

The horses trudged slowly up out of the valley, straining under the weight of the cart which hauled Grisom's trunk, the trunk full of gold and three fully grown men: Grisom, Charlie and the bound Leland. Doris loved running in the tall grass of the prairie and did so as the cart ambled along. Charlie enjoyed watching her tumble and fall as they travelled and was glad to give her some time out of the saddle bag.

After watching her for a bit Charlie turned to Grisom, "You think she's the last one?"

Grisom looked over at Doris as she sped ahead of the wagon, trying to outpace the horses. "Not sure." He replied. "She's certainly the only one that's ever been on record of being in captivity. And with the way their bodies supposedly disintegrate when they pass on, there's been no record of them before excepting the very brief mentions in the Coalition's record books and even those are sketchy."

They rode along in silence for a few seconds.

"You know they are going to want to take a look at her when we get there." Grisom said flatly.

Charlie nodded. "They ain't gonna keep her or anything."

"No. I don't think they would. And I don't think Doris would let them." Grisom added with a chuckle.

Charlie smiled.

Grisom continued, "They'll want to study her a bit though. She's a one of a kind. She's the United State's only native mystical creature. No other creatures like her exist here. The Coalition will want to learn as much as they can about her for the records."

Charlie nodded and looked out at Doris who'd now climbed up the tug of one of the horse's harnesses and was proudly riding upon it's back, closing her eyes as the wind blew into her face, smoothing back the fur on her head. The same horses she'd spooked the night before took her as a peaceful creature now. This was one of her wonders, she could be bold and almost vicious like she had been last night or she can be sweet and peaceful as she was now. Charlie settled back against the buck board and let the rolling of the cart lull him into a nap.

Charlie startled awake to the sound of voices. His right hand went instinctively

to his gun. He came to his senses and realized that Grisom was talking to Leland who'd regained consciousness after being wholoped. And Leland was none to happy at his predicament.

"You have no right. You ain't no lawman. You ain't got no power to apprehend me." Leland was shouting from his prone position in the back of the cart where he lie between the two trunks. Doris had left her perch on the horses and was now seated on the gold trunk looking down at Leland as he spoke, cocking her head like a dog does when they are trying to work something out they can't quite grasp.

"Well, " Grisom started and Charlie could tell by that 'well' that this conversation had been going on for quite some time before he'd woken up, "I tell ya Leland. I may be no sort of official lawman as you say, but I can be quite sure that there's a bank in Yankton that's going to love to have a few words with you once we get there. And It's my thinkin' that they may just have a reward to offer for making sure you arrive."

"Be that as it may, you have no right to make me ride back here lyin' down like an animal with this...creature or whatever it is strarin' at me."

Doris understood this and took the insult directly. Her back arched and her teeth bared. A small, strawberry sized ball of flame hovered between he two long incisors. A low whistle escaped her throat.

Grisom laughed, "Now, you see you've insulted her Leland. And if there's one thing Doris can't abide, it's insults. So if I were you, I'd apologize or things might get a touch bit hot back there."

Leland looked over at Doris again and the fireball had grown to the size of a tangerine and hovered about two inches from her mouth. The whistling got higher pitched. Leland swallowed hard, "I...I'm sorry for insulting you."

Doris didn't look appeased.

Charlie looked back and laughed, "Don't forget you manners Leland, Doris here is a proper lady."

Leland shot Charlie a look that showed he hated to lower himself this much to an animal, but he turned back toward Doris and said, "I am powerful sorry if I have offended you...ma'am." He nodded his head a bit.

Doris immediately closed her mouth and smiled, the fireball disappearing into thin air. Sitting pretty in the sun, proud to have been called 'ma'am.'

The cart continued towards Yankton, with Doris keeping a watchful and weary eye on Leland as they ambled along.