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Category: Science Fiction & Fantasy

Once, there were dragons.

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I. Dragons are born of fire and belief.

A candle is lit, and the flame rises and rises until the small curled form of a miniscule dragon can be seen at its center. It stretches, and sneezes. Even this proves tiring, and they roll up to sleep for a while longer, relishing in the warmth of the flame against their scales.

Dragons thrive in heat. They carry within them tiny sparks, and seek out kindling to turn into magnificent blazes. Children are known to be rather flammable amongst dragons.

Our blue hatchling has stumbled upon a schoolyard full of children out for recess. It lands on one, spreading flames first into their hair, then through their skin into their veins. The fire spreads quickly, and the child is delighted, holding up his hands and turning them around as they seem to glow. He runs towards his classmates and tags one, spreading the fire even more, until the entire schoolyard looks more like a fireplace from a story than a break before lessons.

And as the flames grow, so does the dragon.

It isn't long before one spots the scaly reptile in the first one's hair, and she reaches out. The dragon obliges, jumping into her hand and running around, now about the size of a mouse. They all gather around her, in awe of their small visitor.

One of the caretakers comes to see what the fuss is about. But she does not see the dragon- for her, it simply does not exist. When her eyes tell her it is there, her brain tells her it is not, and that's that.

She is deaf to the children's explanations, and they look at each other, curious. Could this be a game? Or could they possibly be wrong? No one much mentions the dragon after that. And three of the classmates swear that it has vanished, and that maybe it was never there, or just a trick of the light.

The blaze has dwindled into ashes by the time school is brought back in session. The girl with the dragon puts it within her jacket and our little friend shudders, shrinks, desperately clinging on to the heat of the wavering flame within her.

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II. Dragons are born of air and wishes.

In the springtime, dandelions have bloomed, and these are quickly plucked and blown and asked for everything imaginable- times of fun, or a new love, or a chance to travel. And the dandelions listen, and scatter themselves out into the wind.

Within every seed is a newborn dragon. These sing at the thrill of flying on the wind, and cling as fiercely to the dreams they were given as to the seeds themselves. They warble their goodbyes to their siblings as the wind spreads

them over miles and centuries.

Once the seeds land, the dragons feast on expectations and doze beneath the light of the moon, scheming and plotting and growing stronger. And by the time it is fall, they are ready.

The dragons take to the air on new wings, seeking out those dreamers that spoke to them long ago. And they fly through their ears and into their minds. Many do not realize they have dragons within them, and others hear echoes of what they call subconsciousness. But the dragons sing incessantly, through the storms and the dark nights and the tear-stained times.

Some of the dragons enter to find a den, with a hearth and soft pillows and jars of stardust marmalade. Others find abandoned caves, which they fix up, and add pretty curtains and fragrant flowers.

A youth is laying on her bed, staring at the ceiling. She wants nothing more than to do something, yet cannot bring herself to do anything at all. Screens and screams and secrets have sapped her strength, until there is nothing more to give. But the dandelion of a dragon within her strokes her hair, and gives her just the smallest nudge. She flops onto a desk and grabs a pencil, and begins to sketch.

Hours later, she is still absorbed, finally having found herself within worlds of her own making. She spins in the chair and admires her creations.

Some of the dragons enter to find a den. Others find abandoned caves.

And yet other dragons find blocked tunnels and closed doors and high brick walls, and cannot enter, no matter how much they scratch at them. And these have no choice but to leave, and their solemn cries join those of crickets during the long nights.

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III. Dragons are born of water and fear.

A youth stands at the edge of a waterfall, cautiously looking down. His friends are waiting for him below, splashing and laughing their heads off.

He really does want to do this. It's tradition- the tradition of his older sister, of his parents, of their parents before them. He wants to launch himself off and soar to the water below. He wants to remember this day forever, his last day of freedom before the dreads of the stuffy boarding school he is to go to tomorrow.

But his feet are rooted to the ground. His knees refuse to move. His hands won't stop shaking. It's a long way down.

Still peering down the waterfall, he doesn't notice the dragon as it emerges. Brilliant blue scales that turn into rippling water under the light of the sun. Curved claws that are harder than stone. Two slender horns seemingly taken from the oldest tree in the woods. Wings the span of a thousand yards.

The youth doesn't notice as the dragon emerges, but he notices it when it roars. It has the fire of a thousand years stored inside it, and in his eyes, it looks dreadfully hungry. This is no longer boredom, with the chance of excitement. This is danger, with the chance of survival.

Adrenaline pumps through his veins. The absurd thought that perhaps water will harm the dragon enters his mind as the youth leaps for the waterfall, positioned to kick the dragon in the snout.

That blow never lands. And suddenly he is falling into the water, and coming back up for air. His friends are laughing and elbowing him. *What a leap!*

He splashes them back good-naturedly, looking upwards with a slight sense of unease. There had been something important up there... but he'd forgotten. What had compelled him to jump like that? Any notion of threat has been dissolved by the streaming sunlight, replaced by the thrill of the fall.

The dragon looks on from beneath the waterfall, and smiles. Its job here is done.

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IV. Dragons are born of earth and avarice.

A small village sits at the foot of a mountain. It is a simple village, of people who live simply: they work carving stone to sell, or own a small shop, or mend and wash clothes, or farm. Nothing terribly exciting has ever occurred here, nor is it likely to occur. All is well.

The sun is lazily beginning its ascent. A man sings to himself while he mines. From here, he will go home, to celebrate his youngest's 4th birthday. His older daughter is making a cake, and his wife is likely putting the finishing touches on the gift: a new dress.

His pick strikes oddly, sending bits of rock flying everywhere. But something catches his attention: for a bit of rock is reflecting light in an unusual way. He picks it up, his eyes widen, and he heads straight for home.

The man shows his discovery to his wife, and they spend a few minutes whispering. He goes back to the place, piles up some rocks, and then returns home, pushing it out of his mind until the next day.

Another stonecutter rises and goes to the mountain. The stone seems to be loose over there, so that's where she starts. She strikes, only to make the same discovery as the man. Soon, everyone knows about the gold.

Thousands come in search of fortune. Tens of thousands of pickaxes hack at the mountain every day, stealing precious golden drops. Soon, big companies arrive, with their giant machines. Gold is rushed from here to there, bought and sold and bought again. There is yelling in the streets. Whose mountain is it, anyways?

It is the dragon's mountain. She rises above the city with a mighty roar, beating her powerful wings. She takes all the gold she can find: the goblets and crowns and swords and jewelry and coins. And she makes her lair in the center of the mountain, driving away any who come near.

She will guard this gold for centuries, making sure it can never corrupt another human's soul. Until the humans inevitably come, with their arrows and sharp blades.

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V. Once, there were dragons.

There are no dragons anymore. Maybe they died off, or left for the stars, or hid where we could never reach them. Or maybe they're still here- and we just forgot where to look.