

## Peace Offering

008: Peace Offering

[Millicent]

I hear a "thump, thump, thump," against my wall--a pattering of fists forming an oddly regular rhythm of flesh and stone. Squinting, I lift my head to see the first light of dawn begin to crest over the horizon. Rolling over, ignoring the pounding on my wall, I watch as the room slowly warms with morning light, refracted into sparkling rainbows through cut crystal windows that stretch from the marble floors to the high stone ceilings. Beautiful and cold, it is a lovely gilded cage.

Grabbing a ridiculously oversized pillow, I pull it over my head in a vain attempt to silence the pounding which continues without pause, in perfect sync. I don't need to check to know who it is on the other side.

Voice muffled by the oversized cushion I groan, "I guess you can come in," and I sense more than hear when the door reappears and opens, allowing them all to come filing in.

"Miss," a politely monotone and emotionless female voice to my left speaks. "We were sent to bring you to breakfast."

"No," I moan.

"Miss," a different voice, standing just to the side of the first, adds, "We were told to bring you even if you do not wish to come."

"No," I repeat, more firmly.

"Miss," a third voice chimes, "Miss we cannot.."

"Fine," I sit up, pulling the pillow off my face. Standing up, all four of the maids surround me, pulling at corset strings, removing petticoats, sponging off grime and mess from the night before. They move efficiently with no wasted motions, working to get me clean and "presentable" enough to be allowed out of the room. I'm not even sure I saw any of them blink as they worked, focused as they were on their duties.

Just as one of them finishes braiding my hair with a red ribbon to match my plain cotton dress, a familiar voice calls out, "Good Morning, Friend."

Smiling I clap as I spin around to find Leon standing in the doorway wearing a simple cotton shirt over a pair of leather riding pants.

"I was hoping you'd be up," He takes a step into my room as I move to meet him partway. "I just came back from a trip into town."

"I had promised you that we'd have breakfast together," he confirms, looking at me nervously. "So I tried to get back in time. Here," he holds a small parcel wrapped in bright blue fabric and tied with a bit of red silk ribbon edged in gold. "I saw this and thought of you."

I open it and find a small charm made of amber glass in the circular shape of a dragon biting its tail. It hangs from a delicate gold chain and has a weightiness that makes me reconsider its composition. Stone, perhaps? It is both beautiful and terrifying, with a tiny red gem sparkling in its eye.

"Do you like it?" he asks, uncertain.

"It's lovely," I respond as I twirl it in the sunlight. The red eyes of the dragon seem to track my movements as the light bounces off of them.

"May I?" he asks to clasp it around my neck and I nod. Smirking, I think about how mad Primus will be when he sees it--a gift from another that I accepted freely.

"When did you leave?" I query as we exit my room together. "I didn't know any merchant stalls would be open this early."

"Oh they weren't," he responded as he guided me past the terrarium and down a hallway I had not noticed the night before.

"Then how..." but my question dies on my lips as he opens the door.

A large expanse of land stretches out in front of me, so long and wide that it seems like it could go on forever. From down below in Crimson, there is no way of seeing how behind the dragon's keep there is this small hidden valley contained within the mountain. In awe I watch as a waterfall feeds into a creek that winds its way past fruit trees and wildflowers, and well-tended plots of land hold bountiful supplies of squash, corn, wheat, and strawberries. In the distance, I could make out the edges of a giant hedge maze made of blossoming rose bushes.

"Welcome to the garden," Leon pronounces as he waves me inside.

I stand in stunned silence for a moment before turning to Leon, my eyes wide in disbelief.

"This is a garden?" I question softly, my voice trailing off.

"Primus thought that you might appreciate having your breakfast here," he continued, oblivious to how Primus' name made me bristle as he pointed to a wooden table filled with a small feast of fresh berries, bread, and cream. Next to that is a stack of books.

"Did he now?" I give him a hard look.

"Indeed," he grins. "I heard that he was especially harsh with you last night. Maybe this was meant to be a peace offering."

"That doesn't sound like him..." I continue to glare. "Why would he do something so considerate?"

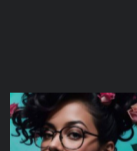
"Well, I don't pretend to understand the motives of dragons," he shrugs. "But I couldn't disagree with his logic."

"Is that so," my tone expressing displeasure at his easy nature with our captor, an irritation I feel growing within me the longer I know him. "Did you even try?"

He shrugged. "What would be the point? Besides, this is a lovely place to start your first lessons, don't you think?"

"What lessons?" I ask, confused. "I thought we were eating breakfast?"

He grins. "Exactly."



**VictoryAnne Vice**

Greetings Readers! I hope you are enjoying this story so far. Please let me know what you think in the comments! I read every single one :)

👍 | 3

## Comments (3)