

## Date #2 Vekar

When the morning came, the rain had stopped and Calan was able to help with damage control. The booth was in shambles and all of his tools were hardly past their due date. Many of his cherished possessions, like his bucket, rug, and stolen mirror were all easy fixes. Some of the more specific tools had some faults now. Many of the brushes lost their structure due to the flux of water and already cramped containment. Calan apologized, despite not needing to and got a list of tools to get as a way to make it up for Grink. As much as Grink wanted to reassure him that he didn't need to apologize, he still wanted the tools that could be bought for him, so he just smiled and nodded as Calan ran off. In his defense, it could be expensive to purchase all of those tools by himself and Calan offered it in the first place. In the meantime, Grink tried to repair his booth as best as possible. With the wood being in less than ideal conditions and his sign dissolved into the dirt, it left a lot to be desired. Grink found himself slumped over behind the lopsided stand of his, the defeat finally sinking in. He's thankful that Calan had been there to support him, but this was still something that he longed to do. He truly loved caring for others and this was supposed to be the culmination of where he wanted to be, yet here it is. Muddied and broken.

"Ahem? Little lizard guy? I hope this isn't how you treated the other customers who came in after me." An easily recognisable scoff made Grink shook to his feet, scampering over to greet Vekar with a large hug over all that he could reach around his scaled arm.

"Vekar! It's so great to see you! I'm sorry you caught me at a really bad time..." Grink sighed, looking back to the mess of his booth remains half heartedly. Vekar shared the sentiment, rolling his eyes at the display.

"I *wanted* to have you fix my claws, but this simply won't do. Follow me." Vekar glanced at one of his claws and showed that one of the more prominent ones had broken off. This immediately caused Grink to forget his current woes and rush over to the dragon prince, lifting his paw and inspecting it closer. Vekar answered the question before it was asked.

"I was simply using my scratching mat and it chipped off. As well as that, my other claws are being dulled in the process. I figured that you would know about that, so I came as soon as I realized something was wrong." The anecdote caused some wheels in Grink's mind to stir.

“Dragon’s don’t conventionally use scratching mats or posts unless their claws are too long or obnoxious? What made you use it?” Grink asked, seeing the dulled ends of the claws that Vekar had mentioned.

“Well... That part isn’t as important. What is important is that I’m not shown with a broken claw in front of delegates who expect nothing but power from my family.” Vekar flaunted, stripping his claws from Grink’s grasp and pressing it to his chest as he upturned his chin dramatically. Grink smiled and looked down at his film covered claws, leaning in to sniff the paste.

“Did... Did someone layer a whole jug of scale protection on you...?” Grink asked, recognising the material with a face of almost disgust and irritation over his face. “You can’t double layer it, it’s much too dense for you! No dragon needs *this* much protection! Especially during this season, you need your scales to ventilate so you can sweat! Don’t you feel like you’re in a sauna? Who on earth would do this to you? Didn’t I tell you about having to use a ratio? Why would your pets ruin your scales like this?!” Grink hadn’t even noticed the raised octave in his voice as he stepped closer to inspect the dragon closely, rubbing off globs of the solution until it dripped onto the floor in a colorful display, reminiscent of oil. Vekar looked off to the side, not wanting to humor the lizard’s concerns.

“Well I doubt they meant to cause such problems, but yes... It is very uncomfortable here. Anyway it’s all the more reason you have for correcting these mistakes. I’m sure we have all the tools necessary for your work, so climb on and we’ll go back to my mansion. And worry not, my father won’t be home until another few days. I’ll be sure to mention him to you in case you make an early decision... You *are* still looking for a master, yes? You haven’t found one yet?” Vekar talked as Grink climbed, a remaining sludge still clinging to the scales. Grink couldn’t help but feel horrible for how Vekar must be feeling in such an intense casing.

“Oh y-you don’t have to! Torin uhm... Kind of scares me? Can I say that?” Grink asked. He felt that he and Vekar were close enough for the lizard to be honest, but not close enough to where he may speak up on such a visceral fear of his. He could practically hear Vekar roll his eyes.

“We’ve long since redeemed our family name, my father especially is nothing to fear. You haven’t even met him, after all.”

“Well... Yes... Though I have to admit that the stories I’ve heard make me shudder. I heard that he eats any disobedient pets of his, sometimes even giving them an impossible

task just to taunt them, he also has a signature squint that shows that he is upset. I have plenty of reasons to fear him!” Grink held a greasy paw to his muzzle in remembrance. Vekar is silent for a while before sighing in what can be understood as defeat.

“I suppose he *does* have that squint, but he always does it! Also eating pets is such an outdated treatment of pets and violates dozens of rules of pet ownership. Just because he is my father doesn’t put him above those rulings.”

“Rules of pet ownership? Like the contracts people make with their pets?”

“What? No! After years of mistreatment, lizards like you as well as a few other figures from more beneficial species banded together in a strike in order to keep their lives safe. It wasn’t always contracts and pacts of blood. This was ages ago and my father, Torin, was one of the leading dragons to open the idea to others. You’re a lizard, why do you not know this? This is rather crucial information if you’re after a master, is it not?”

“Well, yes? I kind of just assumed it was always a contract and that dragons could care less. You guys *are* much bigger than we are. As well as that, a long time to a dragon is a millenia for any other species, it’s hardly fair to assume I’m all too familiar with how it used to be.” This caused Vekar to stay silent again for a short while.

“How old do you think I am? Or better yet, how old do you think my father is?”

“I don’t know? I guess he would be nearing 1000 or some years and you... Uhm... I don’t know... 30?”

“You think I’m only *three* decades old?! I’m slightly perturbed by your idea of me as an infant! You are fully correct with my father’s age though. He is currently 975 years old with doctors saying he could even age another century past!”

“So how old are you...? If you don’t mind me asking, that is.”

“... I’m 79.”

Vekar’s last words carried an odd tinge of somberness to the attitude they previously carried. Grink knew he had to try and redeem the atmosphere from what it was. He leaned over to the head of Vekar from the back of his neck, seeing the distant gaze he carried.

“Well if I were in your shoes, I’d simply be a bag of bones! I’m sure you’ll age well and long, *your majesty*.” Grink smiled through the words with a hardly stifled laugh. With the life expectancy of 90 for most lizards like Grink, he isn’t all wrong. Especially being that dragons don’t have a life expectancy, being that they age as long as they’re cared for. There was even a short lasted fad where lizards like Grink convinced themselves that smearing themselves in grounded dragon scales would increase their longevity, when in all honesty it

only acted as an irritant to their coats. Simply thinking of such a fad made Grink more grateful for being born when he was. His thoughts were interrupted by Vekar's laughter, clearly caught off guard by the 'majesty' comment that Grink threw in.

"*Majesty?* How silly! I don't believe I've been called that in any recent times? What summoned you to call me that without me as your master? Is that not making light of our current relationship?" While Vekar laughed, it was at the cost of Grink falling into silence. He already had a breakdown believing that he was leading Calan on after not picking a master soon enough. Although with Vekar making such a light reference to this tension, it must not be all that tense then, is it?

"It's hardly a master-exclusive title! You are still the son of a well respected dragon and carrying enough prestige for my family to faint at. I think it fits well!" Grink decided against mentioning the amount of scale protection coating to make his family faint first, but he decided against the easy jab. The comment about Vekar's standing seemed to repair his mood more so than before. With the uncomfortable layering over him now slowly becoming less apparent, Grink and Vekar were able to remain in silence through the rest of the trip until they landed in Vekar's mansion once more.

The harsh sunlight illuminating the mansion appeared even more elegant upon his first arrival. As soon as they came through the door, they were met with a few lizards like Grink as well as a bulky looking werewolf that welcomed him back with a bright smile on his face. The werewolf seemed normal for a split second if you were to ignore the massive metal contraption over his snout with straps to keep it over his head. He talked like normal however, continuing to express himself as though it weren't there at all. The werewolf almost missed Grink, had he not slipped off the back of Vekar.

"Welcome back, your highness! Oh, is this the homeless lizard you were referring to earlier?" The werewolf sounded much older than he looked. He had gray hairs, but his body posture and visible muscle linings made it difficult to see the werewolf as a much older wolf than maybe even Reign was. When Grink and him made eye contact, the werewolf immediately shifted away with a strained smile on his face, shuttering as if Grink had done something wrong. Vekar spoke up in his stead, not facing him and walking to his room again. Grink followed close, behind, being carefully inspected by numerous other lizards.

"Yes he is. Grink, this is my family pet, Freik. Freik, this is the lizard, Grink. Grink will help us with our little mess up earlier today and hopefully give proper instructions."

Vekar asserted calmly, with Freik following to his side with his arms behind his back, his paw holding an odd contraption. It seemed pronged in various directions with each end being able to spin with minimal movement. It was almost silent, save for the constant 'whirring' that no one seemed bothered by. Grink scampered along the two massive monsters ahead of him until they got to the room. When they got to the room, it was a mess of filing boards and jugs of scale protecting gel similar to what Grink had. It was all in disarray and instantly got Grink in cleaning mode. As Grink went about gathering it all into one place, Freik went on to explain what happened earlier today.

"I'm unsure if my young master explained what happened earlier, so I will do it in his stead. Upon hearing of master Torin's arrival, Vekar wanted to make himself more put together. Being that he's yet to shave down his claws or apply his own protection gel, he decided to mimic what his father did. Being your previous meeting with my young master, I assume that you know what he insisted was wrong, correct?" Freik continued, explaining a slightly different version than what Vekar had told him on the way here.

"Wait, but Vekar seemed to have magically left that all out... He had me believe that it was a pet's doing." Grink scowled slightly at Vekar, who instantly looked away with a mask of irritation over his face while clearly being too embarrassed to look at the lizard.

"No, all the pets in this building know that it is too dangerous to use the gel on a premature dragon. We insisted that he needed to stay inside, but he insisted on applying it by himself to 'do it properly' and then demanded that he go off to fetch someone to help, which is where you come in." Freik explained more, his loose paw now reaching up to scratch at the metal caging his jaws. As he scratched at it aimlessly, Grink noticed claw scars along his cheeks and fur. Was the metal over his face supposed to stop him from scratching himself? It seemed to be working for the most part.

"Let's not just point the finger and get this done with, yes? I'm sure this will all be good fun once it's over." Vekar scoffed once more, still too embarrassed to face the other two creatures in the room.

"Of course, young master. Grink, could you mitigate these mistakes in time for Torin's arrival? I will gladly offer you payment for these services if you would have it." Freik offered, facing Grink's direction while not making eye contact again. Grink followed suit, instead looking off to the side. He approached this with the attempt of getting paid, but now it seems like it was an option. Would it be rude to ask for money doing this? Surely not, right?

“Whether he’ll take it or not isn’t a concern. He’s here and already proven his worth. If not taking it, then I’ll force him to have it. Now that it is all out of the way, can we *please* get this engulfment off of my body! It is starting to weigh me down!” Vekar hissed in annoyance. Freik faced Grink again with confusion. Grink thought closely on it, and what he knew about the gel. A bath would clog the drains and would simply mix with the water. Assuming it was outside, it doesn’t degrade easily and could pose harm to the environment. The easiest and most immediate option would be to scoop it all off in increments, then scrape it off and apply the ratioed version afterwards. The ladder would obviously take too much time, even with the massive amounts of pets that could be in the mansion. Another option could be to potentially melt it off. Being that dragons are naturally heat resistant and the gel was made with idea to use heat in order to blend into the scales of the appropriate dragon, an area with heat and moisture could potentially apply the ideal mix onto Vekar while letting the remnants fall off and be picked up for later use, assuming it’s even usable. All the while with Grink thinking, the whirring in the room hadn’t stopped and Vekar resorted to scratching around his body. Grink decided that this would be the best course of action.

“Are you even sure this will work? How do we know it won’t all absorb into my scales?” Vekar asked, taking a seat in a massive room dedicated to being a hot springs imitation without the water, instead utilizing vapors to carry the effect. It was a rare design to see, especially incorporated into a mansion. Grink already heard stories about the healing properties of hot springs and its many uses.

“Yes! So long as you keep your eyes closed through the process and limit the amount of talking, then you should be fine!” Grink suggested, taking this time to also experience the sauna. Freik remained outside, something being said about how much he *despises* the feeling of wet fur. This simply left the two reptiles in the sauna, a giant furnace underneath them with steam pouring in through the floor and walls. Vekar took in a deep sigh and shut his eyes, laying his head down. Grink let his body soak in the slow vapors of the room as the hissing rushed through the room. Almost instantly, some of the excess gel dripped off of him and flopped onto the ground. Vekar continued to rub his cheeks and side, helping the process along as they sat in silence. As much as Grink wanted to help Vekar along the process and not urge him to say anything, he felt such a compulsion to say something to fill the silence. It was such an eerie and uncomfortable feeling.

“Has your search for a master landed any results?” Vekar started, keeping his eyes closed all the same as he repositioned his body. Grink was caught off guard, not expecting him to talk, much less ask about his want for a master. Grink considered the idea for a short while, debating on helping rub off the gel or if that was too intimate for him after denying him as a master.

“You could say that, yes. I was able to meet up with someone yesterday and I really like him. But I also lost my booth on the same day, so it was kinda sour. And here I am with you, helping you with your scales once again!” Grink smiled, deciding that helping his scales would be too close. Much too close than they were already.

“What am I going to do about my claws?”

“Hmm? Oh right!” Grink almost forgot about the massive missing claw next to the dulled ones next to it. He scampered off the seat he took and walked over to his claws. Vekar reacted to the sound of his steps and offered his claws forwards. It would be difficult to file down dragon claws any day, but the humidity wouldn't do any favors either. He did come up with an idea though. Grink ran out of the sauna for a short while, utilizing Freik's insider knowledge before coming back in. He then lifted a set of metal clippers to the claws of the dragon and snapping off the ends of it. After the first 2, Vekar quickly snatched back his claws with tightened lips and exasperated scoff.

“Uhm hello? You were meant to repair them, not clip them! What kind of dragon would I be without my claws?”

“Well we can only do so much in this time frame. Let alone that but your claws will grow back quickly thanks to your body still growing. They should all be back to a comfortable length around a month from now. Please just trust me, alright?” Grink found himself now sitting next to the dragon with the clippers in hand still. Wordlessly, Vekar slowly put his arms forward once more. Only now was it so apparent to Grink that he was taking care of a dragon willing to take him in as a pet. He could so easily get another pet to do this task in place of Grink, but he trusted the little lizard. As much as Grink wanted to keep his options open, he couldn't simply ignore the temptation to call Vekar his master.

He continued clipping the claws of his dragon, soon helping wipe away the gel as a few mounds of it slid over Vekar's eyes and soaked past his eyelids despite his best efforts. Soon enough, Vekar was now getting the full treatment that a sauna provided, a smile on his face and his eyes open. Admittedly his eyes were still a bit red, but at the very least he could

open them without consequence. Grink found joy in this as well, sitting a good distance away from Vekar and sprawled out over the benches, hardly even taking up the entire width of the bench with his body. This should be obvious, considering the dragon it was made for, but it was still an interesting thought. Soon enough, the heat became too much for Grink and he decided he had enough. Although Vekar could stay in for much longer, he exited with his lizard, walking into an area to be met back with Freik and a towering figure just next to him. A hardened dragon with a dulled coat of scales with scratches all over to decorate his opaque form with signs of battle. His body was more than enough to make Grink freeze in his tracks, the gaze of Torin made Grink's heart sink as he subconsciously took a step back. This became a fruitless task as Torin took one step forward, instantly shortening the distance in what would have taken a few strides of Grink's in one fell swoop.

"I was told you would be in the sauna. What made you decide to use this? As I remember, you found it boring." His voice was leagues deeper than anything Grink had heard before. After realizing that he had shut his eyes, Grink looked up to find that Torin had completely ignored him and looked over his son, Vekar. Vekar forced a smile, awkwardly shifting in place and wanting to hide his claws the best he could.

"Well... It became easier? But nonetheless, this is the masterless lizard I told you about in my letters! Grink, this is my father, Torin! Father, this is Grink. He helped take care of my scales with excellent guidance and knowledge that even rivals that of your personal pets!" Vekar spoke about Grink with such pride it made the little lizard's heart flutter. As the head of Torin stood still and squinted underneath him to glare at the same lizard, his heart shivered in fear.

"Hmm."

"I-I should be going anyway! It was great meeting everyone here! I should be going, bye!" Grink could think of a million meanings behind Torin's "hmm." but wasted no time in scampering underneath the massive dragon and hopping past his tail, making his way briskly to the exit he had memorized. He was almost there before a sharp claw jabbed his shoulder twice. Grink held his mouth shut after realizing that he let out the highest pitch squeal he'd ever heard only to find Freik behind him. Freik didn't seem to react too much to it, simply pulling out a massive bag of clanking metal.

"He can be intimidating at first, but he isn't actually scary. You had almost forgotten your payment, Grink." Freik offered, a smile on his face and his eyes looking off to the side. Grink remembered his habit and looked down at the bag of money, instantly realizing that it



was much too heavy for him. Was that just his fight or flight? He hardly felt conscious for most of it and the next thing he knew he was by the door. To his surprise, another pet of the dragons pushed a small wagon to the werewolf. Freik set the large money bag on the wagon and spun the handle to Grink, clearly aware of how heavy it would be.

“Would you like an escort?”

“Oh! N-no thank you! I was actually going to use this money to shop here anyway. There’s a woodworking building nearby, right?” Grink asked, nodding to the lizard pet who brought the wagon as they quickly turned to walk away.

“Hm? I suppose so? If you would like something to be built for you then I would recommend the carpenter. If you are familiar with the R and R building then it is just across from it. The creature who lives there is a snake, and tell them that Freik sent you, hopefully they can help you. Also... Thank you, for serving my young master. He thinks very highly of you. As I remember it, you were considering becoming a pet to him, yes?” The werewolf asked, leaning down a bit as he lowered his voice. Grink thought this to be a more private matter, but Freik was awfully privy to it.

“Y-yeah? I wanted to keep my options... Open, you know? Vekar is definitely a contender though...” Grink wasn’t sure exactly what to say to this, still believing that his search for a master to serve was a private matter, not something to be talked about with someone who is already a pet to the guy he is considering.

“He is a good person. He may be a bit difficult, but he can take care of you. With your talents and his favor, I’m sure you could get good standing as well next to the other pets. I myself and the head of the pets here, so I will be taking care of you as well. I don’t wish to apply pressure to your choice, but I still feel it best to honor my young master with a word of his favor.” Freik offered a bow before turning on his heel, awkwardly leaving the conversation without an additional word from Grink.

The snake creature that Freik mentioned was a very enthusiastic wood worker. Their name was Ancan. With the mystery on how they worked not being illuminated by their excitement. When Grink explained his predicament, the snake continued to elaborate on the various ideas Grink had for his booth. Ancan and Grink eventually decided on a rebuild of what it was before but with more reinforcements. Ancan also offered to help carry the booth for Grink, but he decided against it. Soon enough, Grink was able to pay for Ancan’s services with some leftover. Overall, it was a productive day. Grink was able to make it back

to his booth in time to meet with Calan, carrying a bucket in his mouth with some of the replaced materials. He came in just in time as well, sharing an odd story about how he and Reign's werewolf pack all went on a wild goose chase. It made Grink feel a *little* bad for relaxing in a sauna for most of the day, but in the end, they were both able to find sleep on one another.

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