

Oberon and Chili

Sterling + Narnalys cleansed

1006 words

It's nearing evening in the Floating Isles. Wispy clouds drag leisurely across the sky, both above and below, like pale, pink brushstrokes. Gryphons and dragons alike, starkly silhouetted against the reddening sky as little more than black shapes, flit around between the islands, hurrying to get their final chores done before the day is over. It's not dark yet, and has only begun dipping into it, but most of the houses on the islands already have warm light streaming from their windows. Faint laughter can be heard, friends and family reuniting after a long day, and it makes Chili smile, despite herself.

She's rarely felt as free as here, in the open air.

She and Oberon are wandering down the main street of one of the largest islands, looking at the market stalls posted on either side. There's not much point in buying anything, when they have nowhere to store it and no idea how long they'll be here, but it's fun to look.

Winyara and Lathair are somewhere on the same island, she assumes. They broke away from each other at some point when Lathair wanted to show Winyara a fountain or something. Chili wasn't really listening.

"It's so peaceful, despite the evening rush," Oberon muses quietly, his eyes following a pair of gryphons as they lead their cluster of little children across the street and into one of the many elevated huts.

Chili hums. "Quite different from home, huh?"

Oberon smiles at her, but the expression quickly falls into a frown when the evening serenity is suddenly pierced by a fearful scream. They both straighten and look around, but there's nothing in sight that could have been the cause.

At first, the others around them appear as confused as them, looking at each other and murmuring. But then another scream is heard, this time much closer, and the crowd begins to move. Slowly at first, like a heavy wagon picking up speed, but soon enough, the air is a mess of colours and feathers as the gryphons all take flight in a frenzy.

"What could possibly—" Oberon starts, but he's cut off by a loud crash of splintering wood.

Chili ducks instinctively, but she's quickly back up and scanning their surroundings.

"Over there!"

One of the many colourful stalls has been smashed and is now lying in a sad, broken pile of planks. But most strangely, a mottled red gryphon is staggering to his feet in the middle of it, shaking off bits of wood with a growl.

"Isn't that...?" Oberon trails off.

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“Narnalys?”

The gryphon makes no indication that he might've heard his name. He's back on his feet but swaying rather alarmingly, and looking up at the sky like he's searching for something.

A smaller gryphon cautiously steps closer, head tilted, but is soon forced to jump back when a *second* gryphon crashes down right on top of Narnalys. The two of them become a blur of feathers as whatever frenzy has grabbed hold of them kicks back up at the sight of each other.

“Uh,” Chili says. “Should we... do something?”

One of the gryphons screeches, and Oberon winces.

“Yeah, let's break them up.”

Ending their fight proves easier said than done. For one, it's nearly impossible to get close enough to restrain either of them, what with all the claws and beaks whirling uncontrollably through the air. Second, they're *fast*. They're like a ball of rage that just ping-pongs everywhere, without any concern for who they might hit.

But finally, after Chili and Oberon have been chasing after them across half the island, they begin to lose steam, and the second gryphon becomes recognisable: Sterling, the blue Corvus. The two gryphons are still going after each other, but it's far from the frenzied chaos witnessed before.

“Alright,” Oberon mutters to himself, then wanders right up to them and grabs Narnalys by the scruff of his neck. Like a feral cat, Narnalys hisses and writhes, but Oberon's advantage in size makes it easy enough to simply pull him away. As if sensing a weakness in his opponent, Sterling gears up to pounce, but Chili catches him mid-air and wrestles him to the ground.

With the two gryphons separated, some measure of calm finally settles, and Chili blows out a relieved breath.

“What's going on here?”

The glowing spots on Narnalys' feathers flicker with agitation and his eyes dart around without taking anything in. Oberon rolls his eyes and, very gently but without warning, smacks his beak. It makes a clicking sound, and Narnalys blinks with far more awareness, now.

“Wha..?”

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“Good morning,” Chili drawls from where she’s still practically lying on top of Sterling, and gestures to him. “Care to explain?”

“I... I don’t...” Narnalys shakes his head, staring at the still snapping and snarling Sterling like he’s never seen him before.

Oberon sighs and lets him go. “Seems like you’re back to yourself, at least. Could you snap him out of it, too?”

Sterling squawks indignantly and waves his beak like a sword when Narnalys approaches. But all Narnalys does is grab hold of one of Sterling’s horns to keep his head still. As if the forced stillness breaks some kind of spell, Sterling freezes.

And immediately bursts out into a stream of apologies.

Huffing, Chili gets off him and steps back to give him space, standing beside Oberon as the two of them watch the gryphons exchange very awkward apologies for... whatever it was that happened.

Chili tilts her head. “We’re going to have to find out what caused this, aren’t we?”

“I think we might have to,” Oberon agrees, deadpan. “What are the odds Lathair and Winyara *haven’t* already heard about this?”

Snorting, Chili gets up and begins walking back towards the market street where they had last seen the other dragons. “I wouldn’t be surprised if they’ve had their own pair of feisty gryphons to deal with, to be honest. Come on, let’s find them.”

Following, Oberon mumbles wistfully, “Can’t we have just one normal day here...”