and stern even behind a graying beard, firmly pointed at an aluminum placard next to the illuminated menu.

“No shirt, no shoes- Hey I’m kinda not human so sneakers are-”

“Doesn’t matter! I don’t care if you’re a dragon! No shoes, no service!”

“Can’t you bend the rules-” Niktsar gritted her teeth. “Sal...?”

“IF I BEND THE RULES, THEN SOCIETY COLLAPSES. I AM THE KEEPER OF NOT ONLY DELICIOUS DELI MEATS BUT ALSO ORDER!” The shop owner slammed his hands down on the counter, growing increasingly red in the face. **“AND MY NAME ISN’T SAL! SAL IS JUST AN ABSTRACTION STANDING FOR SANDWICH AWESOME LUNCH ‘S SUBS. WHICH IS TECHNICALLY AN INCORRECT USE OF ENGLISH BUT I DON’T CARE--”**

“Fine! This is my emotional support dragon.” Frankie seemed proud of that one, like a little light bulb flickered inside his head.

“Why do you need an emotional support dragon?” The shop owner raised a bushy eyebrow.

“I have an emotional support dragon because I’m allergic to dogs. We’re flexible in the 21st century you see-.

“Well I’m not going to accept an order from an animal, so--”

“Can you just order for me?” Niktsar whispered in Frankie’s ear.

“Yeah sure.”

Niktsar handed Frankie some extra cash and slip-and-slided her way to one of the booths. By some miracle, she still had yet to fall completely on her face.

A moment of peace, however, still eluded her.

Niktsar’s phone rang vibrated again, and the dragoness nearly fumbled it with her thickened hands as she pulled it from her sagging pocket.

“Hello, sorry I’m in line-”

“Son! Ermmm... Daughter! How’s it going!?”

“It’s going great Dad, I assume Mom told you about my eventful morning.”

“Sure did! I think that this is a wonderful development. You know that there’s an old Chinese proverb, ‘may you live in interesting times’ and while that proverb actually has a bit of a negative connotation, I figured the saying was relevant because you turned into a Kung Fu Panda character-”

“Wrong movie, dad.”

“Ah well, I tried. Wait, was the dragon movie the Viking one? I remember now! Yeah I think according to 23&Me we’re approximately 16% Norwegian... well... you’re 8% Norwegian, but we can round up to a tenth-”

Niktsar held back a sigh as she watched Frankie’s eyes glaze over as menu paralysis set in, no easy number 3’s or 7’s to choose in a made-to-order shop.

“Excuse me a second, Dad. I have to help with an order.” Niktsar lowered her phone just in time to see the shopkeeper slam a fist into the register.

“Just order already!” The shopkeeper snarled at Frankie’s dumb expression. “A BLT! You want a BLT!? I can make one right now!”

“I want... you got a number 2?”

“We don’t use numbers here!”

“Uhhhhhhh-”

This third dance across the linoleum brought Niktsar the closest yet to stumbling, her claws scratching deep enough to leave marks the owner would surely *love*.

“He’ll just do a turkey-avocado.” Niktsar poked her scaly muzzle over her friend's shoulder while holding onto Frankie’s shirt for balance. “And I’ll

do a standard Italian.”

“Oil and vinegar?” The unfriendly owner locked eyes with Niktsar.

“Yes, please.”

“Is that a number 2-”

“Frankie. No. Just pay.” Niktsar gave her friend a playful push forward toward the register. “Cash, please.”

Was Frankie always this much of a caricature? She could have sworn that at one point he was pretty sharp, not acting like a human variant of Patrick Star.

“Look, I’m sorry about the no shoes thing, it’s just with transforming into a dragon-”

“What do you mean transforming?” The shop owner’s eyes peaked up while his hands diligently dropped lettuce and tomato across Niktsar and Frankie’s orders.

“I was human this morning. Then I wasn’t. Shapeshifting, metamorphosis. Ruined my morning workout plans. Tragic, still trying to pick up the pieces.”

The owner looked at her like she’d just said the most ridiculous thing he’d ever heard, his eyebrows raised in pure disbelief.

Another flicker of the lights preceded the ding of the shop’s customer bell.

“Hey! Read the sign! No vintage mustaches or cowboy gear! We’re a respectable 21st century establishment!”

The stranger, navy blue overcoat flailing at the tail as if kicked by wind or the act of riding a horse, ruffled his bristling 1870s mustache.

“No sandwich for me today, Doc. I’ve just gotta make a delivery. A Pinkerton’s always gotta stick to the schedule.”

The newcomer walked over to where Niktsar and Frankie were eating,

and the dragon could only look up mid-bite while a figure straight out of the Wild West reached into his pocket. Was he going to whip out a Colt .45 revolver? Would this *eventful luncheon* deteriorate into an old timey saloon shootout? Niktsar wondered if she could get the drop on him with a blast of fire-

“Letter for ya, Miss.” The Pinkerton threw down an old piece of parchment next to Niktsar’s chips and drink combo.

The dragon reluctantly snatched up the letter with her claws and shredded the top with a single swipe of her finger. A hefty series of folded papers spilled out, with *confidential*, written in bold lettering across the top page.

“Be seeing ya.”

“What does it say? Is... is there a DeLorean buried in an old mine that we have to recover to rescue--”

“No. This isn’t an adventure.”

“What then?”

“I’m being sued by DreamWorks for copyright infringement. Apparently I needed their *licensed permission* before being involuntarily transformed into a Night Fury.”

“That sucks, you gonna finish the other half of your sandwich-”

“Frankie. This is serious! I have to find a lawyer now! I have to go to court! Like this!” Frankie pointed at her toothy maw, teeth slipping in and out of their gum sheaths.

“Hmmm... That’s a bad break.” The sandwich shop owner shook his head as he kept his hands busy chopping lettuce and tomatoes for the next customer.

“Yeah, I’m not so hungry anymore.” Niktsar pushed aside her hoagie with her thickened paw. As much as her body physically craved food, her growing fear of not knowing what random event was going to stack on top of the last five minutes’ bad news completely killed her mental appetite.

“Who uses a Pinkerton delivery service to hand letters to people when they’re away from their residence? Seems kinda excessive.” Frankie chomped down on his turkey-avocado roll, talking through vigorous chews. “Like they’re a relic of-”

“Don’t talk with your mouth full, you’re apt to choke.” The sandwich shop owner paused between dashes of oil and vinegar to warn Frankie.

“Why would I cho- chhhh arrrrghhhh awwwwkkk.”

Niktsar watched in horror as her friend sputtered and wheezed on a piece of avocado. She didn’t know the Heimlich maneuver, her PE credits had been satisfied a *long* time ago, and those lessons clearly didn’t stick.

“See that’s what happens when you question the purpose of a Reconstruction-era detective agency. Those agents risked life and limb to secure payments and cargo across the untamed America West. Their sacrifices are why you can choke on that avocado right now.” The shop owner pointed an accusatory gloved finger at Frankie.

“AFHHHH JJJJ DHHHFHHHHJJJ.” Frankie clutched at his throat, his face turning blue as his eyes dimly looked at the menu. *Why didn’t he just go with the roast beef?*

“Seriously I don’t know the Heimlich-” Niktsar swiveled her head around, nearly to an 180, as if anyone else might have appeared

Frankie slammed his face against the table, miraculously dislodging the piece of fruit jammed in his throat.

“Oh my God... I almost died!” Frankie, sweat and tears streaming down his face, picked up his sandwich and immediately took another bite.

Niktsar looked down at her smartphone, claws scraping against the screen as she tried to figure out where to even *begin* for obtaining legal advice. Maybe a WikiHelp guide would be the best starting point...

“Oh, I almost forgot to give you this as well. Separate note from a separate client.” The Pinkerton materialized beside Niktsar, causing the Night Fury to leap to attention with a jolt. “Looks like a lawyer firm.”

“Oh. How convenient.” Niktsar kept her eyes on the courier, as if he might appear and disappear into smoke.

“I would just go to the address and see if the price is reasonable.” Frankie, not having learned his lesson, still talked as he chewed. “If it isn’t, you can always bail.”

“Okay. Well. I guess their office will still be open.”

“Does the lawyer have a name?”

“Agency has multiple lawyers. I, uh, yeah I’m just going to go and speak with whichever one of them wants my case.” Niktsar crumpled the advertisement in her heavy claws, nails piercing the parchment.

Finishing up her meal, she parted ways with Frankie and called an Uber to hitch a ride to the legal agency’s office suite headquarters. Her nerves, completely fried from the DreamWorks legal summons, prevented her from feeling safe with flying. In any case, the fare was light though Niktsar’s concerns weighed heavy upon the dragoness’ mind.

Niktsar didn’t expect to see a male Night Fury clad in fancy business attire, crimson tie, freshly shined shoes, thick-rimmed black spectacles, and tightly clutched briefcase waiting for her in the office, but the day was handing out one cosmic joke after another so she rolled with the punches.

“Skytalon, Attorney at Law. And yes, the ‘A’ and ‘L’ in attorney and law are supposed to be capitalized. My business card is all screwed up, the printer messed up my order and it’s this whole thing--”

“You’re a d-d-dragon?!”

“Yeah, so? You’re a dragon too. What, because I’m a dragon that means I can’t be a lawyer? Huh? That means I have to go back to clown college like ma and pa wanted so that I could be in the circus, the dragon circus!?! Yeah? YEAH?!”

“Look if this is a bad time-” Niktsar immediately started backtrack, claws tearing at the shaggy office carpet.

“No you misunderstand. Don’t leave.” Skytalon rolled his hand as if trying to reel back his thoughts for a round two. “I can sense a client in need.”

“Okay but-” Maybe following the instructions of a stranger in the street regarding a lawsuit. “Really if this is a bad time--”

“Every single day is a bad time, lady. Every. Single. Day. Do you know what it’s like trying to cut your teeth as a lawyer in this town when you’re a dragon and DreamWorks is constantly suing *you* despite them using *your* likeness in one of their movies without credit! It’s horrible! I’m financially ruined, I can barely keep the lights on despite winning every other case and-”

Niktsar gave a silent sigh of relief. Yes, this lawyer was the one. He understood her plight perfectly, maybe he’d even do it pro bono due to his personality history. Could she ask for a more perfect arrangement, really? There were stakes before, but now she had an ally on her side who understood what she had to lose--

“So will you take my case!”

“Yup.”

“Are you going to win?”

“No promises.”

“Good enough for me.”

When Niktsar turned to leave, the step into the hallway brought her into a hall of great marble ceilings and pillars. People in designer suits milled about, frantically walking from hall to hall. Niktsar’s own casual college clothing, now replaced by professional business attire, made her jaw drop as she desperately tried to process her new surroundings.

“Ready to win a case?” Skytalon wore heavy aviator sunglasses and a tie covered in stencils of Trogdor. “Because I am *feeling lucky* today.”

“We’re in--”

“City courthouse. Our room is 3B. Trial’s about to start.”

“Wait but- I just-”

“Look, reality can be fickle. The world around us pliant. One day everything’s normal, the next day super intelligent cats have seized control of your local Walmart.”

“So you understand what I’m going through?”

“I see the cracks in reality, even if I personally have never run afoul of *forces beyond comprehension--*”

“I’m pretty sure I comprehend what’s happened to me just fine.” Niktsar fidgeted back and forth on her paws, her nerves fraying by the moment.

“No, I think you’re still a bit scared and confused. Time itself skips before your very eyes. Peoples’ reactions don’t add up... your friends might be indifferent one moment, scared the next, and supportive within the next hour. Your family’s attitude might be completely out of sync with how your classmates respond to seeing your new form. You don’t know what the next second, minute, hour will bring. Maybe you’re hoping that reality cracks again like ice poured straight from a freezer into a glass of warm lemonade. Maybe you’re hoping that you’ll wake up from the dream. Lots of maybes. But regardless of what happens, I’ve got your back here, okay?” Skytalon smiled at her, his lips pursed to hide his own extended fangs.

“Okay.”

The hallway outside served as the perfect indicator of the type of ol’timey courtroom Niktsar shuffled into, her fanned tail swishing side-to-side. The judge sipped his coffee, looking bored while the seated jury looked even *worse* with tired eyes and building frustrations. At least she only faced a civil trial, the pressure of a criminal one would make Niktsar’s head reel.

When Niktsar finally took a seat, she got her first good glimpse at the opposing team of lawyers. None looked like they even cared about winning, but the stack of evidence presented before them, old merchandise from the 2010 release of the original film and other assorted cinema artifacts told a different story. One box even looked exactly like a beehive, but Niktsar figured

the case contained master records in the form of heaps of manila folders.

The court proceedings opened without incident, Niktsar nervously twiddling her chunky fingers, light clicking of claws as she fidgeted in an uncomfortable wooden chair.

“Normally we here at [REDACTED BY DREAMWORKS] would provide an entire legal team to assure our victory in court, but as this is a state affair and thus subject to public broadcast, we have decided to recruit the honorable radio personality Herbert Mulgrave to be our primary representative.” The DreamWorks corporate lawyer smiled and took a seat, handing over the spotlight to a nodding Herbert.

“Thank you, thank you.” Herbert’s golden radio voice made Niktsar tremble in fear, how was her lawyer going to *compete* with that?

“Don’t worry about him, we’ve got this in the bag.” Skytalon tapped his claws against his briefcase, little clicks that intensified as his toothy smile grew more concerned.

“Yeah, but he’s going to speak and-”

“No, you have to remember that he’s a radio host. He reads whatever is put in front of him. Ever see *Anchorman*? Yeah. Ron Burgundy reading whatever is put on the teleprompter without thinking? We’re dealing with a similar case.”

“So he’ll be easy to outsmart because he only sticks to the notes that the actual legal team prepared? You’re going to use circular logic to crush him?” Niktsar watched with bated breath as Herbert Mulgrave retrieved a stack of papers from a manila envelope, her acute sense of hearing picking up on the murmurs of the opposing legal team.

A few choice phrases stood out, phrases like ‘open and shut case’ or ‘wow this will be easy’ and ‘this will pay for the down payment on my lake house’ popped up multiple times. Apparently there were a lot of lake houses on the market this time of year.

“You learn something every day.” Niktsar muttered as she tapped her claws on their shared wooden table.

“Like what?”

“Like how corporate lawyers really love vacation homes.”

“You know I had a vacation home once.” Skytalon’s eyes glazed over as he stared off into a distant corner.

Niktsar waited patiently for her lawyer to continue... and waited... and waited...

“Uh, excuse me. Skytalon.” She waved a hand in front of his snout. “Hey are you-”

“Oh. Yeah. I had a vacation home once. Long time ago.”

“That was kinda freaky--”

“See the thing about vacation homes is that the property taxes get a little complicated if you do a rental timeshare scheme. And then the IRS is kicking down your door and... threatening to confiscate your ‘legally and morally gray’ hog farm.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Few people do.”

“May we hear opening arguments from the defense?” The presiding judge pounded his gavel to move the trial along.

“Your honor, my client is bipedal. She walks upon her own two feet. You all saw her walk into this courtroom, your eyes did not deceive you about that fact. Yet, if you watch the hit film *How to Train your Dragon*, you’ll quickly discover that the film’s dragon walks on all fours. Such a distinction is not arbitrary. The dragon depicted on screen is the mythological equivalent of a horse crossed with a dog.” Skytalon motioned for the introduction of evidence. “Just look at these comparison stills, and forgive the low video quality because I originally stole the movie from a bankrupt Blockbuster and my copy was damaged in the scuffle--”

“Objection. This evidence wasn’t properly introduced in pre-trial.” Herbert Mulgrave’s voice cut across the courtroom.

“Sustained. Please return your videotapes to Blockbuster, Skytalon.”

“They... They’re out of business!” Skytalon held up several DVDs, including two copies of *Shrek the Third*. “I can’t return--”

“I’m going to make sure that you go to Bend, Oregon and return those final tapes.” The judge’s eyes narrowed.

“No, please... that’s so far.”

“Return the tapes, Skytalon. Do the right thing.” Herbert Mulgrave smiled with teeth caked with years of coffee stains. As a radio personality, he didn’t have to worry about looking spry on the morning news. “It’s for the best, for all of us.”

“FINE!”

The back and forth of ‘evidence’ grew more ridiculous, and Niktsar could only stare at the table in front of her and roll a pen between her thick fingers as she let Skytalon handle all the difficult legalese.

“Your honor,” Herbert Mulgrave raised his right hand toward the judge. “Skytalon is pretty great.”

“Heh.” Skytalon stuck out his tongue at the DreamWorks legal team.

“Your honor, Herbert didn’t write this!” Another opposing lawyer spoke up. “Skytalon must have planted this paper among our notes.”

“Nuh uh.” Skytalon shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know a soul who would do such a thing.”

“Skytalon, one more slip up like this and I’m holding you in contempt.”

Niktsar put her muzzle on the desk and cupped her hands over her eyes. A world gone mad, she lived in a world twisted and broken where rules no longer mattered. The show too, kept marching onward.

When the jury was dismissed, Niktsar felt her heart sink.

“Now is our moment of truth.” Skytalon nudged her with his elbow.
“We’ve got this all wrapped up--”

“I’m going to be in crippling debt for the rest of my life, aren’t I?”

“You’re a college student, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Heh well... *going to be in crippling debt*, uh I’ve got some *bad news* for ya.”

Niktsar held her breath when the jury representative entered back into the room.

“Your honor, the jury has found the defendant party not guilty of copyright infringement.” The look on the representative’s face told the full story of just how done he was with this entire farce of a lawsuit.

Niktsar’s jaw dropped at the news.

“Yes! Yes!” She leapt to her feet, giving Skytalon an aggressive high five as she turned to smile at the opposing lawyers and--

She might not have been able to breathe fire *on command* during the chemistry lecture, but to her own surprise Niktsar found no such constraint during a moment of celebration.

The stream of fire billowed forth with intent and direction, Niktsar’s eyes rolling back behind clenched lids as the wave of liquid flame rushed across the entire opposing evidence table, engulfing the files and merchandise.

“Don’t worry about that, we still win.” Skytalon looked up at the ceiling just as the sprinkler system kicked on, stale water spraying across the entire courtroom as people rushed to exit.

“This is one of the most horrific displays that I’ve even seen in all my years as a servant of the people!” The judge slammed down his gavel only for a

loud buzzing to emanate from beneath the flaming smoking evidence table.

“THEY DIDN’T BRING *BEE MOVIE*, THEY BROUGHT AN ACTUAL BEE HIVE!” A member of the jury pointed and screamed as a swarm erupted under the cover of smoke.

“No! No! Order in the court! As Judge Honorific, I will not allow this!” But the bees ignored the hammering gavel and swarmed the judge, knocking him back over his chair as his writhing form disappeared behind the podium.

“I DON’T EVEN LIKE JAZZ!” Herbert Mulgrave screamed as the bees rushed across him too, bringing the radio host to the ground while the rest of the opposition lawyers escaped.

“Yeah now we really won--” Skytalon grabbed Niktsar by her scaly forearm. “But we really should be going.”

From out of the smoldering courthouse the dragons raced, falling to quadrupedal stances as they bounded along the marble letting momentum carry them over the glossy marble floors. No bailiffs reached for them, no marshals stepping in to uphold rule of law.

“I’ve always wanted to do this!”

“Nah they’re on the hook for the bees, the state will dismiss the lawsuit. We can counter, but it’s best to just let this go.”

Bursting free of the courtroom doors, the pair of dragons bounded down concrete stairs that Niktsar was sure to stumble her up, but just as she started to lose her footing and careen out of control, her wings instinctively snapped to attention and suddenly she felt lift under her body.

“There we go!” Skytalon danced into the sky alongside her. “Victory’s pretty sweet right?”

“I feel amazing--” Niktsar soared above the buildings, lifting herself up toward the clouds.

“Now you’re free from any constraint, to live your life as you see fit!”

For the first time since the cracks in reality sent her life into a tailspin,

Niktsar finally felt like the worst had passed. Now the only obstacle that remained in her way was sticking to her New Year's workout resolution.