

Something odd happened yesterday. A human child walked into my lair. She had the scent of sweetness though, unlike the other humans who enter my lair. Their stench is usually the first indication that they have arrived.

She hid behind my largest pile of gold in the beginning. I thought it odd, but did not have the strength to investigate. I do not seem to have strength these days to do much of anything. I heard neither clanging nor clinking, and therefore decided to let her be.

The girl stayed for a bit, moving from one pile of treasure to the next. I must have fallen asleep because she was instantly in front of me. I was taken by surprise and reflexively reared up into a defensive position. A spell was on the tip of my tongue when I realized she was not attacking me. She was just standing there with her head tilted to one side, staring up at me. I could sense magic emanating from her, and therefore thought she was a powerful sorceress in disguise.

“Who are you and what do you want?” I asked, hoping to see if I could get some useful information.

“My name is Dielle...and I don't really want anything.” She answered in a choppy voice. I could smell the familiar stench of sweat beginning to emanate from her, but I could not understand why. She was telling the truth, or at least according to my magic she was.

Dielle...It was a strange name. Not that I really took notice of human names. “Are you purely human?”

“Yes.” She answered quite assuredly. I could tell she wanted to say something more so I paused to give her some time. After a few swallows, she asked, “Are you really a dragon?”

I smiled. Many years have passed since someone has gawked at the fact that I am a dragon. “Yes, I am. My name is Khalderdash.” I opted to give her my short name as my true name is far too complex for her human mind to remember.

I stooped my head down low to get a closer look, but I suppose I did it too fast. On the approach, I noticed her eyes open wide. “Take me home!” She screamed and was gone through magical means. How a human child that young could have the expertise for such a spell is beyond me.

\*\*\*\*\*

Today the young girl did not show up. Instead, I was visited by a band of treasure thieves.

I feel rather ashamed of myself. Here I am, an infamous dragon; I am a creature that most other creatures hope they will never have to meet. Yet, if that is so, then why do creatures laugh at me when they come to steal my beloved treasure. I do not know, nor do I understand. I shall return to my slumber, for as always, I feel sleep's tender tug upon my old body.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dielle appeared again today. This time I called to her. She stepped out from her hiding place and walked towards me.

“How is it that a young girl like yourself possesses the ability to appear and disappear? If I recall, that is not an easy spell for humans to master.” I was genuinely interested. This little magic user could prove troublesome if her human greed kicked in.

“I have this ring my uncle gave me. See?” She held her hand out to show me. “It takes me anywhere I want.”

It was quite interesting. I had not seen a magical ring of teleportation for quite some time. This type of ring creates a globe of magic that is necessary to make the quick shifts in location. This bit of information helped me understand the strong magical aura around her. I was still curious as to how she arrived at my lair. “How did you get here, in my lair?”

“I don’t really know. Two days ago I said, ‘Take me to the nearest dragon.’ Next thing you know, I’m right here.” The little girl looked around, still trying to ascertain where exactly “here” was. “Yesterday, I asked people about you, but nobody would talk, instead they all laughed. One of them said, ‘Worry not, missy. You needn’t rustle your pritty little self over that one. He hasn’t left his lair in over a hundrid years.’”

I felt ashamed. Humans no longer feared my name and therefore, no longer feared me. They laughed at my name and the picture it invoked. I am no longer the menacing monster I once was. Time has finally caught me in its slow, but ever tightening grasp.

“If you’re really a dragon, then how come people aren’t afraid of you?”

I chuckled. “Look at me. Tell me. Do I scare you? Do I look menacing?”

“No, but that’s only because of one reason.”

“What reason is that?”

“You don’t act like a normal dragon. Shouldn’t you be out taking more treasure and scaring lots of people, not sitting in your stupid lair?”

“Well, you don’t act like a normal little girl. Shouldn’t you be playing with dolls and other little girls, not popping up in dragons’ lairs?” I used her logic against her.

“Maybe, but I’m tired of all that. I’m ready to do something else.”

“Then perhaps I’m tired of doing what I used to do.” I blatantly lied.

“But dragons are suppose to be bad and evil and ugly. They’re not supposed to sit at home and do absolutely nothing. You’re supposed to be flying around the air, breathing fire on everything.”

The human child did have a point there. “True, and I once did do those things. How do you think I amassed such a vast treasure?” I smiled, proud of all the precious gems, shiny coins, and magical items I had taken from those weaker than me.

“I think having lots of treasure is really dumb. I mean, when you die, it isn’t going to go with you.”

I felt rather insulted. Here was this young human telling me that I had wasted my life collecting the only thing that truly made me happy. I suppose the hurt was visible on my face, because she quickly added more to her opinion.

“B-bb-but if I did like treasure, I...uh...I hope it would be as pretty as yours. I don’t think it would be though, because no treasure will ever be as pretty as yours.” She ended with a frown of nervousness, biting her lower lip.

“Why thank you.” I smiled and saw the girl get very relieved. She was too young to have tact. I must admit though, she seemed to be learning rather quickly.

“Honestly...the reason why I do not do those things anymore is because of my age.”

“Are you saying you’re too old to do those things?” She looked very confused. “I thought dragons never got old.”

I laughed hard at that one. “No, we dragons get old just like humans. We may not age as quickly nor live lives as short as you, but we do age.”

“And how old are you?” She asked leaning closer and peering through squinted eyes.

“On my next birthday, I shall be two thousand three hundred and eighty six years old.”

“Two thousand three hundred and, uh...”

“Eighty-six.” I helped.

“...and eighty six!” The girl yelled, bringing her hands to her forehead. “Wow! And I thought my grandma was old. She’s only 66.” The girl walked around and looked at every inch of me. “How long are dragons supposed to live for?”

Slowly, I swung my head around to the rear of my body to look at her face to face. “I do not really know. I am afraid that dragons are not as numerous nor as social as humans. There are no books on dragon history that I know of and I have yet to have run into any other dragons.”

“What about your mom and dad? Where are they at?” She looked around as if she expected to find them hiding in a corner.

“They were killed in a battle.”

“At the same time?” She still looked around, to insure I wasn’t lying.

“No, in different battles against different foes.”

She finally turned back to me, realizing that even if I was lying my parents were surely not hiding in my lair. “Don’t tell me. You were an only child, right?”

“Yes, I believe so. I do not recall any siblings.”

“Yeah, my parents didn’t give me any singlings, or whatever you called them, either. That’s why I had to move in with my uncle once they left.”

“Where did your parents go?”

“I don’t know.” The human girl began to walk back towards the front of me. She found a necklace on the floor and put it on. “My uncle won’t tell me either.” I was about to tell her to take off my treasure, when she took it off herself. She looked at it while she was walking, gave it a disgusted look, and tossed it aside. “He’s very bad with kids.”

“Who is?” I asked, being too concerned with my treasure to pay attention to the conversation.

She stopped and looked up at me, “My uncle. Who else, silly?”

“Oh, of course.” She stopped in front of me and plopped herself down on one of the many thrones I had taken. The royal seat was far too big for her, but she didn’t seem to mind.

“That’s why he gave me this stupid ring?” She removed the ring and fiddled with it.

“Who?” I asked, once again preoccupied with my treasure. She gave me a mean look, which quickly brought the answer back to mind. “Oh, your uncle.”

“Yup. He’s some sort of big wizard. I can’t call him a wizard though. If I do, he always says, ‘I am a High Sorcerer, Dielle, not a Wizard.’ Whatever. Like it makes a big difference to me.”

I was beginning to get a bit curious about this little girl. “Does he know what you can do with that ring?”

“Oh yeah. He’s the one who taught me how to use it. ‘Now, dear Dielle. Do not run off and do something stupid, like wish yourself to the moon, because you will arrive there. And, you will die. Be smart about where you wish it to take you. It is quite simple to use. You merely say, ‘I wish I was somewhere.’ Then you’re there.’ I was excited at first. All my uncle ever does is read books and stay in his lavatory.”

Through a smile, I said, “I believe it is ‘laboratory’, not ‘lavatory.’”

“Whatever. I better get going now. He expects me back by certain times everyday. I’ll come visit tomorrow though, okay?” She paused to make sure she got my answer.

“I look forward to it.”

She put this frown on her face and sarcastically said, “Take me home.” She disappeared and I assume arrived home rather quickly.

\*\*\*\*\*

This morning I was awakened by a “Yoo-hoo.” It was Dielle, giving me a wake-up call.

“Good morning, Mr. Dragon.” She put a big smile on her face to add warmth to the greeting.

“Good morning, Dielle.” I returned her smile and got up to stretch.

“Call-her-rash, how come you only have one fang?”

“My name is Khalderdash. And the story of how I lost my fang is quite gruesome.”

“Can I hear it? Please, please, please...” She shook herself back and forth.

“Are you okay?” I was worried that something was happening to her. It would not be a good thing to have a corpse of a human child lying around my lair.

“Yeah,” she answered in embarrassment. “That’s what we call ‘having a fit.’” Standing up straight, with her hands behind her back, she asked, “Can I please hear the story?”

“If you can handle it.” I looked away modestly. “The tale contains lots of gruesome details.”

“Good!” She quickly ran over and plopped herself in the same throne she sat in yesterday. The throne was one of my favorites. I had taken it from a powerful priestess of some goddess.

“I don’t know where to begin.” I searched my mind for a great opening and remembered one I had thought of a few centuries before. “It was a dark and stormy night.”

“Oh no.” Dielle leaned her head way back and brought a hand over her face.

“Oh no’ what?” I asked confused. “Is there something wrong?”

“No. Well, yeah.” The little girl brought her head forward and looked at me.

“You never start a story with ‘It was a dark and stormy night.’”

“Why not?” It sounded perfectly fine to me.

“That’s how a lot of bad stories start.”

“Okay, then. How about...It was a bright and sunny day.” I looked for her response. “Is that better?”

“Make up your mind. Was it dark? Or was it bright?”

“Well, to tell you the truth...”

“There is no great story to how you lost it. Is there?” The child looked rather disappointed.

I sighed. “I am afraid not. It simply fell out one morning. Losing a fang is no big deal. They usually grow back. However, this time it did not grow back.” I ran my tongue over the spot where my fang once was.

“I remember when my grandma’s teeth fell out. It was one right after another. Pretty soon she didn’t have any left and talked lipped.” The little girl covered her teeth with her lips.

“Does that mean all of my teeth are going to fall out soon?” I quickly ran my tongue over my remaining teeth to ensure none were loose. I flapped my wings a bit to release some nervous energy.

“I don’t know. I’m just a little girl. Hey, what happened to your wing?”

“Are you asking about the one with the tear?”

“No silly, I’m asking about the perfectly fine one.” She frowned. “Of course, the torn one. Sheesh!”

“Now that does have a great story. Give me a minute and I will find it in my journal.”

“Your journal. What’s that?” The little girl asked, scooting back to make herself a bit more comfortable.

“A journal is something in which you keep your thoughts and memories in.”

“I thought that was your brain.” Dielle stated, tapping her head.

“It is, but you can also write things down to reread later. The reason for doing this is so you do not have to keep it all up there.” I moved a claw to her head and knocked gently on it.

“Where do you keep it then?” She looked at me rather confused. “It’s not like you can pick up a quill and start writing.”

“I keep them in this. Come out.” I shouted in their general direction. Almost immediately, my two magical creations appeared.

“Wow! A walking book and a walking pen.”

“What did you call the writing utensil?”

“A pen?” Dielle smiled rather uncomfortably. “I, uh, I assumed it was like my uncle’s. See my uncle has a magical quill that never runs out of ink. He calls it a pen. Since I don’t see a walking bottle of ink, I assume that your quill is like his.” She smiled wide when she finished.

“Interesting.”

“Do they have names yet?” The child asked, running around the two magical creatures.

“No, I never really thought they needed names.”

“Of course, they need names! Everything needs a name.” She bit her lower lip and closed her eyes. “I got it!” She yelled, slightly startlingly me. “We can call them: Brooke and Pren.”

“Why Brooke and Pren?” I was confused by the simplicity in logic. “All you did was add an R to each word.”

“Exactly!” She seemed rather excited by this. “The two Rs: Reading and Righting!”

I laughed very hard this time.

“What’s so funny? Hmm?” She stared hard at me while questioning. She had her arms crossed, and her stubby right foot going up and down.

“Writing starts with a W, not an R.”

“Oops! Sorry.” She sort of sank into herself.

“It is quite all right. I like the names nonetheless. Brooke, find the pages containing the story of when I tore my wing.” The pages soon began to flip rapidly.

“She likes her new name.” Dielle said. Magical items always obey their creator. However, I decided there was no use in telling her otherwise.

“Ah, yes. Here it is.” The book had stopped flipping pages. Realizing it was to be here a while, the book, or I suppose I should call it Brooke, made its magical legs disappear.

“Woh! Where did its legs go?!” The astonished girl asked, pointing to Brooke who had just fallen to the ground.

“It always does that. I suppose it is rather lazy. Every time I write or read from it, it always makes its legs disappear.”

Suddenly the book slammed shut.

“What happened?” The girl asked, looking from the book to me.

“I have no idea. It has never slammed shut before.”

“I think it’s upset because you called it lazy.” Dielle whispered. The book rocked back and forth as if nodding in assent.

“How could it be upset? It does not have any feelings.” I could not recall implanting any when I had created it.

“Of course, it has feelings, Collarsash.” The little human girl knelt beside the book and began rubbing it gently. “He didn’t really mean it, Brooke. He just didn’t know you had feelings. Give him another chance. Okay?” The book just laid there...closed. “Please.” The child pleaded.

The book slowly opened and reluctantly turned back to the page it was open to. Dielle looked up at me and smiled.

I read the story of the last great battle to take place in my lair. It was quite a battle. There must have been over 20 humans, of which more than half were wizards. The battle lasted for quite a while. I was busy trying to flame two of the warriors, when what I assume was a magical arrow tore into my wing. Infuriated, I quickly took care of the remaining warband.

“Wow, that sounds like it wasn’t very fun.” Dielle said after I had read the story.

“Oh, no. It was great fun. I was proud of myself. I had protected my treasure by putting up a great fight; I had triumphed when I probably should have failed; and lastly, I had maintained the idea that dragons, especially ones named Khalderdash, were not ideal creatures to encounter.”

“Didn’t it hurt when they cut your wing?” She asked with a scowl pinching her face.

“Yes, but pain had never bothered me before. All my wounds usually healed.”

“So, how come this one didn’t?”

“I wish I knew.” I answered, while bidding Brooke and Pren away with a wave of my claw. “I waited for it to heal naturally, but it never did. After some time, I tried healing it magically. Still, there was no results. It was during that time when it all started.”

“When what started?” Dielle asked, leaning forward in the throne.

“I suppose you humans know it as ‘old age.’”

“Old age?”

“Yes. It was very odd. I had not noticed anything different until that point. Slowly, but surely, things began changing. Before, I was awake almost all day and all night, taking small bouts of sleep here and there; however, after that battle, I noticed that I was sleeping more and more each day. Before I would scour the land, magically listening to conversations, hoping for news of hidden treasure; now, I have no means to find out about new treasure. Instead, I have to concentrate all my energy on protecting what I have. Unfortunately, it seems as if I am beginning to fail at even that.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ever since then, I have been scared to get anymore wounds. How am I to know whether or not they are going to heal? Most weapons affect me very little, but if I cannot recover, those wounds will quickly add up.”

“But you can’t just sit here and wait to die.”

“Sure, I can.” I said in response to her absurd observation. “This is my lair. All of this beautiful treasure is mine. I have spent a lifetime amassing it. I have done nothing else.”

“I know,” she shook her head. “I bet you never made a friend.”

“Who needs friends?”

“Everyone.”

“Why? What purpose does a friend serve?”

“Purpose,” she echoed.

“Yes, purpose. Reason for being—”

“I know what the word means.” She gave me an angry look. “I just don’t see why you don’t see a purpose in a friend.”

“Give me some good reasons why.” I sat down to get comfortable, thinking it was going to take her quite sometime to come up with some. To my surprise, there was not even enough time to get comfortable.

“They’re nice. They’re around when you need them. They play with you. They help you. They talk with you. They make school fun. They love you.”

“Love? What is this love?” I finally found a human to inquire about that strange emotion. “It is abound in your literature and lifestyles.”

“You don’t know what love is?”

“No. Why? Should I?” I did not think I had reason to.

“Of course, you should. Everybody knows what love is.”

“What about evil people?”

“No, well, not them, because they don’t like love.”

“I was once considered an evil creature.”

“Yeah, but you’re not one anymore.”

“Then why have I not learnt about this love.”

Shaking her head some more, Dielle added, “You don’t learn about love. You feel it.”

“Feel it? Odd. I had no idea that love was something you could touch.”

“It’s not. It’s something you feel inside you.”

“You mean like a pain.”

“Yes, exactly.”

“Why is love so great if it hurts?”

“It doesn’t always hurt.”

“You just said it felt like pain.”

“Only sometimes.” She looked a bit angered.

I persisted. “So, then it **is** painful?”

“Yes, but only because it’s good.”

“I do not understand.”

“The good makes the bad painful, but the bad makes the good feel better.”

Getting even more confused, I repeated, “I do not understand.”

“Uuuuugh!” Dielle said, getting up to pace about. I heard her mumbling, “How can I get him to understand?” After walking a few more paces, she turned excitedly towards me. “I know how to help you understand.”

“Great.” I said smiling, always welcoming the opportunity to learn something new.

“I’m going to leave, but I’ll be back tomorrow.”

“But I thought you said—”

“I know, I know. Trust me. I’ll be back.” She smiled and said, “Take me home.”

And with that said, she disappeared. What a strange little girl that Dielle is. Something about her just does not seem right.

Bah, not that it matters anyway. Oh my, I do believe it is nap time once again.

\*\*\*\*\*

That Dielle is such a clever little girl. Who would have thought that she could teach me, a dragon, the meaning of that human emotion called love? Ah, but I’m getting ahead of myself. Let me explain it from the start of today.

I was awakened this morning by laughter, a strange laughter. Many types of laughter have resounded off these walls of mine: hysterical laughter from a deranged adventuring thief, my own laughter as I played with weak intruders, or, the most recent and abundant laughter, that of the adventurer who sees my decrepit body. Today’s laughter was different though. One I had never heard in these walls before, but hope to hear often in times to come.

It seems as if Dielle went home for a reason, after all. To help me come to grips with this notion of love, she did what I suppose was the obvious: she brought an example. The other little girl that showed up in my lair was a short and pudgy. She had a sort of oafish look to her and called Dielle by the nickname “D.D.”

I noticed the girls laughing at one of the paintings I had stolen from some great palace or other. It was entitled “Consummation.” The painting portrayed two gods consummating their vows amidst the clouds. I thought the painting was a great rendering of the human bodies, but for some reason the girls found it funny.

I stepped forward to greet them, but they did not hear me approach. They continued to point and laugh at the painting. Wanting to make my presence known, I softly cleared my throat. Well to me, it seemed softly. To the girls, however, it must have seemed a bit louder, because they both jumped.

“Collar Rash, you scared us.” Dielle said, helping to pick the other girl off the floor.

“You weren’t lying, D.D. He is a real dragon.”

“I told you so.”

“Dielle, who is this?” I asked as politely as I could.

“This is my friend, Sasha.” She said waving towards her friend. “Sasha, this is-”

“A real live dragon.” The pudgy girl stared at me in awe. I tried to look as dignified as I could, but then again, I had just awakened. “Why are you called Collar Rash. Were you forced to wear a cursed collar by an evil wizard or something?”

I noticed that Dielle had still not quite learned my name. “No, I do not have to wear a cursed collar.”

“Do you make cursed collars?” The girl asked with more intrigue.

“No, I do not make cursed collars either.”

“Ah,” the girl said covering her open mouth with her hands. She moved them barely enough to release the words, “Then giving collar rash must be your breath weapon.”

“No, I have no such weapon. I breathe fire like all normal dragons.” I was getting rather fed up with the collar rash questions.

Dropping her hands to reveal a confused face, Sasha asked, “Then why is your name Collar Rash?”

“My name is not Collar Rash.”

“Isn’t that what D.D. just called you?”

“Well, ‘D.D.’ still has not quite learned my name.” We both turned to give Dielle an angry look.

“Don’t look at me like that. It sounds like your name.”

I sighed and shook my head. Leaning down to put my mouth close to them, I slowly enunciated, “My name is Khalderdash.” I continued to spell it for them.

“Okay, okay. Sheesh.” Dielle said, putting up her hands. “We’re not that dumb.”

Wanting to move on to a different subject, I asked, “Why were you two laughing at my painting?”

“Which painting?” Dielle asked, giving her companion a smile.

Not understanding I said, “The one right to the left of you. The one you were both laughing at a few minutes ago.”

“You mean the one with the dirty people?” Sasha said, wide eyed.

“They look rather clean, if you ask me.”

“She doesn’t mean, dirty-dirty, silly. She means, dirty like in nasty.”

“Nasty?”

“Yes, nasty.” Dielle said. “Didn’t your momma teach you what nasty is?”

“No, she did not. Explain to me what ‘nasty’ is.”

At this point, both little girls began to giggle. “How old are you again, KHALDERDASH?”

She stressed the enunciation, but at least she got it right. "I am two thousand three hundred and eighty-six."

"Wow." Sasha peeped to Dielle. "He's that old and he doesn't know what nasty means?"

"Yes, I am. Now are you going to tell me or not?" I was beginning to get frustrated with the two girls. I began to understand why dragons didn't have many children.

"Just look at them." Dielle said, pointing.

"Yeah, just look." Sasha echoed, pointing as well.

I looked at the picture, saw nothing different than all the other times I looked at it, and I looked back at them.

"Doesn't something seem weird? Like maybe something is missing?" As Dielle said this, she tugged on her clothes.

"What? Their clothes?"

"Yes." Sasha nodded.

"Of course, they are naked. They are about to consummate their marriage; henceforth, the given title."

"They're going to constipate their marriage?" Sasha asked wide eyed.

"Not 'constipate,' consummate. They are about to have intercourse."

"Gross!" Sasha said, spitting. "You shouldn't have pictures like that Mr. Dragon. They're not very nice."

"Wait. I do not understand." I turned to Dielle. "I thought that marriage and intercourse were the ultimate expressions of human love."

"It is when you grow up." Dielle said compassionately. "When you're little though, it's different."

"Yeah," Sasha added.

"So, what is important now?"

"Friends," both said with big smiles. They each threw one arm over the other's shoulder.

"You see, right now boys are gross." Dielle said.

"Disgusting," Sasha added with a wretched look.

"Girls talk with girls—"

"And boys talk with boys."

"You mean, both sexes do not mingle?" I asked, confused.

Both shook their heads rapidly.

"So, how does marriage come about?"

"Eventually, we're going to like boys." Dielle enlightened me.

"Yeah, but that's not until we grow boobies and start bleeding."

"It sounds like a painful process." I had no recollection of bleeding when I was growing up.

"It sort of is," Dielle muttered.

"Yeah, we're not looking forward to it." Sasha added.

"You both are afraid to grow up?"

"Yes." They both answered.

"Things change when humans grow up."

"It all starts to go bad when you hit 'Puh-hurty.'" Sasha said sadly.

“Puh-hurty.’ What is that exactly?” I asked, never encountering such a word.

“I’ll tell him,” Dielle ventured. “You see, the ‘puh’ part is there because for some reason you start to smell. Hair starts growing in places where there wasn’t any before. Plus, with the hair comes sweat and it’s just plain gross.”

“And the ‘hurty’ part is there for two reasons.” Sasha interrupted. “First, you get these things called ‘cramps.’ I don’t know exactly what they are or where they come from, but I know what they do.”

“Which is?” I asked.

“Well,” Sasha continued. “They go around your insides hitting things and messing things up, which make you hurt. Then, once their done, they sort of force their way out and make you bleed.”

“That sounds horrible.”

“Yup, it sure does.” Dielle added solemnly.

“The worst part is that boys’ ‘puh-hurty’ is a lot easier.” Sasha seemed to be the medical expert. “They get the ‘puh’ part like us; only instead of cramps, they get an extra bone the comes and goes when it pleases.”

“How odd.” I looked at the two girls with their vast knowledge. “All my life I have observed humans, and never did I realize this painful transformation took place. Does it happen over night?”

“Oh no,” Sasha said. “It takes your whole life. Guys never lose the extra bone, but girls eventually get rid of those cramps.”

“How much time do you have left before this begins?” I asked, concerned that the hideous transformation would take place in front of me.

“No one knows,” Dielle stated. “It’s one of life’s great mysteries.”

Sasha nodded in affirmation.

“What are some of the other mysteries of life?” I asked.

“Me staining my trousers seems to be one for my mom,” Sasha peeped.

“You dirtying your trousers is one of the mysteries of life?” I had my doubts.

“Yup. My mom always says, ‘Dear Sasha, how do you stain these trousers so much?’ I usually shrug and she says, ‘I guess that’s just one of life’s great mysteries.’”

This time it was Dielle who nodded in affirmation. “Yeah, and my uncle says taxes are another one.”

“Human beings are so strange,” I mumbled.

“Oh and dragons aren’t?” Dielle retorted.

“I was not trying to say that we dragons are any better.”

Dielle walked over to Sasha and whispered something in her ear. They both looked at me while she whispered. Sasha then marched up to me and said, “Well, at least we human beans know what love is!”

“And you two know what love is?” I asked skeptically since Dielle couldn’t explain it to me the previous day.

“Of course,” Dielle said. “We love each other.” The two hugged and put their faces cheek to cheek. They stuck their tongues out and fell down laughing.

“We’re best friends. We grew up together. We’ll probably die together.”

“Die?” I was a bit taken back. “I thought you humans were scared of death.”

“Death is scary only when you’re alone and unloved.” Dielle explained while Sasha starting shifting back and forth.

“Is that so?” I thought back to the many humans I had killed. Some died bravely, while others died shamefully. Cries of pain, pleas of mercy and constant begging could be heard. I took no mercy, of course. I killed them, some swiftly and others after a bit of torture. It was their fault for being there in my lair, attempting to harm the only thing I cared for. This thought brought about a notion. “Is it possible to love inanimate objects?”

“Wait...what?” Dielle was confused. “We were talking about dying. Now, you want to talk about love?” Sasha’s shifting became more and more rapid.

“Yes,” I was eager for an answer. “So is it possible?”

“Well...you see...” Dielle looked a bit lost. After a few seconds of silence, she looked up at me and asked, “What’s a ‘inn and a mit’ object?”

I let my head droop a bit. I looked at her and she seemed sad to have let me down. I smiled and pointed around my lair. “In-an-imate objects are things that aren’t alive, like my treasure.”

“Khalderdash!” Dielle looked offended. You can tell she was about to spew forth some tirade about my love for treasure. Before she could though, Sasha ran up and tugged on her clothes.

“We gotta go home now,” Sasha said, dancing about.

“Wait, I thought we were going to stay until—”

“—I know but...” Her friend was turning a bit flush in the face. “I have to go now.” She squeezed her legs together while she said the last part.

“Oh, okay.” Dielle understood the code and turned to me. “We have to go, I’ll be back tomorrow.”

Sasha grabbed hold of Dielle and the two disappeared.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Sorry I had to leave so suddenly yesterday,” Dielle said today. “Sasha had to go potty. And...” she looked around. “I don’t exactly see an outhouse around here.”

“I see, I understand.”

“Where do you go to the bathroom, Calder bash?” She said with a wink. It was obvious she knew my name, but we both enjoyed the nicknames.

“Well, in my version of an outhouse.” I didn’t particularly want to carry on with this topic.

“Where though? You don’t move from that spot very much, and I don’t see or smell any poop around.”

“I get rid of my waste so as not to have it lying around.” I glanced at the place where I dig a hole and cover my feces.

“Hey, what do you eat too? I don’t see any food around here either.” Dielle suddenly paled and took a step back.

“Why are you frightened?” I took a step closer.

“Wait a minute...” She put up her hands, signaling me to stop. “You don’t eat people, do you?” She gulped.

I smiled. This little girl never ceases to amaze me. “No, my dear friend Dielle. I do not eat humans. “ The flesh is too bitter, but I decided not to add that part.

“Whew,” she sighed and relaxed. “I was getting scared there for a second.” She walked over and plopped herself in her usual throne chair.

“I eat very seldom.” I explained. “Dragons are not like humans, we eat a lot less.”

“Well,” she pointed at my body. “Look at how skinny you are. Maybe you should eat a bit more.”

“Yes, I probably should.” I looked at my frail and withering body. “However, much like everything else these days, I don’t have the energy to do so.”

There was a pause. I was embarrassed by my inadequacies. How sad for a dragon to not even have the strength to eat.

“When was the last time you ate?” She walked over and ran her hands over my body.

Touch. To get near a dragon is difficult, to touch a dragon is near impossible. Yet here was this little girl, running her small hands over my leathery skin.

“I can feel your ribs.” She said with concern in her voice. “You need something to eat.”

I nodded.

“Can dragons starve to death?”

“Hmm...I suppose so.” I had never really thought about that. It would be a sad death, to starve.

“Hey,” Dielle piped. She ran back around to my head. “What’s your favorite food?”

I looked at her with bewilderment. “Favorite food?”

“Yeah,” she said excitedly. “The thing you most like to eat in the whole wide world!”

“In the world?” I asked while thinking. “The world is a big place.”

“I know, but I’m sure you’ve been to a lot of it.”

I reached deep into my mind to recall something.

“Come on. It’s not that hard.” Dielle closed her eyes. “I know what mine is. An In-N-Out...” She licked her lips. “Double-Double.”

“A what?” I asked in bewilderment.

Dielle snapped out of her trance. “Oh, I mean, well, it’s just something that’s rare in this day and age. It’s impossible to find really.” Dielle had a look like she said something she shouldn’t have. “Now come on, what’s your favorite?”

As if by magic, a thought appeared in my mind. A very old thought of a unique fruit from a far off land. “I know what it is,” I smiled.

“Oh goodie. What is it?”

“A fruit, a beautiful fruit from a tree.”

“Where exactly is this tree?”

“I don’t remember the name of the land, but I remember there were four rivers that ran from it. Two of the rivers were Pishon and Gihon, but I can’t remember the other two.”

“I know where that is.” Dielle said solemnly.

“You do?” I asked.

“I’ve read about it before.”

“Interesting.”

“That I can read?” She asked with a bit of anger in her voice.

“No, no, my friend.” I had not meant to anger her. “It is interesting that I did not remember the fruit until now.”

Dielle smiled. “I bet you don’t remember anything before that.”

“Actually, I do not.”

“And you probably don’t remember how to get there either.” She said with an even bigger smile.

“No, I do not.” This little girl knew something. I do not know what it was, but there was something about the knowledge that was beyond her years.

“I have to go now.” She stood up and walked towards me.

She then did something that I see humans do often, but never understood why. She hugged me and with that came a sense of joy like no other. She only hugged my jaw as I am too big for her arms to fit around anything else. She gave me a kiss on my cheek and said, “Take me home.” Only, for some reason, I don’t think she was talking about her uncle’s house.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Hey Mr. Dragon, “ Dielle woke me. “Look what I have.”

I lifted my head from slumber and saw a basket. It was a simple basket filled with the fruit I had mentioned the day before. “Where did you get these?” I asked.

“Umm...from a tree, duh!” She gave me a look that emphasized she was stating the obvious.

“I meant, where did you find the fruit?”

“Exactly where you told me.” I must have had a puzzled look because she continued. “Remember? Yesterday, you told me the tree by the Pishon and Gihon rivers?”

“Oh yes, I remember.”

“Well, I woke up this morning and I was about to say, ‘Take me to the nearest dragon’ like I always do, but I decided to bring you something to eat. So instead, I said, ‘Take me to where the Pishon and Gihon rivers start.’ Next thing you know, I’m in this beautiful forests with lots of trees. I saw two in particular with beautiful fruit, but I could only get the fruit from one for you. These are the ones you’ve had before. I’ve had the others and they’re not that good.”

She picked up a fruit and said, “Open wide!”

I look at her while tilting my head.

“You mouth, silly. Open your mouth.”

I did as I was told and she tossed the fruit into my mouth. It tasted exactly as I remembered it did oh so long ago.

I was taken back by this little girl’s kindness and generosity. I was beginning to like her presence. I hoped she would continue to come visit me.

“Open up. Here comes another.” I did as I was told and she tossed another fruit into my mouth.

“Why are you so kind to me?” I asked. “I do not deserve this kindness.”

“Don’t be, silly. Of course you do. Everyone does.”

“Yes, but I was an evil creature. I killed many people, probably even some of your distant relatives.” I felt ashamed. I felt bad for doing all those evil things.

“No, I doubt you killed any of my relatives.” She looked at me with kindness. “And plus, look at all this wonderful treasure you have. You couldn’t have gotten all this without being mean.”

I looked around and smiled at my beautiful treasure. “Yes, I suppose you are right.”

“Plus, you were just doing what you knew.”

“Are you saying that simply because I am a dragon, I had a right to do all the vile things I did?”

“It’s just like my kitty. I love my kitty. I have always loved my kitty. However, sometimes, he’ll go out and kill a mouse. He’ll chase the mouse around until he corners it. The poor little mouse will just stand there, scared to death with nowhere to run to. Then, when it’s helpless, my kitty will jump on it.” She acted out both the part of the kitty and the mouse.

She paused for a bit and then looked up at me. “Sometimes, I’ll help the mouse. I’ll yell at my kitty and tell it to leave the mouse alone. Other times, when I’m not there though, it kills the mouse. Does that make my kitty bad? Does it make me hate my kitty and not love it? Of course not. Kitties just do that.”

Yet again, the little human child amazed me. Here, with a simple little story, she proved to me that I was not evil. I was what I was, a dragon.

“I wish I could give you a hug, Dielle. Just like you gave me the other day.”

Her eyes got big, “Um...call-her-bash, I think you would just end up smashing me if you did that.”

I chuckled. “I suppose you are right.” I paused and glanced at the basket. “Can you pass me another fruit?”

She smiled and said, “Of course, but this time I’m going to throw you a curve ball.” I didn’t understand what she meant or why she threw it so strangely. None of that mattered though, I was simply glad that she was there.

\*\*\*\*\*

I’m afraid this is going to be my last entry in my journal. I cannot see Brooke and Prenne, but can here the familiar sounds of their scratching. Today I felt such pain, beyond the physical pains my body is familiar with.

Where do I start? I have not the energy to describe it all, nor I am afraid the time. My breaths become shallower as each one passes. I do not even know why I am writing. I think it’s because it’s all I have left. My journal has brought me much peace in my life and I know it will bring me much peace in my death.

I had a battle today. The last battle to ever occur in my lair and definitely the last battle for my frail body. It was with greedy humans, like most of my battles have been, only this one was different.

Why didn’t she wish herself away? Why did she stay? I do not understand. I see her body lying still and can remember how it used to jump about my lair. I have never been saddened by death. I have even caused death many times and can only feel shame for the pain I must have caused others.

I should have been stronger. I should have been able to stop them before they got to her. Why? Why have the Gods seem fit to place such a burden upon me?

Dielle was such a beautiful little girl with such a wonderful gift. Now, she is gone and no one will be able to know that gift. No one will hear her sweet laughter, no one will see her funny expressions and no one will know her gentle touch. I can recall her small hands running over my old bones with such tenderness. She touched me with her hands but managed to reach an even deeper spot.

I must end this entry soon. All I can say is that I am sorry. If anyone finds this, know that I am sorry. I would give up all my treasure; I would give back every year of my pathetic life if only I could bring her back. It is much too late now. The damage is done and the time has passed.

I feel sleep's tender pull and know its sister death is soon to follow. I welcome it and the peace it will give me. I welcome...

\*\*\*\*\*

*Oh sweet Khalderdash, over two thousand years of existence and still such a sweet and innocent mind. It seems fitting now that I chose the form of a child to appear before you. I could have chosen that of a dragon like yourself. Or even that of an aged person, like yourself. Somehow though, I knew that would not work as well as the little body of Dielle. I gave you so many hints. I tried to make you understand who I was and why I was there. Dragons are stubborn creatures though, especially when it comes to matters of the heart. Your time has come and passed. You are now in a better place. A land, I'm quite sure, you will find to your liking. I have made sure that there will be lots of treasure waiting for you at your final destination. I'll come to visit you soon enough. However, right now, I have much more work to do. It seems that there are others in the world that need my assistance in embracing death. Till next we meet, my sweet friend, sleep well. And say hello to your mother and father for me, as they and I are old friends as well.*