Chapter 11:

Even though Ryonir had been expecting to see Flynn standing there in the dragon cave it still was a shock to the system to see the archivist calmly standing there looking at him. How had he not known that the one he had been friends with, talked with about his problems including the Xralix and the Frostward Vale, was a dragon all along? “I’m guessing that you probably have quite a few questions,” Flynn said as he gestured towards the chair. “You can sit, I’ve been doing so for a while reading and waiting for you so I don’t mind standing a bit.”

“How could you do this Flynn?” Ryonir said angrily, pointing one of his swords at him. “Or do you prefer the name Jalru?”

“I haven’t been called that in quite some time…” Flynn stated with a sigh. “Flynn is fine for now, and if you don’t want to sit could you at least put the swords away unless you’re intending on using them?”

Ryonir hesitated for a moment as the other elf stared at him, then grunted in frustration dismissed his gauntlets all together. “I’m surprised you’re not back in your dragon form,” he said through gritted teeth. “Or did you just want me to see a familiar face?”

“It’s… complicated,” Flynn replied. “If I turn back into a dragon the magic holding Xralix will be broken and he’ll be released. I have no intention of doing that at the moment so here I am, elf and all.”

“Alright then, it’s time to start coughing up some answers,” the dragon knight said as he walked over towards the fire, closing the gap between the two of them. “The main one being why you are trying to protect Xralix when he is clearly still a danger to everyone around him! He’s killed probably tens of thousands of people and yet instead of dealing with him, or letting someone else deal with him, you just keep letting him do what he does because you think he’s going to change?”

“He was changing!” Flynn shouted, showing his anger for the first time as the crackling fire flared up. “He had gone so long without going out and killing and I could actually see that he was starting to regret the things that he had done!”

“He was using you!” Ryonir retorted. “I’ve seen the memories of you two together, but I’ve also talked to him directly and I can assure you that he’s just as bloodthirsty and cruel as ever before! I don’t know how you think that sealing him away in some cave up here is going to get him to suddenly turn over a new leaf, but even if that’s true he doesn’t deserve to get away with what he’s done!”

Flynn looked like had had more shouting to do, but as his mouth opened Ryonir was surprised to see tears start streaming down his face as his lower lip quivered. “Sins of the past, right?” the elf said, trying to wipe his face as he went over to a makeshift shelf and pulled a glowing crystal off of the shelf. “This is a memory stone… a piece of the body of a prismatic dragon that you imbue with something that you want to immortalize forever so you never forget. One thing about these is that you can share them with others… but before I do there is one other thing that I want to show you.”

Ryonir eyed up the other male suspiciously, but began to follow him anyway as they went deeper down into the gold dragon’s lair. “Out of curiosity,” Flynn asked as they slowly traveled deeper down. “When did you figure out that I was Jalru? Was it the dragon archivist?”

“He certainly helped, especially saying that the knowledge had been right in front of me the entire time,” Ryonir replied as he continued to keep a weary eye, wondering if perhaps he was about to see the dread dragon in the flesh. “There were a few other hints; giving me your dragon boyfriend’s necklace was an interesting touch, I’m guessing you were the one feeding me those memories as well, but when I really figured it out was when you told Xralix to go and find his own happiness and I remembered that it was something you had told me before when I was healing.” He saw the disguised dragon stop for a second, then simply nod and continue on. “Now my turn to ask a question, what was your grand plan in showing me all of that, try to get me to sympathize?”

There was another brief pause on their downward traverse and Ryonir saw Flynn let out a deep sigh. “I suppose I really didn’t have a defined plan when I started this,” he stated simply. “All I knew when I heard you were given the mission to Xralix I had to tag along, and from there it was basically anything I could think of to get you to stop from coming here. I tried everything, using the weather to stop you, giving you those memories, and the dragon tooth was a spectacular failure that backfired in my face…”

“What about the goblins?” Ryonir asked. “Those a part of your plan too?”

“No, that was all the kobold we found,” Flynn replied. “I translated his little diary on the first day, his whole plan was to take me out of the picture in order to get to you. He also somehow found out we were going to the werewolves to try and get additional help because he arranged that attack as well… I guess he just didn’t count on one surviving and then being set on fire before running into a tent full of rotgut.”

“You know what they say…” Ryonir responded. “Best laid plans.”

In truth the dragon knight didn’t have any plan either; his idea ending with his confrontation of Flynn and confirming that he was actually the gold dragon Jalru that the lorekeeper had talked about. He had hoped that something else would show itself that he could do or use to his advantage, but the only reason that he knew about this place is he had gotten directions from the prismatic dragon just in case. Who knew how long Flynn had been altering documents or legends in order to protect Xralix… he even bet that if he and the other two had gone to where they thought it was they would have found an empty cave or absolutely nothing.

Ryonir had been musing for so long he didn’t realize how far down the two of them had gone until he felt himself beginning to sweat, the heat going far beyond mere ambient temperature. One thing he knew from being at Gildeon was that gold dragons liked making lairs in hot spots, which meant this was probably some sort of inactive volcano… or possibly an active one. Since he hadn’t heard of any such thing in the Frostward Vale he guessed it was the former as he found himself having to shed his armor. While he didn’t like the idea of having to give up his protection he knew one thing, that if Flynn had intended to kill him to protect Xralix he would have done so already.

Eventually their journey came to the end of a large cavern, which at the other end of the cave contained a large, circular mirror that hovered in the air… or at least what was left of it. The large reflective surface was completely busted like it had been hit with a boulder, and when Ryonir started to go forward to look at it he found a hand stopping him. “I wouldn’t go too much closer if I were you,” Flynn warned. “Even in its broken state it still has quite a bit of power behind it.”

“Is that…” Ryonir started to say, trailing off when the other elf nodded his head.

“The mirror of the heavens,” Flynn explained. “Or what is left of the mirror of the heavens. A divine conduit to show us our truest selves and grant us what we want the most in our hearts. It was an extremely powerful artifact… now it’s just a shadow of its former self. I brought it here so I could protect it and make sure no one made use of its power… I didn’t think that it would end up being its undoing.”

“That’s what you brought me down here for?” Ryonir asked in frustration. “To show me a broken mirror?”

“No,” Flynn replied, holding out his hand and motioning for Ryonir to do the same. “I brought you down here for context.” With one smooth motion Flynn brought down the memory stone on his palm. “And to show you the reason I’ve done what I did.”

There was a blinding flash of light and Ryonir found himself transported… nowhere, standing next to Flynn once more. “What happened?” Ryonir asked before he looked over and saw the mirror of the heavens completely intact. “We’re… in a memory?”

“Exactly,” Flynn replied as he looked over at the tunnel. “Forty years ago, give or take, just like the ones you’ve been experiencing before. The only difference is… this one is my memory.”

Ryonir was just about to ask what that meant when he heard a loud roar and saw a cloud of fire head straight towards them, the elf shielding himself from the flame as he ducked down and covered his face with his arms in a feeble attempt to protect himself. When the fire passed by them it was little more than a breeze and when the elf looked at himself he found that he was alright. “This is a memory Ryonir… nothing can hurt you…” Flynn said as he rolled his eyes while watching the elf stand up. “At least not physically.”

There was another loud set of roars and Ryonir could hear the sound of two booming voices fighting, both of which he recognized. The first was that of Jalru, the golden dragon still breathing fire as he came barging down the same tunnel they were in and shifting right through them before appearing on the other side in the cavern. “You promised me!” he shouted in draconic, turning away from the mirror to look at the second dragon coming down. “You said that you wouldn’t go out and destroy things and then I find out you razed two villages to the ground in addition to everything in the area surrounding your cave!?”

“Oh come on Jalru!” Xralix shouted back. “So I relapsed a little bit and got a bit carried away, I’ve been good for almost a decade and then I had a little slip!”

“A little slip?” Jalru said, his eye twitching in pure rage as the walls around him began to glow. “A little SLIP!? No, Xralix, this wasn’t a little slip. Attacking a caravan, that’s a little slip, taking out a trading boat, that’s a little slip, you obliterated everything in five hundred meters of your lair, THAT’S NOT A LITTLE SLIP!”

“Alright, fine, it’s not a little slip!” Xralix roared, Ryonir actually taking a step back from the enraged dragon even though it wasn’t technically real. “And you know what, I ENJOYED it! Here I had been denying myself for so long just so I can raise myself up to the standard of some snobby metallic dragon and for what? Just so I can get mounted every once in a while?”

Despite the screaming and yelling and roaring in draconic that part actually surprised the dragon knight a little bit, not expecting the dread dragon to be the one to take it. “Well you’re just going to have to find a way to mount yourself,” Jalru shot back as he turned away and continued further down the cavern. “Or maybe get one of your precious kobolds to do it! I don’t know what I was thinking falling for a chromatic dragon…”

“Well that makes two of us,” Xralix said with a snarl. “Enjoy guarding this stupid mirror alone and all the prestige it gets you, I’m actually going to go out and have some fun for once in the last ten years!”

For a few seconds Ryonir thought that the fight was over as the two dragons began to part ways… until the gold dragon brought his head back up with molten tears streaming from his eyes. “I thought you loved me…” he said, his face reminding the elf a lot like Zefrit’s when they were looking up at the mountains. “You said you cared about me and promised me that there was nothing else out there that was better then being with me. Now you’re going to give it all up just because you can’t control yourself?”

This time it was the walls around the black dragon that started to glow, but this time it was with blue light instead of orange as Xralix turned with tongues of bright blue flame licking out of his muzzle. “You said it yourself, chromatic dragons are just… incapable of controlling themselves,” the amount of venom in each of those words was palpable as Xralix began to approach the gold dragon leaving flaming footprints in his wake. “Looks like we can’t change our personalities any more then we can change the color of our scales… I bet even that fancy mirror of yours couldn’t with it all its divine energy…”

As the black dragon continued to growl at the gold one Ryonir felt something deep inside his chest, a burning that he had never felt before. It felt like someone had kept stabbing blades inside him, cutting him deep into the very core of his being. The more he stared at Xralix and Jalru the deeper the feeling got and just as he felt like he was about to pass out he felt a pair of hands on his shoulders. He looked up to see Flynn standing there holding him, then motioning for him to keep watching as the two elves stared at the black dragon in a fiery, frothing rage.

Jalru tried to say something but Xralix snapped at him, flaming blue drool dripping from his face before he looked up at the mirror. “What do you say, huh?!” Xralix shouted at it, Ryonir noticing that the entire thing was starting to vibrate the closer he got to it. “You got anything up there that can change me?! Any sort of absolution for my sins of the past?! NO!? I didn’t think so! I’m going to keep being a selfish, angry, bloodthirsty craver of destruction and there’s NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT!!!”

Suddenly the mirror began to glow with such intensity that both the dragons in the vision and the two watching it had to look away as the vibrations grew so strong in the mirror that it began to visibly shake. The hum became audible as Ryonir managed to catch a glimpse of the gold dragon backing away as Xralix looked back at it briefly and was suddenly captivated, standing there dumbfounded as the entire mirror was almost rattling forward. Jalru shouted something but it was overshadowed as the hum grew deafening… and the suddenly everything stopped. For the briefest second there was pure silence, then a loud crack as the mirror split right down the middle.

The black dragon was blown backwards as the wind was so strong that even Flynn and Ryonir had to shield themselves from it, holding onto one another as more cracks and pops could be heard as the mirror continued to break. By the time it was all over and Ryonir could finally look up he saw that the ancient artifact had shattered, its pieces still floating in the air just like what had seen when they had first entered the cavern in the present day. Jalru was also still a dragon, the golden-scaled creature uncovering his head with his forepaws as he started looking around and calling for Xralix. Finally his gaze fell on something that was behind the elves and when the dragon saw it his eyes went wide and his mouth gasped for error before he let out a roar of anguish and ran over to them.

“Xralix!” Jalru shouted as he leaned over something on the ground, Ryonir guessing the body of his lover. “Xralix… please… say something…” The dragon looked around back at the mirror before gently picking up the body… which wasn’t that of a black dragon. “My gods… what’s happened to you…”

Ryonir found his breath catching in his throat as he saw what Jalru was cradling… seeing his own elven form there with the dragon tooth necklace around his neck. “No… no…” Ryonir said as he found himself falling to his knees, his vision spinning as he stared at his own sleeping face. “It’s a trick… you’re trying to… trick me…”

“Forty years ago… we had an argument down here because you had decide to give into your urges…” Flynn said, his voice quivering as they watched the past Jalru swiftly carry the body of the elf up the cave while promising he would get him home to fix this. “I watched as a magical artifact, one that I had been protecting, transform you into an elf… and erase all your memories… in an effort to try and change you like you had asked. When I brought you back to your home… your kobolds thought it was a trick… and before I could explain you… woke up… and they chased you down the mountain…”

Flynn fell to his knees, crying as Ryonir continued to kneel on the stone himself in disbelief. It couldn’t be true, he continued to repeat to himself, it had to be some sort of trick. He was going to wake up after Zefrit splashes water on him. Then he would tell the others about it… but the water never came, and all he heard was the crying of an elf next to him.

The mirror… Ryonir turned back and looked at the floating pieces of reflective glass. Even in dreams a lot of artifacts have power, if this did show his truest self he would see himself as an elf and maybe wake up. With Flynn no longer stopping him he made his way to one of the larger pieces of glass, stopping short as it slowly rotated around to face him. The first thing he saw was a golden dragon lying on the stone with his head buried in his paws… and then… a black dragon, his jaw dropped in disbelief as it stared back him with glowing blue eyes.

“I can… I can just wish myself awake…” Ryonir continued to say, trying not to look at the face of the creature he had been ready to confront for weeks staring at him with his own expression. “This is an ancient artifact, right?! I can just… wish it all away!”

“No… you can’t…” Flynn said suddenly, sniffing and wiping his nose as Ryonir saw the gold dragon turning to look at him in the reflection of the glass. “The power of the mirror is still decaying, your body… your elven form is proof of that. Plus… I used the last of its magic to wish myself the power to remain an elf indefinitely once I saw Zefrit rescue you, which I got on the condition that if I change back…”

“Then I change back…” Ryonir said as he looked down at his own scale-covered hands, clenching them tight enough the claws started to draw blood. “The Xralix in my visions then, it’s… my… chromatic dragon soul, knowing that the curse of the mirror is broken then he lives again, and the elf known as Ryonir dies.”

“It might not be too late!” Flynn said as he grabbed Ryonir and turned him away from the black dragon in the mirror. “we could get Zefrit and Samiel and go back to Gildeon, we could just tell them that Xralix is dead and then find some magic to restore your body back to its elven state!”

“It doesn’t matter and you know it,” Ryonir replied as he continued to look at himself. “You knew from the beginning what was happening, as soon as I touched that claw in the chamber of the elders the clock started ticking down on this body. And even though the tooth was yours it had been around my neck for so long it continued to erode it away… this body is failing Flynn, and when it does then it will release the black death that it’s been holding prisoner once again, and I have a feeling he, I, is not going to be satisfied just destroying Arborrna this time.”

“You don’t know that!” Flynn shouted as he ran over, wrapping his arms around the elf. “You could still be you, you could be the elf that fell in love with a dragon, that saved a werewolf, that rescued me from a rabid band of goblins! Those were all you Ryonir, and changing into a dragon isn’t going to make you forget that!”

“And what about the thousands of people I’ve killed?” Ryonir replied, his voice shifting slightly as his teeth began to form into points. “The hundreds of families that won’t see a shred of justice for the death that was wrought at my hands! Or what about the thousands more that won’t live to see another sunrise if the dread dragon rises again.”

When Flynn looked up he saw that Ryonir had shifted himself to look down at him, his eyes starting to glow with a slight blue tint as a pair of horns pushed out from the top of his head. “Look at me Flynn…” he said, shifting the elf’s chin up until their eyes met. “I’m sorry that you didn’t get to spend more time with me, looking back if I had known I would have shared more rooms with you.”

“It’s alright,” Flynn replied as Ryonir wrapped his arms around him, putting his chin on top of his head as they hugged. “I got to feel you next to me once, and travel with you, and laugh with you. I guess I’m just the one being selfish.”

“No, you are a noble gold dragon,” Ryonir replied, flinching slightly as he felt his ribs shift. “Now I have to let you go… because there’s one last act I can do to make sure the world is safe. I may have to die, but that doesn’t mean that Xralix has to live…”

Flynn gasped and tried to grab hold, but felt himself get pushed backwards before Ryonir turned and bolted up the passageway. The other elf quickly ran behind, but with his augmented speed the changing creature was able to easily beat him up back into the main cave. Even though all of Ryonir’s cold weather gear was still there Flynn knew that he had continued onward, stepping out of the cave and into the cold of the outside. He shouted for Ryonir, and when he didn’t get a response he quickly rushed outside despite the freeze setting into his elven flesh.

“Ryonir!” Flynn yelled as he saw the elf, seeing the transforming creature standing on the edge of the cliff that plummeted down over a hundred feet to the jagged rocks below. “Please, don’t do this!”

“I have to Jalru!” Ryonir shouted back, his voice significantly deeper than before as he continued to stand on the edge. “I can already feel those urges starting to bubble up inside me, urging me to do terrible things. Even when I was just under the influence of the necklace I was changing, thinking differently, I just didn’t realize it until now…”

“Please, get back from the ledge,” Flynn said as he inched his way closer, holding out a trembling hand to the one precariously on the edge. “Think of Zefrit, of Samiel… think of how devastated they’d be to see your body laying at the bottom of this mountain.”

There was a moment of pause, Ryonir flinching slightly at the thought before he once more became resolute. “You know what else would be devastating to them?” he responded, his own voice quivering as he remained on the edge. “If their former friend came flying down the mountain and ripped them to pieces as the start of a blood-soaked rampage! You tried fixing Xralix, and he still ended up destroying two villages!”

The two remained at a standstill, though as Ryonir looked back he saw something that caused his heart to break. The reason Flynn had stopped talking was because his teeth were chattering so badly that he couldn’t talk anymore, his lips turning blue as he fell to his knees. “Jalru… turn back into a dragon…” Ryonir said, turning back towards the elf. “You’re a fire dragon, this type of cold is nothing to you.”

“Can’t…” Flynn managed to reply, shaking his head as tiny icicles formed on his eyelashes. “I change… Xralix… free…”

“Damnit Jalru, change back now!” Ryonir shouted. “You’re going to die out here!”

“Guess… that makes… two… of us…” the freezing elf replied.

Ryonir looked between the cliff and the one that was dying right in front of him. Even if he died immediately on the rocks there was no guarantee that the magic that was linking together would work, in fact it was possible that even without him Flynn might not be able to change back. But… there was a chamber that was basically inside an inactive volcano. He could still save him, he could still save Jalru…

Just as he was about to step back from the brink he heard the seams of his boots split, which caused him to fall backwards. He felt his stomach drop as quickly as his body did, his clawed fingers digging into the stone to prevent him from falling all the way down. The air was smashed out of his chest as he hit the side of the cliff, causing him to cough loudly as he slid a few more inches towards the edge. Unfortunately the cliff had a lip that prevented him from using those newfound toe talons to pull himself up, and as he hung there off the side he could see that the former gold dragon was now slumped on the frozen stone.

“Jalru, sorry…” Ryonir whispered. “Looks like this is the only way.”

Ryonir took one more look at the other dragon and closed his eyes as he dislodged his claws… except that his fingers refused to budge. When he tried again there was nothing, but it wasn’t his fingers that was frozen as he could still feel them attempting to wiggle under his efforts. Xralix… the dread dragon had somehow managed to take control of his fingers in one final act of self-preservation. No matter how hard he tried he could not let the dragon loosen his grip on the one thing keeping him alive.

Let go Xralix, Ryonir said mentally as he pushed his own body against the face of the cliff to try and dislodge himself. He felt the dragon strongly disagree against the idea and he felt his own grip tighten against the stone. “Xralix, what are you doing…” Ryonir said out loud, feeling his fanged teeth gritting in retaliation as the dragon kept resisting him. “Look at Jalru... he was the love of your life, and he’s going to die if we don’t do something…”

Ryonir couldn’t believe he was essentially pleading with the dragon that he was going to kill… who was also him. It appeared he had gotten through to him though, feeling the sadness coming from the creature that had taken such delight in killing so many others. Had Jalru really affected the dread dragon so much? Most chromatic dragons wouldn’t even think twice about another, especially when it came to their own lives.

Suddenly Ryonir felt the claws that had been dug into the rock release themselves, both dragon and elf freefalling down the cliff towards the rocks below. With nothing but air under his feet it came with a strange sense of peace… not only that he was possibly going to save Jalru, but also that he would still be able to stop Xarlix from destroying others. Strangely he felt something similar from his chromatic dragon side, and it made him wonder if perhaps Xralix was more resistant to his urges than he thought. Not that it mattered anymore, he thought to himself as well as directing the message to his dragon self while closing his eyes, this was a more than fitting punishment for everything he did.

“Gotchya!” Ryonir gasped as he felt himself go from falling down to being lifted up, opening his eyes to see silver scales clamped around his shoulders. “Man, I’m good at this! Maybe I should go into business or something.”

“Zefrit, why?!” the transforming elf shouted up at the dragon, who looked back down at him in a mixture of surprise and fear. “Nevermind, get me back up to the top of the cliff now!”

Though the silver dragon was still confused by a lot of things, especially with his current looks, but did what he was told. It took a few seconds to get him lifted back upwards but Zefrit was able to do it, cresting over the side and seeing the body still lying there. “By the gods,” he said as he dropped off Ryonir next to it before landing next to him as well. “Is that… Flynn?”

“No time to explain,” Ryonir said as he hoisted up the body and motioned for Zefrit to get down before hoping on with the frozen elf still in his arms. “Go down into the cave and keep going until you see the big floating mirror! Go!”

The changing elf slapped Zefrit on the flanks to spur him on, together the three going down through the tunnels all the way towards the chamber with the broken mirror of the heavens in it. Tendrils of vapor radiated from their bodies as Ryonir put the elf as close to one of the thermal vents without adding burns on top of the frostbite. As he continued to try and wake Jalru he saw the silver dragon moving over to the mirror before Ryonir told him that wasn’t a good idea. Eventually they were also joined by the werewolf who made a similar assertion of surprise at the presence of their missing archivist.

“He’s not waking up,” Ryonir said, slowly standing up and looking at the other two.

“I don’t suppose a bucket of cold water will do it…” Zefrit said, both Samiel and Ryonir looking up at him with a frown that caused him to lower his head.

“He spent too long out in the cold, if he doesn’t transform back soon he’s going to die.” Ryonir stated as he put his hands against his head, only to pull them back when he felt the small set of horns growing out of them. ”But he’s not going to turn back because he thinks that Xralix… that I can be saved, that I can keep being a good person as long as I don’t have the power of the dragon to corrupt me. He’s going to sacrifice himself for our sake… but I can’t let that happen.”

“Ryonir?” Zefrit asked, causing the partially transformed draconic creature to look back. “…what are you going to do?”

“I… need to have a conversation with myself,” Ryonir stated as he looked back at the mirror. “If you two could just give us a moment, I just need some privacy.” The two nodded and started up the passageway again, only to be stopped by Ryonir. “Oh… and if I’ve somehow turned into a black dragon and cackling maniacally do me a favor and don’t let me leave this cave alive.”

The last request both startled and confused the two, but both werewolf and dragon nodded before disappearing further up the cave and out of sight. Once they were the changing elf let out a deep sigh and made his way back towards the mirror, shifting the very large floating, rotating piece so it was facing him once more. As soon as he saw the visage of the black dragon he stopped it, then stepped back so that he could look at himself properly. Jalru mentioned there was some power left in this mirror, he just hoped it was enough for what he was planning as he concentrated and closed his eyes.

For more than a few moments there was nothing, then he heard an exasperated breath and opened his eyes to see the head of the black dragon leaning in and filling more of the mirror. “What do you want, little elf,” he said with a growl. “Come to plead for your life, knowing that it’s about to come to an end?”

“Oh, knock it off Xralix,” Ryonir replied with a growl of his own, taking the dragon slightly by surprise. “It’s time I finally do my duty as a dragon knight and confront you, so put your prideful destroyer act aside because I know what you really feel. In essence I’m not here to bargain for my life, I’m here to bargain for Jalru’s life… and yours.”

The sneer on the dragon’s muzzle quickly vanished as Ryonir could see that Xralix was growing agitated as well as feel it inside his own body. As the divine magic of the mirror keeping him as an elf continued to break down he could feel the dread dragon more and more inside, his own mind feeling like a sack someone was trying to put way too much flour into. “This is asinine,” Xralix said angrily. “We’re the same creature, how can we be so different?!”

“The gods really did give you a gift that day forty years ago,” Ryonir said softly, slowly approaching the mirror with his clawed hand outstretched. “I’ve seen our memories, I’ve felt the confliction in you between the love for Jalru and your lust for destruction. I felt it when I was with Zefrit, that need to connect to another outweighing every other selfish action… and I could feel it tearing you apart inside when you found yourself unable to keep a simple promise to the one you loved.”

“Love…” Xralix scoffed. “You speak as if we know of such a term…”

“Don’t give me that!” Ryonir shouted, pointing a finger as his dragon self. “You saw Jalru freezing for us, ready to give his life in order to try and give us a chance and decided that you would rather make the sacrifice yourself. Name any other chromatic dragon you know of that would be willing to do that for the sake of another.”

There was a pause and Ryonir could see amidst all the pain and anger his dragon self was expressing there was one other emotion there that he had been hoping to see… doubt. “You tried to change yourself once for him, Xralix,” Ryonir continued on, pointing back so that Xralix could see the reflection of the golden dragon laying there breathing shallowly. “Now you have a second chance; I might not actually exist, but all my memories, feelings, emotions, they’re all going to be inside of you to draw from. You can’t say that you’ve no longer felt friendship, or love, or gratitude because through me you’ve experienced all those things and so much more without the stigma of being what you are. Now, as my final act I’m giving you one last choice; do you, Xralix, renounce your ways of destruction and be the dragon Jalru wanted you to be, or do we go back to the cliff where we have one last fight to see if a dragon knight can stop the destruction of an entire kingdom and more at the hands of the black death?”