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# Abstract

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With a playful squawk, a small blue firelizard launched himself at his green sibling. The two creatures rolled around in the sand for almost a minute before the green remembered her wings, and then the chase continued in earnest in the air, the green chattering happily over her shoulder at her larger brother. Still on the ground, Candidate Sapherlin cursed softly and started to rub out her carefully started sketch. The charcoal blurred easily on the flat stone, but she was unhappy to see the work go to waste.

"If you could only hold *still* for more than a minute at a time," she complained aloud to the quickly disappearing firelizards, her tone a mixture of amusement and frustration. She'd been trying to capture the tiny creatures on her drawing stone for ages, and today wouldn't be the first restday she'd sacrificed to the elusive aspiration. Rather than getting easier, the task of finding a firelizard to hold still long enough actually seemed to be getting harder. She was almost beginning to think they were doing it on purpose.

There was a laugh from behind her, and she craned her head around to see that Headsecond Resla had come out onto the steps of her weycot in time to hear the complaint. Sapherlin grinned at the woman, who smiled back and tucked a loose strand of hair out of her face. She came up behind the candidate and looked down at the half-smudged-out drawing. "Having trouble finding an agreeable subject?" she asked, voice laden with amusement.

"Something like that," Sapherlin answered, and she affected a great sigh of mock dismay that made Resla chuckle. "They're quick, I'll give them that."

"Even when they're asleep?" Resla teased lightly.

"That's the thing – the little monsters sleep in the most impossible places. The Infirmary roof, for Faranth's sake! And it isn't even worth climbing up after them, because the minute you get there, they all get curious!" Sapherlin laughed, but there was a note of genuine frustration in her voice, and after a moment of silence she glanced over to see a thoughtful expression on the Headsecond's face. Leaning over, she mimicked Resla's earlier teasing tone. "Headsecond? Got something you want to share with the class?"

Resla shook her head, then seemed to change her mind, an almost mischievous smile creeping onto her lips. "I think I know a little monster that might actually hold still for you..."

When the two women entered the dimmer interior of the Headsecond's cot, a happy, muffled cheep came from a basket to the side of the room. A tiny bronze head poked up over its edge, and muttering delightedly to himself about his mistress' return, Hope crawled out of the basket and made his way over to them. Sapherlin crouched, cooing at him and holding out one hand – he sniffed at it, tasting her skin delicately with his tongue, and then rubbed his face against it like a friendly kitten, still chattering cheerfully.

"You," Sapherlin said to him, "are the most adorable little thing, aren't you?"

As though he understood that he'd been complimented, the crippled firelizard began to preen, looking pleased with himself. Curious about this newcomer in his domain, he scuttled closer – Sapherlin, after glancing at Resla for permission, carefully picked him up and carried him back outside where the brighter light would make drawing much easier.

Resla and the girl both sat themselves cross-legged in the grass, as Sapherlin had been before, and watched for a few amusing minutes as Hope explored the details of this new person. Resla had to gently dissuade him from trying to taste her charcoal pencil, and eventually the bronze climbed up the candidate's chest to poke his angular head in her face, falling back into her lap when her laugh surprised him into losing his grip on her shirt. It took a bit of coddling to soothe his ruffled dignity, but before long he was splayed out on the grass, eyes closed with pleasure as Sapherlin lightly petted his chin and belly.

"There you go," Resla said after a moment or two. "He's pretty well asleep now, I think."

Withdrawing her hand, Sapherlin pulled her drawing stone into her lap and bent over it. Her expression was one of utter focus as she glanced back and forth between sketch and subject. The charcoal scratched softly on the stone, and slowly the lazy curve of the bronze's body, the careful tuck of his malformed wing, and the wedge of his dainty muzzle blossomed in shades of black and grey. At one point Resla got up quietly to check on her sleeping babe, but neither the candidate nor the firelizard noticed. By the time Hope blinked slowly back awake from the nap, his likeness was mostly complete, and Sapherlin was stretching the stiffness from her black-smudged hands.

Of course, the insatiable firelizard curiosity demanded that Hope peek over the stone's edge to see what the funny human had been up to. He tilted his head as he eyed the sketch, and then shifted his gaze to cheep at Resla, almost questioningly.

The Headsecond chuckled. "That's you, Hope." Whatever the firelizard's reaction was, it made her laugh even more. Sapherlin, wiping her fingers on a rag that she kept just for that purpose, glanced between the two of them inquisitively.

"What's so funny?"

"I think he's...confused," Resla answered, still smiling. "Firelizards don't talk, not the way dragons do, so I don't know exactly how he feels about it. But I think the abstractness of him being Hope, and that drawing also being Hope, is a little too much for him. Either way, he seems to like it."



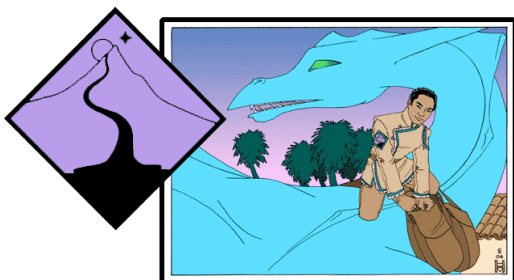
That made Sapherlin grin. “Well, it’s always nice to be appreciated. You were wonderful, Hope,” she told the bronze, who half-closed his eyes and crooned at the praise. Resla and Sapherlin both chuckled.

Glancing at the sun, Sapherlin gathered her things and pulled herself to her feet, Resla rising with Hope in her arms along with her. Sapherlin offered the Headsecond a brilliant smile. “I’ve got to go, but thank you so much, Resla. I think I might actually copy this one to ink – if I do, I’ll make sure you’re the one who gets it.” Resla started to protest, but Sapherlin waved it away. “No, I mean it, thanks. This is the first time I’ve managed to get a clear, relatively accurate drawing of a firelizard – I can’t really draw something from memory or pure imagination until I’ve captured it in life, so this is great.”

“Well, in that case, Hope and I are glad to have been of service to you,” Resla said, and Hope chirped his approval.

Grinning, Sapherlin headed in the direction of the Weyrcrafter buildings, counting on her luck to hold out and someone be there that she could request paper and ink from. She held the stone carefully by its edges to preserve the charcoal lines and shading. Even if she couldn’t ink it today, she’d been allowed a small cabinet to keep her more delicate art pieces in, and that would be much safer than tucking it under her bunk. She wondered on her way whether a dragon would have the same confusion about the abstract nature of art, and decided that the next chance she got, she’d ask. It was interesting to think about, if nothing else. She gazed down at her handiwork and felt the touch of pride that came every time she accomplished a piece of art. Abstract or not, it made her smile.

END



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