

# Friends for Life - Friends for Real

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Submitted: July 8, 2006  
Updated: September 14, 2009

*[WIP] They had what no force on Earth could divide. Be it up or down, right or wrong, they counted on a childhood vow to see them through. But now time has taken its toll and nothing can ever be the same.  
[Spud/Trixie – Jake/Trixie – Jake/Rose]*

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# 1 - Just an Average Day

## Friends for Life - Friend for Real By Evilevergreen

**Summary:** “We all harbor dark secrets,” was what he once told her, but little did she know that those same secrets would lead them to a world full of magic, lies, betrayal, and worst of all. . . love. Follow Jake, Spud, and Trixie through an epic tale that will test the bonds of their friendship, and the strength of a vow made long ago.

### Chapter One: Just an Average Day

*“If you go through with this,” Trixie’s tone was pleading, but firm. “I will never forgive you and neither will Jake.”*

*“Well, then,” Spud’s voice was eerily calm as he spoke, so much so that it sent a chill down Trixie’s spine. “I guess this is finally where we part ways.” He turned around, leaving her where she stood.*

*“Spud, wait!” she yelled desperately, as she lunged forward and grabbed onto his sleeve.*

*“Spud is gone!” he turned back and yelled as he violently tore himself away from her. “The name is Arthur,” he spat, as he narrowed his eyes and looked upon her as if she were nothing more than something stuck at the bottom of his shoe. “Because you killed Spud the moment you turned your back on him.”*

*“Please, understand I never meant. . .” her voice trailed off, tears threatening to fall as she looked into the burning eyes of this stranger before her. Who was this man? This could not be the boy she had grown up with. Where was the sweet, simply Spud she had once known? The boy she had come to adore? Did he even exist or was it all just an act? No, she wouldn’t believe it so. “I love you,” the words slipped from Trixie’s mouth in a breathless whisper. The Spud she knew had to exist. . . he just had to.*

*Spud’s eyes softened at her admission, the admission he had been waiting so long to hear. He stared at her momentarily before reaching out his hand so that he could take her face gently in his touch. “Trixie, I-” he began, but he stopped mid-way in his reach for her before dropping his hand back to his side and balling it up into a fist. He then turned his head as he lowered it towards the ground. He began walking backwards, letting the shadows cover his form from Trixie’s view. “I wish, I could still say the same,” he replied sadly before he disappeared in the cover of darkness.*

“Jake, if you don’t get your boney @\$ down here!” yelled Trixie at the bottom of the stairs of the Long home.

“Will you chill, Trix?” the seventeen year old Jake Long called from upstairs, in the bathroom, as he put on the finishing touches to his over gelled hair. “You know I got to look good for the ladies.” He chuckled to himself.

Trixie leaned on the banister as she crossed her arms and huffed impatiently. She then looked to her watch again for the seventh time in five minutes. “We’re already late for Spud’s competition.”

“Alright, I’m coming. I’m coming.” Jake grabbed his house keys before making his way towards one of his best friends. “How many times do I have to remind you that you can’t rush perfection?”

“Oh please, Jakey,” she grabbed his arm and practically pulled him out the door. “Give it a break. You ain’t that fine.”

“Blasphemy!” he yelled in mock shock as the two headed out the door and walked a few blocks down to catch the train across town.

As they sat, Trixie pulled out her new PDA, which had been a gift from her father, so that she could schedule the upcoming days. “You know, since you’ve gotten that thing, you have been driving me up the wall.” Jake grabbed it from her hands.

“Hey,” she yelled in protest, as Jake held it out of her reach. “Well, that’s funny, considering you’ve still been late to everything.” She reached for the device, only to have Jake pull it away again. “Look here dragon boy,” she whispered. “If you know what’s good for you. . .” she began, but there was no reason to continue as Jake handed it back to her. “Thank you.”

“So is everything planned for next Saturday?” he asked her as he put his arm around her and looked on to her PDA.

“Of course,” she smiled as she pulled up a file. “Spud is going to straight trip when he sees the bash we’ve been planning for this his big one – eight.”

“So has everyone on the list RSVPed?”

“Almost,” she replied.

“And the center is booked, right?”

“Jake, will you stop buggin’. I’ve got my end covered,” she reassured him. “So all you have to do is make sure the cake is there by seven.”

Jake straightened up as the train was coming to a stop. “Wait, I’m on cake detail?”

“Well, yeah. That’s what we agreed on.” Trixie watched as Jake made a face. “Jake, please tell me

you put in the order for the cake last week.”

“Uh,” Jake avoided eye contact as he scratched the back of his head. “Well. . .”

“Jake!” she cried with wide eyes.

“Don’t worry, I got this.” Jake then shot up from his seat. “We’re just going to have to make a quick detour,” he pronounced as he grabbed Trixie by the wrist and pulled her off the train.

OoOoO

“I should have known,” Trixie said angrily as they stepped off the bus into a greenery scene. “You’re late with everything else, why not this?”

“Come on, it’s not that bad,” Jake told her as he followed her along a dirt path up a steadily upward hill.

“Not that bad?” she turned around and spoke to him as she continued to walk backwards. “Jake, we have no cake. We can’t have a party without a cake.”

“No sweat, Trix,” he said with a smile that only annoyed his friend more. “How hard can it be to whip up a cake?”

“Do you cook, Jake?” she asked.

“No,” he answered.

“Do I cook?”

Jake looked at her oddly. “Is this a trick question?”

“Jake!”

“Alright, no.” he replied.

Trixie took a deep breath as she said calmly, “Okay, then how do you suppose we’re going to – whip up a cake!” she yelled the last part.

“I’m telling you. I got this. Come Saturday at seven, Spud will have his cake.” Jake then once again smiled at her. “You sure are going through a lot of trouble for this party. Any reason in particular?” He cocked an eyebrow in her direction.

“Shut up, boy,” she told him as she turned around so she could once again see where she was going, but that didn’t help her much as her foot got caught on a root of a tree growing above the ground.

“Trixie,” Jake worriedly called out as she was in danger of falling over the side of the hill. Jake’s tail,

without thinking, appeared and wrapped itself around Trixie's body before pulling her towards him. He took both of her arms securely in his hands before his tail dissolved. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"Are you crazy?" Trixie asked him, as she frantically looked around. "You could have been seen."

Jake released his hold on her. "You're welcome," he said quietly as he rolled his eyes.

"I'm not playing, Jake. You're too carefree with your abilities," she scowled him.

Jake groaned as he continued up the hill. "Dang, girl, you're starting to sound like my gramps. I could save the world ten times over and all he would say is how I neglected to clean the bathroom in the shop."

"Fine," she said as she caught up with him, walking beside him as she took his arm. "Oh, Jakey," she began with a Southern accent. "My hero, thank you. For I do declare, I would have fallen on my purdy little face if it haven't been for these gentlemanly arms of yours," she paused, rethinking her words. "Or should I say tail?" she asked as she slapped him on the butt. She then laughed as she asked in her normal voice, "Happy now?"

Jake chuckled and playfully looked at her as if she was crazy, but before he could say anything they heard a crowd of voices. They both looked up and saw people starting to make their way down the hill. Among them was their friend Spud holding what looked to be a first place trophy. "Hey, guys. Just get here?" He greeted them cheerfully as he made his way over to them, wondering why Jake's face looked so red as Trixie let go of him.

"It was Jake's fault," Trixie replied as soon as Spud was close enough as he let her see the trophy.

"Sorry, man. Trix and I had to make a detour at- ow!" Jake yelled out as Trixie had elbowed him the ribs.

"What was that?" Spud looked confused as it appeared Trixie and Jake were having a conversation only with their eyes.

"Nothing," he replied as Trixie let him see the trophy. Jake then looked to Spud curiously as they started their way down the hill. "Spud, I'm glad you won and all, but I've been curious. When did you get into archery?"

"Uh- it's always been a dream of mine to learn the ways of the bow and arrow," he began as he put his arm around Trixie. "If only to one day be your cupid and pierce your heart," he said dotingly in a way only he could pull off.

"Keep dreaming, cupid," Trixie said annoyed, as she took a step to the side, making Spud's arm slip off of her. Spud only shrugged as he dipped his hand into his pocket and pulled out his red and yellow yo-yo.

OoOoO

The sun was beginning to set as the three friends soon found themselves in Trixie's home, sitting in front of the television, playing video games. Jake and Trixie sat on the floor as they played a two player game. Spud sat up on the couch as he waited for one of them to lose so that he could take their place. As he waited, he fooled around with his yo-yo, watching it intently as he threw it only to have it return to him.

Jake, being skillful in the game, was able to watch Spud from the corner of his eye. Something felt off about Spud, more than usual that is. Spud had always carried around that yo-yo and now that Jake was thinking about it, he couldn't remember a day when he had seen Spud without it, but nowadays a lot of his attention went towards it.

"Uh-oh, buddy-boy, I've got you on the run now," Jake heard Trixie say and so pulled his full attention back to the game.

They were racing cars and Jake had been in first place, until Trixie hit him from behind, sending his car veering off into the cement wall lining the track. "Aw, man," Jake groaned as he watched Trixie's car pass over the finish line.

"Next victim, please," she said in a sickly sweet voice as she turned around to look at Spud.

"Here, just take it," Jake sulked as he handed Spud the controller before sliding over to make room for him on the floor.

Spud placed his yo-yo on the coffee table in front of him. "Alright," he began excited as he picked his car from the select screen. "Let's put the paddle to the metal." He then looked to Trixie. "I'm sorry, my sweet, but this will be a battle you will not win."

"Oh, we'll see about that, because I got this race in the bag." Trixie then selected her next car and the two were off on the race track.

The two were three minutes into the race when something caught Jake's eye and pulled his interest away from the screen. There was something blinking on the table. It was Spud's toy. "Uh, Spud?"

"Yeah?" he responded as he moved his body in the direction he wanted his car to go.

"Yo man, is it supposed to be doing that?" Jake went to pick up the toy, but to his surprise Spud's hand beat him to it.

Spud then shot up from the floor before Jake had the chance to blink. He then said the first thing that came to his head, "I have to go to the bathroom." It was followed by him jumping over the couch and ending up in the closet.

Jake and Trixie got up and looked a bit bewildered, though they honestly didn't now why, as they looked at the closet door. Trixie then shook her head from side to side. "You think we would be used to that by now," she stated as she slide back to the floor and picked up a controller. "He'll figure it out," she said as Jake continued to look at the door. "He always does." She sighed as she held the second player

controller in the air. Jake soon took it and picked up where Spud had left off.

After several minutes, Jake thought he heard what sounded like a conversation happening from behind him. He paused the game as he looked to Trixie. "Is it me, or has Spud been acting kind of weird lately?" he asked her.

"Where have you been? That boy has been weird since way back in the day," she responded.

"Yeah, but what I mean is, weird even for him."

"You're tripping, Jakey," she told him as she reached over and tried to unpaused the game, but was unsuccessful.

"I'm for real," he protested.

Trixie then looked to him seriously. "So am I, because the day my boy, Spud starts acting 'normal' is the day I know something isn't right with the world. Now are we going to play or what?" With her question, Jake realized she was right, because any kind of strange behavior from Spud could only add up to one thing. . . *just an average day.*

To Be Continued. . .





## 2 - Countdown

### Chapter Two: Countdown

Jake Long groaned as the blaring alarm that sat on his night stand stole him from his rare, peaceful dreams. With his head still under his pillow his hand with out blindly searching for the object making the offensive sound. When he found it he turned it off and rolled over in his bed. He stretched his body as he sat up, but recoiled suddenly as a shot of pain struck his body.

He swung his legs over the edge of the bed and stood up before walking over to turn on the light. He then made his way to his vanity dresser. He frowned as his reflection came into view and put his hand over a part of his bare chest. "Damn, Trix," he spoke to himself as he examined his forming bruise were Trixie had elbowed him. "Baby girl doesn't know her own strength." He smiled, but it looked sad to him before he shrugged the matter off and prepared for the day.

Downstairs, Jake made his way to the kitchen where he saw his sister, Haley, quietly reading a book as she ate her breakfast. He leaned over her chair and read over her shoulder knowing it was one of her pet peeves. "Whacha doing?" he asked in a sing-song voice.

"Something you wouldn't know anything about," she began, not skipping a beat as she turned the page. "Studying."

"I study," he defended himself. "Just because I'm not always on the honor roll, like some people I know, doesn't mean I don't put in the work. Besides-

"If you tell me your responsibilities as the American Dragon hinders your performance in school, I don't want to hear about it," Haley laid down her book and looked up at her brother. "Because if it were me, I wouldn't have a problem setting aside time to do both," she explained.

Jake's brow furrowed at her comment. "Well, not everyone can be as perfect as Haley Long. Besides, my duties aren't something I can keep a date book for," he tried to explain. "When I'm called for help, I go. Anyplace at anytime and whatever I had planned for the day goes on the back burner. You can't see it now, but if for some reason, something should happen to me and you have to take my place, you'll understand that." He reached for her book and flipped through the pages. "There are some things far more important than what you can do in a classroom."

"Don't ever talk like that," Haley told him.

Jake looked at her curiously as he lowered the book from his face. "Don't talk like what?" he asked.

"About you dying," she said softly as she averted her eyes.

Jake sighed as he finally took a sit next to his sister. He then began slowly, "It's been over a year, Haley. You have to learn to forgive yourself."

Haley quickly lifted her head towards him and looked him dead in the eye. "Have you forgiven me?"

Jake blinked rapidly, he wasn't expecting that. "That's not the point," he responded.

"Yes, it is," she turned her head away as she spoke. "If only I had been stronger." Her eyes became distant as her mind traveled a million miles away.

"No, you are strong, Haley," he tried to convince her. "It was me; I shouldn't have left you alone like that. I just thought-

"That I could handle it?" she interrupted him. "That I could do it on my own? Well, I couldn't," she grabbed her book from Jake and stood up. "And mom died because of it." She then grabbed her book bag off the back of the chair. "I'm not as perfect as everyone likes to believe. . . but only you and I know it." Haley then walked out of the kitchen and out the front door.

Jake dropped his head as he sighed, for his sister's pain was also his own. He knew as her big brother that he had to help her, but he didn't know how, and he felt he was failing her somehow. Especially when he couldn't honestly say that he had forgiven her, but how could he when he knew it wasn't her fault? Because their mother's death rested only on one set of hands. . . his own.

But he didn't have time to think about that, he convinced himself, knowing very well, it was a subject he didn't want to think about all together. So he grabbed his things along with an apple out the fridge and headed out the door to meet his friends before school.

OoOoO

"Honestly," Trixie cried as she stepped out of her front door and saw Spud sitting at the bottom of her stoop. "Just once, I would like to come out of my house in the morning, to not find you sitting there," she told him as he stood up, ready to walk her to school.

Spud only smiled at her. "Don't front, you know you would miss my face," he told her as he took the two books she held out of her hands. "Who else, but Jake, would be able to put up with your demanding demeanor?"

"True," she said, proud of the fact, as they began their walk down the Brooklyn streets towards their high school, New Utrecht.

As they continued to walk Trixie noticed how quiet it seemed. She then realized why as she looked to Spud. He was usually very cheery in the morning, going on about something she wasn't trying to listen to. "Spud?" she called.

"Yeah?" he looked to her with a light in his eyes and a smile on his lips.

"Is something wrong?" she asked worriedly.

His smile quickly dropped. "No, nothing," he quickly told her as he shook his head. He then shifted the books and his arms so that he could look at his watch. "We better hurry up are we're going to be late,"

he told her hoping she wouldn't ask him anymore questions. He couldn't stand lying to her. "Trixie?" he spoke a few moments later. "I'm sure you already know this, but my birthday is this week. Saturday."

"Is it?" Trixie asked, trying to hold in her smile. "Eighteen right?"

"Yeah, eighteen," he answered as he turned his head away and sighed before looking at Trixie again. "And I was hoping I could ask something of you," he shrugged. "You know, something like a birthday gift."

Trixie cocked an eyebrow in his direction. "Depends. What do you want?"

His eyes filled with fear as he answered her. "You," he whispered. Trixie froze for a moment thinking she had misheard him. "I just want to spend the day with you," he continued. "Just you."

"Spud. . ." she shook her head. There was no way she could do it. . . even if she wanted to. She had too many things to prepare for the day of his surprise party. She and Jake had already agreed that it would be he that entertained Spud throughout the day until it was time for it, otherwise, knowing Jake, nothing would get done.

"Please, don't say no," he asked of her, already sensing her answer. "All I'm asking is for one lousy day," if Trixie didn't know any better, she would have thought he sounded desperate and that wasn't like him.

So she looked at him strangely before putting her hand on his forehead to feel his temperature. "You know, since Jake mentioned it, you have been acting kind of strange lately," she concluded.

"Woman!" he called loudly, roughly smacking down her hand. "There's nothing wrong with me!" he said suddenly angry.

"Ow!" she yelled out, causing a few of the people around them to look at the pair for a moment. "Boy, you are tripping!" she yelled back as she pushed him.

"That's not what I meant to do," he said quickly, reaching out to take her hand, but she pulled away before he could. "It's just-" he cut himself off as he saw her take a step back. "Trixie," he began again, but softly. "I've never hid what I feel for you," he told her honestly, his voice getting quieter by the word. "So just give me one day. . . to help me through the rest."

"The rest of what, Spud?" Trixie said curiously.

Spud didn't answer her as he looked at his watch. "We should really get going if we're going to meet up with Jake before classes," was all he said as he continued towards the school, leaving Trixie behind for a moment before she picked up her step.

Ten minutes later the two found themselves in front of the school as Jake approached them. Suddenly Spud spoke before Jake came close. "I got to run. I'll see you guys at lunch, okay?" he didn't wait for a response from Trixie as he handed her back her books before running into the school.

"Hi," Jake spoke with a fake cheerfulness. "Where's he off too?" he asked as he just witness Spud's mad dash.

"Don't know," she said heading into the school. "And don't care."

Jake looked at her curiously before smiling foolishly. "Aw, did the lovebirds have a fight?" he asked playfully.

"Not in the mood for it, Jake," she told him as she arrived at her locker and began at the combination.

Jake only shrugged at he went to work on his own lock which was a few down from Trixie's. He was still organizing his books for the day when he heard her locker door close and though his door blocked her from his view, he knew she was leaning on the locker next to his. "Remember when you were saying that Spud had been kind of off lately?" she asked him.

"Well, yeah. It was only yesterday," he laughed lightly, finally closing his locker before swinging his book bag back onto his shoulder. "Why?"

"I think you were right," she told him as Jake noticed the way she was rubbing her wrist. "I'm worried about him," she confessed.

Jake then joined her as he leaned on a locker. "What made you change your mind?"

Trixie shrugged. "Just something he did," she explained and noticing the way Jake was glancing down at her hands she pulled them apart. "Something I know he would never do, if he were in his right mind," she paused as she looked suspiciously around hall, before leaning closely into Jake. "I want you to keep an eye on him," she whispered. "If you know what I mean?"

Jake frowned. "You want me to spy on him?" he whispered back and she nodded. "Weren't you the one telling me that I had to be more careful with my powers? And now you want me to do something as low as spy on one of my best friends. Nah-uh, the Jake man don't play like that," he said shaking his head.

"Jakey," she reached out and took a hold of his sleeve.

"No," he told her again. "Because what if the roles were reverse and it was him asking me to spy on you. How would you feel?"

Trixie looked away. "Betrayed, I guess," she answered after a moment.

"Exactly."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," she agreed, letting go of his sleeve, her wrist once again taking comfort in her hand. "Anyway, he said he would meet us at lunch," she informed him as she pushed herself off the locker and started towards class just as the warning bell was ringing.

"Cool," Jake replied as he too made his way down the hall.

OoOoO

The cafeteria was located on the fifth floor of the school as Trixie and Jake finished climbing the stairs and entered one of the lines. Each grabbed a tray and collected their meal before finding an empty table closes to the entrance. "I'll be glad when they let us leave the school for lunch," Jake complained as he stabbed what looked like meatloaf with his fork.

"Please, boy, don't delude yourself," Trixie told him, pulling out her PDA to change some things around. "Jake, can I count on you for something?" she asked not looking up from her task.

"Ugh," Jake groaned as he found a piece of hair in his food. "Trix, look." He shoved it into her face.

"That's your hair you dimwit," she told him pushing his hand away.

"How do you know?"

"You're kidding, right? I'd know those awful highlights anyway."

"Well, I'm still not eating it," he told her, pushing his tray away.

"Fine, whatever," she said annoyed as her attention went back to her PDA. "Now are you going to do this for me or what?"

"Do what? You haven't told me anything yet."

"Saturday. . . I need us to switch roles."

"Say what?" Jake dropped his head. "You know me and planning parties don't mix, Trixie."

"I know. Believe me, if it wasn't for something I thought was important I wouldn't ask."

Jake then smiled at her. "Something important, huh?" he asked as he threw one of his legs over the bench like seat, putting his elbow on the table before tilting his head into his hand. "So are you telling me, you're finally giving it up to my boy on his birthday?"

Trixie looked at him with deadpan eyes. "I'm going to pretend you didn't say that," she told him.

"Honestly, is that all you think about?"

"Let's see," he pretended to think it over. "I'm seventeen, male, and as horny as hell, right now. What do you think?"

Trixie lowered her head before shaking it from side to side. "Jake, your my boy and all," she patted his leg, "but that's too much information."

"So the dirty thoughts I'm having with your hand on my leg, I should keep those to myself, huh?" Jake laughed as Trixie made a face and removed her hand.

"Pervert," she called him, but couldn't stop the giggle that escaped her lips.

"You're one to talk," he replied as he moved in a little closer. "Listen, I need you to call-

"Sorry, I'm late," Jake was interrupted as Spud made his way to the table and sat down across them.

"Hey, man," Jake turned himself to face him. "Was starting to think you weren't going to show up."

"Yeah, I uh had a thing I had to do," Spud explained before turning to looking at his other friend. "Trixie, I just realized that I never really apologized for this morning," Jake looked at him curiously with the statement, but said nothing. Spud then held out his hands, his palms facing her as he flip them to show they were empty. He then ran them passed each other and when they parted a red, thornless rose appeared in his right hand. His skills as a magician had grown greatly since he won the talent show back in middle school. "I'm truly sorry," he whispered gently as he held out the flower for her to take. "To harm you, in anyway, is never my purpose."

Trixie smiled sweetly as she reached out for her present as she thanked him. "Spud, about Saturday," she began a moment later. "Okay."

Spud froze in his movement, his food slowly slipping off his fork until it landed with a small splash. "Okay?" he asked looking a bit dumbfounded.

"Yes," she confirmed.

Spud looked at her seriously. "You know what this means, right?" he asked her.

Trixie's face went pale as she looked around the cafeteria. "Don't you dare," she threatened. "No!" she said in loud whisper.

"Oh, yes," the smile on the other's face grew from ear to ear.

"No," she shook her head from side to side.

"Sorry, but I got to do it," he rose from his seat. "It's in my blood-

"Jake, help me," she turned to Jake and pleaded.

Jake rose his arms up in a defeat like gesture. "You're on your own, Sista."

"-I got to sing!" Spud finished his statement as he stood up on the lunch bench and cleared his throat.

Trixie groaned as she lowered her head and waited for Spud to humiliate her in public. . . *again*. But instead of the lyrics of a song, she heard someone call out, "Security! It's the Spudinski boy, again." It came from one of the lunch ladies.

Two large men came over. One picked Spud up as if he was nothing more than a toothpick and escorted him out the cafeteria door. "But my song!" he complained as the doors closed behind him.

“Oh, thank Merlin,” Trixie cried softly, collapsing on the table in relief.

Jake cocked an eyebrow in her direction. “You've been reading Harry Potter fan fictions again, having you?” he asked her.

“What? They're good,” she defended. “There's this one I'm reading now-”

“I don't care,” Jake interrupted her. “I just don't understand spending all that time on a story you can't make money off of.”

Trixie sighed. “Some people just don't get it.”

Jake shook his head and was about to speak when something caught his eye. “Is that Spud's yo-yo?”

“Where?” she asked. “You know what happened last time he lost that crazy thing.”

He shuddered. “I certainly don't want to relive that,” he rose from the table, taking his tray with him and dumping it off before going to pick up his friend's toy. Trixie was close behind him as he held it in his hands. “You know, I don't think I've held this thing before,” Jake commented.

“Either have I,” Trixie said as she reached out for it, but her hand snapped back as the yo-yo did something strange and opened up as if were a compact mirror. “What the hell?” she looked to Jake curiously, but his eyes were still on the toy.

There were strange letters inside, but it had an hour and minute hand like a clock, so Jake figured they were numbers in another language. And if that wasn't strange enough they were going counter clockwise. Jake finally looked back at Trixie as he realized what it was. . . . *a countdown.*

To Be Continued. . .

## 3 - Left in the Dark

### Chapter Three: Left in the Dark

“Yo, Jake!” Jake heard his name being called as students piled out of the school at the end of the day. Jake turned around to see one of his classmates, Alex. “Wait up.”

Jake waited for Alex to catch up with him. “Wassup, man?” They greeted each other.

“Spud's party still on Saturday?” Alex asked.

“For sure. Try to be there by six-thirty,” Jake confirmed.

“No problem. Look, I wanted to let you know that since the Jenkin brothers transferred that there's an opening on the team.” Jake started shaking his head before Alex could finish.

“I told you before, Alex, I don't have time to give for the basketball team,” Jake tried to explain.

“Why not? You know you got mad skills when it comes to the court,” Alex told him.

Jake gave him a cocky smile. “I know my skills are like mad legendary, but I work after school at my grandpa's shop and-” Jake stopped when he realized Alex was no longer listening to him. He wasn't even looking at him. So he turned his head to see what Alex was looking at and blinked a few times when he saw Trixie approaching them.

“So when you going to give me the hook-up, man?” Alex asked with a smile.

Jake cocked an eyebrow with the question as he looked back at his classmate. “Hook-up with what?”

“With Trixie, of course,” he answered, his eyes not leaving Trixie since she came into his view.

“Oh, okay, just let me get-” he was interrupted.

“Girl know she be looking good too,” Alex continued. “You know what I'm saying? Wearing those tight-@\$\$ jeans.” He slapped Jake's arm playfully. “I mean, I know you've checked out the booty on that little number. . . I've seen you. And those lips,” he shivered as he moaned, “they just made me want to-”

“She's taken,” Jake told him seriously, becoming protective as he heard the other's words.

Alex finally looked back at Jake, curious at his change of tone. “By who?” he asked innocently.

Jake didn't answer him at first, he just merely stared him down as if sizing him up. “Hey, baby,” Trixie greeted Jake with a term of endearment as she did from time to time as she stood beside him. She was



then taken a little by surprise as Jake put his arm around her shoulder. It wasn't a foreign gesture, she just couldn't remember him ever doing so at school before. Something about always having to look available to any possible female's whose eye he may have caught. She rolled her eyes at the thought.

"Question answered?" Jake asked Alex.

"Yeah." Alex nodded, looking a little embarrassed with the discovery. "Meant no disrespect," he told him as he held out his hand. "We cool?"

Jake looked down at his hand for a moment before removing his arm from around Trixie and smiling at Alex as he took his hand and pulled him into a half hug. "Like the other side of the pillow, man," he told him. "No harm done."

"Great," he said as they pulled away from each other. Alex then started walking backwards. "I got to get to practice, but I'll catch you later." He then looked to Trixie and winked before turning around and disappearing among the other students.

"Asshole," Jake whispered to himself.

Trixie shook her head disapprovingly. "What was that about?" she asked.

"What was what about?"

"Uh-uh, don't play stupid with me, boy. I know you don't like that Alex dude. So why do you even pretend to be nice to him?" she wanted to know.

"I have no clue," Jake told her truthfully. He then reached into his pocket and dug out Spud's yo-yo. "Where is that boy?" he wondered out loud, opening up the device again as he tried to figure out what it thing was counting down to.

"It doesn't look like anything made by a human, does it?" Trixie told him. "Maybe- maybe we should have your gramps look at it," she suggested.

Jake's attention went from the yo-yo to her. "What? No," he shook his head. "It's not our business about what it is. We're going to return it to Spud and we're going to forget about it."

"What if it's something dangerous? What if Spud doesn't know it's dangerous? You know him," she tried to convince Jake. "You think it's a countdown, right?" Jake nodded. "Well, what happens when it reaches zero or whatever it's suppose to reach? We don't know what it will do." She grabbed it from Jake and inspected it herself. "Aren't you just a little bit curious or even worried?" she pleadingly looked at him.

"Well," he tilted his head to one side, "maybe just a little. I mean, sure we've always seen him with this thing, but whose to say it wasn't switched out by someone who is out to get Spud?"

"Or you?" Trixie suggested and immediately regretted it when she saw the look on Jake's face.

Jake then took the yo-yo back. It was the second time that day he had been reminded of his mother. He shallowed hard as he stared down at the toy in his hand. "Understand this," he began softly. "No one else I love will be hurt on my account." He looked into Trixie's eyes. "No one." He then stuffed the yo-yo back into his pocket and lowered his eyes again.

They were both quiet for a moment, neither knowing what to say next as the area around them cleared. Finally Trixie reached out for him, taking his shoulder. "Jakey," she whispered slowly.

Jake pulled away from her, placing a huge smile on his face. "I'm good, Trix," he told her, pulling up his baggy jeans. "Let's head on over to my gramps'." He then turned around and started heading towards his grandfather's store.

Trixie sighed as she followed him. He got like that every now and then. Trixie used to try to get him to talk to her, about his mother and about what had happened the night she was taken as bait. She didn't know much, except that it had something to do with the Dark Dragon and that Jake had taken Haley along with him to go get their mother. Both Jake and Haley refused to talk about that night and Trixie was starting to believe that whatever happened, they would take with them to the grave and so Trixie learned to stop asking.

OoOoO

"I'm sorry, Jake," began Lao Shi, Jake's grandfather. "But there is nothing in any of my books that contain this type of writing." Lao Shi flipped through his last reference book. "But if you just allow me to take it to someone-

"No," Jake argued. "I want to keep this matter in-house."

"So we're back at square one then?" Trixie asked as she slumped in stool. They had been researching the the strange language for a couple of hours, but found nothing that could help them.

"Yeah, it seems so," he replied, before looking at his watch. He then picked up the yo-yo from the counter. "We're going to have to return it for now."

"You're right," Trixie said jumping off her stool. "It's only a matter a time before he realizes that thing is gone and we have a repeat of last year." She grabbed her things before the two headed towards the front of the store. "Where's that creepy dog of yours?" she asked, only now realizing how quiet the place had been without him.

"He's off, gathering some stuff for gramps. He won't be back for a while. Week or so," Jake explained as they reached the door only to find that while they had been there that it had lightly started raining.

Trixie waited by the door while Jake went to go find a couple of umbrellas, but was only able to find one. They huddled closed together as they walked to the nearby bus stop. "You know, we wouldn't have to ride the bus all the time, if you just got your license so we could ride in that car your dad got you," Jake announced as they reached the covering of the bus stop.

"Don't start on that again. That test was hard, I don't care what you say," she told him as she held the umbrella and shook off the excess water in Jake's direction.

“Hey!” Jake protested with a smile. He then said, “Yeah, I'm sure it was hard. . . all four times you took it.”

Trixie glared at him. “You're just pining for an @\$@ whuppin", aren't you?” she asked as the bus pulled up and they pulled out their metro cards.

Before long they were on Spud's block. It was still raining out so they once again shared the umbrella. “What?” Trixie asked after a few minutes.

“What? What?” Jake blinked a few times, utterly confused as they had been traveling in silence.

Trixie laughed softly. “You kind of look like Spud when you do that,” she commented.

Jake didn't know how to respond that, not really knowing if it was meant as a compliment or an insult, but he had no time to debate the matter as he heard some one screaming at the top of his lungs.

“Where the hell is it?” It was Spud.

“shoot,” Trixie whispered, taking Jake's hand before breaking out into a run. “Come on!” she yelled as Jake seemed to be dragging his feet.

“Arthur, calm down!” yelled his older sister, who was his guardian, as Jake and Trixie made it up the porch stairs.

“No, it has to be found!” Spud yelled back. “She'll be furious with me if I've lost it now!” The two on the porch then heard something crash in the bedroom upstairs where the voices were coming from.

“Spud!” Jake yelled to be heard as he pounded on the front door. Then suddenly all fell silent.

It was a minute or so before Spud's sister, Johanna, greeted them. “Hey guys,” there was a huge smile on her face, “come on in.” She ushered them in out the rain. “Art- Spud will be down in a minute.”

Trixie and Jake waited in the living room as Johanna headed back upstairs as Spud was coming down. She stopped him as he did so. Jake stared at them as they whispered something among each other. Jake was conflicted and sighed heavily as he murmured. “Ear of the Dragon.”

“. . . need to know. They're my friends,” Spud spoke.

“I don't care who they are,” Johanna told Spud angrily. “Just get rid of them. We have a lot to prepare for and not a lot of time left. We can't afford anymore mistakes, Arthur.” She then continued upstairs.

“What did you hear?” Trixie asked Jake, but he had no time to reply as his dragon ears disappeared and Spud entered the room.

“Uh- hey guys.” Spud looked anxious, nervous even, as he fidget with his fingers. “Did you want to hang out or something? I heard that pizza joint has opened up down on sixty-eighth,” he told them.

"Yeah, we could do that," Jake replied as he stood up. "But we actually came to return something." He dug in his pocket. "You dropped this earlier when you were being dragged out of the cafeteria." Jake pulled out the yo-yo.

Spud's eyes grew three times their size at the sight of his toy. He started laughing as he literally jumped over the couch that separated him and Jake and knocked the boy back into the chair he was sitting in as he landed on top of him. "I love you so much!" he told his friend excitedly as he took Jake's face in his hands and kissed him on the lips. "I love you, I love you, I love you, I love you!" He took the boy in his arms and practically squeezed the life out of him.

Jake reached out for Trixie. "Help," he mouthed wordlessly.

"Uh-uh," she shook her head, "this is way too much fun to watch." She laughed at the sight before her.

Finally, Spud got up off of Jake. Jake took a big breath as he sat up properly in his chair. Spud straightened up and put his toy safely back into his pocket, patting it to make sure it was secure. Spud then placed a huge smile on his face, once again looking carefree. "So how about that pizza?" he asked as he clapped his hands and rubbed them together.

"What's with you?" Spud turned around as he heard his sister's voice, who was curious about his expression.

"Jake and Trixie found it," he explained as he pulled the yo-yo back out and tossed it to her. "It was at the school."

Johanna sighed in relief as she looked at it in her hands. She then looked back up. "Thank you, guys. Spud will see you tomorrow."

Spud frowned at her words. "But we were going to go get pizza. Come on, Jo, don't do this to me now," he begged her. "I have so little left, just let me spend it with them," he whispered for only her to hear.

Johanna only looked to Jake and Trixie and repeated her words. The two got up and Johanna walked them to the door. As she closed it, Spud stood a little ways behind her and waved his hand sadly.

"What is home girl trippin' over?" Trixie ask, glad it had stopped raining, but concerned about Johanna's behavior. She wasn't usually so rude to them.

"Beats me." Jake shrugged as they made their way back to the bus stop, remembering the part of the conversation he had heard between Spud and Johanna. "But whatever is going on, one thing is certain, she wants us. . . *left in the dark.*"

To Be Continued. . .

## 4 - Gone

### Chapter Four: Gone

It was Friday evening, the day before Spud's birthday, as he and Jake sat down at the new pizza place across town. It was busy as excited voices could be heard all around them. Spud seemed not to notice as he slowly played with the spoon in his Root Beer float, twirling it around and around as he and Jake waited for their food. Spud had called the other up about an hour ago, telling him he needed to talk. Jake could hear the uneasiness in his voice and so readily agreed to meet with him. They had meet up outside the restaurant, but neither had spoken a word to each other as they walked inside, ordered their food, and took their drinks to a booth. "Jake?" Spud sighed as he began. "Can I ask you something?"

Jake looked up from his own drink, thankful that Spud had finally broken the uncomfortable silence that had grown between them. "Yeah," he responded.

"Me and you, we've been friends for a long time, right?" he asked, not looking up from the game he played with his spoon.

"The best, man," Jake assured him, eying the other with concern. Ever since that day his sister had told him he couldn't go out with him and Trixie his demeanor wasn't as cherry as it used to be. The light that used to dance in his eyes, no matter what the occasion, seemed to have grown dull and maybe even had died. He looked older than he was, tired, as if he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders – a look Jake knew all too well when his own responsibilities became too much. "Have you been okay, Spud?" he asked.

Spud shook his head as he closed his eyes. "No," he told him truthfully. "I've had a lot of my mind lately."

"Like what?"

"I'm not allowed to speak about it." He finally put down his spoon and looked up at Jake's confused expression. "What I called you here for is-" he hesitated. "You've been a good friend to me," his face softened for a moment and Jake saw the hint of a smile on him for the first time in days. "And I want to thank you." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small box. "Here this is for you." He held out the gift for Jake.

Jake took it from Spud as he encouraged him to open it. Jake pulled out a necklace. The pendulum rest on a simple silver chain, but it was the pendulum itself that pulled Jake's attention. It was slightly cubed shaped and one inch by one inch. It was sleek black and jewel like with a strange writing in red that Jake recognized as the same kind from Spud's yo-yo. "Thanks. It's nice," he told. He then asked, "What does this writing mean?"

"It means nothing," Spud dismissed the question quickly, straightening up as their food arrived. "You should put it on," he told him, moving their drinks out the way as their waiter placed the pizza on the

table. When the waiter left each placed a slice of pizza on the plate. Spud picked at his pepperoni nervously as Jake dug in. "I also have a favor to ask," he said a moment later. Jake looked over at him, as he had his head tilted back and his slice of pizza over his mouth. Jake chewed slowly and allowed Spud to continue. "I know this is going to sound weird, but I need to know if you'll watch over Trixie for me."

"What do you mean?" Jake asked, now not sure exactly where this conversation was heading – assuming he knew in the first place. "You sound as if you're dying or something."

Spud only looked away at first. "No, nothing that grave," he replied.

"Then what's wrong, Spud?" Jake asked worriedly, the pit of his stomach tightening on him. "You know if I can help, I will. Hands down and without a doubt. So just tell me what you need me to do."

Spud looked to him angrily. "I already have!" he told him loudly before calming himself. "Look, I've already broken a promise to my sister, and said more than I should have. So please," he begged, "don't ask me questions that I can't even begin to answer. In time, I'll be able to tell you everything, but right now it's impossible for me without jeopardizing-" he stopped, his hand balling into a fist in frustration. Jake wasn't understanding, but how could he, when Spud knew he wasn't making any sense?

Jake just stared at his best friend. Spud was only dead serious when it came to several things, Trixie being on the top of his list. He had never really said it out right, but Jake knew he loved her, and at this moment, Jake would do anything to ease his worries, even if he didn't know what they were. "Alright," Jake finally spoke softly. He then rested his elbow on the table as he pointed at Spud. "But whenever you need me-"

"I know who to call," Spud ensured him. A smile came to his face as he held his fist out. "Friends for life – friends for real?"

Jake took his own fist and tapped it against Spud's. "For sure."

OoOoO

It was a little before three in the afternoon on Saturday as Trixie sat in her home while on the phone with Jake. "Alright, alright, alright! Stop nagging me, Trix," he told her as she was calling him for the umpteenth time that day. "If you were going to call me every five minutes, you could have done this yourself," he complained.

"I practically did do this all myself, Jake," she corrected him.

"Uh-huh, whatever." He rolled his eyes, not knowing why since she couldn't see him. "All I know is that my birthday party better be just as bumpin'. . . You are planning me a party, right?" he asked as an afterthought.

"Maybe," she drawled out, teasing him playfully. "It depends. Have you been a good little dragon lately?" Jake recognized the beginnings of the game. It was an innocent little roll playing game they did

from time to time when they were on the phone together. It had started off as a joke at first, with Jake making a suggestive type comment. He had expected Trixie to throw out some kind of insult for his increasingly dirty mind, but instead, to Jake's wonderment, she had made a suggestion of her own and so they played on.

The next day had been a bit awkward though. Jake had found himself not able to look onto his friend's face as had dreamed about her the night before and what they had spoken about over the phone. But soon that feeling had passed and so they each had dipped back into a world of fantasy. And so Jake slightly chuckled before he deepened his voice, just the way she liked it, and said, "Actually, I've been quite mischievous, but we don't have time for this today. Besides, I'm not exactly alone right now," he explained. "But if I were," he began slowly. "What did you plan on doing about it?"

"Hmm, I think a punishment may be in order," her voice becoming sultry as she spoke.

"Oh?" Trixie could almost see the smile she knew was on Jake's face. "And what would you do to me?" he asked. "And don't leave out any details."

"I don't plan on to, because first I would take a-

"No, no, no," Jake interrupted her. "Give me the Southern Belle," he asked of her, but she gave him no response. "Trixie?" he called after a beat. "Trix?"

"I'm sorry, I just heard the doorbell. I think it's Spud. He's early," she informed Jake seriously. "I gotta go. Now don't forget, we'll be at the center-"

"At seven," Jake finished her sentence. "I know," he said almost bitterly.

"Good," she said finally getting up from the couch and grabbing her credit card and a photo ID, putting them in her back pocket. Trixie didn't do purses. "We'll see you in a few hours, okay?"

"Yeah," he replied and then hung up without another word.

Trixie then hung up her own phone and greeted Spud at her front door. "So, care for a picnic?" he asked with a smile that she couldn't help but return as he showed her the basket he had packed for the two of them.

It was bright and sunny spring afternoon as the two settled in the park under the shade of a tree. Just off to the side there was a tournament for some little league baseball game starting up and so as the two ate, they watched the game and spoke to each other. Trixie threw back her head and laughed at Spud after she roughly patted him on the back. He had tried tossing up a grape and catching it in mouth, only to slightly choke on it. Afterwards, he laughed along with her, happier than he had seemed in days. It gave Trixie a warm feeling as she realized he was happy because of her. And so an idea popped into her head, she tried to dismiss it, but found that she couldn't.

The game was at the top of the third inning when, without warning, Trixie leaned over, ever so slightly and gave Spud a gentle kiss on the cheek. Spud quickly turned to her, blinking rapidly at the affection she had shown him. Signs that she liked him were just a little too far and in between for Spud's taste,

but it had always been enough to get him to the next time.

Trixie's face became blank as she watched Spud lower his head and take a deep breath. "Spud?" she said gently, resting her hand on top of his. Instead of answering her, Spud rose his head back up and looked at her in a way she had never seen him do before. He then closed the space between them and took her lips with his own. Trixie was surprised by his boldness, but did nothing than close her eyes as she savored the first real kiss they had ever shared. Trixie spent the rest of the afternoon being held by Spud as he leaned against the tree they were under as they watched the rest of the baseball game.

As the sun was starting to set, Trixie looked down at her watch and realized she had a little less than an hour to get Spud to his party. She tried getting up, only to be held tighter against Spud's chest. "Where do think you're going?" he asked as she turned her head to look at him.

"It's getting dark," she told him. "And I want to take you somewhere."

"Oh," he replied, finally letting her go. "You talking about my "surprise" party at the center?" A goofy smile ran across his lips.

Trixie's mouth fell opened. "How do you know?"

Spud shrugged. "Me and Jake hung out yesterday. He let it slip," he told her.

She growled angrily, "I'll kill him." She had been looking forward to seeing the look on Spud's face.

"I told him to call everyone who RSVPed and tell them the party was canceled," he informed her.

Trixie looked at him in disbelief. "You?" she could barely get out the words. "What?" She pushed herself away from him. "Why did you tell him to do that?"

"I told you already," he said straightening up from the tree. "I wanted to spend my birthday with you. . . just you," he explained.

Trixie placed her hand on her chest. "I put a lot effort and time into planning that party, Spud. Plus, I was doing it with Jake, so you know it wasn't an easy task," she pointed out.

"I never indicated to you that I wanted a party. Why? Because I didn't want one. So just get over it!" he told her.

Trixie's head snapped back slightly as she heard his tone. "Fine," she replied. "Enjoy the rest of your birthday." She then stood up and started walking away.

"Trixie," Spud called as he stood up and went after her. "Trixie, where are you going?" he asked as he caught up with her.

"Home," she replied, keeping her eyes straight ahead.

Spud took her hand. "No. Stop, please," he begged of her. They then came to a stop. Trixie snatched



her hand away from his before she crossed her arms over her chest. "I'm sorry, okay?" he began. "I had no right to do that. Jake even tried to talk me out of it, but I didn't listen." Spud stepped closer and held her upper arms. "I didn't know it was going to upset you like this. Again, I'm sorry. Just don't be mad at me, not today. . . please." Trixie's eyes weren't on him, but on the ground. Spud then lifted her chin. "Forgive me?" he asked.

Trixie looked up at him, seeing the sincerity in his eyes. "Of course," she breathed. "Don't I forgive all the silly things you do?"

Spud smiled sadly. "I hope that never changes," he told her, before cupping her face in his hand and once again claiming her lips. The kiss began to grow more passionate as Spud removed his hand from her face so that he could wrap his arms around her waist. When the kiss was broken, with both breathing just a little heavier than before, Spud spoke, "Why don't we go somewhere a little less out in the open?" Trixie nodded before he retook her hand and they walked back over the area where they had had their picnic.

OoOoO

"I don't know about this," Trixie voiced her concerns, holding herself, as she walked into a suite of a hotel. She eyed the place warily. "I think I've changed my mind," she said as she turned and saw Spud close the door behind them. Then, as she watched him lock it, she felt a strange feeling in her chest. "Yeah, I don't want to be here," she concluded as she walked back over to the door ready to unlock it and leave, but Spud caught her before she could.

"Whoa! Relax, Trixie," he told her softly as he felt her tremble in his hold. "I'm not expecting anything of you."

She looked up at him and made a face as she almost said in anger, "You brought me to a hotel, Spud. A nice one? Yes. But a hotel nonetheless. So don't say you don't expect anything of me."

"Fine," he agreed. "But we don't have to leave just yet. I mean, the room is already paid for," he told her before stepping around her. "So let's watch a movie or something," he suggested.

Trixie studied him for a moment and then the room. They hadn't check in, but gone directly to the room. The room was clean, but Trixie could somehow tell there was something off about it. "Did you spend the night here last night, Spud?" she asked. Spud completely froze at the question as he was reaching out for the remote. "Have you not been going home?"

He looked to her. "Yes, I did and no I haven't," he answered her questions in order.

"Why?" she asked. "Your sister must be having a cow."

"She knows I'm here." He looked around. "She's paying for the room."

"I- I don't understand," she told him as Spud sat down on the bed. "Did you get kicked out? What the hell did you do?"

"I didn't do anything. She didn't kick me out," he told her as she sat down next to him.

"Then what's going on?" She wanted to know, but Spud only shook his head from side to side.

"Spud?"

"Do you trust me, Trixie?" he asked finally looking at her.

"You're one of my best friends, of course I do," she told him.

He seemed pleased with her answer before he stood up and walked over the nightstand, next to the bed. He opened up the drawer and pulled out a small box. "Come here," he told her, and so Trixie shuffled across the bed on her knees to reach him. She looked asking of him as she saw the box. Spud opened it and pulled out a necklace that looked exactly like the one he had give to Jake the day before. "I want you to have this," he told her as he started to put it around her neck. "Don't ever take it off," he added.

"Spud," she picked up the pendulum around her neck and looked at it. "It's beautiful, but you shouldn't be giving me gifts. It's your birthday."

"I know, but I think you deserve it more now," he shrugged. "Since I ruined your gift to me."

Trixie nodded. "You're right," she responded, which made him laugh a little. She than rested her hand on his chest. "Thank you," she replied softly.

"You're welcome," he replied as she leaned up and kissed him. "I love you, Trixie," he told her for the first time. She looked kind of surprised by his words, but instead of waiting for her to reply, he continued, "And I pray you remember that." Trixie didn't know what to say to such a strange statement and so said nothing at all as she stared into his eyes and reached for the belt around his waist. "No, no," Spud protested, stopping her hands with his own. "I didn't tell you that to get you into bed. I said it because it's true."

"I know." She smiled at him sweetly as her hands with back to his belt. "I know."

"Please," he begged, trying to stop her again. "I can't have you regretting this." He looked almost in pain.

Catching the hint, Trixie immediately removed her hands. "Oh," was all she could say at first as she found she could no longer look at him. "You don't want me like that," she concluded.

"What?" Spud couldn't believe what he had just heard. "Have you gone mad, woman? Of course I do," he assured her. "It's just that I'm trying to be--"

"Be what?" She looked to him again.

"Nothing. I'm being stupid," he told her. He then reached out for her and she for him as he lowered her onto the bed, his kisses slow and sweet as he tasted her brown skin. Spud couldn't help but inhale her scent as she smelt like the bright sun and cool breeze that had been washing over her body since that afternoon. It did trouble him, that she began to tremble underneath him as he gradually slid his hand

beneath her shirt. He smiled at her as he rested his forehead against her own, her eyes filled with a fear he couldn't ignore, but also something he felt ashamed for not seeing before. . . love. "Please," he began. "You have to relax. You're making me nervous."

Trixie let out a small chuckle, which confused Spud. "I'm not nervous anymore," she told him. "I know what I want." She shrugged. "I'm excited." Trixie then closed the gap between their lips as she began to be the more aggressive partner. Her hands picked up the task of where they left off for the third time with his belt. She tugged it off rather slowly as she found herself dazed when Spud's tongue decided to make a path that led to the nape of her neck before the task was taken over by his teeth and he began sink them into her delicate skin. Trixie's eyes fluttered close as a soft moan escaped her lips. "I like that," she breathed into his ear.

"Thought you would," he whispered back, taking pride in his work, marking her as his own.

Spud then felt her hand on his chest and looked into Trixie's eyes. "Get up real quick," she told him and so he obeyed. She rose after him before searching for the rim of his shirt so she could take it off. She then discarded it to somewhere on the side of the bed before laying Spud down on his back.

Trixie sat on top of his thighs before leaning forward, licking her lips before they came into contact with Spud's chest. Spud's eyes widen and he hissed through clenched teeth as Trixie made no attempt to be gentle as she bit into his skin. "shoot, Trixie!" he cried out as he quickly took her by the shoulders and pushed her up away from him.

Trixie looked a little offended for a moment, before her face brighten. "Oh, I forgot!" She then reached for the belt that laid beside them. "Give me your hands." She grabbed his wrist and got up on her knees so that she could push them above his head. She started to tie his hands together.

"What are you doing?" Spud asked with concern. He didn't like the idea of being tied up.

"Don't worry. This is one of Jake's-" Trixie immediately froze as she realized her slip of the tongue. "I mean, this is uh-" she tried to recover, but didn't know how. She was going to say, that this was one of Jake's favorite fantasies, but chided herself as she realized, that thinking of Jake while she was with Spud wasn't appropriate.

Spud had not missed her words. "Untie me," he quietly demanded. Once untied he sat up, causing Trixie to slide back as she still sat on his legs. Her eyes never left his face as she knew what was coming. "You uh-" Spud didn't know how to form the question. "Have you-" his brow creased as he examined the belt now in his hands, "-with Jake?"

Spud knew of the close bound that the two of them shared. He could see it, whenever they were looking at each other, it was like they spoke with their eyes, a language Spud tired, but could never comprehend. He always wondered if the reason Trixie was so retarded with his feelings towards him was because she held them for Jake too. Spud then let out a slow breath as he readied himself for her answer.

Trixie felt her chest tighten at the expression on his face. He looked so prepared to be hurt. "No," she told him truthfully. And she figured since they were on the subject. "Have you ever-"

“No,” Spud cut her off before she finished the question.

“Not even with-”

“I said, no-” Spud said again, before the other girl could be mentioned.

“Then,” Trixie reached out and touched his face, “are we okay?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he whispered with a small smile before pulling her closer. “Now, how about we get you out of these clothes?”

She nodded her head. “Okay.” She then gave herself enough space so that she could pull her shirt over head while Spud went to work on her pants before slipping out of his own.

With there clothes now littering the floor around them, Spud took his place on top of Trixie. Her breast pressed against his body steadily as her breathes became faster with excitement. He liked the feel of her flesh as his fingers traced her skin, wanting to know every sensitive area and every curve she had to offer.

She gasped slightly as his fingers finally found themselves between her legs. She bit her bottom lip and squirmed a little as she tried to get used to someone's touch other than her own. Spud's fingers played with the course curls of her sex as he took up her kissing the woman before him again.

“Stop teasing me,” she begged as the boy's exploration ventured to one of her thighs, which to his surprise he found he quite enjoyed. They were firm, strong, he figured because of the skateboarding they still did often, but they were also soft and smooth to the touch. Spud just wanted to squeeze and scratch them, but upon her request his hand returned to their proper place, only to find that this time, her curls damp and her body ready for him.

Well, she would not have to wait long as Spud could feel his stomach contracted before the heat rising within his body concentrated itself before traveling to lower parts of his body. He could feel his once soft flesh become hard as Trixie spread her legs for him and held her breath as she waited for him.

Spud, looking down, silently took his cock in hand before rubbing the head of it against the slit of her wet pussy. When it was covered in the juices of her arousal he positioned it at her opening and then pushed himself into her. Trixie tensed up at the strange sensation, her face contorted in pain as she held on to Spud as if her life depended on it. She let out a small scream when Spud gave a little more effort and rammed himself into her. His head immediately snapped back up at the sound of her distress. “It's okay,” she reassured him, kissing his lips gently. “It's okay.”

He first looked as if he didn't believe her, wondering if they should stop, but he only nodded before returning her kiss and slowly withdrawing from her body and entering again. Each time Spud watched her face, her eyes were closed tightly as each time she expressed only pain as he entered her again and again. Spud couldn't stand the fact that he was hurting her and was about to say something when her appearance visibly softened and relaxed. He could feel the difference in her body as well, it now welcomed him and as he entered her again, he could feel her body longing for him to go deeper.

Trixie finally opened her eyes, her grip loosening as a small smile appeared on her face as she regarded her lover. Spud found himself smiling back before finally feeling free to enjoy the pleasure of their love making. He then began to pick up their pace filling her tight sex to the brim with the width of his manhood. Her pants and moans only aroused him more as he pulled her closer. "frack me harder," she suddenly pleaded, causing Spud to blink a few times in surprise as he had never heard such a strong word like that from her.

"What?" he asked between heavy pants of his own.

"frack me," she whispered before nibbling on his earlobe. Spud's eyes practically rolled into the back of his head with the mind-numbing gesture. She then licked it sensually. "Your prick makes my pussy feel so good. I just need you to frack me hard," she told him.

Spud slightly pulled away. "Could you not talk like that?" he asked her.

She looked a little taken back before smiling. "Why not? It's fun. Try it," she encouraged him.

"No," he told her firmly, causing the smile to fall from her face. "Just don't talk like that."

Trixie nodded her head. "Alright. . . I'm sorry," she said, pulling Spud back to her. They then resumed their love making, neither letting anything leave their lips except for the sounds of ecstasy they caused each other. Spud then let out a long groan as he thrust himself into Trixie racially as he approached his breaking point. As he came, it was like an explosion within his body and his hot seed coated the walls of his lover's sex.

Suddenly, more tired than he had felt in his life Spud pulled himself out of Trixie. She reached for him and guided his head to rest on her chest. He snuggled into her as they both rested so that they could collect their breaths. Trixie played with his hair for awhile before her hand finally stopped. At that point Spud's closed eyes opened and he pulled his head up to look at her. She was falling asleep. It took a little bit of maneuvering, but he finally got her awake enough so that they could rest under the blankets.

They laid side by side as Spud held her close to him, her head under his chin as she drifted back to sleep. "Trixie?" he spoke softly.

"Hn," was all she could say.

"Will you wait for me?" he asked.

"What?" she was so so tired.

"Will you wait for me?" he repeated his question. "Please say yes."

"Yes," she responded.

"I love you," he told her sweetly, but he got no reply as Trixie had finally succumb to sleep.

OoOoO

The next morning, Trixie woke up with a big yawn. She opened her eyes and at first didn't recognize where she was, but soon the memories of the previous day rushed to her. She gasped loudly as she realized she had spent the whole night here. Her grandma was going to be furious. Trixie hoped that her grandma didn't notice she had been gone all night.

“Spud!” she called out, figuring he was in the bathroom as he wasn't in bed. “Spud, I need to get home,” she told him as she wrapped a sheet around herself and walked over to the bathroom door. She knocked on it lightly, but heard nothing. “Spud?” She opened the door slowly and to her surprise the bathroom was empty. Trixie was confused as she walked back over to where the bed was. She turned around, making a full 360 as she realized she was alone and Spud was. . . *gone*.

To Be Continued. . .

## 5 - To Forget

### Chapter Five: To Forget

It was a little after eleven on Sunday morning when Trixie walked through the front door of her home. She sighed as she dropped her house keys on the table next to the door and walked up the stairs to her room. As soon as she made it to her room she began stripping off her clothes and looking for something to wear for the day as she prepared to take a bath.

Once in her own bathroom, she ran herself a bubble bath. She was about to take off the necklace that Spud had given her before she remembered that he asked her to never take it off and so she left it on before she slowly eased herself into the hot water. It felt good and inviting against the now sore areas of her body and skin as she relaxed her head against the wall and closed her eyes.

Unbidden tears slipped down her cheeks as she thought about the night before. Trixie had always imagined that Spud would be her first. Though she didn't act like it a lot of the time, she did care for him, and she knew Spud knew that. But what she couldn't understand was why she had woken up alone and why there was no sign of Spud even being in the room? Why would he slip away in the middle of the night like that? As if she was just anyone and not the woman he had claimed to love?

Trixie held herself tightly as more tears fell from her eyes and into the water that surrounded her. She didn't want to feel this way, like Spud had lied to her. There was an explanation, she knew it. There just had to be. So with that in mind Trixie finished her bath and got dressed. She then grabbed the house phone. She paced as she speed dialed Spud's cell number only to discover it was disconnected, which wasn't a surprise as he often forgot to pay his bill, no matter how much he was reminded to pay it on time. She would have called his house, but most likely his sister, Johanna would have picked up and Trixie didn't feel like dealing with her today. So Trixie jumped onto her unmade bed before rolling over onto her back and dialing up Jake.

Jake was out training with his grandfather and Fu Dog near the Giant Village. They were on a break and Jake found himself under the shade of a tree when his cell phone rung. "Hello?"

"Hey, Jake. It's me," she began. "What you up to?" she asked.

Jake looked to his watch. "You know me, I'm doing my Am-drag thing. My break is almost over, so did you need anything?"

"I was just wondering if you've heard from Spud?" she asked casually.

"Why are you asking me?" he inquired, his tone now different. "Weren't you guys together all day yesterday. . . and all night too?" Trixie made a curious face as Jake's voice almost sounded as if he was accusing her of something. Jake realizing the same thing, cleared his throat and began again. "Look, what I meant was. . . shoot," he whispered to himself. "That came out wrong," he told her. "But no, I haven't heard from Spud," he finally answered his question.

“Jake, break time is over!” Jake heard Lao Shi calling for him.

“I gotta go, Trixie. I'll see you tomorrow, alright?” Jake stood up and dusted his pants off with his free hand.

“Yeah, tomorrow,” Trixie responded before hanging up the phone.

“Jake!” yelled Lao Shi.

“Yo chill, gramps. I'm coming,” Jake told him as he ran over to him and Fu Dog transforming into his dragon form as he did do. He had abandoned his "Dragon up" battle-cry years ago.

“I will not "chill",” Lao Shi began agitated before covering his hand over his mouth and coughing heavily. “You are still young and have much to learn.”

Jake looked with concern felt eyes at his aging grandfather. “I know.” Jake gave a small bow. “Please, I am ready to learn,” he made clear.

“So Jake,” yelled out Fu Dog, removing his shades as rested in a lawn chair, sipping on some fruity looking drink. “So who were you on the phone with, one of your many female admirers.” Fu Dog waggled his eyebrow.

“Nope,” Jake sighed as he got into the last fight stance he was in before the break. “Just Trixie wondering if I've seen Spud.”

“That Trixie, she's one hell of a girl, that one. A keeper in my book.” Fu Dog replaced his shades. “But why is she looking for a potato?”

“Ha ha, very funny, Fu,” Jake said sarcastically before beginning up his training with Lao Shi again.  
OoOoO

It was Monday morning and Trixie was just finishing up an egg sandwich she had made herself as she grabbed her book bag and headed towards the front door to head to school. As she swung the door opened and looked outside she stopped in her tracks. Spud who had always walked her to school wasn't sitting on her porch waiting for her. Trixie checked the time, this was the normal time she usually came out.

She then locked the door behind before taking a few steps down and looking around to see if he was on his way. *Where is that boy?* she thought before deciding to take a sit and wait for Spud to show up. Then as one minute turned into five and five into ten, Trixie slowly stood. Realizing he wasn't coming, she began walking to school by herself before she missed the bell for her first class.

Jake was already at school talking to people outside of the the entrance as he did every morning as he waited for Spud and Trixie. That particular morning, he ran into Alex, the guy which the so not subtle crush on Trixie. “Hi, man,” Jake began as Alex approached him. “I just want to apologize again for Friday and Spud's surprise birthday party being canceled so last minute.” Alex looked at him curiously



and was about to say something, but Jake began again. "But trust, I know my girl, Trix, is so going to hook me up when my birthday rolls around this summer. So considered yourself invited," he told him.

"Yeah man, that's great. I'll so be there," Alex told him as the first bell rung within the school's halls. "But I think you may got be mixed up with someone else," he started towards the school. "I don't know anyone named Spud," he informed Jake before disappearing with a crowd of students heading inside.

Jake was confused about Alex's comment and was about to go after him to ask him about it when he saw Trixie walking towards the school by herself. Jake raised an eyebrow, he couldn't clearly remember the last time that had happened or if it had ever happened at all. "Where's Spud?" he asked when she was within earshot.

Trixie merely shrugged her shoulders at the question. "Come on, we're already late," she stated flatly before she too headed inside.

The two friends, due to their schedules for the day didn't see each other again until lunch. "Jake!" Trixie rushed over to him, when she saw him sitting down at their normal table, looking as if he had been waiting for her. "There's something *really* weird going," she told him as she sat across from him.

"You've notice it to, huh? Good, because I thought I was going crazy," he told her.

"No one seems to remember Spud," she said worriedly. "Everytime I bring him up, people ask me who he is."

"I know," Jake shook his head. "The two classes we have together before lunch – neither teacher called his name. Like he was never enrolled in the first place."

"I don't like this, Jakey." She looked around suspiciously. "This isn't right. What do we do?"

Jake stood up. "To the roof," was all he said as he walked around the table and out to the stair case with Trixie right on his heels.

"What can we possibly do on the roof, Jake," she asked as they opened the door and stepped outside. Trixie watched as Jake made his way over to the edge.

Jake looked down at the distance to the ground from where he stood. "Do you trust me?" he asked Trixie before turning to look at her.

Trixie looked at him for a moment. "Of course," she said unsurely not sure where he was going with such a question.

"Then close your eyes and don't open them until I say so." Trixie brow furrowed at the instruction, but she followed them anyway.

A moment later, Trixie felt Jake behind her before feeling his arms around her body. "Jake?"

"Just don't open your eyes. I know you don't do heights and I can't have you freakin' out on me." Trixie

gave him a simple nod before she felt her feet leave the surface of the roof. She tensed up once she felt the rush of wind against her face. "Calm down. This is the quickest way to Spud's place and back before our next class," he explained as he made his way higher into the sky as to not be easily seen by those on the ground.

"If you drop me, Jake, I'll kick your @\$@ from here to California. You hear me?" She threatened, but Jake didn't think much of it as he felt her hands tighten on his arms.

"Don't worry, Trixie. I'd never let you fall," he reassured her as Spud's house came into his view and he allowed his wing to glide them towards the ground. They landed in an alleyway before Jake transformed back into his human form. The two of them made their way across the street to Spud's home. They walked up the porch stairs and knocked on the door, but no one answered.

Trixie leaned over to look inside of the window. "Everything looks normal," she informed Jake. "Everything is where it was the last time we were here." She turned back to Jake. "Now what?" she asked.

Jake took a step back from the door before looking around to make sure no one was around. "We go inside," he suggested.

"Hell no," Trixie protested as Jake brought out his claws. "That's breaking and entering! As in jail time!"

"Then what do you want us to then?" he asked angrily. "Just go on about our lives as if Spud never existed?"

"That's exactly what you should do." Trixie and Jake were startled by the voice behind them. They turned around to see Johanna behind them carrying a grocery bag. She walked up the stairs as she shook her head in a disappointed manner. "Damn my brother," she began. "I told him to leave you two out of it." She then grabbed onto the collar of Jake's shirt.

"Hey!" he yelled out as she yanked it down revealing the necklace around his neck.

"The Jewel of Eskaw," Johanna whispered. "I should have known he would protect you in this world and in ours."

"In your world?" Trixie spoke. "What does that mean?" she asked curiously.

Johanna then turned to Trixie. "I guess you have one too then." She went to look at the jewel around Trixie's neck, but as soon as their skin touched, Johanna pulled her hand away as if she had been burned.

"What?" Trixie asked as her own hand went to her neck.

Johanna only smiled at her as she shook her head. "Nothing." Johanna then pulled out her keys to unlock her door. "Now listen closely you two," she spoke with her back to them, "since my brother, Arthur, did not. Even with one as skilled in our art as he is, what he must do is dangerous—"

“Dangerous?” Jake interrupted. “What kind of danger? Where is Spud?” he demanded to know.

Johanna continued as if she hadn't been cut off. “-chances are. . . he isn't coming back,” she lowered her head, her voice breaking. “He should have spared you of his memories. A luxury I wish I had.” She then stepped into her home placing her bag on the floor. Her eyes glistened with unshared tears as she looked at the teenagers before her. “It would be best if you forgot him and seek us no more,” with that said she closed the door on them.

Jake and Trixie looked at each other, wondering, after what they had just learned and having so many more questions to ask, how Johanna could possibly think, that when it came to Spud, they could do something as difficult as . . . *to forget*.

To Be Continued. . .

## 6 - Mine

### Chapter Six: Mine

Jake refused to believe his ears as he sat on his knees in Trixie's parent's bedroom on the floor. Trixie sat in front of him with her back against the wall as she cried, her face in her hand. "No," Jake finally whispered to her, shaking his head.

Jake, finding he couldn't stand the sound of her crying, was about to stand up so that he could go in get some air, but as he rose Trixie reached for him, grabbing onto his shirt. "Jake, please," she begged, her cheeks wet from her tears. "Please. . . don't go."

Jake sighed as he realized he needed to be strong for her right now. He then pulled Trixie into his arms as she continued to cry. "It's going to be alright," he reassured her as he pulled her tighter against him. Jake then began to think back to how they came to be in this situation. It had started over a month and half ago, two weeks after Johanna had told them to forget about Spud. It had been hard, trying to adjust, knowing they couldn't do anything to find Spud. The only real link they had to him were the necklaces they were given and no book they researched through could tell them what the writing on them meant. The only person who probably did know was Johanna and she wasn't talking.

Trixie and Jake had one class together, which was geography and were given an assignment to work on together, which wouldn't have been too bad, if the class hadn't been split up into teams of three. Unfortunately, for Jake the third member of their team was none other than Alex Brown, who was shamelessly flirting with Trixie when he thought Jake was paying attention.

It was Saturday night as the three of them had set up to work on their project at Trixie's place within the den. They had sat up a few snacks and the tv was on, but was really paid attention to as they worked. Jake sat on the floor leaning against one of the chairs as his laptop sat on the coffee table in front of him. There notes sat on his lap as looked down at them as he typed up their research paper to turn in. Taking up the rest of the space of the table was Trixie and Alex as they prepared their three sided poster board. "Oops," Jake heard Alex says.

His voice was then followed by Trixie's. "Boy, if you try that one more time, you're going to be pulling back a nub, you heard?"

Jake smiled at her threat as he continued with the paper. Their oral presentation wasn't until Thursday, but Jake didn't have time to leave this until the last minute as he never knew what was coming up and he wanted to do his fair share. It had been a slow week and decided to get a head start on the project. It was coming on along better than expected, in fact if there was no interruptions they could probably get it done tonight, but just as Jake was thinking that his cell phone ring. His shoulders dropped as he saw the caller I.D. "Yeah, gramps?" he greeted his Dragon Master as he rested the phone between his ear and shoulder before his fingers went back to the keypad.

"Jake, come home," he began. "We have dragon business to attend to tonight."

"Can't it wait?" Jake asked as he peered over his laptop to see Alex trying to scoot a little closer to Trixie, who only rolled her eyes making some distance between them. Jake frowned, he really disliked Alex.

"No, it can not. Now come home," Lao Shi insisted.

"Fine, fine. Give me ten minutes," he told the older man before hang up. "Look guys," Jake began as he saved his material. "I'm sorry, but I think we're going to have to call it a night. Somethings came up at home." He looked to Trixie, who nodded her head, indicating that she understood. "We should be able to finish this tomorrow though."

Alex groaned, causing an instant frown on Jake's features. "I'm sorry, man, but I'm not trying to have this project take up my whole weekend. I have plans tomorrow. Besides we're almost done here so go on home. I'm sure Trix and I can finish this up without you," he suggested with a smile. "If you leave your laptop I can even finish up the paper."

Jake shook his head. "No. If I leave, you leave," he laid down the law.

"Actually," Trixie spoke up. "Homeboy over here has a point. We're almost done here and I really don't want to do anything but put this behind us."

"No," was Jake's answer.

Trixie raised an eyebrow. "Excuse me? I think you may have misunderstood me, because I don't think I was asking for your permission."

Jake stood up. "We need to talk," he told her.

She scoffed. "What do you think we're doing?"

"Alone," he said after looking at Alex for moment. "Please," he added.

"Fine," she agreed as she stood following Jake out the room and closing the door behind them as they stood in the hallway. "What's with all the drama, Jakey?" she asked crossing her arms as she leaned against the wall.

"I don't like him," Jake told her.

"I already know that," she informed him. "And if you keep this behavior up he's going to know it too."

"Look," Jake sighed. "I just don't want you alone with him," he confessed.

"I'm not alone," she said. "My grandma is upstairs."

"Oh yeah, that gives me real comfort," he stated sarcastically.

“So what? Are you trying to tell me, you don't think I take care of myself?” she asked.

“No,” he said immediately. “That's not what I'm saying. I just don't like,” he started counting on his fingers, “the way he looks at you, the way he talks to you, the way he tries to *touch* you, Trix,” Jake explained.

Trixie shook her head. “I don't understand you lately, Jake. I'm a big girl, I don't need you watching over me. I'm not a magical creature and you're not my protector, so you can stop the macho overprotective bullshoot right now,” she made clear.

Jake straightened up at her words, slightly hurt by them. “Well, excusing me for breathing,” he began slowly. “I'm sorry, but I've already lost three people in my life and the only way I can think to deal with it is to make sure everyone else in my life that love is safe.”

“I miss him too, Jake,” Trixie admitted. “And I understand that you're not only grieving for Spud,” she held herself tighter. “But I'm grieving too,” she breathed. “And I deal with it differently than you. I just need a little time without you all up in my grill, alright?” Jake lowered his head, not sure how to respond to that. “Let's call it a night, okay, Jake?” she whispered before opening the door back to the den.

“Trixie, wait,” Jake called, grabbing her arm as he did so. She looked back to him, her expression unreadable. Jake opened his mouth to speak, but then saw the tall light skinned African-American boy sitting in the den and closed it before saying, “I'll call you, okay?”

Trixie peeled his fingers off of her. “How about I call you?” she asked.

“Oh,” was all Jake could say as he realized that she really didn't want to see him. “Yeah, alright.” He nodded before they entered back into the den where he grabbed his stuff excluding his laptop. Trixie sat where she had been sitting before as she looked at the work Alex had done on the board while she stepped out. “I'm off,” Jake announced as he slung his bag over his shoulder. Trixie gave him a small wave, but didn't look up. “Night, guys,” was the last thing Jake said before leaving to meet his grandfather.

Alex turned to Trixie after hearing the front door close behind Jake. “It's probably not any of my business, but are you and Jake alright?” he asked looking sincerely concerned.

“Jake and I are fine,” she replied. “Thanks though.”

Alex nodded before pulling Jake's laptop to him and going through their notes. “It's just I've noticed some tension growing between you two during this project,” he shrugged, “and if you want to talk I-”

“You know what?” Trixie cut him off. “You're right, it's not your business. Now, can we please finish this?” she asked irritated. Alex put his hands up in a surrender like gesture and then both went back to work.

OoOoO

It was Monday morning as Jake sat on the stairs that led up to the front door of his high school as he

waited for Trixie to show up. Mornings had been the roughest on her as she and Spud had come to school practically every day together. Jake knew it was the time where she missed him the most and so was a bit surprised to see her coming into her view smiling and laughing. He couldn't exactly see who she was with as other students passed him and some stood in his way. He was thinking it was good to see her smile again, until he saw who she was with, which just happened to be Alex. "Why am I not surprised?" Jake asked himself, frowning as he stood.

"Morning, Jake," Trixie greeted him as Alex handed him back his laptop.

"It's all done. Ten pages and doubled spaced," Alex informed him. "I kept the notes though to study over for the presentation."

"I thought you said you were going to call?" Jake addressed towards Trixie as he completely ignored Alex.

"I didn't mean anytime soon," she stated before grabbing Alex's sleeve and dragging him behind her as she walked into the school.

Jake caught up with Trixie at his locker as she was located a few down from his own. Alex was nowhere to be seen. Jake figured he had to go to his own before class. "What's with the cold shoulder lately?" Jake asked, not looking at her as he prepared his books.

"What's wrong with having my own space?" she asked her voice greatly gentler than before.

"Nothing," Jake replied. "It's just other than that project, we really haven't hung out since. . . you know." He finally turned his head towards her.

"I don't want to talk about Spud," Trixie told him as she pulled out a book. "Besides, when it was the three of us, it's not like we hung out a lot anyway."

"What are you talking about?" Jake asked. "We hung out all the time." He closed his locker.

"Yeah," Trixie also closed hers. "But always on your terms. When you needed help as the Am Drag."

Jake looked taken back. "Didn't realize that helping me was such a burden."

Trixie sighed. "It's not," she said quickly. "It's just your life. . ." she trailed off.

"What about it?" he asked looking almost offended.

Trixie's gaze dropped. "When Spud was here, there was a balance, you know? A sense of normalcy."

With her words Jake felt a little guilty. His life was far from normal and maybe it had finally gotten to Trixie as he remembered when she and Spud were exposed to his world and wondered what things would have been like if he had used the potion Fu Dog had given him to alter their memories. Maybe he had been selfish for not using it and maybe Spud had been too for allowing them to remember him when no one else did. But Jake knew where Spud was coming from, because sometimes that extra edge

comes for knowing that someone is in your corner, no matter the distance.

“But I guess Spud wasn't all that normal either, huh?” Trixie asked once again looking at Jake.

“Things are going to get better,” he promised her. “But lets not have what happen tear down our friendship. We're stronger than that.”

Trixie pursed her lips together before nodding her head. “Yeah,” she said softly.

“So um, what's with up with hanging with Alex?” Jake couldn't help but ask.

Trixie gave a small shrugged. “After you left Saturday, boy was buggin" for a little while, but then we got to talking,” she explained. “He's not as bad as you're always making him out to be.” Trixie then gave off a small laugh. “Did you know that he was under the impression that we were dating.”

Both of Jake's eyebrows went up as he forced a laugh. “Really?” he said, his hand going to the back of his head. “I wonder where he got that idea.” More laughter escaped his lips before dying out lamely.

“Yeah, it's kind of weird really,” Trixie commented, not really picking up on Jake's mannerism. “When my called me from Tahiti, she was kind of under the same expression.”

“Hmm,” Jake thought about it for a moment. “I guess with no one remembering. . . I guess it looks like we spend a lot to time together. It would be the obvious conclusion anyway.”

“Well, that's one rumor that needs to be kicked in the butt,” Trixie said as Alex finally approached.

“Walk you to class?” he asked and she agreed, leaving Jake to walk in the opposite direction towards his own class.

OoOoO

Although things had appeared to have been patched up during that morning between the two, Jake still saw little of Trixie. His duties as the American Dragon had picked up and his training had become more intense. Especially on the days when Haley and her Dragon Master would show up for a sparring match. Jake hated to admit it, but the margin that he would defeat her grew smaller with each match. Haley was improving at a rapid rate and he didn't know weather to be proud or just plained annoyed.

Trixie had been spending a lot of time with Alex as the month passed and Jake did his best to bit his tongue about it. He knew, deep down that he trusted Trixie's instinct when it came to people and figured she was right about his unfounded dislike towards him.

Jake was at his normal training ground with Haley. It was just the two of them for the day as they did their brother-sister thing. The day pretty much consisted of training within their human forms for times when going into the dragon form couldn't help them. Haley had joined a gymnastic class down at the community center a few years ago and so was very agile and flexible, which Jake hated because it made it hard to land a hit on her. . . not that he was really trying to hit her that it.

“Hold still!” Jake yelled as he threw an opened handed strike only to have Haley crouch to the ground



before sweeping her leg across the ground coming into contact with Jake and sending him straight on his back.

Haley stood before she rested her foot on Jake's chest. "You're really bad at his," she said with a smile. "What's that make it now seven to two?" she asked.

"Thought we weren't keep score?" Jake asked as pushed Haley foot of him and sat up.

"No, you said *you* weren't keeping score. So. . ." she got back into position, "again?"

Jake jumped up. "Hell yeah. I think I saw an opening during that last match." He told her before charging towards her. He jumped into the air rolling into a ball before going over Haley's head and land behind her just off to the side. Before she could react, Jake stuck her back causing her to lose her balance and fall over for must a moment before flipping so not to land on her face.

She came back at him with several high kicks toward his head, Jake blocking each one as they came down on him arm. Jake, seeing her opening, hit her, open palm hard straight into her stomach. Haley immediately recoiled holding onto to her stomach as she dropped to her knees. She groaned before before Jake came to her. "I didn't mean to hit you that hard," began as he bent over her to help her up, but as he hands came closer to her she grabbed his wrist and flipped him over, causing him once again to land on his back.

"Eight-two," Haley called as she stood up.

"I hate you." Jake narrowed his eyes as she put her hand out to help him up.

"You're just a swore loser," she told him as he reached up for her, but instead of grabbing her hand, he grabbed her wrist. Haley screamed in surprise as Jake flipped her and she too ended up on her back. She turned her head to look at her brother. "You suck."

"I know," he laughed sitting up. It was then that he heard his cell phone ring. They had left their stuff under the shade of one of trees and so Jake made a slow job over to his these. He held his sore back as he did so. He then rested on his knees as he pulled his cell from his bag. He checked the caller I.D. and was surprised to see Trixie's name. It had been a while since they had properly spoken. "Hey, Trix," he spoke, but the only sound he was greeted with was the sound of crying. "Trixie?" Jake said unsurely.

"They're going to kill me," she said in between her tears.

Jake immediately stood up, panic rushing through his entire body at her words. . . they had been the same words his mother had said to him the night she was taken from them. "Who?" he barked at her. "Where are you?" At that time Haley had made her way over and asked what was wrong, but she went unnoticed by her brother, his concentration on one thing. "Trixie, where are you?" he asked again, this time more urgent as she cried harder. "Trixie!"

"At home," she finally answered.

"I'm on my way," he told her and then turned to Haley. "Go home," he told her before running back into

the clearing, his wings being the first thing to appear as he took to the sky and the rest of his dragon form followed. Within a few minute's time, Jake could now see his destination. He went back into his human form, expect for his wings, as he came to Trixie's fire escape outside of her open bedroom window.

"Trixie!" he yelled as his feet gently touched down in her bedroom. "Trixie!" he called again when he got no answer. Her bedroom was empty and so left it to look else where. He was only in the hallway for a moment when he heard crying coming from behind him in the direction of Trixie's parent's bedroom.

He made his way quickly to the room and found Trixie laying on the floor as she cried, the house phone just out of her reach. Jake sighed in relief as he realized she was safe. He walked over to her before kneeling beside her. "Trixie? Baby girl, what's wrong?" he asked as he helped her sit up. "What happened? You scared the hell out of me with that phone call," he confessed.

Trixie said nothing as she leaned on the wall, her eyes fixed on the bathroom that was adjacent to the room. Jake turned his torso curiously towards it. He then looked back to Trixie before standing up and walking over to it. The door was closed and so Jake slowly turned the knob before pushing it open. His mouth fell open as his eyes landed on the sink. His head turned back to Trixie who was no longer looking in that direction. Jake stepped inside as he looked at three different kinds of pregnancy test. It didn't take Jake long to figure out that they all read positive.

Jake entered back into the bedroom and then approached Trixie before resting on his knees before her. He held one of the test in his hands. "How could you be this stupid?" he asked her. "There's birth control, condoms, and you-

"I didn't plan for it to happen, alright?" she told him. "It just sort of happened." Her tears were beginning to subside, but hearing Jake call her stupid didn't really help her feel better. "They're going to kill me, Jake. My parents are going to kill me."

"Stop saying that," Jake asked of her. "Dammit," he whispered to himself and then addressed his friend again. "Am I the first you've told?" She nodded. "Do you want me there with you when you tell Alex?" he asked. Trixie looked at him oddly. "What?" He didn't understand her expression.

Tears begin to fall again. "You're an asshole, you know that?" she told him before covering her face with one of her hands. "You must really think I some sort of whore to sleep with a guy I've known for about a minute."

"Come on, I would never think that of you," he told her truthfully. "It's just that you and Alex have been so close lately and-

"The baby is Spud's," Trixie blurted out.

Jake looked at her for a long time. "No," he whispered, knowing it was very clear from the way Spud had been acting and what Johanna had told them that he knew he was leaving. *Why would he risk something like this?* Jake wondered.

He tried standing up, needing fresh air to think when Trixie grabbed onto him. "Jake, please," she

begged. "Please. . . don't go."

Jake gave into her request as he pulled her into a hug. "It's going to be alright," he told her tenderly as he stroked her back. "Will get through this."

Trixie shook her head against his chest. "What am I'm going tell my parents when they ask me about the father?" she asked.

"Tell them the truth," he suggested without thinking.

The girl in his arms pulled away, wiping away her tears as she did so. "Are you nuts? Tell them I'm pregnant by a boy I've known for years, but they no longer remember?" she scoffed. "Yeah, after hearing that I'm sure I'll be getting a first class ticket to the happy hotel," she told Jake.

"Well, you don't have to tell them." Jake licked his lips, which suddenly felt dry at what he was about to say. "You could get an abortion," he murmured halfheartedly.

"No," Trixie turned down his idea. "My family is Pro-life and so am I." Trixie's hand then rested on her stomach. "Besides, it's the very last thing I have of him, so adoption is out too. I won't give up my baby," she said firmly. "Oh God," she whispered, the matter of her situation hitting her again before she clung back onto Jake, who did not reject her as he held her even tighter.

He didn't like seeing his friend like this. Her whole world was about to change with the coming of this new life and she would be responsible for it. And even if she had the support of her family, it wouldn't be enough without what she needed from Spud. It was right there that Jake decided he didn't want to see her struggle like that and so offered Trixie another suggestion, who gasped when she heard it. "Say what?"

"You heard me," he began as he looked into her eyes, allowing her to know he was a hundred percent sure about this. "Tell them the baby. . . *is mine.*"

To be Continued. . .

## 7 - Respect

### Chapter Seven: Respect

Trixie Carter looked long and hard at the boy holding her in his arms after he had told her that he would claim her child. She couldn't help but to wonder why a person with so many responsibilities already on his plate would agree to take care of a child that wasn't his? So she continued to stare into his dark black eyes, hoping that within them she would be able to find an answer to her question. But for all the searching she did, all she found was the love a friend, who was determine not to watch her fall.

Well, Trixie wasn't a push over, nor some damsel in distress, and though she appreciated the offer to the very core of her, she could only give him one answer. "No," she whispered as she shook her head as she finally pulled away from Jake and wiped away the remainder of her tears. "I can't allow you to do that. It's just wrong," she told him.

"How is it wrong, that I don't want to see you raise your child alone?" he asked of her.

Trixie smiled at his persistence. She had truly lucked out with having someone like him in her life. Trixie then blinked a few times in surprise, because although she had been looking at nothing but him, it was only now that she really took in his from. "You know, with your wings, you kind of look like an angel," she informed him.

Jake didn't understand at first, that is not until Trixie reached out and her fingers ran across the thin, but durable skin of his wings. It was then that he realized that he had been in so much of a hurry to find her that he actually didn't completely change back into his human form. He slightly frowned as he allowed his wings to dissolve away. "Trust me. . . I'm nobody's angel."

"Look, Jake, your offer is beyond sweet, but us lying to people about this just doesn't sit well with me," she voiced her concern. "And it's not like we could keep it for long. As soon as the baby is born, people will know it's not yours."

"So you want to raise this baby alone?" Jake asked.

"You act as if people don't do it all the time, Jake. It's nothing new," she explained. "I can do it on my own."

"But I'm trying to tell you, you don't have to, Trixie. I am more than willing to be what this child needs," he explained.

"I can't agree to this. I can't," she told him. "It would be selfish of me to even consider it. Besides, what would Spud think if he-"

Jake frowned before cutting her off. "Trixie, you heard what Johanna said. The chances of Spud coming back. . . they aren't good." Jake's shoulders slumped over as he finally said the words out loud. "We

have to play this as if it's the worst case scenario.”

“Have you have no faith in him?” she asked.

“I do,” he confirmed. “But I don't know what he's up against or what he is even doing or why for that matter. I have faith in him, but it's hard to have when we've been left in the dark.” An idea then popped into Jake's head. “We have to see Johanna again.”

“She told us not to come back,” Trixie reminded him.

“You're carrying her niece or nephew. She has to see us. She has to tell us what is going on with Spud or least be able to tell him what's going on with you,” he hoped.

Trixie nodded her head as she stood up. “It's worth a shot, I guess.” She sat on her parent's bed. “When should we try to see her?” she asked.

Jake sat next to her. “As soon as possible. Maybe even today if we can,” he replied.  
OoOoO

Later that day Jake and Trixie found themselves outside of Johanna's front door again. “Well, let me guess,” Johanna began as she looked at Trixie. “You've discovered you're pregnant?”

Trixie looked at her suspiciously. “How did you know?”

“Come inside,” she looked to Jake, “both of you.” The two teenagers followed Johanna into the living room where they took a sit while Johanna remained standing. She cleared her throat before she regarded them. “I know why you are here, but I can't help you. There is no why that I can contact Arthur,” she explained.

“If you can just tell me where he is,” Jake begged. “I can handle the rest.”

“If you find him now, he will be in violation of our laws and lose his right to the throne. He has to do this alone.”

Jake looked at her in confusion. “Throne?”

Johanna closed her eyes and sighed as she realized what she had let slip. “shoot,” she whispered to herself.

“What must he do alone?” Trixie asked.

Johanna stared at them for a moment as she weighed her options. “Alright, if my brother trusted you enough to give you the Jewel of Eskaw. . . I guess, I have no choice but to trust you as well.” She took a sit on the lazy-boy chair. She looked at Jake as she began. “My brothers-”

“Brothers?” Trixie interrupted.

"Please, let me tell my story," Johanna insisted and Trixie indicated she would remain silent. "My brothers and I are not of this world- no," she rethought her words. "That makes us sound like aliens," she smiled at the thought. "I guess the right word would be dimension," she began again. "My brother Spud is the last male of our father's line. On his eighteenth birthday, he had to return home to claim his right as the true heir, but to prove that he is worth there is a test he must survive."

Trixie visibly looked upset as she heard Johanna speak the word, survive. "This test is not easy. Two of three of our older brothers have already done this test and have failed. I am not eligible to claim the throne as I learned on my eighteenth birthday that I was illegitimate and therefore have no rights to it." Johanna then shook her head. "Spud is talented, but I fear for his life."

"Wait," Jake raised an eyebrow, only a little passed the knowledge that one of his best friends was royalty. "What happened to the other older brother? Did he survive?"

"Yes and no. During our eldest brother's younger days, he did a lot of dimension jumping and while visiting this one fell in love with it." Johanna smiled. "No, that's wrong. He fell in love with a girl here, but bringing her to our dimension, though not unheard of, was impossible it seemed for him. So being the eldest with four younger siblings after him, he denounced his chance at the throne and stayed here to raise a family with her," she explained. "I came to visit him many years ago and ended up adoring this dimension as well. Spud and I have been here ever since."

"So Spud didn't have to go, he could have given up his chance?" Trixie asked.

"No, being the last of our father's line, he had no choice. If he does not survive and claim the throne, it will fall to our eldest brother's line. Our eldest brother, has not told his family who he is, therefore his children do not have the knowledge to survive such a test. Spud could not denounce the throne in good conscience."

"And if he survives?" Jake probed.

"Our people are in great hardship at this moment. He must put things in order before he's allowed by our parliament to jump dimensions. News of if he lived or died, will be years from now."

Jake suddenly felt a strange tingle. He looked down and noticed Trixie had lightly taken his hand in comfort. "Years?" she looked at Johanna in disbelief. "Can't you go back to your home dimension to see what's going on?"

Johanna shook her head as she stood up and walked over to the fireplace. On the mantle rested a picture of her and Spud. "I wish I could, but I am not allowed to return home for reasons I do not care to discuss."

"How did you know I was pregnant?" Trixie asked, not able to hold her curiosity.

Johanna turned from the mantle back to the guest that sat in her home. "Because I can't touch you without feeling like my skin is on fire," she told her. "The protection of the jewel is doubled when the receiver is with child of the giver. At first it was mostly used to ward off any other male suitors from our dimension. But with the changing times of our world, it is used to keep enemies from harming the next

generation of our line.”

“Johanna, in your honest option, can Spud do this?” Jake stared at her intensely, longing for the words he wanted to hear.

Johanna couldn't look at them as she answered, “I don't know.”

OoOoO

Jake swallowed hard as he stood in his living room looking at the people looking at him. Trixie stood next to him, her hand once again in his as she shook slightly. She seem to be just as nervous about this as he was. And who wouldn't be as in front of them sat members from both of their families, which include Jake's dad, Johnathan, his sister, grandfather, and Fu Dog. For Trixie it included her mother and grandmother because her father was on tour somewhere overseas.

Jake had suggested to Mrs. Carter about the three of them coming over to have dinner with him and his family, telling her that he had already confirmed that it was okay with his dad. Mrs. Carter thought it was a nice gesture and politely accepted the invitation. She was now looking at him curiously, her forehead faintly creasing, as Jake had told them that he an announcement, which was shortly followed by Trixie standing next to him.

Jake's eyes then lingered on his twelve year old sister as Fu Dog rested his head on her lap before she went stretching him behind the ear. Jake wondered how he would react if it were a few years later and she was standing up here with some boy with the news that he had. What would he want for her? He continued to wonder. He then looked to Trixie who was already looking at him and gave her a gentle smile.

Trixie smiled back, but it was one that did not reach her eyes. Reading her expression Jake knew she was letting him know that if he wanted to back out that this was the time to do so, because after this there was no turning back. Jake simply nodded his head in understanding before seeing her give a small sigh of relief as she finally looked to her own mother. “Mom,” she began slowly. “Jake and I are-”

“-Getting married,” Jake blurred out as he cut Trixie cut.

“What?” was the word Jake simultaneously heard from several people, one which included Trixie herself.

“Jake, what the hell?” Trixie whispered to him. “This isn't what we talked about.”

Before Jake could respond another voice cut in. “You two can not be serious,” Mrs. Carter stood up to express her concerns. “You're just kids. You're not even done with high school yet. Besides, you're not even old enough to get married without our consent.”

“I'll be eighteen in several mouths,” Jake informed her. “I'll be old enough then.”

“But she won't be,” Mrs. Carter grabbed her daughter's arms. “And I won't give consent. We're going home,” she told Trixie. “I can't believe you brought me here to hear such nonsense.”

“Why don't you just let the babies speak?” Mrs. Carter turned to see that her mother-in-law hadn't gotten up from her seat.

“Yes, please, let us speak,” Jake pleaded with Trixie's mom.

Mrs. Carter looked a little taken back before turning to Johnathan and Lao Shi. “Mr. Long. . . and Mr. Loung, certainly you two must agree with me.”

Jake looked to his grandfather, for support, but Lao Shi seemed to be avoiding eye contact with him.

Johnathan then nodded his head as he took off his glass and cleaned them with the bottom of his shirt. “I do. The two of them are much too young to even be considering marriage.” He replaced his glasses before looking at his son. “Maybe in a few years, after college, when you've both have had a little more life experience,” he reasoned. “Maybe then you two can discuss marriage and who knows maybe by that time you'll see how silly this is now.”

“Life experience?” Jake looked to his father incredulously. “Are you kidding me? Can you really say that to my face after-”

“Jake!” Lao Shi yelled out before Jake's anger allowed him to say more than he should.

“I've heard enough,” Mrs. Carter stated. “We're going home,” she told her daughter again. “So you can explain to me why-”

“I'm pregnant,” Trixie finally announced.

Mrs. Carter's mouth fell open at the words. She then shook her head. “No you're not,” was all she could say.

“Yeah,” Jake spoke up stepping behind Trixie as he took hold of her arms. “She is. . . and we're getting married with or without your consent.”

“Oh, Jake,” Jake heard Lao Shi softly say.

Johnathan sighed. “I'm very disappointed in you, son. I don't even know what your mother is going to think when she returns.”

Mrs. Carter looked confused. “Wait, I thought his mother had-”

“Mom,” Trixie quickly cut her off. She then closed her eyes as she slightly shook her head, telling her it wasn't a question she should be asking.

Johnathan Long learned years ago about his wife's side of the family and their dragon bloodline. It had been difficult for him to adjust at first, but once he did, the tension that had built up in the house for years of having to hide it from him slowly faded away almost as if it had never been there. It was new for Jake and Haley be able to use their abilities without fear of being caught by their father. It had made life at home so much easier.



But when the events of last year took place and their mother, Susan was killed, it was hard for Johnathan to digest the story as Haley retold it in tears. She cried harder as Jake refused to look at her as she did so. He blamed her, she knew, no matter how many times he told her he didn't, and feared her father would blame her as well.

Johnathan then entered into a state of denial as he refused to believe his wife was killed and the part his family took in it. Instead, he was in the mind frame that she was on a very long trip and would return any day. Jake, Haley, and Lao Shi could do nothing but play along with his false belief as people dealt with grief in different ways.

Eventually, the night came to an end and the Carters made their way home, but as soon Trixie arrived she called up Jake. "Are you out of your mind!" was her first question as soon as he picked up the phone. "Telling them about the baby would have been hard, but what you did was uncalled for."

"I know," Jake agreed as he settled in his room. "It just seemed like the right thing to do."

"Dammit, Jake," she sighed. "This has gotten way too complicated for me."

"I told you, Trixie, I got your back on this," he tried to reassure her.

"This isn't real, Jake. You can't be serious. You don't really want to marry me."

Jake shrugged. "I could do worst," he joked.

"This isn't funny," she stated seriously. "I mean, what about Rose?" she asked softly.

Jake frowned. "I don't want to talk about Rose," he made clear.

"You never want to talk about anything," she complained. "I know for a fact that you still love her. You know I never liked her, but marrying me. . . you would lose any chance you would have to be with her," she told him.

"I lost my chance along time ago with Rose," he told her sadly.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"You were right about her, okay? I should have never trusted her. She ratted me out to the Huntsclan, Trixie. About a year ago," he explained.

"A year ago?" she questioned. "You mean. . . your mom?"

"When they realized who I was, they took her as bait, figuring they could lure not only me, but my grandfather as well. We knew it was a trap, but we had no other choice. We didn't even know Haley had followed us to the rendezvous spot. But I was glad she was there. Me and gramps had gotten ourselves into a pinch and Haley bailed us out. I was so proud of her." He smiled. "I mean, baby girl, was kicking butt and taking names. But when we had to separate to cover more ground, I was still worried about her,

but she told me she could handle herself and I believed her, but then. . ." Jake softly trailed off not able to finish the story. "I'm sorry. I can't."

"It's okay," she comforted him.

"You know what? I think I'm going to call it a night, okay?" he told her suddenly feeling very tired. Trixie told him goodnight before they both hung up the phone. Jake then found himself staring at the phone when he heard a soft knock at the door. He looked up to see his grandfather enter the room. He offered him a forced smile. "Whaddup, G?" he greeted the older man.

"I have a very important matter to discuss with you, young one," he spoke as he approached his grandson. "This marriage can not take place," he told him.

Jake's shoulders slumped. "Not you too, grandpa."

"I am sorry, but I can not stand by and allow you to make the same mistake as Susan," he told him.

"Mistake?" Jake sighed, knowing that his parents had had a child before him that didn't survive childbirth. "Alright, the baby wasn't plan, but please, don't call-

"I am not referring to the child," he said, which confused Jake. "You can not marry a human, the Loung bloodline has been tainted enough."

Jake only blinked at Lao Shi for a moment before the word "tainted" actually registered. "Are you talking about me and Haley?" he asked confused and a bit angry. "You -you think because we are part human that our blood is tainted?" he had a hard time asking. "Is this why whenever we went to Draco Island for the Summits you seemed so ashamed of me?"

"No!" Lao Shi answered loudly. "I have never been ashamed of you or your sister. I could not ask for finer, more honorable grandchildren," he reassured him.

"Then tell me gramps, how is it honorable to ignore the responsibilities I have to this child?" he demanded to know.

Lao Shi took a deep breath as he composed himself. "Jake, I know you, you have been raised right and as your Dragon Master and your grandfather, I would like to think I had a hand in that. I do not believe you would allowed such a situation to occur."

"What do you mean?" Jake asked.

"The child, it is not yours, is it?" Lao Shi asked.

Jake's brow furrowed. "Do you know what you suggest about Trixie when you say that?"

Lao Shi slightly nodded. "I do. I believe she is trapping you."

Jake stood before side stepping his grandfather and holding his door wide open. "It's late gramps, I

think it's time for you to go home." Jake refused to look at his grandfather as he left and closed the bedroom door behind the older man. Jake then leaned against the closed door as he realized that he had slightly lost something for his grandfather he thought he never would. . . *respect*.

To Be Continued. . .

## 8 - Comfort

### Chapter Eight: Comfort

It was between classes as Trixie looked for the next book she needed from her locker. She jumped in surprised when she closed it, she had not noticed Alex standing behind her door. "Hey," she smiled politely at him.

"Hey," he replied breathlessly. "I was just wondering, got anything planned for this weekend?"

"Yeah, I kind of do," she told him, as she was scheduled to start prenatal care. "Why?"

"It's just," he began nervously, "we've been kind of seeing a lot of each other lately and I enjoy your company," he explained. "Plus, I'm not sure if you've noticed, but I like you, a lot." Trixie's dark cheek reddened a little as she realized where the conversation was heading. "So I was hoping we could make this thing between us official," he ended with a smile, but when he realized that Trixie wasn't smiling back at him it faded.

"Alex," she said softly. "I'm sorry, I can't date you."

"Oh." Alex gave her a hurt expression. "Why?" he asked. "Because I was pretty sure that you liked me too."

"I do like you," she confirmed. "It's just that," she pause, "Jake."

"What does Jake have to do with us?" Alex was confused to hear the other boy's name brought up.

"Have you really never noticed that he's not fond of you?" Trixie asked. Alex first looked at her in disbelief, but then his expression softened as he remembered the way Jake had been treating him when it came to Trixie.

Jake, in Alex's opinion, was very much a loner. No matter how many times Alex offered, Jake refused, time and time again, to get involved in any of the after school activities their school had to offer. When they had group projects, Alex noticed how Jake would quickly do his part and then turn it over to the group leader so he wouldn't have to be bothered.

Even when Alex had worked with him, Jake seemed very anxious to be done, even though they had plenty of time. Alex also noticed how the only person he ever seemed to hang out with willingly was Trixie. And then something clicked inside of Alex's head and he sighed in understanding. Jake was threatened by him. He thought that Alex was trying to take his only friend.

"Rethink us, Trixie," Alex began. "Know that I would never come in between what you and Jake have,"

he spoke the truth. "I know he's your friend."

"Yeah, he is, but. . . he's more than that," Trixie confessed as she found she could no longer look at Alex.

Alex frowned. "That's not what you said when I asked you before."

"I know what I told you." Trixie slowly looked up. "It's just that Jake and I have a lot of history," she tried to explain. "Our friendship is very tangled and very complicated," she admitted. "I can't get into details, but the two of us have gone through a lot and recently something else has come up. And I'm sorry, but unfortunately it doesn't leave room for anyone else."

"Tangled?" Alex repeated. "It almost sounds like you're trapped within it." Trixie looked at him oddly. "Tell me, Trixie, what kind of friend would not allow you to experience things outside of them?"

Trixie's hand went to her stomach, fisting the material of her shirt. "One of the best I've ever had," she whispered sadly. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have class." She went to turn away.

"Trixie, wait," Alex called after her and she turned back to him. "I'll admit, I don't understand you and Jake. I haven't had a friend since I was three years old like you two," he told her. "But please don't count me out. Not yet," he asked of her. "And if you ever find the time, and you just need someone to talk to. . . you have my number, okay?"

Trixie looked at him a moment, she then gave him a small smile before she stepped into him. "You know what, Alex? You're very sweet. You kind of remind me of someone I used to know." She then placed a hand on his chest. "I'll make the time for a call here and there," she promised.

Alex returned her smile, placing his hand on top of hers. "I'm going to hold you to that Ms. Carter," he said sweetly, causing her to slightly blush again as he looked into her eyes. Suddenly they both heard someone clearing their throat. Alex's head jerked up and Trixie quickly turned around to find Jake leaning on his locker.

"Shouldn't you be heading to class?" he asked, his face impassive, as he regarded Trixie.

"Yeah," she replied as she pulled away from Alex before heading down the hall.

Jake then turned his attention to Alex. "You know, I've been very nice to you, but on the real, homeboy, you need to back off my girl, Trixie." Jake pushed himself off the locker. "She's taken," he made clear.

Alex brow furrowed. He was tired of being treated like a fool when all he ever tried to do was be Jake's friend. "Taken? No, that's your own little self-delusion," he began. "She's never indicated that the two of you have been anything other than friends," he lied.

"Exactly, I'm her friend and you're nothing more than the dude who can't take a hint. Besides, when I said she was taken," Jake smiled. "I never said by me." Alex's features soften at the words as he wondered what Jake meant by them, but he never had a chance to ask as the bell finally rung and each made their way to their own class.

OoOoO

"I quit," Jake told his grandfather softly as he arrived at the store that day.

Lao Shi looked utterly confused as Jake had made the announcement completely out of the blue. "Quit what?" he asked seriously. "If you mean your duties as the American Dragon, Haley is still not-

"No, not that," Jake shook his head. "I'm not quitting being the American Dragon," he corrected the other man. "Just working here at the shop, which was only a front anyway," he pointed out.

"But your training," Lao Shi made a point of his own.

"I've been training my @\$ off for fives years, gramps," Jake said calmly. "I know everything I need to know about being a dragon," he then took a deep breath, "I don't need you anymore."

Lao Shi looked sadden by his grandson's words. "If this is about the other night, and what I may have implied. I meant no disrespect against Trixie," he apologized.

"It's not about that," Jake told him, which was only half the truth as he sat down on a stool in front of the counter. "Trixie and the baby have to be priority in my life now." Lao Shi frowned. "That doesn't mean I'll neglect my other duties, but when it comes to my-" he paused "-to my family, it has to go on the back burner."

"That is not what being the American Dragon is about, Jake," Lao Shi tried to warn him.

"Really?" Jaked questioned. "Then tell me. . . how's grandma?" Lao Shi looked a little taken back as Jake waited for an answer. "Exactly," Jake said after a moment of silence.

"Jake," Lao Shi began slowly. "You are only seventeen-

"A seventeen year old who has had more responsibility than any grown damn man!" Jake stated heatedly. "I am not a child anymore!"

"Yes, you are!" Lao Shi yelled back. "You showed that to be when you got that sweet little girl in trouble!"

"Oh, so now she's a 'sweet little girl'?" Jake stood up angrily, knocking over his stool by accident as he did so. "When the other night you practically called her a whore to my face?"

"Do not put words in my mouth," Loa Shi ordered. "You are the one making this more difficult than it should be. If you had only settled for a nice dragon girl-"

"I don't want a dragon girl!" Jake made clear. "I don't want to be with anyone else who is going to hurt me!" he let slip his true fear.

Lao Shi looked at him curiously. "What do you mean by that, young one?" he asked carefully.

"Nothing," Jake spat as he turned his back on his grandfather, cursing himself as he did so. He then grip the counter tightly as he took long and deep breaths to try to calm himself. "Just forget what I said."

Lao Shi continued to stare at the back of his grandson. "Jake, my boy, tell me," he began after a few moments. "Do you love Trixie?" he asked.

Jake turned his torso and looked at his grandfather in disbelief. "Of course I do," he told him. "She's my best friend, I do anything for her," he said honestly.

"That is not what I asked," the older man said to him. "I do not mean the love one friend has for another. I mean, do you love her in a way a man is suppose to love a woman?"

Jake frowned as he thought over the question. "What does that have to do with anything?"

"Why do you avoid the question?" Lao Shi looked at him oddly. "Trust me, Jake, no matter how honorable you think you are being by marrying Trixie, if your heart is with someone else, your marriage is already doomed to fail," he told him sadly. "I know how strongly you felt about Rose-

"I don't want to talk about Rose," Jake interrupted his grandfather quietly. "She isn't a part of my life anymore. She hasn't show her face in a year and I wouldn't care less if I ever saw her again," Jake made clear. "So if you really want an answer, than yes, I love Trixie and once we're married no woman will come before her."

Lao Shi sighed. "You were always a horrible liar, Jake," his grandfather told him. Jake scoffed softly as he shook his head and bent over to pick up the fallen stool.

Of course Jake loved Trixie, no one ever had to question that, but he wasn't in love with her. Jake knew, very well, that her heart already belonged to Spud. And he was convinced, no matter what happened in their lives, that fact was never going to change, and he was honestly all right with that. Besides, in Jake's experience, love complicated things. If he hadn't loved Rose, she would have never been in a position to betray him. Love had blinded him and because of it he lost someone very important to him.

But Jake trusted Trixie, he always had, his heart was safe with her because he knew she would never ask for it. Besides, he had made Spud a promise to watch over her, and though he knew marriage wasn't what he meant, he knew Spud would understand once he learned about the child he had unknowingly left behind. Jake also knew, that though his marriage to Trixie would only be for name sake, that he would never step outside of it, which meant children of his own weren't in his future. But again, that was all right, it wasn't as if he were an only child, the Loung Dragon Bloodline would not die with him.

"You know what? I'm finished with this. I only came to tell you I won't be here after school anymore. I found a real job, one that actually pays," he informed him.

"There is a lot more to raising a family than the money you bring in, Jake," Lao Shi spoke. "A child

needs support and love and so does that child's mother.”

Jake looked agitated. “What are you saying? That I can't provide that?”

“You'll try, Jake, I know you will, but you are still young and the balance between being a father and Protector of the magical world is difficult to maintain,” Lao Shi advised.

“So that's a no, huh?” Jake then shook his head and grabbed his book bag off the floor. “I'm out, gramps,” he said before walking towards the door, where he grabbed his skateboard and jumped on it outside before he began rolling down the sidewalk, going in the opposite direction of his home.

Jake thought a leisurely session of skateboarding would take his mind off of the argument he had just had with his grandfather, but it didn't and before long he found himself outside of Trixie's apartment. He knocked on the door and was surprised not to see Trixie, but her mother, who did not look too pleased to see him. “Uhhh, is Trixie home?” he asked a bit nervously.

“Yes, she is. She's in her room,” Mrs. Carter told him, but made no attempt to move.

Jake slightly gestured up the stairs. “Can I see her?” he asked.

“Only if you can talk some sense into her,” Mrs. Carter replied. “Maybe she'll listen to you. Tell her, if she wants to do right by this child, she'll give it to a family who can take care of it.”

“I've already tired,” Jake said sincerely. “But she's already made up her mind. I won't fight her on it.”

Mrs. Carter's expression soften as she heard Jake's response before she nodded her head and allowed Jake into her home. Jake went up the stairs, skipping two at time. When he came to Trixie's room the door was closed and so he gently knocked on it. “Go away!” she yelled from the other side.

“Trix.” Jake leaned onto the door as he placed his hand on the door knob. “It's me.”

He then heard some shuffling sounds before she came to unlock her door. She had gotten out of her school clothes in opt for a My Little Pony t-shirt, that looked as if it had seen better days, and a pair of dark green shorts. Her hair was put up into a messy ponytail, which told Jake she had been laying down. “You look like shoot,” were her first words to him.

“Take a look in the mirror,” he countered.

She gave him a small smile before she gestured for him to come in, closing the door behind them. Trixie then climbed back into bed, underneath the sheets before Jake climbed in behind her as he laid on top of them. Trixie then felt Jake's arm snake around her waist before she felt his forehead press against her back, where he simply took a deep breath. Trixie then took her hand and laced her fingers with his.

Trixie had been fighting with her mother since the moment she walked in through the door. Her mother telling or rather yelling at her that she was just a baby herself, that she was ruining her and Jake's life. Trixie, of course, didn't want to hear it, but that didn't stop her mother. Then, through some miracle, the yelling stopped and Trixie retreated to her room, where she just collapse into her bed. Then Jake came



to her door, his tired expression looking as if he had just escape the pits of hell himself.

At that point, there was no need for many words, each seeing what the other needed. And so as Trixie felt Jake's hold on her become just a little bit tighter, she found within him the same thing she knew he found within her. . . *comfort*.

To Be Continued. . .

## 9 - Someone Close to You

### Chapter Nine: Someone Close To You

It was seven in the morning as Trixie looked at herself within her bedroom mirror. She had unbutton the bottom buttons of her pajama shirt to examine her slightly protruding stomach. She sighed as she ran a hand across it. Spud had been gone for three months, but she thought about him everyday and hoped wherever he was that he was safe and that he was able to return soon.

With that thought, Trixie prepared for the day. School was over and she was grateful to finally had graduated, but today was still a school day in her mind. New Utretch, her high school, had a tradition of all the seniors getting together the day after graduation to have breakfast at the school. The meal was included in her senior dues so she decided to go.

Trixie fussed as she struggled with a pair of jeans, that she just couldn't seem to get pass her thighs. She finally gave up and abandon the jeans on the floor before she went to the closet to find another pair. "You've got to be kidding me," she said to herself, as she had gotten the jeans up, but couldn't get them fastened. She laid back on her bed, exhausted after struggling for another minute or so. "I need to buy new clothes," she whined, not too fond of having to go shopping.

After another ten minutes, Trixie made her way to the kitchen to find her mother on the house phone. "Of course, dear," she spoke to the person on the other end. "Trixie and I have missed you too." Trixie raised an eyebrow as she noticed the worried expression on her mother's face as she fixed herself something to drink. "I'll see you then." Mrs. Carter then hung up the phone up before looking to Trixie.

"How's dad?" she asked before taking a sip of her water.

"He's coming home," she announced, causing Trixie to spit out her drink.

Trixie's hand came to her mouth for a moment. "When?" she asked.

Telling her mother she was pregnant had been one thing, the two of them had finally stopped fighting when Mrs. Carter realized she wasn't going to win and that Trixie was going to keep her baby. Telling her father though, would be a completely different story. He had been on tour in Europe for seven months, and telling him over the phone just didn't seem right, that and Trixie just didn't want to, because her mother, compared to her father, was nothing more than a teddy bear.

"In a few days, he hasn't confirmed the time yet," Mrs. Cater informed her.

"Okay," Trixie shook her head, as she slowly sat down. "Okay," she repeated staring down at nothing in particular.

Mrs. Carter sighed as she approached her daughter. "Do you want me to tell him for you?"

“No,” she replied. “That’s something I should do. . . with Jake.”

“Whatever you think is best,” Mrs. Carter told her as she reached over and straightened out Trixie’s hair. She then looked to the clock on the wall. “You should get going or you’re going to be late. I found your keys. I hung them on the wall.”

Trixie only nodded before she got up and cleaned the water she had spilled. She then headed towards the front of the house and picked up her keys on the way out. It had taken her a total of five time, but Trixie finally passed her drivers test and so was able to drive the car her father had bought her when she turned sixteen.

As she drove to school, Trixie wondered what her father’s reaction would be when she and Jake told him the news. She already knew he was going to be very disappointed in her and she hated that. She never wanted to be anything less than that perfect daughter in his eyes, but truth be told, she didn’t know her father that well. Being in the military, he had the option of traveling by himself or traveling with his family. He chose to travel by himself, because he didn’t want to uproot his family every few years.

Instead he would be away for months on end, home for a little while and then gone again. Even when he was home, there really wasn’t much time, to spend together as it always seemed he was getting ready for his next trip. It was almost like he a was stranger, who just stop by from time to time. But she loved him or at least the idea of him.

Trixie soon made it to school and made her way to the fifth floor where the cafeteria was located. She was looking around for a familiar face when she surprisingly saw Jake, sitting at their normal table. “Hi,” she greeted him as she sat down. “Thought you weren’t coming.”

“Didn’t come for the food. Came for the peace,” he explained not looking up from his task as he held a book in one hand and a pencil in the other as he wrote something down.

“What are you doing? You do know school is over with, right?” she questioned.

“It’s a Leprechaun depute that they want me to resolve. I have two days to learn all their laws, so I can make a fair decision,” he told her. “I couldn’t do it at home. My dad and Haley were driving me up the wall.”

“I wish you luck with the dispute. I know you’ll make the right choice,” she encouraged him.

“Thanks,” he said as he erased something and rewrote it.

Trixie licked her lips before she leaned into Jake. “There’s something I have to tell you,” she whispered and Jake nodded, indicating he was listening. “My father’s coming home.”

Jake’s pencil suddenly stopped before he slowly lifted his head and looked upon Trixie for the first time that day. “When?” he whispered back.

Trixie shook her head. “Probably within the week,” she told him. “Jake, I need you to be there with

me,” she asked of him.

“Of course.” Jake laid his book on the table and turned towards Trixie. He took both of her hands. “So, how are you and the baby?”

Trixie smiled and though she would never admit it, she liked when she had Jake's full attention. “Fine. In fact, I have a doctor's appointment on Thursday at four. I'm getting an ultrasound to make sure we're on the right track,” she said. “I can come and pick you up if you want or we can meet there-”

“Trix,” Jake straightened up a bit as he shook his head. “I wish you had said something sooner, because Thursday afternoon is no good for me.”

“Why?” She looked curious.

“Uh. . . work,” he provided.

Trixie's brow furrowed. “I know your work schedule, Jake,” she informed him. “You don't work Thursdays. That's why I made the appointment for Thursday.” She then felt a bit stupid as she let her shoulders drop. “Oh, you were talking about your Am Drag thing, weren't you?”

“Actually, no. It's something else.”

Trixie looked asking of him. “Well?”

Jake said nothing at first as he gradually slipped his hands out of her. He then turned back to the table. “Look, I really need to get this done, okay?” he tried changing the subject.

“Aww, don't tell me you're embarrassed about it.” She smiled. “It can't be worst than your secretary job.”

“I'm not a secretary,” Jake told her. “I'm a data entry clerk. There's a difference.”

Trixie cocked an eyebrow. “Do you answers phones? Do you put files away?” Jake nodded. “Then guess what, boy? You're a secretary.”

Jake frowned as he was teased. “It's a good job, Trixie, and I was lucky to get it considering they were looking for someone with experience.” Jake then shrugged. “Besides, I like working at the dentist office.”

“I know,” she replied softly as she looked at Jake's determine face as he studied Leprechaun law. “It's just. . . I'm feeling very guilty, Jake.”

Jake's frown deepen as he once again looked at Trixie. “Guilty? About what?”

“You,” she told him. “You just seem so stressed lately and I know it's because of me. I mean, we've just graduated from high school, but somehow it doesn't mean anything. This should be the greatest moment in our lives. We should be hitting the clubs and just livin' it up before college. . . the three of us,” she

explained. "Instead, Spud is gone, I'm pregnant, our families are fighting to no end, and we're both working like chickens with our heads cut off." She sighed. "Things just aren't how I pictured them."

Jake lowered his head for a moment. "You know what?" he began. "What I had planned for Thursday isn't important-" Trixie went to interrupt him, but he didn't allow her to. "I didn't want to do it anyway," he confessed. "So I'll meet you at the doctor's office before your appointment, okay?"

Trixie nodded before she felt a hand on her shoulder. It was her friend, Belinda, asking her to come sit with her and some of her friends. Trixie, seeing that Jake was once deep into his book, took Belinda up on her offer.

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"Where is he?" Trixie thought out loud as she stood in the lobby of the hospital, trying not to be caught again by the that mean looking nurse who told her she couldn't use you cell phone within the building.

Trixie had arrive fifteen minutes before your scheduled appointment to check in. She was surprised that she didn't have to wait for long as her name was soon called by her doctor. She asked if she could have a few more minutes because she was waiting for someone. That had been ten minutes ago. The doctor would be back any moment and Trixie knew she wouldn't be able to delay her anymore.

"Pick up, dammit," she whispered, as she sat down impatiently, this must have been the eighth call to Jake's cell, but all she was received was a voice mail telling her to leave a message. Finally giving up, Trixie turned off her phone and rested her hands in her lap as she looked down at it.

"Trishale Carter?" Trixie couldn't explain why, but she shuttered when she heard her name called before looking up at the doctor. The doctor gave her a warm smile. "Are you ready?" she asked politely.

"Yeah," Trixie replied softly as she stood and then followed the doctor down the hall.

Suddenly she heard her name being called from behind her and turned to see Jake making his way down the hall. A huge smile came to her face. "Sorry. Excuse," Jake said as he ran into a few people making his way to her. "I know I'm late. I'm sorry," he apologized.

Trixie's smile faded as she saw the scar across Jake's neck. "What happened here?" she asked as her fingers gently went to examine the wound, but Jake caught her hand before she could.

He looked at the doctor who was patiently waiting for them and then back at Trixie. "We'll talk later," he told her, before a worried expression filtered on to his face. "Let's make sure the baby is alright, okay?"

Trixie nodded before once again following the doctor. They were led to a small room and within moments, Trixie was laying back with her stomach exposed to the doctor. She giggled as the conductive jelly was smeared over her stomach. "It's cold," she told Jake, who gave her a smile that for some reason didn't reach his eyes. Trixie ignored it.

"I assume this is your first child?" the doctor asked as she placed the transducer on Trixie's skin.

"Yes, ma'am," Trixie answered as an image slowly began to appear on the sonogram beside them.

"How old are you?" she asked.

"I'll be eighteen next month," she replied.

The doctor nodded as she studied the image on the screen. "About 15 to 16 weeks, yes?" After telling her she was correct, a small frown came to the doctor's face.

"Is something wrong?" Jake couldn't help but ask.

"Well, for the time frame, your baby seems a bit small." The doctor then turned to Trixie. "Are you aware that during pregnancy you should be gaining anywhere from 25 to 35 pounds?" she asked.

"I know and I have been," Trixie told her. "You can ask my jeans at home, trust."

"Then have you been under a lot of stress?" she asked.

"Yeah," Trixie admitted sadly. "A lot actually."

"Is it your job? If it is—"

"It's not," Trixie cut her off. "I work as a receptionist at a hotel. The people are very nice there."

"Then is it school or home?" Trixie lowered her eyes as home was mentioned. The doctor sighed. "Stress can play a major factor when it comes to your child's health," she informed them. "If you can't find a way to reduce that stress, even if you go into labor at full term, your baby is at risk at being born underweight, which can lead to a lot of problems. And with being a teenager and African-American, you are already in a higher bracket of having a premature baby."

"Great," Trixie said sarcastically to herself.

"All I can tell you for right now is to stay healthy, continue gaining weight, and reduce your stress as best as you can," the doctor advised them.

Jake took Trixie's hand as she seemed to be in her own little world. "I'll make sure she does that," Jake replied. "So other than that is the baby okay?" he asked.

The doctor nodded "Yes, ten fingers and ten toes." The doctor then smiled. "Now ask your real question," she told him.

"Is it a boy or a girl?" he asked.

With the transducer still on Trixie's stomach the doctor turned back to the sonogram. "At 16 weeks it maybe a bit too early to— Oh, no, wait. Here we are." She reached out and placed her finger on the

screen. "If you look right here, you can just make out the genitals." She then turned back to Jake. "Congratulations, it's a boy. If you want I can take a picture for you."

"Thank you," Jake said with a nod.

Ten minutes later, Jake was driving Trixie's car as she stared out the window. "Trix, you okay over there?" Jake asked. She hadn't said anything since the doctor told her she could be at risk for a premature birth.

"Just a little worried," she told him.

"Well, I'm not. Not anymore," Jake confessed. "Everything is going to be fine."

Trixie then turned to him, once again spotting the wound on his neck. "So how did you get hurt?" she asked, which immediately had an effect on the happy expression on Jake's face.

"I was caught off guard, on my way to the hospital, by a Banshee," he told her.

"What's a Banshee?" she asked.

"A fairy that predicts-" Jake paused before starting again. "A fairy with a hell of a voice," he told her. "After she left, I was very disoriented and couldn't hear for five minutes."

"You should have had your ears checked by a doctor while we were there," Trixie suggested, but Jake only shook his head. "So what does a Banshee look like?" was her next question.

Jake's face scrunched up. "I don't know," he replied. "All I really remember was that voice and long silver hair."

"Hair, Jake?" Trixie looked at him curiously. Jake only shrugged.

Jake soon parked Trixie's car in her garage and the two of them got out. "You should hurry home. It looks like rain," Trixie announced as she looked up at the sky.

"Yeah, alright. I'll catch you later," he told her as he passed her the keys. Trixie then watched as he went into his dragon form and took to the skies.

She yawned, suddenly feeling very tired as she made her way into her home, but before she could find sleep, something tugged at her and so she went to her computer and searched the word Banshee.

Her breath became stuck in her throat as a sentence struck a cord within her. "Seeing a Banshee serves as an omen to your own death," she read horrified, thankful that Jake didn't get a good look at the fairy. She honestly didn't know what she would do without him. But it was the next sentence that made Trixie's blood run cold, causing her to place her hand on her stomach as she read on. "Hearing a Banshee's cry, predicts the death of a family member or . . . *someone close to you.*"

To Be Continued. . .

# 10 - Count Me In

## Chapter Ten: Count Me In

It was a little before eight as Trixie arrived home from work. She had walked through just in time as the rain began to fall as it had been raining off and on the entire week. She greeted her mother who looked to be on the way out. She then told Trixie, as she picked up an umbrella out of the closet, that she was going to go pick up her father from LaGuardia. A sense of dread came over Trixie at the news as she closed the door behind her mother.

She knew depending on the rain and the traffic, that she had at least two hours before they would be back. She then headed to the den with the house phone in hand as she sat down and turned on the television. She checked the time, knowing that Jake got off at six, but usually was only home enough to get Haley so that they could fly around the city on patrol. So she tried his cell, but because of the bad weather couldn't get through.

Trixie figured she would try again later. In the mean time, she thought she would keep herself busy by doing some light cleaning around the house and tended to her grandmother, hoping it would help calm her nerves. It help for awhile until she once again noticed the time and saw how quickly it seem to be going. "I swear time is on crack," she said to herself before once again trying to reach Jake and as it went unanswered, panic slowly started to invade her.

Trixie didn't know what she would do, if she couldn't reach him in time and telling her father the news alone, frightened her to the core, but as she heard the front door open and then the voice's of her parents she realized this was something she was going to have to face alone. "Trishale, I'm home," Trixie heard her father calling for her.

She looked at the phone one last time before placing it on the coffee table and standing up. "Coming," she replied before existing the den.

OoOoO

Jake placed his hands on the blue tiles within his shower before tilting his head up and he allowing the warm water to hit his face as he breathed through his nose. It had been a long day and he wanted nothing more fall into a nice deep sleep.

After work, Jake arrived home to find Haley on the piano. He had asked her if she was up to learning about Leprechaun law and how their trail system worked as he was finally prepared to give the disputing Leprechaun family a verdict after four days of testimony. It had been a grueling ordeal, but it was something he wanted to expose her too and know about first hand.



Near the end of everything is when the rain began to pour down, but it had lasted long on their side of town. Jake and Haley then took to the skies as the split up and made their nightly route. There was a small incident with a troll and an ogre over a bridge or under it to be more precise, but other than that it had been a slow night.

Jake soon stepped out of the bathroom with a towel around his waist and one on his head as he tried to dry his hair. As he walked down the hall to his room he heard the doorbell ring. "Haley," he called nothing she was in her room when he saw her bedroom door closed. "Haley!" he cried louder when he didn't receive a reply. He then sighed in irritation as he walked over to her door in knocked. When she didn't answer he slowly turned the knob and stuck his head in.

He stifled back his laughter as he saw Haley with a huge pair of wireless headphones over her ear as she danced like a mad woman within her room. Jake had to cover his hand over his mouth as he realized that his little sister had absolutely no rhythm. He was then reminded why he was there when he heard the doorbell ring again. He stepped into Haley's room as he took the towel from his head and swung it onto his shoulder. He then reached out and took a hold of Haley's headphones before yanking them off. "Yo, genius."

Haley jumped in surprised as it appeared Jake popped out of nowhere. "It's not polite to snick up on people," she said angrily.

"Yeah, whatever," he began as he tossed the headphones on the bed. "Someone's at the door. Go answer it while I get dressed," he told her before turning around to exit the room.

Haley placed her hand on her hip. "What am I?" she asked. "Your maid?" Jake didn't even bother to answer her before he opened and closed his own bedroom door. Haley shook her head as she left her room and headed to the front door. "Who does he think he is?" she asked herself. "Thinking he can boss me around. . ." she continued with her rant about her older brother until she opened the door to find Trixie standing on the other side of it. "Oh my goodness," she whispered to herself.

Trixie stood before her with her head down. She was soaking wet from the rain and blood stained her jeans right below the knees. "Is Jake home?" she asked, her voice soft, but flat.

"Yeah." Haley shook her head as she pulled Trixie in out of the rain. Haley then turned her head in the direction of the stairs. "Jake!" she yelled as she guided her into the living room. "I'll go get you a towel," she told Trixie before heading towards the bathroom inside of the guest bathroom. "Jake!" she yelled again as she handed the towel to Trixie to dry off.

Meanwhile, Jake was upstairs wondering what his sister was having a fit about. "What?" he yelled as he pulled a t-shirt over his head for the night. He then smiled as he looked to his mirror, not at himself, but at his copy of the sonogram picture he had gotten at the hospital. He had it tucked in the frame of his mirror and as he looked at it, he couldn't help but wonder what they would name him.

Jake had been worried for a little while after his run in with the Banshee. He had had some type of vision when he heard the Banshee's cry reach his ears. He had seen the death of a little girl and though he didn't know her name nor could he see her face in this vision, he felt the pain of her loss. It had shook him up deeply as he wondered if this little girl would be the one he would raise as his own, but as the

doctor told them Trixie was having a boy, he quickly dismissed the thought, thinking maybe the Banshee's cry wasn't meant for his ears after all. Jake didn't know if that was a good or bad thing, for all he knew for sure was that he saw the death of someone's little girl.

"Just get down here!" he heard Haley answer him.

A moment later, Jake was making his way downstairs. "Alright, Haley, what's the big emerge-" he cut himself off as he saw Trixie on the couch with a towel over her shoulders. "What's going on?" he asked curiously as he regarded his sister who was walking towards him and then the back of Trixie's head as she had not moved from the couch.

"I don't know," Haley told him. "But I think she's upset. She really hasn't said anything to me."

Jake nodded before walking over to Trixie. He sat down beside her. "Baby girl?" he asked softly and slightly gasped as she turned to him and he saw the dark bruise on her cheek. "Who did this?" he asked as he touched the mark on her face.

Trixie's expression was blank as she spoke in a monotone voice. "No one," she replied. "I fell." Jake's brow furrowed as he couldn't remember the last time he just knew she was lying to him. "I tried to call you earlier," she said after a moment. "But you didn't pick up."

"We were on Leprechaun land. Calls usually don't get through," he informed her.

"My father came home today," she announced with her head down.

Jake shook his head as he looked at her in disbelief. "Please don't tell him you told him by yourself."

"I wasn't planning on to," she began. "Not without you. I didn't want do it alone, but my mother accidentally let it slip."

"Accidentally?" Jake found that hard to believe.

"He was so angry, Jake." Trixie hugged herself tightly. "I knew he was going to be upset, but I never thought-" she paused. "We argued. He wanted me to give the baby up. He told me I didn't know what I doing and that he wouldn't allow me to embarrass him. I told him I knew what I doing and that I was going to raise my own child and that I didn't care how that embarrassed him." Tears slipped down her eyes.

"Trixie," Jake whispered.

"He said he wouldn't be disrespected in his own home." Trixie then quickly snapped her head up, her eyes angry. "I told him he was never around long enough for it to be considered his home!" Her eyes then soften as she touched her own bruise.

"And that's when he hit you," Jake concluded and Trixie nodded to confirm.

"I made him do it," she defended her father. "I didn't have to say that. He works mad hard for me and

my moms.”

“Don't you dare make excuses for him,” Jake told her before Trixie covered her mouth and nose with both of her hands and sneezed.

“Bless you,” Jake heard Haley say, not even realizing she was still in the room until then.

Jake stood up taking Trixie with him. “We should get you out of these wet clothes before you catch something.” He turned to Haley. “You think you could find her something?” he asked of her.

“Yeah, I may have something that fits.” Haley was then followed by Trixie upstairs.

Jake shook in his anger at the situation, his fists clenching and unclenching at his sides. What kind of man would hit a pregnant woman? He wondered. What kind of man would hit a woman period? Jake tilted his head up as he let loose the fire that stirred in the depths of his diaphragm. The worst part about it though, was that he felt helpless. He was at a lost and he didn't know what to do.

Trixie's home life was stressful and with the way it effected her, he hated to imagine what that did to the baby. Jake sat back down just trying to calm himself. The best thing would be to get her out of that house. One logical thing to do would be moving her in with him and his family, but his father was against them being together too, so he didn't know if that would help. The next logical thing would be if they got a place of their own, but that just wasn't in their financial means, not unless he. . .

“No,” Jake said to himself, that route -though lucrative- was an uncertain path that his small family and his duties as the American Dragon would not allow him to take. Jake then stood up to head to his room, thinking that after a night's rest that things would look clearer in the morning.

He groaned as he heard the dryer which was, along with the washing machine, located next to his room. He was then taken by surprised as he found Trixie sitting on his bed as he entered. She was wearing one of Haley's long night shirts that had a big sleeping moon on it. “Hi,” was all she said.

“Hey,” he replied. “I was going to head in for the night,” he told her.

Trixie looked at the turned down sheets. “Oh.” She then stood. “It can wait, I guess,” she told as she went to walk pass him, but the comment made Jake reach out and stop her before she could.

“What can wait?” he wanted to know.

“Just a question I wanted to ask you, but I can see that you're tired. It can wait,” she repeated.

“Just go on and ask your question,” he told her, but she shook her head. “Please,” he said, hoping he could help her with something tonight.

Trixie sighed, but found she couldn't look at him as she asked sadly. “I know this is stupid, but I just wanted to know. . . how come you stop calling for fun?”

Jake looked at her curiously. “What do you mean?”

“Don't be coy, Mr. Long, I think you know actually what I mean,” she looked up as she spoke in a Southern accent and watched as an immediate blush came to Jake's cheeks.

Jake took a small step back as he cleared his throat. His hand then went to the back of his head, in a nervous like gesture. “It's just- It was always- And with Spud-” he struggled with what to say. “It felt wrong,” he admitted. “It was bad enough when he was here-”

“You said that's what made it exciting,” she pointed out.

“I know, but you guys weren't really together then, and now. . .” he tried to explain, “you're pregnant with his child. And I know it was just a stupid little game, but it would feel like betrayal and I don't think I can do that.”

Trixie gave him a small smile. “And here I thought it was because you didn't find me attractive anymore.”

Jake returned her smile. “That's not it at all.” He reached out and grazed her arm with his fingertips. “You know you're still the fly honey staring in all of these Mack Daddy's kinky dreams,” he told her playfully.

Trixie threw her head back and laughed. “Ow,” she said suddenly, lowering her head and bringing her hand to her bruised cheek. “You really have a way with words you know that?” She looked back up and tried to smile.

Jake lowered Trixie's hand from her cheek. “I should have been there,” he whispered as his own hand went up to her face. “I'm sorry.”

“It's not your fault,” she reassured him. “Really, Jakey.”

“Maybe, but knowing you're hurt when I could have done something.” He shook his head. “I'll never let it happen again,” he promised.

Trixie just smiled at him. She could never have asked for a better friend in her life. Then as his concern eyes went from her cheek to her eyes, something strange came over Trixie and before she realized it, she had leaned into him and placed a simple kiss upon his lips. Jake's eyes grew wide for a moment, but he didn't even have time to settle into the surprise of it before Trixie began to pull away.

His reaction was not one he had had planned as his body acted on its own accord and quickly leaned in to finish the kiss that she had started, but then it was as if Jake remembered where he was and who he was with and so pulled away. The distance between them was small as Jake shook his head. “I'm sorry. I shouldn't have-”

“What?” she asked as she held onto the fabric of his t-shirt. “This?” She placed another kiss upon his lips. “Or this?” she whispered as she placed one upon his chin and then another on his neck, careful of the scar he had across it.

Every fiber of Jake's mind told him, that he should stop her before things went too far. He knew she was upset about what had gone down with her father and how she didn't deal well when it came to him. His thoughts then led to Spud and how it wasn't fair to him. It wasn't his fault that he had to leave and Jake knew that he shouldn't take advantage of that absence.

He would be lying if he said he wasn't attached to Trixie, but he had put the idea of them away a long ago, once he saw with his own eyes Spud's feelings for her. Plus Spud had always been loyal to him, keeping his family secret, and so Jake knew he could not cross that line. "Trixie." He took her by the arms and looked at her for a moment.

"Don't you want me, Jake?" she asked of him, all kidding aside.

Jake's mind told him to push her away, but his body would not have a part of it and instead pulled her close to him. "I do," he said honestly before he claimed her lips with his own and kissed her with purpose. His tongue clashed against hers hungrily, wrapping his arms around her waist as she wrapped hers around his neck.

Before either knew it, they were headed towards the direction of the bed. They parted only long enough for Trixie to help Jake take off the shirt he had been wearing and throw it to the floor. Trixie slid onto the bed and watched as Jake crawled to her before he took a hold her and laid her onto the bed. Trixie moaned softly as Jake's hand explored the curves of her body as it worked its way down. He watched her face, delighted that he was the cause of her expression before burying his face in the nape of her neck as she took a hold of his shoulder and pulled him to her.

Jake's hand, as it explored down her body, had found the end of Trixie's night shirt. He hesitated for only a moment before his hand ducked under the shirt and his hand crept up her thigh. Jake's eyes then opened as he pulled away from Trixie's neck and gave her a strange look. Trixie smiled shyly as she realized Jake had just discovered that the night shirt was the only thing she was wearing.

Their eyes remained on each other as Jake's hand moved to the inside of her thigh and slightly pushed her legs apart. He then felt her whole body start to tremble and for a moment he looked concerned, but as Trixie took a hold of his face for another kiss, he knew there was no need to be. "Hey, Jake, I was wonder-" Jake snapped up along with Trixie as she quickly covered herself when they heard the bedroom door open and Haley stick her head in. Haley gasped loudly as she realized what she had just walked in on.

"Dammit, Haley, next time knock," he told her a little frustrated.

Haley scoffed. "Well, maybe next time you should actually close the door," she pointed out.

Jake sighed. "What do you want?" he asked her.

"Well, I was going ask if you wanted me to set up the shoe room, but it looks like you two were already discussing sleeping arrangements when I came it," she said with a mocking smile. She then screamed, closing the door behind her as Jake threw a shoe at her.

Jake took a deep breath before he turned his attention back to Trixie, who wasn't looking in his direction.

Jake licked his lips, the taste of her still there as they sat in an awkward silence until he finally found the nerve to speak. "It's late," he began. "If you want, I can set up the guest room for you."

Trixie's brow creased for a moment before she looked to Jake. "Alright," was all she said as she made to get out of the bed.

Jake looked at her as if it wasn't the answer he wanted before his hand shot up and grabbed her arm. "But-" he paused, not really sure what he was doing. "If you want to stay."

"Do you want me to?" she asked.

Jake released his hold on her as he nodded his head. Trixie smiled at him as she sat back down. She then began to lean into him, but Jake turned his head away, his expression reading of pain as he did so. "I'm sorry, Trix." He then looked at her again and said, "But I can't. We can't."

Trixie said nothing, her face looking as blank as it did when he saw her downstairs. She then climbed under the sheets and faced away from him. Jake cursed under his breath knowing his rejection had hurt her.

He wanted to make it up to her and in his mind there was only one way to do that. So he waited until he knew she had fallen asleep before getting out of bed and putting back on his shirt. He then made his way downstairs and grabbed the house phone. Jake leaned on the back of the couch as he dialed a number. He then tucked one hand under his arm as the phone rung before someone greeted him. "Hi, this is-" he was interrupted.

"Mr. Jacob Long," a female voice said on the other end. "We've been expecting your call. Have you made your decision?" she asked.

Jake lowered his head and closed his eyes before raking his fingers through his hair. He sighed silently. "Yes, I have. . . *Count me in.*"

To Be Continued. . .

# 11 - Lies

## Chapter Eleven: Lies

As Jake woke up, his eyes still close as he felt something heavy and warm against his body. It wasn't until that something began to move that Jake became alarmed and his eyes snapped up. That was when he found Trixie's head resting on his chest, her arm wrapped around him securely. Jake first looked at her curiously, wondering if he was dreaming, but as the seconds ticked by, his memories of the day before and why Trixie was in his bed came back to him.

He tried to rise, but Trixie's hold on him was tighter than he had realized. He looked down at her, wanting to wake her, but as he took in her peaceful expression he decided against it, not wanting to disrupt her peaceful dreams. His hand came to her face, his thumb running across her plump lips as he remembered when she had called him an angel, but at this moment, as she slept, he thought that title better suited her than him.

Jake then threw the large blanket back, thinking if he was careful he could slip out of the bed unnoticed. He then slightly gasp as he noticed that the nightshirt that Trixie had been wearing had bunched up around her waist. Her leg rested between his own and since she wore nothing underneath her nightshirt he had a perfect view of the curves that made out her hips and bare bottom.

The seventeen year old immediately averted his eyes, his cheeks reddening as he did so. He then nodded to himself, deciding that she would be a bit embarrassed if she knew how much of her he had actually seen. He then blindly reached for waist, grabbing onto the the fabric of the shirt. He tried to pull it down, enough to cover up, but not being able to help as the back of his fingers ran across her soft skin. He hesitated as his eyes were once again filled with her form.

Then before he realized it, his hand had discarded the shirt, it now acting on its own accord as it caressed her thigh. He exhaled, as his hand slowly made out her round, firm @\$ before he gave it a small squeeze. Jake couldn't remember how many times he had dreamed about having her next to him, making reality out of the fantasies they only talked about over the phone.

Suddenly, Jake felt a bit uncomfortable, his boxers feeling more constricting by the moment as he felt himself starting to become aroused. He kissed the top of Trixie's head, taking in her light scent as his hand ran over the material of his own clothing. He then slipped his growing member out of the opening of his boxers, the tip of his cock already seeping in pre-cum. With a loose grip he slowly began to stroke himself until he was at full attention.

His other hand, which was on Trixie's other side, found her @\$ for the first time, his digits carefully slipping in between the crack of her cheeks as he explored her intimate areas. He closed his eyes as he imagined what it would feel like to slide the length of his manhood into her warm and waiting body. To see her lust filled eyes telling him to take her anyway that he pleased. To have her pull him down to her

and embrace him as if he were the only lover she had ever known.

Jake parted his lips and let out a soft moan as he tighten the hold on himself and quicken the pace, slightly arching his back in the process. He gritted his teeth as his hips suddenly bucked towards his fist as he felt his climate approaching. "Trixie," he whispered as he pulled her body just a little closer as his hot seed shot out of him in long, thick spurts.

"Spud," Jake's eyes widened in shock as the rest of his body froze, his breath became stuck in his throat as he heard Trixie speak. Her forehead was slightly wrinkled as she squirmed a bit against Jake's hold on her. A very tense moment pass before her features softened and her breathing settled, telling Jake that she wasn't going to wake up on him.

Jake finally felt as if he could breath again, but it was shaky as he released his now spent member and the grip he had on her bottom. He sighed in relief as he closed his eyes for a moment. When he once again opened them, he looked at the mess he had made. The signs of his solo project littered not only his boxers and shirt, but a lot of it landed on the blanket and on Trixie's leg. Jake first tucked himself away before carefully taking a clean end of the blanket and wiping down Trixie's leg. His eyes raced back and forth between his task and her face, hoping beyond anything that she wouldn't wake just for a little while longer.

Jake then cringed with pure disgust with himself as he cleaned the last of it off of her. How sick was he, he couldn't help but to wonder. He had discouraged her when she was willing and then turn around and practically molested her in her sleep.

Jake shook his head, as he finally pushed her leg out from in between his and then removed her hand, which was a bit difficult as she was actually clinging on to his shirt as she slept. Once successfully out of bed, Jake headed towards the shower, in hopes of washing away the guilt he felt inside of him.

After his long, cold shower, Jake headed back to his room with Trixie's fresh clothes from the dryer in his hands. He placed the folded clothes on his dress before making his way back over to the bed where Trixie still slept. Jake scratched his head as he saw his spoiled blanket. He then reached for it and the sheet underneath it. He yanked it off the bed and carried them to the washing machine.

He then headed back to his room and went to wake Trixie, but before actually covering her before he did. He squatted down and placed a hand on her shoulder. "Trix," he called as he shook her gently. "Trix, get up." She groaned in protest, her knees moving towards her chest as she felt cold. She then removed Jake's hand before she searched blindly for the blanket. "It's useless," he told her standing up and crossing his arms over his chest. "I'm washing it," he informed her.

Trixie's eyes opened. She turned towards him before she scoffed and rolled her eyes. Jake shook his head as she rose. "Your clothes are on the dresser. Along with a bath towel and a wash cloth," he told her. "I'll make sure my dad knows you're here." Trixie didn't even acknowledge that she heard him as she picked up her clothes and walked out of his bedroom door. Jake then stripped the rest of the bedding off his bed so that they could be washed as well.

As he stuffed the bedding into the washing machine, he heard the shower come on. He then headed downstairs, Haley yawning as she soon fell into step behind him. "So did you sleep well?" she asked



with a huge grin.

“Shut up,” he said plainly without even looking at her. “Up for some breakfast?” he asked as Haley followed him into the kitchen, she nodded as they stepped inside, where they found their father fixing himself a cup of coffee. “Morning, dad,” both Jake and Haley greeted him.

Jake then stood next to him, leaning on the counter. “I need to talk to you.”

Johnathan smiled as his eldest child. “Morning to you too, my little cougar. What can I do you for?”

Jake fringed interest on the tiles that made up the counter. “I know I should have checked with you first, but you were out like a like yesterday,” he tried to explain.

Johnathan looked at his nervous looking son. “What is it, son?”

“You see, Trixie, she uh, had some issues come up at home, so I told her she could spend the night here.” Jake finally looked into his father's eyes. “Dad, she was kicked out.”

Johnathan sighed before he turned back to his coffee. “Sounds like Richard came home.” Jake confirmed his suspicion about Trixie's father. “So how is she doing?” he asked.

“She's more pissed at me than him.” Johnathan looked to him curiously. Jake shook his head. “Don't ask.”

“Hey!” Haley suddenly yelled from the table. “I'm wasting away over here. Where's my breakfast?”

Jake pushed himself off the counter. “You want something, dad?” he asked as he went to find what he needed to cook their meal.

“I'll have a little something,” Johnathan told him as he took his coffee to the table and sat down.

“Waffles?” Jake asked as he reached for the waffle iron.

“No. Pancakes please,” Haley replied. “Would you like some help?” she offered, but was up out of her chair to assist him before he could response.

Before long the three were sitting around the table, just about to start their meal, when Trixie entered into the kitchen. “Morning, Haley. Papa Dog,” she greeted the two before making her way over to the cupboard to fetch a glass. She then went over to the fridge where she poured herself a glass of milk.

Jake merely watched her before he spoke. “You should eat something,” he suggested.

Trixie lowered the glass from her lips. “I will, later,” they were the first words she had said to him that day.

“It'll be cold later,” he reasoned.

"I'll nuke it," she countered.

"Trix," he began, his forehead creased. "You know what the doctor said," he warned her, causing Johnathan to slightly look up from his newspaper, his fork pausing just outside of his mouth.

"I know," she placed her hand on her stomach. "I just don't feel well," she informed him as morning sickness had taken her.

Jake pushed his chair out and stood up before making his way over to her. He took one of her arms in his hand. The other went up to her forehead as he felt her skin. She was a bit too warm for his liking. "Probably because that bastard had you out in the rain."

"Jacob, language," Johnathan, who only called him by his first name when he was serious, spoke.

Trixie closed her eyes. "Please, don't say things like that about my dad."

"How can you still take his side, Trixie?" Jake asked her. "After what he did?" he whispered, the mark on her face darker than it had been the night before.

Trixie angrily whispered back. "I told you, that was my fault. Besides, it's not like he does it all the time."

Jake scoffed. "Of course not, just whenever he's home."

"I can take care of myself, Jake," she told him.

"Then why the hell are you here?" Jake didn't even realize what he had said, until he saw that blank expression on her face. The face she had learned to adopt to cover up the hurt her father had caused her, but now it was he who was the reason for her hurt.

"You're right," she agreed. She then placed her glass on the counter and then for the second time that day she removed Jake's hold on her. She then stepped around him and walked out the kitchen.

"You're a jerk." Haley looked at her brother in disbelief.

"I know," he didn't even try to fight her on that before he made his way out the kitchen and up the stairs where Trixie was.

He found her in his room, holding herself as she looked at the busy people before his window. "Give me a few days," she began with her back to him when she heard him come into the room. "Just long enough to find somewhere to go."

Jake looked at her curiously. "What are you talking about?"

She held herself tighter. "Please, don't play dumb. You've made it very clear. . . you don't want me here."

"That's not true," he slowly made his way over to her. "I just want what is best for you. I always have,"

he admitted. "I know things are very stressful now, but with everything going on, we can't avoid that." Jake then leaned on the other side of the window. "I know you can take care of yourself and I didn't mean to imply otherwise. It's just. . . I'm scared, alright?" Trixie finally looked at him. "There are just so many things that have gone wrong in my life," he didn't need to elaborate for her to understand. "I don't want you- us to be one of them," he said honestly.

"Since the fifth grade, I have kept my mouth shut and I have kept your secret. . . even from, Spud," he told her. "But to be frank, I'm glad he kicked you out." Trixie looked at him in surprise. "I'm glad I no longer have to hear those lame excuses about your bruises, like the ones I used to hear whenever he came home. I'm glad I no longer have to watch as everyone else believed you, when I knew the truth."

Tears brimmed in Trixie's eyes as she lowered her head so that Jake wouldn't see them. "So you weren't asking me to leave downstairs?" she asked.

"No, of course not," Jake made clear. "I spoke without thinking." He stepped closer to her and lifted her downward face. "We are friends for life and friends for real. The three of us made that promise to each other and come hell or high water it will remain," he vowed.

Trixie nodded her head in understanding before she wrapped her arms around him and pulled him into a hug. "Thank you, Jake." Jake said nothing as he merely returned her hug.

OoOoO

It had been a month since Trixie had began living with Jake and his family. It had been awkward at first, but all together not a terrible experience. Their most difficult task had come a week later, when Jake insisted that they go back to Trixie's former home to pick up her things. She had been buying a new outfit everyday, because she had nothing to wear. Trixie fought him on it, she didn't want to face her father again, and thought it would be best if they just waited until he left town again. Jake understood why she didn't want to go, and he respected that, so he went about it himself.

Things did not go smoothly, between Mr. Carter and Jake as Jake packed not only several suitcases with Trixie's belongings, but also took her car keys that were hanging on the wall next to the front door. Jake told him to have everything transferred under Trixie's name and that they would take care of the car notes. Mr. Carter didn't like how the boy who had gotten his daughter pregnant barged into his home and started demanding things of him. Jake had to hold back the impulse to strike Mr. Carters as he had to endure not only Mr. Carter's angry words, but every racial slur the man could think of when it came to Jake's Chinese heritage. Jake was glad that Trixie's son would not have to grow up around such hate.

OoOoO

It was a little before dawn, when Trixie woke up one morning, within Jake's bed, to find that he wasn't there with her. She called out his name gently, but she got no response. She called out his name again after she had risen out of bed. She walked down the hall and knocked on the bathroom door gently.

When she still got nothing, her heartbeat slowly began to rise in panic. She ran down the hall towards the stairs, when suddenly she ran into something that felt like a brick wall. She felt herself beginning to fall, but she never touched the ground as Jake had catch her in his arms.

Trixie threw her arms around him and squeezed him tightly. Jake had asked her what was wrong, but she rapidly shook her head back and front against his neck. A moment later, Trixie pulled back and noticed that Jake was fully dressed. She asked him if had to go to work early, but he told her it was something else and that he would be gone for a little while. Trixie didn't like the sound of that and so asked him where he was going. Jake only smiled at first before he kissed her forehead and told her she should go back to sleep and not to worry. She hesitated, but did what she was asked, not nothing that 'a little while' meant she wouldn't see him for the rest of the week.

Within that week, Trixie had worn a low cut shirt, which within itself wasn't a big deal, but she had been grocery shopping with Johnathan and Haley, when Johnathan went to hand her a bag of sweet potatoes, when suddenly he drew away from her as she was reaching for it. Johnathan leaned over, fixing his glasses as he did so. He smiled as he complimented her on her necklace and asked if it was a gift from her betroth. After providing him an answer, he took the bag of sweet potatoes to the cart and began to wheel it away. Trixie could only smile, thinking Mr. Long was stranger than she once thought.

OoOoO

It was Trixie's birthday and she had turned eighteen years old. She looked at Jake curiously at he sat in front of her at breakfast table with a huge grin on his face. "Why the hell are you staring at me?" she couldn't help but ask.

"Because I have a present for you," he told her.

"It's real nice too. You're going to love it," Haley smiled brightly at Trixie as well.

Trixie became a bit excited, she really wasn't expecting anything. "What is it?" she asked.

Jake shook his head. "After you finished eating," he instructed.

"Aren't I fat enough?" Trixie asked.

Jake opened his mouth to speak, but was interrupted before he began. "Trust me, son, no matter how you answer that, you're going to be wrong," Johnathan advised. "You're better not saying anything at all."

After breakfast, Jake led Trixie to the car where he blindfolded her before they got inside. "Okay, Jake, now you're just being ridicules."

"I know," he said as he turned his head towards her when they reached a red light to see Trixie playing with the blindfold. "No peeking," Jake warned her. Trixie removed her hand and pouted.

A few minutes later, Jake parked and helped Trixie out of the car. He took her hand and she followed him cautiously, afraid he was going to accidentally run her into something as they entered a building. Trixie then felt herself on an elevator and the two rode up. Jake then led her down what Trixie could only guess to be a hallway. "Okay, here it is," Jake said as they came to a stop.

"Can I take this off now?" she asked reaching for it.

"No." Jake caught her hand before she could. She sighed in irritation before she heard the sound of keys. "Come here." Jake took her hand once again and she stepped forward a few more steps. She then felt him move behind her before he reached for the blindfold and took it off. Trixie blinked a few times as her eyes adjusted to the light. "Happy Birthday," Jake whispered.

Trixie looked at her surroundings. It was a small apartment. On her left side was the living area and on the right was a kitchen and dining area. "I tried to get all furniture here yesterday, but it was a no go. The bedroom stuff is all set up, but the rest is coming today." Trixie turned around and looked at him, her expression odd. "What?" The smile that had been on Jake's face faded.

Trixie shook her head. "I don't understand," she told him.

Jake's smile returned to his face. "This is our place," he informed her. "I signed the lease two days ago." He then showed her the rest of the apartment, which was made up of one bathroom and two bedrooms. Trixie stopped in the doorway of the baby's room. The crib was in the corner, next to the window and the changing table was located on the other side of the room. There was also a dresser on the other side of the window. The walls were painted blue with pictures of dragons and other magical creatures. "No, unicorns," Jake pointed out, knowing Trixie never liked them as he came up behind her. "I know it's a bit much, but I wanted the baby, right off the bat, to know what is in this world."

"Jake-" Trixie whispered, concern etching onto her features.

"There's more," he told her as he wrapped his arm around, placing his hand on her stomach. With the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a small ring box. Trixie only turned her head and looked at him. Jake snapped the box open with one hand. "It's not much, but I think it'll do the job," he said before turning Trixie around and slipping the ring onto her finger.

Trixie stared at the expensive looking ring on her finger. "How can we afford this?" she asked as she once again looked at the beautiful apartment.

Jake walked back down the hall. "I got the coolest entertaining system," he began, avoiding her question. "I was thinking we could put it along this wall here."

"Jake," Trixie called again and was once again ignored.

"And we should probably start to baby proof the place. Of course, I don't know how to do that so I bought a few books. They're in the car," he explained. "I also bought-"

"Jake!" Trixie yelled and finally got his attention as he turned to look at her. "We can't afford this. Not on

what we make," she pointed out.

"Don't worry," Jake told her. "I already paid the landlord several months in advance on the rent and the furniture is taken care of."

Trixie frowned as he spoke. "Jakey, where did you get that kind of money?" she asked.

Jake frowned as well. "Why can't you just be happy?" he asked of her. "I mean this is what you wanted, right? Normalcy? I'm giving you normalcy."

"Jake," Trixie shook her head. "Nothing about this is normal. We are eighteen and pregnant. There is no way we should have these kind of finances," she told him. "So tell me, how did you get the money?" she demanded to know.

Jake shifted his weight to one side as he placed his hand on his hip. His other hand went nervously to his mouth before he lowered his head and comb his fingers through his hair. He took a deep breath. "I am not doing anything wrong," he told her in a way that sounded like he was trying to convince himself instead of her.

"Then why won't you answer my question?" she asked.

"Trixie, please," he begged of her, his expression reading of pain. "Don't put me in a position, where all I can tell you. . . *are lies.*"

To Be Continued. . .

# 12 - Alone

## Chapter Twelve: Alone

Jake hadn't told her, but in the few months that they had been living together, in their own place, he had gotten used to the way she clung on to him when she slept. He found it not only comforting, but endearing. He also found that he had gotten so used to it that after she let go, he usually woke up a minute later or so. It wasn't really a big deal for he was always able to find asleep again.

Tonight, or this early morning he supposed, had been no exception, but as he tried to go back to sleep it dawned on him that Trixie was on the phone. He hadn't caught any of her conversation until the tone of her voice changed and she sounded frightened. "Please," she begged. "I don't want you to call here anymore. My husband is—" she was interrupted and made to listen to the person on the other end. "No," she whispered. "It's not like that," she responded heatedly. "You know what? I don't care." Jake then heard as she hung up the phone and sighed.

A moment later, she rested back on her side with her back to Jake. Jake then rolled to his side and wrapped his arm around her as his hand found her now large round stomach. He frowned as she visibly jumped with the gesture. "Who was on the phone?" he asked.

"I didn't realize you were awake," she replied.

"Yeah." He lifted his head a bit and looked at the clock. "I should be getting up," he stated, but did nothing more than lay back down for a few more minutes. "So, who was on the phone?" he asked again.

"It was no one important. Just something I should have taken care of awhile back. Nothing to be worried about," she reassured him.

Jake let out a small chuckle. "That's funny coming from you."

Trixie then rested her hand on top of Jake's and admired their wedding bands. Their ceremony had been simple, non-traditional, as they had gone to a Justice of the Peace. They were married in front of Johnathan, Haley, Mrs. Carter, and Trixie's grandmother. Jake seemed upset afterwards, but told everyone he was fine, but anyone who knew him well already knew what was wrong. His grandfather's absence had cut him deeply.

Things had been shaky at first between Trixie and Jake as they began their married life. Trixie was always asking questions about the money coming in. Questions Jake wouldn't or couldn't answer, and so eventually she learned just not to ask. But that didn't stop her from worrying about him. Once a month for about a week, he would leave to some destination unknown to her.

He always came back, tired and weary, but strangely always had a smile on his face. So Trixie never

told him how his absence bothered her and how it felt like an small echo of her father. Besides, Jake was a good provider, and he insisted what he was doing wasn't wrong, which always rose an eyebrow on Trixie, but she said nothing. Plus he seemed happy, so Trixie let that be enough.

"It's getting about that time," she told him as she looked at the clock. It would be dawn soon.

Jake sighed. "So it is." He looked at the clock as well, leaving was always the hardest for him.

"I wish you wouldn't go. Just this one time," she asked of him, making him feel a bit guilty. "My due date is so close and-

"I'll be here," Jake promised her. He then removed his hand from her stomach and took a hold of her chin. He gently guided her head towards him so that she could see his eyes. "You won't have to go through anything by yourself, okay?" Trixie nodded in understanding as she averted eyes. Jake gave her a lope-sided smile before he finally rose out of bed and prepared for his trip.

An hour later, Trixie felt his weight on the bed, she opened her eyes and looked at him as he sat on the edge of it. "I'm off," he informed her. "I made you breakfast, it's in the microwave, okay?" He then got to his feet. "I'll call in a few days," was the last thing he said to her before he was out the door.

After some time, Trixie finally rose for the day, struggling slightly as she did so. She waddled about the house as she prepared for the day. She had left her job about two weeks ago, comfortable in the fact, that when she was ready she would be allowed to returned, just as long as she brought plenty of baby pictures for her boss and co-workers to fuss over. Trixie smiled at the thought, it really was a great work environment.

Her smile soon faded as she sighed when she entered the kitchen looking at the dirty dishes Jake had left for her. She knew him cooking breakfast for her before he left was too good to be true. "Ugh," Trixie made a face as she looked into one of the saucepans on the stove. "I just don't understand, Allegro," Trixie spoke to her baby. She and Jake hadn't discussed baby names yet, but she had been running through a few to see which ones she liked. "How he can look at a grocery list that clearly says 'Grits' and buy 'Cream of Wheat'? And I don't care what he says, they are not the same."

Trixie then went about putting the dirty dishes in the dish washer, before scrapping the cream of wheat off her plate and eating the rest of her food. After her meal she headed to the living room to watch some tv. About an hour into the movie she was watching the phone ringed. Trixie shared at it for a moment, hesitant to answer. She couldn't handle another phone call like this morning. She knew she should have told Jake about the harassing phone calls she had been receiving from her father lately, but she wanted to take care of it herself. She then realized that just looking at the phone wouldn't help her situation.

So finally, Trixie reached out and answered the phone, "Hello?" A wave of relief washed over her as she heard the voice on the other end. "Belinda, hey girl," she greeted her best girlfriend. "Yeah, Jake and I are well, thanks. . . Uhhh, okay, lunch sounds good. Where?" Trixie asked and soon received an answer. "Okay, I'll meet you there, say around one? I have to run a few errands first." She then heard Belinda's reply and her head fell as she did. "Yes, Cream of Wheat." She then pulled the phone away and scoffed at it as Belinda's laughter came screaming through. As it died down she put the phone back to her ear. "Are you done now?" she asked her. "Good, I'll see you at one."



After her phone call, Trixie went back to watching her movie. When it was over, she slipped on some shoes, grabbed her purse and headed out of the apartment complex to her car. Her first stop included the grocery store, where she happily picked up several things of grits.

Her next stop, before going to meet Belinda, included Radio Shack, where she wanted to pick up two new phones to replace the one in the living room and the one in the bedroom. She wanted them to have caller ID so she could screen her father's call, so she could speak to him when she was ready and on her terms.

She was comparing two different models when she felt someone's presence behind her. She didn't think much of it, thinking it was just another customer. That is, until the person behind her spoke. "Has anyone ever told you, that it's rude to not keep a promise, Ms. Carter?"

Trixie slowly turned her head at the familiar voice. "Alex," she breathed before completely turning towards him. She then saw the surprise look on his face as he took her in. "It's um, Long now," she explained as she put one of the boxes back on the shelf.

"Long?" She nodded at the simple question, noting the hurt in his voice. "I guess congratulations are in order then." His smile was forced. "Congrats," he offered.

"Thank you." Trixie softly smiled at him at first. "Look, I'm sorry about not calling. I guess it just slipped my mind. I've been kind of busy lately."

"It's okay," Alex reassured her. "I can see other things were on your mind, but it would still be nice to catch up sometimes."

Trixie thought about it for a moment. "Yeah," she finally shook her head. "I'd like that. We should set a day aside."

"Why not today like right now?" he suggested. "My next class isn't until three," he informed her.

"Oh, so you're going to school? Where?" she asked.

"Kingsborough," he answered.

"That's where I plan on going," she replied. "You know, once my baby is born and things have settled down a bit."

"It's a good school," Alex told her and she agreed. "I would be glad to give you a tour of the campus whenever you are up to it," he offered.

"Yeah, a dry run of the place before I start there would be great." She then looked at her watch. "Alex, I don't mean to be rude, but I kind of have plans for today. I know I still have your number somewhere, unless it has changed." Alex shook his head, telling her that it hadn't. "So I'll call you a little later and we'll meet somewhere and catch up."

“Alright,” Alex agreed. “I’ll be waiting for your call,” he told her. They then said their goodbyes before Trixie went to go meet Belinda for lunch.

OoOoO

It had been five days since Jake had left. The night before he had called to check in with Trixie. The conversation had started off well, but quickly went downhill when Trixie heard a female voice in the background and asked who it was. Jake then did what he always did when he didn’t want to answer a question; he went about the subject he was on as if it had never been asked in the first place. Seeing that she was never going to get a straight answer out of him she hung the phone up in his face. The phone rang a few minutes later. Trixie checked the caller ID on the new phone and saw that it was Jake calling back. She let it rang.

Then, after an hour of trying to convince herself that she wasn’t angry or worst. . . jealous, she figured she needed to get out of the house for a while. She ended up finding Alex’s number and making plans to meet him for a early dinner. They met across town and discussed many things. Trixie, learned that Alex was majoring in engineering and he learned that Trixie had wanted to be a doctor since middle school. He also learned that today she was calling her baby, Jerry.

And because Alex found it strange that Trixie didn’t bring him up herself, Alex asked about Jake and how he was doing. She told him, from what she gathered the night before, that he was doing fine. Sensing that maybe she was angry with her husband and wasn’t up to talking about him, Alex offered a change of subject, which Trixie seemed very thankful for.

When their meal came to an end, they both left the restaurant. Alex was accompanying Trixie to her car before he was going to head to his own, which he had parked on the other side. He was talking about nothing in particular, as they made a leisurely walk through the parking lot, when suddenly Trixie doubled over in pain. Alex reached out for her asking if she was okay. In the middle of telling him that she was fine, her water broke and Alex could clearly see the panic rush onto Trixie’s features.

She tried to stay calm as she sat down and leaned on the car they had been passing by. She reached into her purse and quickly called her doctor. She then gave her keys to Alex, stating that an ambulance would take too long. In the car, on the way to the hospital, Trixie griped the door handle tightly with one hand while with the other she tried to contact Jake. He wasn’t answering his cell, making Trixie immediately regret the way she had ignored his calls the night before.

So it was Alex by her side, holding her hand and comforting her as she gave birth to a seven pound nine ounce baby boy. Trixie cried as she held her baby for the first time. She touched his red little face gently as she noted that he had eyes like his father and was tempted to name him Arthur, wondering why she had never considered it before.

Before Alex had to leave, his brother coming to pick him up, he informed Trixie that the hospital had gotten in contact with her father-in-law and that he was already in the building. Trixie thanked him for all that he had done before her eyes closed and she succumbed to sleep, exhausted from the day.

It was near an hour later when Johnathan was able to get in contact with his son and almost another hour before he arrived at the hospital. Jake headed straight for the maternity ward where he found his father looking into the nursery of new born babies. He licked his lips nervously as he stepped up beside his father. "Have you seen Trixie?" he asked in a whispered.

"No." Johnathan did not turn to look at him. "She's resting. Maybe in the morning." He then added, "She's down the hall in room 519."

Jake shook his head as he lowed it against the glass window in front of him. "She's going to be so angry with me. I promised her I would be here and-"

"Jake?" Johnathan interrupted him in a somber tone, causing Jake to look at him curiously. Johnathan than finally looked at his son. "You know I love you, right? And that I would do anything to protect you and Haley."

The way he was speaking, slightly frightened Jake. "Yeah, I know."

Johnathan pursed his lips together, for just a beat, before speaking again. He wanted to place his words carefully. "I'll admit that at first I did not think marriage was wise for you, but you and Trixie have know each other all your lives, and so I began to think that you two could work out." Jake smiled at his father's words, but it did not last. "But I see now that my instincts were right the first time. . . I don't believe the boy is yours," Johnathan finally confessed.

Jake then finally looked into the nursery. Because he hadn't been named yet the name card only read, Long. He was a beautiful baby with dark brown curls that stuck out of his blue cap and with light brown skin, but it was very clear with just one glimpses at him that he looked nothing like the man who had been claiming to be his father. "Jake," Johnathan called, placing his hand on the other's shoulder. "It's going to be alright."

"Dad, I appreciate your concern, but you're wrong. That is my son," Jake made clear as he turned his father. "Mine."

"I know how much you want to believe that," Johnathan began. "You trusted her, but don't be blind," he advised. "So please, get a paternity test before you put your name on anything," he stated, referring to the birth certificate.

Jake pushed his father's hand off of his shoulder. "I don't need one," he told him. "Over the last eight months, I have done nothing but think of the welfare of that little boy in there, so even if he wasn't mine, which isn't me admitting that he isn't, I would love him all the same."

Johnathan brow furrowed. "Don't attach yourself, Jake, it's only going to hurt more," he warned, his voice weary. "I know he isn't yours."

"Think what you like. I don't care."

"You will, because what will you do when his true father returns?" he asked.

Jake said nothing at first, not sure what he could say without confirming the fact that he already knew the baby wasn't his. "Dad," he began slowly. "We're going to pretend this conversation never happened and I hope you never bring it up again, especially in front of my wife, okay?" he asked of him. "Now, I'm going to go find a nurse and see if I can go hold my boy. And it would mean a lot to me if you came and held your grandson as well."

"I can't," Johnathan could no longer look at the younger man beside him, "because he's not my grandson and I will never accept him as such." Johnathan then began to walk away without another word, leaving his son with a mixture of emotions.

"Dad!" Jake yelled after him. Johnathan froze where he stood, his back to Jake. "If you can't accept him, it means. . . it means you aren't accepting me. Can you live with that?" he asked him on the edge of heartbreak as he feared the answer.

"No! Of course I can't!" Johnathan spun around, marching back up to him. "You do not know what I had to sacrifice to be with Susan? Trust me, Lao Shi was a light weight when it came to his disapproval of me."

Jake felt shame as his father blew up at him. Jake wasn't stupid, he noticed the lack of his father's family in his life as he was growing up. The only member he had ever met from his father's side was his Aunt Patchouli, and even then when Jake was fifteen he discovered the two weren't even blood related.

"Then would you have me go through the same thing?" was the only question Jake could ask.

"I don't want to," Johnathan told him truthfully. "But I can't just stand back and watch you get hurt." Tears began to brim in his eyes. "When I lost your mother," Jake's eyes went wide, it was the first time he had ever acknowledge that she was gone, "it broke me. . . just like the lost of our first child." He looked into his son's eyes. "So I'm sorry, Jake, but I'm not strong enough to go through something like that again." He looked back into the nursery at the child Jake was calling his own. He then stood silent for a long time. "Don't become attached," he warned again, before Jake finally allowed him to walk away.

Jake then peered into the nursery again and as he saw the sleeping boy, he decided to forgo holding him for the night, he could wait until morning. Jake then turned down the hall and went in search of room 519. When he arrived, Trixie was still sound asleep. She looked so peaceful as he stood beside her merely watching. Jake held himself, lost within his thoughts as he thought about the argument he had with his father. He then realized that he and Trixie were truly. . . *alone*.

To Be Continued. . .

# 13 - Frighten

## Chapter Thirteen: Frighten

“He won’t take it,” Jake heard Trixie speak as he sat silently on the other side of the hospital room watching his feet with little interest.

“He can sense that you’re anxious. If you just relax-” the nurse was cut off.

“I am relaxed!” Trixie snapped at her. She had been attempting to breastfeed the newest member of their small family, but it wasn’t going well. Trixie was angry, but for the first time that Jake could remember, she seemed shy about letting him know it. She had said not one single word to him all morning. Jake then heard Trixie sigh before she spoke again, her voice sounding defeated. “Could you just take him away, please,” she asked of the nurse, who nodded as she reached out for the fussing child in Trixie’s arms.

After the nurse left, Jake raised his head to catch Trixie slipping her hospital gown back onto her shoulder. He stood from his seat and went to stand beside her. “Trix,” he spoke softly. Trixie simply shook her head; she didn’t want to hear it. “I’m sorry,” he offered.

She scoffed and quickly turned her head to him. “You’re not forgiven,” she stated angrily. “You purposely ignored my calls!”

“I was angry,” he replied heatedly. “You hung up in my face.”

“That’s because you’re always lying to me,” she argued.

“No,” Jake shook his head. “I have never lied to you,” he made clear.

“Then tell me where you were last night and what the hell you were doing,” she demanded of him. Jake lowered his eyes and pursed his lips together. “Yeah,” she whispered. “You’ve never lied to me.”

“Trixie. . .” he wanted to explain, but he didn’t know how.

“I was scared,” she admitted, no longer looking at him. “I needed you.”

Jake sat down on the bed. “I know. I wasn’t thinking. It just never occurred to me that. . . I’m sorry,” he offered again and this time Trixie nodded slowly, accepting his apology.

“We should,” Trixie began, but then stop to clear her throat. “We should probably name the baby,” she said, once again looking at Jake.

“Yeah,” he agreed. “What do you think it should be?” he asked.

Trixie sat in silence for a moment as she regarded Jake and then said softly. "I want to name him after his father."

After her words, Trixie watched as Jake's eyes left her for a moment, his expression one she didn't easily recognize. He then smiled at her. "Arthur is a fine name," he agreed.

"I wasn't talking about Spud," she informed him. "I meant you."

Jake's eyes went wide. "Oh – uh, Trix," he shook his head from side to side. "I don't think that's a good idea."

"Why not?" she asked, her brow furrowed.

Jake thought over his word before he began, "Because if it were me in Spud's shoes and I came back to find my only son named after another man, it would feel like you didn't believe in me. As if you didn't think I was coming back." He shook his head. "I don't want Spud to feel like that."

Trixie smiled at him. "Jake, you're just not some other man. You're his best friend and chances are, if he were still here, Jacob would have been the first name on Spud's list anyway."

"Please," Jake didn't want to argue with her, "just pick another name."

"Fine," she agreed, feeling a little bitter towards Jake, as if her son wasn't worthy another to share his name. "Yesterday, I was calling him Jerry, short for Jeremiah," she explained.

"Jeremiah Long," Jake said it to himself to see how it sounded. "Jeremiah Lorenzo Long."

"Lorenzo?" Trixie questioned.

The man beside her shrugged. "I've just always liked the name."

"I like it too," she agreed.

After everything was settled at the hospital Jake and Trixie were able to take little Jerry home. The second day back, Jake had been changing Jerry for the first time when he spotted something very peculiar. "Trix," he had called her from the kitchen to Jerry's bedroom where he was changing him.

"What? I'm busy," she had told him as she had been preparing dinner for them.

"Just come here," he replied. Soon Trixie walked into the room and stood beside Jake in front of the changing table. She looked asking of him. "What does this look like to you?" he asked as he pointed something out on Jerry's bottom.

Trixie rolled her eyes, not believing he had asked such a question. "It's called a birthmark, Jake."

Jake looked irritated with her. "I know what it is," he made clear, "but what does it look like?"

Trixie, who was wearing her hair down, swept a piece of it behind her ear as she studied the mark. "Idaho," she finally answered. "What about it?" she asked, but when she didn't receive an immediate response she turned to Jake, who had don a hard looking expression with a touch of confusion. "Jake?" Trixie lightly touched his arm.

He then closed his eyes and shook his head as if trying to push something out of his mind. Then without looking at her he started to finish changing Jerry's diaper. "Yeah, that's what I thought to," he informed her.

"Okay," she drawled, not really sure what had been his purpose for the question in the first place. "I'm going to go finish dinner. Do you want tea or kool-aid?" she asked.

"Kool-aid," he answered her as he buttoned up Jerry's onesie.

"Flavor?" she asked when she paused at the door.

"Red," he replied without hesitation. He then picked Jerry into his arms and look at Trixie as if expecting her to argue that 'red' wasn't a flavor.

She only smiled at him. "Okay."

Jake looked at her as if he was bit disappointed. "So we'll argue for two hours about Grits and Cream of Wheat, but the flavor red is okay?"

"Yes," she answered with a nod. "Because whether you say red or cherry, it's the same thing."

"Exactly, just like hot cereal," Jake pointed out.

"No," she simply said and disappeared down the hall.

Jake then looked at the child in his arms as he followed Trixie to the other end of their home. "They're the same," he whispered as he received a toothless smile from Jerry.

OoOoO

It had been nearing two weeks since Jerry was born and things at home were starting to become far from peaceful as the couple adjusted to the small child. Jake discovered that Trixie was easily agitated when she couldn't get Jerry to do what she wanted like breastfeed or sleep. She cringed whenever he cried, passing him off to Jake as soon as Jerry began his tantrums.

There were even days here and there where Jake couldn't even recall if she had held her son at all. Jake didn't want to say anything to her about it, but he was tired of being the only one waking up in the middle of a night to sooth Jerry back to sleep. Tired of seeing to Jerry by himself all day, while Trixie refused to leave their bed. But there was only so much he felt he could do on his own and soon his

frustration began to grow until it reached the point where he told Trixie exactly what was on his mind.

Their argument had not quiet or playful as their debate about hot cereal had been. Jake knew their raising voices could be heard through the walls of their apartment complex, but at this point he didn't care. He felt unappreciated and taken advantage of by her. She didn't know what he was risking to make sure that she and Jerry were taken of. If the Dragon Council found out what he was up to. . .

"Do not tell me how to take care of my son!" Trixie yelled at Jake as she stood in front of the television in the living room.

"Well, maybe I wouldn't have to if you got off your @\$@ sometimes and saw to him!" he yelled back from behind the sofa as he gripped it firmly, not realizing in his anger his human form was slipping and that his claws were shredding into the sofa material.

"All he does is cry. What do you want me to do?" she asked, her voice just as angry.

"He's a baby, of course he's going to cry, Trixie. Comfort him!"

"It doesn't help. He doesn't like me," she told him.

Jake scoffed. "Of course not," he began, his voice calmer, but cynical. "He probably doesn't know who the hell you are." Trixie's mouth fell open as she silently gasped at Jake's words. Then, as if on cue, the sound of Jerry crying reached their ears. Jake looked at Trixie expectantly, but she merely hugged herself and lowered her head downward. Jake looked at her disgustingly as he shook his head before he walked out the living room and down to Jerry's room.

"Shh." Jake picked up the crying baby and rocked him gently in his arms. He then reached back into the crib and picked up the blue pacifier that was there. He blew off a piece of the lint that had settled on it before trying to place it in Jerry's mouth, who at first resisted it. "Come on, don't you want your nip-nip?" he asked Jerry, before he eventually took it.

Jake walked in circles around the room until he noticed Jerry's eyelids become heavy with sleep once again. He then placed him back in his crib on his back. Jerry yawned, letting the pacifier fall from his mouth. Jake then covered his body with a blanket before resting on the railing of the crib and simply watching as Jerry sleep. His eyes then caught the pillow, which was located on the other end of the crib. He reached for it and then, in the next moment, all he could hear was screaming. "Jake, stop please!" It was Trixie. She had attached herself to his arm and was pulling him with everything she had. Tears ran down her face as she cried. "Stop it! Stop it!" she begged. "Please!"

Jake was horribly confused as he noticed he was leaning over Jerry's crib. He then noticed he was still holding the pillow, but gripping it firmly with both hands. He then heard a muffled crying noise. It took Jake a split moment to register that he was holding the pillow against Jerry's face and that he was suffocating him. But then, to his horror, he couldn't stop himself and instead pushed even harder down on it. "You're killing him!" Trixie told him as she desperately tried to pull Jake away. She then did the only thing she could think of and socked her husband clear across the face with fist.

"shoot! Ow!" Jake yelled from the floor as he covered his eye with his hand. Then, the reason he was



sitting on the floor quickly rushed to him as he realized there was no sound coming from the crib. "Oh, my God," he whispered as he looked up at Trixie, who was reaching into the crib and picking up Jerry, who looked so still in her arms. "Is he already?" Jake asked.

Trixie said nothing at first as she looked over Jerry as she placed him on the changing table, placing her back towards Jake. "He's not breathing," she whispered to herself. She wanted to panic, but she knew if she did that it wouldn't be any help to her son.

The young mother slightly tilted the boy's head back, knowing that an infant's airway was extremely narrow and that overextending the neck would actually close off his air passage. She then covered Jerry's mouth and nose with her own mouth, creating a seal, before she gave a quick and gentle puff from her cheeks. She then slightly pulled back, letting Jerry exhale on his own as she watched his chest and listened for breathing. He wasn't.

Trixie told herself to calm down, but she couldn't help the tears that rained down on Jerry's face as she repeated her actions. "Please, breathe for mommy," she pleaded with him as she checked his breathing again. Then after what felt like eternity, Jerry began to cry. Trixie thanked God as she scooped him into her arms and held him just a little tighter than she should have.

"Trixie. . ." she was startled to see that Jake had been standing by her side, she hadn't noticed him there.

Trixie took a step back from Jake, her eyes turning red from her crying. "What were you doing?" she asked of him. "What the frack were you doing!" she yelled.

Jake could now feel his own tears slid down his face. "I don't know," he said truthfully as he couldn't even remember actually picking up the pillow in the first place. He took a step towards his family. "Trixie, I-

"Don't touch him," she ordered as Jake had tried to reach out for him.

"It was an accident," he tried to explain. "I would never-"

"You tried to kill him." She looked at Jerry in her arms, his lips slightly blue.

"No!" he yelled. "That's not what I was- I didn't mean it."

Trixie looked back up at Jake. "You didn't see your face." She then nodded her head. "You meant it. It was in your eyes."

"Baby girl," he slowly etched forward before reaching out and taking a hold of her face. "Look into my eyes now," he instructed. "I don't know what happened, but I swear it was an accident and that it won't happen again, okay?" Trixie only looked at him. "Say, okay, Trixie. . . please."

"You just stood there," she said.

"What?" Jake was confused.

"You stood there and you watched," she began. "Did you even think to call 9-1-1? Did you want to watch him die!" she searched his eyes for an answer.

"Of course not," he told her. "I just. . . couldn't move. I got up and I stood next to you and all I could do was watch. My mind told me that I should call for help," he closed his eyes as his hand fell back to his side, "but I just couldn't move."

"What happened?" she asked softly.

"I don't know. I was just putting him to bed and then next thing I knew you were yelling at me and I was-I was," he shook his head, not wanting to put words to what he had done.

"You're tired, Jake," she continued. "You should get some sleep." Jake didn't argue with her. He just simply nodded his head and walked out of the room to prepare for a shower before he would head to bed.

After his shower and in his nightclothes for the evening, Jake made his way to the kitchen to take a glass of water into the bedroom with him. Trixie was in the living room with Jerry. She had been singing the tune to ABC alongside one of his toys, but fell silent when Jake entered the room.

As Jake was heading back out of the kitchen there came a knock at the front door and just as Jake was beginning to wonder who it could be, his question was answered. "Police, open up."

Suddenly, Jake felt his chest tighten before he turned to look at Trixie. "Did you call-"

"No," she said quickly to his unfinished question.

Jake then placed his glass down on an end table and made his way to the door. "Good evening, Officers," he greeted the two people outside his door. "What can I do for you?"

"Yes, we received a call about a domestic disturbance from this residence," one of the officers informed him.

"Uh-" Jake began nervously. He then cleared his throat and began again. "I'm sorry, but you're mistaken. It must have been a prank call."

The other officer noticing the ring on Jake's finger then asked, "Is your wife home, sir?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Can we speak to her?" she asked.

"Yeah." Jake opened the door wider to reveal Trixie still sitting on the sofa in the living room. "Trix, can you come here, please?" he called her over.

"Actually, I would prefer to speak to her inside," the female officer asked of him.

“Of course.”

Jake allowed her in and was about to follow her inside when the other officer spoke telling him he wanted to speak to him outside. Jake frowned as the door to his home was closed and he was left on the other side of it. The officer then asked him a series of questions, which he was only half paying attention to. All he could wonder was if by the end of this conversation would he be arrested.

When the door opened again and the officer stepped out, she told her partner that everything was fine and the two went on their way. Jake then stepped back into his home. “I didn’t tell them anything,” Trixie made a point of saying.

“I know,” Jake’s voice was barely audible as he responded.

Trixie, now satisfied that Jerry was all right, went to put him back in his crib. After finishing his water, Jake went to check on her. He wanted to reassure her that what had happened would never happen again. He reached out for her and felt her entire body tense when their skin came in contact, a small bit of him die in that moment. “I’m sorry,” was all he found he could say. Trixie nodded, but didn’t turn to look at him.

Jake then quietly made his way across the hall and crumbled onto his bed. He closed his eyes and ran his fingers through his hair. He let out a heavy breath as he spoke to himself, “Aw, man.”

Jake couldn’t find sleep that night and not for the reasons one would think. His concerns were not on the child he almost killed, but they were completely on Trixie and her reaction to it. He didn’t like that look of fear on her face. He didn’t like her questioning eyes that asked, ‘Who are you?’ But then again, the fact that Jake wasn’t more concerned about what he had done to Jerry left him. . . *frighten*.

To Be Continued. . .

# 14 - Refusal

## Chapter Fourteen: Refusal

Jake laid awake in his bed as he watched his wife sleep on the other side of it. It had been a few weeks since, what was now known as the incident occurred and things between the two had been dicey to say the least. Jake never knew it was possible to see someone everyday and miss them so much. She didn't laugh anymore; he couldn't even remember the last time she had even smiled at him. He missed the way she used to hold on to him when she was sleeping as if he was the only thing in her life that mattered.

He wished he could fix things, but he had no clue where to begin. He then got out of bed and was on his way to the bathroom when he heard Jerry. He entered the room and smiled down at the small boy who was smiling at him as he went to pick him up. "What are you doing?" Jake cringed as he heard the anxious sounding voice behind him. He didn't get a lot of alone time with Jerry anymore as Trixie had picked up watching him like a hawk whenever he got too close to him.

Earlier on, all Jake wanted was for Trixie to help out more when it came to Jerry, but now she had taken everything upon herself. Jake had gotten his wish, but this wasn't how he wanted it. "Nothing," he answered. "I was just going to check his diaper and get him something to eat."

Trixie walked up to him and held her arms out. "I can do that," she told him. "Give him to me."

He shook his head. "You're going to have to eventually trust me again, Trix," he said to her. "Can we please start with this?"

Trixie looked on the verge of saying no, but then to Jake's relief, she slowly let down her arms. "Okay," she said softly. "Okay." She then walked out the room leaving Jake alone with Jerry for the first time in almost a month.

That small gesture had eased some of the tension that had been between them and by mid-day, Jake was relieved to see Trixie smiling at him, even if it was only because Jerry had spit-up on him. "You know what?" Jake began as he handed him over to her before he walked to the kitchen to try to clean his spoiled shirt. "I think we need a night to ourselves. Maybe go to the movies or something before I leave next week," he suggested feeling just a little silly at asking his wife out on a date, but he felt it was necessary; the two of them desperately needed to reconnect. "I'm sure Haley would be glad to watch Jerry for us."

He waited for her response, but before he could find out her answer, there came a knock at the door. "I got it," she told him and went to see who their visitor could be. Jake couldn't see who was at the door from his place in the kitchen, but complete and utter dread filled him as he heard Trixie say joyfully. "Gregory, my goodness, it's been so long!"

“Trixie!” Jake heard his cousin greet his wife.

“Come in. Take a seat. What are you doing here?” she asked him.

“Believe it or not, I just heard from grandpa that you and Jake got married,” he informed her. “So are you going to introduce me?” he asked referring to the child in Trixie’s arms.

“Yes. Gregory, this is Jeremiah.”

“Well, he’s as cute as a button, just like his mom,” Gregory told her with a wink. “So where is that cousin of mine?”

“I’m here.” Jake stepped out of the kitchen. “Hey,” he said, his voice clear that he wasn’t happy to see him.

Suddenly, right before Trixie’s eyes, the atmosphere of the room changed. Gregory donned a very serious look as he regarded his cousin. “I’m guessing you know why I’m here.”

Jake dipped his head. “I can make a pretty good guess,” he replied. “Trix, could Greggory and I have a few minutes, please.”

“It’s Gregory,” he pointed out, but went ignored by the other.

Trixie nodded, not knowing why as her husband’s eyes were still on his cousin. Trixie then took Jerry into his room and made it look as if she closed the door behind her. She listened carefully as the two spoke to each other.

“You have a beautiful home,” Gregory spoke.

“Stop bull shooting with me,” Jake demanded. “And tell me why you’re here.”

“Fine,” he agreed as Jake took a seat next to him on the sofa. “As you know a new Dragon Council has taken reign. They are strict and unrelenting and not fond of you, unlike the last Council.”

“Your point?” Jake asked.

“You haven’t claimed Trixie or your child to them yet.” Jake went to speak, but Gregory cut him off before he could. “I know she’s human, but as a Magical Protector, you have a high status, by our laws it’s allowed.”

Jake stared at his cousin for a moment. “Wait. . . you don’t disapprove?” he asked a little in disbelief.

“Of course not,” he told him honestly. “And even if I did, would you care? Beside, I know Trixie, and she’s good for you.”

“Thank you. You’re the first to say that to me.” Jake then watched as his cousin lowered his head. “What?”

"I didn't come by just to say hello," Gregory informed him. "What do you know of DOS?" he asked.

"DOS? You mean the Dragon Council's lap dogs. The bastards, who actually get paid, to rat out their own kind? I think they are the scum of the magical world and should go back to whatever trashcan they crawled out of and rot. I still can't believe they're classed higher than I am," he made his opinion known. "What of them?" he asked, noticing how Gregory had lowered his head during his little rant. Jake's shoulders fell. "You're DOS, aren't you?" The other nodded. Jake laughed a little nervously. "Sorry, I didn't mean any of that," he offered.

Gregory looked at him skeptically. "Yes, you did."

Jake smiled at him. "Yeah, you're right." However, his smile did not last long as it finally hit him that he had DOS in his home. He straightened up a bit, his brow furrowed. "So DOS Huang, what can I do for you?" Jake questioned.

"Don't start acting like that," Gregory warned, seeing the serious look on his cousin's features. "I just wanted to let you know that your name has come up in DOS files. There may be an investigation planned around you. If what they suspect is true, Jake, you could lose your status as the American Dragon."

"What do they suspect?"

Gregory looked conflicted, not sure how much he should say. He was risking his livelihood by informing a potential suspect, but this was his cousin and though the two didn't always get along, he knew, if their positions were reversed, Jake would have his back. "It's a matter of your Dragon duties and if you have been abusing your ability and your status."

"Greggy- Gregory," Jake spoke softly. "Can you make those papers disappear?"

Gregory frowned not sure he had heard the other correctly. "Do you know what you are asking of me?"

"Unfortunately, yes."

The younger dragon let out a big breath as he thought over the situation. "Jake, I can't do that."

"You have to!" Jake demanded loudly. He then quickly covered his mouth with his hand and looked at the entrance to the hallway. Jake leaned in and began to whisper, "I may be allowed to marry a human, but I as sure as hell know that Trixie isn't suppose to know what I am and neither is my dad. If I am investigated and that is found out, I'm not going to get a slap on the wrist and be told to make a potion to alter their memory. They know too much." Gregory saw genuine fear in his cousin's eyes. "And like you said before, the new Council reign is unrelenting, and you know the punishment for such a crime."

"I do," Gregory replied sadly.

"Then help me," Jake begged.

“Alright, but you must tell me one thing?” he asked of him.

“What?”

“Are you guilty?” Gregory asked.

There was a short silence before Jake looked his cousin dead in his eyes and stated firmly, “No.”

“Then there's no reason for me to have to do anything, Jake. You can cover up the fact that they know. If you are investigated, I'll feed you information. Everything will be fine,” he assured him.

“Gregory, it won't, trust me. I can not be investigated.”

Gregory shook his head. “Why? What are you hiding?” He listened intensely to Jake's next response, which was once again spoken in a whisper.

“I'm kind of investigating something on my own. A recon mission of sorts, which could look very incriminating from DOS's point of view,” he explained.

“What kind of recon mission?” he wanted to know.

“I can't get into it,” he told him.

Gregory looked at his cousin for a long time, despite their appearance, the two knew each other well. “This has something to do with the Huntsclan, doesn't it? This has to do about Rose.” He looked rather upset and disappointed in the older dragon. “Please, don't tell me you're still looking for her!”

“Shhh! Keep your voice down, I don't want Trixie to hear you,” he said. “And I had stop, I did,” he said truthfully. “But then someone made contact with me, who's looking for her too, we've been working together.” Jake's eyes then looked off into nowhere. “She's very well off and very generous,” he explained as an echo of a smile traced across his lips, but he snapped out of it as he once again looked at Gregory. “I'm not doing anything wrong,” he couldn't help but say.

“Then why-” Gregory was about to ask something, when something else entirely donned on him as he considered the other's last statement. “Jesus, Jake,” he began softly. “You're cheating on Trixie, aren't you?”

“What?” Jake's eyes widen at the unexpected question. “Hell, no. I would never do that to her.”

Gregory nodded and said slowly, “You're right, I'm sorry. I don't know what I was thinking.” He then looked at his watch before standing up. “Look, I have to go. I have to get back to work. I'll see what I can do about the investigation.”

Jake stood as well. “I appreciate it.” He then followed the other to the door.

“Oh, and just telling you again, claim your wife. If you don't, it will only look like you're ashamed of her.”

The eldest of the two nodded. "I know. I'll get on that."

"Alright, I'll see you around." And with that Gregory was out the door.

Inside of Jerry's room, Trixie finally closed the door as quietly as she could while Jake's back was turned. She walked over to the changing table to check Jerry's diaper. She then heard the door open behind her. "I know you were listening," Jake told her. Trixie did not deny it. "How much did you hear?" he asked.

"Not a lot, your voices were too low," she replied.

"Of what you heard, is there anything you're concerned about?" he asked.

Trixie looked confused. It wasn't often Jake invited her to ask questions. "No," she replied, knowing this game very well. He wouldn't tell her anything.

"Trixie," he urged, realizing this was how he was going to begin to fix things.

"What's DOS?" she asked figuring she would play along.

"It stands for Draco Operation Specialist. He's a cop," he put it simply.

"He mentioned status."

"Just like with any group of anything, there are different classes. The highest being a Council member. The lowest is being born to a dragon family, but having no powers at all. . . like my mother. With my gramps being a Dragon Master, he had to claim my dad for my mom. It's usually unheard of, but my gramps can be quite charming when he needs to be."

"Where do you fall?" she asked picking Jerry back up and then going to rest in the rocking chair that was in the corner.

"Being half human, a class above my mother, but when I became the American Dragon I was boosted up to fourth from the top." Jake sat down on the floor in front of her. "But even within that class, there are different ranks. I rank somewhere in the middle because I'm part human and having a mother with no powers. And the only reason I'm in the middle is because I have faced the Dark Dragon and lived."

"What did Gregory mean by claiming me?" she asked, trying not to sound offended, she didn't like being referred to as property.

"Claim, may not be the right word," he began. "But it's pretty much a marriage status, recognizing you as my wife."

"And you haven't done it yet." It wasn't a question.

"No," he replied softly.



Trixie lowered her head and played with Jerry's hand. "So you are ashamed of me."

"That's not it. There are certain rules and laws. I can only claim you after knowing my bloodline is secure. Then there is usually a small ceremony, but since you're human, and not even suppose to know I'm a dragon, it's very informal. I just go in front of the Council and for the record state: I, American Dragon Jacob Luke Long, of the Luong bloodline, claim Trishale Carter, of human descent, under my status and therefore protected," Jake recited the vow a little sadly. Ever since he first learned her name, he had always imagined it would be Rose in Trixie's place. "You make a similar vow for your children, but since Jerry isn't mine, I would be making a false claim, and to do so is a very high crime. Lineage is very important."

"I see," Trixie stated, as she stood so that she could put Jerry down for his afternoon nap. She then sat on the floor beside her husband. "You know, I wouldn't object, Jakey," she stated a little timidly.

"Wouldn't object to what?" he asked curiously.

Trixie's dark cheeks redden as she leaned in and brushed her lips against Jake's. She then whispered softly, "Making sure your claim isn't false." As she continued to speak, Jake's eyes closed, feeling the warmth of her breath against his skin. "I still remember our first kiss. I can't get it out of my mind lately. Your lips were so soft and so commanding that I think I would have done anything they asked of me. And your hands." She sighed contently. "They were so shy, yet so strong. My body craves to be touched by you." She kissed the corner of his mouth. "Jerry's asleep and there's no little sister to interrupt us this time," she pointed out. "So why don't we go to our room, and show our bed that it has other uses?"

At the end of her question, Jake suddenly pulled away, his eyes bore into her, almost angry. "What are you playing at?" She didn't answer, being a little thrown off by his tone. "For weeks you've treated me like the enemy, and unfortunately I gave you good reason," he pointed out. "And I was glad that you were finally coming around, but this is too much for me."

"What's too much? Me wanting to kiss the man I married?" she asked. "Wanting you to make love to me?"

"Yes!" he replied. "Trixie, this marriage. . ." he couldn't find the words to what they were doing. "I don't want to betray Spud," he finally spoke. "I can't forget that you are the mother of my best friend's child. A man who loves you deeply, but when you say things like that. . ." he trailed off, his hand reaching out and taking a hold of her cheek. "I'm so tempted to just," he bit his bottom lip for a moment before bring her face close to his own so that he could whisper, "to just lay you down right here and make you scream my name so loud that we would have the police knocking at our door again."

Trixie took a hold of Jake's shirt, her eyes darting to it for a moment as she felt the Jewel of Eskaw underneath it. She then slid her hand down a little so not to disturb it. "Give in to temptation, Jake," she asked of him, pulling away slightly so that she could look into his dark eyes. "Be my husband, not just in name." As she waited for his response, Trixie could feel his heart race within his chest as he considered her words.

Jake then placed his larger hand on top of hers, stroking her skin in a loving gesture. It caused Trixie to

smile softly at him, but it would not last as it was soon replaced by its opposite when he tighten his hold on her hand and removed it from his chest, giving Trixie a very clear answer.

“I'm going to call Haley and see if she's available Friday,” he spoke as if he hadn't admitted, mere seconds ago, that he wanted to make love to her. “We'll go and see a movie, okay?” He didn't wait for a reply before he stood up and stepped out of the room, leaving Trixie to settle on the floor as she recognized his action for what it was. . . *a refusal*.

To Be Continued. . .

# 15 - A Surprise

## Chapter Fifteen: A Surprise

Jake sighed silently as he drove down the dark lonely streets of Brooklyn. He glanced over at Trixie for a moment before returning his eyes to the road. They had just come back from seeing a movie and were on the way to pick up Jerry, whom was being babysat by Haley. Trixie's arms were crossed over her chest as she watched tiny droplets of rain meet the window on the passenger side of the car. "Jake?" her voice was soft.

"Yeah?" he responded.

"Do you really think he's coming back?" she asked.

"Who?" he replied.

Trixie turned her head towards him. "I'm not in the mood for games, Jake," she made clear as her hand sought out the Jewel of Eskaw around her neck. "Do you think he's coming back?" she repeated her question.

"Yeah, yeah I do," he said confidently. Trixie nodded as she found it ironic that it was she in the beginning who had questioned Jake's faith in Spud, but now how it was her who found her faith fluttering. Apparently, Jake seemed to come to the same conclusion. "Don't you?"

"No," she whispered, shame lining her voice as she looked away. "I mean, don't you feel it?" she began. "Deep inside? I used to feel so whole, and no matter what went on in our lives, I knew I had you and Spud. You guys are a part of me. I mean, even after Spud was gone, I felt it. I felt him, but lately. . ." she slowly shook her head from side to side. "I don't think he's coming back," she confessed.

Jake said nothing. He didn't want to admit that he shared that same feeling and for a while now. He had banished it to the back of his mind, so that he wouldn't have to think about it, but something in his heart felt hollow. It was hard to ignore.

Realizing that Jake wasn't going to say anything else, Trixie went back to looking out the window until they pulled up in front of Jake's childhood home. "I'll be right back," he announced as he turned off the engine and placed the keys in his pocket as he got out of the car.

Jake ran up the stoop stairs and knocked on the door when he reached the top. Haley opened the door with a smile let her older brother inside. "So how was he?" Jake asked as they made their way upstairs.

"A perfect angel, just like me," she informed him with a smile. "After I feed him he was out like a light."

"Good, I'm glad he wasn't any trouble." The two walked into Jake's old room where Jerry was asleep on

the bed. Jake picked him up. "Thanks for seeing to him, Haley."

"No problem. Anytime," she told him as they headed back down the stairs. Once they were down stairs, Haley leaned on the railing. "He really is a handsome boy," she began as Jake reached out for the handle of the door and pulled it open. "He looks so much like Spud," she whispered.

Jake froze, before his head swiftly turned back to his little sister, startling her a little. "What did you say?" he demanded, his expression firm, but marked with confused.

"I- I said he was a handsome boy," she shuttered a little, not seeing what she had said wrong.

Jake seemed irritated. "After that!"

"That he'll be quite the stud. Why?" she asked.

Jake's facial features soften before he shook his head. "No reason. I just thought. . . I'm sorry, I must be hearing things," he admitted. "Um, I'll call you later, okay?" he told her before he finally headed out the house.

Back at the car, Jake carefully placed Jerry in his car seat. "Jake?" Trixie began softly. "You look kind of flushed. Are you okay?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm- No, I don't think I am. I think I may be coming down with something," he told her.

"You want me to drive?" Jake nodded at her question before pulling out the keys and handing them to her. He then walked around the vehicle as Trixie slid over to the driver's side. Once Jake was inside with his seatbelt on Trixie started the car and the small family headed home.

OoOoO

It was a filthy and sick habit, Jake knew, but still there were times when he just couldn't stop himself. Trixie was a beautiful woman, that he could not deny. Sleeping next to her almost every night, and asking him to keep his hands to himself, was just a little too much to ask of him. Besides, he loved the contrast of their skin as his tan fingers mapped out the curves of her body, her dark skin soft to the touch. And it didn't help that she always smelt so good as she slept against him.

He knew if she ever woke up, in the middle of him practically feeling her up, among other things, that he would have his work cut out for him in trying to explain it, but today wouldn't be that day he told himself before his hand found her shoulder and he gently shook her. "Trix," he called.

He watched as her forehead creased and she slightly groaned. "What?" she finally responded.

"Just wanted you know that I'm getting ready to go," he informed her before doing just that. It was an odd thing they did, him always having to wake her before he got out of bed. Jake found it strange, how she freaked when she woke up alone after they had gone to bed together. He had asked her about it

before, but she guarded her secrets almost as well as he did his own.

After almost an hour, Jake tossed his duffel bag over his shoulder. "Alright, I'm leaving," he announced as he picked up his watch from the nightstand.

"Alright," Trixie replied, her back to him as she continued to lay in bed.

Jake let out a small laugh. "Is that it?" he asked of her.

"Yeah," she told him.

"You're not going to ask me to stay," he asked, now feeling a little disappointed. She always asked him to stay.

"There's no point in it," she stated sadly. "You always leave anyway."

Jake nodded. "Fine." He turned around and walked towards the door. "I'll call you in a few days."

"Jake!" Trixie called out, sitting up in bed as she turned to him. The dark eyed man gave a small smile before facing her, feeling almost relieved. "You don't have to go. It's not worth it." Jake looked at her strangely with the words. "I know the money is good, but we can make ends meet without it. I don't want you getting arrested by DOS." It was then that Jake realized that Trixie had heard more of his conversation with Gregory than she had let on.

"There's more to it than just the money, Trixie," he told her.

Trixie's eyes fell. "Yeah, I know. . . there's Rose."

Jake sighed heavily as he placed his duffel bag on the floor. "Listen, you have to understand. . ." he began walking towards the bed.

"It's alright, Jake, I understand," she disguised her hurt behind a false smile. "I mean, she's the love of your life, right? How could I possibly compare," her smile faded, "when I'm just your wife?"

"Wait, that's not fair," he argued.

"Of course it's not!" She looked up at him. "I already know when it comes to you, Rose can do no wrong, even after she had your mother killed," she pointed out.

"Well, technically, Rose wasn't the one who actually killed her," he made his own point.

"No, she just put her in a position to die easy," she scoffed, before she saw the hurt expression filter onto Jake's face. Even after almost two years, his mother was still a very sensitive subject.

"Oh, Jakey." Trixie got out of bed and made her way over to her husband. "I'm sorry," she told him sincerely as she wrapped her arms around him.

"It's alright," he told her softly as he allowed her to embrace him. He then felt her kiss his cheek. He cringed a little. "Could you not do that?" he asked of her.

Trixie slowly pulled back. "So now even a peck on the cheek isn't allowed?" She rolled her eye as she went to sit back on the bed. "This is getting really old really quickly, Jake. How long am I suppose to go on like this?" she asked, but only received a questioning look from the man before her. "How long are you going to make me beg for just the simplest affection from you? Dammit, you didn't even hug me back a second ago."

"Why are you still bringing this up? We've talked about this before. I made my reason to you very clear," he told her. He then looked at his watch. "shoot, I'm going to be late." He then picked his bag back up.

"I'm not going to do this anymore, Jake!" Trixie yelled behind him.

"Do what?" he asked looking at her angrily.

"Pretend this is a marriage when it's not," she told him.

Jake rolled his neck, it was too early, to be arguing over the same things. "You know what? I don't have time for this. We'll talk about it when I get home, alright?" he made his way towards the door.

Trixie quickly stood up. "Jake, if you leave. . . Jerry and I won't be here when you get back," she threaten.

Okay, that's new, Jake thought as he paused in the doorway before facing his wife. "Say what?"

"All I am asking is for you to chose Jerry and me, you're family, over Rose. Please, don't go after her. This marriage can't handle being second fiddle."

"I'm not choosing Rose over you or Jerry," he argued.

"Yeah, you are, every month for once a week," she made a point.

"But the money-"

"We don't need it," she said quickly. "We'll put Jerry in a daycare, I'll go back to work. I mean, that was the plan anyway, right?"

"Yeah, but if we do that, we won't have enough to send you to school."

"It's alright. I've only been wanting to be a doctor since I was thirteen. I'll get over it."

"No, you won't. You'll resent me if I don't go."

"And I'll resent more you if you do," she said truthfully.

"I don't think you will." He then turned to leave.

“Tell me, are you happy?” Trixie asked.

“What kind of question is that?” he responded.

“A very simple one,” she stated, but found the next one hard to say. “Jakey. . . I'm not happy.” Jake lowered his head as he heard the words. He had thought as much. He would have been blind not to see it, but he never thought she would voice it out loud. “And it's not you. For the most part, you have been wonderful. Not many men, would do what you have done. You have given me and my son a home and you've taken care of us the best you can, but in the long run, it's not enough.” Jake lifted his head in time to see tears well in his wife's eyes.

“Oh, don't do that, Trix. Please, don't cry,” he begged of her, he had seen her tears all too often for his liking.

He then dropped his duffel bag, ready to go comfort her when she dropped a question on him he was completely unprepared for. “Do you love me?” she asked of him.

Jake blinked as he froze with the question. It took him a moment to recover. “Trix, I- I care for you, I do. So much that sometimes it hurts, but-”

“You don't love me,” she finished his statement.

“No,” he admitted. “Not the way you want me to.” It was in that moment that Jake realized that she had asked for the one thing he thought she never would, his heart.

Trixie pursed her lips together and looked up at the ceiling as tears began to race down her cheeks. She wiped them away as she spoke again. “You should go. You'll be late.”

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“Yeah, of course,” she placed another false smile on her face. “Go after the one you love. I'll support you, I will.”

Jake took a few steps towards her before taking her hand and planting a kiss on her forehead. “Thank you,” he whispered.

Trixie then watched as he walked out the door. “Goodbye, Jake,” she whispered to herself.

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It was three days later as Trixie found herself in the living room of her home with Alex sitting across from her on the sofa. “You're leaving, Jake?” he asked, hardly believing it.

“Yeah,” she confirmed. “I'm going to tell him when he calls tonight.”

"That's a big decision. Are you sure you're prepared for it? I mean, where will you go?" he asked.

"I've been talking to Belinda. She's been having trouble with her roommate, whose moving out of the apartment they were sharing, so Jerry and I going to stay there." Trixie then placed her head in her hand, suddenly appearing very tired to Alex. "I'm really not looking forward to tonight."

"I wouldn't imagine you would be." Alex then reached for this glass that sat on the coffee table. Trixie had offered him something to drink when he had arrived. "If you don't mind, may I ask why you're leaving him?"

Trixie lowered her hand and looked at her companion. "It's the same old story. He's in love with another woman," she stated with a smile.

"Ouch," was Alex's response. "So he was cheating on you?"

Trixie lightly laughed, causing Alex to look at her oddly. "Jake, cheat? No, that boy is so damned honor bound that it's ridiculous." Her laughter died down. "That's why I'm leaving him. So he doesn't have to feel guilty for loving her while he's married to me. That should make everyone happy," she figured.

"You don't look too happy," Alex pointed out.

"Well, that's my problem," she told him. The two then heard a strange sound coming from Jerry's room. "Excuse me, will you?" Trixie stood up to fetch a bottle for her son, knowing that he would be hungry after his afternoon nap.

Trixie's face lit up in a true smile as she looked upon her son, whom she was surprised to see was still sleeping. She then frowned a bit as she saw the expression on Jerry's face. He looked distressed. He then made a strange sound in his sleep. "Poor thing." Trixie took her hand and slightly rubbed his belly to comfort him. "He must be dreaming." She then debated whether she should wake him up or continue to let him sleep.

"You know, I always thought Jake to be a lucky guy." Trixie turned from the crib to find Alex in the doorway. "He dated one of the coolest girls at our high school and then had the good sense to marry her," he expressed his opinion. "And I think he's a dumb fool, for putting you in such a position." Alex walked towards her. "But then again, I think I have to thank him," he told her.

"Oh, and why is that?" she questioned.

"Because it gives me another chance at being with you." Trixie blushed. She then watched as Alex shrugged. "Assuming I was ever in the running."

Trixie couldn't help but smile at him. "You were," she confirmed.

Alex dipped his head. "That's good to know," he said taking that last step towards the woman in front of him. The back of his fingers then ran across Trixie's face. "He really is a fool. How could anyone be with you and long for anyone else?" His fingers then found the bottom of her chin and slightly lifted her face



up towards him. He then leaned down and pressed his lips against her.

Trixie found her eyes closing as she enjoyed the sweet kiss. When it ended, she could only look at him in shock. She then sidestepped Alex and walked away, her fingers on her lips as she did so. "I am so sorry," Alex said immediately after taking in her reaction. "You're still married- I shouldn't have done that- I'm an idiot," he rambled as he followed her out. "I don't know what I was thinking- I just figured. . ." he stopped when he saw her wave her hand to stop speaking.

"It's alright, Alex," she told him before hugging herself. "It's just, that kiss it. . ." reminded me of Spud, she thought. Alex watched as Trixie seem to zone out right in front of him.

"Maybe I should leave," he suggested before starting to walk down the hall, but was stop when Trixie's hand shot out and grabbed his arm.

Suddenly, Trixie's lips were back on his and before long her tongue invaded his mouth. The thought to push her away, never even occurred to Alex as he scooped her up in his arms and carried her into her bedroom. The woman, securely in his hold, couldn't help but smile against his lips, he had never been one for subtlety.

Trixie gasped as she was dropped onto the bed. Alex stood over her as if waiting for her to change her mind, but instead of a protest, Trixie rose to her knees and her hands found his chest. She stared into his green eyes as her hands found the bottom of his shirt. "We won't be needing this," she told him as he helped her take it off and tossed it beside the bed.

She smile as she took in the male form before her, her hands running across his broad shoulders as she did so. She then leaned in and littered his chest with kisses as she felt his hands snake around her body and firmly take her bottom with both hands as he pulled her closer.

Alex then nudged the top of her head with his nose until she looked back up at him and he stole another kiss. Trixie smiled contently against him. To her it had felt like eternity since someone who had kissed her truly wanted her. Alex was like a fresh of breath as they striped each other of their clothing down to their underwear.

Alex then once again took Trixie in his arms and laid her down on the bed. He settled himself between her legs, their kisses growing more urgent and passionate. "I need you to take me, like I'm the only one," Trixie requested between pants.

Alex rose his head and gave her a small, shy smile. He then kissed her cheek before whispering in her ear, "You are the only one." Trixie smiled, closing her eyes as she pulled the man on top her closer. Alex buried his nose in her neck and slowly inhaled in her scent.

Then, without warning, the couple on the bed heard a throat being cleared. Alex immediately jolted up. Trixie slowly sat up and looked at her husband in the doorway. "Jake. . ." she breathed as she studied him. Blood stained the bottom of his white shirt. It looked like a smeared hand print. It was as if he had tried to wipe his hands clean, but it didn't seem to work as his hands were still tinted red.

She then watched as Jake crossed his arms over his chest and lean against the doorway as he shook

his head. "Didn't expect me to come home early, did you?" he asked her, his face set in anger. "Then again, I didn't expect to come home to find you trying to frack another man with Jerry sleeping in the next room!" he barked the last few words. "But I guess we both got quite. . . *a surprise.*"

To Be Continued. . .

# 16 - Satisfied

## Chapter Sixteen: Satisfied

Trixie stared at her pocket calendar in disbelief as she slowly leaned on the counter sink in the bathroom of her home. She flipped through the months slowly as she counted up the weeks for the fifth time, thinking that maybe she had been mistaken the first four times. She closed her eyes slowly as she lowered her head and took a big breath.

She then placed her calendar back in her purse. She turned around towards the mirror to check her hair one last time before stepping out. She walked into the bedroom to find Jake sitting at the desk in the corner writing checks for the bills they had collected for the month. They had been piling up lately, despite the fact, that Trixie had gone back to work at the hotel she had been working at before Jerry was born.

"Jake, I'm leaving now. I'll be back late," she told him.

Without even looking up from what he was doing. "Where you going? To see Belinda?" he asked.

Trixie shifted her weight to one side and rolled her eyes. Why did he play these games? "Yeah, to see Belinda," she replied somewhat sarcastically.

"Be back before nightfall," he stated.

Trixie frowned at the instructions. "So you're giving me a curfew now?" she asked.

"Yes," he said simply as he signed his name on another check.

"And if I'm late?" she pushed.

Jake then slowly turned around, his arm resting on the back of the seat. "I said, be back before /i nightfall," he said clear and firmly.

Trixie averted her eyes. "Of course," she caved in. Then as soon as Trixie was out the front door she pulled her cell out of her purse. "Hey, baby," she greeted the person on the other end with a smile. "I'm on my way, okay? Don't start without me," she told him as she made it outside of her building. She then hailed a taxi and jumped in.

Within minutes, Trixie was outside of a hotel on the other side of Brooklyn. She strolled up to the front desk where a woman she had come to know by first name sat. "Hey, Dawn," she greeted her happily. "Has my husband arrived yet?" she asked her.

"He sure has." Dawn opened a drawer beside her. She pulled out a card key and handed it over to

Trixie. "You and your husband are so cute. I still can't believe you make little dates to meet with each other. I can't even get my husband to leave his lazy-boy on Saturdays."

Trixie shrugged as she pocketed her key. "What can I say? I'm a very lucky woman," she told Dawn before heading to the elevator.

She got off on the ninth floor and walked down the hall to the room she had reserved for every other Saturday afternoon. She then pulled out her key and unlocked the door. "You're late," said the male voice as she closed the door.

"You try hailing a taxi, this time of the-," her complaining ceased as she was pushed up against the wall behind her and she was silenced with another mouth on her own.

"I need you out of these clothes," he demanded seriously. "Now." His hands went to her jeans as he unbuttoned and then unzipped them.

"Wait," she asked of him as she put a hand on his chest, causing him to slightly pull back. Trixie looked into the eyes of her husband. "Not like this." She shook her head. "I want to see you," she told him.

He nodded. Then before Trixie's eyes Jake's features melted away and were replaced with another. "I hate pretending to be him," he spoke.

"I know, Gregory," she put her arms around his neck as she kissed his nose. "But you know we can't be seen together." Gregory pulled away from her arms, suddenly very stressed by their situation. Trixie pursed her lips together, she knew this probably wasn't a good time, but he had to know eventually and she figured sooner was better than later. "Baby," she called sweetly as she walked towards Jake's cousin. "There's something you should know."

Not noticing the change of her voice, Gregory began to undress. Making love to her always made everything better. "Yeah, Kitten?"

"Remember our first time together?" she asked him. "You know, when the condom broke?"

Trixie then watched as crease lines invaded Gregory's forehead. He then slowly looked at her. "Yeah?"

"Well, I'm not really sure, it's just that I'm late. I mean, it could mean nothing, but then again, I could be, well-"

"Pregnant," Gregory finished the statement. Suddenly, feeling very dizzy, he sat down on the bed. He rested his head in his hand for a moment. "Is it mine?" he asked.

"It it yours?" Trixie repeated, truly amazed at his audacity. "You bastard." She then quickly fastened her clothes back up and walked towards the door.

Gregory caught her just as her hand was on the handle. "Kitten, I'm sorry," he told her. "You know I love you, it's just. . . what are the chances of this being Jake's baby?"

“None,” she told him. “You know very well Jake has never touched me.”

Gregory shook his head. “And Alex?” he asked cautiously.

Trixie looked at him stone faced. “Let me take a stab in the dark here. You think because I'm stepping out on Jake, I would step out on you too?” she asked offended.

“I know what I saw that day, Trix,” he told her.

“And I told you that Alex and I had never tried to become physical before that day,” she argued as she thought back to the day that she and Gregory had begun their affair.

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He had stepped into the room disgusted as Jake. His mannerism so on point with that of his cousin, that there was no doubt to either Trixie or Alex that he wasn't who he looked to be. Alex and 'Jake' had gotten into at that point. Trixie screamed when Jake slammed Alex against the wall by his neck before lifting him several feet above the ground. He then told Alex that he had had a very bad day and that killing him would be his highlight.

He told him it wouldn't take much to convince police that he came home to find his wife about to be raped by some intruder and feared for her safety and that of their child, so he only did what thought he had to do. The threat sent a chill down Trixie's spine as she begged Jake to let him go. Jake's face softened for only a moment as he regarded her before he let Alex drop to the floor. He then told him to get dressed and get the hell out of his home. He then calmly walked Alex to the door and told him if he ever saw him again, he wouldn't hesitate to kill him.

Trixie then stepped out of the bedroom. She had only managed to put her shirt back on as she had feared for Alex when Jake escorted him out of the room roughly. Jake didn't look at her as he asked her how long she had been cheating on him. Trixie tried to explain, Jake argued with her, but he wasn't making any sense. He had referred to Alex as Alan. He had also referred to Jerry as his, though Trixie couldn't recall him ever doing so without there being other people in the room.

Seeing the confusion on her face as they argued, Jake suddenly fell to the floor. Trixie rushed to him and discovered the large gash on the back of his head. She hadn't noticed it before because of all his hair and what had just taken place. He was confused, disoriented, and losing a lot of blood. Trixie told him he needed a hospital, but he refused. They would ask too many questions. Questions neither of them could explain.

Trixie helped him up before they made their way into the bathroom. There was dried blood all over his body. He needed to be cleaned up and his head needed taken care of. She ran a bath for him as she found what she needed to clean his wound and wrap his head up. He told her he felt tired, but Trixie refused to let him sleep, in fear of a concussion.

It was the first time she had seen Jake naked as she bathed him, but that wasn't what she was focused

on. She didn't want to leave him alone in case he fell asleep while in the water filled tub. Jake watched her as she bathed him and asked why she wanted to cheat on him. He thought they were happy. Trixie didn't want to answer. In a few days, he would be better and his questions wouldn't matter anymore.

But he was persistent with his questions to the point where Trixie just wanted him to shut up. So she explained about the argument they had had a few days ago, and how much he had hurt her. With tears, she told him she was going to leave him. It was then that Jake began speaking in third person, his eyelids heavy. "You can't leave, Jake. He loves you, in his own way, he loves you."

Trixie had smiled sadly at the confession. As far as she was concerned it was too late, he had already made his decision. He had chosen Rose. Besides he wasn't himself at the moment, so it really couldn't count. She then stood up, in the mind frame of getting him a towel, but to her surprise, Jake's reflects were still well intake. "Don't leave him," he asked of her, pulling her back down to the floor beside the tub. "Don't leave me," he finally corrected himself. He then leaned in and kissed her gently.

Gregory would later try to convince himself that he kissed her for Jake . So that she wouldn't leave Jake. And that he was only doing his job. The orders for Jake's investigation had come through. He had to pull a few strings to make sure that he was primary on the case, convincing the others that as a relative, that he could get closer than anyone else before raising suspicion.

The first task had been to hit close to home and figure out how much his human wife knew about what Jake was doing before closing in on Jake himself. With the information given to them by Gregory they were able to set up a timetable. Gregory tried to warn Jake, but he was being closely watched by his fellow team, because of the fact that he was a relative and his loyalty yet to be factored.

Gregory knew that Trixie didn't know anything from what Jake had told them, but he figured that while they were focusing on Trixie, that meant more time for his cousin and more time to get word out to him.

They had come up with a cover story to why 'Jake' had to come home early that week, which immediately seem to go out the door as soon as Gregory saw her with a man that was not his cousin. He tried to act in the way he knew Jake would, but for some reason his own anger came through, because he knew no matter how angry Jake was with anyone he would never threaten to take their life, it wasn't his style.

After Alex had left, his argument with Trixie went downhill fast. He had learned things about Jake he would have never guess between then and the kiss he shared with his cousin's wife in the bathroom. Gregory thought he had almost blown his identity when he reacted to Trixie telling him that Jerry wasn't Jake's and that their marriage was nothing but a lie, so why the hell did he care if she was with Alex.

Gregory's answer had been on point to what Jake would have told her. He could see the shame on her face as he spoke to her about honoring her as his wife and not disrespecting their home by bring someone else into it as she had or tried to at least.

She had then asked about something he had no knowledge of whatsoever. She had asked about something called Spud and looked very expecting of him. It was then that he played on his so called blood lost and pretended to be confused and out of it. Though not all of it was an act. The self wound spell had been a little more powerful than he had thought, so much so that he forgot exactly what he was

doing and forgot to refer to himself as Jake.

It tore at him to hear why Trixie wanted to leave Jake, but Gregory knew that couldn't happen, it would ruin the investigation. Jake would be more focus on trying to get her back than anything else. . . not that he wanted his cousin arrested, that is.

There were probably a dozen things he could have said to convince her that his cousin loved her, but for a moment, he had forgotten who he was and what he was doing. The situation, paralleling to one he had not too long ago.

Her name was Sophia, and she was human. She was spirited and patient, a true gift to Gregory. She was someone he could have loved. But he never got that chance. She had found what he was and so he shared with her his world, but it was too much for her and she threaten to expose it. He begged her not too, but she wouldn't hear of it. He told her fine, but that he wanted to part on good terms as he handed her a drink. A tear ran down his face as he watched her drink it, knowing that with the amount of potion he gave her, she wouldn't remember his world. . . or him. By refusing to not keep his secret, she had left him.

In the long run, he knew the potion was the right choice. If anyone had found out about her and what she knew and had determined it was more than a potion could handle, she would have been put to death, as stated by Dragon Council Law, to protect their kind and the world they protected.

Gregory couldn't help but be a little jealous of his cousin. He had a human wife who kept his secrets. How could he treat her as badly as he had just learned and not fear that she would spill them? What kind of hold did he have on her?

But at that moment, as his tongue explored her mouth, those weren't the questions at the top of his head. He had then pulled Trixie into the tub, her clothes become soaked and stuck to her body. "Jake. . ." she breathed as she lightly pulled back. "You're not well," was what she told him before she got out of the tub, water splashing all over the floor.

She then grabbed several towels from the linen closet. She tossed one of them on the floor and slid it along as she walked back down the hall, trying to get up some on the blood and water that was there. She looked up when she heard water splash onto the bathroom floor again, she groaned thinking he was going hurt himself if he didn't take things more slowly.

She met him in the doorway and told him angrily to be careful as she tried to hand him a towel. To her surprise, he took it from her hand plus the one she had gotten for herself. Trixie watched his eyes curiously as Jake closed in on her and forced her up against the wall with his own body. The phoned rung as she gave a sorry excuse for a protest, which was denied as her husband had her wrap her legs around him. Trixie purred as Jake's kissed littered her face and neck. It was then he began calling her his Kitten. Before long the two were in the bedroom. The few clothes Trixie did have on were soon discarded before she searched for the small box of condoms she had in her nightstand drawer, bought before she gave up on the idea of her and Jake ever being intimate.

During their section of course, it broke. Jake cursed, Trixie laughed. It wasn't until they were cuddled up tight in bed that Trixie realized something was off. She had ran her hand across his chest and then up to

his neck. She frowned and then immediately jolted up. "Where's the Jewel of Eskaw?" she asked him. "It's missing." Suddenly all of Jake's confusion seem to make sense. As she understood it, he no longer remembered Spud, meaning based on their life now the blanks were filled in with them and only them. No wonder he had reacted the way he had to certain things. The memories no longer existed.

Gregory seeing her visibly upset lied and said he must have lost it, but he would find it. He had not known that the piece of jewelry that Jake wore that matched Trixie's was so important. His lie didn't seem to calm Trixie though. She ask if he even remembered wearing it. The question completely baffled him to no end. He apologized again for losing it. Trixie settled down after a few minutes, thinking that maybe it was a good thing he didn't remember Spud, at least then she could actually have a husband.

She cuddled back into him and soon fell asleep. Her hold tight on the man she thought was Jake. As Gregory's head finally cleared, and he realized what he had done, panic started to sink in. He had just slept with his cousin's wife, who thought that he was her husband. He had not only compromised his mission, but his relationship with Jake. He cursed softly as he slipped out of bed. He cleaned up the mess he had made, covering up all signs he had been there. He then slipped out quickly as he tried to remember all the ingredients to the potion that would have to be made.

Trixie woke up with a start the next morning when she realized that Jake wasn't beside her. She had called out his name, but there was no reply. She called out louder as she got out of bed and slipped something on from the closet. Her first concern was Jerry, he had slept through the night, which was kind of strange. As she stepped out in to the hallway, she noticed how everything looked the way it did the morning before. She concluded that Jake had gotten up and left, but why didn't he wake her? She then remembered that he had lost his Jewel of Eskaw, so maybe his memories didn't include it. It was something she would have to get used to.

In Jerry's room she found him already awake and smiling as she approached. She picked him up and took him to the bathroom to get him cleaned up before breakfast. Today she had planned on meeting Belinda and starting to pack her and Jerry's things, but she hoped with Jake not remembering Spud, that things would be different. Maybe his confession of love had been real. She would wait it out and see.

Jake didn't come home that night, or the night after that. She had tried calling his cell, but was surprised to find it turned off. It would be another another night before she saw him again. He walked through their home, duffel bag slung around his shoulder, the Jewel of Eskaw sparkling around his neck. Trixie smiled sadly and said, "You found it."

Jake looked at her oddly as he replied, "Found what?" Trixie explained that he didn't have it when he came home a few days ago. Jake continued to look at her oddly, as he told her he had been the gone entire week, just like every month. Trixie, a little thrown back by the news, could only stare at him with wide eyes.

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That same week, a good friend of Jake's stopped by. His name was Fred Nerk, whom Trixie learned was the Australian Dragon. He was in country for his sister's wedding for a few days. He brought with him



Gregory and Nigel Thrall. They had planned a boys night in. Jake had just finished setting up the poker table in the living room in front of the television, which had been placed on the football coming up.

Nigel pulled out a pack of cigarettes as he sat down. Jake asked him to wait until his kid was out of the house. Trixie had been in the kitchen when Jake called out and told him he forgot the drinks and if she could bring them out. Trixie took four cans of soda out of the soda and placed them on the counter. She then took two at a time out to her husband and his boys. Jake and Nigel thanked her as she set them to the side. When she came back and she moved to the other side of the table and placed a drink next to Fred and the other next to Gregory. Fred thank her by addressing her respectfully as 'Mrs. Long', while Gregory thank her softly by calling her 'Kitten'.

Realizing his mistake, he quickly looked at Trixie and then his cousin, who was deep in a conversation with Fred, before turning back to her. "Jake?" she called, her eyes still on Gregory, who almost look like he was shaking his head side to side.

"Yeah?" he pulled out the cards and began to shuffle them.

"Uh you guy have fun, alright?" She saw relief filter onto Gregory's face.

"Alright, and you be safe out there," he told her as she walked back around his way. He then stood and gave her a kiss on the cheek, playing the loving husband in front of the others. Trixie smiled at the gesture before going to fetch her son.

It had been a good two minutes since Trixie had stepped out the the apartment when Gregory excused himself to the bathroom where he turned into his dragon from and slipped out of the window. He changed back into his human form as he touched down in alley outside the building's garage.

He found Trixie as she was putting Jerry into his car seat. He stood beside her and called her name softly. He was not surprised by the hand that belted across his face. "You bastard!" she yelled so loudly that it scared Jerry, causing him to cry.

"Kitten, I am so sorry," he offered.

"Don't call me that." She pushed him away. "You made me think you were Jake! How sick are you?" she pushed him again and pounded on his chest. "You bastard," she began to cry. "You fracking sick bastard!" Gregory grabbed her wrist, stilling them from their abuse towards him. Trixie fought with no prevail, before she cave in and rested her head against his chest. "How could you? I thought I was going crazy." She had ended up calling Alex on one of the nights 'Jake' hadn't come home to discover that Alex had no recollection of ever coming over to her house on the day in question. He also seem in very much of a hurry to get off the phone with her.

Gregory offered her his apologies again as he finally let go her wrist and wrapped his arms around her. Trixie then slowly embraced him back. And with a small gesture an affair began.

OoOoO

Trixie pulled herself from her memories when she heard Gregory speak. "So you're really pregnant?" he asked.

"Like I said, I don't know." She sat down on the bed next to him. "I don't know what to tell Jake," she admitted.

"We don't tell him anything," Gregory told her. "First we have to find out if you are actually pregnant," he decided.

"And if I am?" she asked.

Gregory took her hand before bringing it up to his lips and giving it a kiss. "Then we'll finally tell him the truth. That we're in love and that we're going to be together, okay?"

"What about Jerry?" she wanted to know. "He's become attached, Jake isn't going to let him go."

"Jake isn't his real father, he has no rights to him," Gregory told her.

"You're wrong, because he does. His name is on Jerry's birth certificate, he lives under Jake's roof. As far as anyone who matters is concerned, Jerry is Jake's son."

"Not by Dragon law, he isn't," he raised a point. "Jake has still not claimed you in front of the Council." Gregory placed his hand on Trixie's still flat stomach. "If you're pregnant, when our child is born, I swear to claim you and this child."

Trixie smiled. "Gregory, are you- are you asking me to marry you?"

He nodded. "Yeah, I am," he said softly.

Trixie closed the gap between them, forcing Gregory down onto the bed. "Did you bring the handcuffs?" she asked.

Gregory reached into his pocket and pulled out a pair. "Always."

OoOoO

Trixie arrived home before nightfall as Jake had instructed. She found him watching television while holding Jerry in his arms. "Well?" he asked as she came into his view.

"He doesn't suspect a thing," she told him as she sat down next to him and placed a hand on his thigh. "We didn't even focus on you this time. I kept him well distracted from his task."

After Trixie began her affair with Gregory, Jake soon found out about it. He had been looking for something of Jerry's and thought to look in Trixie's nightstand for it. He had known about the pack of

condoms, he just didn't expect to find it open or with one of them missing.

He confronted Trixie about it that very day. She told him everything, about how she had actually planned to leave him, how 'he' had shown up and caught her with Alex, about the threat, the tub, the kiss, the sex in the bed they shared, and then what she had thought after discovering he wasn't wearing the Jewel of Eskaw.

Jake sat with his head down as Trixie went through the explanation. After she was finished he was silent for a long time. When he finally spoke, he asked a question that completely knocked Trixie off her guard. He asked what she had thought of Gregory as a lover. After a moment of debating what to actually tell him, she told him he left her very happy.

Jake nodded as he stood up, a look of determination in his eyes. He then asked Trixie what she thought of him as a lover. Trixie didn't understand until he took her face with both of his hands and planted a kiss on her that made her forget that her feet were touching the ground. Jake, her husband, now not only in name, made love to her that very night.

As they laid in bed, he told her that Gregory could no longer be trusted. He was DOS and coming into his home disguised as him had a purpose. He told her that he would have to delay a few plans until the investigation on him was completed. He wouldn't leave anything to chance. Trixie was bothered to hear that eventually he would go back looking for Rose. She had thought him finally making love to her was a step from that direction, but she let her concerns go unheard. She was so tired of fighting.

"Good." Jake nodded as he responded to Trixie. "Jerry's already out for the night. I'm going to put him to bed." He stood up.

Trixie stood up along with him. "Alright, I guess I'll go and take a shower."

Trixie brushed her teeth for the night as she waited for the water to adjust in the shower. The hot water was refreshing as it poured down like rain upon her skin. She soon grabbed a bar of soap and began to run it across her body, determined to scrub away any trace that Gregory may have left on her. Jake's senses had grown since he became a dragon and she knew that he was able to smell the other on her.

She closed her eyes, her back to the water, as she tilted her head back and let the water run through her hair, preparing to wash it. She was a bit surprised, her eyes snapping open as she heard the bathroom door. She then heard the sound of clothes rustling before the shower curtain was pulled back and Jake stepped in with her.

He smiled shyly, his face a bit red. Trixie returned his shy smile. At this point they had only been intimate twice before and each time in the cover of night. She suspected that Jake was feeling bold tonight. She concluded her theory true when he took a step closer and both of his hands found her face. He pulled her to him and gently ran his lips against hers, pulling her slightly out of the path of the shower head. The kiss was innocent at first, almost as if they were young children experiencing their first kiss with each other.

Trixie felt her heart began to race when his tongue slowly darted out and he licked her lips. She opened her mouth and allowed him access. Jake took his time. The kiss was not only drawn out, but calculated,

as she him smile against her as she could help but emit a soft moan into his his mouth.

He then gradually pulled back, his hands taking her shoulders and slightly turning her body before pushing her back against the wall behind her. Trixie immediately jumped when her skin came into the contact of the cold tiles that outlined their surrounding. Jake offered her an apologetic smile. She shook her head and rolled her eyes. "I'm sorry," he voiced, his head down as his hands began to travel off her shoulders and headed southward. "I'll warm you up," he promised, his breath hot against her damp skin as he spoke.

Trixie took his waist, stroking his back, as his hands tenderly filled themselves with her full round breast. He gave them a slight squeeze as his thumbs moved back and front across her sensitive nipples until they were hard and erected. He then licked his lips before they contact with her neck, his arms now snaking around her body as her took their time as they made their way up his torso.

Trixie's fingers mapped out each muscle of his stomach, learning each one well, he laughed a little as she ran across a particularly ticklish spot. She stored the information away for later as she now moved up to his strong broad chest. Trixie smirked, they felt so damn bitable. She wanted to skin her teeth into him, marking him as her own.

Jake kissed had moved up from her neck, his lips a breath away from her own. Trixie pouted as she leaned in only to have Jake pull away at the last moment. He was teasing her and she didn't appreciate that. "Ask me," he told her.

Trixie looked at him curiously for a moment before wrapping her arms around his neck. "Please," she whispered before Jake crushed his lips against hers. This kiss was definitely different than the first. In contrast it was rough and passionate. Jake ravaged her lips hungrily as he drew her closer, the presence of his hard erection, he knew, did not escape her.

When their lips finally parted each stared into each other's eyes, panting for air as they were both out of breath. "Please," Trixie whispered once again.

Jake smiled softly at her. His left hand then moved down her thigh as she began to wrap it around his body. He then pressed himself hard against her, pinning her to wall as her other leg followed the first. "Drop me and I'll kill you," she threatened, her voice a little strain at the pressure she was feeling.

"You know I'd never let you fall," he reassure her sweetly, his eyes showing his sincerity. Trixie smiled as she began to to cover his face with kisses. Jake then took his cock in hand. He bit his lower lip as he slid the length of it into Trixie's opening. She gasped as he completely filled her. He smiled at the reaction, he loved the sounds she made as he went for another long and delirious kiss.

Jake began to move slowly against her, trying to grow comfortable with the position they were in. "Oh, God," Trixie cried against his neck as his thrust began to pick up speed. "Oh frack, yes." Her nails began to dig into her lover's back.

"You're so hot," Jake told her, his eyes closed as he took in the sensation of her surrounding him. "Your pussy feels so good," Trixie heard his lust filled voice invade her ears. He moaned as she began to kiss and suck on his neck and shoulder. Her tongue sweeping over his skin as the water washed

away their sweat. Her teeth then began to replace her tongue, leaving red marks in their wake.

She then slowly begin to close her mouth around the flesh she had taken into her hold. Jake sucked in air through his teeth at the gradual pain of it. He smiled contently liking the feeling it sent throughout his body.

Jake began to pound into her more forcefully. "frack!" Trixie yelled out. "I like that," she told him, her words coming out more like desperate sob. "Right there," she let him know as he found a spot inside of her that made he want to scream. "Right there, don't you dare stop."

Jake's mouth came up to her ears. His breath hot against her skin as he spoke. "Does he frack you like this?" he asked her. "Does he made you feel as good as I do?"

"Oh God, Jake." His cock felt so thick inside of her, rubbing against her just in the right way, that she barely hear his question. So she was completely taken by surprise by the sudden stop. Her chest heaved heavily against his one bare chest. "Why the hell did you-" she was cut off.

"Tell me I frack you better." Trixie looked at him oddly not sure if it was actually a demand or if he was begging her.

She licked her lips before she placed a kiss on his forehead. "You do, baby. You do," she soothed him.

To her disappointment, he didn't seem too convinced, but he said nothing at first as he buried his head in her neck and began again, but a lot slower than when he had stopped. "I used to dream about you," he confessed smiling, knowing that she already knew that. "I had all kinds of crazy fantasies." Trixie frowned at his words, somehow feeling that maybe he was the one who was disappointed. She then watched as he redden. "You're- You're better than any dream. I just want you to know that." Trixie smiled, her eyes closing as Jake steadily began to pick up the rhythm of their loving making.

Jake felt her become wetter, the juices of her arousal flowing down the shaft of his cock as he slammed himself into her over and over again with a force that was sure to leave her bruised the next morning. Her moans of ecstasy echoed throughout the bathroom as he began to growl and grunt as he felt his dick began to pulse. "frack!" he yelled loudly, his hold on her crushing as he explored inside of her.

He continued to plunge himself deep into her pussy until he heard her cry out and he felt the walls of her sex clench around his manhood, demanding the cum he was all too willing to give.

Completely drained, Jake slowly slid to the shower floor carefully taking Trixie with him. She took a moment to fill her lungs with air before exhaling, her head now resting on Jake's shoulder as she sat on his lap. Her whole body tingled at the sensation of his flushed, yet warm flesh next to her.

Jake stroked the small of her back lovingly, placing a light kiss upon her lips. "Give me ten minutes," he began in that low huskily voice, which caused Trixie to tremble against him, she adored that voice. "And I'll be ready to go again." Trixie couldn't help the school-girl giggle that escaped her mouth as Jake licked her neck. It was then that she realized that although Gregory may have made her happy, her husband made sure that she was quite. . . *satisfied*.

To Be Continued. . .

# 17 - Rose

## Chapter Seventeen: Rose

Trixie woke letting out a long breath. Her eyes remained closed, thinking she would fall back to sleep, but something kept her from it as she laid on her belly in the middle of night in her bedroom. She took another long deep breath, realizing now that it was quite unsteady. She gave a small sleepy moan, not knowing why her whole body tingled.

Her eyes opened slightly, only catching a peek of the figure beside her before closing them again. She gave another moan, laced with a hint of pleasure, as she felt something hard going in and out of her body in a very slow, steady manner. She then finally opened her eyes, allowing them to adjust to the moonlight pouring in through the open blinds, which were on her side of the room.

She saw Jake beside her laying on his side, his head resting in his hand. "Hello there pretty lady," he greeted her with a kiss on the shoulder. "I got you something," he told her.

"What?" she asked him sleepily.

Jake shook his head against his hand. "You don't feel it?" he asked with a slight frown. "Wait, I'll turn it on for you."

Trixie, still half asleep, gave him a curious look. A moment later, she heard a soft buzzing sound before the lower part of her body squirmed with something below the blanket. Trixie's eyes immediately snapped opened and she sat up abruptly, startling Jake a bit in the process, who sat up as well. "What are- What are you doing?" she asked.

"Calm down, Trix," he told her. "I didn't mean to scare you," he told her truthfully. "It came yesterday while you were out." He reached for the object underneath the sheet, which had fallen from his hand when Trixie freaked out. "I forgot about it until a little while ago," he explained as he brought it up for her to view.

Trixie looked baffled. "You bought me a dildo?"

"No!" Jake looked outraged at the accusation. "I bought you a vibrator," he corrected her with a smile, waggling his eyebrows as he played with the dial. "It comes in three settings."

Trixie laughed at the expression on his face as she became settled once again, this time on her back. "Boy, you're a trip, you know that?" She fluffed the pillow under her head, her dark locks sprawled across it.

Jake only shrugged before he got back in his original position. "Don't you want to see it?" he asked her teasingly. "You know you want to."

Trixie gave him an annoyed expression before snatching the toy from his hand. "Give me that!" It was now Jake's turn to laugh as she took the light green, thick six inch vibrator into her grasp. "You don't know how to do it right away."

"Oh?" Jake raised an eyebrow, mildly surprised. "So you've used one before?"

Trixie blushed as she realized she had given herself away. "Yeah, but only once before," she admitted. Jake went to speak, curious as to when, but as if reading his thoughts, Trixie closed her eyes and shook her head. "Please, don't ask."

He seemed a bit disappointed, quite sure it was just his kind of story, but he would leave it for another time as there was another pressing matter at hand. "Show me," he said suddenly.

"Show you what?" she replied.

"You told me I wasn't doing it right." He pulled back the bedding that covered her naked body. "So show me," he asked of her again. Trixie gave him a skeptical look. "Please," he said softly.

Trixie smiled and nodded her head, causing a huge grin to spread across Jake's face. Trixie spread her legs, bending the one closest to window up so her foot was flat on the bed. She took the vibrator and turned the dial to its middle setting before lowering in between her legs. She slid the humming toy slowly between her lower lips, which were already nice and moist thanks to the horny man beside her. She closed her eyes, her heart pounded rapidly against her chest knowing Jake's eyes were on her with want and desire.

She allowed her body to feel the pulses that were generated by her new gift, her thighs slightly tightening around it. She wiggled her hips a little, her mouth opening as she let a moan escape. She then spread her legs open again. She bit her lower lip, her eyebrows drawing together as she finally pushed the vibrator into her now aching pussy. She pulled it out and shoved it back in in a steady rhythm. "Did I pick right?" Jake had leaned in and whispered in her ear. "Did I do good?" he sought approval.

Trixie opened her eyes and smiled at her husband, her vibrator not missing a beat. "You did real good," she thanked him, a little out of breath. She stretched her neck towards him; Jake leaned in the rest of the way and they shared a long heated kiss. Jake groaned loudly into her mouth. It was then that Trixie noticed Jake had his member in his hand and that he was pumping it wildly, getting off as he watched the woman before him please herself.

The dark skinned woman then completely pulled her toy out and brought it up to Jake's mouth. "Suck it," she instructed as she rubbed her pussy juice across his lips. Jake gave her a disapproving look before he drew back a little, lowering his head before licking his lips. "Well?" She looked expecting of him. "How do I taste?"

Trixie watched as he licked his lips again, a gleam in his eyes. "Delicious," was his answer before he gradually opened his mouth and Trixie dipped the head of the toy inside as she turned it off. She smiled as she watched him swirl his tongue around the tip before taking as much of it as he could inside his



mouth. His eyes stayed on Trixie as his head bobbed back and forth against the light green rod. Trixie felt her chest constrict as she found herself becoming more aroused as Jake gave off a small purr. He seem to be enjoying himself as he licked the last of he essence off. "All clean," he told her in a deep voice under hooded lids.

Trixie smiled as she laid the device down on the bed. "You do that kind of well," she began. "There isn't anything you want to tell me, is there?" she teased. "You know you're my boy, no matter what you tell me."

Jake tilted his head to one side. "I know you just didn't question my manhood?" he tried to sound serious, but failed horribly.

Trixie looked away and shrugged. "I'm just saying. Sometimes you just don't know." Trixie then let out a small scream as Jake unexpectedly jumped on her.

She began to giggle as Jake tickled her. "Married myself a real jokester, didn't I?" Trixie grabbed his wrists, but wasn't strong enough to move his attacking hands as she continued to laugh. "Shhh," he shushed her as he finally stopped. "You'll wake up the kid," he warned her, now grabbing her wrists and pushing them to either side of her head.

Trixie hiccuped as her laughter died down, her breathing easing as she looked at the man on top of her. "So?" she took a deep breath. "You plan on screwing me any time soon or what?" she asked with a knowing look.

Jake's shoulders shook as he chuckled silently. "Kind of almost have to now," he began, speaking almost as if it were a chore. "Manhood being at stack and all."

"Then I should let you know now." Trixie struggled against his hold until Jake got the hint and released her. She then moved her hands behind his back and slid them down until she had a firm hold on his @\$\$\$. One hand stayed where it was as the other came back around front. Trixie took Jake's fat prick in her hold and guided it towards her waiting opening where she rubbed the tip of it against her wetness. "I'm going to need a lot of convincing." She nodded her head as if agreeing with herself.

"Really now?" Jake asked looking down between their bodies as Trixie slowly removed her hand as he started to fill her body.

"Oooh, that's nice," she said softly, her head tilting back as she adjusted to him. "Nothing like the real thing."

The comment, caused a small smile to appear across Jake's face as he began with a few long strokes. "So how do you want your Mack Daddy to put it down?" he asked his forehead resting on hers.

"Hmmm," she replied pleasantly. "Anyway he wants it," she answered bringing her hands up to his back.

Jake gave her a tender kiss. "Then you may want to hold on," he warned her. Trixie's eyes sparkled as she securely wrapped her arms around her lover, who at once began ramming himself into her. His hips

thrust forward, allowing a wet, slick slapping sound to be heard and despite the fact that Trixie was desperately hanging on to Jake, she couldn't help as she bounced fiercely underneath him on his huge cock.

The bed began to rock below them, the headboard hitting the wall every now and again as Jake showed no signs of slowing down. He panted hard as he fracked her faster and so roughly that it was almost cruel. Trixie's face contorted in pain as tears began to well in her eyes. They finally fell down her face as she opened her mouth and let out a wounded whimpering sound, which was soon replaced by a loud sob.

Jake, hearing her, opened his eyes and looked down at her. "Trix?" his throat sounded dry as he spoke. Seeing her tears, he stopped immediately. He then shifted his weight to one side as he took his hand and cupped her face. "Why didn't you say something?" he asked her, brushing her tears away with his thumb before placing kisses on her damp face. "We'll just call it a night for now, okay?" he suggested as he began to pull out.

"No!" Trixie cried, clinging to him before he could. "We don't have to stop," she told him.

"I was hurting you," he pointed out, concern etched onto his features, which could be clearly seen as the night was beginning to pass.

His wife smiled at him. "I'm okay, really," she tried to persuade him as she ran her hand through his hair. "What? Do you want me to beg?" she asked him.

Jake tried not to smile. "Maybe," was his response.

Trixie gave a small sigh. "Please, frack me," she purred as she nuzzled her nose against the curve of his neck. "Dominate me." She began kissing his neck and shoulder. "Control me." She rolled her hips underneath him, provoking him in a sense. "Take me, anyway you want me." She kissed his chin and then his lips as she ran her nails along his back. "Don't you feel that?" She continued to squirm. "My pussy's calling for you, so please frack me."

"We'll take it slow this time, alright?" he decided. Trixie nodded as she felt his long cock rub against her inside, hitting that spot that always made her feel like she was close to the edge. "Besides," Jake spoke. "How could I turn down such a tempting invitation?" He then once again closed his eyes, letting his body take in and enjoy the warmth of the woman he was on top of.

"Oh God," Trixie whispered, several minutes later, out of breath. Jake's brow furrowed as he couldn't help but pick up the pace as Trixie arched her luscious body into him. "Jakey- Jakey, I'm going to- Oooh, I'm going to- frack!" The headboard began slamming into the wall again. Trixie's mouth fell open. "Ah!" she cried out each time Jake stuffed his dick into her up the the hilt. "Ah!" she cried out again as she heard Jake growl almost like a feral animal as he concentrated. "I'm cumming!" Trixie practically screamed as the sun broke over the horizon.

"Almost. Almost," Jake informed her as he huffed and grunted, his prick throbbing for release as he continued to shove himself into her.

Trixie closed her eyes tightly as she hung on to Jake. He was back to the point where he was hurting her, but all she could get out of her mouth was his name as he had road out her first orgasm and had her approaching her second. "Jake- Jake - Oh Jake!"

Jake's own eyes were still shut as they fracked intensely. He then felt his balls tighten before he shot his cum into her like a loaded gun. His hot seed spurted out wildly as it coated the walls of her sex. Jake let out a long throaty groan as he cried out, "Rose!" before he completely collapsed on top of Trixie.

Trixie swore she felt her heart stop when she heard the other woman's name leave Jake's mouth. Her bottom lip began to quiver violently. Jake took his time catching his breath as he rested his head on her soft chest, their bodies cover in a thin layer of sweat. Trixie pursed her lips together, hoping to make the quivering stop as she felt her eyes began to sting.

Then suddenly, Jake gasped loudly. He bolted up and looked down at his wife. "Oh my God," he began. He shook his head back and forth in a panic. "Trixie, I didn't mean-"

"Shh." Trixie placed her index finger on his lips. "It's alright." She then smiled, much to Jake's disbelief, but the sparkle he had seen before was no where to be seen. "Mistakes happen. No big deal, right?" she reassured him.

Jake could only stare at her for a moment. "Are you sure?" he asked, knowing if she had called out another man's name that he would not have been as calm about it. Trixie nodded at his question.

He said nothing more as he finally pulled out. "Ow," Trixie whispered softly as she closed her legs and laid on her side, her back to Jake.

Jake licked his lips as he took his place beside her. He wrapped his arm around her waist as he cuddled next to her. He then heard something that sounded a lot like a snuffle. "Are you cold?" he asked, knowing very well that she wasn't, but that didn't stop him from pulling the blanket further up her body.

Trixie then took the top of it and pulled a little more of it over her shoulder. "Thank you," she replied flatly.

"Trixie-"

"Jake," she cut him off. "I'm tired," she stated. "Just go back to sleep, it's still early."

"Yeah, okay," he agreed and said nothing more before he drifted back to sleep.

OoOoO

Jake woke up in his bed to find himself alone within it. He sat up rubbing the sleep out of his eye as he yawned. He smiled as the door opened and Trixie walked gracefully into the room albeit a little stiffly. She was wearing a short, satin gown. It was pink and exposed every inch of her long brown legs. Jake's smile grew, remembering the fun they had earlier as he took in her movements. She placed the six inch

toy she had just finished washing off into her nightstand drawer. "Morning, Trixie," he greeted her happily.

She turned his away, pausing where she stood. "Morning," she greeted him, her voice dull. Jake frowned as something else came back to his mind. "Could you wake Jerry for me?" she asked, her back to him as she fetched clothes for the day from her closet. "I bathed him last night, so just dress and feed him and I'll take him to daycare on my way to work," she told him.

"Yeah," he replied as he got out of bed. He found his red boxers on the floor and slipped them on. He had just pulled his t-shirt over his head when he saw Trixie head back towards to door. "Trix?" he called after her.

"What?" She sighed.

"Me and you. . . we're good, right?" He wanted to know.

Trixie turned her head and forced a smile on her face. "Of course," she told him before leaving the room to go take a shower.

Jake cringed as he raked his fingers through his hair. He knew he had messed up no matter how Trixie tried to deny it. And deny she did, because no woman got over her husband calling out another woman's name as they made love as Trixie would have Jake believe. She had become so docile, in Jake's opinion, that she hadn't even been arguing with him lately, something he didn't know what to make of. He sighed as he made his way across the hall into Jerry's room, who fussed and cried as Jake woke when he picked him up out of the crib.

Jake had the small boy, changed, dress, and was still feeding him by the time Trixie came into the kitchen to find herself something to eat while in the car. Jerry's diaper bag hung on her arm as she stuffed an energy bar into side where it could easily be reached. "Where's my Mr. Man?" Trixie spoke playfully as she rounded Jerry's high chair. The seven month old laughed happily as his mother came into his view. "There he is!" Trixie bent over and hummed as she littered his fat cheeks with little kisses.

Jake seemed amused as he dripped the tiny blue baby spoon back into a jar of baby food. "He's almost done," he told her as gathered the last bit of carrots onto the spoon.

Trixie straightened up as she placed the baby bag on the table. She then went over to the cupboard to grab a glass before heading to fridge. On the refrigerator door was calender. "August twelfth? Dammit, I almost forgot," she whispered to herself before pouring herself some orange juice.

"Almost forgot what?" Jake asked curiously.

"I have a doctor's appointment this afternoon." She put the juice carton away. "It's right after work so I won't be able to pick up Jerry."

Jake nodded in understanding. "Alright, I'll pick him up."

"So I guess that means you're taking the car today?" she asked, as Jerry easily got carsick on the city

bus.

“Yeah,” Jake replied as he tossed the empty jar into the trash from where he sat. “So what's the appointment for?” he asked casually.

“It's nothing really,” she told him as she continued to stand by the fridge, her glass close to her mouth as she drunk from it. “It's just I think I could be pregnant,” she said hurriedly before taking a huge gulp from her glass.

Jake looked at her curiously. “I sorry, I didn't caught that.”

Trixie took a deep breath as she lowered her head and her glass, which she now held with both hands. “I said. . . I think I might be pregnant,” she announced slowly before her eyes looked worriedly at the man sitting across the room.

Jake turned his head away before lifting his hand and allowing several of his fingers to massage his temple. He was surprised by the statement, though not sure why. It wasn't as if he and Trixie had shown a lot of caution lately. They had literally been going at it like a pair of jack rabbits for the last three weeks. Honestly, she was starting to wear a brother out, hence the new toy. She was insatiable really, and this was with Jake knowing full well about Gregory. Not that his cousin was a subject he wanted to dwell on. What he had done was unforgivable in Jake's eyes. . . but then again, he was also thankful to him. It was very complicate in a way.

After Trixie had admitted to him how her affair began with Gregory, she apologized to no end, telling Jake she would end it right away as she began to cry. Jake found that he couldn't look at her as he sat with his head down trying to soak in everything. It was then that he realized, that if Gregory hadn't intervene that he would have come home to an empty apartment. Jake knew that although life with Trixie was no where near perfect, learning that she planned to fulfill her threat of walking out on him was a devastating discovery.

It was then that he had asked what kind of lover his cousin had been, wondering what were the chances of her still leaving him. When she told him that being with Gregory made her happy, it was probably the last word that he wanted to hear, considering she had told him only days before that she wasn't happy with their marriage.

In that moment, Jake told himself, he would not allow his cousin to mean more to his wife then he did. He would make her happy no matter what that meant. So he had given himself to Trixie that night, thinking that was what she wanted. It was only afterwards when he told her of his plans, which involved her staying close to Gregory and he saw the look of disbelief on her face, that realized it wasn't. She wanted more than his body, she wanted all of him - his heart, his soul, his thoughts, but Jake couldn't give that to her, not when they belonged to someone else. . .

“Jake?” her soft voice reached his ears. “Will you please say something.”

“Uhh- Yeah.” Jake stood and walked over to her. He took the glass from her hand and placed it on the counter next to her. He then took her small hands within his own and smiled at her. “How about this? I'll call Haley and see if she's busy this afternoon, if she's not I'll drop Jerry with her and I'll meet you at your

appointment.” He still felt horribly guilty for not being there when Jerry was born. “Afterwards we’ll go out to dinner, whether you’re pregnant or not.”

Trixie began to shake her head. “Jake, I don’t. . .” she trailed off.

“What?” He looked at her curiously, but she only sighed. “I know what you’re thinking. Time wise, if you’re pregnant. . . well, the timing could be better,” he admitted as his hand found her stomach. “But to tell you the truth, I’m a little excited.” Jake couldn’t help but think that maybe things between him and Trixie would be better if they shared a child.

“Jake,” Trixie continued to shake her head as she removed his hand away. “Jake. . . Gregory, is meeting me at the hospital this afternoon,” she informed him.

Jake only stared at her. “I don’t understand.”

Trixie licked her lips as she looked into her husband’s eyes. “I’m pretty sure that, if I’m pregnant, that it’s Gregory’s.”

“Okay, Trix, don’t play with me like that. That’s not funny.” He turned away and made his way back over to Jerry.

“I’m not joking,” she confirmed.

Jake leaned on the kitchen table tucking a hand under his arm. “You told me that you two always use protection.”

“We do, Jake.” She took a step forward. “It was an accident, okay?”

He turned his head away. “Yeah, right,” he said skeptically.

“Don’t you-” she stopped, waving her hand as if it was all too much. “I need to go.”

“Wait, where are you going?” Jake walked around the high chair and grabbed Trixie’s arm. “I don’t- what?” he demanded to know.

“Let go!” Trixie yelled as she tried to pull herself from his grip, but he only held on tighter. “Ow! That hurts!”

“I don’t- what!” he repeated himself.

“Realize this is all your fault!” she yelled in his face. Jerry hearing his parents angry voices began to cry. “Dammit, Jake,” she said softly as she was finally able to shake herself loose of her husband. “Shh, it’s okay,” she reassured her son as she picked him up.

“My fault?” Jake, though outraged, kept his voice calm as best as he could. “Please, enlighten me, how in your little world, you being knocked up is my fault?”

Trixie looked at the man before her in disgust. "It happened, when I thought he was you," she whispered, her voice somewhat broken, but still filled with anger. "Which would have never happened if you were where you were suppose to be. *Home*." She then handed Jerry over to Jake, whose face melted of all anger. "Second fiddle, Jake," were her last words to him before she walked out the kitchen to leave for work.

OoOoO

Jake had just finished getting dressed and was almost out the door with Jerry in his arms when the phone ringed. He sighed in irritation before putting down the baby bag and picking up the phone. "Hello?" he greeted.

"Good morning, Mr. Long," said the voice of a woman on the other end.

Jake's forehead creased. "I thought I told you never to call me at home," he told her. "What if my wife had been here? What if she had answered the phone and heard your voice."

"Yes, I see how that could be problematic for you," she concluded. "I'm sorry, but this is urgent. Luck has finally smiled on us," she informed him.

"What is it?" he asked. "Wait, no," he added quickly. "Not over the phone."

"Then we should meet," she suggested. "I'll be in the city today."

"Are you sure that's wise?" Jake asked her as he shifted Jerry in his other arm, who was gnawing on his shirt.

"You worry too much long," she told him with a smile. "Meet me where we first meet and we'll take it from there. What time is good for you?"

Jake looked down at the child in his arm. "Uh later this afternoon is good maybe around six or so. I'll call you to let you know," he informed her.

"I'll be waiting for your call," she told him him before they said their goodbyes and each went along their way.

OoOoO

Later that day, Trixie stepped through the door of a hotel room with Gregory behind her. It wasn't the usual place where they met, but one near the hospital that they just left. Trixie walked over to the bed. "This is a good thing, Trixie," Gregory told her with a smile as he closed the door behind them.

"Yeah," she said softly as she plopped herself down and fell back before placing her hand on her

stomach.

Gregory laid down beside her as he kicked off his shoes. "We should celebrate," he suggested as he placed his hand on top of hers. "Are you hungry? We could order room service," he offered, but Trixie only shook her head before turning her head away from him. Gregory slightly frowned. He sighed. "You're thinking about Jake, aren't you?" he asked.

"He's not going to be happy about this," she told him. "I mean, I can only imagine what he'll think—"

"Who cares what the frack Jake thinks!" Gregory said loudly as he sat up.

Trixie finally turned her head towards him. It was the first time she had ever heard him raise his voice to her. He was more stressed about this than he was letting on. "I'm sorry," she mumbled. She then sat up and wrapped her arm low around him, resting her chin on his shoulder.

Gregory's shoulders fell. "No, I'm sorry." He turned his head to her and kissed her gently. "It's just I know this isn't the ideal situation, but can you please just look on the bright side of things for once?" he asked of her. "In a few days we'll go to Jake and we'll tell him what's going on, okay? That's the hard part, right? And maybe telling my mother," he added. "But after that there shouldn't be anything we can't handle," he reassured her.

Trixie nodded before standing up and going over to that small round table that was in the room. She looked at the menu. "I was thinking that maybe I could talk to Jake by myself," she began. "I don't want him to feel as if we're rubbing anything in his face by you being there," she told him her thoughts.

"Alright, that's understandable. Jake can be quite prideful," he agreed.

"I'm not really feeling anything on this menu." Trixie eyed the items again.

"Well, actually." Gregory stood up and walked over to Trixie. He wrapped his arms around her waist from behind and kissed her neck. "I was looking more forth to dessert than dinner." He began swaying back and forward. Trixie gave a small laugh. "What a beautiful sound," he told her as he began to unfasten the buttons that made up her work uniform, which included a gray looking blazer and a matching skirt that went down to her knees.

Trixie lowered her head enjoying the kisses Gregory was placing on the back of her neck as he slid the blazer off, revealing the white, short sleeve blouse underneath it. Trixie gasped when she opened her eyes and noticed a dark mark just above her elbow. She pulled away from Gregory and quickly threw the blazer back on. Gregory looked up baffled. "Trixie? What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said quickly as she pulled the jacket tight around her.

Gregory raised an eyebrow as he made his way to her. "Than you do know for this to work, clothes need to be taken off, right?" he teased playfully. "Come on, I'll help you." He removed her hands and slide the blazer back down her shoulders.

"Please, Greg, I'm just not in the mood anymore, okay?" Trixie protested, slightly struggling as she tried



to keep the jacket above certain area, but she knew it was too late as she heard Gregory's next words.

"What's wrong with your arm?" he asked, brow furrowed as he took in the hand shape like bruise on her skin.

"He didn't mean it." The response sounded so automatic leaving Trixie's mouth that it sent a cold chill down Gregory's spine. "It's just he doesn't realize his own strength when he's excited," she shrugged as she added, "or angry."

She began to grow self-conscious as Gregory's eyes had not left the bruise on her arm. She tried to cover it with her hand, but it was small compared to Jake's. Gregory then finally looked into her eyes. "Has he- has he ever hurt you before?" he asked.

"What? No!" Trixie said immediately. "Well. . . not purposely." Gregory looked asking of her. "He uh burned me once, back in the seventh grade. I had figured out that Rose was Huntsgirl. He had been planning to tell her who he was. I had tried to convince him otherwise, but of course all I got for my trouble was him thinking I was trying to throw him off *my* tracks. I still can't believe he thought I could be a Huntsclan member." She shook her head in disbelief. "Anyway, I tried to physically hold him back, which he didn't like. That's when he burned me. It wasn't anything serious mind you. It just hurt more that he didn't trust me."

Gregory then held Trixie tightly in his arms. "I trust you," he told her. She smiled as she regarded the father of her unborn child.

OoOoO

It was half past five o'clock when Jake got home from work. He soon got undressed and took himself a shower, hating when he came home smelling like the dentist's office. He was in his bedroom still getting dressed when he received a call on his cell. He looked at the caller ID, the number had no name, but he recognized the number all the same. "I thought I said I would call you?" he asked as on as he answered the fun.

He was greeted with heavy breathing. "I don't know how, but our rendezvous shot has been compromised," she informed him. "Jake, DOS, they were waiting for me." She sounded on the verge of tears. "I'm hurt."

"Where are you? I'll come and get you," he told her.

"I'm coming to you, I-"

"No! We'll meet somewhere else," he cut her off.

"Please, I don't know the city like I used too."

Jake sighed. "Fine, but once you get here, we can't stay."

“Of course,” she agreed. “I’m on my way.”

After hanging up, Jake threw his cell on the bed and finished getting dressed. He was walking down the hall when the last sound he wanted to hear reached his ears. . . keys in the door. “What are you doing here?” he asked as Trixie came in carrying Jerry, who reached out for his father.

“Well, hello to you to Jake. My day was good, thanks for asking,” she said sarcastically as she tried handing Jerry over, but Jake wouldn’t take him.

Jerry began to fuss, but he went ignored by Jake. “I just thought you would be home later. I thought you had an appointment and that I was picking up Jerry,” he explained.

“Yeah, I was called at work. My appointment was moved up, so my boss, Diana, let me off early.”

“So, how did it go?” Jake couldn’t help but ask.

“I’m pregnant,” she confirmed as she held Jerry tighter to stop his struggling. There was then a knock at the door.

“Uh you should take Jerry into the kitchen, I’m sure he’s hungry,” Jake tried to direct them out of the room.

“Yeah.” There came another knock. “I’ll just get the door first,” she told him since she was the closest to it.

“Trixie, wait!” he called, but it was already too late as Trixie pulled the door open.

“Oh my God,” Trixie began in a whisper as she took in the sight of the woman before her. “. . . *Rose.*”

To Be Continued. . .

## 18 - Jake

### Chapter Eighteen: Jake

Blue eyes pierced through the brown eyes of the woman before her before moving towards the man standing behind said woman. The man's anguish felt eyes did not leave his wife until his name was softly spoken. "Jake," she breathed as she leaned heavily on the door frame.

Seeing how weak she seemed, Jake immediately went to her. Trixie only stepped to the side as to not be in the way as Jake picked the collapsing woman into his arms and carried her towards the couch. As he did, Trixie noticed the blood dripping from the side of her abdomen. Jake then carefully placed her onto the couch. He scanned her body slowly, before slightly lifting her shirt and revealing the three claw marks that had been placed upon her.

Jake rose his head and found his wife, her expression blank as she regarded him as well. She sighed before walking over to the corner of room to place Jerry in the corner where his toys were set up on the floor. She made her way over to the couch and took her place next Jake. Trixie reached out and swept blonde locks out of the way as her cool hand made contact with a warm forehead.

She then looked at the gashes that pooled with a rich red liquid. "She needs a hospital," she told him.

"That's where they would expect to find her," he informed her.

"I can't do much, but clean her up, Jakey," she told him firmly. "If she develops a fever-

"Just tell me what you need." He stood as he waited for her instructions.

"Grab that large mixing bowl we have in the kitchen. Fill it with warm water," she began. "Then go to the hall closet and grab me a wash cloth and several bath towels." Her eyes went back to the woman's lesions. "And don't forget to bring me the first-aid kit from our bedroom. I didn't have time to replace all the materials from the last time I used it, but it should be enough to wrap this wound up."

A few minutes later, Trixie had the other woman sit up as best she could. She cringed and hissed as the antiseptics Trixie had applied still stung. Trixie then began to wrap the bandages around her with the help of Jake. "Will she be okay?" he asked her.

"Don't worry, her blood loss isn't as bad as it could have been. Rose will be fine," Trixie said her head down as she concentrated on the task before her.

"Jesus, Long, you really haven't told her anything, have you?" Trixie looked up curiously at the statement. A hand was then held before her. It was unblemished. "I'm not Rose," she spoke. "My name is Daisy. Rose is my twin sister."

Trixie looked to Jake, who nodded, indicating it was true, before Trixie clipped the bandages turned to the table to place the items she had not used back into the first aid kit. "In that case, it's very nice to meet you, Daisy," she said flatly.

"Thank you, Mrs. Long," Daisy smiled before turning her attention towards Jake. "I have news of Rose." Trixie frowned. "Well, not yet anyway, but I'm meeting with someone tonight here in New York. I don't really trust him, which is why I wanted to see you. I want you there with me in case things don't pan out."

"Yes, I understand," Jake rose from the floor, "but what about the dragons who attacked you?" concerned lined his words as he spoke. Trixie scoffed to herself as she stood and made her way down the hall.

Daisy lifted her hand to wave the thought away. "They only attacked me because they thought I was Rose. It doesn't matter."

"Yes, it does," Jake needed to make clear. "You coming to my home could put my family in danger."

Daisy sat up a little straighter, her hand finding her side as she looked at Jake a bit surprised. "So you rather I had bleed to death?"

"No, of course not. But what if you had been followed? We can't stay here."

"I am not my sister!" Daisy argued. "I don't bounce back as quickly as she does." She slowly took a deep breath. "Look, I just need to rest before we meet our contact."

"Fine." Jake stood. "But not here." Daisy went to speak, but before she could, crying reached her ears.

She turned to see the small child in the corner, who seemed to be having a fit for no reason at all. Jake walked around the couch to pick up the crying boy, who immediately began to smile as Jake held him. "He's a beautiful boy," Daisy spoke as he looked over Jerry suspiciously. Jake had mentioned him before to her, but never said anything about not actually being his biological father.

"Thank you." Jake smiled as he kissed Jerry's head. "He can be a handful sometimes, but I love him more than anything," he admitted softly. "I don't know what I would do with him and Trixie."

"Then tell me," Daisy began. "If your wife and child mean so much to you, why did you agree to help me find my sister?" she couldn't help but ask. "I mean, if I were in your wife's shoes, I think I would have some issues with you chasing after someone you once loved."

Jake's brow creased at the question, his attention once again going back to Daisy as Jerry played happily with his shirt. "Well, you aren't my wife," he stated almost angrily, not impressed with her observation. "And whatever issues I have within my home, aren't your business."

Daisy's eyes grew a bit wide before returning to their normal size, apparently she had hit a nerve. "You're home?" she cocked an eyebrow curiously. "You forget where you are, Long. Don't forget whose family owns this building and who is living here rent free."

“What are you getting at?” he asked.

She stared at him for a moment. “Exactly what it sounds like.”

Just then Trixie entered back into the living room, feeling a little self-conscious with the Rose look-alike only feet away. “Um, will you be staying for dinner?” she asked politely.

“Actually,” Daisy held her side firmly as she stood up slowly, pain clearly reading on her features. “We should probably head out.”

“We?” Trixie looked from Daisy to Jake, who did not look at her, and then back to Daisy.

“Yes,” the blonde confirmed. “We're meeting someone around the way in Flatbush.” She made her way to the front door as Jake walked over to Trixie.

“I'll be back later tonight. I don't know when, so don't wait up,” he told her, half expecting her to argue with him, so he was taken by surprise by her next words.

“Okay,” she began. “Your dinner will be in the microwave when come back.” She then held out her arms for her son. “Come on, Mr. Man, daddy has important things to do,” she spoke softly.

Jake went to pass Jerry over, but something tugged at him. He looked down to see that Jerry's fist was tightly holding the fabric of his shirt. Jake looked upon the child's face, which looked more expressive than he had ever seen it look before. If Jake didn't know better, he would have thought that Jerry understood the words spoken and didn't want Jake to leave.

Jerry began to whine as Jake was finally able to release the grip that held him. With Jerry now in her hold, Trixie walked Jake over to the open door, as Daisy had already stepped out into the hall and began to make her way towards the elevator. “Nothing I say will stop you from walking out this door, will it?” Trixie asked.

Jake blinked and then only stared at her as she pretended his gaze wasn't on her. “No,” he told her honestly.

“Then good luck.” She finally met his eyes. “I really hope you find what you're looking for.” Trixie's eyes closed as Jake did something he hadn't done in a long time. He kissed her forehead. “Tell Daisy to check on her bandages often,” were her last words to him before she closed the door behind him.

When it was closed, she walked over and sat on the couch and sat there silently for several moments. Jerry cooed as he watched his mother bring her free hand up and cover her face. He felt her body begin to shake, almost violently as she tried, but failed miserably, to hold back her cries. Then finally, she stop trying, and cried loudly as she held her son closer. Jerry leaned his head against her, his arms around her as he stayed silent, allowing his mother to find the little comfort that he tried to provided. Even at such a tender age, he knew the reasoning behind all these tears all too well. . . daddy had made mommy cry again.

Finally, when she had no more tears to shed, she reached for the phone beside her. "Hello, Gregory?"

OoOoO

Jake lingered in the shadows, behind a large cylinder support beam, hidden from site, inside of an office building parking garage. Daisy leaned on the supporter as well, but on the other side where the light was abundant. Jake looked at his watch. "We've been here for over an hour," he whispered to Daisy. "He's not coming. We should just cut our loses," he suggested.

"Ten more minutes," Daisy asked of him, her tone almost desperate. "Just ten more minutes, please."

"Fine," he agreed. "But if in ten minutes no one-" he stopped abruptly.

Daisy slightly turned her head towards him, still not able to see him from where she stood. "What is it?" she asked him softly.

Jake tilted his head upward and sniffed the air. "Goblins," he replied.

"Ms. Hunter, I presume," came a voice from across the garage as he made his way towards the blonde woman.

"Yes, I am Hunter," Daisy stated as she made her way towards the goblin, covered from head to toe as not be discovered by any other human. "Do you have what you have promised me?" she asked.

The goblin reached into his coat and pulled out a large yellow envelope. "I have it all," he told her. "And you?" he snatched the envelope away as Daisy reached out for it.

She narrowed her eyes angrily with the gesture. "Of course I do." She then reached into her back pocket and pulled out what looked, from Jake's point a view, a bundle of credit cards. "Untraceable," she added before each made their trade.

"Good luck to you, Hunter," the goblin bid before starting to walk away.

"To you as well," she wished before he disappeared as quickly as he arrived.

A moment later, Jake appeared from his hiding place to find Daisy opening the her package. "What was that all about?" Jake asked, curious about her last statement to the goblin.

"Nothing to concern yourself about," she ignored the question as she pulled something out of the package. Jake watched as she slowly brought her hand to her mouth as her usually stern expression grew soft.

Jake then looked over her shoulder and found an image of someone who looked exactly like Daisy. "Is that. . ." he could bring himself to finish the question.

“Yes.” Daisy nodded. “It’s Rose.” She then flipped through the remaining pictures. “Here,” she passed the pictures to Jake when she was finished and reached back into the package inside were two passports and a piece of paper folded into threes. She opened it up and read it. When she was done, she turned to Jake, who was fondly still long at the pictures of Rose. “Go home and pack, Long,” she instructed. “We leave for Australia tonight.”

Jake's head snapped up. “Australia? That's clear across the world.”

“Well, that's were we'll find Rose,” she informed him.

“And how long would we be gone?” he asked.

“As long as it takes to find her,” was her answer.

Jake shook his head. “I don't know if I can leave Trixie and Jerry for that long,” he expressed his concerns.

“Alright, I understand,” she nodded as she began to hold her side. “You have a family to see to, but Rose is mine. So with or without you, Jake, I'm leaving tonight.”

Jake lowered his head. She was right before, she wasn't Rose, there was no way she would survive traveling alone, not when her face was so familiar in the magically world. And then there was were his own selfish reasons. He had searched this long for Rose and now he was on the verge of finding her. He couldn't let his opportunity slip through his fingers. “Fine,” he agreed. “I'll come with you.”

Daisy smiled at him, truly grateful. “Thank you.” She then pulled out her cell phone. “I'm calling my pilot. Meet me at JFK in two hours, okay?” Jake nodded before she walked away.

Jake then pulled out his own cell phone and called Trixie. He told her he and Daisy had a lead on Rose and that they were heading out that very night. He asked her to pack a suitcase for him so save some time. She agreed.

OoOoO

“Trixie?” Jake called out when he arrived, but then cringed, realizing it was past Jerry's bedtime. He hoped he hadn't woken him up as he made his way down the hall towards the bedroom as he noticed it was kind of quiet. “Trix?” he spoke.

“I'm here, Jake,” she replied as he finally entered the room to find her simply sitting on the bed facing him.

On the bed, behind her, sat two suitcases. “I thought I said I only needed one?” he asked, positive he had told her that over the phone, yet she knew how he always managed to over pack when he had to do it himself.

"I did only pack you one." She turned slightly and placed her hand on one of the suitcases. "This one is your. I put about two weeks of clothes in here for you," she told.

Jake was confused. "Then what's with the other one?" he asked.

Trixie sighed, before looking up at Jake. "That one's mine."

Jake shook his head as he thought he realized what was going on. "You're not coming with me, Trix," he made clear.

"I didn't plan on to," she corrected him.

"Then why. . ."

Trixie then said the last words any married man wanted to hear from his wife. "Jakey, I want a divorce."

"Say what? You're not serious." He made his way over to her and she stood. "That's not what I want."

"I know, but it's what I want," she said.

"Alright," Jake said slowly as he took Trixie by the arms and guided her back to the bed to sit down. "Let's slow down a bit and talk about this."

Trixie scoffed. "Now, you want to talk? After you've done nothing but ignore me and push me to the side? Now?"

"Trix." Jake got down on one knee in front of her, his hands still on her arms. "Okay, I know I'm not perfect, I admit that, but we have gone through too much to let this fall apart."

Trixie shook her head, taking Jake's hands off of her as she did so. "I don't want to hear it. We have become no more than a broken record. We tried, we did, but we just have to realize this was a bad idea from the start. A marriage can't work without love," she explained. "You don't love me and I don't-" she stopped, realizing long ago her feelings for Jake. "And I don't want cry over you anymore." She lowered her head shielding her eyes from him as they bled tears. "So just give me my divorce, please," she begged.

"No, I refuse to let you go," Jake told her.

Trixie wiped away her tears, her eyes sad, but angry as she looked into husband's. "You can't have your cake and eat it too, Jake. What are going to do when you find Rose?" she asked, causing Jake's head to slightly jerk back. He hadn't thought of that, of what would happen when he finally found her. "Do you honestly think you, me, Jerry, and Rose are going to be one big happy family? Well it doesn't work like that! I will not be your fool!" She then stood, grabbing her suitcase. "I've been it long enough."

"You? My fool?" Jake stood as well, his tone darker than before. "If anyone has been anyone's fool, I have been yours!" Jake yelled. "My grandfather doesn't even speak to me anymore! My father refuses to look me in the eye! He still doesn't even acknowledge Jerry and how can I blame him? *Everyone*



knows he not mine, but I go on pretending I don't see it!"

Trixie swiftly turned towards him. "Don't you dare put that one me, Jake Long. You are the one who went telling everyone he was yours after I told you not too. You are the one who wanted this marriage and then talked me into it," she set the record straight. "This isn't what I wanted and you know it! You just didn't want-" she cut herself off knowing she was about to go too far.

"Finish it," Jake demanded in a low voice. "What didn't I want?"

"You just didn't want to be alone," she told him softly. "Before I got pregnant with Jerry, you knew of my plans of going to Kingsborough and then transferring out to California. You were okay with it then, because you still had Spud, but then when he left," she placed a hand on her chest, "I'm what you got stuck with."

"That's not it," he told her. "I don't feel stuck with you," he tried to explain. "Don't you know how big a part of my life you are? Do you think I could have gotten through half the shoot I got myself into without you?"

"You would have been fine, you're the American Dragon," she told him.

"That doesn't mean I'm invincible," he admitted. "I need you, Trix."

"I know how that feels," she told him. "Now let me show you another feeling." She picked up her suitcase, causing Jake to look at her curiously. "This is how it feels, when the person you need, chooses not to care." Jake found he could only watch as Trixie walked pass him and though the next words out of her mouth were words he had heard many times before, they had no greater meaning then they did now, ". . . *Goodbye, Jake.*"

To Be Continued. . .

# 19 - The Same

## Chapter Nineteen: The Same

Daisy Hunter looked at her companion curiously from where she sat on her private plane. They had been in the air for three hours now and he hadn't said a single word to her since they had boarded. All he had done was either one of two things. He was either looking out the window into the night sky, or staring at a photo he had in his hand, consisting of him and his wife when they were younger.

She could tell that something was upsetting him, but didn't know if he would take offense if she asked if something was wrong. "Long?" she finally thought it would be best to say something. She waited for him to look at her before she spoke again. "You've been kind of quiet. Is everything alright?"

"Yeah," he sounded so tired to her ears. "Everything is fine," he told her, but then closed his eyes as he began to shake his head. "That's a lie," he admitted with a sigh. He then looked back down at his photo. "I think- I think I've just sacrificed more than I was willing to lose," he said. Daisy waited for him to continue, but instead he only turned his head back around and looked out the window once more.

As he stared out the window, what had occurred between him and Trixie ran like a movie through his mind. It constantly rewound and played again. Reminding him of one simple fact. . .

OoOoO

"Wait!" Jake quickly moved forward, his tail appearing and wrapping around Trixie's waist tightly as his outstretched fingers had missed her.

She shrieked in surprise as she dropped the handle of the suitcase and was pulled closer to Jake. "Let go!" she demanded.

Jake did as he was asked, his tail dissolving as he loosened it from around her. "You have to remember, that you and I aren't alone in this marriage," he reminded her. "What about Jerry?" he paused for a moment. "What about our son?" Trixie's expression softened for a moment, before reading of suspicion. Jake had never referred to Jerry as his when they were alone, and when he had, he wasn't Jake. So Trixie stared deeply into his eyes looking for any signs of falsehood, but found none. "I mean," his head fell, "I know, I probably have no right to ask, but will I be able – I mean, will you allow me—" he didn't know how to form his question.

"Jake," she interrupted him. "All I want is a divorce, not a custody battle," she explained. "As far as I'm concerned, you are Jerry's dad. You can come and see him whenever. . . if you want to."

"I do, I want to see him," Jake responded softly. "And you too," he added.

"Know, just because this didn't work out, doesn't mean I hate you or something. Friends for life and friends for real," she reassured him as she gave him a lopsided smile. "But I should really get going now," she told him. "And you have a plane to catch."

"Of course," he nodded his head. He then took a few steps towards the door. "I uh I just want to see Jerry before you leave, alright?"

"What?" Trixie, who had once again reached for her fallen luggage, looked up a bit confused as she watched Jake walk out the door and across the hall. "Jake, wait." She followed after him.

Jake froze in the doorway of Jerry's room after turning on the light. He had wondered why during all their yelling Jerry hadn't woken up and as he saw the empty crib the answer became obviously clear. Jake slowly turned his head when he heard Trixie approach him. His eyes narrowed with his question. "Where's Jeremiah?"

"He's not here," she answered. "After you left, I called Gregory and he came to pick him up."

Jake walked over to the crib and tossed the blanket aside as if what she just told him was a lie. "How could you?" He looked at her in disbelief when he turned around to fully face her. "How could you allow him to march in here, like he owned the place, and take that child from this home?"

Trixie shook her head as she took a small step forward. "This has never been a true home," she stated her opinion.

"How- how can you say that to me?" Jake practically yelled, unshed tears glistened in his eyes, as his blood boiled within his veins. "We were a family, dammit!" Jake felt as if his world was falling from beneath his feet. Everything was happening much too fast.

"That can't be what you actually called this," she spoke softly. "I mean, Jesus, has there been a day, were you haven't thought about Rose, or a day I haven't longed for Spud to come back? If we were really a family, we would be the only thing on each other's mind, but we aren't," she explained. "And I'm tired of pretending," she admitted. "I want something real, Jake, and you can't give that to me. You've refuse to time and time again. I'm tired of it."

Jake stood silent for a moment before coming to his own conclusion. "This is Gregory's doing, isn't it?"

"It's Gregory," she corrected him. "And no, this has nothing to with him. This is about me, Jake. Me," she emphasized.

Jake spoke as if he hadn't heard her. "He's gone and turned you against me," he was convinced.

"He's done no such thing," she protested. "This has been on my mind since before Gregory even came into the picture," she admitted.

"I won't lose you to him," Jake's voice became unfamiliar to the woman before him. "Jerry is mine," he

spat. "You are mine." Trixie was dumbfounded for a moment. She had never heard him speak like this before. Jake then took her long silence as an admission. "What I said was true, wasn't it?" he inquired. "You would let him get away with anything. Like him convincing you to leave me or coming in here and taking my son!" he yelled.

"Okay, Jake," Trixie lifted her hand, wanting to soothe him. "Maybe you should calm down a little," she advised.

"What else did you let him do, huh?" Jake demanded to know as he took a few steps towards her and grabbed her arm. Trixie's eyes went wide as she took in how angry he had become. His hands slowly began to turn red as dark, black claws broke from underneath his nails. This, sadly, was something she was used to, but what she saw next, was not. His eyes, once the color of a moonless night, burned bright and intensely, but somehow it was more than just that. It was then she realized that they were truly on fire as they bore into hers. Jake's nostrils flared as smoke escaped from them. "Answer me!" he shook her roughly, but Trixie still could not find it within herself to speak. "Did you invite him into our room?" She frantically shook her head no. "Did you allow him to frack you our bed, again? Did you like it?" His grip tighten with each question.

"Jake!" Trixie finally cried out as she found her voice, tears screamed down her face as she covered under his rage. "Please," she begged as she tugged at where he had taken a hold of her. "You're breaking my arm!"

"And you're breaking my heart!" he countered.

"Let go!" Trixie began to struggle harder against him, until she was able to break free, but her freedom was short lived as she had only managed to take a few steps back before she saw Jake's claws reach out for her again. She stumbled back, losing her footing as she tried to avoid his touch.

Jake did not miss his target, but gravity had already taken its effect and he fall along with her. Trixie cried out in pain as her head hit the hardwood floor before she felt the weight of Jake's body on top of her. "Please," her voice came out weakly as she begged him. Her head throbbed as black and white spots rapidly swam in her vision. She placed her hand on Jake's chest. "Don't," the word was barely audible.

Jake snatched her hand away, taking both of her wrists as he pinned them to either side of her head. "Don't what?" he asked as he looked down at her. "Isn't this the very place, where you told me to give in to temptation?"

"No," she lied.

"Isn't this the place, where you wanted me to be your husband?" he inquired. "And take you the way only a husband should?"

"Jakey," tears raced from her eyes as she spoke. "Don't do this," she begged of him.

"Don't do what?" he asked.

"Don't hurt me," she sobbed.

"Don't. . ." Jake's angry face soften as he watched Trixie break down underneath him, "hurt you?" It was then that he realized how his actions must have appeared to her. It had never been his intention to hurt her. He just wanted her to know how betrayed he felt as she had chosen that back stabbing, snot-nosed, poor excuse for a dragon, he called his cousin, over him. But then again, hadn't he done the same thing when it came to Rose? Hadn't he knowingly turned his back on her? Jake then remembered the last real conversation he had had with his grandfather. . .

*"Jake, my boy, tell me," he began. "Do you love Trixie?" he asked.*

*Jake turned his torso and looked at his grandfather in disbelief. "Of course I do," he told him. "She's my best friend, I do anything for her," he said honestly.*

*"That is not what I asked," the older man said to him. "I do not mean the love one friend has for another. I mean, do you love her in a way a man is suppose to love a woman?"*

*Jake frowned as he thought over the question. "What does that have to do with anything?"*

*"Why do you avoid the question?" Lao Shi looked at him oddly. "Trust me, Jake, no matter how honorable you think you are being by marrying Trixie, if your heart is with someone else, your marriage is already doomed to fail," he told him sadly. "I know how strongly you felt about Rose-*

*"I don't want to talk about Rose," Jake interrupted his grandfather quietly. "She isn't a part of my life anymore. She hasn't shown her face in a year and I wouldn't care less if I ever saw her again," Jake made clear. "So if you really want an answer, than yes, I love Trixie and once we're married no woman will come before her."*

*Lao Shi sighed. "You were always a horrible liar, Jake."*

Jake realized then that he had broken a promise. A promise he had made himself for her. He had promised to never let her fall, but he had, and he had done more than than. Because he hadn't just simply let her fall, he purposely dropped her and than only watched.

Jake looked at his hands, so lost in his anger that he didn't notice that his human form had been slipping. He then looked back down at his wife, reading the fear that clearly marked her features. She was afraid of him. . .

Tear rose back to Jake's eyes as he finally released her. "Trixie, I," he had begun, but got no further, for as soon as she felt him rise, she desperately backed away from him, her back hitting the wall. Jake's chest ache painfully at the reaction. The look in her eyes as she looked at him was unbearable. "Baby girl, please. I'm sorry," he tried to offer.

"Don't touch me," was her response as she quickly tried to wipe away her tears, ashamed of them. "You're a bastard," she told him. "And I hate you," she hissed as more tears wet her cheeks. "And I never want to see you again." Then, before Jake could say another word, she rose and ran out the room.

"Trixie, wait!" Jake cried, as he got up off his knees and ran after her, but Trixie paid him no mind as she slammed the front door behind her with a resounding smack.

Jake froze in his tracks as he watched the front door close and for a time all he found he could do was stare at it. Jake then brought his hand up to cover his face as he began to weep. He then fell to his knees as his tears had weighted him down and he cried like he had never done so in his life.

The memory played over and over again, reminding Jake of one simple fact, when he came back. . . *nothing would ever be the same.*

To Be Continued. . .

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**A/N:** Alright, has everyone seen "Love Cruise"? I just actually saw it for the first time like two days ago.

Who thought the best part of the episode was when Jake said, "I'm sorry Rose, but I won't lose you to Brad."? And then he shot her?!

To me it seems that Jake is a very emotional person and he seems to be led by them. It also appears that he isn't all there at those times, if you ask me. I mean, come on, boy went all up in arms over some imaginary smoke enemy over an imaginary smoke Rose. Repeat it with me now:

*Issues. . .*

Anyway, I hope you've enjoyed the Jake/Trixie part of this story as Trixie joins Spud in a temporary exit. But don't worry, Trixie and Jake still have plenty of problems to deal with when he returns. And I don't know about you guys, but I would love to see things come to a head between Jake and Gregory. I can't wait to get to that part. I smell a beat down! ;-D

Then after this short Rose story arc (fears short will be a lot longer than she thinks), you may expect the return of King Arthur. I'm still a little sad over the fact of his name. I so wanted to call him Emperor Ezekiel. :-(

Alright, I think I may have to take a break from this story for a little while, I got five other WIP stories, which I have neglected terribly. Plus, I have to work out the Rose arc. Actually, to be honest, I have to *come up* with a Rose arc. ++Blushes++ I have only worked out what will happen after she's returned to America.

Oh, and if you haven't noticed, the episode "HOMECOMING" does not, I repeat ***DOES NOT*** exist in this world. Usually, I can blend new information from a show into a story, but damn, if "Homecoming" didn't knock me off my feet.

## 20 - Best of the Huntsclan

### Chapter Twenty: Best of the Huntsclan

A nineteen year old Jake Long sighed heavily as he stared up at the roof of the five star hotel he and Daisy were staying in. It was late and he knew he should have been sleeping, but sleep hadn't come easy to him in the last four months since he had left Trixie and Jerry. Every time he closed his eyes, he could swear he could feel her beside him, smell her as if she were there. And it always hurt, just a little, to open his eyes only to realize his mind was playing tricks on him.

He turned over and faced towards the window as he tucked his arm underneath his pillow. He had tried calling her, a few weeks after he had left. It had been her birthday, and it had been a long day as a lead on Rose had left him emptied handed. He just needed Trixie's comforting words, but they were far from what he got. He had called Trixie's cell, and was not pleased when Gregory picked up the phone.

"I don't want you calling her," Gregory told him.

Jake scoffed. "Excuse me? I think I'll call my wife whenever I damn well please," he responded.

"Oh, so she's your wife now, huh?" Gregory began. "After you abandon her and your kid?"

"That's not what I did!" Jake said angry.

"Yeah, sure," the other said sarcastically. "And I bet you're also going to tell me, you didn't try to rape her either."

Jake froze a moment at the words. "What?"

"Yeah, she told me." Gregory then thought over his words. "Look, I don't condone your behavior about that night, but I do understand-

"Bullshoot!" Jake cut him off. "You have no idea how I feel. Trixie was not only my wife, but my best friend! Since grade school." He sighed softly, his voice breaking a little as he continued to speak. "I would have never done that to you."

"I'm sorry," Gregory said sincerely. "Look, I never meant to you, you're my blood," he confessed. "You don't know the things I have done for you-

"You mean to me," Jake interrupted again.

"For you," Gregory made clear. "It took a lot to make sure you weren't arrested by DOS, I put my job on the line for you! And then you go fled the country, for no apparent good reason. There's nothing I can do for you now. You're status as the American Dragon has been revoked. Haley has taken your place and has been given orders as well as with the rest of DOS, if you are seen on State soil. . ." he took a deep

breath. "You are to be arrested without hesitation. "

Jake found himself shaking his head from side to side, his own troubles on the back burner as it was overpowered by another thought, Haley isn't ready.

"So as your cousin, I'm telling you, you're better off staying where you are."

"Don't you dare pretend you give a damn about me now. You already got what you wanted from me," Jake pointed out.

Gregory frowned at the statement. "You're right I do," his tone turned dark. "So putting the fact that you're my cousin aside – I'm telling you this once: Don't call here again. Trixie and Jerry are no longer your concern, so stay away from my family."

"Your family?!" Jake was outraged, but before he could truly give Gregory a piece of his mind, all he heard was the dial tone. He had tried calling back after that on several occasions, but the number had been disconnected.

Jake stared at the 1st birthday card sitting on the nightstand. Jerry's birthday was next month in January. He didn't want to send it to Gregory's place in fear that Jerry would never receive it. He decided to send it to Haley, with no return address, with hopes that Trixie would see that he made attempt to say in touch.

Jake couldn't help but wonder if Trixie was still upset with him. He still couldn't get over how angry he had gotten that night, it was so unlike him, but he promised, as soon as he settled what he needed to with Rose, that he would make it up to her, or die trying. With that thought, Jake finally closed his eyes and fell into the land of dreams and nightmares.

OoOoO

Fred Nerk, the Australian Dragon, yawned as he flew over the city lights of his beloved home in Sidney. Being the first dragon to be assigned to protect his country, Fred took great pride in what he did and so took his job very seriously. A few months ago, he had gotten word from the World Dragon Council about a fugitive among the Magical World. He was surprised to find out that it was his American mate, Jake Long. There were rumors that he was in his part of the world, but Fred was sure that they were nothing more than just rumors. What did he need in Australia, right?

A few weeks after he received that message, he was surprised to find Jake trying to make contact with him, asking him if he could trust him. Fred reminded him that he once saved his life and so he had not only his friendship, but his loyalty, even if that meant going against the Dragon Council. Jake was relieved to hear his words.

Fred listen as Jake told him how he was going after someone in the Huntsclan, Fred immediately stopped him right there. "The Huntsclan?" Fred couldn't believe his ears. "Jake, no one has heard from the Huntsclan in over five years."



"I know," Jake made clear. "They were wiped out." He shrugged as he added, "All but a handful that is."

"How do you know?" Fred asked.

"Let's just say," he sighed, "sometimes, wishes do come true." Fred had no idea what the man before him was talking about, but he decided not to push the issue, as Jake didn't seem up to it anyway.

"So what you're really trying to tell me, is that there are Huntsclan members here in Australia?" Fred asked, humoring Jake.

"Members? I don't know," he began. "But there's a girl, who was once known as Thorn. I'm looking for her and it's very important that I find her," he said.

"What do you want me to do?" Fred wanted to know.

"Nothing more than you usually do. Just keep an eye out for anything suspicious or out of the ordinary," he asked of him. "I can't be caught, so I'll be keeping a low profile, but this is your home, you probably know it better than anyone. I just need your help."

Fred nodded as he listened to his friend. "Then you have it," he said, causing Jake to smile, something Fred was sure he hadn't done in a good long while as he returned his smile. "So how's Trixie?" he asked innocently, realizing it may have been the wrong thing to say as Jake's expression change rapidly.

"She's fine," he informed him. "She and Gregory are doing great from what I hear. Very happy," he stressed. He then lowered his head and spoke softly. "One big happy family." He twisted his wedding band around his finger.

"Jake?" Fred reached out for him and placed a hand on his shoulder. "What happened?" he asked.

"My grandfather was right," Jake finally admitted. "I wasn't ready for marriage. I didn't understand the work that it required. I-" he felt his chest tighten. "I gave her everything she needed, and what she wanted was something I could have given, but wouldn't. And she left me for it."

"For Gregory?" Jake nodded at the question.

"When we were kids, people always praised him, even when he wasn't very good. I used to wipe the skies with him and never got more than a 'Good job'. I could never understand it, but now I do." Jake looked back up at Fred. "Things always came so easy to me, I didn't have to put a lot of effort into anything when it came to my abilities. But Gregggy, he struggled. They praised him because he tried, because he gave it his all, even when it was hard. That's what made him better than me." Jake finally saw what the rest of his mother's side of the family saw. "And when it came to marriage, to my wife. . . I dropped the ball, I dropped her, but he was able to pick up the pieces and put them back together, when I refused to try."

Fred only listened as Jake poured out his heart about his cheating his wife and why it was his own fault.

Fred wanted to tell him it was okay, but knew they were only words at this point. Fred sighed as he thought about the other's situation. He honestly didn't know what he would do, if he ever found his girl cheating on him, but lucky, that was something he didn't have to worry about.

He yawned again, finally concluding that it was late and that he should finally start to head home, but his wings were aching and thought it would be a good idea to rest them for a few minutes before starting the long trip in the opposite direction. He land right in the middle of the street, with no fear of being seen as he changed back into his human form. Even if someone did see him, they would probably just convince themselves that they were tired and that they just really needed some sleep.

Fred jogged on over to the sidewalk before sticking his thumbs in his pockets and walking towards home. December, the start of the summer, Fred couldn't help but love this time of the year. The city always seem to come more alive during the warm summer months.

Suddenly, as Fred was thinking about nothing in particular, he heard a strange sound behind him. He didn't think much of it, but he slightly turned his head anyway, when he didn't hear the sound again, he simply continued his walk. But now he felt uneasy as he now heard the sound of footsteps that didn't seem to be his own. He quickly turned around, but once again saw nothing.

“Okay, old boy, you're losing it,” he said softly to himself as he took a few more steps when he heard a trashcan fall over between an alleyway. His eyes quickly scanned the empty streets. He saw nothing but what was highlighted by the streetlights. “Show yourself!” he demanded loudly as he readied himself. He then saw a black cat jump from out of the alleyway. Fred chuckled to himself as he relaxed. He then went to turned around. He gasped as two figures appeared out of no where.

He had no time to react as he suddenly found himself on the ground. “Oh hell yeah!” one cried out joyfully.

Fred let out a feral growl before bright yellow and orange flames blasted in every direction as he turned from human to dragon. “Let me out!” he struggled with the net that he had been surprised with. He scratched and clawed at it, but it made no difference. He even tried extending his wings, but the netting only seem to become tighter.

“Fight all you want,” said the taller of the two figures dressed in matching outfits of red and black. “It only makes it easier for us when you wear yourself out.”

The shorter one than pulled out a small cylinder like object with a spear like end. He held it in front of him and each side extended turning it into fully functioning spear. “I vote we slit his throat.”

“That's not the plan,” the other reminded him. “Hey!” he yelled out, but was ignored as he watched his partner stab the trapped dragon in their capture. “Eighty-eight, stop! That's not cool!”

“I just wanted to see it bleed,” Eighty-eight face remained emotionless as he watched Fred take a hold of his arm, blood spilling from in between his claws.

Eighty-nine shivered, he hated when Eighty-eight went all psycho-like on him. He then walked over to him and stood next to him. “We have to take him back to the lair,” Eighty-nine said calmly. “We can't

question him if he's dead," he reasoned.

"Question me? For what?" Fred spoke.

Eighty-eight then spit in his face. "You filthy beast, don't speak to us." He then brought the spear head to his face and licked the blood that resided there. The 'Eww' expression on Eighty-nine's face did not go unnoticed by Fred.

"You're right," Eighty-eight replied to Eighty-nine's last statement. "We'll take him to the lair." His eyes did not leave the wound he had made on the dragon in front of him.

"Who are you?" Fred demanded to know, anger clear in his eyes as he continued to struggle against the netting, as he wonder what it was made out of. It couldn't be sphinx hair, which rendered a dragon powerless, for he was in dragon form, but whatever it was it was strong and constricting with every movement.

"Fool, don't you know who we are?" Eighty-eight asked.

"Yeah, Dragon boy, you better recognize, and quickly, because we," Eighty-nine pointed to himself and then his companion, ". . . are the best of the Huntsclan."

To Be Continued. . .

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**A/N:** Best of the Huntsclan? Eighty-eight and Eighty-nine? Yes, I know that's a little hard to shallow, but trust me, I'll make it work.

Oh and for those who really didn't catch it as they were reading, Jake was born in June (but I think I only hinted that it was in the summer. Oh well!), Trixie in September, Jerry in January, and Spud was born in March. Just because I'm anal and I have to do my stories using a calender. :-)

--Insert Shameless Self Plug Here-- I got a new ADJL story out entitled, No Good Deed. It's a -wait for it- Trixie and Brad story. Now all I need is a Spud and Rose story (which is probably the only pairing I don't touch in this epic tale) and my madness will be complete. Mmwahaha!

# 21 - So Bright

## Chapter Twenty-one: So Bright

Number Eighty-nine smiled as he heard the sound of children around the corner as he walked down the hall. They gasped and looked almost frighten as the three of them practically ran into him, but seeing his kind smile relaxed them. "Sorry, Huntsman," said the eldest, who was about eleven years old.

"It's almost time for light's out," the sixteen year old, Eighty-nine informed them. He watched as each nodded and made their way to their own respective quarters. Eighty-nine continued on his way down the hall. It had been almost five years since the Huntsclan that he knew had been wiped out by a single, blood red dragon. But what the dragon hadn't realized was that though he had basically wiped anyone who had been an official member of the Huntsclan then, it did not effect those who had quit and those who were not old enough to enter the academy at the time.

New Huntsclan members were being born everyday. In fact, those who had a member of their family born with the purple dragon birthmark, whom had disappeared, didn't find it hard at all to hand over their children born with the mark. One instance stood out clearly in Eight-nine's mind as he remembered one mother who kissed her five year old daughter on the forehead tenderly before whispering, "You were born, with the same mark as my brother, Lexus," she informed her child as she touched the dragon on Lexus' neck. "He was taken away from us unjustly, and though I can do nothing, you can." The young child seem to understand completely. "Learn fast and learn well. Avenge my brother, and do our clan proud."

The little girl then stepped backwards until she gently ran into Eighty-nine who took both of her shoulders as she looked up at him. He gave her a reassuring smile before he then looked to her mother. "I knew your brother, he was my teacher," he admitted. "I'll make sure Lexus learns everything he taught me."

The mother rose back to her feet. She looked over Eighty-nine very carefully. "You're such a tiny thing." He cocked an eyebrow at such a demeaning comment. "How did you survive such powerful magic when one as powerful and as knowledgeable as my brother did not?" she asked.

Eighty-nine's head jerked as he heard the question. He then lowered his gaze from her, unable to answer her question. "I hope you are through with your goodbyes, we leave for the Academy in five minutes," was all he said before walking away, Lexus at his heels. Eighty-nine knew very well why he and Eighty-eight had survived. . . and they spent everyday trying to make it up to their fallen brothers and sisters.

He sighed as he finally came to his quarters, ready to finally hit the sack after a very long night. His room was dark as he entered and closed the door behind him. He heard a creek from the corner. "Who's there?" he demanded, immediately drawing his weapon.

"Who else would be waiting for you?" came the voice, slightly irritated.

Eighty-nine instantly relaxed as he slightly turned and reached for the light switch. "Dammit, Eric!" he scowled at Eighty-eight. "You know I hate it when you do that."

Eric rose from the bed, he was dressed in his pajamas, as he made his way over to the other. "Come on, Kaden," he whispered. "You know that's not true, you like it when I wait for you." He stood close as he ran his fingers up Kaden's stomach and chest before reaching up and pulling off his mask. Kaden slightly shook his head as his brown curly hair came free.

Eric, being a few inches shorter, tilted his head up as he grabbed the back of Kaden's head and basically forced him into a kiss. Any other night, Kaden would have delighted in one of Eric's rare kisses, but tonight was a different story. "Stop!" Kaden pushed him away.

Eric looked at him curiously. "What?"

Kaden only shook his head as he sidestepped Eric and picked up his mask from the floor before walking over to his dresser. "I hate it when you get like this," he told him softly, his back to him.

"Get like what?" Eric didn't understand.

Kaden turned around. "Like this!" he gestured wildly with his hands. He then only stared at the other for a moment. "You- you kind of scare me a little," he confessed, his neck turning a shade of red. "With your behavior," he clarified.

"My behavior?" Eric looked offended. "You've been acting weird since we caught that filth earlier," he pointed out. "All worried over someone who doesn't mean shoot."

"That's not it!" Kaden defended himself. "We have to stick to the plan, if we don't-"

"What?" Eric interrupted him. "The world as we know it is going to end?" He stepped closer. "I don't know, if you've noticed, but that's already happened."

"You're too obsessed with the past," Kaden stated matter-of-factly. "You got to let it go. You're allowing it to eat at you and I don't like what it's leaving behind," he told him. "You're angry all the time, Eric, and when you're not, it's kind of like you're not there at all."

Eric didn't know what to say, but he knew one thing for sure, *he was angry*. "Don't you dare stand there and lecture me about the past!" he demanded of the other. "At least I have changed. You're still just a silly little boy, who doesn't realize what is expected of us!"

"Hey!" Kaden yelled back. "I know we're not children anymore, but that's no reason to start acting like an asshole!"

Eric looked hurt by the comment. "You think I'm a asshole?" His brow then furrowed. "I bet you think I'm a coward too, huh?"

“Eric. . .” Kaden said softly, but Eric only shook his head as he lifted his hand indicating he didn't want to hear anymore.

“I'm going to bed.” Eric turned around and headed towards the door and opened it.

“Wait!” Kaden rushed to him and grabbed his hand as he was halfway through the door. “Stay with me tonight,” he asked of him.

Eric turned his head and looked directly into Kaden's brown eyes. “What's the point?” was all he said before his hand slipped out of Kaden's and he disappeared down the hall.

OoOoO

Eric plopped down on his bed before turning his head and staring at the wall. “Have I really changed that much?” He couldn't help but to wonder out loud. But Kaden had been right, they weren't children anymore, after what happened with the Huntsclan several years ago, they were forced to grow up and grow up fast. They had to be each other's teacher as they learned of their history and why the Huntsclan had come to be. They had to teach each other to fight and to rely on each other. They had too, if they wanted a decent chance to rebuild what they once had. It had become very clear than that they didn't have time or the luxury for the childish things they used to do.

Then, when all seemed lost, she came waltzing back into her lives. She had not been pleased with their cowardice and she voiced it out loud. Kaden, who was always just a little outspoken, told her she was no better than they were. She who had fallen in love with the enemy. “Maybe,” she had began. “But when push came to shove, even after learning about my family, I stood by the Huntsclan. I didn't run off and quick like scared dog with my tail in between my legs.” The argument ended there.

But trust did not follow, Rose wanted them to demonstrate their loyalty and they wanted the same in return. Kaden, knowing he and Eric weren't full pledge members yet until they slayed a dragon, suggested that, not knowing that Rose, hadn't slain one either. Eric then suggested something he thought they could all agree on. He suggested the American Dragon, the one who had caused their downfall. He then turned to Rose waiting for her to object.

And object she did, saying that going after the American Dragon, would put an end to them before they began. He was a popular figure in the magical world, his death would not only cause unrest, but they would be seen as targets, and with their numbers so few, it just wasn't a bright idea. Eric and Rose glared at each other.

Kaden then suggested an alternative, that in turn would change the course of everyone's lives. “Then we target his family.” Neither Eric nor Rose objected, though Rose did look on the verge, she said nothing.

And so they kidnapped his mother, Susan Long, but Eric had been careless, he had lost his phone. Not realizing it until Susan had made a desperate call to her son. “They're going to kill me!” were the last words she said to him, before Eric was able to take back what was his.

In the end, Rose had been faced with holding off two dragons, the American Dragon and his Dragon Master, while Kaden had been faced with fighting the tiny purplish/pink dragon by the name of Haley as she had made her way to where the American Dragon's mother had been kept.

It was a skilled fighter, that Eric would give it, but it was weak and small compared to the American Dragon they had faced before, Kaden held her off well. She was so distracted with getting passed Kaden, that she never noticed Eric's pretense, that is not until, "Haley!" yelled Susan. "Watch out!" But it was too late, Eric had taken her by surprise from behind and she was out like a light as she hit the waters of the sewers below her. "Haley!" Susan cried again, but received no answer.

Moments later, both Eric and Kaden stood before Susan in her tight little cage, their spears in hand. Eric shallowed hard, his hands sweaty as what he was about to completely donned on him.

"Together, okay?" Kaden raised his spear and stuck it in between the bars of the cage and pointed it towards Susan's heart, who did not look at them as her eyes were still on the waters, waiting for Haley to resurface. Eric nodded at Kaden's words as he followed his lead. "Ready?" Kaden asked softly as he looked to his partner. Eric once again only nodded. "Now!" he shouted as the tip of his spear disappeared into the flesh of the woman before him.

"NOOOOOOO!" came the shriek of the tiny dragon.

"Haley," were Susan's last words, a small, sad smile on her face at the relief that her daughter was still alive before she closed her eyes and lowered her head to never wake again. The small dragon charged at them, tears in her eyes as she fought once more with Kaden with everything she had. Eric could do nothing but stand there as he looked upon the dead woman in front of him, his spear was still pointed towards her, but it was still clean. At the last moment, he couldn't bring himself to do it.

"Retreat!" Eric's head whipped around as he heard the voice of Rose. The young boys did as they were told, knowing they would not be followed as they jumped on their Huntsclan motorcycles and sped off. . .

Eric groaned as he turned to his side and readjusted his pillow underneath his head. After that night, Kaden refused to look at him for a week. When Eric finally cornered him and made him speak to him, he had not been prepared for the other's words. "You made me do it alone!" he cried. "Do you know what it is like to watch someone's life slip away and know you're the cause of it?" He shook his head. "No, of course you don't. Her eyes don't haunt your dreams."

"I'm sorry," was all Eric could say, not really able to look upon Kaden's face.

"Yeah," Kaden walked passed him, "you are."

Eric immediately sat up when he heard a knock from the other side of his door. "Who is it?" he called out.

"It's me," said none other than the formerly named Eighty-nine of the Huntsclan. "Are you going to open the door. Some of the cadets are still out and I don't want them to see me." Kaden was very shy about the type of relationship he had with his partner.

Eric debated whether or not he wanted to let him in. He then hopped off his bed and went to unlock his door. He opened it slightly and peered out to see Kaden, with his mask back on, outside. "What do you want?" he asked.

"What I said before," he began. "Maybe I overreacted," he offered. "Just a little. I mean, you were only trying to. . ." he trailed off before he nervously looked around. "Just let me in." Eric took pity on him as he finally stepped back and fully opened his door to the other. "You're not a coward," Kaden made a point of saying. "And I would never call you one," he assured him.

Eric walked back over to his bed and sat down, his shoulders were slumped over as he crossed his fingers and rested his arms on top of his legs. "I know," he replied. He then sighed. "Kaden, I don't mean to blow up the way I do. It's just, that sometimes. . . I think you see me as weak."

"What?" Kaden looked taken back as he rushed over to him. "No, that's not true."

"But that first dragon, the one without the powers," he reminded him.

"Please, don't live in the past, Eric," Kaden urged him, sitting next to him and reaching out for his hand as the sound of young Huntsclan members could be heard out in the hall, "when our future. . . *is so bright.*"

To Be Continued. . .



## 22 - Broken

### Chapter Twenty-two: Broken

Eric, better known as Eighty-eight, took a deep breath as his arm stretched across his bed. He frowned as the only thing that came in contact with his fingers were the sheets itself. He yawned as he opened his eyes and set up within his bed. His frown deepened as he realized he was alone with his quarters. "Kaden?" he called out nonetheless to Eighty-nine.

"Yeah?" was the response he received as he turned his head and saw Kaden step out of his private bathroom.

Eric then reached for his alarm clock, which was above his bed on a shelf. "Yo, you have got to be kidding me," he said irritated as he saw it was little past five-thirty in the morning. "The sun isn't even up yet," he informed the other.

"I have things to do," Kaden told him as he tried to find his clothes which littered the floor along side Eric's.

"Like what?" Eric demanded to know.

"Well, for one thing," he began, as he slipped on his pants, well aware of the way the other watched him. "I have to finish up my lesson plan for the day. My class starts at seven."

Eric let out a light chuckle. "No wonder your students walk around like the living dead." He laid back down on his bed and tucked his hands under his head.

"And what time do you meet with your students?" Kaden asked.

"A little before noon. No reason teaching, if they aren't awake for the lesson," Eric pointed out.

"I suppose you have a point," Kaden replied. "Maybe I should rethink my lesson time." He found his shirt and slipped it on before starting with the bottom button and working his way up. "So what are you teaching today?" he inquired.

"A few of the younger cadets have never seen a dragon up close. I'm taking them down to the dungeon and showing them the one we caught last night," he explained. "You know, point out the weakest parts and maybe a little demonstration."

"Demonstration?" Kaden's fingers paused at one of his buttons as his face paled a little. "Your youngest cadets are five, you don't want to traumatize them." He quickly recovered.

"He's in a cage, man. Besides, the younger they are when they're exposed to them, the less afraid they

will be later on.” He then chuckled again. “I mean, do you remember the first time we ran up on a pair of dragons?”

Kaden laughed along with him. “We ran around like chickens with our head's cut off,” he remembered.

Eric's smile soon faded. “Dragons are more dangerous than they used to be. We were captured so easily. The cadets need to be prepared,” he said seriously.

Kaden nodded his head to agree before he made his way back over to the bed. He bent down, a ghost of a smile on his lips as Eric etched his head up to meet him. “Whoa!” Kaden suddenly yelled out in surprised as Eric had quickly wrapped his arms around him and brought him back down onto the bed.

“Now, I don't know why you got dressed,” Eric asked him. “When you knew I wasn't going to let you leave this room,” he informed him as he placed himself on top. Kaden then reached up and cupped Eric's face in his hand before he gently pressed his lips against his. Eric seemed to visibly relax with the gesture. The taller of the two then heard the last words he ever thought he would hear from the other boy. “I love you. . .” Eric confessed softly as he looked into Kaden's eyes, which had grown wide.

“I- uh,” he stumbled, now unable to keep eye contact. “Wow, um. . . Eric, I- you know- Oh, boy.” Her chuckled nervously.

Eric slightly shook his head as Kaden struggled with his words. “Forget about it,” he finally told him as he got up. “It's not that big of a deal,” he tried to brush it off.

“Eric, wait. You're my best friend, you know that,” Kaden began as he rose out of bed as well. “But we've talked about this. This.” He pointed back and forth between them. “You know this can't work,” he told him. “Not like this.”

“And tell me why again,” Eric crossed his arms over his chest. “Because I love hearing it.”

“Well, because,” Kaden stood a little straighter, “I'm not gay.”

“Uh-huh,” Eric replied sceptically. “And what we did last night, or for the first time last month, what would you call that?” he asked of him, anger lining his words.

“Hormones,” was his simple response.

Eric stared at him for a moment, his mouth slightly opened at the disbelief of the other's deep, deep denial. “You uptight, motherfu- Get out!” he yelled out of frustration.

“Eighty-”

“Out!” he demanded again, not believing the balls he had to began addressing him by his codename.

“Fine!” Kaden yelled back before marching towards the door, where he slammed it shut behind him.

“Ahhh!” Eric screamed, before reaching for the nearest object and throwing it towards the closed door.

Kaden slightly jumped as he heard the sound of shattering glass. "You homophobe!" Were the last words Kaden heard before making his way down the hall, hoping no one saw him coming out of Eric's quarters.

OoOoO

It was nearing nine as Eric looked at his alarm clock. After Kaden left he felt a little light headed and decided it was probably best to go back to bed for a few hours, but sleep did not return to him. He honestly, didn't know why he put up with Kaden the way he did who had been denying what Eric knew he felt since the beginning. And although things had progress since then, Kaden still refused to give into the fact that maybe he just wasn't into girls. Eric was about to turn back over and dwell on the faults of his partner, who would never consider him his 'partner', when he heard knocking on his door. "What?" he barked out.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Huntsman, but the Huntsqueen wishes to see you," informed the child.

"Tell her I'm on my way," he replied as he got out of bed.

"Yes, sir!" was heard before Eric heard running.

He then took a quick shower before dressing in Huntsclan attire. He then made his way down the hall and to the elevator where he stepped inside. "Destination," spoke a computerized voice.

"War Room," he said holding on the rail as he went down. When the door opened he looked up and realized he hadn't reached his floor yet. Several of the older students, ranging from eleven to twelve, entered the elevator. "Morning, cadets," Eric greeted him, his voice authoritative.

"Morning, Huntsman Number Two," the four said together.

Eric than eyed them curiously as the elevator once again asked for a destination and one of the them gave the same answer he did. Eric then realized he didn't recognized them. "Were you all recruited by Number One. You're all his students?" he asked.

Three of them nodded, indicating that he was right. "I was recruited and trained by the Huntsqueen herself," one said proudly, almost as if she were better than everyone around her. "Ranked first in the school. I'm Cadet Number One."

"You're real proud of that, aren't you?" said the only other female cadet among them. "Of course, the Huntsqueen, was going to pick one of her own students to be Number One. It means nothing more than that you were the biggest suck up in your class. Because I'm Cadet Number Forty-two, but it ain't nothing but a number, because I'm sure I could still kick your @\$\$," Number Forty-two said with a smirk.

Number One growled as she took a step towards the other cadet. She gasp slightly, when a hand found her shoulder. She looked up to see Eric, who said nothing, but shot the two a warning look. As Eric took back his hand, he wondered why female Huntsclan members were always the aggressor. He rolled his

eyes as he thought, *This is why I stick to boys.*

Then to his relief the elevators finally stopped. "Entering War Room: Voice Authorization Password Required," the computer spoke.

"Purple Dragon," Eric spoke and the doors slid open. As they entered a long rectangular table that sat sixteen. At the end of the table sat Rose, better known as Huntsqueen. She stood as the five man party entered the room. "You summoned us?" he spoke.

"Yes," she replied. "Please, sit." Eric sat on the opposite end, while the the cadets sat between. Numbers One and Forty-two also sat opposite of each other.

"I have gathered you all together for a very important mission." Rose raised her scepter, taken before the Academy was reopened by her, Eric, and Kaden, when they took down a very powerful wizard. She continued to speak as a huge screen lowered from the ceiling. "This mission calls for sheath and discretion, which means nothing that has been said here will leave this room. Understood?" she asked and was satisfied with their nodding heads. "Good."

"I believe that we may have a traitor amongst our ranks. This person must be found and brought back to the Academy immediately," she informed them.

"Do you wish for the traitor to be killed?" asked one the male cadets.

"No, Number Twenty-four, he must be brought back alive." Rose gave a soft sigh, "Even traitors have the the right to tell their side of the story."

"Huntsqueen," Eric called to her. "I have no problem with this mission, but shouldn't we wait for everyone to get here before you go into more detail?" he wondered.

"This will be the mission party, Number Two," she told him.

"Number One has been my partner for years, and though I could do this without him, his input maybe valuable on something of this importance," he let his opinion be known.

"Any other time I would agree with you, but I need you to do this without Number One," she asked of him.

Eric frowned. "Why?" he asked.

Rose said nothing at first as she turned around and waved her scepter across the screen. "This is why." The lights dimmed in the room as an image of the dungeon appeared on the screen.

In a small cage laid a handsome blonde headed boy about nineteen years of age by the name of Fred Nerk. Everyone in the War Room watched with extreme concentration as Fred picked up his head at the sound of the dungeon door coming open. "You shouldn't be here," Fred warned to a figure in the shadows.

"I had to see how you were." Eric gasp so loudly that it was heard by everyone in the room, but no one turned to look at him as the realization of whom he had heard donned on him. "I swear, I didn't know he was going to stab you." Kaden got down on his knees and reached into the cage, but Fred turned from his touch. "Fred. . . please."

"You should have told me. I trusted you," Fred began. "And you said nothing."

Kaden held on to the bars as he rested his head against them. "I know, and I'm sorry, but please, understand, if I told you I was Huntsclan. . ." he shook his head back and forth slowly. "I would have lost you." He looked back into the cage. "And I couldn't risk that."

"What does the Huntsclan want with me?" Fred wanted to know, ignoring the other's apology.

"It's not you that they want, but someone you know. Someone the Huntsqueen needs to keep tabs on," he explained.

"Who?" Fred asked.

"Who else?" Kaden thought the answer was obvious. "The American Dragon."

"Sorry, but I've never met him," he lied.

Kaden narrowed his eyes. "You fool!" he barked suddenly. "They will kill you, if you don't give them what they want!" He then took a moment to calm himself. "Just tell the truth and I will do all I can to make sure you get out of this alive," he promised.

"Or," Fred placed his hand on over Kaden's, which was still wrapped around the bar. "You can help me escape, before they question me at all."

Kaden shook his head. "And what if I was found out?"

"Then come with me," Fred suggested. "Throw yourself at the mercy of the World Dragon Council, they will protect you. And all you would have to do is give the names of those within the Huntsclan."

Kaden only looked at him. "Betray my clan. . . my family?" That didn't sit too well with him. "I can't do that."

"I know that seems hard, to betray everything you've ever known, but in your heart you know you don't hate the Magical World. You can't help, what you have been born into, but the choices you make, are your own. I just hope it's the right one," Fred asked of him.

The fabric of Kaden's mask became wet underneath his eyes. "My life doesn't allow me a lot of choices, Fred, but of the ones I have been able to make, I know you were the right one. So I will have faith, and do what needs to be done." The Australian Dragon smiled at his words, who gave him one in return. "I love you," came the whisper from Kaden's lips.

Eric felt his chest tighten as he continued to watch the screen. He then suddenly found it a little harder to

breath and then a moment later found he had completely forgotten how to as he watched both Kaden and Fred lean into each other to share a kiss. The kiss was tender and heartfelt. A kiss Eric knew Kaden had never shared with him.

It was then that Eric noticed the date and time in the corner of the recording. It was a little past midnight, that morning. He had been waiting in Kaden's room at that time, like some lovelorn idiot. Then things had ended up in his room where he and Kaden. . . for the second time that day, Eric felt light headed, as he finally saw the truth, that Kaden had never been in denial about his sexuality. . . and that maybe what he thought was a relationship was nothing but a lie.

Then as Fred told the dragon slayer, who was three years his junior, that he loved him as well, Eric lost it. "Lies! That's not Kaden!" He stood from his chair and yelled. "Turn this shoot off!" he demanded. "You." He directed his attention towards Rose. "What the hell are you playing at?" he asked her.

"This isn't a game, Huntsman," she told him. "And this footage is no lie. I mean, do you really think I want to believe that one of our own could do this. . . repeat the same mistake I made?" She turned back towards the screen to see the dragon and the dragon slayer, born enemies, defy the logic that bound them. "I know how close you and he are," she regarded Eric. "That's why you're need on this mission. He's more likely to let his guard down around you." Rose than made her point quite clear. "He needs to be brought in, and short of death, by any means necessary."

"I'm sorry," Eric stepped away from the table. "But I can't do this," he told her as he made his way to the elevator. It opened and he stepped inside.

"Destination," came the computerized voice, but it went unheard by the one who stood inside. Eric stared at the ground, but all his mind could see and hear were Kaden as he confessed his love to someone who wasn't him and as it got louder and louder, Eric's heart arched more and more until suddenly, in the blink of an eye, it didn't hurt at all. For it had done the only thing it could when surround by so much pain. . . it had broken.

To Be Continued. . .

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**A/N:** Well, it seems my Rose storyline has taken a backseat to my unexpected 88/89 storyline. . . sorry. But don't worry, the current storyline is leading into the Rose one. I promise.

I was going to do the unthinkable. I was going to have Eric and Kaden have a *healthy* relationship, which is something I've never written before. I then realized. . .

I COULDN'T DO IT! -Cries like a baby- I'M SORRY!

## 23 - The Trusted

### Chapter Twenty-three: The Trusted

Rose, better known as Huntsqueen, laid quietly in her bed within her quarters. Eric had not taken the news about Kaden very well, but it was better than expected. Betrayal of any kind in a relationship that was already fragile did a lot of damage, but one on the scale of Kaden's, well Rose was no stranger to it.

The Huntsqueen then rolled onto her side as she reached for the drawer handle of her night stand. Inside was a picture taken what seemed a lifetime ago. She smiled sadly as she looked upon the picture of her and Jake taken at their school dance back when they were in middle school. She knew she should have disposed of it long ago, but she just couldn't bring herself to do.

Her relationship with Jake had made her weak. Because of him she had questioned everything she had ever known and ever trusted. Sure, the Huntsmaster, who had raised her, had unwillingly taken her from her parents, but they were Huntsclan members as well, who had betrayed the clan. The Huntsmaster had taken her before her parents could taint her mind, but it was already too late, it was already in her blood.

When she had recovered all her memory, and everything hit her, it hit her hard. She would never see the Huntmaster again and that sadden her. Sure, he was a strict dictator, but there was a side to him many never saw. He was a father. He was the one who had tucked her in at night, and read her bedtime stories when she was child. He was the one who kissed her boo boos when she fell and scraped her knee. He was the one who taught her how to hold a spear and how to strike with precision. And though he may have never said it, he loved her just as much as any father could love their child. And though Rose realized he was only her uncle, in her heart, he was her father and Jake had taken that away from her.

She had had a family. It had always been there and though it was not ideal, it was hers. But Jake had made her confused. Made her question if she knew right from wrong and because of it, she lost everything. . . even her own identity. But she was making amends. The new Huntsclan, under her rule, would be the strongest in their history. She had to pull Kaden back in and make him see the errors of his way through the eyes of one who had walked the same path and had lost so much.

Rose sighed as she put the photo away. She still cared for him; he still made her weak, but she would not allow that weakness to get in the way of what was destine of her. She would destroy the magical world in the name of her uncle. . . even if that meant the demise of the one she once loved. But as always, that always seemed easier said than done.

There soon came a knock at her door and she told the person to enter. "You wanted to see me?" Eric didn't make eye contact as he closed the door behind him.

"Yes," Rose nodded her head. "Please, sit." She indicated a chair near the fireplace as she rose and

took a seat across from where he eventually sat. "I know this is hard for you," she began. "But I need you to be level headed on this, Eric. I know you and Kaden are partners in more than just one sense." Eric looked at her a little wide eyes. Rose gently smiled at the expression. "It's the way you look at him. I know love when I see it." It was the way Jake used to look at her.

Eric shoulders fell with her statement. "Then I guess you only ever saw it coming from me." Rose said nothing, which proved Eric's statement true. "I just thought, if I just gave him time, he would eventually see me the way I saw him," he sounded as if he had already been defeated. "But somehow I always knew that time was never the problem."

Rose looked at the one she had named her Huntsman sympathetically. "Kaden, right now, is lost. The lore of a dragon is strong. Their words can be intoxicating. They have a way of getting into your head and taking a hold of your heart. He's being tricked. The Australian Dragon will use the hold he has on him to get him to do whatever he wants. So as long as Kaden in out there, our clan is in danger." Eric looked as though he understood.

"I know," he whispered, closing in his eyes. "So, what you're basically saying is, he's under some kind of spell. Can it be broken?" he asked, a light of hope burning within his rich brown eyes.

Rose thought of the photo in her drawer that she had tried to burn on several occasions, never once succeeding. "No," she told him truthfully. "Even if he comes back to us, a part of him will always be connected to the dragon who marked him." Eric opened his mouth to speak, but his words died in his throat. "I know what you want to say," she began. "And there's only one answer. . . and it's you. Bring him home, Eric."

Eric, finally understanding what was needed of him simply nodded before standing up slowly. Rose quietly followed him over to the door, where she couldn't help but notice the way the boy carried himself. In her eyes, Eric had always been the confident one, the outspoken one, and to see him in such a state pained her. "Eric?" she whispered as he had taken a hold of the door handle.

"Yes?" he responded before finding himself engulfed in his leader's arms as she hugged him tightly. Eric was surprised by the gesture. "It's going to be alright," she assured him before his expression relaxed and he buried his face into her as he wrapped his arms around her and returned her hug. He exhale, comforted by her words, if only just a little.

OoOoO

Kaden stared out the window. He was far outside the limits of the city as Fred had taken him to a safe house deep in the middle of nowhere. Right now, Fred was where he had been for the last two days, in the other room peacefully sleeping as he recovered from the wound Eric had inflicted upon him. He was running a bit of a fever as being locked in a damp and darken dungeon hadn't helped. Kaden had draped a cool towel over his head and replaced it ever so often hoping it would help.

"What in the world am I doing?" Kaden asked himself as he leaned his head against the window. His stomach churned and twist as it hit him what he had done. He had left the Academy without informing



anyone, but why would he, since he was helping the blonde in the next room to escape? That whole morning was now just a big blur, he wasn't quite sure how he had escaped the compound without being noticed.

But what he did know, was if they hadn't noticed his absence then, that they did now, especially sense they would have quickly noticed the absence of their prisoner and put two and two together. He knew officially that he was a fugitive in their eyes and that he would be hunted. It was only a matter a time before they found out where he was.

He and Fred had already been in one place for far too long. Kaden had taught his students when trying to escape from the enemy. . . enemy. Kaden's shoulders fell as the word echoed in his head as he realized that's what they were now. The enemy.

Kaden then closed the curtains of the window before heading towards the bedroom of the cabin. He walked quickly as he was anxious above anything. Every fiber of his being burned for him to do was drilled into him. They couldn't stay. He had taught his students well, and though he had trust in his own ability, he no longer had Huntsclan resources. He was cut off and alone, but he had chosen that path.

He swung the bedroom door open and like a wave from the ocean he was calmed, and remembered why he had fought the feeling to flee for the last two days. Fred suddenly went into a coughing fit, Kaden rushed to his side handing him a glass of water from the nightstand. Fred breathed heavily once his coughing had stopped. His eyes were hooded as he smiled weakly at the brown haired boy by his side. He wasn't getting any better and both of them knew it. "I'm fine," came the lie from Fred's pale lips.

Kaden picked up the wet towel that had slipped off Fred's forehead during his fit. He dipped the cloth into a bowl next to him before wringing it out and placing it back on Fred's forehead. "It's dangerous here," Kaden let be known. "Staying in one place too long, as we've done, is bound to get us caught. The Huntsclan will hunt us down," he explained.

"Even if they find us," Fred spoke with his eyes closed, "they can't see us. I had my animal guardian put up barriers around this place years ago for emergencies."

"Animal guardian?" Kaden was baffled by the term.

Fred nodded. "It's exactly what it sounds like. An animal companion who looks out for me."

"How come you never mention it before? Where is it now?" Kaden wondered.

"Never had a reason to mention her before. She's an independent little thing; as stubborn as they come." He smiled at the thought of her. "She mostly goes off and does her own thing. I never question her, I don't feel the need to, she always comes home. In fact, she'll be here soon," He seemed assured of that fact and feeling the curious look on Kaden's face he answered the boy's question before he could ask it. "I check in with her every few days. I miss my last check in, so she'll come looking for me. This cabin is always the first place."

"What's her name?"

“Yan Yan, but I call her Yani.” Fred then began to cough again, more violent than the last. “I’m so tired,” he admitted when he settled down.

“Than you should rest.” Fred nodded at Kaden’s suggestion before turning over to go back to sleep, he cringed in pain for a moment before his features once again relaxed. Kaden sighed silently at the sight of it before getting up and softly closing the behind himself.

OoOoO

Kaden had fallen asleep on the couch when he felt a slight weight land on his chest. He opened his eyes and nearly jumped out of his skin when his vision cleared and he saw purple piercing eyes staring into his own. “Where is my boy?” demanded the female voice.

“Are you Yani?” Kaden asked the pink hairless cat.

“How dare you address me so familiarly?” she was outraged. “You will call me Ms. Yan Yan,” she made clear. “Now, do not make me repeat my first question.” Her claws seem to shimmer in the soft light.

“He’s in the bedroom.” Yan Yan immediately jumped off his chest and made her way to the cabin bedroom. The cabin, knowing who she was, opened on its own accord as it sensed her approach.

Kaden followed her, her steps were quick and graceful. He stood in the doorway as he watched Yan Yan jumped onto the bed to take a closer look at her charge. “I should have come sooner.” Her paw gently touched his sleeping form. She then quickly whipped her head around. “Who are you?” she asked the former Huntsclan member.

“My name is Kaden,” he replied.

Yan Yan’s expression towards him soften as she learned his name. “I know that name. My boy here is very fond you. You have made him very happy,” she confessed, causing a smile to appear on the younger boy’s face.

“Know that it’s not one sided.” Yan Yan nodded at his words.

“What happened to him?” she asked.

“He was captured by the Huntsclan and stabbed by one of the members. He was locked up for a while before we had a chance to escape. I think his wound is infected. He’s sick and he needs help. I’m afraid to move him, but I’m also afraid that staying in one spot too long isn’t smart.”

“This is the safest place for now.” Yan Yan looked upon the blonde’s innocent looking face. “The barriers I put up are of old magic, no one but the trusted can see this cabin.” Yan Yan rubbed her face up against Fred sadly. “Be strong for me little one,” she murmured to him before straightening up.

“Only the trusted?” Kaden questioned.

“Like I said,” Yan Yan jumped off the bed and began to walk passed him, “he's very fond of you.” She than made her way down the hall, when she noticed she wasn't being followed she slightly turned her head. “Well, just don't stand there,” she barked. “If we want him to get better, there's a potion I must make, and unfortunately I need help.”

“You do?” Kaden asked in disbelief as he fell into step.

“Yes,” Yan Yan sighed. “If he had been some curse, I could do it myself, in my sleep,” she added. “But weapons made by man, are a little more than tricky.”

“Is- is he going to be alright?” Kaden voice shook as they arrived in the kitchen and the light automatically switched on. Yan Yan ignored him for a minute as she jumped from a stool onto the counter. She opened the cupboard and quickly went through the ingredients. “Those weren't there before,” Kaden pointed out.

“Fred may trust you,” she began as she put aside a small jar labeled, 'Eye of Newt' and another labeled, 'Howlet's Wing', “but the cabin does not.”

Silence fell over the pair as Yan Yan finished gathering the supplies she needed. As she brewed the potion that she hoped would spare Fred's life she gave short, exact instructions to Kaden, who followed her direction without question or hesitation.

“Finished,” Yan Yan announced happily after nearly five long hours of work. Kaden slumped tiredly into the nearest chair, wiping away the sweat that had gather on his forehead. “He's going to be alright,” Yan Yan finally answered the questioned Kaden had asked several hours before as she poured her concoction into the nearest container before capping a lid on it. “Here,” she tossed it over to Kaden who easily caught it. “I have to clean this up quickly, or it becomes poisonous,” she explained. “Pour a drop onto his wound and have him drink the rest.”

Kaden eyes widen at the thought of giving Fred poison. “But I though you just said-”

“Now!” Yan Yan yelled causing Kaden to drop his question and hurry about his task.

He made it as far as the living room, when he noticed something out of place. The front door had been left opened, which he thought was strange since he could have sworn it was closed when he and Yan Yan went into the kitchen.

Kaden narrowed his eyes as he slowly looked around the room. It was dark and the cabin was filled with many shadows. “Who's here?” His voice was deep and intimidating. “Show yourself.” Instead of an answer Kaden was kicked in the back, the potion he held in his hands went flying into the air before it landed, hard, on the floor where it joined Kaden.

Kaden grunted as he was kicked in the side and forced onto his back. He then felt the point of a spear at his neck before his breath became stuck in his throat. The person over him still remain shrouded in the shadows. “Who-” his throat was nicked as he spoke, “who are you?” he asked.

“Who do you think I am?” came the voice, dark and fearless. Kaden's eyes widened as he recognized the voice.

“No, impossible!” Yan Yan voice was heard from the other side of the room.

“Eric,” Kaden whispered as Eric leaned forward revealing his eyes, which for the first time in Kaden's memory held no love for him. It was then that Kaden realized that though he knew he would be hunted, he never expected that Eric would be the one on his trail, because for Kaden, even after the incident with the American Dragon's mother, Eric had always been. . .*the trusted*.

To Be Continued. . .

## 24 - With the Devil

### Chapter Twenty-four: With the Devil

Kaden held his breath as he stared into the eyes of his former comrade. The young Huntsclan cadets could feel the tension all around them as the once friends realized that they were on opposite sides of a war that was older than all of them put together. The eerie silence seem to stretch on for days until Eric finally decided to speak. "You betrayed me," his voice was nothing more than a whisper, but in a room so still, it felt like a thunderous boom to the ears of those around him.

"I never meant hurt to you," Kaden's voice was just as soft.

"I don't blame you," Eric admitted, causing Kaden's eyes to widen in surprise. Eric then cringed as he sounded more emotional than he meant to. Kaden then watched as Eric eye's once again grew cold. Eric knew what he had to do, he had to make an example out of Kaden, and he knew exactly how to do it. "Number One," Eric spoke and Number One turned her head towards the Huntsman. "Hold him down," he instructed.

"Yes, sir," she walked over, a smirk in her eyes as she had been trusted with the task over the others. She pointed her spear downward and took her place as Eric lifted his own.

The dark skinned boy said nothing as he walked out of the room and disappeared from everyone's sight. A moment later, there was a burst of green light accompanied by a devastating boom that rattled the whole cabin. A moment later, his voice was heard, "Let him sit up." Number One frowned at the idea, but did what she was told as she took a step back and slowly let him rise.

Kaden gasped as he watched Eric drag Fred across the floor by the collar. "Let him go," he demanded at the sight.

"As you wish," Eric gladly obeyed as he let Fred drop like a rock. "This is who I blame," he made clear before kicking Fred on to his stomach, who cringed in pain. Eric twirled his spear before sinking it down into Fred's still opened wound. Fred yelled out in pain as he grabbed the spear with both hands trying to pull it out, but it was useless in his weakened state.

But Fred's screams weren't the only ones that pierced through the night air, as they were accompanied by Kaden's, who sounded as if he were the one being stabbed. "Leave him alone!" Kaden cried out. "You'll kill him!" He went to stand, but the moment he tried he felt the tip of Number One's spear at his chest. He gave a low growl as his dark eyes looked into hers. The stare was so intense that Number One couldn't help but to gasp sharply as she slightly flinched at the murderous intent that was directed towards her.

"That was kind of the point," Kane's eyes went back to Eric as he spoke. "This filth, has done a number on your head and I'm sure that once he's dead, you'll begin to think clearly."

At that Kaden scoffed causing Eric to look at him curiously. "You're all talk, you know that?" Eric narrowed his eyes as the other continued. "Let's not forget who, out of the two of us, was given the higher title. Whose hands have actually been stained with that of a dragon," he laid down the facts. "Because I don't know about you, but I'll never forget that when push came to shove, you just weren't man enough." Eric lowered his gaze as he heard the truth. "Pretend all you like, but I am the only true slayer in this room!" Kaden roared, as without warning he grabbed Number One's spear by the handle and yanked it towards himself and to the side, causing the young cadet to lose her balance before she fell to the ground, her weapon now in the enemy's hold.

Kaden pointed the spear towards Eric, who eyes had grown wide as a green blast came barreling towards him. Being agile, Eric quickly flipped backwards, his feet touching down on the wall before he sprung towards Kaden, colliding into him roughly. Kaden dropped the spear as he and Eric went rolling across the floor.

They landed with Kaden on top, who drew back his fist and struck Eric across the face. Number One, who finally recovered from her fall looked towards the other three cadets. "Shoot him!" she ordered before cringing and grabbing her ankle. Her fall had been anything but graceful as she had sprung it. The remaining cadets, seem to snap out of whatever daze they were in, when they heard her words, for they had been amazed that the Huntsmen in front of them, who once would have died for each other, were now coming to blows.

Number Twenty-four was the first to react as he aimed his weapon at Kaden, who had been overpowered as he was now on the receiving end of an assault. Number Twenty-four watched carefully as he waited for a clear shot. "Seventeen!" he yelled at the other male cadet and made a head motion towards Number One.

Number Seventeen, understanding the silent command, ran over to his fallen comrade, sliding to his knees as he took off his backpack and pulled how a first aid kit.

Yan Yan, who with luck, had gone unnoticed by the intruders, quickly dashed across the room where she recovered, with her mouth, the bottle Kaden had been forced to drop and made her way over to Fred. Once by his side, she opened and applied the potion before placing the container against his mouth. "Drink quickly, little one," she begged as she lifted his head and forced the liquid down his throat. She didn't know how much longer Kaden could hold out as Forty-two had joined the fight with he and Eric.

Nothing else mattered to Yan Yan as she watched her boy, praying that the potion she slaved over worked and that he would open his eyes and see her. Her praying seem to help as she finally saw Fred's deep blue orbs, his wound was now almost completely healed. "Ya- Yani," he breathed and reached out to scratched her behind the ear.

"Kill it!" Fred suddenly heard and before he had time to register what was actually said, a bright green blast flew passed his head and hit Yan Yan, a sickening crack was heard as her small frail body hit the wall.

Fred quickly sat up, ignoring the pain that still electrified his body as he looked at Yan Yan's limp body

slide to the floor, her purple eyes open, with no sign of life within them. Tears welled in his eyes as he realized his beloved graduation was no longer apart of this world.

“You bastards!” His scream was raw and feral, sounding more like a vicious animal than anything a human could make. Orange and yellow flames circled around him as he turned into his dragon form. He took a deep breath before blowing fire in every direction, not caring what was in the way, not even Kaden, as he had been blinded by his anger and his loss.

As the flames came racing towards them, each person took evasive action. Number Seventeen, dropped everything before scooping Number One in his arms, bridal style, and moving her out of danger. Number Twenty-four twirled his spear rapidly, dispensing the flames and making them harmless.

Number Forty-two, who was the quickest on her feet, ran towards the flames before jumping clear over them as she reached for her utility belt. Meanwhile, Eric and Kaden, who had been fighting until they heard Fred's scream, suddenly felt an overwhelming heat wash over them. “Get down!” Eric yelled, pushing Kaden to the ground with him. “Shield!” he yelled, activating a small transparent barrier around them.

Each breathed heavily as they found themselves in very close proximity. “Eric,” Kaden whispered. Eric turned his eyes away as they both realized what he had just done. He had saved him. But then again how could he not? The Huntsqueen wanted him alive. He was only following order. “Eric,” Kaden repeated just as softly, causing the other to look at him again. Kaden smiled before he tilted his head up and his lips brushed against Eric's.

Eric eyes had grown wide at the strange gesture. What if the cadets saw them? But how could they as the cabin had been set on fire and black smoke surrounded them? He was toying with him! He was only trying to buy time. Time Eric would not allow him to have. Eric quickly sat up and decked Kaden across the face, blood flew out of his mouth with the motion. Eric then reached for the blade he kept around his ankle and stabbed Kaden's shoulder, causing him to scream. “Don't play with me!” Eric demanded before lowering his shield and allowing the black smoke to engulf them. “Cadets!” he yelled, unable to see them. “Sound off!”

“One!” Number One yelled out, before she was followed by the others.

“Seventeen!”

“Twenty-four!”

“Forty-two!”

Eric nodded as they were all accounted for. “Where's my dragon?” He wanted to know.

“I got him, sir!” He heard Number Forty-two.

As the smoke and flames began to die down Eric was able to see that Number Forty-two had caught Fred in one of her nets. He smirked at the sight. “Good job, cadet.” And as Number Forty-two beamed

at the recognition, Number One frowned. "Come here and watch this traitor."

"Yes, sir," she quickly made her way to take his place as Eric, who was now walking with a slight limp, took his time making his way over to the dragon, picking up Number One's fallen spear as he did so.

Fred gave Eric a dirty look as he stood over him. "How does it feel, knowing I'll be the last face you'll ever see?" he asked, his tone revealing his joy at the situation.

"frack you," was Fred's only reply.

Eric placed the spear tip on Fred, as he was still in his dragon from. "You heal quickly I see," he commented. "This time I won't give you the chance to recover. He aimed for the soft underbelly of his captive, knowing that striking here would result in a clean slay. He then rose his spear ready to make his, long overdue, first kill. Fred struggled against the netting, knowing it was a lost cause, but if tonight would be his last night, he would go down fighting.

Eric began to make a downward motion with his spear. "Stop, please!" came Kaden's voice from the other side of the room. He was on his knees, his hand covering his bleeding shoulder, which he could no longer feel. "I'll do whatever you want. Just leave him alone. Please," his voice was scared and desperate. "Eric," he called his name.

"You are to come back to the Huntsclan."

"I'll come back, but only if he's alive," he gave his condition.

"You will also have no more contact with this- this thing," he indicated Fred.

Kaden went to agree, but hesitated before looking at Fred, who looked at him longingly. Catching this, Eric stomped down on Fred's underbelly, causing Fred to curse loudly at him. Eric raised his spear again. "Okay! Okay!" Kaden yelled out. "I'll never see him again. I promise." Tears fell down his eyes.

"Then we are agreed." Eric safely lowered his spear to the ground. "Let's go home," he spoke to his cadets.

Eric watched as Number Forty-two placed a hand on Kaden's shoulder before reaching for her utility belt with her free hand, they both then disappeared. Eric then looked to Number Twenty-four, who nodded before pressing the button on his on utility belt and disappearing as well. Number Seventeen held Number One just a little tighter as she reached for her belt and they vanished from Eric's sight.

Eric once again looked down at Fred. "Know it's only out of respect, for the friendship that Kaden and I used to have, that you life is being spared, but if we ever come across each other's path again, there will be no mercy for you," he made clear and was surprised to hear the other laugh.

"Kaden was right," he began. "You're just not man enough."

Eric frowned deeply before he cried out, lifting his spear and driving it into the underbelly of the dragon at his feet. Blood splattered everywhere. "At least I am a man," were the last words Fred heard before



he took his last breath and his eyes closed forever. "So much for a clean slay," Eric thought out loud before reaching for his belt and headed home.

The four cadets waited patiently for their leader to return at the Transport Station located within the academy. The transporter then began to hum before a orange light engulfed the room and Eric appeared before them. Each of them looked a little surprised to see him covered in blood. "Huntsmen," Number Seventeen called out as he quickly made his way towards him, "are you injured?"

"No, I'm fine," he reassured the medic in their group as he placed his hand on his shoulder. "Where's the traitor?" he asked, looking across the room.

"He's in-" Number One began as she rested on the floor, her ankle not strong enough to allow her to stand.

"I'm speaking to Forty-two," he cut her off, causing her to look more wounded.

"As soon I as arrived, I contacted Team Delta to escort him to the Nursing Station. After he's patched up, he will be returned to his quarters, where he will be locked in until orders come down from the Huntsqueen, sir," she reported.

"Good." He nodded his approval, before he stepped off the transporter platform and began to make his way towards the door, his limp very apparent by now.

"Huntsmen?" Number Seventeen spoke.

Eric turned to him. "Yes?"

"Did you slay him after all?" he couldn't help but ask.

"Him?" Eric shook his head. "It," he corrected. "And yes, I did. Because we don't show mercy to dragons and we don't negotiate with traitors." He then looked around at them all. "Understood?"

"Yes, sir!" they barked.

Eric smiled tiredly at them. "You're all fine cadets," he told them before he left the room.

"I need to go to the Nursing Station," Number One spoke quietly. She felt as if she had disappointed her team leader. And how could she not, when it was her weapon that had fallen into enemies hands. Maybe Number Forty-two was right, maybe she had just been the biggest suck up.

Number Twenty-four reached down to pick her up, but was stopped with a touch on the arm. He turned to see Number Seventeen. "Thank you, Twenty-four, but she is my responsibility," spoke the medic.

"Of course." Twenty-four stepped out of the way. The four then left the room and went their separated ways.

Yan Yan jolted into motion before she coughed life back into her body. Her body was sore and her brain felt as if were going to pound right out of her head. "Dammit," she cursed as she was now down to six lives. She tried to stand on all four feet, but her legs felt like jell-o underneath her. Then she remembered how she had lost her life and her head snapped up looking at her surrounding. The cabin was nearly gone, burned to the ground. In fact, in some places, fire still remained, but was slowly flickering out.

As Yan Yan continued to look around it was then that she noticed Fred, in his human form, under netting, and not moving. "Boy!" she yelled out. She went to run to him, but still had not regain her bearings; she tripped and fell several times as she made her way over. She collapsed on top of him, breathing heavily as she shook him, trying to ignore the blood that surrounded them. "No, no," she cried as she laid her head on his chest and dug her claws into him, but she felt no movement.

Fred was dead.

Yan Yan had never cried before. She had also never cared about any of her charges before this one. And yet, he was the one she had failed. Yan Yan wiped away her tears. She knew what had to be done. It would call for great sacrifice, but she would do anything for her boy. She would make this up to him. But there was only one other who could help her now. "Fu Dog," she whispered his name as if it left a disgusting taste in her mouth. Asking him for help would not be easy, because seeking assistance from Fu Dog, for Yan Yan, was like dealing. . . *with the Devil.*

To Be Continued. . .

## 25 - Laws of Nature

### Chapter Twenty-five: Laws of Nature

*(Push and Pull)*

“Faster!” barked Sun Park as she supervised over Haley's training. “Harder!” she continued, as she knew her student could put more power behind her strikes.

Lao Shi walked into the training room quietly, with Fu Dog by his side. He said nothing, at first, as he watched his youngest grandchild work through the obstacle course set up for her by her teacher. Haley, though still not as powerful as the one who preceded her, moved with a grace that only came from years of dance. She was able to maneuver in ways that Jake could only dream about.

The current American Dragon was slowly coming into her own. She was no longer the small, pink, and fragile dragon she had once been. Her scales were slowly growing darker, making her appear more purple than she once was. Her wings, which were once barely able to keep her in the air, had expanded. They were now longer than her body measured from head to toe.

Haley, jumped, flipped, ran, and flew through the course she was given. At random times a cardboard figure would jump out, either revealing an enemy or a friend. Her precision and aim were remarkable . . . and she knew it. She smiled to herself as she came close to the end, knowing her time would make record, but then one last figure sprung up and Haley couldn't help but pause in front of it.

“No hesitation!” Sun Park ordered and so, snapping back into what she was doing, Haley took a deep breath before the flames rose from her throat and ignited the figure in front of her. Haley found she could do nothing as she watched the image of her brother slowly burn to the ground. She went to turn away, unable to look at it any longer, before Sun Park told her to stand her ground. So Haley turned back to the figure, her body shaking, as the fact that her brother was a fugitive was concreted into her mind.

“That was unnecessary.” Lao Shi gave his critique to Sun Park as he heard his granddaughter stifle tears.

“Hello, Lao Shi,” Sun greeted the man beside her. “And I'm sorry, but I must sadly disagree.” Her tone was melancholy. She hated seeing her student in pain. “There may come a day when she has to face Jake. She must be prepared.”

“Jake would never attack Haley,” Lao Shi pointed out confidently.

“Just like a dragon could never go bad,” she countered.

Lao Shi's head snapped towards her immediately. “My grandson is nothing like the Dark Dragon.” He hoped his voice did not give away his anger. “He is not evil,” he pointed out. Lao Shi then lowered his head and continued softly. “He has just lost his way, but soon he will see his mistake and return home. I'm sure of it.”

“You have too much faith in your grandson,” Sun responded. “We can not turn a blind eye, we made that mistake before.”

As Lao Shi and Sun Park continued to speak, Fu Dog excused himself before making his way over to Haley, who had changed back into her human form. “I hate when they argue,” she whispered, as Fu Dog came into listening range.

“Come on, kid,” Fu Dog indicated that he wanted her to follow him. “We have your potion lesson.”

Haley sighed as she fell into step behind him. “I don't remember Jake ever having to do so many potions,” she pointed out.

Fu Dog only smiled. “Jake didn't have the brains nor the patience for potions. He only attempted them when they benefited him. He was selfish like that, I suppose.” His eyes then grew a bit sad. “It was the only time he ever was.”

“Let's not talk about Jake, okay?” Haley asked, and Fu Dog complied.

Before long Fu Dog and Haley were in the back of the shop gathering ingredients. “It's okay to be afraid,” Fu Dog whispered as he handed her the next ingredient for a transformation potion.

Haley looked to him curiously. “Afraid of what?” she began. “About this blowing up on me?” She smiled. “Believe me, after last month, I won't make that mistake again.”

Fu Dog shook his head. “You know that's not what I meant.” He sighed as he paused in his actions and looked over to his youngest charge. “I meant, when it comes to facing Jake.”

Haley's brow furrowed deeply. “I thought I said I didn't want to talk about him.” She angrily grabbed the jar labeled 'Spider Webs' and hastily threw it into her cauldron.

“Sun Park is right you know, there will be a day when you have to face him.” Haley went for another ingredient, but Fu Dog pulled it from her reach, causing her to look at him as he sat on his stool. “You're more like him than you know.”

“What do you all want from me?” she asked, clearly upset. “I'm doing the best I can here, okay? I understand that Jake did this job better than I could ever wish to, but I'm trying!” She pushed back the tears that threaten to fall.

“No one said you weren't, but you're having to face something none of us have before.” Fu Dog left it at that and as he predicted, Haley finally spoke.

“He's my brother,” she concluded. “And though I would have never admitted to it when he was around, I admired him. Even when he did stupid things, like he's doing now.” Haley pulled up a stool next to Fu Dog. “How could he just leave like that?” she wondered out loud. “Why would he willingly do something like this? What could have been so important?”

"I've spoken to Gregory," Fu Dog began before he heard a scoff like sound leave Haley's mouth. "He said-

"Whatever Gregory said, I don't care," the young girl informed her canine friend. It wasn't long after Jake had left that she learned that Trixie was pregnant and it wasn't with her husband's child. Haley half wondered, if Jake had left from the shame of that alone. Raising one child that wasn't yours was honorable, but raising two? Well, that was just down right foolish. "So can we just get back to the potion, please," she asked, her expression tired, but willing to push on.

"Yeah," Fu Dog nodded and so the two went back to work.

"Fu," came a voice so soft that Fu Dog thought he had imagined it. He looked up from his book and the potion, which was now coming to a boil. He looked to Haley curiously, but it was clear by the expression of concentration of her face, that she had not said anything. So Fu Dog shrugged it off, chalking it up to it being a long day and that his mind was playing tricks on him, before going back to his book for precise measurements.

"Fu," the sound was strong, and there was so mistaking it this time.

Fu Dog's head slightly jerked up and he gasped. "La," he whispered to himself. He then swiftly turned around, his fangs on full display as he growled. "Yan Yan!" Haley aware of the two's relationship quickly turned into her dragon form and took a fighting stance, a stance her brother had taught her.

Yan Yan seem to float in mid-air as she peered at them through a tear in time and space. "Fu, I am not here to fight you." There was something in her voice; it was so foreign that Fu Dog could not hold his anger. His expression softened towards her as he realized it was sadness. "I need your help. Please, this won't stay long," she said, referring to her already shrinking window.

"What is it?" Fu Dog asked, still not convinced this wasn't some kind of trap.

"It's Fred," her voice shook. "He's dead."

It was all she had to say before Fu Dog strung for his stool and jumped through the portal that lead him to her. "Fu!" Haley yelled. "Wait up!"

"Stay there!" Fu Dog ordered, but it was too late, Haley jumped into portal after him. She crashed onto the floor on the other side and sat up just in time to see the portal close and disappear. "Oh, that's probably not good," she concluded, as she reverted back to a fourteen year old girl.

"You shouldn't have come," Fu Dog warned her.

"Where are we?" Haley asked, still sitting on the floor, as she took a look at her surroundings. It was a burnt down cabin in the middle of the woods, which seemed to be magically rebuilding itself at a slow rate.

"Welcome to the land down under," Yan Yan greeted the teenager. She then turned to Fu Dog. "I have business to discuss with you and I would prefer not to do it in front of the child."

"Of course," he agreed, before asking Haley to give them a minute. Haley nodded before finally standing, watching her step as she made her out of the cabin and into the woods. Fu Dog then turned to Yan Yan when he felt Haley was out of ear shot. "What happened?" he asked.

Yan Yan closed her eyes and Fu Dog was amazed to see an actual tear escape down her cheek. It had been so long since he had been reminded of how vulnerable she could be. "It was the Huntsclan," she began. "Fred was captured and he had escaped, but not without help or injury. They came for him, and the other. They took the other with them, and left my boy to die." She looked back up at Fu Dog, her eyes no longer sad, but enraged. "I want them dead," she told him, before her bottom lip began to quiver, "but most of all. . . I want my boy back," she confessed.

Fu Dog slowly began to shake his head; he knew where this was leading. "No," was his answer.

"Please," she stepped forward, her desperation clear. "You're the only one powerful enough. You know I can't do it alone."

"No!" Fu Dog barked loudly, looking at her like she was out of her mind.

"Fu Dog?" Haley had yelled over when she couldn't help but hear him. He told her everything was fine before going back to his conversation with his feline companion. Unconvinced, Haley whispered softly, "Ear of the Dragon." She listened closely as her ears were now able to pick the two up.

"I won't do it," Fu Dog continued. "You don't realize the sacrifice it calls for?"

"Yes, I do," she confirmed. "And the sacrifice is my own. You know that." She watched as Fu Dog continued to shake his head. "I'm not asking for the boy, but for me," she tried to explain. "He's the only charge, I have ever had a connection with. He's the only one, who has ever treated me like an equal, and not just a pet or a guardian. He was my boy. He was my friend." She paused for a moment. "I have never been able to say that about a charge before," she admitted. "And I want him back." It was more of a demand than a request, and she knew it. "Please," she added for good measure.

"You want me to bring back the dead for you," Fu whispered, causing Haley to gasp where she stood. "You know the cost, La."

"La?" She stepped closer to him. "It's been so long since you've called me that."

"Don't change the subject," Fu Dog asked of her.

"Fine," she agreed. "And you're right, I know the cost and I'll gladly pay it. I can spare them, Fu," she assured him. "I am a cat, as you can see."

Fu Dog looked straight at her as he gave his reply. "The answer is still no," he whispered.

"Why?" she demanded.

"You know why!" He was growing weary with this conversation. "We two are so much older than we

have let everyone believe,” he began. “You know I’ll follow, I always have, but I can’t right now. My own charges need me.”

“I told you I can spare them. I would never ask you to leave your own for mine,” she made clear. “I mean, did you really think I was that selfish?” she asked. Fu Dog only looked away, causing Yan Yan to scoff. “You and I are older than time itself,” she began. “You have faithfully followed me in death and I, you in birth, no matter what the form. Whether it be the sun and the moon, koi fish in a pond, or a cat and a dog, playing an endless game of tag.”

Fu Dog looked defeated. “I’ll bring him back,” he finally agreed, Yan Yan’s face lit up. “But under one condition.”

“Name it.” She sat up tall.

“I know you’re lying to me,” he told her. “So tell me the true reason you want him back and he is yours.”

“Tui,” she whispered his true name, but he would not be deterred. Yan Yan sighed before telling him what he wanted to hear, knowing it would hurt him. “His soul,” she referred to Fred. “It’s the soul she left behind. The boy is his reincarnate.”

“So you finally found him, after all this time?”

“Not me, her,” she corrected.

“You’re one in the same. You gave her life and she gave it back to you. Her thoughts and feelings are your own. You’ve allowed them to dominate.” As they spoke the cabin finally finished rebuilding itself. Fu Dog stood on all four before walking past Yan Yan to the room where he knew Fred’s lifeless body would be resting.

“Fu,” she called after him, causing him to stop where he stood. “Are you angry?” she asked.

He didn’t turn around as he answered her. “Compared to us, he loved you mere seconds. Seconds!” His bark was so ferocious that it caused Haley, who was still eavesdropping, to nearly jump out of her skin. “Yet, it was enough to make you search for him, century after century, lifetime after lifetime.” There was then a long pause. “No,” he finally said softly. “I’m not angry,” he lied. “Now, if you’ll excuse me, it takes concentration . . . *defying the Laws of Nature.*”

To Be Continued. . .

## 26 - Haley

### Chapter Twenty-six: Haley

Haley's face was deadpan as she sat outside leaning against a tree. "Bring back the dead," she whispered to herself, after having overheard the private conversation Fu Dog had had with Yan Yan. Or should she say Tui and La?

Haley knew the tale of Tui and La well, but she had thought it had just been a bedtime story, a myth, or even a fairy tale. She had been at the library, doing research for an up-coming project, when she had stumbled upon a strange looking book that seemed somehow out of place. She picked it up and was immediately intrigued by what seemed to be a love story.

Tui and La were of the Spirit World, destined to be opposites in all that they did. Tui was the Spirit of the Water and La of Moon. They had given up their immortality to live in the mortal realm. Each lifetime, one would die and the other would soon follow, only to be reborn, and so their cycle was never ending. Each lifetime they would have to search for each other, for they had an internal need to always know where the other was, to always have balance.

But then something had changed. La, in the form of a koi fish, had given part of her soul to a dying baby girl. That little girl would grow up to become a princess named after her savior. The princess had fallen in love with a young warrior from another tribe. Their love was pure and innocent, but not without hardship. The princess's hand had been promised to another. Each wanted to do the honorable thing, so they tried denying what they felt for each other. But soon war approached and in the midst of that battle La, the koi fish was lost.

Tui did not understand why he had not followed, his beloved was gone, but he couldn't seem to follow her into the next life. He grew angry and aided his allies against the ones who had slain La. But then a miracle happened, and La was brought back to him by the girl she had once saved. He was overjoyed, but it wasn't until the next lifetime that he realized something was wrong. After finding each other, La seemed to still be on the hunt. Searching for something she couldn't quite recall. It would take her several lifetimes before she realized, she was looking for a soul she had left behind.

Haley's brow furrowed, that was all of the story she remembered, but then she realized she had just watched its conclusion. Within Fred was the soul of this warrior, the love La had to leave behind long ago and apparently Tui was not happy with the discovery.

And though their story was intriguing, it wasn't what struck Haley the most. What did was the fact that Fu Dog had the power to bring back the dead. "Mom," the young girl whispered sadly to herself. But then her sadness evaporated and turned into anger. If he had that power, why had he not brought back her mother? Why did he idly sit back as he watched their family slowly fall apart?

Haley pushed herself off the ground, ready to confront Fu Dog and demand an answer. She stormed



into the newly rebuilt cabin and made her way down the hall towards the only close door in her vision. She was so blinded by her anger that she did not notice the bright light that was escaping from the crack underneath the door. "Fu!" she yelled out, as she turned the doorknob and opened it wide, only to be blasted off her feet before striking the wall behind her.

As she landed on the floor she closed her eyes and covered them with her arm. "Fu!" she screamed, fear in her voice, as she wasn't sure about what to make of the unearthly light. Haley could feel it all around her. It invaded her senses right down to her very core. Then it was as if she was looking through eyes that weren't her own. All she could see was white, but it had structure and a form. . . it was snow.

The next image was harder to place. It was blue, and it made Haley feel warm and safe. They were eyes, followed by a smile, and then a face. It was a boy. And somehow she knew his name was Sokka, and that she was loved. And then suddenly, everything went black and she shivered in the coldness of it. She was submerged deep in the ocean, with no sense of what was up or down. She felt alone. She felt abandoned.

Haley then began coughing and surprisingly, air filled her lungs. She breathed heavily as she lowered her arm and looked into the bedroom. "Fred!" Yan Yan jumped onto the bed and landed on Fred's chest, where she laid down her head and began to sob openly.

Weakly, Fred lifted his hand and placed it upon Yan Yan. "I'm okay," he replied hoarsely, a soft smile on his face as his eyes remained close. "Don't cry, Yani."

"Don't ever leave me again," she begged of him through her tears.

Haley's eyes then drifted to Fu Dog on the other side as he watched the interactions of the two before him. He was no longer needed here and so he slowly lowered his head, a pained expression on his features, that he didn't know had been noticed, before walking out of the room. He seemed tired as he finally noticed Haley sitting outside the door. "Come on, kid," he tried to sound cheerful, with a job well done, but the dulling light in his eyes, made it unconvincing. "Let's find some Krylock venom and go home."

Haley only nodded. Moments ago, she had been so angry, and now the only thing she could feel was her aching heart for her animal guardian, bound for eternity to love one who loved another. The story of Tui and La was anything, but a fairy tale.

"Happy birthday, boy." Was the last thing Haley heard Yan Yan say to Fred as she caught up with Fu Dog down the hall.

OoOoO

"It's been rumored that Jake may be in this part of the world," Haley informed Fu Dog in the kitchen. "I want to find him," she said softly as she watched him pour Krylock venom into the potion that would take them home. "I want to see Jake."

Fu Dog frowned at the request. "I don't think that's a good idea. You're not ready to face him."

Haley returned his frown. "Do you really think Jake has gone bad?" she asked. "Do you think he really wants to fight me?"

Fu Dog turned to her. "Look, it's not my call to make. And I don't want to make it. I just want to go home!" he yelled. "Okay?" he said softly. "I can't be here anymore," he admitted. Haley said nothing more as she only looked at him. She then sighed before turning around and going to see the recovering dragon.

Fred smiled at her as she poked her head around the corner. "Don't be shy," he told her. "I don't think we've officially met," he greeted her as he slowly sat up. "I'm Alfred Nerk, but my friends call me Fred. I'm the Australian Dragon." Yan Yan purred as Fred continued stroking the length of her body.

"I'm Haley Long," she hesitated. "The American Dragon." The title still didn't feel like it was truly hers.

"It's nice to meet you." Fred then gestured to a nearby chair. "Please, sit." Haley nodded her thanks before sitting down. "Please, don't see this as rude, but I have to know. What terms are you on with your brother?" he asked.

Haley looked at him curiously. "What does that matter to you?"

"Just answer the question," he requested.

"They're training me to hunt him down," she confessed sadly, not noticing Fred's displeasure at this knowledge. "But I don't think I can do that. We've had our differences, but he's still my brother, and I don't care what the council thinks, he didn't leave his station because he's decided to turn against the Magical World. He's protected it too long to turn his back on it." Haley then thought of Fu Dog and how desperately he needed to get out this cabin. "I think Jake left because his heart was hurt and he needed to repair it," she hypothesized.

Now it was Fred's turn to look at her curiously. "You know about the Huntsclan?" he asked, wondering how much she knew about Rose.

Haley only looked at him for a moment. "Wow, that's a word I haven't heard in a long time," she told him. "What about the Huntsclan? They've been gone for years."

"You're treading on dangerous waters," Yan Yan warned Fred in a harsh tone.

"I know what I'm doing. Trust me," he whispered back before returning his attention back to the other dragon in the room. "The Huntsclan has returned," he said, revealing the truth. Seeing that she didn't believe him, he continued. "Your brother is searching for them." Haley was speechless. "He's contacted me, we spoke-

"You've spoken to him? So does that mean you know where he is?" she cut him off. "Where's my brother?" She stood as if demanding that he answered.

"Here, in Australia," was his simple reply.

"Take me to him. Please," she begged of him. Fred thought over her request. "It's been over seven months since I've seen him. He's written me a few times, but it's not the same," she tried to explain, but his expression had not changed. "I guess, I can't expect you to understand," she lowered her head in defeat.

"I'll take you to him," Fred finally announced. Haley looked at him in shock, thinking that she wanted to hear those words so badly that she had imagined it. When she realized his words had been true, there was a feeling of joy so strong within Haley that she couldn't help but throw her arms around him and squeeze him for all that he was worth. Fred returned her hug, but with a warning. "Don't make me regret this decision."

OoOoO

"frack!" Jake yelled as he tossed down a map of the place he was temporarily calling home. "This is getting us nowhere!" he cried out in frustration.

Daisy sat calmly off to the side in a chair as she sipped her drink. "Settle down, Jake. Acting like an idiot won't help our situation. We have to be patient," she advised him.

"Patient?!" Jake looked at her in disbelief. "It's been over half a year and we still haven't found any trace of the Huntsclan." He flopped down on the bed inside his hotel room. He sighed heavily before saying in a murmur, "I'm starting to think this was all a big mistake." He then closed his eyes, but then only moments later he felt water being dumped on him. "Hey!" he yelled as he bolted straight up and found Daisy standing over him.

"If you want to give up, fine!" she yelled. "I don't need you here, so just go back home."

"Home? Home to what?" Jake asked her as he stood and wrung out his shirt. "To my wife and kid?" He looked at her. "Because she ain't there waiting for me. She left me the night I decided to come here with you."

Daisy's eyes grew wide with Jake's words. "I- I didn't know," she stuttered.

"Of course you didn't. You're so busy caught up in your own world, you don't realize that I am slowly going insane," he informed her as he realized his shirt was beyond repair. He quickly pulled it over his head and tossed it to the floor before pulling a clean one out of a drawer.

Daisy opened her mouth, closed it, and then opened it again before she spoke. "It almost sounds like you're blaming me."

"Ding, ding, ding, ding! Someone give the lady a prize!" Jake then sat back down. "I was finally starting to forget about her. I was finally ready to let her go. It was a slow process," he suddenly remembered his first kiss with Trixie, "but I was getting there." He then looked at Daisy. "Then you came along and

you reopened an obsession and it consumed everything.” He then lowered his head into his hands. “I've lost so much.”

Daisy only wrapped her arms around herself. She had no words to comfort him and so she treaded slowly. “I didn't hold a gun to your head, Jake. If you think you've lost everything, it's because you've willingly let it go.”

Jake softly gasped at the truth. “Get out,” he told her with his head still down, anger clear in his voice.

“Fine, I'll be in my room.” Daisy walked towards the door and stepped out, going to her hotel room across the hall.

A moment later, there was a knock at the door. Jake wasn't in the mood to hear anything Daisy wanted to say. She had touched a nerve and knowing her, she probably wanted to push on it. Jake then stood up, drawing out his claws and baring his sharp fangs. He didn't want to hurt her, he just wanted to scare her enough so she would leave him alone for a few days. He whipped the door opened and growled furiously.

He heard a soft gasp, before he finally made out the person who stood before him. “Haley,” he whispered to himself as he watched her turn into her dragon form.

“I didn't come to fight.” Her face was stern. “So please don't make me.” Haley couldn't help but wonder if she had been wrong about her brother turning his back against the Magical World.

She jolted back as his claws slowly came towards her, but as they did, they turned back into a human hand. He grabbed the back of her head and she froze in fear. It wasn't until her head was against his chest, that she realized he had pulled her into a hug. Tears fell from her eyes as she changed back into a young teenager and returned her brother's embrace, before hearing him speak for the first time in over seven months. “I've missed you. . . *Haley.*”

To Be Continued. . .

## 27 - Breathing

### Chapter Twenty-seven: Breathing

“And that's the whole story,” Jake laid out almost everything for Haley to hear, skipping over the parts about Spud, as they sat across from each other in his hotel room. He sighed as he looked down at the floor, his little sister's eyes on him, intense as she analyzed the situation.

He then noticed her straighten up, ready to speak. His ears perked as he waited to hear what she thought, because Jake could deny many things, but Haley's intelligence was not one of them. There used to be a time when he envied her insight, but it was only now that he was grateful for it. So he sat patiently until she was finally ready to speak. “You're an idiot,” was her verdict. His shoulders dropped.

Haley looked angry at him. “All this time, I thought she had broken your heart.” She shook her head from side to side. “When in fact. . . you broke hers.”

Jake's expression read of shame. “I know,” he whispered.

“Jesus, Jake!” Haley yelled out of frustration. “What did you expect from her? To stay home and be the good little wife, while you went off chasing after some other woman?” Jake had no words for her. “And what has that gotten you so far? Here, alone in another country. No friends, no family, no status. Do you even know what dad and I have been through since you left?”

She was visibly upset and she had every right to be, Jake knew as he watched her stand. “With dad,” she began slowly, her arms wrapping around herself. “It's like with mom all over again. He won't even wrap his head around the idea that you may not be coming back. He thinks-”

“Stop,” Jake's brow furrowed as he cut her off. “I always planned on coming back,” he clarified.

“How?” she asked. “The Council has gone mad. They want you brought in. You left your post, Jake, and as far as they're concerned, you're AWOL,” she explained. “Jake,” her voice seemed tired as she spoke. “They're going to take the search for you world-wide.”

“What?” Jake couldn't believe it. All this fuss over leaving his post? “I don't understand.” His confusion was clear.

“What's not to understand? You're a powerful dragon.” Jake knew it was bad when his sister started complimenting him. “Not only that, but influential in the magical world. You can easily make others see your side. Jake. . .” she didn't know how to say it. “They think you have the potential to become the next Dark Dragon.” Silence then fell over the siblings.

“I-” Jake finally began several moments later. “I could never betray the oath I took,” he said softly. Haley looked relieved to hear him say the words she had been preaching to others for months. She

knew her brother could never be evil. And with that fact secure in her mind, she sat back down, a smile on her face.

"I know," she whispered as she reached out and took his hand. "So let's return home, stand before the Council, and explain everything. They'll reinstate you and we can start getting things back to normal," she suggested.

"No," was Jake's final word as he slid his hand away from Haley.

"Why not?" she wanted to know.

"You're smarter than that, Haley. You already know why," he told her.

"The Huntsclan," she confirmed. Jake nodded. "Don't you think this is the type of information the Council would want to know? If you tell them you left your post on official duty they will understand."

"I don't think they will. This isn't only about the Huntsclan," he tried to tell her.

"You're right, it's about you and how each day brings you closer to destroying your marriage."

"My marriage has already failed." He looked away. "But if it means anything to you, I never meant to hurt Trixie," he admitted.

"Really? Because you had me fooled. I mean, have you truly forgotten what Rose did to our family?!" she yelled, furious that her brother had fallen so deeply into his own denial. He was so much like their father in that respect. "You can't possibly still care for her! She had our mother killed, Jake. And if what you say is true, she's begun a new reign of the Huntsclan." She was frantic. Her brother could not be this blind. "I watched our mother die, Jake. She died!" Haley was determined to make him see the light. "You trusted her, you loved her, and she turned on you like rabid dog!"

"Enough, Haley," he whispered, but she continued.

"That heartless dog doesn't deserve your loyalty! What that monster deserves is to be tied and beaten within an inch of her life. That dog-" But Jake would not give her a chance to open his eyes, as she was cut off immediately when she felt his hand strike her across the face. He did so, with so much force, that Haley was knocked from her chair. Jake gasped as he realized what he had just done. He didn't even remember rising from his seat to stand over her. All he could remember thinking at the time was that he wanted her to shut up and shut up now!

Jake could only stare as Haley slowly brought her hand up to her stinging face. Her cheeks wet as tears began to cascade down her pale skin. Jake went to speak. "I'm sorry," but they were not his words that were heard. The older dragon's eyes grew wide as he realized that the words had slipped from his sister's mouth.

Why was she apologizing to him? He didn't understand, because everything she had told him was true. Jake knew he had been losing his focus, but didn't know how to get back on track. "I'm sorry," Haley's voice broke as she repeated her words.

Jake then suddenly dropped to the floor beside her. "No." He shook his head as he wrapped his arms around his little sister and embraced her tightly. He had already failed so many people in his life, including himself, but he would be damned if he allowed Haley to be one of them. "No, I'm sorry. Me," he stressed as she began to sob openly into his chest.

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His eyes had been opened, he knew, but he was already in this too deep to turn around now. If he had any chance of things returning to normal he had to set this right. He laughed at the thought. Normal. That was all Trixie ever wanted and though he was nowhere near the definition of normal, he knew he could have tried harder.

After apologizing to Haley and regaining his cool, they spoke for a while longer. Jake learned about Fred and how he had had his own ordeal with the Huntsclan. "Wait," Jake interrupted her in the middle of her story. "Are you telling me. . . Fred knows where the Academy is located?" At his question, Haley knew she had said too much. "Haley," he demanded an answer.

"Yes," she finally responded.

"Where is Fred now?"

"Recovering," she answered slowly. "I know what you're thinking, Jake, he's not up to it," she told him.

"I wouldn't ask him to go back, not after what he's been through. I only need him to point me in the right direction," he explained. "Take me too him."

Haley sighed. She thought she had been so close to convincing him to come home with her, but then she had to go and open her big mouth. "Fine," she agreed, knowing that there was no changing his mind once it had been set. "It's faster if we fly," she told him.

Jake couldn't help the smile that came to his face as he flew beside his little sister. It was a simple thing that he had taken for granted long ago. For months he had flown the skies alone, looking for what seemed to be the impossible, but he had his sister next to him now and somehow that made everything better. Everything now seemed just a little more bearable. "Thank you," he whispered into the wind, knowing full well that the rush of air around them would never allow it to reach her ears.

It wasn't long before the siblings reached their destination. Jake followed Haley inside and he was greeted with a warm smile from his fellow dragon. "Jake!" Fred was glad to see his trusted friend, but it didn't seem like the sentiment was returned. "Jake?" he questioned.

"Haley, she told me what happened." The smile on the blonde's face finally fell. "You didn't give me up."

"Of course not. What kind of friend would I be if I had?" He then gave him a friendly hit on the arm. "Come on." He led them to the sofas. "We should talk," he suggested.

As they sat down, Jake got straight to the matter at hand. "Tell me of the Huntsclan," he asked of Fred.

Fred frowned. "They aren't the Huntsclan we remember," he let the fact be known. "From what I can conclude, the top three run everything and they are not older than we are. The rest, no more than thirteen."

"Children?" Jake questioned, not knowing how he felt about going up against someone several years his junior.

"Don't let the fact that they are children fool you," Fred warned. He then pressed his lips together for a moment before beginning again. "When they had me locked up, they brought down a handful of their members to see me. . ." he trailed off in deep thought. Haley gave him a concern look before she reached over and gently touched his hand. He smiled as his gaze focused on her. He then continued slowly. "Their eyes. There was so much hate within them. It burned with it. They were hungry for blood. Each is trained to be anything, but a child." He gave his point of view. "Like I said, they are not the Huntsclan we remember. Something stirs within, something darker than before."

"It's revenge," Jake answered. The other looked at him curiously. Jake only shook his head. "It's a moment I don't want to relive," was his only explanation, and Fred respected it. Jake then stood and walked over to the window. It was beginning to grow dark. "Where can I find them?" he asked and found that a moment later that his friend stood beside him.

"Do you know what you're doing, Jake?" Fred wanted to know.

"I don't know what I'm doing anymore," he said honestly. "But this is something I have to do. I have to face her. I have to know where I stand," he finished in a whisper.

"Then we leave tonight," Fred announced and then turned around to prepare.

"No," Jake answered. "You've been through enough. You don't have to go back."

"You don't understand," Fred began with his back to both of the Long children. "They took something from me and I want him back." Both could hear the anger in his voice before he continued down the hall.

"Him? Who's him?" Jake asked his sister.

Haley gave him an exhausted sigh. "Were you not listening to me at all at the hotel?" she wondered. "One of the top three, the Huntsclan member he escaped with, who was forced to go back, is his boyfriend," she clarified.

Jake then quickly sat next to Haley and then whispered. "Fred's gay?" he asked seriously.

Haley stared at her brother in amazement. "Wow, Jake. Just when I think you can't surprise me anymore." She got up and headed towards the kitchen.

"What? What did I say?" he called behind her.



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"You probably already know him." Fred answered when Jake, feeling bad that he hadn't known more about his friend, asked about his boyfriend. "He was part of the New York Chapter. Brooklyn Even. He's the Number One Huntsman." he paused to think a moment. "But more than likely you know him by his cadet name. . . Number Eighty-nine," he revealed. "My Kaden," he spoke softly to himself.

Haley's stomach dropped at that moment as she lost a bit of her altitude when she heard the familiar name. Number Eighty-nine. Her mother's killer. How could someone so kind, love someone so vile? She wondered as she regained her altitude. Jake then swept in beside her. He spoke only loud enough for her to hear. "I know what you're thinking."

"You have no idea what I'm thinking," her voice was tight and low.

"Relax, because I want the same thing." The words surprised Haley greatly as her head whipped towards him.

She then gave him a concern look. "You know what this will cost you." She reminded him. Jake chanced a glance at Fred. He had always been a good friend to him and so the thought of betraying him gave him a nasty feeling in his stomach. "Can you truly be with me on this?" Haley's voice rang through his thoughts.

"Would you forgive me if I weren't?"

"Never," she declared.

"Then I'm with you." He had made his decision. He knew it would sever all ties he had with Fred, but what kind of son would disrespect the memory of their fallen mother? This was about honor for both Haley and Jake and it would be restored.

"Good," Haley began. "Because be clear on this, we are not-" she stopped when both realized that Fred had finally noticed them. Jake fell back into their V formation without hearing Haley finish her sentence, but it was alright because he already knew her final words. They were not leaving Number Eighty-nine. . . *breathing*.

To Be Continued. . .

## 28 - Hey There

### Chapter Twenty-eight: Hey There

Kaden groaned as he slowly pushed himself up from his bed. He made a face of pain as his hand went to cover his injured arm. He had been confined to his quarters going on two days and his mind raced with worry over Fred. Although, at this point, he should have been worried about his own well being. No one had come to see him yet, other than the cadet who made sure he was fed on time, and the lack of contact did nothing, but put Kaden on edge, if only just a little. He knew there would be some kind of punishment, but he wasn't sure if he wanted to think about it, so worrying about Fred, was all that occupied his mind.

But not even the Huntsclan would give him that as Kaden heard the door being unlocked from the outside. He sat calmly as it opened and Eric stepped through, his eyes on the floor as he did so. Kaden was no better as he immediately averted his eyes when he recognized who was coming to see him.

Each knew what was coming next, would be a pivotal moment when it came to each other lives. Silence rained over them, as each began to wonder, if the damage had already been done, if all that they were, was already severed beyond repair.

"Tell me, why," Eric finally spoke, his voice soft, fragile even. He then slowly allowed himself to look at the boy who sat across the room. "Why did you betray the Huntsclan? Why-" his voice broke, his chest felt heavy. "Why did you betray me?" he asked his true question.

Kaden shook his head. "What I did had nothing to do with you," Kaden tried to explain.

"So after everything – the good, the bad, the supernatural. . . I meant nothing to you?" Anger was clear in his voice.

"The opposite actually. You mean a lot to me," Kaden let be known.

"Maybe." He took comfort in that fact, if only just a little. "But that didn't stop you from leaving."

Kaden took a deep breath. "I had to follow my heart, no matter who that may have hurt. Even if it was you." Eric said nothing as he took in the other's words. "But don't think I planned this or did it on purpose," Kaden tried to explained. "I didn't think things would end up this bad when they started so simply."

Kaden then went on to explain how he had met Fred. It had been one of his free days off from the academy and he thought it would be a good time to go birthday shopping for Eric. He had entered a random shop with the intent of looking for inspiration, when one of the associates approached him and asked if he needed help. The associate ended up being Fred, who worked there part time.

Right away, the two of them seem to click. At the time, the young Huntsclan member would never admit it, but the thought of having a friend outside of the academy intrigued him. So he had gone back to the store and by chance caught Fred as he was ending his shift. Kaden had asked Fred if he was interested in hanging out.

Fred had looked at his watch, as if he were in a hurry, and explained to Kaden that his schedule didn't leave a lot of room for a social life. Fred expected the other to look slightly rejected, as he had said it in a rude way, but to his surprise, Kaden only smiled and told him that was another thing they had in common.

Fred, amused by the kid, and realizing he hadn't had a friend outside of the Magical World in years, thought he could use the change in pace. So by the end of their conversation they ended up exchanging information.

Things started out slow. There were a lot of missed calls and plenty games of phone tag before they realized emailing and text messages suited them better. One night, one had actually caught the other's call. Fred told Kaden he had some free time coming up and wondered if he wanted to do something. Kaden, being one of only three teachers in a still very young academy told Fred he didn't know if he could find the time.

Fred sounded put out, when he heard the news, and Kaden not wanting to push away a new friendship before it really began, recanted his words and told him he would maneuver somethings around and find the time. Kaden regretted that decision the moment he saw the fifteen foot waves at the beach Fred had dragged him to. He had to put up with Fred's teasing about being a city boy all day.

And that's how things went for many months, one found himself with free time and would immediacy call up the other, who would clear their schedule for the other.

One night, while at a local arcade, eating pizza, Fred received a phone call and went outside to answer it. Kaden couldn't hear the conversation, but he could see him through the glass doors as Fred steadily became agitated. He knew the news wasn't good when his blonde headed friend couldn't really look at him as he made his way back to their table.

Fred had apologized, telling him something had come up as he gathered his bookbag and made sure he had the book he had shown Kadan earlier. He hoped that they could reschedule as he said he would make this up to him. Kaden only smiled as he reassured him everything was fine. Another moment later, Fred was out the door leaving Kaden sitting by himself.

Then as soon as Fred was out of eye sight, Kaden heard a familiar sound. He soon realized that it was Fred's cell, which was sitting under the table. He quickly picked it up, the call already missed, and ran out the door and down the street where he had seen Fred heading. Kaden then froze in his tracks as he had spotted him around a dark alley turning into a yellow dragon.

And as Fred's wings spread out, his back to Kaden, he took into the sky, disappearing into the night. His cell began to ring again, which slowly fell to the ground from Kaden's fingertips.

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Kaden continued his story. "My first thought was to contact the Academy to let them know I had discovered a dragon in the region. But as I went to make the call, I realize I couldn't." He took a deep breath. "It was then I realized I had come to care about him."

"What about me?" Eric wanted to know. "We had been together, you made no mention of someone else. You gave no clue, I wasn't the only one."

"At the time you were." Kaden gave a weak smile. "Fred and I had gotten into it sometime after that. He had noticed I was acting differently around him and he wanted a reason behind it. I lied and he caught me. I thought he was a hypocritical bastard when he told me he didn't do secrets and he ended our friendship. I wasn't in a good place after that and you noticed. You didn't know what was wrong, but you never pressured me into telling you. You were just there, and I appreciated you so much for that. Soon we sort of took off. And it was good. We were good."

Eric seemed genuinely pleased to hear those words, even though he knew they were lies. Their relationship had always been rocky at best, especially with Kaden trying to deny he was attracted to guys. "So why didn't we stay good?" he humored him.

Kaden looked hesitate. "A few weeks back, Fred called. He wanted to see me so I went to him. He told me, in his own way, that he missed me. He didn't want to end our friendship. And me, not thinking, told him I wanted more than friendship. To my surprise, he accepted, as he concluded that's what I had been hiding from him. He said he didn't want secrets in our relationship, so he showed me his true form, but I never told him I was Huntsclan."

"Or that you were already dating someone else, huh?" Eric interrupted his him. "I guess, I just completely and utterly slipped your mind."

"That wasn't it!" Kaden tried to defend himself. "I told you how much you meant to me, but how I didn't see us working like that. I always told you the truth."

"You were as clear as muddy water. Because no matter how the chips fell in your world, I was still cheated on. You didn't even have the decency to break it off with me before I made an idiot of myself," Eric told him. "Do you know how long it took me to gather the courage to say that I love you?" he asked, walking over to Kaden's bed. "And you just spit on it. Then you went and told that filth what you should have been telling me." He shook in his anger. "I love you! Do you even know what that means?!" he screamed.

Kaden sat there calmly before he reached out and placed his hand on Eric's cheek. Despite himself, Eric closed his eyes and leaned into his touch, taking an all too familiar comfort within it. "I'm sorry," Kaden finally whispered. "I care for you, but I can't love you like that."

Kaden watched as a single tear slipped down Eric's dark cheek, before he opened his eyes. Kaden drew away, expecting the full force of the other's anger, but to his amazement, it didn't come. "I understand," were Eric's hushed broken words. He then turned around and walked towards the door. He opened it and closed it behind him, but not before saying, "And I hope you understand, why I had to kill your precious dragon." And leaving Kaden locked within his quarters, with only his thoughts to console him.

Eric had walked around the corner before he heard, the gut wrenching sobs of Kaden, but with each step Eric took, the other's cries meant less and less to him. He was a full blooded Huntsmen now, a foolish boyhood crush would no longer hold him back.

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“Alright, lights are going out on my count.” Getting in was not easy. Sneaking into a Huntsclan Academy had not been as simple as it was back when Jake was fourteen, but then again, he had had Spud by his side to hack into the system. It wasn't that his sister couldn't do the job just as well, but it was times like this that Jake wish that he, Trixie, and Spud were still an untouchable trio. “Three. . .” Haley began her countdown. “Two. . . One. Go!”

The lights were out and the three separated down different halls of the Academy, each with their own mission. Jake realizing just how huge the compound was stopped. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. When he opened them, ten identical clones stood in front of him. He nodded and they all took off. He then continued down the path he was originally on.

Suddenly, there was a blaring alarm and flashing red lights. “Attention all cadets,” came a recorded message, which made Jake falter in his steps.

“Rose,” he couldn't help, but whisper her name.

“This is not a drill,” the message warned. “Intruders have infiltrated the Academy. Seek and destroy. Repeat, this is not a drill.”

Jake turned quickly as he heard footsteps and fighting down another corridor. One of his clones had been engaged in battle. “What's that?” Jake took off quickly, he couldn't be spotted now. He had to hide and wait for them to pass if he wished to know where Eight-nine was being kept. He slipped into the nearest room that had an unlock door and slowly close it as not to be heard. “I think I saw something go this way!” yelled a cadet, probably no more than nine. His spear was close to twice his side, but he carried it as if he had been born with it. A rush of cadets flew down the hall pass the door. “Echo – Romeo!” The nine year old seem to be giving silent instructions to two teams.

A moment later, when they could no longer be heard, Jake turned around to lean again the door, but as he did he realized he wasn't alone in the room. Frozen in shock across the room, stood none other than the woman Jake had been in love it for a good part of his life.

Each just stood there, staring at the other, not believing their eyes. Jake's lips curled into a small smile, she was just as beautiful as he remembered, even with the flashing red lights still going strong. Time and time again Jake wondered what he would do if he ever came face to face with her again. He hadn't heard from her in several long years. So much had changed and yet, when he looked at her, he still felt like that thirteen year old boy who had bumped into her one day after school.

His stomach was full of butterflies as he waited for her to speak. It was then that he realized she seemed hesitated and so Jake knew it was on him to do so. Suddenly his throat felt dry. How did one sum up everything in a moment like this? Jake then realized it was with one word at a time. And so he began the

only way he knew how. . . “*Hey, there.*”

To Be Continued. . .