

Frost Dragons

Rain patters outside my window, like tiny drum beats trying to etch themselves into my brain. I stare out across the street, watching people scurry like plastic covered mice, trying hard to stay out of the drizzle. Thumping avidly behind my eyes, my heart mocks me.

"You gotta go out," my sister scolds. Her voice is annoying normally, but after my drinking binge the night before, it's impossible. I close my eyes trying to block her out, but she takes it as a cue. "Don't you ignore me, and go to sleep! You been cooped up here too long already. You ain't been out for almost a month, and the family is getting worried."

For some reason, a T-shirt I saw once springs to the front of my mind's eye. *"If I throw a stick, will you please go away?"* it exclaimed in bright letters.

"Listen! I know that you and John were close a long time, but he's gone. Waiting ain't gonna change that." She waits for a response. "You need to try again. Just 'cause a couple a guys are assholes, don't mean that all of them are bad!"

I can't take it anymore. "Y'know, your attempts at trying to cheer me up really suck."

Her lips pull into a grade A pout.

I don't feel sorry.

She looks around. I know what she sees: empty peanut butter jars, old take-out boxes, dirty dishes, overflowing trash can, clothes scattered like shrapnel, pans filled with water from leaky ceilings, bare light bulb fixtures, cracked plaster, and a twisted, bitter, washed up bitch of a sister.

I don't care.

I don't seem to care about anything anymore.

The world seems gray, featureless.

Like the world on the other side of my window.

It's quiet.

I look over my shoulder, half-curious.

My sister is gone, probably off to report to our mother. Full of news about how sad and wretched I am.

Good.

The rain outside hasn't stopped. I like this time of year, when the rains cool off the noon heat, and make the streets steam. The world seems magical for some reason. Special.

The rain has fogged up my window, making the scurrying people fuzzy and indistinct. I can imagine that they are anything I want when they are like this. They could be giant bugs or fruits, like escaped extras from a commercial; robots or tinker-toy creatures that some child put together and set free; even paint splashes that run across the canvas of the street with the rain.

I take my finger and trace the outline of a dragon on the misty window. I carefully sketch out the spiked head, and long tail. Huge wings lift the mystical beast over a foggy pasture of my imagination. Stripes give him a more exotic look, and I work hard to make the scales as fine as I can. A section of my window is clear where my dragon's feet should be. I breathe on the glass, giving myself room to complete my picture.

Despite myself, I grin.

My dragon needs a castle.

Taken by some odd energy that only strikes me when I'm mist carving, I run to the window next to the bed. Soaring towers and crenellations flow from my fingers. Arrow slits, tower balconies, and flags appear as if by magic. The draw bridge is up, and soldiers from my cloud castle stand at attention, waiting to repel the danger painted on my living room window.

I blink.

One of the knights neatly carves out a person standing on the street.

I look closer, through the unwitting soldier.

A man dressed in a dark blue rain slicker is standing calmly at the corner, waiting for the light to change. He seems unruffled by the falling drizzle, a marked contrast from his fellow pedestrians.

I get the bizarre impression that he is looking at me.

The "walk" sign flickers to life, and the man strides across the street toward my apartment.

He stops under my windows.

"He *is* looking at me," I whisper horrified.

I back away from the windows, but I can still see him through the sketch lines of my castle. His eyes flow over the window panes and a smile tugs at his lips.

This is horrible! Not only does one man ruin my life, but here another one is trying to spy on me as well.

I run to the living room window closest to the street. I grab the latch and raise the dragon inscribed sliding pane.

"What?" I snap, feeling strangely violated.

The man jerks in surprise and stammers. "I'm sorry, I didn't expect you to come out."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Well..." he takes his hat off, despite the rain. "I--my name is Dylan Joseph. I write children's books, and--well--I saw one of your window drawings a few weeks ago and I loved it. I...I've been trying to walk past here every day since, trying to see what you've come up with since."

"What?"

"Your pictures; I've been coming to see them for the last few weeks. I haven't missed a day. Each one is different, and you've inspired me to write new stories. I hadn't been able to come up with anything for months and my publishers were getting upset. When I saw the circus you drew, the ideas just started to fill my head and I couldn't wait until I got home to start writing again."

I just stare at him.

He stands in the rain with his hat clenched nervously in his fist, waiting for me to say something. His spectacles are hopelessly spotted with water, and he looks vulnerable and small on the street corner.

I look up at the dragon on the glass over my head. The pane is clearing with the change in temperature, and the dragon is fading with it.

What could it hurt?

I look at Mr. Joseph. "Do you like coffee?"

A smile breaks across his face and he looks like a little boy. "Yes."

I close the window, and take a look at my apartment. I grimace, and quickly open the window again.

"Let's go to the shop down the street," I say.