

The screaming whistle of the tea kettle brought me out of my trance. I reach for the kettle sluggishly, my fingers barely registering the contact of the silver handle. It's as if my whole body was trapped in a gelatinous box. Every move, no matter how slight, travels in space far longer than it needs to, gravity pushing down on my fragile bones as they fight their way through the jelly-filled space. The tea kettle makes it to the other side of the kitchen. I don't know how. There are moments like that now. Moments where I move without realizing it, moments where I just nod along, saying "Yeah, alright, no problem" even if it is a problem.

Nick says I should go to a doctor or a psychologist or something. I tell him I don't have time, that the kids need to be at rugby practice in thirty minutes or that Mrs. Paisly from down the road needs help finding her keys again. He just stares at me when I say things like this, his once bright hazel eyes grow dark and cold. I'm afraid he'll set up an intervention. He'd invite my parents, my sisters, probably even Father What's-His-Name from the church he still goes to, even though I tell him constantly that I don't want anything to do with organized religion.

"Lou."

The way he says my name sounds worse than the screaming kettle. He says it in the same tone that you'd use when you read a shopping list. What do we need from the shops? Oh, I don't know, bread, apples, Lou, cereal. I don't answer him. Instead, I grab a packet of sugar, flicking the middle until all the granules are neatly in place.

"Lou, I'm leaving." I don't need to turn around. I know he's in his grey suit, holding a navy, checkered umbrella in one hand and a worn, brown leather briefcase in the other. From the way he dresses, I can't help but think that he ought to be the one with depression, not me.

"Mhm," Is the only response I give him. The door clicks shut. I tear open the sugar packet.

I find myself in the study surrounded by towering bookshelves cluttered with books entitled, "The Five Ds of Entrepreneurship" and "Don't Start a Business, Build an Empire". There was a time when broken crayons littered the floor of the study and a staticky radio would blare old Queen hits while two kids and their mum stamped their feet and howled that they needed somebody to love. Nick mostly uses the study now. But here I am, standing in the center of the room surrounded by boring books and a growing sense that my life is falling apart.

That's when I see the dragon outside my window.

It takes me a minute to realize that I have, in fact, taken my anti-depressants and that I'm not experiencing hallucinations or symptoms of withdrawal. It takes me another minute to realize that there is a dragon at the edge of my yard, guarding the bare skeleton trees of the forest behind it. It is the forest that my children are playing in. I can hear them, even from inside. Their screams of glee echo across the yard and penetrate the fragile glass window of the study. I take a momentary look at the dragon, taking in the ruby-red scales and its bright orange wings, then bolt for the back door.

My bare feet pound against the grass, still slick with the morning dew. I don't have a plan. Would anyone? A good mother would, surely. I don't think I'm a good mother. I can't be, considering the fact that I've let my children go out to play with nothing more than a half-hearted, "Don't get dirty," while a dragon prowled about.

"For Christ's sake Lou," Nick's voice finds its way into my head, "We live in England. There's no bloody dragons in England! There's no dragons *anywhere!*"

I get halfway across the yard before I stop. The dragon's wide head turns toward me, flaring its nostrils. It sits, almost lazily, at the entrance to the forest. Despite my rising panic, the dragon reminds me of a cat in a way. Diamond shaped pupils dilate while a scaly red tail swishes back and forth in the grass. My children cry out, in surprise, in glee, I'm not sure, but I can hear them getting closer. I'm sure the dragon wouldn't mind two bite-sized snacks, though I realize that I'm probably bite-sized to him as well. Balling my shaking hands into fists, I call out,

"Milo! Piper! Stay where you are! Don't come back to the house,"

"What?" My son, Milo, calls back, "What'd you say?"

My throat begins to close as the dragon rises onto its feet.

"We're coming, Mum!" The carefree declaration of my daughter brings tears to my eyes. Before I can shout at them to stop, to run, to call the police (though, really, what would *they* do?), Milo and Piper burst through the trees. Right in front of the dragon. I think that I've killed my children.

The dragon blinks out of existence.

"Hi Mum!" Piper says by way of greeting. Milo runs up behind her, panting. Both of their faces are red, the blood rushing across their cheekbones and to the tips of their ears. Piper's hair, a mirror of my own ruddy-brown, has crumpled leaves and sticks strewn about it. Milo's is no better, though the way his hazel eyes shine, I can tell that he's having the time of his life.

"What'd you want to tell us?" He asks, swinging the long stick in his hand back and forth.

"I-um," What can I say? That a dragon had been in our yard mere moments before disappearing? Piper's face drops, her eyebrows furrowing together.

"Mum, are you having a sad day again?" Nick told them, right after my diagnosis, that there were days where "Mummy would be sad and wouldn't like to do much of anything". Mum's Sad Days became a regular day of the week. Then, it turned into multiple days per week. I'm sure they've noticed, but Mum's Sad Days don't seem to be ending.

"No, Piper, no, I just—I was wondering what you and your brother were up to." The lie comes out quicker than it should have. I wonder if other mothers lie to their children this quickly. They probably don't. Nevertheless, Milo gives me a wide, crooked tooth grin.

“We’re playing knights and dragons!” He tells me. The bright red dragon pops back into existence, seemingly unbothered.