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Yes,

I can attend a reading to the public on March 31, 2020.

Where

There Be Dragons

In

my sister's garden, I tend dragons. They emerge from the soil, shaking earth from their scales.

Hello, little ones,

I say. With bodies no bigger than my palm and small
spires pressing from their backs, they are vibrant. They blink in the bright sunlight and snort, catching the dried leaves on fire, fires that burn briefly then smolder. I feed them the roots of the weeds I'd pulled this morning.

The dragons snap at the bits of dead matter.

"Who are you?"

I ask.

I am Rage, the first one says.

Despair, the second one answers.

And the third, a magnificent creature with black scales that shimmer like crow feathers, says,

I am Gentleness. I brush away the flecks of dirt that cling to her tail.

"May I take you with me?" I ask.

Of course, she says. Peace settles in my chest. I open the pocket of my hoodie, and she crawls inside. Far beyond the garden wall, a cat screeches in the morning.

Outside the garden, my father is dying. A bay window lets sunlight into his hospice room. I pour lukewarm tea into a
sippy cup. His shaking hands bring it to his lips, but some of the tea dribbles down his chin anyway. I wipe it away with the edge of the bed sheet.

*Thank you, tootie-pie.*

I smile. He smiles, then his forehead creases in pain.

I want to run. I slip my hand into my pocket instead and feel the small, comforting warmth of my dragon.

An

_infection_, the nurse tells me and my sister.

_We could treat it, but if it's_

_not this one, it will be the next. Do we have your permission not to treat it?_

I

take a moment to myself in the hallway. I register the distant clatter of a hospital tray, the muffled complaints of a resident. I bring my dragon to my chest. I want to shake her for her powerlessness. "I should have brought the others,"

I say. "Rage, he is fierce. Couldn't he stop this?"

She

shakes her head, and in that moment she feels old, older than any of the others, born from roots and gardens planted long before my own.

*I am fierce too,

Gentleness says.

*Keep me with you.*

I

breathe deeply, talk to my sister, and we agree: *You*
have our permission not to treat the infection. The
nurses increase my father's morphine, and he slips into sleep.

The
afternoon turns into evening. We keep vigil. My sister lays a blue tapestry with the designs of peacock feathers radiating from the center over my father. I tell him about the garden, but not the dragons. I tell him that the beds are almost clear, that yesterday's
rain soaked the earth and threw the trees into saturated greens, that we will plant sunflowers, sunflowers that will grow tall and bow over with seeds. When I mention the sunflowers, he raises his index finger, and I decide that this means he can hear. We
fill the room with quiet and beautiful things, perhaps for ourselves as much as for my father.

Sometime
before midnight, my brother-in-law brings takeout noodles. While time brings my father closer to death, it has made my sister and me hungry. My brother-in-law gazes too long at the man who is almost the body of my father, then promises to pick us up when the
night is over. I break inside as I understand what he means.

I
am tidying the takeout away when my sister whispers my name. "Rose,"
she says, without taking her eyes from my dad. I turn
and kneel by his bed. His chest is motionless, still, and still again, until, like magic, it rises. Then deflates. We hold our own breath. A second passes, then another, and in the next: nothing. In my pocket, my dragon wails.

My
sister leaves me alone with the body. With no one to see, I let Gentleness onto the bed. Now that my father is not here but his corpse is, I am afraid. I don't know what to do, have no ritual or ceremony for this. I twist my
hands. My dragon, her talons tucked
away, uses her snout to smooth his hair, then looks at me, expectant. I understand. I stroke his hand, tuck the
tapestry around his body, and comb the grey wisps above his forehead, tending to my father for the last time. I
press my head to his chest and listen
to the silence. Gentleness comes to me. I scoop her into my pocket and walk into the hallway, where I wrap my
arms around my sister. Together, we weep.

It
is past midnight, but I return to the garden anyway, feeling a strange mix of relief and fear. I pull up more roots
and feed them absentmindedly to the bed of dragons. Rage and Despair have grown older, their bodies filling
with muscle.

I
look to Gentleness.

"Thank
you," I say, stroking her snout.

Of
course.

"Will
you stay with me?" I ask, thinking of the new demands of the morning -- a funeral to arrange, friends to inform,
eventually, a journey back to my own home. These demands seem like objects on the far side of a foggy
window, irrelevant to the holy peace of these
moments in the garden.

I’ll

stay with you, she says.
"What about the others?" I ask, looking at Rage and Despair asleep in the soil. "Where will they go?"

_They will perch on your curtain rods and nest in your kitchen cupboards now, she says. You will know them. But they will not destroy you._

I nod. We watch the silhouettes of the trees along the horizon. A street cat stalks along the garden wall, alive and rippling with movement. Gentleness follows it with her gaze, then steps into my lap, circles once, and closes her eyes. I carry her softly into the house where together, we fall asleep.