

18 sept. 24

"Marina, hurry up! We're going to miss the boat," Fedde called out, his voice echoing through the hotel corridor. He fidgeted with the strap of his bag, glancing at his watch for the fifth time in as many minutes.

"I'm coming, darling," she replied, her heels clicking against the tile floor as she approached. "I just had to make sure I had everything," she said, flashing a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes.

Fedde sighed, trying to mask his annoyance. This vacation was supposed to be a time to unwind, not a race against the clock. He knew his mother's vanity was the culprit for their almost-missed departure, but he bit his tongue. The last thing he needed was to start the trip on a sour note.

As they rushed through the village square, the heat from the sun-baked cobblestones seemed to intensify the stench of fish and diesel. The villagers, mostly men, paused in their activities to watch them pass, their gazes lingering on the shapely form of the beautiful woman beside him. Fedde felt a mix of pride and unease. It was clear that his mother's allure wasn't lost on the locals.

Marina, unfazed, waved gracefully at the staring crowd as she walked. Her golden hair, tied back in a loose ponytail, swished with every step she took. She was wearing a floral sundress that accentuated her figure and made the men's glances even more obvious. "Looks like we're the main attraction," she murmured to Fedde, a hint of amusement in her voice.

The boat, a small wooden vessel with a faded red hull, bobbed gently in the harbor. The captain, a weathered man with a thick mustache, nodded curtly as they boarded. He spoke little English, but his gestures were clear enough. They had to hurry. Fedde helped his mother settle into the boat, trying not to let his anxiety show.

As the boat chugged away from the pier, the stares of the villagers grew smaller and eventually disappeared from view. The sea spray cooled the sticky heat, and the rhythmic motion of the waves soon lulled Fedde into a state of near-sleep. He watched as the island of Komodo grew larger, the shoreline revealing a dense jungle that seemed to hide untold secrets.

Marina, however, remained alert, her eyes scanning the horizon with an excitement that was infectious. "Isn't it beautiful, Fedde?" she exclaimed, her voice carrying over the drone of the engine. "The water's so clear, you can almost see the dragons from here!"

Fedde forced a smile, the mention of the island's fearsome inhabitants bringing his nerves back to the surface. "Yeah, beautiful," he murmured, trying to ignore the thought of the creatures lurking nearby.

As the boat approached the island, the captain throttled back the engine, allowing the vessel to drift closer to the shoreline. Fedde's heart raced as he caught sight of a shadow moving through the mangroves. The water was indeed crystal clear, and he could see the dark form of what was undeniably a large, prehistoric-looking reptile gliding through the shallows.

Marina leaned in closer, her eyes wide with excitement. "Look, Fedde," she whispered. "Isn't it magnificent?"

The dragon slithered out of the water, its massive body leaving a trail of ripples behind it. Its forked tongue flicked out, tasting the air as it approached the boat. Fedde felt a shiver run down his spine as he took in the creature's size – easily twice the length of a grown man, and thick enough to crush a bull.

The captain spoke rapidly in a language Fedde didn't understand, but the urgency in his tone was clear. He reached for a rifle propped against the side of the boat, his hand shaking slightly. The creature's eyes, the color of polished stones, remained fixed on the boat, and specifically on Marina.

Fedde felt his stomach churn. "Mom," he began, his voice barely above a whisper. "Maybe we should go back

."

Marina turned to her son, her expression a blend of excitement and defiance. "Fedde, don't be such a scaredy-cat. This is the experience of a lifetime!" she exclaimed, her eyes sparkling. "We're going to see these incredible creatures up close. It's not every day you get to be this close to something so wild and untouched by civilization."

Fedde's grip tightened on the side of the boat as the creature drew closer. He couldn't shake the feeling that this wasn't just a sightseeing trip for his mother. There was something more, something primal that drew her to the island and its terrifying inhabitants. It was as if she wanted to conquer her fears or perhaps find a piece of herself that she had lost in the bustle of their urban life.

The captain's voice grew more urgent, but Marina remained transfixed by the dragon. The beast was now only a few feet from the boat, its powerful tail cutting through the water with a grace that belied its deadly intent. The captain's hand hovered over the rifle's trigger, sweat beading on his forehead.

Fedde couldn't help but think about the safety of their chosen destination. Tenerife would have been nice – sipping cocktails by the pool, the warm sun kissing their skin without the looming threat of death lurking in the shadows. But no, his mother had insisted on this exotic, dangerous adventure, and now they were face to face with the very reason he'd rather be anywhere else.

"Mom, these things are poisonous," he managed to say, his voice cracking. "One bite and it's over."

Marina looked at him, her eyes still gleaming with excitement. "Fedde, don't you get it?" she said, her voice low and intense. "It's about the thrill, the rush of adrenaline. This is what keeps me feeling alive."

Fedde swallowed hard, his eyes darting back to the dragon. It was true, his mother had always been drawn to the extreme, the exotic. But this was different – this was playing with fire. He could see the creature's teeth, the serrated edges glinting in the sunlight. One wrong move and they'd both be dinner.

He glanced at the captain, whose hand was now firmly on the rifle. The man's gaze darted from the dragon to Marina and back again, as if trying to decide if he should shoot or not. The creature's eyes never left her, and Fedde couldn't shake the feeling that it had singled her out. Was it the bright color of her dress? The scent of her fear? Or was it something else, something deeper that called to the predator within the ancient beast?

The captain's decision was made for him when the dragon suddenly lurched forward, its mouth gaping open. Fedde's heart skipped a beat as he watched the powerful jaws snap shut just inches from the boat. The captain didn't hesitate, firing a shot that rang out across the water. The dragon's head jerked back, and it let out an eerie roar before sliding beneath the surface with a splash, the water stained red.

The silence that followed was deafening, and Fedde felt a cold sweat break out on his forehead. He looked at his mother, expecting to see fear, but instead, her expression was one of pure exhilaration. "See, darling?" she said, her voice breathless. "It's all part of the adventure."

The captain, visibly relieved, steered the boat towards the shore, navigating through the shallow waters with practiced ease. The hotel they arrived at was far from the luxurious resorts they were accustomed to. It was a simple, rickety wooden structure, nestled on the beach like a forgotten toy. Palm trees swayed lazily overhead, casting dappled shadows on the sand.

The door to the hotel was indeed massive, made from thick, ancient-looking timber, with iron bands bolted across it. It looked as if it could withstand a siege, and Fedde couldn't help but feel a sense of relief that at least this one dragon wouldn't be crashing their vacation. The captain gestured for them to follow him up the creaky wooden steps and into the shed-like building.

Inside, it was surprisingly cool and well-kept. The walls were lined with woven mats, and the floor was packed earth, which felt solid underfoot. The air was heavy with the scent of incense, masking the faint odor of damp wood. If you had to pee, you had to go outside and hope there was no dragon out there. By the way, another creep that stalked the island were wild boars. What the hell were they doing here at all? Would they survive?"

Marina took in the rustic charm with a nod of approval. "It's quaint," she said, her voice bubbling with enthusiasm. "Just what we needed to get away from it all."

Fedde couldn't help but feel a twinge of doubt as he followed her up the creaking stairs. The hotel was indeed a stark contrast to the modern comforts they were used to, but the thought of a dragon-proof door was oddly comforting. The room they were shown to was small, with a single bed and a chair that looked like it had seen better days. First question was how to manage sleeping here with only one bed?

Marina, ever the optimist, tossed her bag onto the bed with a flourish. "Look, Fedde," she said, pointing to the small balcony that overlooked the beach. "We can see the ocean from here. How romantic!"

Fedde couldn't help but roll his eyes. "Yeah, romantic," he muttered. "Just what we needed."

The captain left them with a curt nod, and the door thudded shut behind him. Fedde's gaze lingered on the heavy timber, wondering if it was really enough to keep the island's prehistoric inhabitants at bay.

Marina, unfazed, flung open the balcony doors, letting in the sweet, salty air. "It's gorgeous," she said, stepping outside. "The perfect place to get some sun."

Fedde followed reluctantly, his eyes scanning the tree line. "Just don't let any dragons crash the party," he quipped, trying to lighten the mood.

Marina laughed, the sound tinkling like wind chimes in the quiet afternoon. "Oh, you're so dramatic," she said, leaning against the railing. "The captain said they don't come this close to the hotel. They know better than to mess with humans here."

Fedde couldn't ignore the unease that had settled in the pit of his stomach. He'd read enough about the island to know that the dragons were unpredictable and incredibly dangerous. "I guess we'll see," he said, his voice tight.

They spent the evening exploring the small, makeshift hotel. The restaurant was indeed a short walk away, but it was the only option for food. A wooden shed, similar in construction to the hotel, sat just beyond the tree line, with a dimly lit sign that read "Eat at Joe's" in peeling paint. The sound of laughter and clinking dishes spilled out from the open windows, mixing with the distant crash of waves and the occasional buzz of a mosquito.

After a meal of questionable origin, Fedde felt his stomach churn. The local cuisine didn't sit well with him, and the nausea grew with every passing moment. He tried to ignore it, focusing on the flickering candlelight and the gentle sway of the hammock they'd found on the beach. But nature called, and it couldn't be ignored.

Marina noticed his discomfort and offered a knowing smile. "Looks like you've had too much of Joe's special," she teased, patting his back.

Fedde's cheeks reddened. "I'm fine," he said, trying to keep his voice steady. "Just a little... indigestion."

Marina's smile grew wider. "Well, we wouldn't want that to ruin our first night on the island, would we?" She winked at him, a mischievous glint in her eye. "You go ahead and take care of that. I'll grab us some dessert."

With a groan, Fedde left the restaurant and stumbled towards the shadowy bushes. The darkness felt like a living entity, closing in around him. His heart pounded in his chest as he thought of the dragons and their lethal bites. He didn't dare look back, fearful of what he might see lurking in the underbrush.

Fedde took a deep breath and tried to relax, his heart hammering against his ribs like a caged animal. He didn't dare make a sound as he pulled down his pants and sat, his eyes glued to the gap under the door. Every rustle of leaves, every crack of a twig outside, sent a jolt of terror through him. He thought about the dragons, their beady eyes and forked tongues, and how close they could be, watching, waiting for a moment of weakness.

Just as he started to do his business, the noise grew louder. It sounded like something was pushing through the bushes, heading straight for him. His breath caught in his throat, and he froze, his eyes darting around the tiny space, searching for a weapon. All he had was a small flashlight.

The creature burst into the clearing, and for a moment, Fedde thought it was one of the dragons. But instead, it was a massive wild boar, its tusks gleaming in the moonlight as it snorted angrily. It charged at him, and he barely had time to react before he was knocked over hard, his body slamming into the ground. His head hit the earth with a thud, and for a moment, stars danced before his eyes. He heard a deep, guttural growl that seemed to shake the very air around him.

Panic coursed through Fedde's veins as he scrambled to his feet, his pants still around his ankles. The boar was only a few feet away, its eyes gleaming with aggression. He stumbled backward, desperately trying to pull up his pants with trembling hands. The warmth of his accident spread down his legs, and he cursed himself for his carelessness.

"Mom!" he yelled, his voice high-pitched with fear. "Mom, help!"

Marina sprinted back from the restaurant, dessert forgotten. The sight of the wild boar charging towards her son sent her into a frenzy. Without hesitation, she grabbed the nearest object she could find – a wooden chair. With all the strength she had, she hurled it at the creature. It hit the boar with a loud thwack, but instead of stopping, the beast only seemed to become more enraged.

Fedde's eyes were wide with terror as he stumbled backward, trying to escape the charging boar. His pants were still around his ankles, and the warmth of his accident spread, leaving him feeling embarrassed and vulnerable. "Mom!" he screamed again, his voice cracking with fear.

Marina was already sprinting back, her heels digging into the sand as she approached the scene. Her heart pounded in her chest as she saw the creature bearing down on her son. Without a moment's hesitation, she snatched up a nearby wooden chair and flung it with all her might. The chair smacked into the boar's side with a satisfying thud, but instead of deterring the beast, it only served to enrage it further.

The boar, a hulking mass of muscle and tusk, didn't falter. It continued to charge, its eyes fixed on the vulnerable human before it. Fedde screamed again, his voice echoing through the night air. He managed to hobble backward, his pants tripping him up, but the boar was relentless.

Marina's mind raced. She had to do something, had to save her son. Without a second thought, she darted back to the restaurant, snatching a bottle of hot sauce from a table. She knew it was a long shot, but it was better than nothing. She uncapped it and dashed towards the beast, her heart hammering in her chest.

Fedde's eyes grew wide as he watched his mother approach the charging boar with nothing but a chair and a bottle of sauce. "Mom, no!" he yelled, his voice a mix of terror and desperation.

Marina didn't listen. With a fiery determination that belied her delicate frame, she doused the charging creature with the contents of the bottle. The boar, caught off guard, squealed in pain and surprise as the hot sauce made contact with its eyes and nose. Its charge faltered, giving Fedde the chance he needed. He stumbled backwards, his pants finally up around his waist, and dashed for the hotel's massive door.

Theo, the burly islander who'd been watching the commotion with a mix of amusement and alarm, rushed to help. He slammed the door shut just as the boar regained its footing, the heavy wood shaking under the creature's frenzied impacts. Fedde leaned against the timber, panting heavily, his heart racing like a wild animal itself.

"Thanks," Fedde murmured, his voice shaking.

Theo chuckled, his wide grin displaying a mouthful of tobacco-stained teeth. "No problem, young man. That was quite the show you put on," he said, slapping a meaty hand on Fedde's back.

Marina, slightly out of breath but otherwise unfazed, joined them. "Are you okay, darling?" she asked, a hint of laughter in her voice.

Fedde nodded, still shaking. "Yeah, thanks to you," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. He couldn't believe what had just happened. The fear still clung to him like a second skin.

Marina looked around the hotel lobby, her eyes wide with excitement. "Well, that was certainly an adventure!" she exclaimed.

Fedde, still shaking from the encounter, managed a weak smile. "More than I bargained for," he murmured, his voice trembling.

Marina, ever the optimist, couldn't resist a chuckle. "At least we're making memories," she said, ruffling his hair. "Come on, let's get you cleaned up."

The next morning, Fedde awoke to the sound of the sea, his makeshift bed of cardboard crunching beneath him. He looked over at the bed where his mother slept peacefully, a gentle smile playing on her lips. Despite the horror of the night before, she looked more alive than he'd seen her in months. He couldn't help but feel a twinge of resentment – this was his vacation too, and it was turning into a nightmare.

They ventured outside into the sticky heat, the sun already climbing high into the sky. The beach looked even more tempting than before, but the memory of the dragon's attack kept Fedde's feet firmly planted on the sand. He couldn't shake the feeling that the ocean was just a dragon's playground, waiting to snatch them up at any moment.

Marina, on the other hand, seemed rejuvenated by the incident. She'd slept soundly in the one decent bed, while Fedde had made do with a makeshift mattress of cardboard and a few stray pillows. Her eyes were bright, her cheeks flushed with excitement as she suggested they take advantage of the hotel's offer for a guided tour. "It'll be fun, Fedde," she said, her voice a siren's call luring him into danger. "We'll get to see the island up close."

Fedde couldn't shake the feeling that their so-called hotel was less of a vacation spot and more of a dragon-proof fortress. The walls were high and thick, the windows barred, and the beach outside was more like a moat than a playground. But the thought of being cooped up in this wooden prison was too much to bear, so he reluctantly agreed to the tour.

The guide, a grizzled old man named Budi, met them at the hotel lobby. His eyes gleamed with the kind of knowledge that comes from a lifetime spent on the island. "You want to see the dragons?" he asked, his English heavily accented. "They come with the package."

Marina's eyes lit up. "Yes, of course!" she exclaimed. "How much?"

Budi named a price that made Fedde's wallet cringe, but his mother didn't bat an eyelash. She was too busy laughing at the absurdity of their situation. "We'll do it," she said, her voice giddy with excitement.

Budi pointed them to the wild boar that had attacked Fedde last night. His mother had thrown hot sauce in the animal's eyes after which it had run into everything and caused havoc. Until, fortunately, it had fallen prey to a horde of Komodo Dragons. They had torn the boar to shreds and practically eaten it. Fedde and his mother looked in horror at the havoc left by the wild boar. For the first time they were faced with the facts. This was the life-and-death battle ahead, the bloodlust of those Komodo creeps and the stubbornness of those wild boars that would not let a cannon stop them.

The carcass of the boar was a gruesome sight, surrounded by the telltale signs of a vicious battle. The sand was churned up, and palm fronds were strewn about like the aftermath of a tornado. The air was thick with the metallic scent of blood, and the buzz of flies provided an eerie soundtrack to the scene. Fedde felt his stomach turn at the sight of the torn flesh and bone, the remnants of the creature's fierce spirit.

Marina, however, couldn't seem to tear her eyes away. "Look, Fedde," she whispered, her voice trembling. "They didn't just kill it. They devoured it."

Fedde's stomach lurched as he took in the grisly scene. The boar's body was unrecognizable, reduced to a pile of bones and gore. The dragons had left nothing behind but the stench of death and the frenzied buzz of flies. The sight was a stark reminder of the true nature of their surroundings – a place where the wild reigned supreme, and humans were merely visitors treading on the edge of their domain.

Marina, however, remained unperturbed, her gaze fixed on the carnage with a strange fascination. "It's... mesmerizing," she murmured. "The circle of life, right before our eyes."

Fedde couldn't find the beauty in the macabre scene. "Let's just get this over with," he said, swiping a hand across his forehead. The heat was already stifling, and the stench of death didn't help.

Budi led them away from the grisly reminder of the night's events and into the dense jungle. The foliage was thick, the air humid and alive with the cacophony of unseen creatures. Fedde's senses were on high alert as they moved deeper into the greenery. He could feel the weight of the jungle pressing down on him, a silent sentinel watching their every move

.

On the narrow dirt path, the inevitable confrontation came as the sun reached its peak, casting sharp shadows across the open plain. Fedde's eyes widened when he saw the unmistakable silhouette of a massive Komodo dragon blocking their way. He couldn't help but think of the terrace in Tenerife, the warm embrace of the sun, and the alluring smile of a Spanish girl who had caught his eye in a brochure. Here he was, sweating in the jungle, face to face with death on legs.

Marina, ever the thrill-seeker, stepped closer to the creature, her eyes alight with fascination. "Look at it, Fedde," she whispered, her voice low and reverent. "It's incredible."

Fedde felt a cold knot form in his stomach. "Mom, maybe we should go back," he said, his voice shaking slightly. "These things are dangerous."

Marina shot him a look that was both exasperated and thrilled. "Don't be such a baby," she whispered. "This is what we're here for!"

Fedde took a step back, his eyes never leaving the dragon. It didn't move, just watched them with cold, reptilian indifference. Budi, unfazed, waved his stick at the creature, making a shooing motion. "You go now," he murmured in broken English. "No eat humans today."

Marina's eyes were glued to the dragon, a strange mix of fear and fascination playing across her features. "It's so... majestic," she breathed.

Fedde couldn't believe his ears. "Majestic? That thing wants to eat us!"

Marina's eyes didn't leave the dragon. "But think of the story, Fedde," she said, her voice filled with excitement. "We can tell everyone back home about the time we faced a real-life dragon!"

If we survive, he said.

Marina, still in awe, didn't seem to hear the sarcasm in her son's voice. "This is incredible," she breathed.

Fedde's mind raced as he looked from the dragon in front of them to the one Budi had just pointed out behind them. "We're surrounded," he murmured, his heart hammering in his chest.

Marina's smile didn't falter. "How exciting," she said, her eyes shining. "This is just like on TV!"

Fedde couldn't share her enthusiasm. His heart hammered in his chest like a caged animal. He'd seen enough nature shows to know that this was a dangerous situation. "We should go back," he said, his voice shaking. "We don't know what they're capable of."

Marina looked at him with a mix of surprise and excitement. "Don't you feel the thrill, Fedde?" she asked, her eyes still on the dragon. "This is what life is all about – facing the unknown, the unpredictable."

Fedde swallowed hard, his thoughts racing. "I'd rather face a café au lait and a good book," he muttered under his breath. But aloud, he said, "Okay, okay, let's just get out of here."

Marina's face fell, but she didn't argue. They turned to retreat, and that's when Fedde saw it – the flicker of movement in the tall grass behind them. His heart sank as a second dragon emerged, its tongue darting out to taste the air. "Budi, we're

surrounded," he whispered, his voice barely audible over the hammering of his pulse in his ears.

The guide nodded gravely. "They know we're here," he murmured, his stick poised defensively. "We must be very still."

Marina's expression was a mix of excitement and trepidation. "But, Budi," she whispered, "what if they attack?"

Budi's eyes darted from dragon to dragon, assessing the situation. "Stay calm," he murmured, his voice steady despite the tremble in his hand. "Do not run."

The dragons stalked closer, their scales glinting in the sun, a stark contrast to the vibrant green of the jungle. They were monsters from a bygone era, their very presence a reminder of the fragility of human existence. Fedde felt his legs wobble, his entire body screaming at him to bolt.

But he remained rooted to the spot, his eyes fixed on the creeping beasts. Budi had disappeared, leaving them to face the predators alone. The betrayal stung, but the fear was too great to be overwhelmed by anger. He watched as his mother's excitement morphed into something more primal – a visceral understanding of their precarious situation.

The dragons moved with a silent grace that belied their size, their serrated teeth gleaming in the dappled sunlight. Fedde could feel the vibrations of their heavy footsteps through the ground, the very earth seeming to tremble in anticipation of the impending clash. He reached for his mother's hand, her skin cold and clammy with fear.

The worst thing that could happen is what happened: Budi had vanished into the grass, leaving them to face the dragons alone. Fedde's mind raced, conjuring images of a serene terrace in Tenerife where he could be sipping a cool drink and flirting with a beautiful Spanish girl. Instead, he was trapped in a nightmare with the woman who had brought him into this world.

Marina's grip on his hand tightened, and he felt the tremor of fear in her body. Yet, her eyes remained transfixed on the advancing dragons. They were like nothing he had ever seen before, these ancient reptiles that could bring down a water buffalo with a single bite. The reality of their situation hit him like a sledgehammer.

The dragons continued to creep closer, their scales whispering against the dry grass. Fedde's mind reeled with the knowledge that the venom in their bite could kill a man in hours. The sweat trickled down his back, mixing with the sticky residue of last

night's fear. He couldn't believe that Budi had abandoned them. The treacherous guide had vanished as quickly as the hope of a peaceful vacation.

In his desperation, Fedde did the only thing he could think of – he began to pray. It had been years since he'd last spoken to God, but he figured now was as good a time as any. He didn't know which deity to call upon, or if his words would even be heard, but he sent them out into the jungle, a desperate plea for salvation.

Marina watched him, her own fear momentarily forgotten in the face of his sudden piety. "Fedde, what are you doing?" she hissed.

Fedde didn't stop praying. "Just a little insurance," he murmured, his voice shaking. "I don't know which god to pray to, but I figure it can't hurt."

Marina, watching him with a mix of bewilderment and admiration, couldn't argue with that logic. She took a deep breath and squeezed his hand, her eyes still on the dragons.

The moment felt like an eternity as the dragons inched closer, their beady eyes locked onto the trembling humans. Then, as if in answer to Fedde's prayers, a wild boar crashed through the underbrush. It was a sight to behold, a creature of the jungle, unbridled and fierce. The boar barreled straight towards the dragons, its hooves tearing up the earth as it charged.

Fedde's heart leaped into his throat. He had never felt so relieved to see the creature that had terrorized him the night before. The dragons, startled by the sudden interruption, paused in their approach. The boar didn't slow, its tusks lowered like the spears of a Viking warrior.

Marina's grip on Fedde's hand tightened as she whispered, "What are we going to do?"

Fedde, his voice shaky, said, "I don't know, but it looks like we might have an unexpected ally."

The wild boar plowed through the underbrush like a furious bull, heading straight for the dragons. The beasts looked momentarily surprised, their scaly heads turning towards the charging intruder. In that split second, Fedde felt a strange kinship with the creature. It was a fellow outsider in this deadly dance, a creature that shared their fearlessness in the face of the island's terrifying predators.

Marina's eyes widened as she took in the scene. "This is insane," she whispered. "What are the chances?"

Fedde didn't bother with probabilities. He was too busy watching the boar, his newfound ally. The creature barreled through the grass with surprising speed, heading straight for the dragons. It was a dance of predators, each creature assessing the other. The dragons' eyes narrowed, their muscles tensing as they prepared to defend their territory.

The boar didn't falter, its hooves thundering against the earth. It was a creature of chaos, a living embodiment of the wild and untamed spirit of the island. As it approached the dragons, Fedde couldn't help but feel a twinge of hope. The boar's recklessness was their only chance.

Marina watched, her eyes wide with horror and fascination, as the boar collided with the nearest dragon. The creature's screams pierced the air, a sound that was both terrifying and mesmerizing. The dragon, caught off guard, released its grip on the boar's hind leg, the teeth marks deep and bloody. For a brief moment, the boar stood tall, victorious in its own right. But it was clear this was a battle it couldn't win.

The dragon's scales rippled as it bared its teeth, a hiss of anger escaping its throat. Fedde felt a strange mix of awe and terror as he watched the ancient dance of predator and prey unfold before him. The wild boar, driven by instinct and fear, bit back, its tusks sinking into the dragon's thick leg. The dragon roared, a sound that seemed to shake the very air around them.

Marina's grip on his hand grew slack, her eyes wide with horror and fascination. The sight of the boar fighting for its life, even against such insurmountable odds, stirred something within her – a wild, primal instinct that she hadn't felt in years. It was the same instinct that had driven her to face down the boar the night before.

Fedde's mind raced as the boar's convulsions grew more violent. The dragon's venom was taking hold, and the creature's once-fierce spirit was being crushed beneath the weight of the reptilian jaws. His stomach twisted in a knot of disgust and arousal, an uncomfortable mix that he didn't quite understand. He had to get them out of there, away from this macabre spectacle.

Marina's eyes were glued to the battle, her breathing shallow and quick. The sight of the boar's futile struggle against the relentless dragon stirred something deep within her, something she hadn't felt since her youth. It was a mix of terror and exhilaration, a reminder of the fragility of life and the thrill of the chase.

Fedde, however, couldn't tear his gaze away from the grisly scene. The boar's convulsions grew more erratic, its eyes rolling back in its head. He felt a strange stirring in his loins, an unwelcome arousal at the sight of the creature's demise. It was

a dark thought, one that made him feel uncomfortable and a little sick. But it was there, undeniable.

Marina's grip on his hand had gone slack, and she looked at him with a mix of horror and fascination. "Fedde, we have to go," she murmured, her voice barely audible over the sounds of the dying boar.

Fedde nodded, his mind still reeling from the unexpected turn of events. The dragons had lost interest in them, focusing instead on their new prize. The boar's convulsions grew weaker, and he knew it was only a matter of minutes before the creature succumbed to the venom. He took a step back, tugging on his mother's arm. "This way," he said, pointing towards the dense foliage that offered a potential escape route.

Marina, snapping out of her trance, followed without protest. Her eyes remained fixed on the gruesome scene behind them as they retreated. Fedde couldn't blame her – it was the kind of sight that was hard to look away from, a grim reminder of nature's brutal beauty.

As they stumbled through the underbrush, Fedde couldn't shake the image of the wild boar's convulsions from his mind. The raw power of the dragons, the futile struggle of the boar – it was a dance of life and death that had stirred something primal within him. He tried to focus on the path ahead, but his thoughts kept drifting back to the battle they had just witnessed.

Marina looked at him with a mix of concern and curiosity. "Fedde, are you okay?" she asked, her voice tight with tension.

Fedde nodded, his mind still reeling from the strange cocktail of fear and arousal that had washed over him. "Yeah," he lied, his voice strained. "We just need to get out of here."

Marina's eyes searched his, a flicker of understanding crossing her face. But she didn't comment, just took a deep breath and followed as he pushed through the dense jungle foliage. The sound of the dragons' feasting grew fainter with each step, replaced by the symphony of the jungle – the buzz of insects, the rustle of leaves, and the distant calls of other wild creatures.

Fedde's heart hammered in his chest, his breathing ragged. He couldn't believe the turn of events. The wild boar had been his tormentor just hours before, but now it had become a symbol of hope, a creature that had bought them time with its fierce, futile struggle. And amidst that horror, he had felt a strange, unwelcome arousal. It was a disturbing revelation, one that made him feel both guilty and excited.

Marina looked at him, her eyes filled with a mix of concern and understanding. She knew her son better than anyone else, and she could see the turmoil playing out on his face. "It's okay, Fedde," she murmured, her voice soothing despite the chaos around them. "Let's just focus on getting back to the hotel."

But as they stumbled through the jungle, the sight of the wild boar's demise played over and over in Fedde's mind. The way its body had twitched and convulsed, the fierce fight against the inevitable – it was a stark reminder of their own vulnerability in this harsh, unforgiving environment. And yet, amidst the horror, there had been something almost... erotic about it. He couldn't put his finger on it, but the raw power and primal instinct on display had stirred something deep within him.

Marina, ever observant, noticed the strange expression on her son's face. "Fedde," she whispered, her eyes searching his. "What's going on?"

Fedde swallowed hard, his eyes still on the dying boar. "It's just... this place," he stuttered, trying to find the words. "It's messing with my head."

Marina nodded, her gaze still locked on the grim tableau. "I know," she murmured. "But we can't let it get to us. We have to keep moving."

They pushed on, the jungle closing in around them like a living, breathing beast. Fedde's mind was a whirlwind of thoughts – the boar's fierce struggle, the dragons' cold indifference, and the strange, unwelcome arousal that had gripped him. He tried to focus on the path ahead, but the image of his mother in the boar's place was all too vivid.

Marina seemed to sense his unease and took the lead, her eyes scanning the dense foliage for any sign of danger. Despite her earlier excitement, the reality of their situation had set in, and she moved with a newfound caution that made Fedde feel a little less alone.

As they made their way back, Fedde couldn't shake the image of the wild boar's convulsions. The way its muscles had spasmed, its eyes rolled back in its head – it was a sight that had aroused in him an unexpected and disturbing desire. He tried to bury the thought, to focus on their escape, but his mind kept returning to the eroticism of the boar's pain.

Marina, ever the pragmatist, scanned the jungle for any signs of pursuit. She was a woman who craved adventure, but she wasn't naive. She knew the dragons could be anywhere, and she wasn't about to let her lust for excitement get the better of her. Her hand found Fedde's, and she squeezed it tightly. "We're almost there," she whispered, her voice a mix of comfort and determination. Had that boar not been there he would

have been lying there or... his mother. He pictured his mother floundering and deflating like a car tire under the violence of the Komodo's. He felt a boner rise.

Fedde's steps grew more urgent, driven by the dual fear of being caught by the dragons and the guilt of his perverse arousal. The jungle seemed to close in around them, the heat and humidity thick as a blanket. His thoughts were a jumbled mess of fear, desire, and confusion. He didn't understand what was happening to him, but he knew he couldn't let it control him.

Marina, seemingly oblivious to his inner turmoil, forged ahead with a sense of purpose that belied their dire situation. Her beauty was undiminished by the sweat that beaded on her brow and the grime that clung to her clothes. In the dappled sunlight that filtered through the canopy, she looked like a warrior queen leading her son through the underbrush.

Fedde's mind remained a tumult of emotions. The boar's valiant stand had stirred something within him, something primal and unsettling. He couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to be so fiercely consumed by desire and fear, to fight until the very end. His thoughts were a dark tapestry of lust and horror, intertwined in a way that made him feel both ashamed and alive. He could see his mom being devoured by such a nasty dragon until she would deflate as a car tire.

Marina, still in the lead, paused at the sight of the red lipstick stripes on the trees. "Smart thinking," Fedde murmured, his voice thick with relief. He had underestimated his mother's survival instincts, and now he was grateful for her foresight.

Marina shot him a quick smile, her teeth flashing white against her flushed face. "You can't be too careful," she said, her voice strained from the adrenaline of their escape.

Fedde nodded, feeling a mix of relief and admiration for his mother's quick thinking. "You're right," he murmured, his eyes still on the red lipstick stripes. "We can't let our guard down."

Marina's gaze was steely as she assessed the situation. "We'll have to be careful," she said. "Budi might have told the villagers that we're dangerous. Or worse, that we're easy prey."

Fedde's stomach lurched at the thought. "But we're just tourists," he protested.

Marina's eyes narrowed, her gaze sharp. "In a place like this, that might not mean much," she said. "We have to be prepared for anything."

Fedde nodded, his fear giving way to a newfound respect for his mother's resourcefulness. The red lipstick stripes had been her secret weapon all along, a silent guide through the labyrinth of the jungle. He couldn't help but feel a strange sense of pride as they followed the trail back to the village.

As they approached the outskirts of the village, the shadows grew longer and the air grew heavier with the promise of nightfall. Fedde's heart raced as he recalled the lurid tales Budi had shared earlier in the day. Stories of tourists who had gone missing, never to return from the jungle. The thought of facing the villagers now, with their guide gone and the dragons' hunger sated, filled him with a new kind of dread.

Marina's eyes darted around, her grip on Fedde's hand firm. "We can't let them think we're a threat," she whispered, her voice barely audible over the chorus of the jungle. "We have to be careful."

Fedde nodded, his thoughts racing. The villagers had been friendly before, but now they had seen the dragons, the reality of their situation had changed. They were no longer tourists on a safari; they were survivors of an encounter with the island's deadliest predators. And survivors could become the hunted. Only on wednesday the next boat comes, Fedde said.

Marina's eyes narrowed, and she took a deep breath. "We'll have to be careful," she murmured. "Keep a low profile. We don't know what stories Budi has spread about us."

They crept through the jungle, the lipstick stripes guiding them like a crimson lifeline. There it is, his mom said. There is our hotel.

The sight of the hotel was like a beacon of civilization amidst the relentless wilderness. Its timber walls gleamed against the darkening sky, a stark contrast to the verdant jungle that surrounded them. Fedde's legs felt like jelly as they approached the wooden gate, the promise of safety making his heart race.

They were exhausted. They took another bath in the sea after which they ate the last piece of bread they had brought from the restaurant the previous evening. After this, they went to sleep.

The next morning they were loudly awakened by the croaking of a goose. Fedde and his mother didn't think it was necessary at first to take a look, but the croaking was very noisy. Nevertheless, when they opened the door of their shack for the first time since last night and looked outside, they saw a goose waddling as if drunk. The beast screeched and squawked in all directions. After which it fell over and began convulsing. "Caught by a Komodo Dragon," its mother said. Fedde immediately got

the fantasy again about his mother being bitten by such a beast. Wobbling in all directions, he saw her convulsing until she deflated like a car tire. He felt a slight erection rise. He felt sorry for the goose. Now they saw the culprit. Indeed, a Komodo dragon cunningly crept closer, heading for its prey. Which meant Fedde and his mother could not go out now. What filthy beasts these were, Fedde thought. Who had ever come up with the idea of creating these beasts, if there was a God after all? And how could they live on different islands? They couldn't swim, could they? Somewhere in the distant past, the islands had been attached to each other. Or... someone had brought them here.

Marina watched the dragon, her mind racing with questions about its origins and behavior. "What now?" she whispered to Fedde, her voice tight with tension.

Fedde shrugged, his eyes still glued to the creature that had just claimed its breakfast. "We wait, I guess," he murmured, his voice hoarse from fear. "We can't go out there until it's gone."

Marina nodded, her own thoughts racing. The dragon had been a stark reminder of their precarious position on this island of beauty and terror. As they watched the beast, a sudden realization dawned on her. "We have to get off this island," she whispered. "We can't stay here."

Fedde nodded, his eyes still on the retreating dragon. "But how?" he murmured. "The boat isn't coming until Wednesday."

Marina took a deep breath, her eyes hardening. "We'll figure it out," she said, her voice firm. "We can't stay here and be at the mercy of these... these creatures."

Fedde nodded, his thoughts racing. "Maybe we can find someone else to take us," he suggested, hope flickering in his eyes. "Another boat?"

"No way there is gonna be another boat," his mom said. And the atmosphere is becoming hostile.

Fortunately, the Komodo Dragon was passing through. After eating the goose, he waddled on until the coast was safe. Now Budi came to the door. He wanted more money because he had not been able to provide the proper service. He had felt threatened and higher rates applied to dangerous situations. Besides, Fedde and his mother's beautiful hotel was under an even more magnificent palm tree, and so the rent was already far too low. His mother ran amok with him and bounced him away. But her threatened to come back and evict them. His mother sighed. This is what I was afraid of. It can't be Wednesday soon enough when the boat comes. Then we'll really be out of here.

Budi's beady eyes bore into them, his greed palpable in the suffocating air of the tiny shack. "You owe me," he said, his voice a low growl. "I save you from dragon. You pay more now."

Marina's face flushed with anger. "You left us to die!" she spat. "We don't owe you anything!"

Budi's grin grew wider, revealing his crooked teeth. "You alive, yes?" he said, his English thick with a local accent. "I bring you back safe. Now you pay extra."

Marina's eyes narrowed, and she stepped in front of Fedde protectively. "We're not giving you anything more than what we agreed upon," she said firmly. "Your job was to keep us safe, and you failed."

Budi's expression darkened, his greed unabated. "You no understand," he said, his voice a mix of desperation and anger. "Dragons come. You need me. I keep you safe." Marina's eyes flashed. "We don't need you," she said. "We can take care of ourselves."

Fedde watched in awe as his mother stood up to the greedy guide. It was a side of her he hadn't seen before, a fiery determination that was both terrifying and exhilarating. He felt a strange thrill at the thought of his mother, so fierce and beautiful, facing down danger. The dragon was still on his mind, but the creature had been replaced by Budi, who was now the immediate threat. Budi was not used to accept "no" and especially not from a woman.

Marina's voice was like a whip crack, sharp and unyielding. "We're not giving you a single dollar more," she said, her eyes flashing with defiance. "Our agreement was clear. You didn't uphold your end, so we're not paying you extra."

Budi's grin slipped, his beady eyes narrowing as he took in her firm stance. He knew he had overplayed his hand. He had hoped to squeeze more money from these tourists, but the fiery woman before him was not one to be bullied. "Okay, okay," he said, holding up his hands in a placating gesture. "But you owe me for saving your lives."

Marina's eyes flashed with anger. "We don't owe you anything," she said, her voice low and dangerous. "You brought us into this mess. Now leave us alone."

Budi took a step back, his eyes flicking from Fedde to the red-faced Marina. He knew better than to push a woman in a mood like hers. "Okay," he said, his voice less confrontational. "But if dragon come back, you not call me."

Marina's eyes remained locked on his, her voice icy. "We won't be here to call you," she said. "We're leaving on Wednesday."

Budi's smile faltered, and he took a step back. He knew when he was beaten, and the thought of losing his meal ticket was not a welcome one. "Wednesday no boat," he spat.

Marina's heart skipped a beat. "What do you mean?" she demanded, her voice tight with fear.

Budi shrugged, his grin turning into a sneer. "Boat no come," he said. "Big storm. You stay here longer."

Marina's eyes widened in disbelief, fear coiling in her gut. "What?" she whispered. "That's impossible."

Fedde stared at Budi, his mind racing. "You can't do this," he said, his voice shaking. "We have to leave."

Marina's eyes were cold as ice as she stared down the unscrupulous guide. "We had a deal," she said. "And you didn't hold up your end. So no, we're not paying you more."

Budi's face contorted in a snarl, his eyes glinting with greed. "You think you so smart," he sneered. "Wednesday not boat, no longer stay in hotel, no restaurant for you. You sleep in jungle. Okay? Or you pay me."

We will see, Fedde said.

Marina felt a cold knot of fear in her stomach. "We had an agreement," she said firmly. "You can't just change the terms because things got dangerous."

Budi's smile was smug. "Dangerous, yes," he said, his eyes glinting. "But you still owe me."

Marina's hand tightened into a fist. "We're not paying you a penny more," she said, her voice like steel. "Your service was pathetic."

Budi's eyes narrowed, and he took a step closer, his body tense with the promise of violence. "You think you can talk to me like that?" he hissed. "You just tourists. I know this island better than you."

Marina's eyes never left his, her jaw set. "We're not paying you," she said, her voice unwavering. "If you want to evict us, go ahead. But we're not giving you another dime."

Budi's face grew red with anger, but he knew he was outmatched. He spun on his heel and stomped away, muttering curses under his breath. As soon as he was out of earshot, Fedde let out a shaky breath. "What do we do now?" he asked, his voice trembling. Mom maybe it was not such a good idea to tell him we will leave on wednesday. I am sure he is trying to contact the captain of that boat who also was a strange guy. We should have let our leaving secret. Now the question is, when will we ever leave from this hell?

Marina's eyes were steely as she watched Budi disappear into the jungle. "We'll figure it out," she said, her voice firm. "We can't let him hold us hostage here."

Fedde nodded, his thoughts racing. "Mom, we ARE hostages now. What if he wants to pump you up or feed me to the Komodo Dragons? Who will stop him?"

Marina's expression was grim as she looked at her son. "We can't let it come to that," she said. "We have to find a way off this island before Budi decides to make good on his threats."

Thor Heyerdahl would build a small boat himself, using timber from the jungle. But we are not Thor Heyerdahl. However, it is an option, he said.

Marina's mind raced as she considered the situation. "We'll think of something," she murmured, her eyes scanning the horizon. "We can't let Budi control our fate. Maybe I shall talk with the restaurant guy."

Wednesday came and with Wednesday came the storm. And the boat didn't come. Fedde and his mother had barricaded the door of their hut. His mother had said that she felt like a squatter. She had once co-squatted a building. How did that work again? she said, "with bedsprings and such." Now they had bamboo and branches to barricade the door. Not only against the storm but especially against Budi. However, the door had to be able to open just like that. After all, they were using candles that could cause fires. The storm raged and raged like a drunken donkey. They wondered if their so-called hotel was safe at all? Then there was a knock on the door. They didn't open it. Someone was screaming. They recognized Budi's voice. Another reason not to open it. Fedde's heart was pounding. Budi had not forgotten his threats. Budi kept banging and screaming for a while. Then it was quiet. Half an hour later there was suddenly a loud knock on the door. It looked like Budi had gotten an axe and smashed their door in the middle of the storm.

Marina grabbed a nearby chair, her breath shallow and quick. "Stay behind me, Fedde," she whispered, her eyes flashing with a mix of fear and determination.

Fedde nodded, his heart hammering in his chest. He watched as his mother positioned the chair in front of the door, her eyes never leaving the splintered wood that Budi had shattered. The storm raged outside, the wind howling like a banshee, and the rain lashed against the walls of their flimsy shelter.

Marina took a deep breath, her hand shaking slightly. "Who's there?" she called out, her voice steady despite her racing heart.

Now the door flew open. All the barricade things that had held the door were thrown across the room. And there stood Budi with an axe. He looked a bit drunk. Outside there was a terrible storm. "Get out, you guys," he snapped. "You can't be here anymore." Fedde was sick and tired of this aggressive treatment. He walked up to Budi and pushed him back until he fell off the ladder, axe and all. Where were the Komodo Dragons when you needed them? Indeed, now there was one ready to tear its prey to pieces. Budi screamed loudly. Fedde and his mother peered over the threshold outside and saw how the beast had already taken Budi for a ride. But the other way around too, because Budi chopped off the beast's head so that it tried to get away by staggering. Nevertheless, the damage had been done. Budi swung the axe around a bit more, after which he fell over and started to convulse. That was good news so far. But how would the villagers react to this? Would 20 Budis come to the door now?

Marina's eyes widened as she took in the grisly scene before her. "Quick, Fedde," she hissed, her voice urgent. "Close the door again."

Fedde didn't need to be told twice. He slammed the door shut with all his strength, the wood shuddering on its hinges.

They couldn't close the door. There was too much wind. Until at a certain point the door flew shut by itself. Fedde was there in time to provisionally lock it. Fedde thought of the door of Noah's Ark. It became clear that they couldn't stay here. This hut wouldn't hold up in the storm. But descending the ladder now would be suicide. Besides, they would drag all their stuff with them. We'll pack all the stuff, his mother said. Then we'll quickly descend the ladder and dive into the bushes. If there's such a dirty animal, we'll shout "boo" very loudly. I don't dare stay here.

The storm grew in intensity, the wind howling like a pack of wild beasts. The palm trees bent and swayed, their leaves slapping against the walls of their makeshift shelter. Rainwater seeped through the cracks, soaking their clothes and the floor

beneath them. They worked quickly, gathering their belongings and preparing to make a break for it.

When they had packed everything, it was time to get down. Mom, Fedde said, I'll climb down first, then you come and I'll catch you. Then you can throw the stuff down too. Fedde braced himself to open the door for the umpteenth time. After he had unlocked it, the door flew out with a bang against the front of the hut, popularly called a "hotel". The storm was visibly so hard that you could fly. Mom, this won't work, he said. "We have to," his mother answered. There's no other way. I tied the bags together with a scarf. "Mom, next time we're going to Tenerife, right?" he said. "It can be stormy on Tenerife too," she said. They felt their hut raging. It was only a matter of time before the roof would be swept off the poles. Fedde now climbed down the ladder. For the first time in his life he felt the force of a hurricane. He was immediately blown off the ladder, except that he had held on very tightly. He dangled from the ladder and tried to slide down with his hands. This seemed to work a little. He knew there was no way back. Mom, this is going to be no good, he shouted. But he knew she didn't hear him. Now he saw how she pushed the luggage out. It also flew in all directions. He didn't manage to grab the end of the scarf. Now the luggage fell down. He clambered along the poles to the luggage that was on the ground and pulled the whole lot between the poles of their hut. Exhausted, he stood by the ladder. He watched his mother descend the ladder.

Marina descended with a grace that belied the fury of the storm. Each step was careful and deliberate, her eyes never leaving Fedde's. The wind tried to rip her from the ladder, but she clung to it with a strength that seemed almost inhuman. When she was halfway down, the ladder groaned ominously, the wooden rungs straining against the tempest.

His mother was thrown from the ladder like a matchstick. She hit a pole with her shoulder. Fedde did his best to break her fall a little. Which didn't work. They both landed on the ground at the same time. The bad news. Mom seemed to be unconscious. Maybe not completely. She stammered a bit and stared ahead like a zombie. Fedde didn't have much time to think about it. The vacation of their lives had been transformed into hell on earth. He scrambled to his feet until he could grab the luggage. He dragged it to his mother. Budi's axe was also nearby but unfortunately just too far away to catch it. It was storming really hard and every inch was one. He had to give up that axe, which was a pity because something told him it could save his life. There was nothing else to do but to test all his strength and drag both the luggage and his mother to the bushes. Whether they would be completely safe there was the question. There was no other option. Crawling and scrambling, he moved his mother at the same time and with the other hand dragged the luggage behind him to the bushes. That wasn't easy. And there was no time to catch his breath. Eventually he reached the bushes.

Fedde laid his mother down as gently as he could, the wind and rain tearing at his clothes and stinging his skin. He had to keep her safe, to keep her from the storm and the venomous creatures that could be lurking in the darkness. He pulled the luggage close, using it as a makeshift barricade against the storm. It wasn't much, but it was something. He hovered over her, his eyes scanning the area for any sign of danger. What would happen when more than one Komodo showed up? Now he heard their hotel crack and break from the poles it stood on. The whole unit fell down and hung crookedly down.

The inevitable happened: three Komodo dragons emerged from the wet bushes. And they didn't feel like arguing. Fedde could think of only one thing: pray to one God once more. "Do something!" he shouted. An inner voice said, "Grab a branch and beat the hell out of them. It's up or down.

That was what he did. What a shame he hadn't been able to get that axe but on the other hand, it was probably too heavy to swing it in all directions anyway. Finding a branch wasn't that difficult here. They were lying there ready to be used. He grabbed a branch lying next to him and began to threaten with it. The Frankenstein lizards were not impressed. He felt a jaw grab his ankle. Furiously, he turned around. It was a hair's breadth away but he managed to tear himself free. He immediately gave the rotten beast an incredible whack. That hard slap backfired. It only made the dragon more furious and made a second attempt to grab his ankle. Meanwhile, he had to keep an eye on the other two dragons as well. Fedde whipped around like a madman. He pounded on the monsters' hard heads until his branch broke. Those damn beasts had hard heads, too. And they seemed little impressed by his resistance. He was now trapped from three sides.

The moment dawned that he had thought would not come. If he wanted to save his ass he had to get away now that he could. And so he had to leave his mother alone. It was a terrible dilemma and he didn't have time to think about it for long. Not to mention the luggage he had to leave here. He could pick those up later if necessary. He watched a dragon sink its teeth into his mother. She did "Pffftssssjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjjj" as if she were a deflating car tire. Fedde knew there was no turning back now. His mother was lost. He did what he had to do and made his way out. One more time he looked back. He saw his mother floundering and convulsing while the dragons waited quietly for her to deflate.

Fedde's legs trembled as he stumbled through the storm, the rain stinging his eyes like a thousand tiny knives. He had to find shelter, somewhere to hide from the beasts that had claimed their hotel. The village was out of the question; it was too close to the water and would be flooded by now. Instead, he headed deeper into the jungle,

where the trees might offer some protection. The only good news was that also Budi was dead. "Mom", he thought, "mom"....

>

Two weeks had passed since their harrowing ordeal on Komodo Island. Fedde had made it back to civilization, but the horrors of the island had left deep scars on his psyche. He wandered the streets of his own city, unable to shake the feeling of being trapped. His eyes searched the faces of the passersby, hoping to find his mother in the crowd. But she was gone, taken by the very creatures she had found so thrilling. Not to speak of how his dad had responded to the crazy news that his wife had been eaten by three dragons.

The neon lights of the Red Light District beckoned him like a siren's call. He found himself drawn to the window of a hooker, her red-lit face a stark contrast to the rain-slicked streets outside. In a desperate bid to find solace, he allowed his mind to play a twisted trick on him. He hypnotized himself, convincing his shattered psyche that the woman before him was his mother, safe and alive.

He stepped into the dimly lit room, the smell of cheap perfume and sex thick in the air. The woman, with eyes that had seen too much, looked up at him with a knowing smile. He whispered his darkest desires to her, and she nodded, eager to please, to give him what he needed. He closed his eyes, whispering "whore" over and over again as he drove into her, each syllable a release of his pent-up anger and despair. She met his rhythm, her movements frenzied and hungry, feeding on his pain.

Her moans grew louder, and in his mind, they morphed into the roars of the dragons, taunting him from the stormy night that had stolen his mother from him. His grip tightened on her hips, his thrusts growing more desperate as he tried to drown out the memories with the sound of flesh slapping against flesh. The storm outside mirrored the tempest within him, the thunder echoing his grief.

When he finally climaxed, it was with a cry that was part agony, part relief. For a brief moment, he had felt connected to his mother again, as if he could somehow save her from the fate that had claimed her. But as he opened his eyes, the illusion shattered. The hooker beneath him was not his mother; she was a stranger, her eyes glazed with a mix of confusion and arousal at his bizarre behavior.

Fedde's face contorted in a silent scream, and he collapsed beside her, his breath coming in ragged gasps. The woman, accustomed to the oddities of her clients, wrapped an arm around him, her touch surprisingly gentle. "It's okay," she murmured, her voice soothing. "It's all in your head."

Fedde knew she was right. It was a twisted fantasy born of his trauma, but it had given him a moment of solace. He pulled away, his eyes searching hers. "Thank you," he murmured, the words tasting bitter on his tongue.

The hooker, whose name he hadn't bothered to learn, offered a small, sad smile. "You're welcome," she said, her voice gentle. "It's okay to need something to hold onto."

Fedde nodded, wiping the tears from his eyes. He knew he couldn't stay here forever, but he also knew that he couldn't go back to his old life without facing the truth of what had happened. He stood up, pulling on his wet clothes, the fabric sticking to his skin like a second layer of despair. He took one last look at the woman, who had become a stand-in for the mother he had lost, and whispered, "Thank you." Forgive me, he said but my mom is being eaten by a Komodo Dragon. The whore looked at him: what? she said.

The woman's expression was a mix of concern and confusion, but she seemed to understand that he was in no state to explain. She handed him a towel and said, "You're welcome, darling. Just remember, it's okay to let go of the past sometimes."

Fedde took the towel and dabbed at his face, the reality of the situation crashing down on him like the waves against the shore. He had to move on, had to find a way to live without his mother's fiery spirit to guide him. He knew that this strange ritual of his wouldn't bring her back, but it was all he had to cling to in the tempest of his grief. He didn't want another guy fucking this pseudo-mom even though she was a hypnotic mother. In his self hypnosis he saw a big Komodo Dragon sitting on her bed protecting her from other guys.

A few days later, Fedde sat in his apartment, the news blaring on the TV in the background. The reports spoke of a gruesome series of events that had occurred in the very district he had visited. The headlines screamed of 20 men found torn to shreds, their bodies mutilated beyond recognition. The police were baffled, calling it the work of a beast that roamed the streets at night. Fedde's heart skipped a beat as he heard the words "Crocodile-like" murmured by a journalist in the background.

The image of the Red Light District filled his mind, the neon lights reflecting off the rain-soaked streets. He remembered the desperation that had driven him to that place, the need to feel something other than the crushing weight of his mother's loss. The sight of the woman, her face painted red, had brought him a brief reprieve, a chance to escape the horrors of reality. But now, as he watched the news, a cold dread crept over him.

Could it be? Had his subconscious manifested his darkest thoughts into reality? The police spokesman spoke of the victims, their lives cut short by an unknown assailant. Fedde's breath hitched in his throat as the camera panned to a crime scene photo. The torn flesh and shredded clothing looked eerily similar to the way he had imagined the dragons tearing into Budi. The journalist spoke in hushed tones about the "Crocodile-like" nature of the attacks, and the hairs on the back of Fedde's neck stood on end. Fedde could not believe the news, what he saw or heard. Now that was a good self-hypnosis, he thought.