

A Tail of Dragons and Sai

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/18138095) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/18138095>.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Categories:	F/M , M/M , Multi , Other
Fandoms:	Undertale (Video Game) , Undertail - Fandom
Relationships:	W. D. Gaster/Grillby , W. D. Gaster/Original Female Character(s) , Grillby (Undertale)/Original Female Character(s) , Grillster - Relationship , Grillby/W.D Gaster/Original Female Character
Characters:	W. D. Gaster , Grillby (Undertale) , Original Female Character(s) , Other Undertale Characters , Minor Characters
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Dragons , Dragons , Middle Ages , Harems , Kings & Queens , Grillster , Established Relationship , Mates , dragon treasure , Singing , Alternate Universe - Farm/Ranch , Drought , hard life , Tags Are Hard , Original Character(s) , Minor Character(s) , Flying , Kidnapping , Competition , How Do I Tag , Legends , Undertale Monsters on the Surface , Inspired By Undertale , No Smut , No Sex
Language:	English
Series:	Part 1 of MacBeth AU
Stats:	Published: 2019-03-17 Completed: 2019-03-28 Words: 10,683 Chapters: 2/2

A Tail of Dragons and Sai

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Summary

Sai has never had an easy life. Growing up on the family farm, she was expected to work and grow, learn how to best provide for her family. But when the years turn tougher, drought falls and winter is never ending, it is then that her father and mother consider the unthinkable to secure the family for at least another year.

There was one thing that they didn't count on though.

There be dragons amongst them.

Notes

A request from Lines for Saiyurimai!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

Chapter 1

It was another hot, humid day.

Sai worked in the fields like she always did, tilling the soil, pulling weeds. She stretched out her back for a precious second, looking around the farm. The plants were few and far between this year, and those that did come up were looking dusty and old. It seemed that, despite the moisture in the air, none was hitting the ground for the plants to drink. She hoped that the drought would end soon. If they had to endure another hungry winter, she didn't know how they would survive. There were no more cattle to slaughter, no more sheep or lambs. And there were no more coins in the bank.

Catching her mother's eye, she returned to the earth in front of her. Pulling, weeding, removing a small stone or two. Pruning the dead leaves from the crop. As sweat trickled down her back, she allowed her anger to fester.

It was the kingdom's fault that they suffered like this. The king and nobles didn't have to do a day's worth of hard labour in their life, so of course things carried on as normal. Taxes and prices increased as the poor remained broken and silent. No one cared about them in the slightest even their it was their crops that were eaten on tables of oak and marble. Perhaps the king would notice their troubles when his plate began to go empty?

Sai began to chop hard at the earth, freeing the hard earth so the roots could seek moisture deeper. She imagined that the soil was the king's head, her hoe was a sword. Cut, cut, cut. What made him so special that he could be immune to the hardships of life? He was a king, a tyrant that had stolen his kingdom from his elder brother. His blood was red like theirs, she had seen it when he had returned home from the battlefield. She bet that it would even spill the same way.

Shaking her mind free of the scandalous thoughts, she returned to work, carefully freeing one of the plants from a weed that had wrapped itself around it.

"Sai! Bow! Eyes to the ground!" she heard her mother hiss to her from her laundry rack.

Sai had just enough time to see a flash of a golden carriage, the six pure white horses that pulled it, and the Royal Family's crest on the door. She averted her eyes to the ground, dropping to the ground despite her clenched teeth. Speak of the devil. It was the little tyrant himself. Probably showing off the countryside some other royal princess. She waited until the carriage passed before raising, knowing that her mother would kill her if she dared to disobey. She watched the dust cloud fade away before she returned to work.

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Dinner was bland as always. Soup with weak broth and even limper vegetables. Sai poked at it but knew better by now than to turn it down. Their stores were running low and, judging by the empty fields, they would remain that way for some time. They might even look back at this as a treat in the coming months.

That scared her.

“They said a girl was taken last night. You’ll have to be extra careful Sai when you’re in the fields.” Her father told her, dunking his hard bread in the remains of his soup. His eyes were hollow, so his mind was elsewhere.

“A girl?” her mother questioned. “Was it from the opposing army that took her?” There was almost a slight hope to her voice. Sai glared at her before following her trail of thought. If the opposing army was coming, there was potential for Sai to be married off. A dowry paid, their family would survive another year. As Sai suffered or lived at the hands of her husband. This was the way of life here. Women were for children and the kitchen, they weren’t supposed to be out in the farm fields. That was men’s work.

He shook his head. “The family is quite distraught but has said it wasn’t human. According to them, the girl was outside, all alone, tending to her chickens late at night. When she screamed, they ran out and she was carried off by what appeared to be a large wolf. They tried to pursue it but lost it in the Wild Wolves. It was described as a wolf larger and faster than any man.” he sighed and shook his head. “But who knows what it really was.”

“Makes you wonder if this drought is more far-spreading than we initially thought. If the wolves are coming inland for food, perhaps the other provinces are also suffering. That means our trade won’t be as bountiful either.” Sai’s brother began to look more worried. No trade meant no seed. No seed meant no crops, no food.

Sai’s mother and father looked so defeated. “We will make do. We have to.” Sai’s father said. “If not this year, then the next. I’ll go hunting tomorrow, see what I can find.”

Silently, Sai finished the last of her soup, looking around at the worried faces. There was nothing more to say. They had barely survived last winter. Without food and other supplies, how would they survive this winter?

* * * * *

The days slowly passed without seeing improvement. The plants withered and tried to die, but the farmers refused to give up on them. Little shelters were built to protect them from the wind and hail, but still, no rain fell.

No rain, no water, no crops.

When Sai’s father returned from hunting, he had nothing more than a small bag of mushrooms on him. None of the wild vegetables that grew along the creek bed had sprouted that year. And there was no game to be seen. Not a goose or duck, not even a deer. “There was a cow’s carcass picked clean across the ravine,” he told them when they pressed him for details. “I thought it had to have been that wolf but there was no sign of footprints, nor of a blood trail. It was like it was dropped out of the sky.”

That had to be a bad omen.

Another day, more backbreaking work. Sai sighed as she stood and stretched her back. Her bones creaked with protest. The humidity still hung low in the sky, but the temperature had plummeted. Her father and mother worried for frost and already whispers of snow on the far mountains found them. The winter had just left them. It couldn't return again so soon.

Many of the other farmers had already packed up their tools and bags and left for the winter homestead, hoping against hope to find some way of surviving the long cold winter. Others turned to the sea, fishing the meat from the water, stealing its seaweed. Anything that might help them survive whatever Mother Nature threw their way.

They already knew that it was too little, too late.

Sai's brother was working beside her, tying little stakes to the plants, encouraging them to live. She could already tell that it was all for naught. The stem was dark and rotten, slowly dying. Another loss when none could be spared.

There was the sound of quick hoofs. As Sai and her brother looked up, a golden carriage with six white horses trotted up the way to their little cottage. They shimmied as they stopped, the sweat on the coats catching in the dim light. A guardsman hopped off the bench, folding down the steps to the carriage, before opening the door. A blonde-haired man stepped out, glancing around at the farm. Even if the gleam of the crown was missed, there was no mistaking those dark eyes, or the scar that raced across his nose.

The king... the king was here.

Sai and her brother look to one another, dumbfounded. There was no reason for the king to be here. Their father brushed the dust from his pants, walking slowly up to greet them, removing his hat as he went.

"He has to be lost," her brother said, watching the guards and their shiny swords. "There is no way that he would even step close to our farmland if he wasn't."

"Shh. You can't say that in front of the king. You know that he has ears like those of an owl. He'll have you beheaded. Or even worse." Sai hissed at him. There were stories of what happened to those who disrespected the king. Her brother rolled his eyes at her, but did not say anything else. They both watched carefully should their father, or king needed help.

Their father had been talking to the king for what seemed like an age before the king nodded, shook their father's hand, before climbing back into the carriage.

In a moment, it was like he was never there.

Sai's father watched them leave, a stunned expression on his face, hand still outstretched, before he walked into the little house. He closed the door firmly behind him.

"What do you think that was about?" her brother asked, watching the dissipating dust cloud. Sai could only shake her head. She had no idea.

Something was very wrong.

* * * * *

That night, their parents tried to pretend that everything was fine, that everything was normal. But it obviously wasn't. They were trying to hide something from the two of them. Her father had led grace in his usual baritone voice, but her mother was acting differently. She even smiled at her from across the table quickly, encouraging her to finish the soup that was left in her bowl.

After supper, the night was quiet, not even the sound of a howling wolf broke the quiet. This was the time for them to do their little extra activities. Her father took his boots and thread, repairing his boots in the hopes that they would hold out for a few more months. Her brother took up his carving, settling in front of the fire and kettle to work on his art. Sai reached for her book.

"Sai. Sit down in front of me. I'm going to brush your hair this evening." Her mother called out to her, already waving a hairbrush.

"Mom, I always brush my hair, I don't need you to do it for me. I'm not a baby anymore."

"Oh, just sit down for a moment and let me do it. I haven't done it in a coon's age."

Recognizing the tone, Sai obediently sat down in front of her mom. Slowly, reverently, she began to brush. Sai's hair was different than anyone else's. A natural purple and red, it was unlike anything that the midwives had ever seen before. Today her hair cascaded down her back, past her shoulders, to her waist.

Brushing slowly, her mom would pause every so often to dip the brush in water, making sure to detangle every strand. Make the hair shimmer with health. "When was the last time that we cut your hair?" she asked Sai, feeling the rough, uneven ends.

Thinking, Sai couldn't remember. "I think before last winter."

Shaking her head, Sai's mother grabbed her shears and carefully began to trim her hair. Her scalp already felt lighter, cleaner than it had in days. "What do you think?" Her mother asked her as Sai checked out her reflection in the mirror. Her hazel eyes were tired and worried, but bright. Her cheekbones were slightly jutting, and the two dimples were winking at her in the reflection. Not too bad, she had to admit to herself.

"It looks so much nicer than it has. Thank you, but what is the occasion?" Sai asked, still running her hands through her hair. It felt so nice.

It was her father that spoke this time. "The king said that there was a little bit of a talent show going on tomorrow for the local girls. He personally invited you and a few of the other peasant girls to attend as well as the nobles. Your mother and I thought that it would be best for you to attend."

Sai froze, her hand still in her hair. Oh. That was why she was getting all sorts of special attention. "So, I guess that you signed me up for this contest already? Hoping to parade me in front of all the single knights and noblemen and see if anyone would come for my hand?"

Her mother and father looked at each other before looking back at her. "I'm sorry, dear," her father said, "I had to answer right away... and you don't dare say no to the king himself."

"It doesn't sound like I have much of a choice in the matter," Sai muttered, folding her arms. When her parents made up their minds, there was nothing that she or her brother could do to make them change them.

Her mother came up to stand beside her, pulling her head into the mirror again. "All that we ask is that you do your best." She said. There was a warning squeeze to her shoulders. "You will. Right?"

There was no other answer Sai could give. "Yes, Mom." She said, trying to smile at her reflection.

"Excellent! I have one of my Sunday dresses that I can trim and modify for you. You will look so beautiful in it!" For the first time, in God knows how long, Sai's mom seemed happy, excited even.

Perhaps this wouldn't be such a bad idea.

* * * * *

Sai sat in her father's old wagon, their old and arthritic donkey limping across the cobblestones. She looked around, doing her best not to stare at the other people and monsters she saw. She had spent most of her life on her father's farm, but she knew the existence of monsters, though she had rarely seen one unless they came down to their farm for fresh food. They tended to live on the other side of the city.

And the styles! Her own hair had been braided and pinned up, the strands glimmering in the low light of the sun. Her dress was a faded one of her mother's, but there were no patches or stitches that could be seen. Her mother had spent the night taking the dress so it would cling to her curves. A bow was tied around her waist, amplifying her hips. But Sai could already see that she was dressed plainly in comparison to the others. It was painfully obvious who was from farming or peasant life, and who had enjoyed a life of luxury. The richer girls' dresses were bright and vibrant, dyed colours that Sai could only dream of owning. Bright pinks and purples, nothing that would last long, and nothing that was suited for working in a kitchen or in a stable. There were frilly, bits of lace hanging from sleeves and dresses.

They weren't practical, but they were beautiful. Like peacocks.

Her father said nothing as he directed the donkey through the crowds of people and monsters. His lips were clenched tight and white, and Sai could see the bags under his eyes, his sunken cheeks. He too contrasted against the rich merchants and their slight bellies.

"Here we are," he said finally, stopping the wagon beside a wooden stage in the middle of town. Sai recognized it as the one where the public executions would be held. She gave a hard swallow, seeing the stain of blood still on the dark wood. "Go check yourself in. They are expecting you. I'll park John and be in the crowds." Sai nodded, carefully stepping off and onto the cobblestones, mindful of her dress.

Her father whistled and flicked his reins, urging the donkey off.

The city looked so large and imposing. Buildings that climbed the sky, merchants selling their goods, and the constant bustle of people. Giving a hard swallow, Sai stepped towards a man who was holding a quill and parchment, watching her.

“I am Saiyurimai Farmar,” she told him, making sure her voice was clear and didn’t shake.

The man looked her over, an eyebrow raised as he scrawled something on his notes. There was something deeply unsettling in his eyes, but Sai didn’t know how to explain it. “Very well. Go over to Nurse Mary and we’ll get your measurements.”

Sai did as she was told, confused but obeying. Why would they need measurements for a talent show? Maybe they would be adding a stage platform for the shorter ones? That way they could be seen better?

Nurse Mary was a green and grey lizard monster, and she talked to Sai as she worked, measuring her height, waist and then her chest. “You look healthy as a mule!” she exclaimed looking into her mouth. “The drought has taken the health of so many.”

“My mom makes sure that we always eat a bit of a balanced diet if she can,” Sai said as the nurse weighted her. “Need to have the energy to work the fields.”

“I can only imagine,” the nurse said absently as she wrote something down. “Strong, slim and curves. All the farm boys must be asking for your hand.”

Sai shook her head, trying to ignore the tinge in her gut saying that the question was wrong. “Who has time for boys when you need to work? Besides, my family has nothing for a dowry.”

The nurse seemed pleased by this and gave a quick nod of her head. “Very well, dear. Go into the small area there, have a seat and wait for your turn to be called. Be brave.” The nurse smiled as Sai got up and walked towards the old bench where a few other girls were already sitting. Human girls only she noticed. As she turned to leave, a quick flash of gold caught Sai’s eye. There was a small pin in her apron, a crown engraved on it.

Why was a royal nurse checking them over? And why were they asking such intrusive questions?

Nothing was making sense anymore.

Over the next hour, Sai watched as women came up and paraded in front of the audience. She quickly realized that the word title was being used very loosely here. One noble woman attempted to dance a jig while some hired help played music behind her. She was off rhythm, stepped on her skirt more than a couple of times. Mercifully, she left the stage when she tripped over a rougher part of the stage, falling into the servants. She wasn’t the only one that winced at her display. The king was sitting in his throne in the front of the stage.

Sai's stomach was full of butterflies, jumping with her heartbeat. What if she was terrible? What if he was disgusted with her voice and punished her? Executed her? Dishonoured her family?

"Saiyurimai Farmar," a voice came, as if from far away.

Giving a hard swallow, Sai stepped onto the stage, looking around at all the unfamiliar faces. The servants began to play and she took a deep breath, letting the music swell deep within her. And then, she released it. As she sang, everything else faded out.

She didn't notice how the king sat up straight on his chair, staring at her. She missed how the townspeople silenced their mutterings and listened to her voice. She didn't even see her father give a grateful sigh, watching as she captivated the town square.

She missed the flame and skeleton monster in the back, watching her intently.

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After singing, Sai returned to the farm with her father, much like nothing had happened. There had been more than a few eyes following her as they left, but no one came out to spoke. "When do we find out the results?" Sai asked him, watching as they left the town behind in the dust.

"Hopefully soon. They said that they will be sending a messenger within the week to tell the families of their selection." Her father did not look at her. He was staring straight between the donkey's ears, avoiding her eyes.

Sai felt like something was off, or maybe he was upset with her.

"So, hypothetically speaking, if I won the contest, what would we win?" Sai was expecting gold or jewels, or maybe a townhouse. This was the king that she was performing for. There had to be something big as a reward to draw in the crowd the size of what it did.

She was in for a surprise.

"The winning girls will be selected to join the King's harem," he said, still refusing to look at her. "The families of the girls will receive a suitable payment for them."

Sai turned to look at him, her eyes narrowing. The pieces were coming together. The nurse's questions, the unusual behaviour of her parents the night before, the insistence of her mother that she look as beautiful as possible. "So. I just performed to give you guys a chance to see me off and be a royal whore."

"Don't say that..."

"I bet it was for the good of the family too. 'Sai is just a girl, and unwed. It is her duty to provide for the family since she's just a girl.' Isn't that right? Isn't that the argument that you and mother had for putting me in this competition?" He remained silent. She knew that she was right.

A girl was always a burden until she bore sons. That was the way of life around here.

He stopped the donkey at their house and Sai jumped off the wagon, storming into the house. Her mother met her at the door. "How did things go?" she asked brightly.

Sai spun around, getting into her mother's face. Her temper was lit and no one was safe.

Especially those that put her in this position to begin with.

"How dare you.... I thought I was doing the family proud, going up on the stage and singing. Showing everyone that, just because we are poor families, doesn't mean that we are nothing. I just found out that I performed to be sold to the Royal Harem. The next time you want gold, take to the streets and spread your own legs. Perhaps then you will feel the shame that you had me suffer for the sake of this 'family'," Sai spat at her, pulling her hair free from the elaborate braid her mother had put it in. "But if you excuse me, some of us have real work to attend to." Pushing by her, she threw the dress to the ground, vowing to never wear it again. It was tainted. Slipping into her work dress, she stormed out to the fields, ignoring the calls from her mother and her father.

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Sai reached out and touched the plant that her brother had tied. The stalk had sagged around the rope, breaking the plant in two. Another plant, dead.

This whole kingdom was a bloody joke, Sai decided, pulling the plant from the ground. It was just as she suspected. The roots were as dark as a raven's feathers, dripping with sour smelling juice. Dead and rotten to the core and had probably spoiled the rest of the field. With a small curse, Sai flung the plant out of the garden. The soil would need to be burned for the next year's crops otherwise the disease would continue to spread.

It had been two days since the 'contest' and, in those two days, Sai had refused to talk to her family. How dare they deceive her the way they did? Were they so desperate for gold or a break that they would ruin their only daughter?

She knew the truth. They would.

A daughter is only worth the sons she bears.

Returning to her work in breaking the soil, she felt her anger feed her. Every slash of the hoe was the face of the king, or her parents, or even her brother. Her brother had refused to defend her and even had the gall to say that she would be happier in the castle then working the fields. How did he know what she wanted, or what was good for her?

She had seen the parchment on their table. She had won the contest and the king wished to discuss the finer details of her purchase with her father. Both him and her mother were probably already at the castle, discussing gold or jewels, seeds or equipment now.

Anything that would better their lives, and condemn her to her new life of servitude.

The hoe sang as she moved, sinking into the soil with a soft thud. She would show him, show them all, that she was worth more than a few pieces of gold.

Perhaps she should run away, start her own farm or business. Show her family exactly what she was worth. Make them miss her and know that they missed out on her.

There was a loud whistling noise above her, along with a strange crackle of energy. It caused the hairs on the back of her neck to stand up. There was something very dangerous above her. Slowly she turned, her eyes slowly rising to the heavens.

Almost like they sensed her gaze, the heavens burst open. Rain poured from the sky, dropping to the thirsty earth in a small downpour before dissipating. Not that it would do any good. The earth would lap it up and look for more.

However, Sai was not worried about her crops. Despite the human race living shoulder to shoulder with carious monster races, there were a few things that one could never prepare for.

Hovering above her, two mighty dragons seemed to stare down at her. Both had to be twice the size of the farmhouse. One was cloaked in entirely in flames, making its form more of a phoenix than a dragon, but the face was more lizard-like than a bird. The other dragon was nothing but bones. No membranes, flesh, or organs, only bones. Sai could see two large cracks running through the eye sockets of the skull.

They had always been told tales of dragons, werewolves and other mythical creatures though they were rarely seen. Humans had driven away creatures that they couldn't control, hunting them to the brink of extinction. Dragons were one of these creatures.

And now, there were two flying, hovering, above Sai's head.

"Sai, get out of the way!" Her brother came racing from the shed, a pitchfork held in his hands. Hatred clouded his eyes as he stared at the beasts, lifting the fork like a javelin. Sai felt a flash of fear for the dragons. She doubted that the pitchfork would hit them and, even if it did, that it would do much damage to them.

But if he did, they may never return.

"Don't!" she called out to him, her gaze turning from the beasts for one second. Just one.

The next moment was a blur of movement and heat. Sai heard her brother scream, dropping the pitchfork and running towards her as if in slow motion, just as something wrapped around her and she was lifted off into the sky. The phoenix-dragon had grabbed her in its talons and was quickly regaining altitude, flying off towards the mountains in the south. With a small roar, the skeletal dragon followed them, flying just beneath them but keeping pace easily.

Sai was stunned. She couldn't scream, she didn't dare move out of fear of being dropped. Instead, she felt her body go limp, allowing the dragon to carry her where he saw fit.

(Allow her to settle on my body, Grillby. Perhaps she would be more comfortable riding than being carried like a fish.) The voice was deep and harmonious, centuries of intelligence

engraved in it. The words sounded in Sai's mind, she was sure that she didn't hear them by her ear.

(As long as she doesn't fall off your skull.) The other responded. This one had a smoker's lisp to the voice. Sai was intrigued. She had never heard about the different voices of dragons. She had only heard how they roared or growled. Never this inter-mind communication. The phoenix dragon carefully readjusted her, dipping lower in the sky, before placing her on the skeletal dragon's neck. Instincts deep inside of Sai took over. It was sort of like riding a horse. Squeezing her thighs around his neck, her hands seized the head of the vertebrae in front of her. Powerful magic surged through her, further anchoring her to him.

Grillby, the phoenix-dragon she supposed, flew up, watching her carefully as she settled onto the other dragon's neck. (Well call me an ember. She's a natural, Gaster)

(I told you that she would be,) came the smug response. (Now increase your altitude or you'll start popping clouds again. We don't need your flames going out again.)

Grillby shook his head but was soon rising above them, above the clouds.

The three of them flew on, Sai looking over Gaster's head and neck to see the scenery below. Brown and orange colours of the landscape eventually changed to blue and grey, mountains beginning to scratch at the sky. The oxygen was thinner here and she could see that Grillby's flames were becoming less vibrant.

The dragons began to slowly descend, flying between the mountains instead of over them. Grillby's flames reignited, regaining their brilliance. They passed glaciers and goats, passing waterfalls and low-lying trees. Eventually they landed on an outcropping of the largest mountain that Sai had ever seen. The ledge itself was able to fit the two dragons comfortably and it felt extraordinarily stable. Like it had been cut out of the mountain itself.

Lowering his head, Gaster gestured to Sai to jump off. Shaking slightly, she obeyed. Taking one last glance around, she looked up at the two creatures. "You're... you're not going to eat me, are you? I doubt I would be a meal for one of you, let alone the two of you..."

Gaster and Grillby blinked at each other before looking back at Sai again. (No, I promise you, my dear, that we do not wish to eat you.) Gaster said, nodding his head.

(Human flesh is much too thin and flavourless.) Grillby assured her.

Feeling the slight relief that she wasn't going to be picked clean by these two dragons, Sai felt some of her courage return. "Then can you please explain to me why did you kidnap me and why are we here?"

(We can explain inside,) Gaster said, nodding towards the entrance of a large cave. (Please come in, Sai. We will explain everything inside, but it will hail soon. Let us at least be somewhere safe and warm from the elements.)

Sai looked between the dragons and back up at the clouds. They were looking a little swollen and grey. Weighing her options, Sai stepped into the cave.

The floor was lined with fur and moss, like a giant nest of a bird. It wasn't as rocky or even as cold as she had imagined it. The dragons stepped inside, the cave easily housing the three of them. The lights in Gaster's eye sockets flashed purple for a moment. A large stone, outlined in purple magic, rolled in front of the entrance of the cave. (That will keep the outside, out.) Gaster explained, already curling up on the floor. Grillby perched beside him, his long tail wrapping around him. (Now, what do you want to know?)

Sai was dumbfounded. "How do you know my name? Why was I kidnapped and why am I here? Who are you and, again, why me? Why was I kidnapped?"

The two chuckled softly, their voices melding together into beautiful music. (We apologize, Sai. Let me start over from the beginning. My name is Gaster. I am a SkeleDragon as you can clearly see. Beside me is my mate of several hundred years, Grillby, a FireCloak Dragon.)

Grillby nodded towards her and Sai felt something in the pit of her stomach. Something hard and demanding. How could she be jealous of a dragon, or two? "It is an honour to meet you," she said, nodding towards them. "My people tell of many stories of dragons."

(Many of them ending with the dragons being skewered by some brave knight on a horse, I bet.) Grillby said with a slight chuckle. Her cheeks burning, Sai gave a small nod.

(Anyways. We were in town, your town, a few days ago. We were seeing what supplies were available for the upcoming winter. It was a rather disappointing run as your village had nothing of use but then... Well, that was when we heard you sing. Your precious voice... it called out to us. Held us under your spell.) The dragons paused in their tale, a far-off look appearing on their faces. The skull flushed a faint purple while the phoenix-dragon became blue. (We knew what the competition was about and we knew that we couldn't allow you to be sold for use by that king. We needed to save you and your voice... but before we could approach your father, potentially to make a deal, the two of you had driven off.)

Sai folded her arms. "So you wished to buy me for your own, twisted, harem then? Is that all? you could have entered bidding for me with the king and got me that way"

The phoenix-dragon shook his head. (No Sai. We don't have a harem for you to join. We aren't as vile as that fool that you humans call your king. You are too much of a priceless treasure as for that. We wanted to save you from that life. We would have done this properly, but once your brother came out and threatened to attack us...)

(Our emotions got in the way of us in that regard. We knew that we needed to keep you safe and we were worried that you would have been hurt in the middle. So we needed to get you out of that area, away from him, away from the greedy fool.) The two dragons bowed their heads towards Sai. (Please forgive us for not doing this the proper way that you humans are used to. We know that it will take a long time for you to trust us, especially in the way that we acted. But if you give us a chance...)

Sai reached over, touching the two's snouts. "You did this, in a way, to give me my freedom. To protect me from the king, my family..."

(Only the best for our mistress.)

Oh gosh did she like the sound of that. Her cheeks turned pink as she looked the dragons over. Unlike when she looked at the king, there was no fear. There was no gut feeling to be wary of, nor impending death should you look at them the wrong way.

It was silly, even contemplating this.

"Alright. I'll stay with the two of you."

The two dragons purred softly at that, the sound emitting from their chests as the two of them wrapped around her, sheltering her with their bodies. (Our precious treasure.)

* * * * *

And that, dear reader, is the end of our legend. Or rather, the end of the beginning. The Tails of Sai and the Two Dragons are lengthy, filled with adventure and love, gold and booty.

But that is all the time that we had for today. Keep your eyes to the skies and perhaps you will see a flash of flame or a gleam of bone. And where Gaster and Grillby fly, Sai sits with them. After all, you don't leave the most precious jewel at home where others can steal it.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Winter is coming, slowly crossing across the land and swallowing all that lies in its path. Even the dragons must gather their own supplies to ensure that they make it through the coming months. Sai, the newest addition to the nest, also does what she can to help out.

But it isn't just the winter that spells trouble for our heroes...

It had been a spur of the moment decision when Sai had agreed to live with the dragons. Not that she regretted it, she found living with them more tolerable than with her so-called family any day of the week. They spoke to her as an equal, as one who had equal say. They did not plan on selling her to the highest bidder and then gamble her earnings on the dead farm.

Her days passed easily now. The sun would rise early, peeking over the horizon and creeping into the area where she slept. The cave, despite its rocky and rough exterior appearance, was cosy. The mountain was like their own little house. The stories of dwarfs and elves hiding their gold and treasures made more sense to her now as the mountains were not as solid as they first appeared. Not only had the dragons lined the inside of their caves with moss and fur, protecting themselves from the cold of the rocks, but there was so much more that they had done to the mountain. There were many caverns and tunnels that had naturally formed over the years, and both Grillby and Gaster had re-shaped them. Making every little nook and cranny have a purpose. It had surprised her just how resourceful the dragons were. A couple of the rooms held their own pantry of dried or smoked meats – it seemed that Grillby had a talent for cooking and preserving food – while at least one room was used for Gaster's experiments. And, of course, a few of the rooms held the treasures and gold that they had accumulated over the years. Their collection would put the kings' to shame. (We have many years of collecting on that vulture,) they told her when she exclaimed over the size.

Yes, there was a new routine that she had easily fallen into. During the morning she would wake up, watch the sunrise with at least one of the dragons. They would eat together, though the dragons would consume much more than she would, and her afternoons would be spent combing the mountains for roots or berries as the two hunted. Gone were the days of looking for eggs or watching their cattle, gone were the endless rows of dead and rotting plants. There was no screaming mother, no disapproving father or brother, and no king who wished for her honour. This was peaceful and calm, but still held new opportunities for her, new education.

Her mother would scoff and say something along the lines that education should not be wasted on a mere girl, but the dragons thought differently. They wanted Sai to be their equal. In her first few weeks of staying with them, she had learned more than all her years with her family. Gaster had taught her words and numbers, math, and science. Grillby showed her the

different plants and their uses, teaching her about animals she had only heard about. Sai could still remember the feeling of joy and accomplishment she felt when she was able to read a small poster without their assistance.

She was happier than she had been in years. Often catching herself humming or singing as she cleaned the caves and taverns, helping Grillby cook or clean the hunts.

During her stay, she had seen first hand how the dragons were more than just large, dangerous animals. They were more than wings, scales, claws and teeth. They were more than hunting and feeding. They were conscious and smart, able to clearly think through their actions.

They were almost like humans or monsters, but more so.

Sai had almost forgotten about the upcoming winter until, one early morning, she was sitting on the ledge, watching the sun slowly rise. She was leaning against Gaster, watching the pinks, oranges and reds streak across the morning sky. Despite having no flesh or scales, Gaster's bones were hot, keeping her warm. The great dragon turned his head, his purple eye lights fixated on the distant clouds. (Sai, do you see those clouds over there?) he asked her.

Turning to look where he was, Sai saw them. Instead of white and fluffy, they were grey and dark, their edges like reaching fingers. "Those ones?" she asked him.

The dragon nodded. (Those are what the others called cirrus clouds. They carry snow and hail and ice.)

"They look so low. Will they hit us too?" Sai stared at them. Even though she and her family had been warned that winter would be coming early, she still couldn't believe that it would be this early. She had just been gone a month. There was no way that the others of their province would be prepared for winter so early.

(Unfortunately, yes. The winds will drive them towards us, and more will form as they travel across the land.) Gaster said to her. (Grillby and I have been preparing for the winter since before the snow first started to melt... but I do not know how long this one will last for. The signs all point to one that will be longer and colder than one that you have ever seen before.)

Sai shivered at the thought. She was still in the clothes that she had been grabbed in. "Will we have enough stores?" she asked him.

Grillby carefully fluttered beside her, peering at the sky. (We should. We have lots of dried meat, vegetables and fruits. And, if we must, Gaster and I will trade some of our treasure for provisions.) She had seen their monster forms once or twice, knowing how they could sneak into town and blend in with the others. But they were dragons, to them, gold was sacred. Gaster used it in his experiments sometimes.

"You can't do that! That treasure-"

(Is nothing more than a pile of unfeeling metal and rocks. We can always find more. For now, this winter, and our survival, is what is important.) Gaster said to her, his eye lights

warm. Grillby nodded, glancing around the mountain.

Sai was quiet, unsure on how to respond. Although she had been with the dragons for only a month, it seemed like they had known each other for longer.

Almost... almost like they truly cared about her.

Sai stood up, brushing herself off. The dragons turned to look back at her. Fire and bone, purple and orange. The strange colour combination brought up a strange feeling of déjà vu but she shook it off. "Well. I will do what I can to help too," she said, rolling up her sleeves. "It'll best that we keep some of your treasure around. Never know when you might need some gold or shiny metals."

The dragons chuckled as they watched her re-enter the cave. (I think I like her even more,) Gaster said to Grillby.

(Get in line, lover.) Grillby said to him, his plumage ruffling with fresh fire.

* * * * *

The day was a blur of sweat, slivers, dirt and grime. Sai felt tired and exhausted, but thrilled to show the dragons what she had done. She had tapped into her farming background to do what she could, but she still needed a little bit of the dragons input. "Can you guys come in here?" she called out, knowing that, no matter where she was, they would hear her.

There was a slight whisper of flames and the clanking of bones as the two appeared. (Goodness Sai,) Gaster said looking into the room. (What did you do?) He sounded like he was surprised.

Sai smiled. "Well, I remembered that my family always like to have eggs, especially in the winter. They are full of protein and energy. So, I built a henhouse. If we can get a few hens and maybe even a rooster, we could have them laying in the cave. The small hole won't be large enough to let a lot of snow in," she said as she pointed to the small skylight, "nor can any hens reach it to escape. But that will also help ventilate the area. And, if push comes to shove, we can always have fresh chicken."

Grillby was nodding, liking the idea already. (And what of the fencing that you built in the other side?) the firey dragon asked her.

"Well, it is a little bit of a long shot, but perhaps we could fit a milking cow or two in here." Sai was fiddling with her fingers as the two looked at each other for a second, looking back at her.

(So, you want us to build a little farm in here?) Gaster asked, looking around the area. The area had been unused, and Sai had done an amazing job on it. The cave was clear and level, the pieces of wood she used were smooth. (Do you miss it?) he asked her.

"I... well I suppose sort of. It makes sense. If we can shield them from the worst of the outside, we could have fresh milk and eggs, and that would help our supplies." Sai was

gesturing to certain areas. She decided not to answer if she “missed home” question. To be honest, she wasn’t sure if she did.

(Not to mention the benefits of fresh food during the winter months.) Grillby interjected beginning to look slightly thoughtful.

Sai was looking at the great bone dragon, silently hoping that he didn’t find dumb. The dragon was smart, more intelligent than anyone that Sai had ever met before. His opinion, well if he agreed with her, would mean the world to her. But, infuriatingly, he remained silent. He said nothing, looking around the two areas with a critical eye. Silently, he turned and walked away. Deflated, Sai looked at the pens and chicken coop. “He thought it was stupid. Didn’t he?” she asked Grillby, hearing the sound of wings.

(Not at all. I’ve seen him when he thinks something is stupid. He tends not to hold back on that.) Grillby assured her.

Feeling better, but still unconvinced, Sai carefully walked outside. If he didn’t like her odd ways of doing things, maybe she should stick to the conventional ways. Gathering her basket, she began to search the area for berries and wild onions. Anything that would help them in the coming months. Blackberries grew wild here, but even Sai noticed that they were smaller than usual this year. They were small and withered, like hard like stones instead of the juice, fluffy fruit. Still, perhaps they would taste alright in jelly or frozen? She would have to ask Grillby about that.

It was hours later when Sai returned, her little basket just full with what she could find. “I’m home!” she called out, heading into the kitchen. She placed her basket on the counter before looking around for the dragons. It wasn’t like they could hide well up in the mountain.

There was a loud commotion coming from the two rooms that Sai had altered. Carefully walking towards them, Sai saw a tall, skeleton man and a flame monster, pushing a rather reluctant milking cow into the pasture. “Yes I know it reeks of dragon, but if you get your furry backside in there, I promise that the dragon won’t eat you!” Gaster snapped at the creature.

The creature decided that it wasn’t taking any chances. Baulking at the gate, the eyes rimmed with white, it was yanking at the ropes, screaming. The rope began to splinter. If the cow became lose it would topple down the mountain...

Losing his patience, Gaster’s skull morphed into a sharp-toothed, hybrid of both monster and dragon. Purple ooze dripped out of his eye lights, a serpentine tongue between his jaws and teeth glistening in the pale light and he roared in frustration at the beast. “GET IN THE GODDAMNED PASTURE BEFORE I CONSUME YOU FOR YOUR FOOLISH ACTIONS!”

The cow seemed to pause, appearing to seriously consider its options. It decided that it would be best to listen to reason and quickly trotted into the gate. Grillby closed and locked the gate, taking a long look at Gaster. “Now I know that it was being a cow, but...”

“I will find the closest cloud and bathe you in it.” Gaster groaned, holding his aching head.

Sai stepped into the area, looking around. There had been some moss hung over the chicken coop, some flowers in pots to attract the bugs. A gaggle of birds squawked at her, their beady eyes carefully watching her every move. There was a brilliantly coloured rooster who was stalking around his area, already acting like he owned the place. The cows' pasture had been laid with straw and some other greenery. Despite watching Gaster and Grillby carefully, they too seemed right at home in their little cavern.

"Was this how you imagined it?" Gaster asked her as she came close to them. "I have some of the seeds I was working on planted, but that will take a while to grow. Even with the added fertilizer." He sighed, already looking at the rich sprinkling of cow patties.

"The farmer sold all the feed to us too," Grillby said. "But we thought it wise to keep that in another room. Just in case."

She was speechless. Hens clucked and the cows gave their low mooing sounds. "It's even better," she said, nodding in approval. "Seriously guys..."

"Well, we couldn't have done it without you and your idea," Gaster told her. A hand wrapped around her, hugging her softly.

"I'm sure that you would have figured something out, even without me," Sai told him, chuckling.

* * * * *

As the days continued on, Sai watched over her cows and chickens, feeling the comfort of the familiar routine sinking in. Hunting for eggs in the morning and evening, sprinkling dry, old corn for the hens to peck at, and then tending to the cows. The cattle were still upset with the constant scent of dragons. Their eyes had lost their wild stare but they were constantly on edge, ears flickering with the slightest of sounds.

In the late morning, she would carefully walk the paths up and down the mountain, collecting what she could. The strange disease that had affected the plants on her family's farm had not spread here. The wild vegetables and fruit, if small and withered, were free of rot and disease.

The afternoons were when the dragons would hunt. Even after so many times of watching them, it was still incredible to see them spread their wings and take flight. Effortlessly they would rise as if they were angels. Soaring above the clouds, sprinting across the landscape, searching in far off provinces. It was both a blessing, a curse. As much as they said that it was because they enjoyed bringing new trinkets that she had never seen, showing her how the landscape had made familiar animals different, she knew that there was a different reason. Sai knew that part of the reason they searched so far was to prevent humans from tracking them down and following them into their lair.

But also that there were many places that were already affected by the upcoming winter. The clouds had swept across the land, slowly devouring everything in its path.

(It just might be as bad as the Ice Age,) Gaster had told her one night as they had listened to the wind howling through the mountains. It had sounded like the screams of the Wendigo, causing Sai to shiver in fright.

She remembered looking at him. “You were around for the Ice Age?” she asked him. She knew that dragons were old but still. That must have been over a couple of thousand years ago.

He shook his head. (Not I... My father had just been hatched. He always told us stories of the mammoths as they crossed the snowy plains. How they kept warm by burrowing into the earth, close to the streams of hot magma. It was how he met my mother, actually. This clan of bone dragons had met up with the others, enjoying the rare warmth. He said she was hot.)

Sai groaned and laughed at his joke. “Gaster, that was terrible.”

(Maybe so. But it did make you laugh. And that is a win in my eyes.) He nuzzled her forehead gently, a small purr escaping him. His eye lights sparkled with a warmth she hadn’t expected from a fierce, bony dragon. Her cheeks flushed softly, eyeing him in surprise.

Grillby fluttered into the cave, his fires slightly dim but already crackling with new light after escaping the wind. Sai got up to see him but he shook his head, gesturing her to stay there for the moment. Untying the pack from around his leg, he slowly approached. (I saw this in one of the shops and had to get it.) he said, carefully pulling out a blanket and laying it over her.

Her hands slowly felt the blanket. It was thick and soft, softer than anything that they had made at the homestead. The fibres had been dyed to a royal purple and a midnight blue, little stars woven into it. And in the middle of the blanket was a proud, orange...

“How did you know that I loved foxes?” she asked, touching the amber eyes.

(We saw you interacting with the kits that live beside us. Wasn’t very hard,) admitted Grillby with a small chuckle.

Sai stared at the blanket. It was thick and warm, beautifully crafted... She didn’t want to know what he had traded for it or how much gold that it cost. If he had paid for it at all. “Thank you. I.. I love it,” she whispered, tucking it around herself.

Grillby gently nuzzled against her cheek. (Anything for our precious treasure.) he told her, settling around the two of them, listening to the wind outside.

Sai felt warm and comfortable. Curled between the feet of the bone dragon, covered by a blanket they had gotten just for her, and then Grillby’s natural fire... she fell asleep, a happy smile on her face.

* * * * *

Another day passed and Sai found her out on the mountain again. She had wandered a little further than normal today. Most of the nearby bushes were picked dry by her previous visits

but she had seen another couple of bushes further up. She was sure that she could at least get another couple basketfuls off of them. Grillby and Gaster had gone out for a hunt and wouldn't be back for at least a couple hours yet.

She was rummaging through the bushes, seeing to her dismay that these bushes were also dry when the hair on the back of her head stood straight up. She was being watched by something she was sure. Slowly, hoping not to draw further attention to herself, she got up, brushed herself off and slowly walked to a few of the other bushes on the rockier side of the mountain. The rocks would act as shields from whatever was following her.

Besides, she knew this mountain better than anyone other than the dragons. It would be the perfect place.

Sai never made it that far.

With a loud screech, a Griffin, its eagle talons outspread, dove from the outcrop where it had been hiding. It seized her back, plucking her from the mountainside easily. Sharp talons locked around her and it pulled her from the mountain. With a loud scream, Sai found that her feet left the earth as the Griffin began to gain altitude again. This wasn't the same as when Grillby or Gaster snatched her. Even with the dragons they had been careful with her tender skin.

The Griffin had no such qualms. Its grip tightened on her as it flew, pulling her far from home.

Sai looked on in despair as she watched the mountain begin to disappear. Panic began to set in but she pushed it back. She had to think logically, Gaster had taught her as such. Her mind racing, she began to plan how she could escape. She couldn't just let herself be taken like this. Not without a fight. But she knew that alone and unarmed, she was no match for the Griffin.

But, perhaps a dragon or two would be.

Thinking hard, remembering how Gaster's and Grillby's mind links always felt when they spoke to her, she could just feel the barest trickle of consciousness. The prickle of magic. (HELP ME!) she screamed to the link. (I NEED YOU!)

There was silence... and then the strong crackle of magic.

There was a deafening scree to their right. The Griffin screeched in response, narrowly missing the diving fire dragon's attack. Grillby gave another roar, pivoting and coming straight at the Griffin, his own talons outstretched. There was a determined glint in his eyes. He was fully prepared to do what he needed to do to protect Sai, to steal her back.

The Griffin lashed out, rearing in the air and flapping its wings in vain. Clashing in midair, Grillby sank his own beak into the neck of the Griffin. The Griffin screamed but refused to let go of Sai. Kicking out with its lion feet, he propelled Grillby back, just enough to spread its wings and regain some altitude.

Grillby was right on his tail though.

As was the other dragon.

Gaster met the beast head-on, skull colliding with the monster's chest. There was a loud cracking sound, and then the Griffin screamed in pain. Dropping Sai, it limped in the air, turning to fight the bone dragon.

Sai screamed as she fell, the earth and air tumbling together, blurring until she couldn't tell one from the other. Green mixed with blue, brown with white. A red and orange glow grew larger even as she fell.

Carefully, Grillby snatched her from the sky, talons wrapping around her torso. Flapping wildly against a cold draft, he began to climb into the air again, his beady eyes on the tumbling dragon and Griffin.

As Sai watched, the two twisted and turned in the sky. There was a glint of teeth, a glimmering beak. Feathers flew and there was the slight powdering of bones. Both were set to tear the other apart.

Grillby bent his head to Sai, checking her out. "I'm fine! We need to help Gaster!" she cried out, pointing at the two battling creatures. Nodding, Grillby bent closer to Sai, offering his head as her perch. Climbing on top of the Phoenix-Dragon, Sai made sure she was secure before giving the signal.

Time to fight.

Turning quickly, Grillby caught up to the Griffin. He took a deep inhale, the roots of his fires turning purple and blue. Sai watched as his throat swelled, smoke escaping his beak. His eyes turned green for a split second.

Then he exhaled.

Belching fire, the sparks and fire spewed from his beak, landing over the two fighting creatures.

Gaster, being made completely of bones and a dragon himself, felt nothing of the attack. No heat, no spark, the smoke didn't even sting his eye sockets.

The Griffin was another tale.

Screaming out, the Griffin pushed itself away from Gaster. Sai noticed that a majority of its body was on fire, the feathers mostly incinerated, dusting in front of her. The fur on its hind legs slowly turning grey. Even in its ruined state, the Griffin glared at the two dragons and human, raising the remains of its wings for one last attack.

Gaster's eye lights dilated as he opened his mouth, almost unhinging it. A glowing orb, pure white in colour, swelled in the depths of his mouth, crackling with pure magic. He reared his head back for a second before letting it fall forward again, the magic firing.

The beam of magic struck the Griffin even as it tried to escape the attack. The Griffin hung in the air for a moment or two, almost like it was stunned with what had occurred.

As if like a cartoon, the Griffin sagged and fell. Its smoking wings were limp and weak, its legs and talons lifeless. Before it hit the ground, it crumbled to dust, floating away with the cold breeze.

Grillby and Gaster watched it drift away, Sai still safely on top on Grillby's neck. Gaster growled something at the remains before turning, heading back to their cave. It was a quick, if quiet journey. Sai could tell they were thinking about the Griffin and the fight, and she chose not to interject. Not just yet.

Once they landed, Gaster gave a little stumble, catching himself quickly. It was then that Sai noticed the numerous cuts all over his body. His body was dripping with marrow and blood. "You're hurt!" she cried out, rushing over to him. The lacerations were deep, the marrow not yet clotting.

(He was a tough one... but thank goodness you were safe.) Gaster said, limping into the cave. Grillby followed him. His own flames were dimmer than before, but they would return back to the original splendour of his plumage before long. He just needed to rest, let his fire rebuild.

Sai rushed into one of the smaller nocks of the cave, grabbing clothes and bandages. Seizing a bowl from the kitchen, she filled it with water before returning to Gaster. The bone dragon was already licking himself over, attempting to clean himself up.

"Stop that. Your mouth is full of bacteria and germs. We don't need these to scar anymore than they already will." Sai said, plopping herself down beside him, dipping her washing rag into the water and beginning to clean one of the cuts.

(Scars are a sign of pride amongst the dragons. Shows how many battles we have one and overcome... each scar tells a story.) Gaster told her, still licking one on his foot.

"You're going to lose your good looks if you just let them fester."

(I already have you and Grillby. I don't need to impress anyone else.) Gaster told grumbly.

Sai paused at that. "You.... you consider me part of your family?" she asked him.

The two dragons shared a glance before looking back at her. (Well... yes. In a way...) Grillby said, humming around the issue.

Sai folded her arms, glaring at the two dragons. "Spit it out," she ordered them. The two were quiet again. They were trying to buy time. Trying to plan out what they wanted to say. Sai began to tap her foot. "Well? I'm waiting."

(We didn't just rescue you because we think you as part of our treasure hoard. We said before that we would give up the treasure to ensure yours, and our, survival. Sai... you....

You are more than just our precious treasure. You are more than just your voice. You are more than just a normal human.) Grillby told her, his mental voice softening.

Gaster caught her eye. (We admit that the first time that we heard your voice, Grillby and I were hooked. That we wanted to squirrel you away, keep you away from others that could hear you. From others that would seal you away. But... but you are much more than that. Your laugh... your voice... your ideas... the way you care about us and even those stupid animals... everything. We love everything about you. We would do anything to keep you safe. To keep you healthy and happy.)

Her mouth was open Sai realized with some embarrassment. Shaking it off, she stared at the two dragons. “What... what are you asking me?” she questioned them.

(We know that it may seem unorthodox, but, frankly, we don’t care. Sai... will you become our number three?) Gaster asked her. His eye lights were large and scared, and a shiver ran through Grillby’s feathers. If she said no...

“I... I... yes...” Sai finally whispered, pulling the two dragon heads in for a hug. “I... I think I would love that very much... but only if I get to clean those wounds of yours. I don’t want to be the cause of any more scars.”

(But those would act as our bonding mark...)

“I said no more scars! I cannot have an ugly mate!”

End Notes

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