

“THE HUNGRY GIRL AND THE MISERABLE DRAGON”

By Alexander G. Tozzi

There once was a dragon who could not sleep without having nightmares. When this dragon awoke, it was in a cold sweat which rained from its scales when it flew, smashing through the roofs of many a house, flooding many a garden. This town grew to hate the dragon, and through rocks and pitchforks at him when he flew back to his cave.

Nightmares are terrible enough, but with a whole town throwing rocks and pitchforks, the dragon was especially distressed, and spent most of his time wallowing in misery. And when the night came, and the dragon went to sleep, his nightmares would be more the worse.

In the village there lived a girl who spent her days picking turnips from her parents' garden. When the dragon's cold sweat rained down, all the turnips would be washed away, and the girl and her family had to wait for new ones to grow. While the dragon slept in terror, the girl slept in hunger.

Hunger is a terrible thing, and one becomes desperate to take their mind off it. This little girl of the village would sneak around town, hiding under the eaves of windows, listening to people share their secrets. She learned that an old woman suffered from tow fungus, that a little boy spooked horses, and other such things you'd expect in a town. But one of the windows whose eave she hid under belonged to a wizard, a wizard who spoke in his sleep. Listening to that mumbling wizard, the girl learned of a magical plant which soothed dragons.

Dragon's Wort, this three-leafed plant was called. And it grew not too far from the village.

Now this little girl had no idea that the dragon whose flight over the village flooded their crops, was suffering from nightmares. But it left a sharp pain in her heart, worse than

hunger in her belly, to see the townsfolk throw rocks and pitchforks at the dragon. If the giant serpent wanted to cause destruction, she reasoned, then wouldn't it spew flame, or rake its claws throughout our village?

This little girl itched her chin, knowing there was something the matter with this dragon, and though she did not know what, a batch of Dragon's Wort just might perk it up.

Falling asleep is hard when you have nightmares, as the dragon did, but it is even harder when you have no food in your belly. While her parents, who still worked to clean house and rebuild houses, dozed like lambs, this little girl threw off her cover and wandered outside, into the dark night. Outside looked very different than it did in the light, but our little girl found her way to a small forest by way of the stars. There, growing in the crook of withered oak trees, just as the wizard had mumbled, was a patch of Dragon's Wort!

It was a fine patch, too, more than enough for a dragon. If those three-leaved plants that smelled like beets were. . . well, actual beets, this little girl and her family would have been full for a week.

This little girl's belly was far from full, and it made tugging those plants from the ground a challenge. Falling back, she was quite dizzy when she rose, and stumbled along the way to the dragon's cave. With each step she hoped that the plant in her arms would quell whatever the dragon suffered from, that it would stop raining down on her village's crops, because she was so, so hungry.

Seeing the dragon's cave, jagged rock shining in the moonlight like stone fangs, she forgot her hunger, for fear makes you forget everything. The dragon's snoring echoed out the cave like a warm breeze. This little girl started to back away, but, the scent of beet rising up from the plants in her arms gave her the courage to take a step over those stone fangs, and step ever deeper into the dragon's cave.

Now the dragon had just fallen asleep, and though his nightmares were too terrible to mention, it is quite unpleasant to

be woken by the soft sound of little feet. With a grumbling growl the dragon awoke and snapped its long neck toward the shivering little girl in its cave. Eyeing her with eyes as red as ruby, the dragon growled again. This little girl was from the village which had thrown rocks and pitchforks at it! She would make a fine snack. But this little girl was also very brave to enter tis cave, it knew, and decided to give her a few seconds head start before snacking on her.

This little girl spent those seconds trembling, too frightened to speak. As the dragon opened its maw wide, revealing fangs sharper than the stone ones she had just stepped over, this little girl held out her bundle of beet-smelling plants. The dragon, about to lunge forward and close his mouth round the girl, caught a whiff of a very distinct, and very pleasing smell. Dragon's Wort!

The dragon grumbled, but not an angry grumble. Feeling a calm wash over his scaly body, the dragon gently collapsed on the stone floor. Almost asleep, the dragon knew that the girl from the village had come with that armful of Dragon's Wort just for him. And as she saw that the dragon was peaceful, this little girl stepped over, a smile on her face, and dropped the smelly plants before the dragon's nose. The dragon snapped a lizard tongue out and devoured the plants in one bite. Seeing the dragon eat made the girl's smile vanished, but the dragon recognized the look of hunger on her face, and before he set to snoring, he pointed with his tale to a deeper part of the cave. Within that little chamber the girl found a store of meats, cheeses, and all sorts of fruit. The little girl ate a feast like no other, and the dragon slept a sleep free of nightmares.

And with no nightmares, the dragon woke up without a single drop of cold sweat on his scales. And since there was no cold sweat on his scales, his flight over the village did not drop any rain. Crops quickly returned to that village, but it took a little girl from that village to keep the people from throwing rocks and pitchforks. This little girl is no longer hungry, and no longer hides in the eaves of windows. Not because she is full, but

because she is too busy tending to her garden of Dragon's Wort. A smelly plant she grows especially for the dragon, which keeps the fearsome beast from having nightmares, and no one should suffer nightmares.

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