

For Threadweaver, life was good.

The lithe and slender NightWing, with threads of dark grey scales weaving itself down her black-toned side, lapped once more from her glass of wine as she leaned back into her well-padded seat and closed her eyes. All she had to do right now was take in the gentle sounds from her favourite performer, Gentleclaws, playing the dragon-harp just for her and her alone. (Even if her bodyguard, Sharpsight, got to listen to it too. He was a quiet fellow. Just how she liked it). The music was close enough to drown out the faint sounds of wood creaking and metallic snipping from below.

Threadweaver idly thought about those tools on the first floor of her estate as she listened to the music crescendo and diminuendo. The other NightWings of Renewal thought that she was a very hard worker, indeed. How funny that was. No, instead, she was smarter than all of them. Little did any other than her closest inner circle know about her power as an animus, those rare few dragons who could make the world around them bend to their will with a thought. She had taken her name as inspiration, and began with a small workshop, enchanting the spinning wheels, the shears, and the sewing needles to make wonderful and beautiful trade goods even as she slept. She made a small fortune, and nobody was the wiser.

Now look at her. She opened her eyes gently to survey the common room of her lavish domicile she had built around the old workshop. She was nestled in the conversation pit, cushions filled with only the finest down, imported from the Sky Kingdom, and on her side was Gentleclaws, reaching a soft conclusion to her current piece. By the door was her faithful guard, Sharpsight, looking as grim as always. Threadweaver raised her cup to her snout once again, looking to take another lap of her vintage SandWing noir, as she drank in her fine surroundings...

And the dragon sitting across from her?

Certainly, there wasn't supposed to be one there. And definitely not a SkyWing, of all dragons. This older, reddish-pink dragon, unusually heavy-set for a SkyWing yet still impeccably polished and trimmed, wearing almost as much jewelry as she did, was wearing a soft smile and holding a glass just like her own.

In her great shock, it took for him to speak for her to take any action other than staring.

"Mhm, yes, quite delightfully leathery, while just rich enough to please, wouldn't you say?" The interloper said, swishing around his cup gently in one claw.

Threadweaver immediately jumped up onto all fours, tossing the glass aside, which promptly shattered right at Gentleclaws's paws, staining her and her instrument with dark red. For her part, she yelped and ran off immediately, while Sharpsight dived from the door to the pit, growling.

"Who in the three moons are you!?" Threadweaver hissed out.

“What, you don’t recognize *the* legendary animus?” he replied, lounging back in the cushions further even as she took a step forwards, bristling. Before she could reply, her bodyguard was on top of him, grabbing him by his thick neck and lifted him up a little. The SkyWing let out an irritated grunt and looked up at Sharpsight. “Excuse me for a second. Oh, **be still**, will you?”

Sharpsight, at that, let out a confused grunt, and then he went rigid. Threadweaver could only watch in slowly growing outrage and horror as this odd uninvited guest easily ducked his neck down and slipped out of the grasp of her guard. Sharpsight didn’t react to this. In fact, he didn’t react to anything. His foreclaw was still hanging there in the air as the other dragon settled himself a bit to the left of the frozen NightWing.

What did he do to her guard!? Threadweaver would have none of this. She considered how to direct the things around her as she stalled for time. So... The legendary animus, hmm? “Darkstalker is not alive. Nor a SkyWing,” she decided to say.

Said SkyWing cycled through several emotions in short time. First shock, then irritation, then a smug smile once more. “Hmph! Times really *have* changed, ohhohhoh. No, no. I am Feather, and I think it is long overdue I paid you a visit.”

“So this is all? You barge into my estate, paralyze my guards, and waste some of my finest wine, just to talk? Honey, I have a long list of people who want my secrets. You won’t get them this easily, animus or not.”

“Your secrets? Oh, that’s *adorable*.” Feather replied, giving an all too eager smile. “No, you don’t need to tell me a thing. But, from one weaver of fates to another... I think it’s high time you learned a lesson or two from me.”

“Weaving? You don’t know the first thing. I studied, and *created*. Look around you. Perhaps you could learn something from *me*.” She began thinking about the tools of her trade, especially the sharp ones, downstairs as she talked. What to do, what to do...

“Ooooh, I like your confidence. Inspiring.” he whispered, getting closer to her. “But I’m being serious now. Listen to me, dear. The path you go down...”

Feather began talking of something about “order” and “means of production” and “mass despair”. She wasn’t paying attention. Instead, she was mentally reaching out to the things around her that she could enchant. She thought towards her cutting tools in the workshop: ***On my mental command, strike at the dragon in front of me until they live no more.***

“... Are you listening?” Feather said, lifting an eye-ridge.

“I don’t need to listen to you.” Threadweaver replied, and gave the mental word.

With a great groan, creak, and a crash, the floorboards around her splintered in multiple places at once, and metal cutting shears and large needles rocketed up through the floor. She briefly shielded her eyes with a foreleg as splinters went everywhere before she readied herself to strike with her own claws. She wasn't trained in fighting, but with Sharpshot frozen in place, she would have to make do.

Feather didn't have time to react as he was impaled by a large needle, used for the more impressive tapestries she sold at a massive premium. He grunted as he was harried by cutting tools further. But he didn't scream, or reel, or even cough up blood. Instead, he calmly pulled out the needle and tossed it aside. It immediately rushed back in to stab him again, but he paid it little mind as let out an indignant *hmph*.

"You can make enchantments," He said, "but really? Something this simple?"

"I am the most powerful animus in this entire kingdom!" She hissed back.

"Oh, are you now? Forgive me! I didn't think you were full of such *hot air*. Hmm, in fact..." Feather put one claw to his chin. Tap tap tap...

Hot air! Coming from *this* dragon!? Threadweaver was about to make a sharp retort when Feather rose a claw into the air, making a happy little noise as he did so.

"Yes! How about ***I enchant you to fill with your own hot air until you meet your fate.*** Ohohohoh."

She froze in place, her eyes going wide despite herself. Did he just...? Certainly he couldn't...?

Feather only grinned and swooped a wing over his form, obscuring himself from her view as she stared. "And with that... ***I enchant this form to be... Somewhere else.*** Tata!"

With a *whumpf* noise of displaced air, the SkyWing was gone.

Threadweaver laid back and groaned indignantly as she felt over her lower middle with her claws yet again.

Over the past day, she had begun to notice *it*. Normally, she was sleek and svelte, perfectly eye-catching. But now she felt a rise in her stomach, a firm ball just below her ribs, slowly growing inside of her. It gave a hollow noise as she drummed over it with her claws. Her middle gurgled at that, and she felt it bubble up in her once more. She couldn't help but let out a most un-lady-like belch, rattling the windows of her estate.

She could *not* believe this was happening to her! After the altercation, she enchanted all the broken wood flooring back into place, and while she oversaw that, she felt just fine. Just normal. She thought that Feather was simply calling a bluff. But it all really started the next morning, when she went to attend the settlement of Renewal's council meeting.

As someone of her status, she was invited there to influence the growing settlement's policies and behaviour. Just one of the perks of being so successful. Of course, it was also a chance to be graceful and elegant in public, just like any NightWing should aspire to be. Currying influence was so very important, which is exactly how she noticed the first... Changes.

While sitting around the big long council table they had placed in the rebuilt ruins of the City of Night's palace, Threadweaver felt a light pressure in her middle. A bit of bloating. She had pushed all thoughts of that Feather and his enchantment out of her mind at the time, explaining it away as some bad goat meat from her morning meal.

Then she felt the gas welling up inside her.

With only a moment of warning, too little to react in any useful way, she was forced to let out a crass belch right in front of everyone assembled! And oh, did they *stare*. All she could do was quickly assemble herself, apologize, and let the others continue bickering about trade deals with the greater Rain-Night Kingdom.

Then the gas really started building up. She was fighting for her life at that table, stifling emanation after emanation to keep up appearances, all the while she could feel her middle begin to bloat truly uncomfortably. She even missed a chance to reply to some important conversation about the Pantalan silk trade, something she needed to seal for her goods! She left the meeting stalking out, getting a few questioning looks. She didn't care. She was busy fuming and thinking of that damn pink SkyWing.

Now, she was back home. She was reclining once again, considering her state. How did Feather do all this? You can't just *enchant dragons directly*. That was *impossible*. Her gut rumbled, and she let out another annoyed burp, as she looked over to Shardsight.

Her bodyguard was exactly as Feather left him yesterday. Same pose. Completely still. The strong, bulky NightWing continued to stare ahead into the distance, the same slightly confused expression on his face. She idly wondered if his mind was still in there as she raked her claws along his side gently. Maybe she could pass him off as a very realistic statue for her private garden? She'd need to hire another guard, too. She let out an irritated belch as she considered her options, before freezing as a thought came over her.

What if it was possible to enchant dragons? What if Feather's trick wasn't as fancy as she thought?

She placed one claw firmly on Sharpsight's shoulder and gave a slight grin. Good thing she had a, ah, test subject first. She spoke clearly and simply... Or so she tried.

"I enchant your flesh- UUURP- to move on your mind's volition."

It took a second for the animus spell to soak into its target. But soon, Sharpsight sputtered and coughed, falling forwards and groaning weakly. Threadweaver did not try to, or want to, catch the suddenly limp dragon. Her smile widened as she watched the dragon shake out some apparently very stiff limbs.

Oh, she really *was* the greatest animus of all time. She caught on just so quickly! And she didn't even have to find a new guard, to boot.

"Get up, Sharpsight." Threadweaver said. "If that animus comes back, you'll now be prepared. Thank me later."

"Oooooogh..." he groaned in reply. "Sore..."

"Yes, yes, we all have our- OOOURP- problems," she grumbled. Although, with the newfound knowledge that you can enchant dragons, maybe she could have significantly less problems... She pondered as she watched Sharpsight hobble back up.

Before she realized, she had another foreclaw back on her softly rounded middle, lost in thought. It was a bit warm, wasn't it? Absolutely a part of Feather's vaguely worded enchantment. How to get around it...

Well, first things first, she'd deal with the worst part of it all. The *embarrassment*. She could deal with some hot air, but she'd *never* mortify herself in front of her peers ever again. How to keep the gas from bubbling out of her? Well, there was one way... She thought for a second before properly wording a spell.

"I enchant my scales to never let hot air escape," she muttered to herself while stifling the last awful burp she'd ever have.

The burp building in her died to nothing, and she arched her back, a smug smile creeping across her snout. She inhaled sharply and let out a sharp laugh. She had won!

... Her laugh was entirely silent.

Threadweaver froze as it slowly dawned on her what she just did. Her breathing came faster, save with only raspy, useless exhales that did nothing. And all the while, the modest rise of her stomach, entirely manageable, grew just a little bit with each breath. She realized that the only thing keeping Feather's enchantment from *really* working was that she could let out the air, such gross ways notwithstanding.

Now there was no such safeguard, she realized, as she watched her stomach slowly expand outwards.

She immediately clamped down on her panic. She would be fine. She would think of something, and she would reverse this bloat making her look so worryingly gravid. She slowed her breaths. Inhale. No exhale. Inhale. No exhale. She kept it slow and steady. The growth of her middle, now feeling a bit overly warm, slowed appreciably.

She just had to get her thoughts together. Where was Gentleclaws when you needed her? She tried to huff indignantly, but of course failed. She ignored Sharpsight looking at her with a look of dismay and concern as she stalked past him, towards the door to her balcony. Her middle was already beginning to jostle to the sides just a little whenever she took a step, which was just so distracting. She needed calm and quiet and she was going to go get it. Sharpsight, for what it was worth, followed her diligently, only making a few protests as to her state. Whatever.

She was about to get a breath of fresh air from the outside, when she realized that would only make her problem worse. Well, she was outside, anyway. She flapped her wings before getting enough lift to take off. It was... Disturbingly easy. She was never a good flier, she never found the need, but today it was much easier. She grumbled as she went into a glide over Renewal, gut now jutting out to her sides if you were looking from below, before landing some blocks away from where she might find her oft-retained musician.

Some dragons about the streets stopped to stare at Threadweaver as she stalked down towards the residence of Gentleclaws. She had better be in. Her middle was getting to be too much to ignore now; it was pressing against the inside of her hind legs, and every step now sent it shaking. She had to widen her stance as she knocked on the harp-player's door. Normally, she'd have Gentleclaws sent for, but she needed her *now*.

She knocked a foreclaw on the door as heavily as she could. She heard shuffling inside, and soon the door opened. Gentleclaws was there in the doorway, her dark grey scales still a little stained with red along the foreclaws. She was about to greet her guest, but stopped, her eyes going wide.

"I have need of your services." Threadweaver tried to say; instead, nothing came out. Oh. Right. She desperately tried to ignore the fact that her swelling gut, now feeling really warm, was pressing against her forelegs as she devised the proper gestures to convey her meaning.

Gentleclaws, now extremely nervous, tilted her head. "Is this about... Last night? No, no, please, mistress Threadweaver, no need to apologize. I won't say a word, I promise."

Threadweaver shook her head and hitched her forethumb backwards, indicating a need to leave with her. Hopefully as urgently as possible.

“Oh! It’s about... The odd dragon? Did he... Do something?” Gentleclaws gazed downwards at Threadweaver’s growing gut. It let out a soft creak, and she shuddered.

Threadweaver mimed playing music and nodded. By now, Sharpsight had caught up, and landed next to her with a huff. Oh, right, him.

“Come back with us.” he said bluntly. Ah, that would work.

“Ah. Do you need me to... Roll you...?”

Threadweaver bristled at Gentleclaws’s idea. She was still quite capable of moving under her own power, and would continue to be! She turned to walk away, head held high and proudly. She just had to... Maneuver around her continually swelling black-scaled gut. She tried to groan as her gut firmly pressed on the ground, spreading her legs even further outwards. She lifted one side of her body, and then the other, in a supremely awkward waddle. Left, right, left... She was supposed to use this time to think about the enchantment she was going to make to fix this, but instead she couldn’t keep it off of the shocked and interested looks of dragons around her on the streets of Renewal. She was going to be the damn gossip of the town at this rate!

She tried to hurry up her pace, but soon with a sharp inhale, instead of touching the ground with her claws on one side, her gut did instead, and she rocked in place instead of step forwards. She flailed for a second, yelping silently, before regaining herself. Gentleclaws, looking away nervously, bumped into her from behind, sending her rocking a little bit more, while Sharpsight moved to stabilize her. She pushed against her gut with her skinny limbs, but it did nothing. Damn that Feather!

“Should, I, ah, roll you now, mistress Threadweaver?”

She let out a silent, embarrassed sigh, and nodded ever so softly.

Her growth was slowing down, ever so thankfully, but it still was deeply concerning. She’d been rolled back to her estate, and that was itself supremely awful. The constant motion she had no control over made her nauseous, and she got a nice good look at just about everyone in the city gawking at her, her bodyguard keeping them from asking her questions. There was even a councilmember in the crowd. *Mortifying.*

Now the three dragons were sitting in her private garden. Gentleclaws was playing music, but it wasn’t her best work. She kept missing notes. Sharpsight paced back and forth.

“Mistress Threadweaver.” Sharpsight said. Threadweaver looked at him as her belly swelled up another inch. It was looking red and angry under her parted scales. “We are... Still getting paid for this?”

She furrowed her brow and nodded. She'd dock Gentleclaws's pay for not being there for the full agreed-upon time last night, but-

Her thoughts were drowned out for a second by the unrelenting pressure in her middle. It had begun to ache, and then hurt. She was stretchier than she ever thought, but... She was reaching a limit. Her hide was getting angry at her, and her limbs were beginning to puff out, rendering movement sluggish. Not that she could do much beached on her stomach.

She *had* to ignore the pressure and think of something. Else... She remembered the exact wording on Feather's spell as her middle creaked loudly, making Gentleclaws stumble. "until you meet your fate", he said. She slowly came to the realization that her "fate" could be as scraps. She *had* to think of something! Anything!

Her inhaling grew shaky. To avoid bursting, she could... Think of an enchantment for her scales... Perhaps to... ***enchant her scales to withstand any pressure...***

Threadweaver went rigid as she felt magic seep into her scales once more. She felt relief as suddenly the reddening receded and the scales grew to cover her gut... She would sigh if she could. That was another issue dealt with, but to deflate with her own hot air, she'd have to-

She was interrupted by a pulse of inflation rounded her out even further. She heard Shardsight grunt in surprise as her mind was lost for a moment in the pressure of the surge. Her legs thickened further. Soon after, another came, and another. She clutched her claws against her now completely impenetrable belly as they began to sink in.

She just had to... Make the air compressible! That was it! ***I enchant my-***

Another wave of mind-breaking pressure washed over her, and her words stumbled. ***I enchant-***

And then another. Were they getting more intense? Or was that just with the pain of stretching further now gone permanently? She couldn't think it through. ***I-***

And then *another*. She tried to whimper, but no air came out. She couldn't bend her legs, and her tail felt like a sausage. She reflexively flailed, and felt the air whip around inside her, so uncomfortably warm, making her bounce slightly.

She didn't feel herself bounce back onto the ground. Instead, her mind was replaced with pure panic. She was gently but surely floating away! She was outside, and she'd just go up and up and... She flailed some more, but to no use, as-

She felt a claw grip the fat tip of her tail, and she groaned as she bobbed in place.

Oh good, she thought amidst the continuing waves of pressure daze. Sharpsight was doing his job, and-

“I see you’ve gotten yourself into a little pickle, ohohoh!” Feather’s voice said. She could no longer turn her head to the source of the noise, her vision only of the sky, but she knew.

Threadweaver could only let out a little silent whine as he continued. “It seems now you’ve enchanted yourself into a little corner. I tried to warn you, you know. Now you’ll never deflate again.”

The pressure was unbearable. What was this about it being... Permanent? She gulped as Feather continued. “Who is the better animus now? No, no, don’t answer. No need. Now that you cannot meet your fate, it seems you’ll be growing with your own hot air forever. How, mmm, *terrible*.”

She bobbed in the air helplessly as he prattled on. “You could be a fourth moon one day. How about... Imprudence, as a name? It suits you. Ohohohoh. But no, if you get too big, I think you’d do better in my collection instead.”

She could just tell he was grinning wickedly. “But for now, it seems you’re at the mercy of your employees. I wonder what they’ll do with you. But oh, we can’t have anyone try to *fix* you now.”

She whimpered, again perfectly silently.

“I enchant the minds of all dragons save us to think nothing strange or unusual about your physical state.”

Her blood ran icy cold.

“Oh! Thank you for saving mistress Threadweaver.” she heard Gentleclaws say. “It’s a risk, letting her outside.”

“Give her to me.” Sharpsight said, and she soon felt another claw on her tail. Feather released his grip.

“It is my *absolute* pleasure.” Feather said. “Tata!”

“Let’s get you inside.” Sharpsight sighed out. She felt herself bob and jerk as she was moved, before the pressure washed over her again.

Threadweaver hide creaked loudly, jolting her out of her previous daze.

She couldn't see much around the divot her head was sinking into more every day, but she knew where she was. She was out at the market square. Her pinhole of the world currently included some dragons trading in the distance.

And she knew exactly what she was doing here. She got to see the gaudy *drapery* they were putting over her. Her animus-automated textiles factory had, of course, worked perfectly fine without her. So her former hired help was now running the place, and didn't need her skills one *drop*.

They were using her to *advertise!* And of course, nobody thought that a black-scaled sphere was odd at all, so everyone just went about their business while she floated there, tied down by ropes. She flexed her claws, now deeply compressed by the divots they were permanently stuck in.

She just needed a new enchantment! She just needed to-

Another deep, massive wave of pressure overtook her, and she couldn't do anything but hold on as she grew another fraction of an inch in diameter.

She had weaved her fate, and now she had to deal with it.

She vowed revenge on Feather once more as she went under once again, lost in the pressure forevermore.