

The Foundling

There were three things that he knew. First, was that it was a nice morning. The sun was just coming up over the hills and making a majestic entrance as seen from the hilltop he was sitting on. The second was that he was hungry. That was a given though. He was almost always hungry. The last of what he knew, was that he was alone.

He also had a name, but it would be hard to say that it was something that he knew. He was a little young to understand the concept of names. But he understood that there was a set of sounds that when put together, somehow meant him: Tokoz.

And there he sat, alone and hungry, on a hill overlooking the human town of Dalimond: a barely hatched dragon with light blue scales, some of them almost white, and a round head. His teeth were small and close together, and the horns that surrounded the back of his neck were very newly formed.

Tokoz never heard the saris approach, a golden colored cat person wearing leather and walking silently and almost invisibly. He jumped when he heard the voice suddenly behind and turned, ready to instinctively protect himself. To him, the saris smelled like food.

“Balak naekar, Bahar.” the saris said and Tokoz took a step closer, but said nothing.

After a short pause the saris continued, “You don’t speak Krieg Praefar, little one? Even a Lunus would at least answer a formal greeting...”

Tokoz took another step closer to the saris, and unconsciously licked his lips. Whatever it was, it made somehow familiar noises, and it smelled like food.

The saris took a small step back and said, “Well, I’m not sure you understand, but I am Sly Loki, master of stealth and practical jokes.” He bowed slightly. Tokoz took that opportunity to try and take a bite of the saris’s head.

But as quick as the hatchling was, Sly was faster and delivered a fast and hard slap directly on the top of Tokoz’s head. The force of the blow was enough to lower the little dragon’s head almost into the dirt.

Tokoz couldn’t remember food hurting before, so decided that maybe this new creature wasn’t something to eat.

While this thought was going on in the hatchling’s head, another was forming in the saris’s. A smile crossed Sly’s face and he reached into a small sack at his side and pulled out a carrot.

“Are you hungry there, big fellow?” he asked.

Tokoz smelled the carrot suspiciously. It smelled like food. He tried to take a bite of it, but Sly pulled it back and started to move away from him. Tokoz followed easily and Sly laughed. “This is so easy...”

Across a road and up and down another hill they went: Tokoz seeming to never tire of not getting the carrot and Sly being always too quick to lose an arm. They avoided the town, and soon came to small patch of earth with rows of green shooting up from orange bases.

Tokoz stopped short and sniffed the ground near him. This didn’t look like food that could get away from him. He grabbed a few tufts of green in his teeth and easily pulled some carrots up from the fresh, soft soil. Making a snapping motion with his head, he easily swung them around and up into his mouth.

These tasted like food. He liked them and bent down to get more, while Sly Loki looked on smiling. “Well, hatchling,” he said, “I need to be gone.” And either because of extremely skillful

movement, or because Tokoz was so pre-occupied with his meal, the saris was gone without a sound.

Tokoz only got another mouthful of carrots when the screaming started. He was happy and content though, so didn't bother looking around until he felt something hard slam into his back scales.

"Get away from my carrots!" a small, almost squeaky voice shouted. It was followed by another strike, which was hard enough for Tokoz to actually turn his head and look at what was happening.

The gnome was dressed mostly in green, and had a small hoe that he was using to beat the young dragon on the side. He had brown hair and long curly mustaches. The square glasses that were precariously perched on his round nose, were bouncing closer and closer the edge with each strike. "Those are mine." He shouted again, taking the opportunity to hit Tokoz's now much closer head with his hoe.

It wasn't that the blow hurt the hatchling. Dragon armor is thick to begin with, and in the case of this particular hatchling, there was little danger of the blow landing near anything vital. But instinct did kick in, and though he could not put a name to it, Tokoz realized he needed to defend himself. Lifting himself up on his back legs, he took a quick swipe at the gnome, careful to make sure his claws were not too extended.

The gnome rolled back about 10 feet from the blow, tumbling several times and ending up with grass in his hair and mouth. He went back to reach for his hoe when the field erupted with laughter.

"Oh, Tyynn!" Sly Loki was saying between gasps, some strange package in his paws, "He's just a baby after all."

Tyynn slightly lowered the hoe and glanced up at the saris above the hill from him. "What're you up to now, Sly? Can't a gnome live in peace?"

Tokoz, sensing that the need to defend himself was past, returned happily to eating more carrots.

Sly came down the hill and put a re-assuring hand on the gnome's shoulder. "You are one of the Gifted," he said almost confidentially, "You're no farmer. There is a fight to take on and if you don't fear the dragon getting into that carrot patch any more than you did the last rabbit I sent..."

"That was you?" the gnome shouted, throwing Sly's hand off his shoulder, "I should have known."

"You need to turn to the fight," Sly said in a very rare serious tone. "Istaria needs you."

"Hmmfff," Tyynn sighed. "Like the Empire needs carrot-raiding dragons too, I suppose?" He then began pushing at Sly, "Well, don't sit idle," he said, "Get what it's called out of my carrots."

Sly placed a hand on the hatchling's neck and said, "I don't know what his name is, I just found him this morning over..."

Before he could finish what he was saying the dragon spoke, a deep echoing voice typical of his race, "Tokoz." He said.

"Ah, so he does speak," Sly said carefully luring the hatchling away with a fish he'd brought with him back down the hill. "And what else does Tokoz say?"

"Tokoz." The hatchling responded.

"Quite the vocabulary," the saris mused, still luring the dragon with the fish as Tyynn looked on suspiciously. A few steps from the carrot patch, Sly let Tokoz have the fish, and confidently

put his hand around the dragon's neck to lead him. "I think we shall have lots of fun together, my young eggling. Lot's of fun..."

Having quickly finished off the fish, Tokoz turned and gave the saris a taste, but began quickly rubbing his tongue on this ankle scales, trying to remove the hair... Saris, he decided, were not food.

There was a shining in the saris's eyes that didn't just come from the still rising sun. "And I think the name of the next set of fun, is an elf named Celly..."

The visit to Celly was somewhat disappointing. Sly had planned to coax the dragon up top of a little shed where she stored flax, knowing full well that it wouldn't bear the weight of the hatchling. But Celly had just been leaving as they arrived and so saw the blue dragon from distance.

Being much more traveled than Tyynn had been, she recognized how young the hatchling was immediately. The elf came up to Tokoz and gave him a hug rubbed deeply the scales on the back of his head. For a moment Sly thought that Celly might lose her hand at the least, and possibly her head, but the hatchling took it all in stride.

The saris mostly ignored the typical female comments about how adorable the little "baby" was.

"Oh and look!" Celly almost squealed in excitement. His scales are the same color as my hair!" And it so it was. Tokoz apparently noticed the similarity and was sniffing her blue hair deeply. For a moment, Sly had hoped to at least get a laugh out of her getting her hair slightly singed, but the hatchling was very careful.

They grudgingly stayed for lunch. Celly gave Tokoz a bushel of carrots, and brought out some roast gruok r all of them to share. Tokoz sniffed the gruok, but only took a politely small bite before returning to his carrots.

"From Tyynn?" Sly asked Celly, motioning to the stack of rapidly depleting orange vegetables.

"Yes," Celly replied with a laugh. "All things considered," she said, "he grows far too many carrots."

A low series of growls came suddenly from the blue foundling, "Toekoz laeko toekoe'g" He smiled and grabbed another set of carrots by the green stems with his teeth, swung them up and around and into his mouth.

"Krie Daefarata" Sly said slowly looking at the hatchling in a new light. "Bemi granak Krie Daefarata bet beto?" It was obvious that Sly had spoken that language for quite awhile, as he sounded more like a dragon as he spoke than a saris.

"Ri" The hatchling replied simply. "Ri laeko toekoe'g"

Celly watched the exchange part with amusement and part with curiosity. "What are you two talking about?"

Sly turned toward the elf and said with a little excitement in his voice. "He said, 'Tokoz eats carrots.' I asked him if spoke the ancient dragon language, and all he said in reply was 'I eat carrots.'"

"Doesn't sound anything like what I hear dragons say now." Celly answered, quickly adding, "Not that I speak their language. I know when one says hello to me, but that's about it." She paused a brief moment and then continued, "This sounds, well, it sounds old."

"Well," Sly said, slowly rubbing the back of his neck and taking the opportunity to scratch light behind his ears. "I asked him when we met if he spoke that language. It didn't surprise me

when he didn't speak it at all."

"I know you too well Sly, since you couldn't bust down my flax shed, the least you can do is give me a story. If you're not causing trouble, it's because you have a story to tell."

"Bust down..." Sly stammered, "Me? You think I would have done something like that?"

"It's the newest thing built on my property, so your most likely target, yes. Although I wouldn't have put it passed you to see what you'd have tried with my chicken coupe and that dragon."

"To the best of my knowledge," Sly said smoothly, as though the subject had never changed, "There are no dragons left that speak that tongue. Only the most ancient of ancients spoke it, and they, sadly, are no more in the land."

"But you said you tried to speak it to him earlier. What made you think a hatchling would know it, if there are no dragons left to speak it?"

"I'm not sure why," the golden haired saris responded. "It seemed kind of funny at the time to try it. He didn't answer then. When the bipedal races, the naka duskael as they called us then and call us now, were subjects of the dragon's rule many ages ago, they spoke a language that was forbidden for the 'lower' races to learn—not that they easily could anyway. Some sounds are much easier for the dragons to make than it is for us."

Celly rose and grabbed a rag to pull a kettle off the fire. "Mint tea?" she asked.

"Please," Sly responded.

"So if it was forbidden, how did you ever learn it?" Celly asked as she poured the tea.

Sly stared far away for a few moments, and gently stirred his drink before taking a sip. When he finished all he said was "someone had to learn it." It was said in a sad whisper that was so uncharacteristic of the rogue saris, that Celly dared not ask more.

"I don't know how he knows any of it," Sly continued without changing his volume or tone. "Or how much he knows. But it's a curious thing. A very strange thing..."

The blue haired elf and the golden haired saris both stood for a moment quietly observing the dragon happily eating a bushel of carrots. Obviously simple minded even for a dragon, Sly could only wonder about his sudden appearance.

"Bemi fzig toemakt Krie Daefarata, sutil ata." he said, Tokoz obviously not understanding or perhaps not wanting to hear any of it. "You must learn your language, little one." Sly said. "The time has come for Krie Daefarata to be heard among your race again." Again his eyes seemed to drift to a far off time and it looked as though Sly was not aware of anything else around him.

"Baco Krieg'g graezo k watiem'g wittz, k falto'tae ag." He took a deep breath, "When Ancient Dragons fly the skies again, the time will have come."

Celly stared at the rogue and Tokoz continued his meal of carrots. Sly was oblivious to both. "The time must be very soon then." He said, "Very soon."