

## Chapter 3

## Destiny

Something smelled off. Lowering my snout, I sniffed the ground and tried to figure out what it could be.

“What do you smell, Muldrix?” Garm asked, standing beside me.

He was tall for a human, or at least by the standards I could gather by observing others. As the wind flew past his long mane of hair it billowed out behind with a beard that stretched down to his chest. I always wondered what it would be like to have a beard but didn’t know how to grow one.

Shaking my head in confusion over the smell, I snorted in frustration. “Don’t know the smell. It’s a new smell, like yours, but not one I’ve smelt before,” I said.

“Don’t worry about it too much,” said Garm, patting my back. “I’m sure it’s nothing. Perhaps it’s some farmer in the area who we haven’t met yet.”

I puffed a ball of smoke in doubt at him but decided to leave it at that. I was, after all, a hatchling still and wouldn’t reach my second birthday for a few more months.

Waving away my smoke, Garm chuckled and scratched behind my ear.

“That won’t comfort me forever,” I grumbled. I tilted my head to let him get in better, my sides rumbling in pleasure.

Garm chuckled as he dug harder with his nails.

Ever since my incident with the chickens over a year ago, Garm had kept us on the move from place to place. He was worried about people coming to look for us, but I never understood

why he wouldn't tell me that. Not that it mattered since I already knew why. I'm a dragon, not some bird or mouse that never cared to understand, or learn, higher thought. My scales had already started the process of changing color from green, to a light bronze at the tips, and I had seen Garm carry a red scale once before. It hadn't come from me; of that I knew for sure. But why he, or anyone else, would need a dragon scale was beyond me.

Garm stopped scratching and gazed at the mountainside, the golden rays of the setting sun bringing out darker colors as the shadows lengthened in the forest. Soon we wouldn't be able to discern the true shape of things as night continued.

"We need to find shelter if we're going to weather the nightly frost," Garm said. "Could you fly around and see if you might spot a cave to spend the night in?"

Grunting in the affirmative, I jumped into the sky and began my search.

It didn't take me long before I found a cave not far from where we were, where we could cover the entrance with one of Garm's blankets. In no time we were sitting beside a small campfire in the cave as the smoke filtered past Garm's ragged and torn blanket. The cave extended further back than we cared to explore, and, tired from our travels, we decided to settle at the entrance.

Garm rested on my side, his weight pressing comfortably against my wing as he dozed slightly. Not quite asleep, but nearly there.

"Garm?" I croaked softly.

"Hm?"

"Where are we going?" I asked with some difficulty. "We've been wondering the woods and mountains for a while now. Will we go back home?"

His body stiffened against me, and in the corner of my eye I saw his face tighten with stress.

“I’m tired, and want a place to call home,” I said as I laid my head down.

“I know, little one. But with dragons being hunted I can’t let us settle down where someone might find us,” Garm said, and I could feel his muscles still taunt against me. I didn’t respond. Instead I wrapped my tail over him like a blanket and let him stay close, hoping against hope that we could find someplace that we could call home.

We let the fire burn itself out and fell asleep with the ashes.

“Wake up dragon,” a voice called into my ear. “I want to see your eyes before I end you.”

Opening my eyes, I saw another human had found their way into the cave with us. I looked at the woman but something about her eyes made me want to cringe away. I tried to move but ropes creaked, and I struggled to pull free of their grasp.

“Garm! Gaaarm!” I cried, shaking the ropes to come loose. Deep inside I could feel an unfamiliar fear boil up, and I growled ever more, trying to get free.

“Please, leave him alone,” Garm called from behind my peripheral vision. “He’s all I have left.”

“All you have left is right,” the crazed woman said, picking up a small knife and holding it over my head. “You have a pile of money travelling with you and yet you live in squander. With this hide I’ll be able to claim my title once again.”

“I’m scared,” I cried. Stopping my struggle against the ropes I reached out a paw for Garm to take. “Garm, please! I scared.”

The woman's eyes went wide as she gapped. "The beast can speak!"

"And think and feel," Garm added. "He has been in my care since he was a hatchling, and he has taken care of me and spared me from a darkness that threatened to take me from this world. You may not be robbing me of any treasure that I value, but he is more valuable than all the scales you could find in this world. If you kill him, then you will be condemning me to death as well."

I continued to struggle, stretching my limb as far as it could go. I could feel Garm's presence but could not reach him and it frightened me to no end. *Why won't he come? Is he stuck too?*

"Garm! Garm!"

"You see, he even knows my name," Garm said in a ragged breath, and I heard him struggling with something.

"Is this true, dragon?" the woman asked, looking at me with eyes that faltered in her desire. "Is his name Garm?"

"Yes," I croaked. "And I'm Muldrix."

"Muldrix," the woman said, rolling the name in her mouth. "Muldrix. Why would you name a dragon 'happy last' in the old tongue?"

"You know the language?" Garm asked as he stopped struggling.

"I do, and it is blasphemous to use it for such a thing. Because you have defiled the ancient language, I cannot allow this creature to live," the woman said, raising her blade once again.

“Garm!” I called again. I strained against the ropes once more and they dug so deep into my hide it began to hurt.

“Please, he is my last happiness,” Garm said, falling beside me, his arms tied behind his back. “I swear by Olodrix’s light that Muldrix is my family, and if you so much as prick his tail I will hunt you to the ends of the earth.”

A thunderclap resounded through the cave, echoing into the bones of the mountain. This time it was the woman’s turn to shake as her breath came in ragged gasps and the knife clanged to the floor.

“As you can see, I have *not* been struck down by the gods and my oath stands,” Garm said, his voice filled with power. “Now release me, and I promise that no harm will befall you from myself, or Muldrix.”

Nodding shakily, the woman bent down and picked up the knife and went to work on releasing Garm. Just as well, my fear of her was fading and anger was building up in its place.

Garm must have noticed the change in my bearing because he now spoke softly to the lady. “What is your name, and what troubles have brought you here?”

She glanced at me nervously as she moved to cut Garm’s hands free, and I raised my lip in a low growl. Her eye’s opened wide with terror and she quickly cut Garm free, and then moving back until she was far enough away that I couldn’t reach her if I wanted.

“Easy, Muldrix,” Garm said as he rested a hand on my neck. “She doesn’t mean us any more harm, and we’re not going to harm her. Understand?”

I looked at the frightened woman and I blew a puff of smoke disdainfully at her, and then relaxed as Garm released the bindings from around my head and neck. Once free, I walked over

to the cowering woman and sniffed her. She shook horribly and I could taste the fear radiating from her in waves.

“She has the same smell from last night,” I told Garm. Backing away from her, I rested against the opposite wall, and watched them carefully.

Slowly, Garm walked over and sat beside the woman. She turned away from him, tucking her knees up against her chest and resting her head on them as she stared towards the entrance. Her long hair flowed from her head down to the small of her back, and her clothes, though they be worn and tattered, looked as if they could have belonged to some fair Lady from a royal house. *Her clothes are nice, and she looks as if she is traveling. But if this is the case then where is her family?* I wondered. *And more importantly, why is she here?*

I wasn’t sure if Garm was thinking along the same lines because instead of questioning her like I would, he pulled out his own knife and began to whittle away at a piece of wood.

We all sat in silence for a long time, the light of the morning sun filtering through our blanket and diffusing the darkness with twilight. The sound of wood being chipped away turned into a soothing rhythm and caused me to become drowsy as my eyes closed a little at a time. Soon my eyes shut all the way and I drifted off to a half sleep where I could still listen to any conversation that might take place but rest as if I were truly asleep.

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“He’s asleep,” Garm said. He hoped his comment would draw a response from the woman, but she continued to sit huddled against the wall. He frowned as he set down his knife and inspected his carving. He had the dragon’s tail and head formed. The wings would be the roughest part when he got to it, but he hoped he’d get better with practice.

He glanced at the woman and was again surprised by her beauty. Her mess of hair and dirt covered face had done nothing to hide the confidence she had brought moments before when she had come in and tied him and Muldrix with their own rope. Garm watched her for a second more before moving to the cold fire pit. A few quick strokes of his flint and steel into some kindling and within minutes he had flames he could use to cook the morning breakfast.

“My name is Wylinth,” she finally said.

Garm looked over his shoulder and saw that her eyes appeared glazed over, as if in thought. He caught the glint of something reflecting the fire’s light by her left ear. Turning back to the fire to keep an eye on it, he replied, “And what brings you out here Wylinth, daughter of Legorn?”

Her head jerked so quickly it startled him, almost dropping his pan he had just picked up.

“How do you know me?” she asked, her gaze dark and heavy.

He smiled, glad to know he had gotten her full attention. “Even us lowly peasants from Trollox have heard of Legorn’s troubles. Tell me, why are you here and why is he not here with you?”

At his words, her face fell, and she rested her head on her knees again before she answered. “He has passed beyond the Veil, along with the rest of my family.”

Garm’s smile faded, and he put the pan with food over the fire. “I am sorry. It is difficult to bury a loved one—”

“I didn’t bury them,” she snapped. Her eyes glared at the sun’s light peeking through the hanging blanket. “They were taken from me as we travelled on the road. Bandits hold no love for any but themselves and my family was no exception.”

Garm waited to see if she would continue. When she remained silent he pressed on. “I heard you were to be betrothed to the Lord of Tollox. Were you ambushed on the way?”

She nodded.

“My condolences to you, Lady Wylinth, and my apologies for my harsh words from earlier. I was desperate to save Muldrix and am willing to save him from any danger.”

“Why do you care for that creature?” she asked. “I thought that the Lord of Tollox declared all dragons to be destroyed, and yet I see you caring for this one as if it were family.”

“I care for him because he saved my life,” Garm said simply.

“It seems you have quite the story to share,” Lady Wylinth said. She scooted closer to the fire and closer to Garm. “If you expect me to tell my tale then I expect the same in return. A tale for a tale.”

“And a little breakfast to share,” Garm added. He lifted the steaming pan from the fire and checked the food. Satisfied it was ready to eat he set it between them. “Careful, they are hot. So, my Lady, who is to go first in the telling of the tales?”

“If you would please,” she said with a wave of her hand. “I fear your tale may be more interesting than mine, but please tell me first for I wish to hear how you have tamed a dragon.”

Garm sat back as he held a piece of meat gingerly, careful not to burn himself as he pondered where to start.

“I did not bend his will to mine,” he said, his thoughts going back to over a year ago. “I found him in the woods on the very day I wished to end my life.”

“The gods have forbidden us from taking any life, why would you do to yourself?” Lady Wylinth asked.

“The same reason I imagine that one might try to rob a man,” Garm said with a grim smile. “Desperation. You see, I lost my wife and children roughly two years ago to a pack of wolves. I had gone out hunting and she took them out to pick flowers and berries.”

His voice dropped and Wylinth sat still, waiting on him to continue. He cleared his throat and kept going. “It wasn’t until I heard the screams that I knew they were in danger. By the time...by the time I found them it was too late. I was able to kill or chase away the wolves, but that still left me feeling empty inside.” His voice cracked and tears came to his eyes as he remembered the day. “For the next year I did what I could to move on, but life became dull. Food was tasteless, and my cabin seemed stale without my family there beside me.”

Garm wiped away the tears, keeping his eyes trained on the fire and not wishing to meet the Lady’s face as he strove to control his emotions before he continued. “It was during that time that Lord Trellin decided to put an end to the dragons living in the mountains of Melduith. I watched as he sent his men up the mountains into the dragon’s lair to kill them. Sorrow like I had never felt went out to those creatures as I watched the battle from afar. It was too much for my tender mind and I waited in my home the rest of the night as the sounds of battle floated down from the mountains.

“The next morning, I went out in the morning to see my end, when I heard a sound fill the forest. Not quite the squeaking of a baby bird and yet not quite like a kitten’s mewling either. I followed the sound until I happened upon a little egg that had been dropped among the trees. For a single moment, I felt as if it had been my lot in life to be the witness to one final tragedy as the creature within died without a parent. But to my amazement he was hardy, and strong as his

voice carried far and wide for the care of a parent. But none would come, and I thought for sure the creature would die without aid. Again my reasoning was folly, because then he snatched up a bug that had been crawling nearby.”

Garm laughed as the memory filled him with warmth and delight. “The face he made was like a child eating their first sour food. It was then I knew the only thing this little one needed was someone to watch over him, and to make sure that no trouble came as he grew into adulthood. From that moment on, I placed it upon myself to care for Muldrix, for he saved me from despair, and gave me a hope that I had not felt in a long time.”

He turned from the fire to see that Lady Wylinth had finished her strip of meat and had been watching him, her hair falling about her face as she listened intently.

“Then why are you no longer living in those woods near Melduith?” Wylinth asked when it was clear that Garm would not continue. “We are far from that mountain and well out of Lord Trellin’s domain for him to harm your dragon. What made you leave?”

“It was Lord Trellin,” Garm chuckled darkly. “I took Muldrix when he was no taller than my knee, just over a year ago, to a nearby village that was hosting its harvest festival. He was involved in an incident that resulted in us being revealed to some Trollox soldiers attending the festivities. I was only able to escape because a good friend stayed behind to point them in the wrong direction. Since then we have been wandering the woods, eating what we can and saving the rest. Muldrix has shed a few scales and I have used those to purchase food from villagers from time to time, but we have stayed nowhere for longer than a few days.”

The fire crackled in the silence that followed and Garm lost himself in its flames as they danced on the logs. It had been so long since he had ever told anyone of the death of his family. When he *had* told them, like to Zelu, it had left him aching inside so badly that he would beg for

relief from the gods. Now it was a dull pain, a reminder of what had happened and who he had become. He was a different man now, and there were parts of his mind that were different as well. He couldn't explain how he knew they were different; he just did.

He jumped when Lady Wylinth began to speak, forgetting she was there with him.

"You were not wrong about my betrothal," she said. Her eyes stared into the fire with an intensity that reminded him of that pain two years ago.

"But it was not as the rumors made it out to be," she continued. "We did not need the money, though it would have helped our cause. My marriage to Lord Trellin would have united our two lands in an alliance against Lord Farrow and his country in Valibu to the south."

"You meant to start a war," Garm said as he understood their purpose behind the marriage. "That would explain why Lord Trellin would have wanted the dragons killed. Their scales would have helped fund his war. But what for? What was so great that you would agree to marry for the sake of war?"

"Land, rule, scales, everything my father could want," she confessed in a small voice. "In marrying Lord Trellin and taking the land from Lord Farrow we could have tripled what was ruled individually. My father wanted all of it, so he agreed to marry me to Trellin to unite our borders. I never wanted the war, but I saw how much my father cared for his people and I hoped I could serve as a good queen to my people. I wanted a land of happiness and my father convinced me we could do it.

"It was about twenty days ago we made our way to Tollox city. Our caravan was small, but we had two hundred of our best soldiers escorting us as we travelled for my wedding. We were nearly halfway to Tollox when our company was attacked at the break of dawn. Our carriage was hit hard and fast. My father pushed me out the side of the carriage that wasn't being

bombarded by bandits. I ran as fast as I could, carrying this knife my father had thrust into my hands. I went as far as I could until I came to the crest of a hill where I could look back on the road.”

Wylinth paused as she wiped her tears and sniffled. “I never wanted to get married,” she said, her voice choked up. “Not really. I told him I didn’t want to, and that something about Lord Trellin seemed off. My father told me to mind my own business and to think of it as doing my part for the good of our Kingdom. Not that it matters anyhow since our land will go to Lord Trellin.”

Garm thought that through and was confused by what she meant. “Why would Lord Trellin get your Kingdom? Doesn’t it still belong to you?”

She shook her head. “It was agreed between my father and Lord Trellin that if anything should happen to either myself, or to him before we were married, that the betrothed would be counted as the heir to all we possessed. Since I had my brother Brego, my father wasn’t worried about my inheritance going to Lord Trellin.”

“But what about your mother, or brother...any other siblings?” Garm asked. “Wouldn’t they be considered heirs of your Kingdom?”

“They’re all dead,” she said quietly. “As I stood at the top of that hill, I could see my family’s carriage burn. I could make out the clothing of my father, mother, and of little Brego by the fire. The men hadn’t let them burn but they *weren’t* about to let them escape. I...I saw... they didn’t...”

Wylinth erupted into sobs, her head fell between her knees, her hair covering her face.

“I am sorry for your loss, and the troubles you must have gone through,” Garm said when her crying calmed to the occasional sniff. He reached over and placed a hand on her shoulder, not knowing what else he could do to comfort her. “If there is anything I can do to help, I will.”

“How can you mean that?” she asked suddenly. She stared at him with a piercing gaze. “You’ve only just met me and even then, I tried to kill your dragon. Why would you so willingly offer your services to me? For all you know I could have made up the story.”

“Perhaps,” Garm conceded. “But the grief you carry I have seen, and that cannot be faked. Grief causes us to do things we will regret, like tying up strangers.” Wylinth blushed and Garm chuckled. “Do not worry, I told you myself that I nearly took my life because of my grief. Tell me, what have you been doing these many days alone?”

He handed her his waterskin and she drank greedily from it before she spoke again.

“I’ve been wandering the woods along these mountains for the past six days,” she said, wiping her chin and handing him his now empty bag. “I salvaged what food I could from the attack, but they didn’t leave much. I ran out of that about two days ago and have been scrapping off the land for anything I could recognize as edible.”

“Which isn’t much I would imagine,” Garm said with a smile.

“No, it isn’t,” Wylinth said, smiling back.

“How did you find me and Muldrix?”

Wylinth opened her mouth and then closed it again. “You’d think me crazy if I told you how I came here.”

“Would he?”

Both Garm and Wylinth jumped to their feet and Muldrix was startled awake, a puff of smoke and tiny flames jutting from his mouth in surprise. At the mouth of the cave was an old woman wearing a black cloak, her ash gray hair falling through the opening of the hood that was covering her head. When Garm looked into her eyes, he couldn't decide if they were blue, or gray.

"Would you believe her if she told you it was I who showed her?" the old lady asked, walking in further and pointing a finger at Garm. To his surprise they were a vivid green now. "You don't have to worry about this young lad, Wylinth, but you might want to make sure to stay on Muldrix's good side since he's still not so sure about you."

"Who are you?" Muldrix asked.

"Why I'm the Seer young wyrmling, the Seer of the Capilu Mountains," she said, raising her hands dramatically.

"I thought you were a myth," Garm said. He saw Lady Wylinth face light up with recognition, but she seemed just as startled by the Seer's announcement as he did.

The Seer froze and stomped right up to Garm's tall frame. Even though he was taller than her by about three feet he felt like a child about to be reprimanded by a parent.

"You have a dragon for a son, and can make oaths by the gods names, but you can't believe in a little folktale? Unbelievable," she said, poking him hard in the ribs. "Maybe I should have thought better before sending the Princess to you for help."

"You wanted me to come to him for help?" Wylinth said, her face turning pink with anger. "You only said it would be to my benefit to chase down the man with the dragon and that I would find my path to reclaim my birthright."

“Did I say you had to slay poor Muldrix here?” the woman said, walking over and placing a hand right behind his chin and scratching it just the way he liked.

“Well—I uh, no you didn’t, but—”

“But nothing girl, you took my answer and interpreted how you wanted it to mean. I said to follow the man with the dragon to the cave, there you will find your way back to your rightful claim. If you heard something completely different, then don’t blame me.”

“I’m sorry,” Garm said, stepping forward and feeling that now was the time for him to ask a few questions of his own. “But how do you know me and Muldrix, and what did you mean by sending the Lady here to find me?”

“Oh, there is a lot you can do to help the Princess,” the Seer said, a mischievous twinkle in her eye. “Let me get a couple of things that will help guide you.”

Walking over to the cave entrance she looked behind the blanket Garm had set up. The light blinded him, Wylinth, and Muldrix together, and they had to wait until their eyes adjusted to the dark again when the flap was lowered. As the cave came back into focus, they froze, shocked by what they saw. Instead of the small campfire that Garm had made there was a roaring fire with a big black cauldron sitting on top of it. Along the walls hung shelves with instruments and ingredients the group weren’t sure if they belonged in a kitchen or not.

“That’s better,” the Seer said, dusting off her hands as she walked up to the pot and began throwing in obscure vegetables, parts of animals, and things stuck inside glass jars. “Don’t you worry sweetie, I’ll get you all pointed in the right direction soon enough.”

She stirred the concoction with a long wooden spoon, talking to herself merrily in a strange language that none of them could understand.

“Do you know where the pot came from?” Garm asked Wylinth in a low whisper.

“It wasn’t there when I spoke to her last,” Wylinth said, matching his tone. “When we met it was in the forest and she just pointed to you both on the mountainside.”

“And to a bad ending you would have gone to, if I hadn’t shown you the way,” the Seer cackled. “If you had kept going on the path you were on, you’d be experiencing the insides of a hungry bear right now.”

Wylinth’s face blanched, and Garm had to reach out his arm to catch her as he helped lower her to the ground.

“Don’t worry dear, you’re very safe now. In fact, you’re much safer now than you’re going to be soon enough,” the old woman cackled once more. Walking over she reached out and plucked a hair from Garm’s unsuspecting self.

“Ouch,” he said, rubbing the back of his head. “What do you think you’re doing?”

“Oh, stop your fretting, Garm. Since when has worrying ever gotten you anywhere?” She added the hair to the mix and walked over to Muldrix and with *his* permission grabbed a couple of loose scales that she then added to her potion.

“What are you making?” Muldrix asked going over and sniffing the fumes rolling out of the pot.

“It’s a potion, for your friend Garm,” the Seer said soothingly. “It will help you find what you need to get Wylinth her Kingdom back. And it will help you Garm find the thing that you have been searching for a few years now.”

Instead of reacting how Wylinth did, Garm sat down and looked at the floor between his feet.

What did he want? What had he been searching for? He knew that he had found something with Muldrix, but there was still a void in his life that he couldn't quite place. He had thought it was peace and safety, which was why they had run out into the woods to get away from Lord Trellin. They had both for a while, but Garm knew it was only a matter of time before someone would find him with Muldrix again. *Very much like today*, he thought, glancing over to Wylinth. *I need solitude and protection. That is the only way Muldrix, and I can live. The only way we can truly be left alone is if no one can search for us.*

The Seer continued her work, pausing only to walk out of the veiled entrance and into the sun, coming back with a tall walking stick. "This should do," she said excitedly as she shuffled quickly to her bubbling cauldron. "Here, Garm, hold this and use it to stir the mix, but don't put it all the way in. Just hold it as far in as it can go, and now stir."

Garm watched, opened mouthed, as he stirred the potion with the rod that should've gone only half of the way down. Instead, he was holding on to the last foot or so of wood that could be seen sticking out above the gurgling potion. When she gave him the signal to pull the wood out, he had to tug with all his might, as if something were trying to drag it back in. Grunting, Garm heaved it out, inch by inch. Finally, with the sound like a boot being pulled from mud, he held the branch aloft. The wood glowed with an inner light and the tip seemed ready to bloom like a flower.

The Seer giggled, dancing like a little child would on their birthday, and in a tight squeal she said, "That staff has been imbued with magic and will now lead you both to the thing you seek."

Breathing deeply, Garm held onto it as its light began to shine from the bulbous end, bouncing off the walls until they all had to close their eyes in fear of damaging their sight. When

the light had faded once more Garm blinked and found that the Seer was gone. The roaring fire, the cauldron, the tools, all her ingredients were gone, as if she never existed.

“Where’d she go?” Wylinth asked.

“I’m not sure,” Garm replied. “But she left us with this.”

Holding up the staff, the light slowly began to dim until it appeared to be no more than a normal walking stick with the end of it blossoming out and twisting away.