

All is Fair in War and Dragon Scales

SAMPLE

## Chapter 1

### The Eagle and The Falcon Pt. 1

“While time is a construct that is human made, I think you can all see that its creation has helped us tremendously in different ways. Some might say that creating weeks, days, hours, minutes, and seconds was an idea given to us by a god. Interesting, isn’t it? Don’t you ever sit down and ask yourselves just how something so perfect came to be?”

The students blink, struggling to stay awake.

“Littlemen.”

Cailin flinches, raising his head and pretending not to have been sleeping on his knuckles. The girls in his class that have been watching him coo and giggle, eyes filled with love and want.

“Yes ma’am?”

“What do you think? Was time given to us by a god?”

He yawns. “Yeah, sure.”

The teacher nods her head, standing up from her desk. She grabs a ruler, walking up to the closest desk in front of her. She slams her ruler down on a student’s wax tablet. The rest of them are yanked out of their dreams. They sit up properly without a second thought, backs straight and eyes forward.

“You all came here to learn magic. To make something of your lives. To go back to the world one day and have a happy life. A much happier life than you lived outside The KSDM’S walls, yes?”

The students nod, their faces dropping with frowns.

The teacher smiles, clamping her hand around the ruler. Her fingers turn white. “This is the beginning of the year. So, I have to make you aware of the most important rule at this school before you get your wands: Don’t mess with time. Time is a perfectly created construct that has its complexities. Do not. Touch it. I don’t care if you need to go back just a few seconds to complete your homework. No, no. Spells *that* strong have consequences. Why is that?”

Cailin sighs. “Because magic is not human made. It’s not perfect.”

The teacher nods. “Exactly. Now....” She looks at the empty seat in the back of her classroom. “Where’s Finley?”

Out the back doors of King’s School for Dragon Masters, large fields of crops and pastures of grazing animals are tended to by workers and small children carrying buckets of vegetables and fruits just picked off their bushes and trees. The entire area gleams under the afternoon sun, emitting peace and tranquility.

Finley has decided to enjoy this perfect day kneeling behind a large rock at the edge of a forested area, staring at the dead carcass of a raven. It must have fallen from a tree, its head turned at an unnatural angle. Strangely interested, his eyes are wide and round, not blinking for several minutes. He doesn’t touch it, knowing his mother wouldn’t do such a thing, so he shouldn’t either.

*But... She wouldn’t be staring at it either.*

There’s a huff, a large gust of wind blowing back his long blonde hair.

Finley looks up, staring at the glittering eyes of a large and imposing alpha dragon. It's black scales glow with different colors under the refracting light of the sun shining through the tree leaves. At first, the dragon looks angry. It growls lowly in its throat, its head tilting.

Finley falls back in shock, hitting the ground. Then, he sees the green, painted dot right under the dragon's right eye.

"Oh.... Leo. You scared me." The dragon huffs again, eyes flicking from the dead raven to Finley, and back again. Finley raises his hands in surrender. "I just found it here, I swear. I didn't hurt it."

Leo pauses, then grins. He suddenly moves to position himself in a playful stance, head to the ground. He pushes his nose into Finley's chest, eyes closing as Finley's hand pats his head.

"I'm guessing you're here to tell me to go back to class?"

Leo backs away, sitting down. He doesn't respond.

Finley looks away. "I don't want to go." Leo's head tilts. "Kids are mean."

Leo's ears fold, whimpering. After a moment, Finley's eyes slowly shift back to the raven.

Leo promptly crushes the carcass under his paw.

Finley's confused by this, but Leo pretends not to notice. His head turns up to the sky with his eyes closed, pretending to sunbathe.

Finley chuckles, falling back to rest against the ground with his hair spreading among the grass. He fiddles with a shining blue butterfly pin in his hair as he stares up at the clouds, the

smile slowly leaving his face as the urge to investigate that raven fills his mind again. He closes his eyes, trying to ignore it.

*Hold on.*

His eyes open, seeing another raven land on a branch above him. It squawks, clicking its tongue. It sounds like it's laughing.

*I've never seen a raven around here before—*

“Fin?”

Finley sits up, opening his mouth, but Leo's gone. And so is the raven carcass.

“Fin!”

Suddenly, who cares about ravens? A smile appears on his face, and he gets up. He runs through the trees until he gets to the crop fields.

He stops at the edge of the wheat fields, chuckling as he sees his best friend Cailin standing alone with his hands on his hips, staring at the stalks.

Whatever he's about to say gets stuck in his throat. With the sun high in the sky, Cailin's shaggy brown hair looks shiny, the light casting a halo of gold at the crown of his head.

Finley frowns, crossing his arms. If there was one word he'd use to describe Cailin, it would be *heavenly*. It was used so much by the young ladies in his classes that even the nannies of the school know about it. Cailin's popular, handsome, athletic, and talented. His presence demanded attention—

“There you are,” Cailin says, turning around. “I’ve been looking for you, where in spells have you been? What? Why are you staring at me like that?”

“You think I hid in there or something?” Finley asks.

“Not gonna answer my question?” Finley turns his head, defiant. “Well, I was about to go find out. You’ve hid in the wheat before.”

“You would’ve gotten lost yourself.”

“You missed the first class of the day. Why? Is someone bullying you again?”

Finley walks down the dirt path back towards the school. In the distance, the large and imposing gray brick castle they called home. Cailin walks with him. “Just lost track of time.”

“On your first day?” Cailin wraps an arm around his shoulder. “I won’t pester you about it.” He pauses. “Lady Penelope will do that for me.”

Finley groans. He can hear the nagging already.

“Hey boys!” The two stop, meeting eyes with an old farmer carrying heads of lettuce a few feet away. “What are you two doing out here? Classes aren’t over yet!”

Finley swallows nervously, stepping behind Cailin who raises his hand confidently in a wave. “Good afternoon, Mr. Devon! We were just heading back.”

Mr. Devon huffs. “Right.”

“I’m telling the truth! I’ve never lied to you!”

“Quit pushing it. Come over here and take this extra basket of lettuce for your mother.”

Cailin runs over, taking the basket. “Where’s your grandson? Lolling about?”

Mr. Devon is not amused. “Wow, you really got me laughing, boy. He’s tending to the parsley.” Mr. Devon glances at Finley who has stayed all those feet away. “What’s with Fin? He alright?”

Finley’s attention is on a ladybug crawling along the blades of grass.

“Fine. Just Finley,” Cailin says. “Had a hard first day.”

Mr. Devon hums, shifting through his pockets. “You fifteen-year-olds and your *hard days*.” He takes out a persimmon. “Here. Give him this for me. From my best batch.”

Cailin chuckles. “Give it to him yourself. Hey. Fin.” Finley looks up, Cailin beckoning him over with a finger. Finley hesitates, before walking up to them. “Mr. Devon wants to give you a present.”

Finley holds a hand out, Mr. Devon setting the persimmon on his palm. “From my best batch.”

“Thank you, Mr. Devon,” Finley says, cheeks turning pink.

The old farmer coughs, uncomfortable. “Go on now, get. Your next class should be starting soon.”

“We’re getting our wands today,” Cailin says.

“Congratulations. Let me know what specializations you two get later.” Mr. Devon gets down on his knees to get started on another basket of lettuce.

Cailin salutes. “Yes sir!”

The two walk up the steps towards the back door of the school. Two large alpha dragons sit on each side as bodyguards, both of their ears lifting at the sight of Finley. The two dragons happily lean their heads in for a pat on the head, Finley happily granting them.

Cailin notices a purple dot under one of the dragon's eyes. "Hey Violet!" Cailin calls, the dragon on the right turning her head to him as if just noticing he's there. "Take these to Mother. We're heading to class." He holds up the basket of lettuce. Violet hums, gently taking the handle into her mouth. The back doors open on their own, Violet shrinking her body to fit through them and happily running inside, flapping her wings to get to the other floors.

Cailin and Finley follow her inside, the first floor and common area of the school welcoming them with pops of color sprouting from the wands of older students that run around. Juvenile dragons they're training either sit on their shoulders, hang on backpacks, or lay on top of their heads.

The air is thick with the smells of old parchment and fresh rain. The floor beneath their feet is smooth black tile that, with every step, shift gently. They rearrange themselves like a puzzle, gold outlines creating drawings of dragons or other creatures. Arched windows line the walls revealing not the outside world, but visions of different landscapes: a forest bathed in moonlight one moment, a stormy coastline the next.

Chandeliers float overhead, dancing around each other. Their lights shine in hues of deep purples and golds, casting shadows along the stone walls. Tall, polished wooden doors lead to classrooms in varying hallways, each one engraved with a unique emblem that hinted at the magical specialization taught inside: Fire, Wind, Water, Nature, Mental, Dark, and Light.



A grand staircase in the center of it all splits in opposite directions on the upper floors leading to dorm rooms where the students and their families live. As though made of melted down silver, it flows like a liquid but firm under their feet.

Next to the staircase is a towering grandfather clock that ticks rhythmically.

“Now class, I expect you to choose your wands wisely. The KSDM has deemed you all fit to wield wands after a significant testing period. If you keep up with your good behavior, you’ll be able to get your dragons next year. But before then, you’ll need guidance.” Ms. Green, the head of the magic training department smiles. “Mr. Len and I will be your guides.”

She turns her back to the class, gesturing to the large room they all stand in. What has been deemed “The Arcanum Vault” by other students, is an awe-inspiring chamber. It’s bathed in a soft glow that pulses with the latent energy of thousands of wands of varying ages. The room is vast with towering shelves made of dark wood, intricately carved with runes and symbols that protect and preserve all the wands stacked within. The shelves rise all the way to the high ceiling, where constellations of shimmering stars twinkle.

“This vault is yours to explore.”

Each wand rests in its own alcove. Cradled on velvet cushions, they are all waiting to find their masters. Some wands hum softly, others occasionally spark with a flicker of light, as if testing their power.

“Each wand is infused with a specialization. You will not be able to know what specialization it is until you’ve claimed it.” Ms. Green turns back to the students, pushing her

square glasses further up her nose. “So, take your time when you’re looking around. Do not use them until we tell you it’s okay to do so. Now, off you go.”

All the students race down the halls, scattering around the room.

Finley’s eyes sparkle as he looks around the vault, not knowing where he wants to start. He’s overwhelmed and anxious. This is possibly the biggest choice he will ever have to make in his life.

“Cailin, where are you starting?” He turns to look at his best friend, but the space next to him is vacant.

He finds Cailin already talking and walking around with other friends in the class. Disheartened, but not surprised, Finley lets Cailin leave without a fuss. But as soon as he realizes he’s alone, Finley can feel the stares on him.

The hair on his neck rises, but he ignores it. He runs into the nearest hall to his left, taking his time to really look at each wand to see if he can guess which specialization they hold.

He hears laughter. Finley tenses, looking down the hall where he came in. There, three boys have blocked his way. They whisper to each other, all three of them with wands in their hands. The boy in the middle fiddles with it before flicking it towards Finley. A puny spark of lightning hits the floor. It bounces once, twice, three times before striking Finley in the shin.

“Ow....” Finley mumbles, stumbling back. He looks around for the teachers but they’re nowhere nearby.

The boys cackle. “Hey, Rapunzel, did that hurt?” The one in the middle asks.

The boy on the right twirls his own wand, wind whipping through the air. The spell twists Finley's blonde hair together, yanking it. He yelps as he's tugged to the floor.

The boys walk towards him. "Let me try something out, too."

"Hold on, I want to see if I can make him cry—"

Finley gets up and makes a run for it. The boys are quick to follow, the unclaimed wands humming and jumping in their alcoves as Finley moves through the hallways. He turns right, left, and right again, until he loses them.

He stops when he's sure they're no longer following him, out of breath. He coughs, lightly touching his long blonde hair with a frown.

There's a loud creak.

Finley stops, letting go of his hair to slowly spin around. *Where...?*

Mistakenly, he's traveled deep into the vault. So deep, he's reached the wands that were built thousands of years ago. The shelves are old and cracked.

Finley's read a lot of books over the years. He loves reading. He loves jumping into fictional worlds to leave the one he's living in. But he's taken a liking to history books as well.

He knows the older the wand, the stronger it is.

And he can feel one calling to him. Deeper. Way in the back.

"Fin?" Cailin walks up behind him. "You feel it too?"

## Chapter 2

### The Eagle and The Falcon Pt. 2

**THEN...**

The happiest day of Christine's life was the day the baby arrived.

Known for her sarcastic comments, crude vocabulary, and frothing hatred for the residents of the nearby village, Gillian (though she was one, twenty years ago), Christine was a very well-known nanny-in-training in the popular Nanny Program at the school. Not only was it shocking to many that someone like her would so desperately want to be a mother, but the other nannies just couldn't stand the thought of a child being placed in her care.

“We live in a world with such vile creatures.”

Everyone in the nursery turned to look at 30-year-old Christine who was pinning her stick straight brown hair into a tight bun. She never minded the stares; she got them often enough.

“Christine. Must you say such things?” Nanny Ethel asked.

If there was one rule Christine lived by, it was to never silence herself. *Much like Nanny Ethel's own daughter*, she thought. Said daughter was busy wailing to the heavens in her mother's arms. She wanted everyone to know she was exhausted.

“The headmaster will never grant you a child as long as you think like that,” said Nanny Evelyn. She was shaking a baby rattle in front of her son as he laid on the floor.

“I’m as happy as the next person that so many kids get to live their lives in a school like this, with people like us, but can’t the headmaster do something about that violent village?” Christine asked, sitting down in front of the fireplace to warm her hands. “It’s like that headmaster hopes things will continue on like this so he has more kids to raise.”

“There she goes again—”

“Lady Christine, please! Watch your words, he could be listening!”

“I agree!” Everyone turned to Lady Penelope, 16 years old and in the middle of the Nanny Program. “Babies and children are the only pure things in this world. Everyone else is vile. That’s what you meant, right Lady Christine?”

Everyone turned back to Christine, who smiled.

“Lady Penelope, don’t encourage her,” Nanny Ethel said. “And how dare you. There’s nothing vile about us nannies.” She placed her daughter on a nearby cloth hammock as her cries settled into tired whimpers.

“I think there’s something to be said about how none of you are questioning this whole arrangement,” Christine said, moving over so Penelope could join her by the fireplace. “We should be out there making a difference, so no more kids need to be in our care.”

Nanny Ethel couldn’t stand it a second longer, feeling as though she was hearing something she shouldn’t be. “There’s nothing we can do—”

“I’m excited to be granted a child,” Christine continued, “but I’ll tell them the truth of the world. They’ll never be sheltered when they’re a part of my family. You never know, maybe they’ll be the ones to bring change.”

Everyone quieted down.

“Me too. I’ll be honest with my kids,” said Penelope.

“You should make me your mentor,” Christine said.

“Really? You’ll really mentor me?”

August 25th, 1585 was the day that Christine’s life began.

The now 40-year-old woman had a book open, sitting on a stool in her bedroom as the sun shined through her window when she heard a shout.

"Christine!"

Christine jumped, the door opening and Penelope running in. She was out of breath, cheeks flushed, her wavy blonde hair out of its usual high, sophisticated bun. She stood in the doorway for a long time, trying to catch her breath. Her blue eyes were wide, and she had a smile Christine had never seen before. She was not expecting such a dramatic entrance, and Christine was not a fan of surprises.

"What is it, Penelope?" Christine asked, closing her book and setting it to the side.

There was a low and rumbling roar that shook the floors. Christine smiled at the sound, knowing another baby had arrived at their doorstep.

"The council. They said we're ready," Penelope whispered as another soft groan came from downstairs.

Christine stood. “Are you sure?”

"Positive! Ash from the council is downstairs waiting for us right now!" Penelope's eyes welled with tears as she pressed her hands to her cheeks. "I'm going to be a mother!"

Christine could hardly believe it. She had been waiting for this moment for years. If she thought about it, she had been dreaming of this ever since she was young. In the village of Gillian, nearly everyone was poor and starving. There wasn't enough food to go around, so kids were seen as death sentences to their parents. Christine's life as a girl born there was filled with neglect. She told herself every day that if she ever had the chance to have a baby of her own, they would never want for anything.

Christine slowly walked up to Penelope, who was trying to fix her hair. "Leave it," she said.

Penelope dropped her hands. "Yes."

"Take deep breaths."

"Taking them!"

"Then, let's go."

Penelope wiped away her tears. "Let's."

They walked out of Christine's room within The KDSM together. The entire floor was indoors, the hallway lined with doors that had more rooms behind them. Kids and their parents walked together, entering and exiting, waving to each other. Like a small town, everyone knew each other.

The two hurried downstairs and entered the common area, which, in contrast to the upper floors built for families, was quiet. What was usually a floor filled with loud and rambunctious

kids, the air filled with pops of energy from the tips of wands, was calm. If any students were walking around, they did so quietly. Violet was waiting for them, wings outstretched and hopping around.

She settled, thumping to the floor on her belly as her large head leaned over to where two council members were standing. The dragon let out a huff as he nudged the bundle Ash held.

The two council members, Ash and Amelia, stood together. Penelope and Christine walked up, anxious and trembling.

“No need to be so nervous,” Ash said. “You’re both ready.” He opened the bundle of blankets to show off the small face of a sleeping baby boy. “Welcome Cailin, Christine. Your adopted son. Congratulations.”

She stepped forward, eyes watering as Ash set the baby in her awaiting arms. Amelia held the other baby, whose gray eyes were wide open, fascinated by the floating chandeliers above. “Penelope. Congratulations. This is Finley.” Amelia set him in Penelope’s arms. “They arrived together. We hope you keep them close to one another.”

“Of course,” Penelope said.

“Are they brothers?” Christine asked.

“No,” Amelia replied. “Usually, if they’re related, they come in one basket. But these two each came in their own. Their parents might have known each other, but... it’s an odd coincidence.” She smiled sadly. “That’s all I know. There were no letters left behind for them.”

Christine shook her head, pressing a kiss on Cailin’s forehead. “It doesn’t matter. I promise to take care of him.” She looked at Finley. “Both of them.”



“Christine.... Can I really do this?”

“Don’t be silly. You’ll be the best mother in the world.”

Penelope sniffled as she stared down at Finley and Cailin, who were placed in a wooden cradle together. Both asleep, they held onto each other’s hands tightly, heads resting against each other.

“I feel so stupid. I love him so much already. There’s a part of me that’s nervous for when he grows up. This school... it’s lovely, but... it’s difficult—”

“Live in the present, Penelope,” Christine said quietly, kneeling next to her so they can both stare at their new sons. “You know they won’t be babies for long. Don’t worry about such things until you need to. Enjoy this.”

Penelope nodded, gently rocking the cradle. “I know, but... I just feel uneasy for some reason.”

**NOW...**

“Fin...? You feel it too?”

Cailin and Finley stand together in the decrepit vault of wands that creak and groan around them. Broken glass, uprooted nails, and shattered copper mirrors are scattered around the floors.

“If that pulling sensation is what you mean, yes. I feel it.”

“Interesting!” The boys flinch. They turn to see Mr. Len standing there, hands on his hips. “Interesting, interesting! No kids have ever made it this far into the vault!”

Finley fixes his posture, rigid. “M-Mr. Len! Good afternoon!”

“Why not?” Cailin asks. “Doesn’t every kid want a stronger wand?” He walks up to the nearest shelf and blows off the dust.

“Good question. Give it a try. Touch one.”

Finley hesitates before moving closer to the wands in front of Cailin. Before he can touch them, a wand shocks him back. “Ow!”

“Fin!” Cailin takes his hurt hand. “You okay?”

“Yeah.”

“These wands are older and more temperamental.” Mr. Len walks over to another shelf, sighing. “They’re very particular about who they want their master to be. Back here at least.” He frowns. “The energy down here is so dark; the kids usually avoid it.” He looks back at the boys, who are standing without an ounce of discomfort on their faces. “But neither of you feel that dark energy.”

“No. Just a pulling in our chests,” Cailin says, letting Finley’s hand go.

“You two were brought here at the same time, weren’t you?” Mr. Len asks.

“Yes?” Cailin answers.

“Lead the way.”

Finley blinks. “I don’t understand.”

“To the wand. Lead to where you’re being pulled.”

The three walk deeper into the vault. The air grows colder, the room darker. Mr. Len pulls out his own wand, a harsh white spotlight appearing at the top.

“Are we allowed to be back here?” Finley asks, nervous.

“If you weren’t, you wouldn’t be able to *get* back here,” Mr. Len answers, no longer messing around. His face is serious, glancing around the room uncomfortably. “You’re still being pulled forward? We don’t have to go back?”

“No, but I’m getting closer,” Cailin says.

“Me, too,” Finley adds.

The students stop. Mr. Len stops with them, eyes widening with excitement. “I see....”

The kids don’t ask what he means, both entering a section of shelves to their right. A few wands down, they stop, both of them rubbing their chests uncomfortably.

“Here,” Cailin says.

“Pick them up!” their teacher urges.

After his first mistake, Finley is too scared to get close. Cailin picks his wand up first, an ordinary long and thin brown wand that shimmers gold in the light.

Finley watches him, waiting for any backlash. “Cay....”

“It’s okay, Fin.”

Finley swallows, turning back to his wand and slowly picking it up. It’s painted black. That’s it.

“Why is yours prettier than mine?” Finley asks, glaring.

“I don’t know. A pretty man needs a pretty wand.”

Finley rolls his eyes.

Footsteps draw nearer.

“Mr. Len, what are you doing back here?” Ms. Green says angrily. “Did the headmaster—”

“MS. GREEN!” Mr. Len shouts, turning around to face her.

Ms. Green stops, eyes widening.

Mr. Len’s voice is filled with warning. “Be careful! It’s... dangerous back here! You know, so many nails poking out. So glad you could join us! Me! And the *kids!*”

Ms. Green clears her throat, putting on a smile. “Yes, absolutely, thank you for the warning! You and the kids, yes! Um, what— what are you doing back here with them?”

Mr. Len steps to the side, revealing Finley and Cailin holding their wands.

Ms. Green pales. “Oh.”

Again, Finley fixes his posture, desperate to impress his teachers. “Ms. Green! Good afternoon!”

“*Oh?* What does that mean? Is this bad?” Cailin asks.

“What she means is, *ohhh* my gosh how wonderful!” Mr. Len gestures for Ms. Green to join in.

“I— Yes! This is a great day! Nobody has chosen any wand this far back in the vault in decades!”

Silence.

“Cailin. Finley,” Mr. Len says. “Are these your wands?”

“I think so,” Cailin answers.

“Yes,” Finley agrees.

Their wands spark.

Everyone watches as Finley and Cailin’s names are written with golden flares on the hilts.

“Congratulations,” Mr. Len says. “Let’s head back. I can’t stand it back here a moment longer.”

As Finley and Cailin are led back to their class, they pass by a copper mirror that’s dangling off a broken-down shelf of wands.

As they pass it, Finley stops.

“Fin?” Cailin asks.

Finley stares at himself in the mirror, not seeing anything out of the ordinary.

“Sorry!” He says with a smile, catching up with them. “Thought I saw something, but it was nothing.”

“Don’t scare me like that. I may be an adult, but this being all the way back here makes me nervous,” Mr. Len says, continuing to lead everyone out.

Finley remains at the back of the group, swallowing nervously. It was in his peripheral vision, so it could have been nothing. But he was sure he saw his reflection looking right at him as he walked by.