

Chapter 7

ISABELLA OFTEN THOUGHT OF HER mother, Serpinafria. In her grief, she struggled against memories of the copper-gold dam defending herself from Moktawls who had ambushed her, but that painful image hung on.

She remembered how, on that last terrible day, Serpinafria had been teaching her about using her tail to hurl boulders from the Coldside Mountains. The aged dam left her and went to rest in a flower-filled meadow near Anonom Trace. With a happy sigh, she had folded her weary wings, gold flecks glinting in the sunlight. Her head was drooping sleepily between her outstretched forelegs, while her flanks rose and fell slowly. First one eye had closed and then the other. Isabella could hear her mother's rumbling snores.

The attack had been sudden and deadly. A band of men from Fossarelick—Moktawls, they called themselves—had surrounded her while she slept deeply. One of them pierced her heart with a thick spear while another quickly stabbed the dragon's spark gland. Before the fatal wound killed her, Serpinafria screamed and her cry rang across the Valley.

As she lay dying among crushed flowers matted on the ground near her still body, one man had approached her with his durk. He said to another one, "Your spear it was that struck her heart, so her hide is yours." He tugged his moustache and pointed toward the dragon's flank.

The scales of his blue tunic gleamed as he knelt beside her and began to mark where his companion would strip the gold-striped copper skin from her side. His large silver amulet hung around his dirt-streaked neck.

"Much thanks, Atty," replied the man. "It's time I had my own dragon-skin tunic." He grinned.

Isabella had heard her mother's cry and the men's voices. In a flash, she reached the meadow. Although still a juvenile, her spark and fume glands worked well. With a blast from both, she spewed her breath over the Moktawls.

Startled, the men gaped at her, then at their limbs as their movements slowed. Their weapons fell from their hands and they collapsed to the ground. Blistering steam had scalded their faces and hands and they were weeping with pain. Isabella readied herself to destroy them by snorting several times through her spark gland.

Before she could reduce them all to ashes, her father Aurykk arrived and cast his shadow over her. He called her away from her mother's corpse. As they hovered over the horrific scene, Isabella could see tears running from her father's fiery red eyes—but she knew that a Golden rarely kills his enemy, and these Moktawls would not die this day.

"They attacked Mother," she argued. "They killed their friend. They were going to skin her! I want to burn them alive!"

"No, my dam deserves better. We shall take her body to the mountains and bury her there. In time, these men will regret their attack and will need us again. Come help me give your mother the burial she deserves."

With that, the Golden and the young Copper flew to the Coldside with Serpinafria's body held between them. They laid her body on a flat rocky shelf near the peak of the mountain. One by one, they piled boulders on top of her remains. Aurykk and Isabella paused when the cairn covered his dam and came to a point above the peak.

"Now all who come here will see her resting place and will remember her sad end. May she be the last dragon to die by a Moktawl blade!"

...