

Chapter Two

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Our class plodded onto the small bus and plopped into their seats. Students normally didn't bond to their own Dragon until they were in the Advanced classes. Only a few kids in my class had dragons, and even fewer kids had ones that felt inclined enough to come to school. Just two kids had their dragons with them right now. I went to the opposite end of the bus from those two kids and Zaid plopped down in the seat next to me.

He looked at me out of the corner of his eye. "It's been 10 years now hasn't it? My Mom didn't want to talk much this morning, not even to the kids, your mom the same way?"

"Yeah, she was trying to hide it, but even Daniel could tell what day it is. Could your siblings tell at all?" I asked. While I had only one brother, aged 11, Zaid was one of four siblings, aged 11, (his sisters were twins) 13, and Zaid, who is 15 like me.

"Nick could, but he's the oldest, and I don't know about Tina and Kayla." He muttered and shifted in his seat. We rode the rest of the way in silence.

In a few minutes, we were in front of the Nursery and all the kids piled out and wandered toward the entrance. Zaid and I got out last and paused in front of the entrance. We looked at each other; I did an exaggerated gulp and walked in with Zaid trailing behind me.

Inside there were squeaks and caws and snorts from the various Dragons inside. The walls were painted a sky blue color, there were dents in the metal walls, and a musty smell was in the air.

Walking slowly, concentrating on my feet, I walked toward the front desk. Ms. Merryweather (an obviously unusual name around here,) sat at the front desk and smiled when she recognized me. "Oh, hi Katrina, how are you doing?"

I must've given her a very unconvincing smile because she then said "Oh well, still afraid of Dragons I see? Ah well, can I give you a bit of advice? When I first came here, 12 years ago, I was terrified of them, thought that they would eat me up the first chance they got, BUT, when your father first showed me what amazing creatures they were, and had Gyro talk to me, it was

amazing! I no longer thought of them as beasts, but as equals, and it helped me very much to get over my fears.”

I had the urge to roll my eyes, but I didn't, knowing that she was the kind that wouldn't take me acting like a teenager.

“Now I know that your situation is different,” Merryweather hummed, “but I'm sure with a little bit of perseverance, you can pull through too!” She handed me a little bit of cooked hamburger, patted my hand and smiled.

I smiled back and walked toward Zaid, who had a Dragon on his shoulder. I stopped back about 10 feet away from him. The Dragon was about two and a half feet long with greenish scales and golden claws and teeth. The dragon gave me a toothy grin and nuzzled Zaid.

“I'm thinking that he's the one that I'll get, he says his name is Calam.” He grinned and let Calam nibble some hamburger out of his palm.

I gave a forced smile and held out my shaking hand to Calam. He pressed his muzzle against my hand and I felt him brush my mind.

*Hello... Are you afraid of me?*

I shook my head and trembled. I hadn't felt a dragon talk straight to me since my fear had first developed. I finally pulled free from my trembling fear and said, “Hello Calam. I am honored to meet you. You have great promise to be a wise and powerful dragon.”

My flattering must've worked because Calam puffed some smoke, then grinned again. Zaid walked away and I was wondering what to do next. I heard some clattering metal and yelling in the back of the room and I walked over to see what was happening. Ms. Merryweather was jumping up and down in the back of the nursery along with some of my peers. I was wondering what they were chasing when a shiny black streak flew over my head. I spun around and ducked as feet clattered around me trying to catch the flying thing. It finally perched on a cage near the ceiling, where it knew the jumping people below couldn't get it.

It was a beautiful black dragon, as dark and shiny as obsidian, and had emerald eyes. At about two feet long, its claws were white and I saw that its teeth were too when it smiled down on the silly people below. It casually groomed its claws and flicked its tail while everyone was

jumping up and down and yelling at it.

After a minute, the dragon looked around then seemed to lock its eyes on me. It spread its wings and glided down. It flew right over my shoulder and as I spun around to watch it, the dragon perched lightly on my shoulder. I froze, too scared to do anything.

*Hello. You seem to have a comfy shoulder. Though you are about to get trampled.* It purred in my mind and flicked its tail toward the people that were now running towards me, trying to save me from the crazed dragon. I spun so that no one could reach her and yelled "STOP!"

Everyone stopped, which surprised me because I wasn't exactly one in a position of authority. I have no idea why I was trying to protect the small black dragon; my normal first reaction might have been to swat it away before she could eat me.

"You can't catch a dragon if they don't want to be caught, so you may as well stop running." I said, remembering what my dad told me. "You should ask him to go back to the cage before you start running around!" A few of the teachers looked mad at being told beginner lessons but it seemed to work, though the response from the dragon was sudden.

*You mean that 'you might as well ask her and I am not one of those nursery pets!* I felt a little puff of smoke from her nose as she snorted. I cringed as I felt the soot from her breathe leave a mark on my neck. *Now, when Mother told me that humans were rude, I didn't expect them to be this bad. I've been here a whole five minutes and I'm still hungry.*

I stared at her; most dragons her size and age don't have that big of a vocabulary. She must've been older than she looked. I gulped and picked some of the hamburger Ms. Merryweather had given to me and held it up, hand shaking, to my shoulder. I tried not to imagine her biting off my fingers, leaving just bloody little stumps. Too late, I imagined it. She delicately scooped up the meat with her tongue and began chewing it thoughtfully.

*Not exactly the best quality is it? A little cheap consider who you're feeding right now. So, no one making small talk? No introductions or anything of that sort? Fine, be that way.* She squawked and launched herself from my shoulder. All four feet of her wings extended, she glided toward the open front door. I saw that her flying was a bit wobbly, and she misjudged the doorway; clipping a wing. She tumbled, landed in a little heap, and sat there, dazed.

Immediately realizing that this was their chance, twenty people at once lunged for the poor little dragon. The dragon perked her head up and tried to run, but there were too many people to avoid. After a bit of skirmishing, someone managed to get an arm around her. She struggled and hissed but now they had a grip on her. All the while she was screaming in our heads with more cuss words than any of us even knew existed.

Then the captor ran to an empty cage and shoved her in it, locking the door before the still screaming dragon could escape again. Now all the dragons were flapping around their cages, hitting against the walls saying various gibberish.

During the sudden panic of the others, and the realization of what just happened settled on me, my fear of dragons decided to kick in again, causing my knees to buckle. I landed hands and knees and started hyperventilating. Everyone was too absorbed in calming down the dragons to notice me.

Zaid finally saw me, curled up on the ground and picked me up, which amazed me. Truthfully I don't know how he did it, I'm not fat, but I'm not light either. He carried me out and set me on the steps to the nursery. He sat by me until I started breathing regularly again, and was able to sit up normally.

Once I started paying attention to around my surroundings again, I noticed Calam perching on Zaid's shoulder. I just started to scream. I saw Zaid cover his ears, and Calam fall off his shoulder. I kept screeching until the little dragon had the sense to fly where I couldn't see him. I finally caught my breath again and put my head against Zaid's opposite shoulder and sighed.

"Why does the world have to rub in my face that I don't like dragons?" I breathed, my forehead pressed against his bony shoulder.

"Well, actually, I thought you did pretty good handling with that one." He replied. He grinned as I glared at him. "I know you have a reason, but you need to break your fear. After all, you're just about surrounded by dragons no matter where you are."

Ignoring him, I said, "Are all the dragons calmed down? I think I can go back in now." I shivered in the cold as Zaid stood up and held out his hand to help me up. I grabbed his hand, and he pulled me up. We then slowly shuffled back toward the nursery door. I opened the door

to see that everyone was calmed back down, except for the little black dragon that had still not ceased her screaming.

*Let me out you jerks! Why are you humans so determined to be the masters over everyone? Scum, that's what you guys are! Scum! If my kin were here they would have burned you all to charcoal by now! Scum, filth, and hate! That's all that humans are!*

I wanted to cover my ears, but a dragon's speech isn't actual noise. There was no way to block it out. I looked over at my classmates, whose expressions showed me that she hadn't let up since I had left. I looked at Zaid, who shrugged. I walked over to her cage and tapped my nail on the glass. She spun around, with green hatred in her eyes, and tried to bite my finger through the glass. I opened my mind to her and spoke carefully.

"Beautiful dragon, I am sorry for the situation in which we meet, but I have felt guilty for not asking, what is your name?" I hoped that flattery worked on her as well as it had for Calam.

She stopped trying to bite my fingers and thought-screaming. She licked her lips and said. *Finally, a human who knows how to talk to a superior creature such as a dragon, she sniffed, I am called Cynder of the Obsidian Stars, daughter of Ebony. Now what is your name?* She had sat down and started to lick her claws again, flicking them at each swipe of her tongue.

"I am Katrina Driffin, daughter of Grace and Jaydun." I whispered back, happy that she wasn't yelling anymore.

That seemed to perk Cynder's interest. She clicked her claws against the glass in excitement. *That sounds very familiar, Driffin. Wait, I know!* She closed her eyes for a few seconds to think, then looked up and snapped her eyes open. *Yes, Jaydun Driffin, he came to our clan years ago. I can see the similarity.* I almost cried out. My father. I pressed my forehead against the glass of the cage.

"H-how do you know my father? Where is he? He must've disappeared long before you were hatched!" I whispered in a panic.

*Well, Cynder said casually, I personally didn't know him, but everyone in my clan knows what he looks like. After all, he is practically legendary to us.*

"Legendary? My Father? He was a wonderful person but legendary? And where is my

father?" My voice had risen to a quiet screech.

*Disappeared... Ah, I seem to remember the stories now. To protect his family, he left without a word, correct? But I had thought that you would figure it out eventually. Your father was very mysterious about his mission, but he stopped at my clan to rest and figure out where to go next. He saved my clan because we were all sick. Even the elders and the eggs. We as dragons normally heal ourselves, after all, we are not primitive, but this was a deep and horrible sickness. Your father, Jaydun, I shall call him, had brought a wonderful medicine that healed all of us within a week. Cynder had laid half-curved on the floor of her cage, resting her head on her front paws.*

All while she was talking, I felt my emotions mix up more and more. *He didn't say what the medicine was, Cynder murmured, eyes closed, all he would say was that it was a secret where he came from. After we were all healed, he left, refusing any sort of escort. His dragons were nervous, but he wanted to go alone. My family tried to follow him, but it was like he had disappeared into thin air.*

Cynder hesitated, looking into my eyes, *he later got a hateful message from our neighboring clan, the BloodClaws, which are known for being savage. They hated that a human had wandered into our territory. We are afraid that your father was killed immediately.* She hesitated, then stood back up, *I'm sorry Katrina.* Cynder put her claws against the glass and seemed to feel remorse.

Cynder's news either hadn't hit me or I had already accepted it, because I hadn't gone into a screaming rage, yet. I shut my eyes and tried to find any emotions about my father's death being confirmed.

Cynder blinked a few times, *I've only been around humans for a few minutes and I've already been tainted by their silly sentiments,* She snorted and began to investigate her container. Feeling shell shocked, I noticed that the class was getting ready to leave, but I just blankly stared at the cages around me.

The cages, or at least Cynder's slightly small cage, were about 15 cubic feet. It was enough room for them to flap a little and stretch. Above the cages were glass tubes that connected to the tops of the cages and led to a wide-open glass dome so that the dragons could fly around and socialize. Only the well behaved dragons could go and be with the others

so I was worried that Cynder wouldn't be able to get around considering that she was a wild dragon. I leaned over one last time and whispered "I need to go, but I'll come and talk tomorrow." Cynder blinked in acknowledgment, and as I turned around, I almost ran into Zaid. He was smiling from ear to ear and I tried to give him a small grin.

"They are going to let me take Calam home in a few days, but I have to come here after school everyday until then." he frowned a little when he saw my expression. "Are you alright? You looked alright after you came back in, did something else happen?"

"No, I'm fine now, just tired. You think that I could come here with you after school for the next couple of days?" I asked. Apparently, my brain wasn't working, since I still hadn't freaked out about what Cynder had told me.

Zaid frowned again as we walked to the bus, "You know, you don't have to prove anything to me. You have a perfectly good reason to not like dragons." He put his hand on the back of my neck and I stared at him, confused. He ran his finger down my neck and around my shoulder, tracing a thick white scar. I shuddered at his touch, but he kept his hand lightly on my shoulder. I looked him straight in the eyes.

"I want to go with you" I growled, letting some stubbornness edge into my voice.

He smiled at my growl, "Alright, fine. It's not like I could keep you from going anyway." He let his hand fall off of my shoulder and turned to face the nursery, "They have them stuck in cages like they're birds, but they have thoughts and emotions. They're smarter than us too, we just were more forceful, didn't want to be equals. Humans imprisoned them." He sighed deeply.

"Yeah. I wish that it wasn't like that. But no one can find a better way." I whispered reassuringly. I felt a slight prickle, as if this was going to be a major plot twist later.

I rolled my eyes at my own crazy thinking, and hopped onto the bus, once again sitting as far away from the two trained dragons as I could, and Zaid sat next to me.

I curled toward the window, happy to be away from the nursery. I still had the chills. My mind must've been messing with me because I could still hear the strong breathing of a dragon in my-

"EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEKKKK!!!!" I screeched, cowering down into the seat when I had

noticed that one of the dragons on the bus, Pearl, had snuck up behind me, perching on the back of my seat.

Pearl, named appropriately for her iridescent scales, arched her neck toward my ear and whispered, *You are wanted by small-black-scales at sun-high tomorrow.*

Holding my breath, I nodded slightly, resisting the urge to swat her away.

Pearl snorted, letting a small puff of smoke float to the ceiling, then took a gliding leap back to her human, who scolded her for running off.

I slowly put my head into my hands and sighed. Zaid leaned toward me and whispered, "You sure are popular today."

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