Beastly Behavior

WARNING This chapter contains verbal, physical, and psychological abuse. It also contains brief descriptions of graphic violence.

[Primus]

The girl is staring at me as if her eyes were made of blades and her glare could pierce my armor. I' ve noticed that she is quick to anger, a trait I can respect.

"You cannot destroy an entire village," she argues, her dainty foot stomping hard on its wooden heel, reverberating through the mostly empty hall.

"I can do whatever I please," I roar at her. She blanches, taking a step back. "I AM LORD HERE."

"Then be a lord, not a beast," she demands. "Lords think. Beasts act."

"But I am a beast, my dear." I remind her as I take a large step forward. She stands her ground. Good. She is beginning to behave less like prey. "Don' t let this pretty face fool you." My hands point upward to my horns as I grin, showing off my fangs.

She is shaking as I close the gap between us, but she stands firm. Her angry eyes still hold my regard as I study everything about her. Once I reach her side I bend down and whisper into her hair. "I am a beast in every way."

If only she knew that I could hear the fear in the beat of her heart and the quickness of her breath. Would she still be such a brave golden jewel before me? Carnelian. Yes, she reminds me of Carnelian. Brave and bold, streaked with the colors of fire trapped in stone. If only she were not a simple girl from a simple town with simple virtues about right and wrong.

If only she were a dragon.

"Well, beast, if you have nothing else to show me, I will take my dinner in my rooms..."

She begins to turn from me but I grab her arm. She winces in pain. It is easy to forget how fragile human flesh is. She doesn' t have the advantage of my scales.

"I agree to not destroy the village, but under three conditions."

She pauses, her ears perking up, her eyes curious. "I' m listening."

"First," I begin reciting my lists of demands. "You will allow me to call you by a special nickname of my choice. I hate your given name. I refuse to call you by something so ugly and common."

"No," she argues immediately. "My name is my name. Deal with it."

Some of her hair comes loose from its net as I shake her, angry at her defiance. She tears her arm away from me, rubbing where I was holding her. Reaching forward I grab both of her arms and pull her close to me, our faces almost touching.

"Second," I continue. "You will dine with me every evening dressed appropriately for the event. You will be clean and properly clothed."

She doesn' t say anything, not even to whimper about the pain I must be causing her.

"Third," dropping my voice, I use all of my otherworldly charm to look her directly in the eyes. I see her face soften around the edges as her body relaxes against me, at the fight gone from her. "You will accept my gifts, no questions."

"Gifts?"

"Is that a question?"

She licks her lips. "Yes."

Letting her go, I return to my seat. She walks toward the hallway, bypassing her chair when I call out, "Sit!"

She stops mid-stride.

"Our agreement included you receiving my gift." I remind her, feigning impatience. Part of me wants her defiance as an excuse to follow through on my desire to destroy that insignificant little village.

Enjoying the beautiful rage-induced flush of her skin, I continued to goad her. "You must be seated to receive them properly. "Or are you already failing to complete your end of the deal?" Her body becomes still, stiff, and straight. "Trust me, you do not want to go against a deal with a dragon. We have no choice but to follow our nature. And that nature demands proper payment."

"But I owe you nothing! I..."

"You owe me YOUR LIFE," I bellow, leaving no room for argument. "You still breathe the air because I allow it. Now SIT DOWN." I pick up my goblet of wine, drinking it all in a single gulp as I take a seat once more. "I will not ask again."

Her internal fight is almost palatable. I can taste her frustration as she decides against her better nature to retake her seat. She crosses her arms stubbornly, glaring at me petulantly.

"That will not do." I needle at her some more, trying not to chuckle as she huffs at me. "You are also required to dine with me, are you not, Carnelia?"

"Carnelia," her lip curls.

"Yes, like carnelian. A very strong and beautiful stone. I think it fits you."

She opens her mouth to say something but then snaps it shut. Placing a single finger on her lip, she taps herself several times with that single finger.

"Eat." I demand once more. She' s gone back to glaring at me. "Once I am satisfied with what you have eaten, I will bring out your gift."

"What if I want to see the gift now?" She demands regally. As if she had any power to command my decisions.

Waving my hand, the plate disappears into the table. She stares down at the empty space as I say, "You are far too slender, Carnelia." Her scowl deepens. "And weak. You will begin training tomorrow."

"Training?" she sounds indignant. "In what?"

"Everything," I admit. "You are ridiculously simple-minded. You will need to be properly educated if you are to serve under me. Consider it another gift."

"I am not..." she begins to argue, but I choose to ignore her words.

"And now, your next gift..." I speak over her chattering as I make a motion with my hands as if I am pulling up the stone beneath us with my fingertips, a large rectangular container of clay rising before the table. The girl stares, open-mouthed, her simple mind unable to grasp the wonder of my powers. As she watches, the box begins to reform, becoming a cage.

Inside are twenty men between the ages of 18 and 50, taken from the village of Crimson after they confessed to the sin of touching my precious gem.

Payment from the village for sending me a damaged sacrifice.

Looking over at her proudly, I am shocked to see her looking away. Doesn' t she appreciate my gift? It took me all night to find them.

"Why are you looking away?" I am confused, and angry. "Are you rejecting my gift?"

"Why did you bring them here?" the weakness returned to her voice, making my stomach sour. "What am I supposed to do with...?"

"Tell me how they should die." I demand. "Are they not the ones who harmed you, who took from you something precious and irreplacible that was not theirs to take?"

"I do not want this gift, I do not..." she stammers, crying, her hands grasping her dress as she keeps her head turned.

Marching over to her seat, I pull her chin, forcing her to look at her gift. She closes her eyes tightly, weeping silently. "Look at them. LOOK!"

She opens her eyes. The tears begin to fall.

"How do you want them to die?" I repeat.

"I can' t...I already..." she cries.

"Let' s start with just one of them," I walk over to the cage, pulling the oldest man forward, his slack skin jiggling impotently. "This bastard confessed, bragged even, about sampling you when you were just a child. That it was okay to take you when you were only eleven because you were not human enough to matter." I look up at her expectantly. "How should he die?"

"No! I..."

Releasing the first man I grabbed another, a younger man with large arms and a stupid face. I pulled him forward, his panic already slick with sweat as I grabbed his arm, breaking it. He screamed as I demanded, "How about this one? The mayor' s son. He would create messes for you to clean just so he could trap you in a corner."

She is on her knees crying. "Please stop, I can' t, I cannot tell you how I want someone to..."

"OR this one," I continue.

"PLEASE," she shouts at me. "Please, this is torturing me." She covers her eyes and begins to rock back and forth. "Do whatever you want just please, please let me go." she begs.

"Fine..." I agree to her demand. But then she adds, "Just please don' t kill them. I don' t want the memory of their deaths in my mind. This was bad enough."

There is silence.

Then I sigh, my voice low, "I will not kill them," I promise. I release the hooting man and add, "And a dragon always honors an agreement."

I don' t watch as she stands and runs back to her room. I don' t need to. I can feel every footfall in the hallway as she struggles. I can feel it when she slams against her door and shuts herself in.

My heart is heavy. She didn' t want my gift.

But then I look up and my lips curve around pointed fangs. Moving forward, I let the bars of the cage melt around me, reforming into hard columns once I' ve passed through. My features grow more bestial, my talons glowing golden in the candlelight.

"Stop, no! ARRRGGHHH!" the first man screams as I dig into his groin and castrate him with a single pull.

I had promised I would not kill them.

But they still had to pay their debt. And a dragon always keeps his word.

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