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In Loving Memory

Dr Julie Louise Steele

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Opening the Lost Eye.

The wandering stars twinkled like glitter strewn across the dusky twilight speculating how long it should be before one of them would muster up the courage to wake Draco.

There was trouble stirring below them on Planet Yarn and had been for a fair few months. It was the dragons you see, and dragons were Draco's responsibility.

The Little Dipper nudged a nearby constellation and whispered in its squeaky voice.

"Shouldn't one of us wake Draco?"

It received no response so it shoved a little harder, sending a couple of stars shooting off in all directions.

"Not now," said The Big Dipper sternly. "You know how lazy Draco is and he's sure to be in a bad mood if we wake him. You do it, you're closer anyway."

"But you're bigger than I." squeaked The Little Dipper.

The arguing had disturbed Draco who, as predicted, was not in a good mood.

"Must you two bicker like that? Can you not clearly see that one is trying to sleep?" he asked.

"There's no time for sleeping," squeaked The Little Dipper. "Trouble is stirring on Planet Yarn below us."

"Trouble?" asked Draco.

"Yes, a crisis even. Terrible business."

“Crisis?”

“Yes, Lady Oktober is turning them domestic. There won’t be many fire-breathing dragons left at this rate.” Squeaked The Little Dipper.

“Go on.” Said Draco.

“I know that when you lost your eye on your last visit to Planet Yarn, it became a sensitive subject, but it’s meant you haven’t been able to watch over the dragons as you should. Lady Oktober has taken full advantage of this.”

“But how on Yarn has she managed to domesticate them?” asked Draco.

“The Heliotrope Lagoon at Dragons Cove.” Started The Little Dipper.

“Yes?” said Draco as though this was going somewhere.

“She’s replicated the liquid in the lagoon. She has many sites around Norwood where the dragons will drink from. You know they can’t resist the colour.”

“Of course they can’t resist. The liquid from The Heliotrope Lagoon is what they use to sustain their inner pilot lights.” Said Draco.

“But her version of it gives the beast’s brain-freeze.” Said The Little Dipper.

“Brain-freeze?”

“Yes, it extinguishes the dragons’ internal fire, rendering them about as ferocious as your average house cat. Then she sells them on for profit as ‘guide dragons’.”

“What!” Draco spat. “That hideous woman, interfering with the laws of nature. It won’t do, I will have to go back down there and sort this out.”

“If he can stay awake for long enough,” sniggered The Big Dipper to The Little Dipper. “You know how lazy he is.”

Draco overheard the comment but allowed it to pass over him. There would be many dragons to revert back to fire-breathing beasts. Perhaps he could delegate the work to somebody else whilst he supervised the process. Perhaps he’d make life a little uncomfortable for Lady Oktober too, it appeared she deserved it.

He found Lady Oktober to be a little suspicious and wondered how it was possible that one witch could possess so much control over many dragons. He was starting to suspect that maybe Lady Oktober had come into possession of his eye. That would certainly explain her ability to achieve such powerful magic. It was a lead at least. The people of Planet Yarn weren’t too pleased to see him on his last visit but it wouldn’t stop him going.

“I’ll be back before you know it.” He said as he quivered and quarked.

As he did, the Draco constellation manifested into a single ball of light, which shot out of the sky like a falling star.

The Fiddler and the Mouse

It was around seven in the evening when Draco arrived at Planet Yarn with a hefty *Thud!* The ground was chalky and flew up into the air on impact, entering his nose, mouth and eyes rendering him momentarily senseless.

It had been donkey's years since he'd left the company of the stars above him, which we know to be an accurate measurement of a long time.

He had taken human form again this time, the same long black trench coat with scarf and battered old hat which would keep him warm if it even mattered.

He found his feet immediately and to his surprise, he'd remembered how to walk. Kind of like riding bike.

He tightened his heavy scarf and, cocking his battered hat, he set off alone down the chalky hillside, a mere silhouette against the glowing horizon.

He was travelling downhill which required only shallow breath and he was grateful as he resented the density of the atmosphere, interstellar gas circulated much easier in his opinion.

The distant glow from a town called Gheywood beckoned and it would be the first of three towns he would visit to find his idiot to delegate his cause. He decided his perfect candidates would be insolent and valiant enough to not falter on their journey. To secure this, he decided he'd curse them until the job was done.

It seemed a little harsh perhaps, however, Draco just wanted to go home as soon as possible to rest.

When he arrived at Gheywood, he was completely underwhelmed. It was a plain and featureless place which, had it not been for the faint glow, would cease to exist in the growing darkness.

Winter was almost over and Mother Nature had already begun her spring cleaning, dusting off the snow and promising to polish each leaf to reflect her perfect beauty.

The residents of Gheywood were far too busy to appreciate or recognise this as they bustled about their business in their blind ignorance.

Draco watched with disbelief as they swaggered to and fro with their guide dragons on a length of rope just long enough (as the expression goes.)

The dragons looked ferocious as ever, though their inner fires had been extinguished, the heat faded from their eyes which were glazed over with silver filigree. They trotted obediently beside their 'masters' carrying various items of household use and anything else they could be overloaded with.

Draco's concentration was snatched as a group of screaming brats charged past him with an angry woman in hot pursuit. She flailed a rolling pin wildly in the air and was shouting the kind of profanity the children would repeat in the playground the next day. The

satisfying *thunk!* of a clipped ear suggested that she'd successfully collared one of them in her haste.

From the corner of his peripheral, Draco noticed a donkey roaming freely upon the dusty cobbles. It looked sad and lowly as donkeys often do and he considered its practicalities. Upon pursuing the animal he'd decided to call Clementine, he was left breathless in a cloud of dust as Clementine poked his head around a corner to see if he was still being followed.

Draco had given up the chase as he was felling rather tired and wasn't in the mood to play Clementine's game. The lowly donkey snorted and trotted off feeling rejected.

It was by chance that Draco stumbled upon an alleyway where he'd find his first idiot. It was a bakery called 'Milo's' it promised quality and good service, though Draco knew only too well that humans often lie.

A fat cat lay on the ground enjoying his twilight nap and Draco shooed him out of the way.

"Fickle feline." He sneered as his foot made contact with the furry critter.

Opening one eye, it looked up at Draco and sighed.

"What brings you here again?" asked the cat.

"Twain? Is that you?" said Draco surprised. "What happened to you Twain?"

“Yes it’s me.” Said the cat. “It was Lady Oktober’s doing. She kidnapped me and turned me into her cat, the woman is out of control Draco. She’s kidnapped the queen too, nobody knows where she’s hidden her and King Merlot is being held hostage in his own castle by a black knight called St. Nick.”

“Is this the same Lady Oktober that is domesticating these dragons?” asked Draco signalling towards one of the beasts as it trotted past on a leash.

“Yes, she’s a frightful sight to look at. She came from nowhere it seems and suddenly she’s taken over.”

“What else has she been doing?” asked Draco.

“Where do I start?” Said Twain. “Not only does she sell the dragons to the townsfolk, she also has a factory where their food comes from. I think she’s making a good profit from it.”

“What on Yarn is she feeding them?” said Draco.

“Vera plants,” said Twain. “It’s the only food she endorses. She said if they’re fed anything else then they’ll revert back to their fire breathing ways.”

“What a load of old rubbish,” said Draco. “She makes me furious already. Where can I find her?”

“She’s being held up at The Sad Spider. It’s a tavern in Norwood.” Said Twain.

“What on Yarn is she doing there?”

“She’s upset some crows, killed their mother apparently when she was putting her spell together and they chased her into the tavern. They’ve got her ring and she’s powerless without it.”

“Interesting,” said Draco as he removed his battered old hat and brushed the dust away revealing his face.”

“Wow, you truly are hideous to look at aren’t you?” said Twain.

“So this ring,” interrupted Draco. “What does it look like?”

“It’s got a yellow stone but that’s about as much as I know. She took me to Dragons Cove to get a sample from the Heliotrope Lagoon, we had to fly in during the early hours because we didn’t have visas. After that, she spent all her time in her little hut in the woodland trying to modify the liquid so the dragons that sipped it would get brain-freeze. If you go into the woodland, you’ll see the ponds there glow just like The Heliotrope Lagoon.”

“That dastardly woman,” Said Draco. “I’m in two minds whether to confront her or not, I need to put an end to all this and turn the dragons back.” He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. “I need to find a few people to do it for me, along the way I may be inclined to make things very awkward for the witch.”

It was clear to Draco by now that Lady Oktober did in fact, have his eye in her possession, albeit set within a ring by what he’d just been told. He would get it back

but he'd have some fun in the process. The idea of changing every single dragon back single-handedly was daunting. Draco was far too lazy to do it all himself.

“Good to speak with you Twain, I’m off in here now,” he gestured towards Milo’s bakery. “I’m sure to see you soon before all this is over.”

“I can’t wait.” Said Twain sarcastically and returned to enjoy his twilight nap.

The heat hit Draco like a blanket at the door, the warmth meeting his bitter cold breath soon became uncomfortable underneath his heavy scarf. Eyeing rows upon rows of pastries and rolls of indeterminate freshness, he was interrupted.

“Fresh?” The voice which was not especially assertive, was that of an unhappy customer, who decided that aggression was the way forward and an excellent substitute for intelligence.

The customer slammed the ‘fresh’ loaf onto the glass counter which nearly cracked. A few depressed looking cherries rolled across the floor. They didn’t quite reach the exit, and it became apparent that they were doomed to be consumed.

“I paid two shrabn’l for this loaf and on return home, my old lady found it to be stale and housing a small mouse. Where do you stand?”

Milo, the proprietor of the raggedy establishment, fondled his greasy beard whilst examining the loaf with his other hand.

“I have no idea how the rodent became embreaded,” he sniggered “But it is not of this establishment and there shall be no reimbursements. *That* is my final word on the matter.”

The customer did protest, for it was his last two shrabn'l.

Draco interrupted them.

“Excuse me but if you did indeed sell that loaf to this gentleman, then you should compensate him. You'll lose customers with an attitude like that. The customer is always right.”

Milo scoffed at Draco.

“And what do you know? I will not pay for the mistakes of other bakeries. If people choose to shop elsewhere around here, they can't expect me to cough up when they receive shoddy loaves like this. I've never seen this customer before in my life. No, there will be no reimbursements.”

“But I was in here only this morning.” The customer protested..

“I wouldn't forget a face like yours lad, you're lying and it's something I do not condone. You can leave this shop and take your disgusting loaf elsewhere.”

Draco purchased another loaf and handed it to the customer.

“What an extraordinary display of human compassion,” scoffed Milo. “Move along now before I fetch up my dinner.”

Draco couldn't help but feel deeply insulted, he'd never met such an audaciously rude individual before. The customer moved quickly across the shop floor sensing the approaching storm.

“Thanks Mista.” He paused and looked up at Draco before sidling his way quickly past. He tucked the loaf into his tatty overcoat as it was beginning to drizzle outside.

The rain pitter pattered at the window pane in short bursts and the bustle outside moved onto warmer dryer places mostly.

Milo stood behind the counter sorting through a pile of letters. He examined a small white envelope at arms-length as though he was struggling to read the writing. His hands quivered and his palms were sweating. He opened it slowly and read.

Dear Father,

As it is soon to be my sixteenth birthday, I have but one wish. A desire to operate as a herbalist, it's something I've been learning lots about through mother (who says Hi by the way)

I know that you're disappointed the baker profession didn't work out for me but it doesn't run in my blood as herbalism does.

I'd really like to trade from your premises as rent is high at the moment. This is the way in which I have chosen to make my living.

Mother is still angry that you threw us out on our ears after that argument, so I don't think she'll be joining me anytime soon. She said something about hell freezing over (although I've heard it's quite warm down there.)

She called you words I daren't pencil on paper for fear the word goblins will eat them.

Anyway, think about it. I hope you reply this time.

Yours Estranged

Henrith Pollock.

Milo ripped the letter to pieces but he saved the area with the address on lest he changed his mind – which was unlikely.

“Home time.” Milo pointed to the door interrupting Draco as he picked up a croissant. “Don’t you have a home to go to?”

“Well yes Milo, yes I do,” He smiled. “Mind if I call you Milo?”

“A paying customer can call me anything he likes.”

“And the customer would always be right? Right?” said Draco.

“Well... Erm...”

“You’re obviously an intelligent person Milo,” Draco paused with a half-smile. “You make a good living from your vocation and sharp tongue do you not?”

“I guess I do...” Milo unfurled which left him standing tall and proud.

“Good, good for you. I was hoping that perhaps you would share some of your wisdom with me by teaching me how to bake a simple loaf. As payment I offer this gold sovereign ring.” He thrust his hand forwards dramatically and it glistened with a cheeky wink.

A gold sovereign? Though Milo as he almost laughed out loud thinking his luck had changed.

The fellow stood before him was clearly a twit of the highest order knowing no gain of money. Of course he would teach him how to make the simplest loaf. He’d use his cheapest ingredients and over complicate the entire process. The customer would look up to him

then, he fantasized. He did say he was an intelligent fellow after all didn't he?

He savoured that idea for a short time until he became aware that his daydreaming had left an awkward silence.

“Er, yes sir of course, I'd be only too happy to show you the tricks of the trade. Do me a favour though please and pull the bolt across. We need not be disturbed if I'm to give you my undivided attention.”

He shot a greasy look at Draco and rubbed his greedy mitts together.

“Through the back, this way sir,” Milo skipped gleefully leading the way. “This way, mind your head and your step, I say, what a tall and handsome fellow you are sir.”

Nausea flooded Draco's stomach, he despised grovelers. They were a waste of foot space on land and they leached off the air.

In the back room was a small, filthy kitchen. It was uncomfortably stuffy and the wall was beginning to fall away, leaving puddles forming between the valleys of cobblestone flooring. The floor near glistened under the oil lantern upon the wall, giving the impression of cleanliness. This was just an illusion though.

A clatter of tins from a pile on the floor sent a little mouse running for its life. It scurried to a large crack

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