

A Running Dream

“You can’t catch me!” Sebastian said with a laugh.

“Wanna bet?” his little brother replied smiling. It was a sunny day in Ensenada and on days such as these, the people could not do anything but be drawn out to the streets. The marketplace was especially filled with masses of people – sellers and buyers – anxious to see what new things there were. Houses were decorated with strings and flowers of the colors red, blue, and white – the colors of Puerto Rico. The Atlantic Ocean shimmered through the spaces between buildings and gave the whole city its astonishing atmosphere.

“Excuse me! Coming through! Sorry!” Martias tried his best to navigate through the crowds and catch up to Sebastian.

“You’re so slow, Martias! Did you grow up with snails?” Sebastian joked as he turned around and stuck out his tongue. Sebastian’s physical face features – freckles, oval shape head, and all - made it look even dorkier than it should.

“I’ll catch up to you in time!” Martias shouted back. His black, scrubby hair moved up and down as he took his steps. Martias’ smile lit up his blue eyes.

“Only in your dreams, turtle rider!” Sebastian replied. They crossed through the marketplace, accidentally knocking over a small stand of apples.

“Hey! Start watching where you’re going, you brats! I can’t deal with this every day!” the owner said with a frown.

“Sorry, Jose!” they both replied as they continued running. Both of the two kept running at fast paces until the small street ended at a messy and garbage-full place. Now, the siblings stood across from each other.

“Oh! Looks like I’ve got no way to go”, Sebastian said with a grin and a sarcastic flare. Martias knew that tone.

“You’re not tricking me out of this one, brother!” Martias said laughing.

“Tricking you? Me? I wouldn’t think of such a thing.” Right then, Sebastian kicked a tin can towards Martias direction. Martias automatically flung to the side to avoid it while Sebastian ran right past him.

“Hey! No fair!” The chase began again.

“I only said I wouldn’t *think* of tricking you! Doesn’t mean I wouldn’t do it, ha!”

The adrenaline rushed up in the two boys. The breeze of the ocean refreshed them with new will. They ran and ran, turning up and down streets, back and forth, across and all over the block like there was no tomorrow. They felt free like the birds above.

When they reached the edge of town, they both stopped. The park was empty except for some birds picking up food crumbs from the ground that gathered over the day. Both of the siblings were drenched in sweat.

“Ready… to… give… up?” Sebastian said while taking a deep breath between words. Martias flung himself on some grass and gave an agreeable “Mhm”. A few moments of heavy breathing had past until Martias had enough strength to get himself to sit up. That’s when he noticed that his older brother had already sat down next to him. He was staring out into the

ocean. Martias did the same. The setting sun was at the horizon and made the water shimmer like stars.

“Hey, Martias?”

“Mh?”

“Remember our mom?”

Martias was taken aback by that question. There was a moment of silence before he replied. “Of course I do... Why?”

“Remember how she told us that we could do anything as long as we believed in our dreams?”

“Yeah”, Martias replied a bit confused, “What about it?”

“Running is my dream. That’s what I want to do.” Martias turned to look at him from the side. He was still staring out at the horizon with seeming flames of determination in his eyes and a half smile. “I’m gonna be a runner one day, Martias. Believe it! No matter how much it’ll take, how much I will have to sweat, one day I’ll run with people across the globe and compete with the champions!”

Sebastian now turned to face his brother who slowly started to grin. “And when you’re the champ, I’ll be there to cheer you on, tin can kicker.”

Sebastian gave a quick laugh and then gave Martias a small noogie. “Hey, nicknames are my thing, not yours, snailkid.” He stood up right after that. “It’s getting late. We should probably get some food.” Martias nodded.

The streets that were once filled with life, were now – in the darkness of the night – lifeless and dull. Only the moonlight and a few lights from the inside of houses made the streets visible to human eye. As the two brothers went along the streets, only a small number of faces could be seen. A couple blocks down, they arrived at their destination.

They stood in front of a small brick house. The roof was a bit crooked and some rats were eating some junk next to the front door. It was nothing the two were not already used to. Martias and Sebastian heard music coming from the residence. The lights were on so they decided to enter.

A middle-aged woman was listening to the radio while picking up clothes from the floor and putting them into a basket. When she turned around and saw the two boys, she jumped up in joy.

“Boys! There ya are!”

“Aunt Valeria!” She put down the basket and Martias jumped right into her arms.

“Hi there! I bet ya two ar’ hungr’, eh?” Sebastian and Martias nodded quickly. “I got some soup. Hold on, let me get it read’.” The two brothers went over to the small kitchen and sat down at the dirty table in the middle of the room.

Once the soup was ready, she served the soup bowls with a toothy grin. “Go righ’ at it.” She did not have to say that twice. “So ya two have been runnin’ the streets again?” Both of them nodded with full mouths and then took more slurping sips of soup. She grinned. “Knocke’ over Jose’s stand again, eh? I bet he had a *fruity* reaction.” The brothers had a hard time keeping in the soup from their laughter. Once they gulped their food down, they told Aunt Valeria

everything about their day which then continued into different off-topics including how to catch a shark with tuna which Aunt Valeria found very *fishy*. After a while the boys went back to the front of the house.

“Thank you for the meal, Aunt Valeria”, Sebastian said.

“Don’ worry abou’ it, boys. You know I’m always here for ya. Take care.” With that, the boys left.

Sebastian turned to his brother while they walked. “Now, let’s head back to our fathers.” A shiver went down Martias’ back.

“Do we have to go back to father?” They already started walking up the hill.

“You know we do, Martias.”

Hardly any lights were now lit and the street could hardly be seen at some places. As the road continued, shadowy figures passed the eleven and thirteen year old.

“We could live with Aunt Valeria instead, could we not? He’s horrible. I don’t want to go back.”

“We can’t leave him alone. He’s our father. We have to” Sebastian said sternly.

They made it up the hill. A house near the cliff side was all that could be seen. The lights were on and the siblings went inside.

“We’re home” Sebastian said. The house smelled like vomit. Bottles filled the dirty hallway. Just as they walked in, wide, red-veined eyes peeked around the corner from the living room.

“So you two nasty squirrels made it back.” The man stumbled into the hallway with a bottle of beer in his right hand. He stood above the two and moved his head around as if he was trying to figure out how to see them clearly.

“You’re drunk, go to bed!” Martias shouted at him. It took the father a while to understand what he said and once he did, their father’s face expression changed into complete rage.

“No one tells me what to do! How dare you?!” The father quickly picked up some bottles and got ready to throw. Martias shut his eyes as his father aimed for him. When Sebastian saw the incoming bottles, he jumped in front of his brother.

“NO!” *CLASH!* Martias opened his eyes. Glass splinters spread over the floor. *CLASH!* More bottles came coming. *CLASH! CLASH! CLASH!* and then there was... blood. Martias could only watch as his brother fell to the floor.

“Sebastian!” he screamed as he flung himself over him. He did not respond. “Sebastian!” His head was full of glass splinters and blood. “SEBASTIAN!”

“You two are useless little bugs!” The father stumbled backwards and then started swinging a bottle as he came back forward.

“Stop!” Martias screamed with tears in his eyes, “Stop!”
“Nobody can tell me anything!” He made a swing towards Martias who backed up, shivering.

Martias was pressed against the front door as his father took another swing. Martias moved as it came. It hit the door and spread into pieces. Some flew into Martias’ arm and some

others of which flew the father straight in the eye from which upon he started screaming in pain. The scream filled Martias' head and he finally came back to his senses. He knew he had to get away. There was no other option. He swung open the front door and ran as fast as he could, leaving behind...

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“*Sebastian!*” A man flung up from his sleep. He took deep breaths as he gripped the mattress sheet tightly. Letting go, he slowly went over the scars on his right arm. He looked around the Korean hotel room and calmed down once his eyesight met with some pictures of Aunt Valeria. *Just a dream.* He got out of bed, still a bit shaky from his re-experience, and got ready for what he was there for.

“Welcome to the 26 mile race!” a speaker called out, “Only the best and fastest can compete, win, and become known around the world!” The man with short, black hair stretched along the sidelines. His legs were muscular after all the preparation he had made over the years. “The race will start in just a few minutes! Please line up along the start line!” All the participants did as they were told to, so did the man.

“Ready...” He was ready. “Set...” in honor to his brother. “Go!” The runners sprinted off and the race began. As the man ran, he smiled while remembering his brother. *I'll make you proud, tin can kicker... Just you wait.*

## The Boy

I heard screams from outside, then... *Knock knock knock*. Someone banged on my door. I hesitated from the silence that loomed outside and peeked through the small window frame. A small figure stood there, unmoving. *Creak*. I left the door half-open until I realized that it was a brown-haired boy with sky-blue, out-of-the-ordinary shoes. It took me another moment to grasp that he was silently crying.

“What’s wrong?” I bend down to the little boy. He looked at me, then at the ground. He stood in silence. I looked around, but couldn’t see anyone, just an empty street. “Where are your parents?” He continued to make no sound. “Let’s get you in first, alright? Then you can tell me what happened.” I slowly took his hand, walked him in, and closed the door.

“Fior...”

“Hm? Did you say something?” I turned to the boy who shook his head with no emotion. I was starting to get a weird feeling, but shook it off and walked the boy over to my green couch. “You can make yourself comfortable. What’s your name?” I first thought he wouldn’t reply, but after what felt forever, he finally spoke.

“Fior. Fior Rosenberg.”

“That’s a nice name” I smiled. His face still had a sad expression. “Would you mind telling me what happened?” His eyes felt like ice on my skin, almost feeling like his stare pierced through my body. Then, instead of saying anything, he reached into his left pocket and pulled out a piece of paper with something written in *red* ink.

**Diana Erlenbach Arrived To Home**

I was confused by this statement, but somehow knew that the boy wasn't going to answer on this matter. He just kept on staring at me as I held the old paper in my fingers.

"Would you like something to drink?" I asked uncomfortably.

"I don't... but Diana would like some tea." A shiver went down my back as the boy slowly pointed to an empty place in the room. I laughed a bit uneasily, thinking it might be his imaginary friend.

"Oh, okay. I can get you some tea, Diana." The small boy looked over at where he pointed before, and then turned back to me.

"She said... Thank you", he said in a monotone voice. I weakly smiled and went to the kitchen.

I set up the water on the stove and got a teabag from the shelves. My head kept turning to the kitchen entrance, unconsciously from the odd feeling I was having. After a minute or two, I poured the water into a cup and added the bag. I turned back to the entrance... *Swush!* My face turned pale and my heart beats hastened. For a second there was...

I ran back to the living room and found nothing, but small, sky-blue shoes.

## Griffon Heart

It was a hot summer day, like every other. I'm sure the heat could have killed anyone that day, but considering our home was above the clouds, there's not much one can do when there is no fluffy whiteness to cover up the shining red ball of inferno. Yeah, normally you'd say living on a cloud would be amazing, but I think you'd take it back after all the sunburns you get.

Life in the sky wasn't too bad though. The fresh air and breeze in ones hair could not be compared to the wind on the grounds down below. If you wanted to fly a crystal-kite though, I would suggest not getting too close to the sun. I once flew one and it caught on fire, which then fell into the forest where it... well... *kinda* set loose a big flame tornado. Let me tell you, the Erians – the little, fairy-like creatures that inhabited that forest - were so angry, they even threw all their coal mushrooms at me when I tried to apologize.

What I longed for the most about Skiam – our upper paradise – though, was the yearly race. From everywhere around the land, people would come to watch or participate in the Skiam race. If you had a magical creature that could fly you were eligible to enter the competition. Griffons – half lion, half eagle -, pegasi – horses with wings -, dragons, flying pet rocks, you name it!

I was such a huge fan that I always tried to get the best spots for the viewing. You see, the big crystal-vision screen above the crowds wasn't too important to me. I wanted to witness the real-life action.

My mom was just as crazy as I was, so we would always fly up close to the race with our big pet griffon, Ria. We could never keep up, but I didn't care about that much. You see, we

Skiams had very keen senses. That moment when you started with all of the racers... you heard all of their hearts stop for a beat and felt the intensification of adrenaline for that very split-second before it started... then you stormed off with them and you were a part of the excitement, *that* is what it was all about.

I would look at the racer in first place – *Lyra, the Wyvern rider* with her golden dragon - and utter “That’s where I want to be.” I then would turn around to my mother and we’d both grin.

“One day, I know you’ll be there” she’d always reply with a smile on her face.

My mom knew how much I wanted to become a racer so she did everything she could to bring me to the reality of my dream. I couldn’t believe my eyes when I woke up face-to-face with a curious, baby griffon one morning. Vi is still a very anxious, female griffon, I’d say, but that first morning surely was the most exciting breakout of hers. She even managed to break my iCrystal which was a must-have for every teen in our skyblock at that time. It took me ages to get the crystal-dust back to buy one again.

We lived in nothing fancy, just the average house out of cloud-bricks and some magical crystals here and there to keep it steady. Goo from the swamps in Yiarm were great to make everything stick together and the smell was, unlike expected, nice to breathe in. The Yiarm’s goo turned out to smell like fresh-baked cookies once hardened so it was always a great experience coming back home every time. Due to the cloud being so loose and fuzzy, it felt like – well – heaven when you’d lay on it. Though whenever there was a storm, I tell ya, we’d be swirling around to the point of getting dizzy like Vi when she chased her own tail.

The funny thing about living on clouds is that you wake up to new neighbors every day since they move at different speeds. Ria and Vi's stable therefore was located on the same cloud as our home since we probably would have a hard time getting off the cloud without falling face first into the ground thousands of miles down below without the two.

Even though we didn't have much, there's nothing I would have changed.

Oh, I'm sorry, did I not introduce myself yet? The name's Blaze. My mom gave it to me in honor to my father. He died before I was born so I sadly never got to meet him. She thought that carrying his name would keep me close to him even if he wasn't here with me in body.

Anyhow, that day I was getting ready for some flying when...

"Hey Blaze, headin' out?" I turned to face my blond-haired friend, Dazo, who went over Vi's saddle with his fingers. Before I could answer, another voice continued.

"He's probably just going to destroy another home or two."

Remember those fairy-thingies I mentioned before? While some went to another forest, others actually decided to live with some of us – a constant reminder for me of what awful thing I did. Turns out they can hold really big grudges, too, so the list of people without Erian fairy, of course, included me, considering I literally burned down their whole property. Dazo, on the other hand, was perfectly capable of keeping one, which... he did.

I sighed. "Do you have to bring *her* every time?"

Zya - Dazo's little, green fairy - flew up in front of my face. "What are you getting so *fired* up about? Can't handle a small *mushroom* like me?" I literally was about to get some insect spray, but Dazo interrupted in a soft fashion.

"Wanna fly down Guba Mountain together?" he asked with a smile.

"You bet'cha."

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It felt great having the wind against my face as we flew inches away down the mountain. I looked over at Dazo who was riding Wo, his blue, four-legged dragon. Wo's scales were so long and elegant it was hard to think that he was male. Vi, on the other hand, with her red-lined feathers and wild attitude could easily be mistaken for a male griffon.

Zya, Dazo's Erian *companion*, was sitting in the little back-pocket on Wo's saddle, holding on tight as we looped through holes in the peak. I wished that pocket would have just fallen off midair so she'd had to fly all the way home by herself, but I knew that would just be too good to be true.

"I heard they're having a race down at the Bay" Dazo yelled over to me - since I probably wouldn't have heard it in mid-flight.

"Alright, let's go then!" I replied as I leaned Vi into the direction. It didn't take long for us to arrive at Dragon Bay. The reason for its name was due to its dragon wing-like shape it gave the water and Guba mountain actually looked like a dragonhead when one looked at it from the

Bay. We came around some hills and landed at the Bay. I was surprised at the masses of teens that were gathered there.

“Are all of them participating?” I asked in astonishment. Dazo laughed a bit.

“Nah, most of them are just here to watch. Maybe ten are actually racing. Come on, they’re already lining up at the start line! Let’s go!” Dazo patted Wo’s side and Wo gave a quick grunt – his sound of agreement – then went over to the start.

“You heard ‘em, Vi. Let’s do this” I smiled at her. She gave me a joyous squeak and jumped-flew over to the starting line with such energy that it almost catapulted me off of her.

After rubbing my butt from the down-fall of the heap, I started to notice someone very odd at the starting line. He stuck out from the rest, wearing clothes that covered much of his body, including a black mask that only showed his eyes. His two-legged, yellow dragon was much out of the ordinary, considering only high standards could effort such a creature. As if he knew I was staring at him, his head turned to me then back towards the front.

“Ready!” I almost fell off as I was snapped out of my thinking. “Set!” *Hold on! Hold on!* I quickly leaned forward and grabbed the side-handles. I took a deep breath.

“Go!” All the magical creatures swung into the air and the race began.

The flying purple crystals showed the way of the track, but they were only a blur to me as we swooshed past them. I was in the front herd, Dazo not too far behind me. Two other griffon-riders and the mysterious yellow dragon-rider were right ahead of me. The crystals led into a cave, in which everyone glowed in different colors from the crystals that every rider had in their

creatures' neckband. Vi and I flew as fast as we could until we past a green and purple color – the two griffons.

That was when I noticed that someone was flying in front of me without any light-crystals. *Is that...?* Sunlight shone on the path again and I could only glimpse a yellow dragon boosting to the lake – the finish line. That was our signal to speed it up. *You're not winning this.*

I grabbed on tight, leaned into the front, and closed in on the flyer. The goal was not far away now. My adrenaline rose. *Only a little bit more!* I saw the guy look back at me and speeding it up, but I followed his pace. That's when I saw it. The opportunity to strike. I got next to the guy, time literally stopped, and in that moment, I swore I saw the guy slowing down... on purpose.

I crossed the finish line, barely in the front. The crowd cheered and we landed back on the ground.

“Nice flying, kiddo” a female voice said. I turned to find the masked person. *Wait... is this guy actually...* My mouth stayed open as the person removed the mask. It was...

“Lyra, the wyvern rider, nice to meet you,” she introduced herself as she stretched out her hand towards me for a shake. I could only make stuttering sounds as her dragon turned from yellow to golden.

“You’ve got quite some talent. What would you think about becoming my apprentice?”