

KURO: A Dragon Lord's Son

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Chapter 2

As the moonlight peered through the painted windows, Jathir repeatedly raised my body high into the air for all to see, staring at my form. The moon only allowed for so much light, but the candles and torches lining the walls seemed illuminate the space fairly well. From that vantage point, I had been able to better analyze him as well. His wings were halfway folded in, but I could make out the web-like film between the finger-like bony appendages. It was a deep blackish-red, and thin, but dense from what I could estimate based on how little I could see and feel of my own tiny wings. Mine seemed to be silver where his were red.

The way he threw me in the air reminded me of my father picking me up. I half-expected him to start saying things like “My boy! My sweet, precious boy!” However, something like that might have been a much. Not that I would have necessarily minded such a thing, but I could tell this was not his usual behavior judging by the awkwardness I sensed filling the room. Everybody watching the scene twisted their lips into a smile to the best of their abilities, but the tumultuous air was so thick it could be cut with a knife. All I could tell from Jathir's actions is that he truly seemed to care about me for the moment, though it may have been purely because of that so-called Ability I supposedly had.

A faint rumbled escaped my gut as Jathir brought me close to his body once more. The back edge of his lip had parted just enough for a barely audible snicker to be heard. “My little Kuroginryuu is hungry, huh?” I had not even thought about food, but after hearing both my stomach and him speak, I had to admit that I was. Even if I could ignore the fact that I didn't get a chance to eat dinner due to my predicament, there was the strangest feeling that because this body had just hatched from its egg, it needed nourishment.

I'd seen dragons feed their small fish and small chunks of meat to their young in movies, but given such creatures didn't exist in history as far as we as humans knew, there was no telling if that applied to this situation or not. Though not very long, my teeth had grown in enough that they could draw blood from anything soft and fleshy. I ran my tongue across them to check their sharpness as was surprised to find that they were even sharper than my teeth were as a human. Not that I didn't expect a dragon to have sharp teeth, but I would not have expected that from a newly hatched dragon. Perhaps that was just an advantage of being in an egg given I had been able to open my eyes and crawl around. Or maybe it was because I was reincarnated. I did not know enough about dragons of this world to judge something like that.

“Fear not, Lord Jathir!” The voice came from behind me. There was another kobold with scales of an ashy-grey. From their appearance and voice, it was impossible to tell if they were male or female. Their voice was only slightly feminine and their body structure was slimmer than the others, but they had no defining features behind their

cloak that could be made out. They seemed young if anything. “The hunting party returned quite some time ago. I'm certain Zamne and his assistants have already prepared plenty for young Lord Kuro to eat.”

So now I'm a lord? I thought. Well, given the respect they showed Jathir, it was only natural that they showed respect for me as well. It would certainly take some getting used to. As least it wasn't as awkward as calling me a prince.

“Then I'll--” Jathir stopped himself as his eyes trailed up toward the ceiling. I couldn't lift my head enough to spot whatever had captured his attention. I did, however, manage to catch a glimpse as a sparkle reflecting off his eyes as the moonlight above hit something.

He sighed loudly. “VRERK!!!” he roared, turning his attention to the crowd.

“He's not here, my lord!” a voice rang from the back. “He and his lieutenants are off on assignment!”

“Then who did he leave in charge here?!” he demanded to know. The dragon clenched me tightly against his body as his voice grew louder. Suddenly everyone was on-edge.

“Nephis... but I think he's outside,” a voice meekly replied.

“Then get him in here!” Jathir stomped his foot one, causing the stone-masonry beneath his feet to crumble. His voice was had a commanding presence to it. All in the building had moved from kneeling or bowing to standing up completely straight.

Barely a moment had passed before Valka came dragging in a fox-like character. The lizardman tossed the fox onto the ground in front of Jathir, but he immediately stood up. Nephis, I was assuming, had a chain around his forehead with a single stone. He was wearing a very dark cloak obscuring the greyness of his fur.

“Y-You called for me, my lord?” he stuttered nervously, standing completely straight with his arms locked against his side. Jathir took look at him and sighed.

“How old are you?” the dragon asked bluntly.

“Twelve, sir!” the fox answered. That was incredibly young, though it could have been old depending on how long his species lived.

“Twelve, huh?” I could hear an extremely long sigh get drawn from Jathir's mouth. “Vrek isn't one to make mistakes like this, so he must have seen something in you.” A glare suddenly shot out of toward the fox, chilling him to the bone. “So give me one good reason why I shouldn't skin you alive to use as a bed sheet.”

His words were decisive. Nephis did not speak a word in response, instead proceeding to flick the purple gemstone hanging from the chain around his cranium. The fox suddenly disappeared from view. His body, cloak, and jewelry... all had vanished.

“If I release enough stored energy, I could make a small platoon disappear,” came Nephis' voice. I couldn't see him, but as my eyes trailed up toward Jathir's, I noticed his pupils were slowly moving.

“That'll do, but if you're going to hide, make sure you hide your smell and aura,” Jathir finally said, snapping his tail to his left. Nephis emerged from his veil, clutching his chest. Surprisingly, he was still standing, which seemed like enough proof for Jathir to spare his life. “Vrek probably left you behind to guard the fortress because you still need more training.” Jathir's eyes once again shifted toward the ceiling. “A LOT more!”

Jathir roared loudly, blasting a heated fireball from his mouth at the rafters above. I was amazed that the woodwork did not catch fire, but they were probably designed that

way given Jathir was a dragon. It was then that I finally saw something up there move. Valka's image disappeared behind one of the rafters; I hadn't even seen her move from her spot. *How did she get up there?* I asked myself.

“Aaaaaaaaaaagggggggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

The scream tore through the chamber above all else. Those below were unfazed, although I felt the thin layer of fur on my body prick up. Valka leapt from the wood bearings and landed heavily in front us, holding a robed, bearded man by the scruff of it. Even underneath the purple sleeves, I could see that his right humerus was now bent in 90-degree angle and his left leg in three different places. Seeing that convinced me that my earlier assessment of her was correct.

“You see, Nephis, it your responsibility to detect when spies like this enter my territory so Valka and her men can focus on much larger threats,” Jathir sneered, clenching me even tighter. It seemed like Jathir had a feeling what the human was after. “And on the matter of spies...”

Jathir knelt down, leaning forward on his spread legs like an adult man about to explain something to a child.

“Tell me which kingdom sent you, human...” inquired the dragon, hiding his rage.

“Answer!” Valka demanded with a kick to his broken leg.

“N-Nobody!” the human quickly responded as if to stop himself from screaming in pain. I could almost swear at the time that I saw the blond hair of his short beard turn whiter. Although Jathir seemed to have calmed down, the air around his body quivered with a killing intent. Was it just a father protecting his son? Or was there more to his rage? I couldn't help but wonder that as the human spoke.

“I find that hard to believe,” Jathir sighed in disappointment.

“There's a huge bounty on your head!” the human attempted to explain. Valka's eyes peered down at him, ready to detect the slightest suspicious movement. “E-Even mapping your territory or knowing your movement is enough to--”

Jathir quickly silenced him by smothering him with his right hand. Although he had been holding me, he had enough leeway to waggle the equivalent of his left index finger at him.

“Don't take me for an idiot,” Jathir rumbled, his irritation starting to show through. “I'm well aware of how much I'm despised.” A smile formed along the back of his lips; he was genuinely pleased with the idea of being hated. “Allow me to explain why I know you're lying. First, you got this far into my territory, which I find difficult to believe you managed on your own.” Jathir's head tilted backward. “DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE YOU MANAGED ON YOUR OWN.”

Nephis finally caught on at the repeated statement. Though still doubled-over and clutching his chest, the cloaked vulpine stumbled toward the back of the chamber. Jathir smirked.

“That means you got in here with intimate knowledge of this outpost, a place which I came to only fifteen days ago in secret,” he continued. “The only way a no-name like you could have done that is if a kingdom was backing you. No small guild would trust a lowlife like you with that kind of information.”

“No-name?! Lowlife?!” The human was completely insulted. Enough that he had managed to lift his mouth above Jathir's hand. He barely manage to expel a “I'll have you know I--!” before being silenced again.

“So I'll ask you again... WHO sent you? Which kingdom was it?” After he finished asking, the dragon removed his hand to finally let him speak. Again the human pleaded ignorance to it, claiming he was only trying to learn Jathir's plans to report back.

Valka was not so easily convinced. She violently ripped the man's robes away, leaving him in a ragged copper-colored tunic that was not odd for a small time adventurer to wear. The lizardman continued her strip-search by lifting the tunic to reveal a holster stringing his loose pants against his waist like a best. Connected to it was a small brown leather sack. Valka dug through it as the man's skin turned paler.

The lizardman stopped for a second. Without saying a word, she grabbed something and tossed it Jathir. He easily caught it with his large hands. He unfurled his fingers to reveal a ring with a flat surface. Engraved upon the surface was a strange symbol I'd never seen anywhere before. If it was a written language, it was not a character I was familiar with.

“Koseer, eh?” A scowl crossed Jathir's face, but he seemed a bit less irritated than I had expected of him. “That explains everything.”

There was a light murmur in the crowd. Though the news was shocking to them, I could vaguely hear whispers along the lines of “At least it wasn't Drahart.”

“Indeed, my lord!” spoke up the kobold who attended to me earlier. “Koseer is one of our vassal states. With something like that, he could easily enter our territory without suspicion. Even seek out your lordship for a meeting!”

“But I don't recall news being leaked to Koseer that I would be having a child.” Jathir sighed to himself, but surprisingly he did not seem ready to burn down a human settlement as I had expected from his tone earlier. Then again, I knew nothing of this Koseer.

“Maybe an emissary was sweet-talked into divulging it?” the kobold pondered.

“Perhaps...” Jathir returned his attention to the human. The look on his face was a man who had resigned himself to death. If Jathir did not kill him, one could reasonably guess he had no safe method of returning home. “You! Human! Do you think you could be useful to me?”

The man's face suddenly lit up. “O-Of course!” he answered vigorously. If a chance for his life to be spared had arisen, he definitely wanted it.

“Excellent!” Jathir passed me a glance before looking to Valka. “Take him to Zamne.” Valka coldly nodded her head in compliance and dragged the human off with her. She pulled him along without grace by his broken arm, ensuring that he would be experiencing nothing but pain. Jathir dismissed the crowd and held me out in front of him.

“I think human meat will be a wonderful first meal for MY son!” he beamed.

I could feel my face loosen and my body droop at his words. *Did he just say “human” meat? I misheard him right?* I had to think he couldn't be serious. He wouldn't really feed me human, would he? Then again, dragons did eat humans in many games and movies, so it didn't sound unnatural. The problem was that I am, or rather was a human. I had no way of knowing if Jathir knew I was a human that had been reincarnated as a dragon, or if he knew such a thing was possible.

Since eating a human was the last thing I wanted to do right now, I opened my mouth to speak against the idea. “Arrrrrr!” The sound that came out was embarrassing and seemed to only lighten Jathir's mood. In his eyes, I seemed excited by the idea.

Unfortunately, I had little choice in the matter. With my stubby arms, I lacked the strength to push away from him. No, it wasn't just that. Some part of my body refused to push away from him. The fact of the matter was that I was a hatchling, and even if my mind knew enough to discern what edible and what was not, my body's survival instincts kept me close to my father.

I spent so long thinking about it that I had not realized that that were moving. For the first time I was seeing beyond the cathedral room, passing down a long and fairly decorated hallway. As I observed the tapestry detailing what I could only assume to be religious figures, I began to wonder if this was a place that Jathir had built or a place he annexed. I really had a lot to learn about this world.

The doors and hallways were large enough for someone much larger than Jathir's size, perhaps even larger. Perhaps, I thought, that the world build things with dragons in mind. Maybe they were holy figures or something.

Jathir didn't have to push anything open as the room he was heading to was already open. Inside was a long wooden table that was probably large enough to seat 50 people. The guests at the table consisted of some of the kobolds I saw earlier, lizardmen, beastmen, and even a couple human-like figures. I had no way of knowing if they were humans, dwarves, or elves from this far away. Did this world even have things like that?

The dragon made his way to the front and sat himself down at the end closest to a large stonework fireplace. There was a small fire burning with a cauldron-like pot dangling above it.

A tiger-like beastman approached Jathir. Unlike the others, he wasn't wearing any sort of fancy armor or cloak. All he had on was a faded cloth tunic and a bloody apron. The blood looked quite fresh. As he placed a slab of meat resembling a misshapen burger patty in front of us, I felt my fur stiffen. Though the shape resembled a patty, the texture was clean and almost shiny.

"For the young lord," the tiger-like beastman smiled pleasantly. He definitely did not see anything wrong with this scene. I was guessing that this was Zamne. Now that I looked, the rest of the table was filled with lavishly cut meat and vegetables that were spread out so either was within reach of everyone at the table. However, none of them had dared to reach for anything, despite the drool sparkling from the lips of more than a few. They were waiting for Jathir to eat.

Zamne had brought the largest slab of caveman-like meat. The entire thing was still wrapped neatly around the bone. I think I heard somebody mention a direwolf. The meat was easily larger than me.

Although a fork and knife had been prepared -- *Since when did dragons eat with silverware?* -- the dragon made no effort to use either. He pushed on his finger-like digits to produce even sharper claws and off a piece of meat from the small patty in front of me. He kept me seated in his lap as he brought the meat closer.

No! I screamed in my head. If this was what I thought it was, then I couldn't let it touch my my tastebuds.

"The young lord is a picky one!" laughed someone close tot Jathir. I didn't see who.

"He's just probably disappointed the human was such a lowlife," Jathir snerked, finally succeeding in wrenching my jaw open. He shoved the meat into my mouth and smacked my jaws closed. The meat was so juicy that it was practically drinkable. Zamne

must have prepared.

Reluctantly, I swallowed it. Suddenly my eyes widened and smoke seeped from my nostrils. The taste was exquisite. Perhaps it was my body's desire for the nutrients the meat provided, but it was craving more. It was smoked to stimulate the texture a dragon would presumably taste with their fire breath, but heat slowly over a flame to bring out the savory flavor. As I described it to myself, I shuddered. Why did I like this? I felt so bad!

So as to not have more forced down my throat, I knelt my head down toward the edge of the table as my dragonic father brought the dish closer. Hating every fiber of my being, I dug my miniature teeth into and easily ripped off a decent chunk. I wanted to cry as I found myself actually enjoying the meal. Pleased with my actions, Jathir and the other turned their focus to their own meals.