

The Dragon

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Rowena awoke in a large field. The sun was just rising and dotted the sky with pink and orange clouds. Beautiful, wild peonies, millions of different shades of purple, flecked the tall green grass. She sat up and took a deep breath of the fresh, spring air. She got up and brushed the dirt off her long purple dress that she had never worn or seen before. At the edge of the field was a forest full of mist. She didn't know where she was but she was surprisingly calm. Things like this happened to her quite often.

Rowena lived in the peaceful, arboraceous, kingdom of Dragon Bow. She had no parents so she lived alone in the wild, journeying to new places every day but so exhausted that she doesn't remember getting there. This place seemed very nice and she hoped this would be the one. The last place she could remember being was in a forest much darker than this one, running away from some sort of creature but that didn't explain the dress. She shrugged it off.

Now she was here. She decided she would explore the woods and see whether it was habitable for her. Rowena grabbed her handmade pack made by her mother, grabbed her dagger and put it in, and swung it over her shoulder. She strolled down the path of trampled grass, toward the forest taking her time to explore the environment.

She came to the edge of the forest and paused to find where she should enter. Bracken and undergrowth made it almost impossible to get into the forest. Like a wall of plants that she couldn't pass through without getting multiple scratches. She circled around and eventually found a small hole in the bushes where some other small animal had squeezed through. She went in head first barely fitting through. At one point she thought she might be stuck forever because halfway through, her leg got trapped in a thorn bushel. She tried and tried to pull it out, getting it scrapped so deep she thought she might faint. After tugging it with all her strength the bristles broke into pieces and she quickly pulled herself in. When she looked back to where she had been trapped the bushes had grown back.

That was weird. She thought to herself, hoping she would find a way out of the forest when the time came to leave. She got up swiftly and brushed her long, braided, chocolate-brown hair out of her mouth. She briskly moved on through the overgrown forest, the weak sunlight peeking through the high canopy of leaves.

Suddenly a screeching stirred the forest. It came from somewhere above in the trees. Orange, red, and yellow flashed by overhead. The screeching came to a halt and the forest was back to being dead silent. She heard a small clicking noise in the branch above her head and looked up. She gasped at the beautiful sight of the magnificent creature. A gorgeous phoenix settled on the branch, peering down at her with large, round, black eyes. Rowena held her breath trying not to spook the bird. It peeped and suddenly took flight into the air and flew swiftly out of sight.

She had seen many unexpected creatures before but that was probably the most appealing. She kept walking, keeping an eye out for any other uncommon creatures. After walking for about half an hour she heard a small crack of a branch snapping. She turned around and looked for any sign of movement but couldn't see anything in the dim light and still misted forest. She shrugged it off and kept going, sure it was just her imagination. She kept walking until she heard the noise again and the sound of breathing that wasn't coming from her. She looked around but still couldn't see anything.

Oh no, She thought to herself. She heard a growl come from out of nowhere and a massive, gray-furred, animal emerged from the shadows. It looked like a huge wolf but had three tails and long, sharp, pitch-black teeth. It slowly circled her, **probably checking whether I'm edible or not.**

She backed away from the large wolf and it snarled like it still wasn't done with her yet. She stayed where she was as it came up to her. It started sniffing her neck and legs. Rowena's whole body stiffened and she stayed as still as possible. Once it was done it backed away and lowered its head. It met its eyes to Rowena's and gave her a genial look. Just then it let out a humongous howl and dashed away into the trees. She sat there enthralled and still unnerved. She kept walking aimlessly through the forest. Suddenly the scent of smoke stung her nose. It made her eyes water and she tried to find the source of the smoke. She followed the smoke until she reached a small clearing. A fire surrounded by four people, two women, and two men,

sat in the middle of the clearing. The people were tall and had many scars. They wore outfits made of moss and dried leaves, and all had matching necklaces with emerald green amulets on them. They whispered to each other quietly and were deep in conversation. Rowena couldn't hear them so she crept closer to eavesdrop.

“This monster has been keeping us here for far too long I'd say, we need to come up with some way to escape or defeat it,” the man closest to her with black hair and dark brown eyes said.

“ I know we do and I have a plan,” the runty, short-haired woman said who was on the right of the man.

“ Oh yeah Sadie, so what is this great plan of yours?” asked the other woman with long blond hair and sage green eyes, mocked.

“ Well if you don't want to hear it that's your problem, Caroline.” Caroline rolled her eyes. Sadie jumped up and looked like she was going to strangle the bigger woman.

“ Girls, girls. Calm down both of you. Let's hear what Sadie has to say.” the other man said, glaring at Caroline. Caroline and the first man groaned.

“ So, I was thinking, what if we tried to ambush it?” Sadie said. They all rolled their eyes, even the second man.

“ Is that it? Because if so, just so you know, we've done that. Remember Jade?” Caroline said. Sadie shuddered.

“ But what if we give it another try? Last time, the dragon knew we were there because Lucas stepped on the dumb creature's tail,” she said exasperated. They all looked at Caroline who was obviously the leader of the group. She sighed but nodded reluctantly. Sadie jumped with joy.

Rowena tried to process everything she'd heard. So the only way out was to defeat the dragon. That didn't seem too hard, but she had never seen a real dragon before, she had only heard stories from the village she lived in as a child and always thought they were just old fairy tales. She started walking away when she accidentally stepped on a nut making a small pop. The four people looked up.

“ What was that?” asked Sadie.

“ Dunno, maybe just another one of those lion bug things,” suggested the first man. Caroline stood up, heading to where Rowena was. Rowena jumped away and ran as fast as she could breaking branches and bushes. Caroline stood there with no clue what just happened.

Rowena was panting after her long sprint. Once she was far enough away she draped herself over a tree stump. She was exhausted and a bit scared in the woods. After taking a break, she found a small bush of scale berries. She picked them and quickly ate them. When she was done eating she set off again. She didn't have any idea where in the woods she was but didn't really care. She heard small chirps come from the trees and looked up. There were two small brown birds in the tree. She watched them not paying attention to where she was walking when out of nowhere she felt the whole earth shake. A giant roar loud enough for the whole forest to hear came from somewhere in the sky. The sound of wingbeats hit her ears and she looked through the leaves. A huge blur of green shot over top and then started descending toward her. It roared again and broke through the branches of the trees. Rowena gasped and ducked back into the bushes. A gigantic dragon was flying down, trees fell over around it as it plunged to the ground. It had dull brown scales that changed to forest green in the sunlight. Long, razor-sharp teeth filled its mouth and honed, talons shot out of its claws. It glared straight at the spot where Rowena was hiding with its sharp, fern-colored eyes. Its thundering wings came to a halt as it landed making trees fall to the forest floor. It had cleared a gap in the forest from where it had knocked down all the trees including the ones behind Rowena. It stepped towards her and a deep rumbling noise came from its throat. The creature stuck its long neck towards her face and snapped its jaws. Rowena screamed and jumped away. It clawed after her and knocked her to the ground with a loud growl. She flipped over onto her back and scrambled away. It lowered its teeth down to her head and opened its mouth. It snapped down its muzzle on thin air. She rolled out of the way and dove into the trees. The dragon shrieked with anger as Rowena ran away. She watched from afar as the dragon sniffed around and peered through the trees. It must not have been able to find her and flew back up into the sky. Rowena exhaled a sigh of relief. She knew it wasn't safe out in the open with that monster flying around so she looked throughout the forest for some shelter. She soon heard the sound of a trickling stream nearby. She followed the sound until she came to a brook and behind it stood a tall mound of rocks with a

small cave carved into the side. She darted to the stream and fell onto her knees taking mouthfuls of water in. When she was satisfied she went over to the cave. It was tiny so she could see to the back of it. After this tiring day, she was worn out. She flopped onto her back and closed her eyes.

When she woke up the sun shone above her. She had only taken a small snooze but already felt much more energized and went out of the cave to look for food. She found a few bushels of several different types of fruits and berries and had even found some edible green and blue mushrooms that were growing on the side of a tree. As she walked through the forest she could hear shouts in the distance. She wondered what it was. She spied through the shrubs and saw the dragon on its back with Sadie, Caroline, and the two other men over it with sharpened, spear-like, tree branches held at the creature's neck. She looked at the dragon and almost left it to die when she noticed its eyes on her. They were pleading and remorseful and begging for help. She turned around and started walking away but it let out a deafening scream and she looked back at it to see it with a branch to its head. She would never help that monster but when she looked at it she didn't see a monster but a creature that breathed and lived. It wasn't its fault for attacking, they all had invaded the creature's territory where it probably just wanted to live peacefully like everyone else. She took a deep breath and walked purposely towards them. She snuck up behind the people and almost stepped out when something pulled her back. She looked back and saw the wolf creature she had seen earlier behind her with its pack. They looked at her expectantly and they all went out together. They jumped to where the humans were and snarled in their faces. Caroline was the first to fight back, getting a gash in her leg from the claws of one of the wolves. Sadie was already trying to run while the two men went to help Caroline. The two men tried to help Caroline up but she pushed them away and yelled to defeat the dragon before it recovered. Suddenly, another ten giant wolves jumped into the clearing and chased after the people. The people screamed and ran away knowing they were outnumbered. Rowena grinned at their pathetic figures until she remembered she had done the same thing before. She then recalled the dragon was there and walked carefully over to it. Rowena put her hand to its neck where it had a small puncture. Weirdly, scales started covering the injury. The dragon popped up as if nothing had happened and looked at her calmly. It looked as if it were smiling at her and lowered its body down to meet her eyes.

“ Thank you,” a female voice sprouted in her head coming from the dragon. “ Most people would have run or joined them, but you were different Rowena. I know why you have come here and I grant you permission to inhabit this land. You are kind-hearted and caring and I respect people who respect me.”

Rowena was speechless.

“ Thank you very much, I will make sure not to disappoint you.” she managed to say. “ I can’t believe this is really happening.” The dragon nodded its head and gave her a dragon-like grin. Just then she heard cracking sounds and looked out to see the large wall of plants and trees disperse, leaving room for people to enter and go as they liked. She looked through the trees to see Sadie already bursting out into the open while the others followed, not too happy with her after she ran away.

“ So I can really live here?” Rowena asked uncertainly.

“ Yes of course,” said the big dragon. Rowena smiled from ear to ear. Finally having a home.

“ Now I will leave you to explore the forest and meet all the creatures.” the dragon said, preparing to fly away.

“ Wait, one more thing,” Rowena stopped her. “ What’s your name?” she asked.

“ I’m Dracona,” she replied, then took off into the sky. Rowena stood there with no idea what to do or where to go. She decided she would try to find somewhere to make a home and a good spot to find food. A few days later she played with one of the three-tailed wolf’s pup. She went to the stream to get some water and the puppy pounced on her, shoving her into the stream. Dracona’s loud wingbeats came from above again and she flew down. She watched Rowena and the little canine for a few moments before coming over. Dracona opened her large mouth about to speak but Rowena cut her off.

“ I know I’ve said it millions of times but thank you so much for everything, I’m so grateful,” she said.

“ I know you are and I am too. I’m finally done with those people bothering me,” Dracona nodded, Rowena hugged Dracona’s head and went back to playing with the small creature. They both had what they wanted. Rowena glanced back at Dracona and felt a pang of sadness. She missed her mother and father, but it was happy and sad because both she and Dracona had what they needed: a family, peace, and a home.