

Chapter 32

735 words

"So, if you didn't want to talk to me, what are you doing here?" Lord Chu was clearly irritated that Wen Ch'ang had breached his solitude and now just sat, shifting from claw to claw, saying nothing. "You know what kind of danger you're in? There are still Azghun Demons abroad in the land. Did you think Ao Rue could kill all of them in a little over a year? Get back to the sea, boy, where you're safe!"

"Strange stuff goin' on in me. Nothin' like it happenin' to my friends. Don't figure." Wen Ch'ang spoke begrudgingly, like he was throwing up some alien brew he'd been forced to swallow. Lord Chu clearly intimidated him.

"Oh, you're one of them. Should've noticed. Lemme see those eyes, boy! Yep, there it is big as life. You've no mentor. How could you understand. No one knows enough to guide you."

"Can't go to Ao Rue."

"Of course, you can't, boy. He's chasing Demons. You need to stay as far away from them as possible. But now's not the time for us to do anything. We'll have to wait until the land is safe again. And I don't know how much of Ao Rue will be left when the Demons are gone. The hunt and Mei-chou are the only things that keep him going these days."

"Ao Rue's gonna kill'em quick. Mighty sorcerer. Great hero. And don't call me boy; name's Wen Ch'ang."

"Your admiration serves you well, boy, err, sorry, Wen Ch'ang. But it's going to take years, decades maybe, for him to ferret out those yellow horrors. Even magic has its limitations. You'll know that soon enough. And Han Chung-li's still out there somewhere. His mind's completely gone. He'd rend you and not even know it. Or know it and do it for the joy of plain spite."

"When then? Feeling really weird. Keep wantin' to go off by m'self. Strange visions. Odd voices. Stirrings in me. Mei-chou said yea'd help me if no one else would or could."

"Of course, I can help you, but you're going to have to be patient. Fortunately, you dragons seem to hang around in adolescence forever. And I'm not about to sacrifice you to haste."

"Yea're old."

"What are you talking about? I'm not old, just mature. If you doubt me, take a look at the cave mouth."

Wen Ch'ang looked. Pita was fussing over a small litter of kittens. They were of mixed colors -- one was stone black, another white; one had brown and white patches. The most rambunctious showed dark-blue eyes and the hint of a camel mane amid the blacks and browns of his kitten fuzz.

"Does that look like old to you?"

"Yeers?"

"Of course, they're mine, boy."

"Guess yea're not too old. Will wait."

"You bet you will, and I'll be waiting here when it's safe. Now get out of here, and do try to work on your speech. You sound like an illiterate! Now get!"

Wen Ch'ang said nothing more. He simply nodded before his master and took to the air. Lord Chu walked back to the cave. There was more vigor in his step now than even the kittens had brought him.

"What was that all about, Chu-Chu?" Pita paused from bathing two of the dirtier kittens. If there was dirt anywhere, they found it . . . repeatedly.

He didn't answer her immediately. The little, brown monster had decided Lord Chu's bushy tail was the perfect prey again and was wrapped around it claw and milk tooth. Chu looked at him for a moment, deciding whether to toss him over the side of the cliff, beat him silly, or just endure the indignity. He choice the last, reasoning that Pita wouldn't approve of the other two.

"Well, Chu-Chu, are you going to spend the rest of the day watching your son practice or are you going to answer me?"

"Oh, sorry dear, just trying to remember some ancient wisdom."

"Wasn't he the one who saved Ao Rue and Mei-chou?"

"Yes, he was the one. Got blue eyes too."

"So what did you talk about?"

"The future, I think." Chu's eyes took on a faraway look as he thought of Wen Ch'ang. "Maybe the future. Ouch! Damn, Pita, will you take this little thug." Chu swung his tail around so Pita could pry the kitten loose. Even the future waited on some things.