

*(Written by Shard)*

Well, she'd signed up for this. Dasha was unsure now, whether this was all really a good idea. Thrown together with a few disparate candidates and brought to this massive place was not really on her list of things to do, but. Here they were.

They were here, she had faintly overheard or maybe faintly listened in on further discussions, because of the *others* - the 'why did you invite them' 'how can they possibly show up here' 'how did they even' dragons. The Death Court. So... maybe she still wanted to be here, maybe she and the others still were absolutely ready or able to find a dragon bond or companion here. But they were here as a *revenge stunt*? In the long run, would that matter? Only by virtue of knowing how to filter gossip from nonsense did she realize that the many whispered rumors circling in the dining hall back home were very, very real.

Now, though, they were at the Ball and they were all dazzled and hopeful. What's this now? She recognized someone right away, at the coat-and-hat check. Lord Noone?! Here? Oh. He was handing out proper capes, fancy ruffled collars; she got the treatment too: a kind of garland in white silk that she realized had flower designs embroidered in it in satiny white thread. She wondered if she'd get to keep it. She wondered how they could possibly take anything *back* from people once all was said and done, so of course she'd keep it.

There was precious little lead time for them, and though they were all given the once-over and twice-checked in their (sometimes) rented gear, Dasha still felt a touch out of place. But she realized they all felt this way. This place was 'out' of their experience, after all. Mystic and her group were already present, apparently, because every one of this weird little collection of candidates could hear her simmering and heated words, over on a balcony. It wasn't hard to hear her specific voice, even among the throngs that were milling around, dancing to the music, or even performing over the ballroom's big floor. But it wasn't hard, either, to distract herself from that measured, irate voice - to watch an aerial dance, quite fun.

Dasha felt a bump at her elbow and immediately realized that she had been staring in wonder at those performers, not paying attention to where she was going. She'd put one foot in front of the other and had usually been able to avoid crashing into anyone given her upbringing in the kitchens of the Warren. Busy places, lots of people to move around, she was used to it. But this place seemed to be drawing her attention anywhere but right in front of her.

"Oh I'm sorry," she uttered and then glanced down when the bump continued at her arm. Where a shiny, satin-sparkling dragonet sat patiently looking up at her. A horse-like face, but with gigantic floofy curls around its long ears, and two small horn buds on its forehead. A shimmering mane of platinum and white tumbled down its neck, and those wings were like molten silver!

***No need to be sorry, I'm the one bumped into you!*** The mental voice was so gentle, slightly masculine, all very curious and a little bit tired. ***I've been waiting but not for very long. I don't think you were here when I first looked.***

Dasha realized that... this... was her dragon? This beautiful creature like a cloud poured out of mercury?

***I am! And... I think we should wait and watch. I am Burmei nye'aynn, I'll come with you wherever you wish. But there's definitely ... something.***

"Something, or some one?" Dasha finally found her voice, a rarity while back home. The dragon gave a furry-shouldered shrug, unsure yet.

Little Burmei did need to be fed, and then took a bit of a nap while Dasha was busy reading up on the breeds in the pamphlet they got. It was harder to study that pamphlet when the music got raucous, or when the more booming and blustery operatic performance came onto The Stage. After that though... With an hour to go, Dasha had also enjoyed some food and drink - food she neither had to prepare nor serve! bonus! - as well as hazarded a few inexpert steps on the dance floor. She was much more comfortable up on the balcony watching... and listening to the Warren's leadership gripe and grumble to each other...

As the hour bell chimed, and the acts started up once more, Burmei woke up and shook off his slumber a little. ***We should go down there!*** He bespoke somewhat urgently.

Dasha picked up the hatchling and hefted him gently over her shoulder and using her new sash to support him (oh how Noone would throw a fit if that sash got ripped by those already-sharp claws) and headed straight down to the ballroom's big - crowded - floor. The dragons who were walking there now were proud little things! Heads similar to Burmei's, well marginally, and...

***That one! That one! There you are!*** Burmei struggled a little and then tumbled to the floor, rolled (tail and legs and wings and hind wings going all directions) and came up next to a littler one - one with the distinctive event's checkerboard pattern improbably on their body?!

Dasha watched as her faintly-older and slightly-bigger Burmei came to a halt near this dragonet and they nuzzled muzzles. ***Bask is ours! Yours and mine!***

It settled its wings over its very boggling back, and looked up at her with big blue eyes, and nodded. "W...wait, both of ours?" Dasha wasn't sure, she'd heard about riders who had more than one dragon to their name, but was never - ever - one to imagine that one would be *her!*

"I didn't imagine being with anyone else!" The little dragon could speak? Already? And again it nodded, proudly. They made their second trip to the meat counter, and Dasha had to rein in Burmei from gobbling up another big share of it!