

## **A Father's Love**

Lord Masdaniel Ganisrath, seventh of his name, stood quiet and alone. Watching as the body of his wife Isalriela was given to the sea. His daughter, Ilisri, was being held by a maid to nurse a few feet away.

The suckling stopped. "Daddy?"

Lord Masdaniel turned away, forcing his eyes to stay dry and his face stern. He walked over to the maid and then slapped her, the sound of it loud over the whispers of shock that swept through his retainers.

"You will keep her quiet." His daughter had to be strong.

"But her first word my Lord..."

He slapped the maid again, so hard that Ilisri slipped from her grasp. She would have if he'd not caught Ilisri's arm. Almost in a panic, he grabbed Ilisri's arm so tightly that she started crying from the pain.

"Tinganariel?"

"Aye."

"This woman is no longer fit for my service. Take her and send her to be with my wife."

"Masdar..."

He spun around, still holding his daughter in the air by her arm. "Do I need to repeat myself?"

Tinganariel swallowed. "As you wish," he replied, starting to turn.

"Stop. Haven't you forgotten something?"

Tinganariel just looked at him, his eyes narrowed.

"Am I not your lord?"

A moment of silence except for the shushshush of waves on the shore and then, "Aye...Lord."

"Do not forget again." Masdaniel turned away and glanced around the crowd of the people who were his, and would eventually be his daughter's. "Hanasra?"

A young lady made her way before him and bowed. "My lord."

Behind them the former maid started to scream as she was tied to the funeral barge of Masdaniel's wife and doused in oil.

"You will take care of my daughter. You will teach her to be silent."

"My Lord."

Behind them torches were tossed and, with a hungry roar, the fire crackled and spit as it burst skyward.

"And remember what happened to her last maid."

She bowed.

The boat was pushed away, and gradually the screams faded to a hoarse silence. Ilisri had also stopped crying.

Masdaniel turned away and started walking up the living wooden stairs to his private quarters and closed the door, the sound soft and lonely. Then, only when he was alone, did he let himself begin to sob in grief.

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"My Lord, the House Inlani has sent a messenger to ask for the honour of fostering...", Tinganariel began.

"No."

"But my Lord, you..."

Masdaniel stepped forward and grabbed Tinganariel by the chin and yanked him upward until Tinganariel's face was looking up at his own. He could feel his castellan swallow. "There will be no fosterage."

"But..."

"I fought according to tradition, and that cost me my wife. There *will be* no fosterage."

"I have heard talk of them bringing the matter to the High Council and forcing you to choose."

"They would dare?!" Letting go, he spun around, stalked over to the window, and looked out over the trees and water.

"They'll keep trying -- she is the heir and..."

"And they think she's defenseless like my wife. They think to use her, to possess her."

“Masdaniel...”

He spun around. “I am your Lord! Never call me anything different!”

“Aye, ...my Lord.”

Masdaniel turned back to the window. “You’re right though, I need to do something.”

For a while Masdaniel stood and watched, listening to the sigh of the wind in the leaves, and the faint shush of waves on stone, and the occasional laugh of a child.

“I have it!” He spun around and walked over to Tinganariel. “I will send her to the Priesthood of Tuomyn...”

“Tuomyn, but that isn’t for the eldest heir, that...”

“She is *\_my\_* daughter, and she *\_will\_* be fostered with Priesthood.”

“But...”

“Silence! My daughter will *\_not\_* be weak! She will be fostered. She will be raised with a hatchling sister, a soulmate. That is my *\_final\_* word.”

“My Lord, but...”

His voice quieted to nearly a whisper. “I don’t care about the council or the other great houses.”

Tinganariel opened his mouth to speak.

“This is my *\_final\_* word on the subject.”

“Aye, my Lord.” Tinganariel turned and left.

Masdaniel watched the door close and then went back to the window. *Am I doing the right thing? It’s against tradition, she should have other friends.* The memory of Isalriela dying on the floor before him at the hands of her brother burned through his mind. His daughter would not suffer the same fate. And if it meant that she would be the fostered sister of a dragon, then so be it!

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After five years his daughter was coming home. Masdaniel closed the book that he hadn’t been reading anyway.

There was a knock at the door.

“Enter.”

Tinganariel entered. “Lord, your daughter is returning.”

“I will meet her in the great hall. Have Naveela wait outside until I call her”

“Aye my Lord.” Bowing, Tinganariel left.

Masdariel sighed. His daughter was back, and he so much wanted to hug her and kiss her and love her, but then she’d just be killed. Swallowing, he forced anger onto his face. Then, with long, loud steps, he made his way to the great hall and sat upon his High Chair and waited. A few minutes later Ilisri came running in.

Her long black hair was disheveled and flowing behind her; her leather clothing dirty and sweaty, and behind her he heard the scrape of claws as her hatchling sister followed.

“Daddy!” she screamed, running across the living wood floor, her arms open to embrace him.

He waited until she was almost upon him before he quietly said, “Stop.”

Of course she didn’t hear him, and leapt up to hug him. He’d expected that, so he grabbed her shoulder and pushed and flung her to the floor.

She hit the wood with a loud slap.

Masdariel watched, his face calm, as his daughter’s hatchling sister leapt into the air and flew towards him. Then he looked down at his daughter who was staring up at him, her face bloody where her cheek had scraped the floor; her eyes wide and disbelieving.

He clenched his fists. He wanted to comfort her, but he couldn’t.

Managing to keep any emotion but anger from his face, he reached out with his will and sealed the dragon in a sphere of magery, just before it breathed its fire -- the dragon was sealed with its own flame. Keeping it trapped, and knowing that its own fire couldn’t hurt it, Masdariel stepped down until he was standing just before his daughter looking down at her. He could feel the dragon struggling against his will -- the dragon was strong and he was actually having trouble containing it.

Good.

But he didn’t let his pleasure show in his face.

“Stand up.”

His daughter remained on the floor, looking up at him.

“You will stand up. Now.”

Her lips quivering, she got to her feet. She started to raise her arms, and then let them drop to her side.

“You will learn discipline.”

Ilisri flicked her eyes to her hatchling sister, still struggling, although the struggles were getting weaker as she ran out of air. “Please let her go.”

He could feel her will joining the dragon’s will so that both were fighting him. For a moment he remained silent, keeping his face calm, until he finally stated, “You did not address me properly.”

“Daddy?”

“I am you lord, and you will address me as such.”

He watched her clench her fists and close her eyes for a moment before she answered. “Yes, Lord. Lord, will you please release Sarsynalithagas?”

He could sense the dragon’s will weakening. There was time for one last lesson. “My daughter will never ask, she will demand.”

“Dad... Lord. Please?”

“You will demand.” He could sense the dragon’s struggles weakening -- it was near death. He wanted to let it go now, but his daughter had to learn the lesson, for her own sake. She would not die like her mother.

He watched her eyes flicker from his face to her hatchling sister.

“Lord. Ple... Release my hatchling sister. Pl...”

He didn’t have time to improve upon the lesson so he cut her off. “My daughter will never ask.” And then he released his will and heard the dragon, three times his size, crash to the floor.

Its gasping for air was loud in the hall.

His daughter turned and took a step towards her hatchling sister.

He grabbed her with his will and dragged her back so that she was facing him. “If your dragon ever threatens me again, I will destroy it. Is that understood?”

“Yes Lord.” Her voice was almost a whisper.

He could feel her struggling to go to her hatchling sister, but he wouldn't let her. She had to learn fear and hatred for her own safety. "Naveela!" He heard the quiet footsteps of the woman he'd hired to train his daughter in combat. She was the best he could find, much better than he was. Waiting until she was standing beside his daughter, he introduced her: "Ilisri. This is your swordmistress, Naveela."

His daughter turned her head, her eyes sullen and damp, and looked at Naveela.

"She will train you in all forms of combat, as I will train you in magery. Is this understood?"

"Yes, Lord." Her voice was turning sullen. Good.

"You will spend each morning with me, and each afternoon with her. The evenings are yours."

She nodded.

"I didn't hear your answer."

"Yes, Lord."

He stood up and turned to leave, still holding her with his will. "The rest of the day is yours. You are dismissed."

He felt her try to move, and when she couldn't, he felt her fling her will against his with a strength that almost broke his. Good.

"I'm waiting."

She stopped and stared. Then, a moment later she responded, "Yes, Lord."

He released his will and watched her run and hug her hatchling sister's snout, sobbing.

"Lord?"

He turned, it was Naveela.

"Yes?"

"She's your daughter, shoul..."

"Silence! She is *\_my\_* daughter, and she *\_will\_* learn discipline."

He watched Naveela open her mouth to speak, and then close it.

Masdariel stepped forward and grabbed her chin and raised her head until she was facing him. “You will train her for combat. You will discipline her as you see fit, and you may mark her if you see the need. But as she is my daughter, that is all that you will do.”

He felt her swallow.

“Is that understood?”

“Yes, Lord.”

“Your time is your own until tomorrow afternoon when you will start her training. Any other questions?”

“No, Lord.”

He let go. “You’re dismissed.”

“Yes, Lord.” She turned and left.

Glancing at his daughter from the edge of his vision, he turned and made his way back to his study. His daughter would not be weak. His daughter would not be murdered.

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“No.” He used the last strength in his will to remove the sweat from his face. His daughter, still only thirteen, could not see how close she’d come to breaking him. She had to be stronger.

Ilisri collapsed in her chair, finally releasing the grip of her will on the carved onyx dragon she’d been trying to move with her will while he’d secretly held it down with his.

“I’m disappointed. You should have been able to move it with ease.”

Ilisri stared. “You were holding it down.”

“You will not lie to me.” He knew she wasn’t, but her hate was making her strong. She had to learn to trust nobody!

“You were!”

Masdariel sighed. He stood up and walked around the desk and glared down at his daughter. If only he could let himself hold her... “You disappoint me. First you fail a simple magery, and then you lie to try and cover it up.”

“I did not lie!” And then she reached out with her will and crushed the sculpture into a needle and flung it at him, point first.

He didn't notice it for a second, but then grabbed it with his will and slowed it, fought for it.

The air wavered before him with the force of their competing wills.

He grabbed it away from his daughter with his mind, just inches from his neck, and gently put it down on the desk, willing the magery that released its tension and changed it back to its original form.

He didn't have enough will left to remove the sweat from his face. By the Gods, that had been close.

Good.

"Well, at least you can do something," he said dryly. "But you lied, and then you reacted with anger rather than control."

Ilisri glared at him.

"You will learn. Stand up."

Ilisri stayed in the chair.

"Stand up!"

"Yes, Lord," she whispered.

"Turn around and remove your shirt."

He saw her starting to tremble.

"Now."

"Yes, Lord." She removed her shirt revealing the scars as she walked over and leaned against the wall.

Some of the scars were fresher than they should be -- he closed his eyes and concentrated on changes in reality and saw the ripples, small, hidden, but there. His daughter had changed her scars to be fresh. That was indeed clever, and deserved to be rewarded. He walked around the desk and removed the well-used whip from the wall.

"You did move the sculpture though, so you learned something."

"Yes, Lord."

"You will only receive five lashes for your lie."

“Five...? Yes, Lord.”

He picked up the whip and slashed it across his daughter’s back, drawing blood. “One. You will not lie to me.”

The sound of it slicing into her back echoed through his study. Ilisri remained silent.

“Two. You will master magic.”

Silence but for the sound of the whip.

“Three. You will control magic.”

Silence but for the crack of the whip.

“Four. You will never let your anger rule.”

Ilisri remained silent. His daughter was becoming strong.

“Five. You will be strong.”

Silently Ilisri leaned down and picked up her shirt and put it on.

“Naveela is expecting you. You’re dismissed.”

“Yes, Lord.” She turned and went.

As she left he sensed her will creating magic and healing her scars. All of her scars. He smiled -- he was proud of her.

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Or at least he was until later that day.

He left his study and went down the stairs and across the bridges to watch Ilisri practicing her sword play. She was becoming extremely good.

When he arrived, she wasn’t practicing, but was instead leaning against Naveela. Crying on her shoulder.

Swallowing, he set his face. This was not the first time, and it could not be permitted to go on. It was a weakness.

He made his way down the steps and into the practice yard.

“Naveela.”

They both turned and stared, but it was Naveela who answered, “Yes, Lord?”

“Ilisri, stay. Naveela, turn around.”

“But...” Ilisri began.

“Now!”

He watched his daughter back away as Naveela slowly turn around. Once Naveela was facing away from him, he willed a magery and created a whip in his hands from the air.

He started uncoiling it. “Ilisri you will stay and learn.”

“Father, don...”

“Silence! I brought her to train you, not to make you weak.”

Words burst from Naveela: “Lord, I’m sorry, I’ll only train...”

“Silence. I’ve warned you before.” He leisurely maneuvered the whip and then slashed its tip through the linen and deep into the flesh of her back.

Naveela started to scream at the sudden pain, and then clenched her teeth into silence.

“Father, Lord, if you must punish someone, punish me!”

“Silence. Watch and learn. Naveela disobeyed me time and again.”

He whipped her again, but she remained stubbornly silent.

Ilisri started to turn away, but he grabbed her with his will and made her watch.

Made her watch the second lash, the third, the fourth...

By this time he knew that most of the rest of the staff that remained were watching from nearby. Most that had once been here were gone, fled from his anger, from his sudden change upon the death of his wife. Once he’d been loved, respected.

Now he was only hated.

If that was the price of his daughter’s safety, then he would gladly pay it.

Eight lashes, nine, ten...

He remembered the day Tinganariel had asked to leave his service. Tinganariel whom he'd known since he was a child. He'd almost broken down and told Tinganariel the truth, but he found that he couldn't -- he'd kept the secret too long. So Tinganariel had left.

Twelve lashes, thirteen, fourteen...

He remembered leading his men against the forces of House Falagen. The struggle on the field of battle; the neighing and screams of horses; the smell of blood and sweat. He remembered the joy of victory, the pride he'd had as he'd returned home.

Seventeen, eighteen, nineteen... The strokes were harder, filled with his rage.

"Father, stop! You're killing her."

All he could see and hear was his memories. He remembered coming home and seeing the dead guards.

Twenty-one, twenty-two...

Ilisri grabbed his arm and he stopped for a second and threw her away, both with his strength, and with his magic. Naveela was unconscious.

He'd run up the stairs and into his bedroom...

Twenty-four, twenty-five...

And then he saw, with his magery, Naveela's soul leaving her body.

He stopped and let the whip fall to the ground, turning towards his daughter. She was just staring at him, her eyes dry. Her face filled with hatred.

"That is the price of disobedience."

Lord Masdariel let the whip fall to the ground, and let reality start to break his magery and return the whip to the air he'd formed it from.

Then he turned and left.

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The next day Lord Masdariel was preparing to leave to meet with the heads of most of the great houses. Their secret project was almost done. Soon, like his daughter, he'd have nothing stronger than himself to fear.

He was halfway down the staircase into the Great Hall when he heard his daughter's voice.

“Father?” Her voice was cold, hard, turning the term from one of love into one of hatred.

Masdariel stopped. “You will not address me in that fashion.” He looked down at his daughter who was standing at the base of the steps, a sword in her hand. Her hair was braided tightly and fell down her back, and she was dressed only in tight leathers.

“I will address you however I want, father.”

Slowly walking down the staircase with his cloak shushing over the live wood beneath him, he repeated his command. “You will address me as Lord.”

“You do not deserve that name, father.”

He stopped on the bottom stair. “I am your father and your Lord.”

“You are neither.”

He laughed. “Go to your chambers, I’ll punish you when I return.”

“No.”

“No?...”

And then she struck at him with her will, fighting his mind for control of his body. Falling backward he still managed to keep control, although he couldn’t go on the offensive.

“Never again, father.”

He watched as she calmly stepped forward, one step at a time, no evidence of the magical struggle they were both engaged in on her face. Closing his eyes, he ignored the physical world and concentrated on the magical basis of reality. He could see the waves of her will striking at his body, and the ripples of his will bowed inward, barely holding hers.

It was time for a different strategy. He let his will start to weaken, and slowly, stealthily, reached a tendril of magery around for her braid to wrap it around her neck...

And her anger, her hatred, tore the tendril from his mind. Easily. Contemptuously.

The loss, the suddenness, it all burned. He could have kept silent, but instead he let his pain fill his mouth in a ragged scream.

Opening his eyes, he looked up at her looking down at him, her eyes dark and black, her sword at his chest.

Then, still screaming, he mustered all of the will he had left and struck directly against her, against the force she was pushing against him.

She staggered back and the sword edge lowered to the ground, but she didn't drop it. And she didn't fall.

Inwardly he smiled, but he let only a sneer of disdain appear on his face. He forced his daughter to take another step back.

And then she laughed.

Laughed? His will faltered for a moment...

And then she struck, her mind blasting through his, ripping aside his wards, his barriers, and ripping his magic from his body.

This time his scream wasn't forced.

Shaking his head, he opened his eyes and looked up at her, her eyes narrow, and her sword back at his chest.

Before he could stop it, a smile etched itself across his face.

No! She must remember the lessons. He hid his smile by opening his mouth in fear, and forcing himself to soil his clothes. "Please..."

But his last word didn't stop his daughter as she thrust his sword into his chest and twisted.

She would be strong. She would be safe. When the great houses revolted against the Gods, she would lead them to victory. His daughter would gain the immortality that the Gods kept from him.

And from Isalriela, his dearest Isalriela. Soon he'd be with her.

He felt his blood oozing out onto the floor. He tried to will his flesh to heal, but felt his daughter's will holding his back as his life slowly oozed out.

His vision changed, he saw Isalriela, lying on the floor of their bedroom. Her dress was soaked in blood and her brother was laying over her, still in the midst of raping her.

His wife's brother, whose forces he'd met honourably in battle, counting on their honour to keep his wife safe. Their honour had shown him the truth.

All that mattered was strength.

Isalriela, I have made our daughter strong. She will live.

She will survive.

END