

Bronze knew a lot about dragons. As a scavenger, this was a little unusual, yes; most knew that they were massive creatures that were basically unkillable and unstoppable, whose ire you could not afford to draw, but Bronze, well, *he* knew more than that. Ever since the language of the humans and the dragons had been bridged, there had been a select few actually interested in learning about the culture of those big flying lizards. So Bronze had learned their language and crawled around dragon settlements under-talon; from the SandWing capitol listening to stories to getting help looking at scrolls at the IceWing archives, he'd heard some things that not even many dragons knew about themselves.

Bronze always had an interest and appreciation in dragons few others had. He always thought they were gorgeous creatures, enviable in their power and appearance. And perhaps... He envied being able to look so wondrous. Just a tiny bit, in a way he never admitted to himself, not truly. But regardless, this interest all came to a head one day, when he read up on an old tale of what an old, dusty scroll called "the legendary animus", a SkyWing named Feather.

Feather was a trickster who, at least according to this scroll, gave ruinous gifts to greedy queens, played pranks on wrathful nobles, and caused stirring among the peasantry (as far as dragons had those concepts). With his gift of magic, something Bronze was still wrapping his head around as something that was real, Feather always ended up on top of whoever was a little too big-headed. This was something Bronze could admire (considering his own home sanctuary's wrong-headed reluctance to even let him leave to pursue draconic studies).

So thus began a particular obsession with the particular dragon. Something about his force of personality oozing through the accounts of the animus's deeds and misdeeds drove Bronze to find out all he could about this Feather. Little records were left of him, but one day he caught ear of a rumor that a dragon by that very name had touched down from the sky merely to play tricks, and leave once again. Bronze at first didn't believe that the dragon could still be alive, but soon this turned into a burning desire to track down the legendary dragon.

One fateful day, Bronze would get his wish.

A day before, Feather was reported to be in the region by a very sore and very oddly-colored SeaWing passing through the forests of this part of Phyrria. Bronze felt so very lucky to get such a fresh report, but little did he know that tracking down the lead through the winding woods, all on foot, would be fruitful. Certainly, he was exhausted after the trek through the massive eastern-central woodlands, terrain untrod by most scavengers. And he was getting a bit discouraged, considering it was just a single unreliable account, of which was probably too old to act upon. He was just considering how he trekked all this way with his heavy traveller's pack all for nothing when he came across a river clearing.

The trees were cut by a small babbling river meandering through the woods. A pinkish-red SkyWing was laying down yet leaning forwards, forelegs dangling off the edge of the bank and into the water, idly making a splash that rippled and flowed downstream. His wings were

spreading out across the bank, taking in what sun was given by the gap in the trees the water gave. His head, topped by two large wavy horns, was peering downwards, lost in thought.

Bronze stopped for a second, breath hitching in his throat. This had to be him...! This was further confirmed when he froze and listened to what he was mumbling about. His tone of voice was flowery like many SkyWings, but he had a bit of an accent- or was it an ancient dialect of Dragon?- that made him sound even older and even more pompous.

“Oh, let me see here... **I enchant your mind to understand in full the concept of marital divorce.**”

Yes! This had to be Feather! Nowhere else had Bronze heard of an animus willing to do such things to- who now? Was it him? He already knew that, but maybe Feather thought-

“Oh, I almost didn't notice you there. Almost~!” Feather slowly turned his neck to Bronze, looking downwards, giving him a side-eye that wasn't threatening, but certainly wasn't warm, either, with a hint of a smirk. “Don't worry, little one; I am just giving the fish something to think about, ohohohoh... Do you think I should have shown them what marriage was first?”

Bronze had frozen up previously, to avoid notice from a being who was likely to have never even considered scavengers as sapient, but now he was in the spotlight. Feather wasn't just cooing at an animal, he was talking to Bronze! How did Feather know he knew Dragon? He had so many questions swirling around his head. Before he knew it, they were all spilling out like a leaky dam.

“Oh by the moons... Are you Feather? Really and truly? I've been wanting to meet you for so long... Were you enchanting just now? How are you still alive?”

Feather stopped and chuffed softly. His response was more curt than Bronze expected, deflating him a little. “Yes, yes, good, yes, and wouldn't you like to know, respectively. Now, answer my question, hmm~?”

“Oh- umm...” Bronze was too starstruck to pick a side here, despite the topic. He had to snap himself out of looking at Feather for a second to form a response. “I'd never presume to know more about granting knowledge than you. I'd defer to you!”

“Oh, I see how you are, dear~” Feather responded casually, that smirk growing just a little. “Flattery will get you *everywhere*. Now, what brought you to me, I wonder...”

Bronze sputtered as he tried and failed to hold back the tide of exactly *why*. “I'm- I guess I'm your biggest fan! Among the scavengers anyways! I just wanted to see you and hear about the things you do, and... See if you were as pretty as that one scroll implied... I love dragons and their scales and their wings and their big tall stances and...” It just kept coming, and he only

barely knew why he was dumping all this on such a powerful dragon who could squash him like a bug for being this annoying.

Feather began to sit up, turning around to face Bronze, smirk now a full-on grin. "Is that so... Well, I'm quite pleased to hear I still have fans, ohohoh! But you're more than that, I think..."

"O- oh?" Bronze stammered.

"Oh, yes. Your little biped heart has something more in it. Would you like your deepest wish to come true, my friend~?"

Feather leaned down much closer to Bronze, making him reflexively flinch backwards as the dragon's head now took up his vision. His deepest wish... What could that be...? Could it be...?

"Well, since you revere us dragons so, and make my opinions your own... **I enchant your body to assume the form and likeness of mine exactly...**"

Suddenly, Bronze's skin began to tingle all over, from the base of his skull to the backs of his calves. His eyes went wide, and he shuddered, looking down at himself in shock as the feeling began to grow.

He raised the back of his hands up so he could see them, and he noticed his skin was feeling and now looking rather sensitive, blushing pinkish-red. Soon, he felt itchy all over, and when he scratched, the skin peeled away in a small patch, revealing... Scales. Hard little plates that interlocked. It was about then that he felt sore in his arm and leg bones.

He groaned softly as it hit him in a wave. The soreness cut deep, and he wobbled unsteadily as he watched his limbs begin to lengthen in slow, throbbing pulses. With a soft grinding and shifting, he felt them *rearrange*, too- With a long, slow tear, his hiking boots were destroyed as his soles raised off the ground, his heel lifting as his nails thickened into claws. All the while, he could only stare in shock at his hands, which were now forming into foreclaws, losing some dexterity as he flexed them with a growl.

Wait, a growl? He began to notice that the bone-soreness was expanding to his chest and his skull. With each low, long throb, he felt his jaw creak as it expanded outwards, teeth lengthening and sharpening as they rearranged. Meanwhile, his ribcage lengthened and deepened, his shoulders shifting to accommodate... Something new. He felt his arms slowly shift forwards, and his stance wobbled unsteadily as his pelvis reshaped...

Bronze went from feeling his growing snout with his hands- no, foreclaws now- to having to spread them outwards as he couldn't help but fall forwards. With a hard *whumpf*, he landed on all fours. He couldn't help but chuff softly as he pressed his claws into the forest grasses, testing his weight on his fores and then his hinds. This felt so *good*, so *natural*, so... Feather-like... The

implications of this were made to wait as he felt a growing pressure in multiple places at once. The back of his head, his neck, his shoulders, his tailbone...

He closed his eyes as he felt his neck begin to lengthen in waves, as he felt something heavy grow from the back of his head. *Horns*. His head jerked slightly up and down as they grew in Feather's curvy pattern. Meanwhile, the pressure from his backside and rump became too much to ignore. They exploded outwards with new sensations and new growth! His shoulders grew into what felt oddly like another pair of arms, except when he flexed his hand, he could feel the whole appendage move awkwardly, all interconnected by a huge membrane. And at the same time his tailbone grew what he knew was a tail, much more instinctively. He couldn't help but flick it back and forth as all the changes settled in, his body creaking as it grew in pulses, his clothing long shredded by the growth.

Bronze was left panting heavily, eyes still firmly shut, as the wave of soreness and sensitivity slowly faded. Eventually, he hazarded to open his eyes. The world was more clear, more sharp than ever before- and in front of him was, what he realized, his splitting image. The real Feather was looking eye-to-eye with him, a fiendish grin coming over the SkyWing as he was silently watching Bronze's process. It soon really sunk in that he was looking into a mirror of his new form as he flexed his wings softly, craning his new, long neck to get a better look at himself. Pinkish-red scales. He was... An identical copy of Feather. He began to blush deeply. Not only was he a *dragon* now, he was *the* dragon, and while *that* was strange and awkward and maybe a little embarrassing, it just felt so right!

He let out a low roar, head tilted up high, wings stretched out upwards, forelegs locked with haunches settling down on the ground. What a gift! What a wish! He looked back at Feather as he tried to fold his wings at his side, like he saw other dragons do, and was trying to figure out how to speak Dragon with his new maw, when his mumblings died in his new throat.

It was then that Bronze realized that Feather held his next words, rather than finish the sentence that was an animus's spell. As if on cue, the SkyWing he became a perfect copy of began rumbling out some final words.

**"... Except made of pure, solid gold,"** Feather said, all without losing his grin.

Instantly, Bronze began to feel more stiff. He once again craned his neck to his side to take a look at his new scales. From the tips of his claws upwards, he could see it. They were taking on a deep orange-yellow hue. Definitely not bronze in color, though; that was indeed *gold*.

He immediately started to panic a little bit, even if his deepening blush betrayed him. He was becoming a *gold statue of Feather*? That was the sort of monument to decadence the scrolls didn't talk about! He wanted to try hunting, flying, using magic, being Feather! He took frantic steps backwards on his four claws, tripping over his own tail and stumbling. He tried to stammer out a plea, but he only whimpered and sputtered, as he watched the golden hue travel up his legs.

Where the gold encroached, he began to feel... Heavy. So very heavy and utterly stiff. He could barely raise his legs now, struggling to backpedal more as he looked up at Feather in blushing horror. The real Feather, the one *not* becoming a statue, took a step forwards and passively inspected the changing dragon.

“Very good, dear. Be sure to **strike a good pose, before you maintain it forevermore**, please~”

Suddenly, the other Feather’s legs, now each heavier than lead, became just bearable to lift as he felt his mind race about such a pose. He was helpless but to settle on something he thought would be appropriately awe-inspiring for... Feather’s greatness. His blush deepened even more as he began to assume it. As the gold spread up to edges of his body, he curled slightly, lifting one foreleg into the air as much as it would bend any more, which wasn’t much. He flared out his wings and lifted his tail around him in just the right way as the gold just started to creep over the scales there. He managed to get his neck arcing in just the right way as he felt it stiffen into uselessness.

He tried to move his legs to get a better pose. He found that when he tried, he managed a twitch, but being even a little tiny bit out of position felt so very *wrong*. He immediately moved back into place, or at least tried to. They felt so utterly stiff and heavy, the gold soft but firm, and wouldn’t move. However, he felt the need, the strain, to keep into place anyways! This made him whine softly as he felt the gold creep up his neck further.

He could only look at himself, now mostly a shining gold rather than pink, as the unmoving material crawled forwards. He couldn’t help, despite the blush, stretching his long lips into a smug-looking slight grin as he finalized the pose he would maintain, forevermore. Slowly, inexorably, he felt his face stiffen as the gold finished his transformation into a statue. He watched the very last bit of pink scale at the tip of his snout change to gold before his eyes slowly moved into looking forwards, directly at the real Feather, once again watching with rapt excitement.

The statue of Feather twitched softly, and then went still.

He felt his muscles, converted to gold as they were, seemingly strain to hold the perfect pose. The pose best exemplifying Feather, the dragon who was an idol to him... And now he was the perfect image of... Forever. He tried to move, he struggled and groaned internally, but he only managed a tiny, almost imperceptible wobble, before slackening to his correct pose once more. He tried to whimper, but no noise came out.

The real Feather padded up to the newly minted statue, caressing his golden cheek with a foreclaw softly. “Oh, you came out even more beautiful than I ever expected, Feather~!”

The statue would blush even more if it could. A beautiful dragon... Forever...

“You will make such a wonderful curiosity for travellers. They will wonder so why such a gorgeous and expensive work of art is sitting here by this unremarkable river... And maybe, just maybe, they will know my name. Ohohoh~” Feather trilled as he gave the inanimate flank of the statue a reassuring pat-pat.

The statue groaned internally at the touch. He knew that from now on, he could be felt up by any passing traveller, dragon or scavenger, and do nothing about it... But the sensation he would be few and far between, he realized with another silent whimper.

“... Ah, I almost forgot. Greed knows no bounds, you know! We can’t have them melting you down, now. Ahem... **I enchant you to, when grasped by any hand or claw for the purpose of avarice, transform them into your form alike.** That will be so delightfully ironic, ohohoh...” Feather rubbed in between the golden horns of the statue, eliciting yet another soundless whine.

“Well, my work here is done. Ta-ta for now, my dear Feather!” He waved with one wing before he crouched into the ground, began flapping those wings, and jumped up into the air. The statue could only stare forwards as the sound of the dragon grew more distant, until it was left with the sounds of only nature.

As it stood there, forever unmoving, its thoughts settled.

It was a dragon...

It was beautiful...

It was a perfect image...

It held its pose...

It was Feather...

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