

Prologue

Caerleon, 1007 AD

A great mist shrouded the rugged land, while thundering hooves propelled armed knights to the battle ahead. Swords drawn, they pounded the hard earth in search of their quarry. The stench of charred wood and rotting carcasses drifted across the blood-drenched fields. The cackle of ravens and the ring of metal on metal grated on already tense nerves. Never before had such an onslaught proved so destructive, so senseless.

The shrill cry tore at Fintan De Warring's heart. One of the knights had scored another kill. Fintan stood frozen on the edge of a rugged cliff, overwhelmed by the hate and fear these warriors had for the winged beasts. Below, the scene unfolded with cruel results, the sounds of battle echoing across the battered terrain. A great stabbing pain entered his chest, making it difficult to breathe. Why couldn't his magic protect them?

Why did the dragons have to die?

Beside him, Nimuette cackled. "You're weak, old man."

Fintan glanced at his wrinkled hand. Aye, his body had seen a few years, but his soul would never die. "You'd like to see me fail, would ye now?" Fintan studied the carnage, unwilling to give Nimuette the attention she craved.

"Aye, you know I would. Your wizardry has taken all I hold dear, my family, my pride, my--"

"Your own evil machinations did that."

She smiled, but the tilt of her lips did not mask the hate in her eyes. "Dragons feed your power. What will you do when they've all vanished?"

Fintan growled and swung his cape about his body to ward off the chill created by her words. He was trapped by his inability to guard against this new evil. From his fingertips, the most powerful magic flowed to save the fey creatures that roamed the land, but his power couldn't be summoned to save himself. Nor could the magic protect the great winged beasts that fought for their lives this day. Before the dragon wars had gathered momentum, he and his friend Fenot had created an alternate realm to preserve as much of the magic as possible, but it hadn't been enough. A great many wizards had lost their lives.

With each dragon death, Fintan's powers diminished. If Nimuette had her way, every last dragon would die, and with the last of the fierce creatures, Fintan's magic would be lost forever.

He consoled himself, knowing the destruction she wrought would destroy her as well. The dragons' breath fed all powers, evil and good.

"Tell me what you really want," he rasped.

"You."

Nauseated, he swallowed hard to control the sickness. The woman was mad to think she could own him. Aye, the jealous witch had done all in her power to destroy him, and for what?

For the wizards and witches who would lose their powers this day, he held no regret save one, that Alfheim Haven had been created too late to save the other wizards and their dragons.

“Be gone, witch! I’ll ne’er be yours, nor will I feed your gloating.”

She laughed, a shrill sound that floated on the heavy mist long after she’d gone.

He sighed. *By the dragons’ blood that flows this day, I must find a way to thwart her plans, or all of mankind will suffer from the loss.*

Taking a deep breath, he pondered the situation. His gaze lifted skyward toward the heavenly bodies that shone dimly in the fading light. Anger surged through his veins, lending power to his thoughts. With every ounce of strength he possessed, he cast one last spell. An explosion of light erupted from the earth, and a terrible chorus of screeching scraped against sensitive ears.

Madness claimed the remaining dragons, and they tore through the village, snatching up young maidens and raining fire upon those wishing them harm. Cradling their prizes, they tore through the skies, the atmosphere, and beyond.

When silence reigned once more, Fintan fell to his knees to await his fate.

The dragons were gone and, with them, his last ounce of power. Mortality cursed his soul.

One

North Ter Sector, Earth, 4374

Níor bhaol ar bith na dragáin ach amháin in intinn na ndaoine.

Candlelight flickered over the ancient manuscript, and Tucker Bolen strained to read the faded letters. His finger trailed under the words, and he was amazed to discover his knowledge of the language. Gaelic had long been considered a lost form of communication. The ledger, written in the tenth century, would have confounded most scholars, but not Tucker. Intuitively, he understood it all.

“The dragons posed no threat, save that which man perceived.”

A knock rattled the door before a gust of wind followed the visitor inside. Cajun growled until the scent of the intruder became known.

“Egads, keep that beast away from me. That artificial wolf and I don’t get along.” Rayne shed his trench coat and flapped the wet material at the animal, dripping water over the floor and rousing another low growl from Cajun. “Blasted weather. You’d think the Unit would devise a way to control such nastiness. They control everything else.”

Tucker didn’t even glance at his partner. Rayne could find the most mundane issues to complain about. “One shouldn’t control nature. It messes with the natural order of things.”

“And what god made you an expert?”

“Give it a rest, Rayne.” Tucker patted his leg. Cajun obeyed without question and plopped down beside him.

“Ooh, aren’t we in a surly mood. Couldn’t be this weather. You like thunderstorms.”

Tucker inhaled a deep breath and stretched his neck until the bones popped. “Because it usually keeps vagrants away but obviously not tonight.” Ordinarily, Tucker did like storms. Tonight, however, the downpour made him testy. Rayne’s uninvited presence made him even testier.

Rayne laughed then nodded at the book. “You’ve found another relic to add to your growing collection. Tell me what you’ve discovered, and I’ll gladly leave.”

In the soft glow of light, Rayne appeared eager for news. Tucker hesitated. They shared a long history, but even so, he wasn’t sure Rayne could be trusted with the information. The man was a born gossip.

“Ah, you don’t think I’ll keep my yapper shut. Truly, Tuck, it doesn’t matter. The Unit probably already knows what secrets you keep.”

The chair scraped along the metal floor as he shoved himself from the desk. Cajun lifted his head, but made no move to follow. Rayne had a point. If the Unit didn’t already know his findings, they were sure to find out soon. Should he present the data to the Unit or allow them to discover the information? Either way, he could not escape their involvement. Regardless of his situation, he must retain the most important part of his discovery. In the hands of the Unit, the true worth of the book might prove a disaster for all mankind.

“Where did you find this artifact? Does the Unit know you have it?” Rayne studied the

open book and frowned. “The only one I’ve ever seen is in a virtual library.”

“I came by it as honestly as I could.”

Rayne’s brown eyes bulged. “You left the city. You traveled to the ground zone. Do you have any idea how dangerous that is?”

Tucker stared out the glass window into inky darkness. The safe haven of the domed city wrapped him in suffocating arms. Yes, he’d traveled to the unknown. He’d spent a small fortune locating guides. The musty earth nurtured a depraved society of genetic misfits and unscrupulous creatures, yet the memories flooding his every waking moment drove him to search for the book. He’d found it with very little difficulty, the danger more perceived than real. The book provided proof his memories were grounded in something more than fantasies, that man once roamed green fields, and enchantment had kept the world balanced. Rayne couldn’t begin to understand the thirst for knowledge the book evoked.

Tucker shrugged and glanced at a shelf laden with other artifacts and antiques. He boasted a fine collection of ancient weaponry and technological gizmos. “No amount of credits could secure its possession. I was able to pay dearly for these few items but not the book.”

Rayne bent lower and squinted. “Gibberish. Do you understand any of it?”

“A little.”

Rayne narrowed his eyes. “That look you’re wearing says otherwise.”

“Barker’s report came in yesterday. The Zarloke Sector is working its way into being a major player. They’ve taken over the Telsin planet in the Manuvak galaxy for control of mining rights. Afcop will probably ask the Unit for help in retaliating against the Zarlokes.”

“The Alliance for Consolidation of Planets is one entity I wouldn’t want to tangle with. I can’t imagine what the Zarlokes hope to gain,” Rayne said.

“Power mostly. They live for the fight. Once they get a whiff of weakness, they become obsessed with the need to conquer.”

“Changing the subject won’t stop me from pestering you.” Rayne gave him a lopsided grin.

“Actually, that report is part of the subject.” Tucker went to a cabinet and retrieved his most recent find. Rayne wouldn’t believe without proof. “Take a look and tell me what you see.”

Nimble fingers turned the large bone fragment in all directions. “Pre-Roman Empire? Possibly reptilian. Have you had an ecto-scan done yet?”

Tucker nodded. An ecto-scan and a DNA analysis confirmed his suspicions. “If you were to hazard a guess?”

Rayne’s nose twitched as he studied the specimen further. “Don’t tell me it exists. Am I holding proof?”

“I believe so, but the tests are inconclusive.”

The bone landed on the table with a decided thud. Tucker made a move to punch Rayne for his carelessness then thought better of it. Cajun growled.

“Your obsession wears thin, old man,” Rayne said, shooting Cajun a disgruntled glare. “You keep hunting for an elusive dream. Dragons were nothing more than fabricated beings meant to keep the minions in place. Shoot, they were probably robots like that blasted beast.” He shook a finger at the wolf guarding a piece of Tucker’s less-than-clean floor.

Tucker tasted blood where he bit down on his tongue. What would Rayne think when he learned what the book offered? “Leave the dog out of this. I’m quite sure ancient man didn’t have the technology you suggest.”

A long silence followed, both men lost in the enormity of the discovery. Rayne broke the

silence first. “Okay, let’s say dragons did exist. They have long since been eradicated, along with every other animal. This bone fragment is too old for DNA reconstruction, so where does that leave you?”

With a burning desire to find out if the pearl really exists.

“Dragons posed no threat, save that which man perceived.” The quote rolled off his tongue, generating another scathing remark from Rayne. The man had no sense of adventure, no purpose except to exist. Tucker wanted to live, to really live. He was tired of feeling disconnected from everything and everyone. Hunting dragons gave him a purpose and a challenge. The key rested within the cryptic words of a wizard’s diary and a bone fragment found in Telsin mines.

“Your obsession with dragons got worse the day you had your first reincarnation reading. Spending money on that reader thingy was a pure waste of credits, if you ask me.”

“No one asked, and that thingy was a very sought-after reincarnation reader. I now have a full map of my soul.” The reincarnation reader was a rare addition to his collection and provided him with the intimate knowledge of past souls. Unfortunately, the Unit required a copy of the genetic map created by the reader. He foresaw the Unit eventually using this information to play with the genetic pool, to further manipulate the pairing of breeders. Still in its infancy, the reader was a gadget for those who could afford it, but it wouldn’t be long before it became a household item and the government had another useful tool in maintaining control of its subjects. His mind turned inward.

The reincarnation reader had provided more than a map. The odd piece of equipment had channeled the memories and emotions of past souls. Even now he fought an oncoming episode with little success. Fintan’s voice sounded clearly in his mind as if they were his own thoughts...

“I could not see them die.” He glared at his nemesis. “The dragons didn’t deserve to suffer for your wickedness.”

Nimulette clutched the cape to her breast. “What have you done?”

“Protected the magic. The dragons are gone. You got what you wanted.”

The witch laughed. “You’d rather become mortal than seek a place in my bed. So be it.”

“Mortal until I can reclaim that which you stole, old hag.” He stalked away from her ugliness. He’d seen to it the dragons were safe. Mortality had nothing to do with his soul. He’d bide his time until his soul found the means to recapture the magic.

“What’s it gotten you?”

Tucker blinked, forcing his attention to Rayne’s question.

“Tucker?”

Tucker shook his head, clearing the fog from his mind. “I don’t expect you to understand.”

“No--you’re right. You’re just my work partner,” Rayne said. “What’s to understand?”

“Look. I don’t need any more skeptics in my life.” What he really needed was the rain to quit. Being cooped up exacerbated his restlessness.

A huge sigh escaped Rayne’s lips, and he scratched the back of his head. “You’ve been hunting dragons since before we met with little to no results.”

“I have results.” He fingered the bone fragment.

“That bit of fossil proves nothing.”

Tucker wavered between telling his work partner everything and keeping his complete findings secret a while longer. In the end, it didn't matter. He couldn't keep most of his findings from the Unit, because he needed the Unit's funding for further research. He hedged, trying to keep his eyes from shifting to the opened manuscript.

Rayne's eyes grew bright. “You've unearthed further proof of their existence, haven't you?”

Rayne couldn't find out about the book's importance, not if Tucker planned to keep its existence hidden from the Unit. The ancient writing held more than proof of dragons. It contained spells and magic more powerful than any advanced intelligence. Besides, his partner wouldn't understand his fascination with the historical relic. His compulsion to reach into the past guided his every waking moment. Why else would he have spent two years saving for a reincarnation reading of his soul? A genealogical map of his ancestry proving his strong Irish-Comanche heritage hadn't been enough. He'd wanted a documented understanding of his insatiable wanderlust and thirst for past knowledge.

He wanted a way to make the voices in his head stop.

Rayne looked at the bit of bone again. “You're not thinking what I think you're thinking?”

Tucker glared at Rayne. “I don't know. What do you think I'm thinking?”

Rayne's mouth gaped. “I knew it. You're planning to hunt dragons.”

“You've got one hell of an imagination.”

“And I know when you're hiding nanobytes.”

Tucker frowned at the familiar saying. Hiding nanobytes indeed. If Rayne only knew his true thoughts. He wasn't just hiding information; he was trying his best to misdirect Rayne. The man didn't know how to keep quiet about anything, and hunting dragons wasn't something Tucker needed to have bandied about. Not yet, anyway.

He resumed pacing. “Hunting dragons? A mission of that magnitude would be foolish.”

“But necessary if you plan to prove your theory.”

Therein lay the reason for his frantic movements. The existence of dragons proved that the great wizard, Fintan, was more than mere fantasy. Not only that, but dragons held the key to unlocking the magic. The magic held the key to silencing the voices. While the manuscript directed him to the right path, where would he find funds for such a venture? Unfortunately there was only one entity with the resources to help him. He sighed. Keeping his thoughts secret proved futile.

“You're right. I plan to hunt dragons.” Tucker nodded. “As soon as I convince the Unit, I'll begin my search.”

“Where will you look first?”

He scratched Cajun behind the ears. Perhaps he should solicit Rayne's help instead of keeping him in the dark. The man had connections that might help speed the process. “The Lennitere galaxy. I believe we'll find our fabled dragon on the planet of Mioisiad.”

Yet he hoped to find so much more than dragons. The reincarnation reading had awakened strong personalities that warred with his conscious being. If all went well, he hoped to find himself.

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On the outskirts of Miotone, on the planet of Pelicosia, 3039

The whisper of a *terment* blast kissed the silence, seeking refuge in a live target.

Cari Barock's keen hearing alerted her to the danger, and she dove for the ground, sliding her body along the jagged rock. Plastered against the hard surface, she searched for safe harbor and found none. Her heart hammered painfully. The assailant fired again. She rolled just as stone splintered beside her.

Whoever aimed at her wanted her dead.

Her heart accelerated, drumming adrenaline through her veins. She didn't deserve to die so young. Hand over hand she crawled toward the dragon caves. She didn't dare run, for then she'd be a more visible mark. Bright sunlight glinted off the rocky terrain, providing as much camouflage as possible in the open arena. As much as she feared dragons, the dragon caves were her only chance at survival.

A scream tore across the lands, echoing through the stark landscape. She crawled faster, scraping her knees and palms. Only one creature could pierce eardrums with the loud-pitched noise. An adult dragon flew across *nezzarine* skies, heading straight for her.

"Cari!"

Thorman? Was Thorman trying to take her life? Atop the mighty beast, he looked every bit as fearsome as the dragon he rode. She glanced over her shoulder. Her throat clogged with fear. The thought of betrayal momentarily sapped her will to fight. Her gaze swept the craggy landscape, lighting on the entrance to the caves. How appropriate that her place of refuge should be a hole in the ground.

Heat scorched the air, and the earth vibrated. Thorman had landed the creature nearby. All was lost. She clutched flapping material to her chest. The loose-fitting balloon pants and tunic hampered her progress.

Behind her, hard soled boots pounded the stones, coming closer.

"No," she cried and scampered toward her goal.

"Cari." Thorman drew near, his weapon drawn.

Desperation made her scramble to her feet. She broke into a full run, but fathoms separated her from safety. She cried. Thorman had been a trusted friend. Why would he want her dead?

"Cari, stop." He raced to catch her.

She tripped, falling to her knees and landing hard on her right elbow. The cry tore from her lips. His long strides ate the distance between them. "Ah, sweet Draccus. I have more years ahead. Don't take them now."

A callused hand grabbed at her arm. She screamed, panicked by the horror of dying. Thorman hauled her to her feet and wrapped powerful arms about her. "You're safe now. Stop struggling. You're safe."

His words penetrated the haze of fear that held her prisoner. Slowly she calmed her breathing and stilled her thrashing arms. "You ... you shot at me."

"Nay. 'Twas another." He pointed to a shape half hidden by the slope of the terrain. "See. I know not who dared such cruelty, but the man is dead. You have nothing more to fear."

She pulled from his embrace and stared at the dead assailant. "Why? Why would he seek my death?"

Thorman frowned. "Have you been experimenting again?"

Cari pursed her lips and glanced at the ground. She had, but she wasn't ready to discuss her results.

"Your silence is answer enough. Could someone want to keep your findings quiet by silencing you?"

“Nay!” Her head snapped up. “Surely not. I’m no closer to finding answers than I was a year ago. I don’t see how the attempt on my life can be related to my research.”

“Your findings could make mining zeel obsolete.” He folded his arms. “An alternate energy source that’s easily accessible would strip the Verside of their current bargaining power.”

“The precious ore will never be obsolete, even if another source of energy was found.” She shook her head. “*Nock*. That can’t be the reason. Perhaps if my research proved successful, someone would have motive for murder, but ...”

“Someone must think you’re close to an answer. Consider last week’s fiasco. You came close to dying then as well.”

She gasped. She’d put the incident from her mind until now. Thorman had come to her rescue then, allowing his dragon to pluck her from the air as she fell from the ridge. The harrowing ride had left her deathly afraid of the beasts. Had someone caused her to lose her footing? She’d attributed the accident to clumsiness, but now she wasn’t so sure. “I thank you for seeing me safely home that day.”

He drew her to him and settled his chin upon her head. “Be my mate, Cari. You’ve put me off too long. I need to hold you close and keep you safe. You ...you frighten me with your blatant disregard for rules and your need to help others at the risk of your own safety.”

She squeezed her eyes shut. “But there’s no spark.”

His deep sigh tickled the hairs at her forehead. “’Tis not necessary.”

“You’ll regret our mating forever should you find the one with whom you share the spark of awareness.” She withdrew. For a member of the Verside, Miotone’s elite fighting force, the spark of awareness signaled the union of two soul mates. Thorman had yet to experience the spark with a woman, but still, he claimed a deep affection for Cari. They’d been drawn to each other when his brother and her best friend, Darcet, had died unexpectedly five *yons* past. She felt the same affinity, but it wasn’t the kind of love that would sustain them through the years. She sighed. Why couldn’t he see? “I won’t do that to you or to us.”

His hands fisted at his side. “You’re the most stubborn female I’ve chanced to meet. I want you. That should be enough.”

“Desire is not enough. And you call me stubborn?” she asked, amazed by his persistence.

His eyes narrowed, shadowing the deep *nezzarine* of his irises. “From hence forth, you will take an armed escort when you venture from Miotone. I’ll not have your death on my conscience.”

Why would he suffer guilt for something not of his doing? “You’re not my keeper.”

“If I claim you before Zan Tared and the council of elders, you will indeed find yourself mated and under my authority.”

She sucked in a harsh breath. “Are you threatening me?”

Never had she seen him so furious. His eyes shone with a coldness that froze her soul. With his *ferlai* hair pulled tight against his scalp, the wrinkles caused by his fierce frown were more pronounced. When had he grown from an awkward youth to this stern warrior?

His nostrils flared, and his cape flew from his body as rage lent wings to his feet. He stalked down the path without waiting to see if she followed. In so doing, didn’t he contradict his own edict? What happened to the armed escort he demanded she employ?

Her gaze swept across the desolate land. She’d walked the edge of the zeel pits, searching for solitude after spending the morning attempting another set of experiments with little result. The uncertainty of the future troubled her, and she sought solace in her favorite place.

Suddenly she felt more alone and isolated than she had before. A chill settled in her

bones. Why couldn't Thorman see they weren't meant for each other? She rubbed her arms.

The still form of her assailant caught her eye. A shiver made her body convulse. Someone wanted her dead, and yet she wasted time worrying over her relationship with Thorman? Her sudden lack of concern made no sense. She shuddered again, focusing once more on the threat to her life. Had the assailant acted alone, or had he been hired by another? Bile crept to the back of her throat, and she fought the urge to vomit.

Why? Why did he mean her harm? Or maybe she should ask whom. Who wanted her gone? Since Thorman had made her revisit her "accident," she now had reason to believe someone had hired mercenaries to see her dead.

The sharp cry of the dragon tore her from her musings. She looked up in time to see Thorman and his ride bearing down. An uncontrollable shivering took hold of her body. She stood frozen, unable to move. The dragon swooped from the bright sky, its claws extended. She screamed and forced her legs to move. Running, she headed toward a large boulder. Thorman's high-handed tactics made her seethe. She should have known he wouldn't leave her alone to walk the distance. Like before, he would snatch her from the ground and whisk her back to Miotone. She pressed her back against the rock and tried to settle her breathing. Closing her eyes, she awaited the inevitable.

Thorman never made idle threats.

An arm made of hard, sinewy muscle wrapped around her waist. The momentum of the dragon's flight made her body jerk in an awkward dance until Thorman's grasp became more solid. With a strength born from years of training, he lifted her in front of him. The dragon's rough scales bit into her tender flesh. She grabbed hold of its neck and dug her fingernails into its clammy hide. Her heart pounded, and her toes cramped from the tense way she held her legs. Even so, she refused to show Thorman her fear. Instead, she kept her eyes closed and prayed for a safe delivery.

"You...you can't watch my every breath, you know," she said when the silence became unbearable and fear threatened her sanity.

"The Verside will agree with my assessment of the situation."

She swallowed hard, hoping conversation would take her mind from the dragon's reckless flight. "H-have you stopped to think that maybe it's the Verside who wants me gone?"

"Nay." He tugged her more securely within his embrace, and she welcomed his warmth. "Zan Tared's men do not conduct business in such an underhanded manner. This you know."

He had a point, but if that were so then... "Who? Who has access to *terments*? I thought the forbidden weapons were stored under strict guard, to be used only in times of war or some other dire emergency. While you defended me with a *larat*, the assailant used a *terment*."

Beneath her fingers, his body tensed. "'Tis a mystery I plan to investigate. In the meantime, it's best you keep your speculations to yourself."

Her eyelids flew open. "But you concede the possibility of Versidian involvement?"

"Nay." He guided the dragon across the zeal pits. "I refuse to believe that Zan Tared's warriors are responsible. Your foster father loves you too much."

"I am not accusing Zan Tared." Familiar fingers of zeal jutted from endless pits. The feelings Zan Tared had for her were debatable. "But as you pointed out, the Verside stand to lose a valuable commodity if my experiments yield the desired result."

"When you accuse the Verside, you accuse their leader."

"And you're a fool to embrace such blind faith."

"I'll accuse no one without proof. In the meantime, you'll adhere to my dictates," he said,

punctuating his displeasure by squeezing her body.

“You’re a bully.” She elbowed his midsection, frustrated by his authoritative demeanor.

He grunted. “Yea, but at least I have your best interests at heart.”

Did he? She wasn’t so sure. He pushed too hard for her peace of mind, wanting more from her than she was willing to give.

Warm air brushed her skin as the dragon bore them across the land. She yelped when the dragon made an unpredictable dip and dug her fingers deeper into its tough hide. Thorman’s left hand settled possessively on her thigh while he held firm control of the animal with his mind. Stark fear held her stiff upon the dragon’s back, and a wave of dizziness flowed over her.

Thorman brushed a stray hair from her neck, and she welcomed the distraction. He was one of the few who touched her freely, for most held to the old myths and prejudices, refusing to have any contact with a *Deliphit*. She sighed. At least Pelicosia had offered a more accepting environment than her home planet of Satobik. There, they had enacted laws forbidding all normal humans from touching a *Deliphit*. Could her affliction be the reason for the threat against her life?

There were many who distrusted her powers, but did they hate her enough to want her dead? But then, why only her? Why not target the other *Deliphits* as well? Perhaps because they lived on Mioisiad and not Pelicosia. As if he’d read her mind, Thorman’s hand kneaded the tight muscles in her leg. She’d developed an easy friendship with this man as they’d been closer in age than any of the other inhabitants of Pelicosia. Shared grief over Darcet’s passing had made their bond stronger, but she considered him a friend and nothing more.

She stared at the clear sky. Somewhere across time and space, a man existed who would touch her heart and soul. She believed strongly in the power of love and knew that if she waited, she would be as blessed as the other two *Deliphits*, Sialys and Chelian. If they could find their heart mates, then surely Cari would as well.

“You’re trembling.”

“I just got shot at, and now I’m perched upon your dreaded beast. I think I’ve earned my reaction.” Shallow breathing accompanied her words, and her knuckles appeared white against the thick hide.

“You’ve been around dragons your whole life.”

“But never atop one until... until the attempts on my life. I... find myself growing more afraid of them each time you use one to rescue me.”

“Be easy, sweet. We’ll reach home soon enough.” He brushed a kiss against the side of her temple.

His ministrations did nothing to alleviate her distress. The dragon dipped, making her stomach roil. Cold fingers of reality touched her soul.

Someone with knowledge of her habits wanted her dead.

