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Dragon Season

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Cover Page Footnote

This piece was brought into workshop in progress. Because we operate under a workshop model, we see value in an unfinished piece.

Dragon Season

“Hey Miss Anna, mind if I borrow Simon for a bit?”

Anna looks up from the dough she is kneading, a dusting of flour and some well disguised disappointment on her dark face as I burst into the bakery. It almost makes me feel a little bad; Miss Anna had probably thought I was a customer, and well, the bakery hasn’t been doing so great these days. It’s always hard during dragon season—all the fancy TV stars and Wall Street businessmen go off on the west coast, and none of the leftover people goes out more than they have to. Just because downtown ain’t an ideal place for dragons to hunt doesn’t mean they’d never attack you. Most people don’t like to take risks like that.

They slept after dark, of course, but there are plenty of dangers besides dragons, especially after dark.

“Sure, honey, lemme call him. Simon!” she hollers up the rickety staircase behind the counter. I think those stairs are so funny—Simon is near six feet tall for sure, and his brothers bigger than him, and they all have to squeeze up that tiny little staircase to get to their apartment above the bakery.

I take a rag and wipe down the display cases while I wait because they’re getting pretty smudgy and I know that’s part of Simon’s afternoon chores, but I don’t know if he’ll be back in time to do them today. I do feel a little bad. Everyone in the neighborhood always says *she works so hard* about Miss Anna, but they say it like *too bad she don’t do better* and not like *good for her!* It makes me kind of mad when they do that, and I can tell it makes Simon madder because he never makes eye contact with people after and his fingers start tapping a mile a minute.

“Hey, Mom,” Simon says as he ducks into the bakery. “Hey, Kat.”

“Hey yourself.” I rinse out the rag and look from him to Miss Anna. “I’m gonna go out and look for scales, if you want to come.”

“Sure,” he nods, “Let me get my jacket.”

A minute later he has his downy soft sweatshirt that I love over an old NYU t-shirt. I would steal that sweatshirt in a heartbeat, if sharing clothes didn’t freak Simon out so bad. I got a new denim jacket for my birthday that’s filling up with as many pins and buttons as I can find, and it looks much cooler than Simon’s jacket, it’s just not so damn soft.

“Let’s go through Central Park.”

“That’s the long way to what I want to show you.”

“Aren’t we getting scales for Miss Mirry?”

Miss Mirry, who looks after me, does collect the scales that dragons naturally shed—or rather, *I* collect them, and she wraps them with wire and makes jewelry for tourists and her Etsy shop. And both her and Miss Anna think that’s what we’re doing now.

“But you know what’s even better than scales?” I ask mischievously.

“What?”

“A *real dragon*.”

Simon yelps at that answer, because honestly it’s kind of a crazy one. I knew he was listening to me the whole time, but now he actually turns and looks at me, wide eyed. Simon loves dragons.

“Where?”

“It’s ain’t hatched yet, so it’s safe,” I say, quite pleased with my surprise. “It’s in the old entrance to the A train on 82nd. Its mom must have thought it was a dud egg and left it there.”

“It could have been getting enough heat, if it’s right by a vent or something. Dragons don’t need as much heat as people think they do.”

“Not if they’re flying over New York in November, that’s for sure.”

For all my complaining, it’s not actually that cold. The sky is bright and blue, and I keep skipping ahead to burn off energy. I never get too far in front though, since Simon’s legs are so much longer than mine. It’s a good thing both of us like walking so much, since smaller dragons sometimes try to make lairs in the subways, which is probably how our egg came to be in one. We have to walk all that way to 82nd and keep a sharp out eye on top of that, but I’d rather be outside and free and watching for dragons than trapped in the house when I know it’s only a matter of time ‘til they find me.

When we get to the egg, it’s still there, which is good because it’s as breathtaking as I remember. It’s a dull reddish kind of color, but there are whorls of glittery coppers and golds under the plain rust, and they glint off the light so’s it looks like the whole thing’s burning hot if you only see it out of the corner of your eye. Simon kneels down and I think I would never get slapped at church again if I could only look at pictures of Jesus the way Simon’s looking at that egg.

“It’s still alive, ain’t it?” I ask. There’s a desperate kind of part of me that didn’t want to tell anyone else about the egg, that wanted to keep it all for me, my own special thing. But I don’t know anyone who knows as much about dragons as Simon, and it would be a whole lot sadder if the egg gets lost altogether than if I just have to share it sometimes.

“Oh, it’s alive, it’s alive! See how the patterns of reflection are shifting? It’s not just because the outside light is hitting it differently, the actual internal membrane of the egg is shifting with the fetus dragon. The closer the egg is to hatching, the shinier the outside will get because the fetus is using up more and more of the membrane to feed itself, and the membrane is what makes the egg all thick and dull like this.”

He brushes a hand against it reverently, and I immediately place my hand on it too. It’s warm, and leathery instead of hard; I’ve heard dragons breathe on their eggs instead of sitting on them, so they don’t need to be so sturdy as birds’ eggs.

“How soon d’you think it’ll hatch?” I have a feeling like I want to whisper, so I talk louder than normal to make up for it. Simon startles a bit, and I scrunch my face to apologize.

“I can’t say exactly. I’ll have to look at my book when I get home. And there’s a forum for zoologists trying to breed them in captivity that might have some good facts.”

Simon will talk about dragon husbandry and life cycles all day if you let him get going. It’s fun to listen to him go off, he’s so smart and knows so much, but right now I interrupt him because there’s something more important to worry about.

“What are we going to name it?”