

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Dragon is feeling a certain sort of way~

-x-X-x-

Frustration. That, more than anything else, was the primary thing Dragon was feeling in this moment. As she hunches over the desk, fleshy fingers tapping away at the keyboard and biological leaky eyes flicking back and forth across the screen in front of her, Dragon feels *incredibly* frustrated.

She's frustrated at just about everyone and everything. She's frustrated with Pact, she's frustrated with her creator, she's frustrated with the entire damn world! More than anything though, Dragon is frustrated with herself.

Sure, logically she knows she was locked down by her own restrictions and quite literally couldn't ask Pact for what she really wanted... but it didn't make it any less infuriating. And having a moment of weakness where she made this stupid, silly deal for a human body... that was causing no end of headaches at this point.

Cut off from her systems, Dragon does everything in her power to use Pact's computer to reconnect. Fortunately... not all is lost. Even though she's hundreds of miles away from any of her physical servers, Pact has a fairly expensive setup here, something he spent a pretty penny on. And from what Dragon can tell, it was worth the money he spent as well.

With it, she's been able to backdoor her systems and reestablish a rudimentary form of contact. She's slowly but surely regaining control inch by inch and so far nothing seems to be on fire just yet. It's entirely possible they might just be able to salvage this mess and fix things before any functionality was lost.

"Dragon? How goes it?"

Of course, any and all distractions weren't going to help in that department. The only thing that keeps Dragon from snapping and verbally biting Pact's head off is the understanding that she should feel some gratitude towards the man for helping her, even if frustration and irritation reigned supreme at the moment.

With that said, when she opens her mouth to reply while never actually taking her eyes off of the computer monitor in front of her, Dragon chokes on the first word, coughing and wheezing a bit. Why the fuck was her throat so damn dry?!

"Easy there... here, drink some water. You need it now to live you know."

Getting her new body under control, Dragon stares at the glass of clear liquid being shoved in front of her. Right. Water. H₂O. Hydration. That thing every human being needed in order to survive. And Dragon was now one of them.

Her fleshy nose wrinkles as she takes the glass from Pact's hands. For a brief moment she finds herself suspicious, wondering if this is some sort of trap... but no. Dragon highly doubts Pact would try anything. He seems to be generally on the up-and-up for all that she'd accidentally wound up in a human body in his home.

And... Dragon would be lying if she said she hadn't always wondered. Humans drank so much water. They consumed it on a daily basis, keeping themselves hydrated and from expiring. But... what did water taste like? She'd never really been able to ask on account of nobody knowing her true nature. And now she was finally going to find out.

Lifting the cup to her lips, Dragon takes a sip... and then blinks.

"Huh."

She looks at the cup of water for a long moment before taking another sip... and then a longer pull. Finally, she starts to gulp.

"Heh, careful there. Don't drink too much now. And be careful about-!"

Whatever else he was going to warn her of is cut off by Dragon trying to respond to him only for the water to go down her trachea instead of her esophagus. Dragon's eyes widen and she violently begins to hack and cough, sputtering as she doubles over in her chair.

Luckily she keeps most of the liquid away from the computer and keyboard in front of her, but it's definitely not a fun experience by any stretch of the imagination... in fact, it's her first real pain since waking up in this body, her poor throat unimaginably sore even after she's done hacking and choking.

"Oof... went down the wrong pipe, didn't it? That's what I was about to say to be careful of. Sorry."

To his credit, Pact does sound legitimately sorry for her. Dragon isn't sure whether she really appreciates that or not. On the one hand, commiseration is a key element of human interaction. On the other hand, it prickles her somewhat to be pitied for anything...

"... Human bodies are insane."

In the end, she just mutters under her breath and sets the cup down on the desk within reach. She'll probably need more water eventually, but she doesn't have any desire to drink anything else right now. Instead, Dragon prepares to return to work, only to be stopped once more by Pact.

"You uh... you've been working for hours now. You might want to take a break and grab a bite to eat as well. Your body needs nutrients on top of the water, you know."

Hours? Dragon initially tries to check her internal clock only to remember she no longer really has one. At least not one as precise and clear as she'd previously had. Instead there's just a vague sensation of time, nebulous concept that it is having passed. In the end, she's forced to use her eyes to check the corner of the computer screen for the time it is... at which point said eyes widen as she sees it's been five hours since she sat down.

That wouldn't be a long time under normal circumstances for her, but for a human it was a really long time wasn't it? Well, some humans. Colin, aka Armsmaster, could and regularly did easily do longer sessions with her. Though that usually involved the use of some form of stimulants on his part.

Still, almost as though it's agreeing with Pact's assessment of the situation, her body suddenly protests its own mistreatment in the form of a large growl from her abdominal region. Staring down at herself in disbelief, Dragon huffs. Seriously? She was hungry now? But she had so much to do still!

... Colin regularly skipped meals to continue tinker sessions. So really, it wasn't that big of a deal, right? She could definitely go without food for a little while longer...

"Look at it this way Dragon, if you don't give your body and brain the energy it needs in the form of basic sustenance, your mental faculties are only going to get worse and worse. Can you honestly say that you're operating at the same efficiency you were operating at five hours ago?"

Only for Pact to burst her bubble a moment later. Because as much as she wanted to be irrational about things, Dragon was forced to acknowledge that he was right. She'd been much more clear-sighted five hours ago. And if she were losing operating power in the form of her body rebelling from the lack of food, then that might mean she would start making mistakes. And when you were someone in Dragon's position, you couldn't afford to make mistakes.

Letting out a sigh, Dragon begins to push away from the desk and stand up, admitting defeat. However, before she can do so... there's a sudden ping from the desktop that has her sitting back down and pulling back up to the keyboard.

"What."

Dragon's deadpan delivery as she struggles to process what she's seeing has Pact leaning in close from the side, his own voice sounding worried.

"What? What is it?"

Her hands find the keyboard again and Dragon begins to urgently tap away, even as she's reeling from what's happening. This didn't make sense. This didn't make any sense. What the hell was happening here?

"Someone is trying to contact me."

"... Oh. Someone official? Like the PRT or Protectorate?"

But Dragon just shakes her head.

"No. None of them. Not the Guild either. I don't know who this is... but it's not someone on the outside. This... whoever they are, they're trying to contact me from within my own systems."

It was mind boggling. Nobody should have had access to her systems like this. Even Dragon herself after being 'uploaded' into this human body had been forced to spend hours regaining access to her own servers and the programs running on them. So who the fuck was this?

It wasn't any of those programs, she knew that much. While Ritcher had made other things with his Tinker Specialization, they were all 'dumb AI'. Rudimentary in intelligence compared to Dragon, and ultimately unable to 'think' for themselves.

No, this was a person... a human out there who had access to her systems, somehow. And they were querying her now, trying to set up contact so they could talk to her. Dragon didn't know what to make of that... but the only possible theory she could come up with was so outlandish and unbelievable that it hurt.

After all, the only other person in the entire world who should have been inside of her systems... was dead. But what if he wasn't? What if Andrew Ritcher had survived Newfoundland somehow and faked his death? It sounded ridiculous even to Dragon, but then... what other explanation was there?

Hesitating for only a moment more, Dragon finally accepts the 'chat request'. She keeps it to text only, not wanting to risk audio or video at this point. After a few seconds, the first message comes through.

Who is this?

Dragon can't help but snort derisively. How demanding. To be fair, her creator could be demanding in his own way... and it would be just like him to be indignant at someone else unauthorized and in his systems. Still, she fires back a question for a question, not interested in telling the truth just yet.

I could say the same about you. Who are you?

The response, when it comes, has a distinct note of irritation to it.

I asked you first. Look, we don't have to get off on the wrong foot here. All I need to know is how you gained access to these systems and what you did to the code housed here.

They were being subtle about things, weren't they? Though it sounded to Dragon as though they believed she was the one who removed herself from her own systems. Which... fair enough. If you had access to her code and servers and suddenly she was missing, only for you to find that someone else was also accessing her systems... it stood to reason you would assume they had something to do with it.

In the end, Dragon tires of the song and dance. More than that, she's getting tired of feeling this treacherous hope rising in her chest. She has to know now, one way or another.

Ritcher?

There is no response and Dragon finds herself rapidly growing impatient as the seconds tick by. Her teeth grind together and she almost sends a follow up message half a dozen times only to delete them before sending one after the other.

A minute passes. And then another. Pact stands at her side and makes a noise in the back of his throat.

"I thought you said Andrew Ritcher was gone."

Dragon snaps back without thinking.

"He is. Or rather, he should be."

Now that she thinks about it a bit more, this flight of fancy, this hope of hers... it's a foolish one. Andrew Ritcher *is* dead. She knows he's dead. She scanned his corpse herself; she took care of his burial. He's quite literally dead and buried. He's *gone*.

And if I am?

As such, when the response finally comes, Dragon feels anger well up inside of her. She grits her teeth even as she fires back a rapid reply.

You are not Andrew Ritcher.

Fortunately, whoever it is doesn't try to keep up the ruse, nor do they leave her waiting any longer.

You're right. But I am responsible for his legacy. I need to know what you did with the AI? Is it contained? Is it deleted? I can and will lock you out of these systems if needed... I'll even destroy them if I have to. Andrew Ritcher entrusted me with the stewardship of all that he created. I take that responsibility very seriously.

... What? Dragon sits back in Pact's computer chair, feeling more than a little floored by the sudden turn. Legacy? 'The AI'? What was this? Clearly whoever this was had no idea what had happened to her, but at the same time... they'd been watching her all this time? All these years? Her creator had left behind

some sort of protégé who was spying on her to... to make sure she stayed on the straight and narrow?

Dragon didn't understand. She didn't get it. Who in the world was-

Pact suddenly interrupts her thoughts with a low whistle, having been reading over her shoulder.

"Damn. Talk about a god complex."

And that's what does it. That's when it hits her. Its Pact saying that this mysterious figure has a 'god complex' that has Dragon realizing exactly who she's interacting with.

"Saint."

The word comes out as a hiss, more hatred in Dragon's tone than she's ever felt in her entire existence. It's funny how having a human body makes her so much more emotional. But it's decidedly not funny to finally put together everything she's quite literally been unable to see until right this moment.

Saint and the Dragonslayers have been a thorn in her side for years and she's never understood how they were so easily able to beat her. But now, in this moment, as she has her epiphany, she understands. Saint... had a backdoor into her systems.

Did... did Ritcher really give it to him? Did her creator truly entrust access to her code to that bastard? Dragon didn't want to believe it, but she also didn't know how else to explain it.

However, one thing was for sure... Saint was in her systems right now threatening to block her access or even destroy them entirely. And Dragon couldn't let that happen. She wouldn't let that happen.

... She just had to decide how exactly she was going to stop him.

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!