

A Makeshift Friend



SHREYOSI ENDOW

Orion skipped from one heap of dry leaves to another, setting them afire.

I leaned back against the trunk of an old oak and began peeling the skin off a ripe, yellow mango. He looked back at me and his orb-like hazel eyes gleamed with joy as he caught sight of the fruit. "Catch!" I said and flung it towards him. He fluttered his wings, leaped into the air momentarily and swallowed it whole.

Home wasn't an ideal place for a dragon's recreation and for a while, I tried entertaining him with games meant for ordinary pets. I should have known dragons did not like to play 'fetch' but then again, I was just eight.

In the meantime, I was trying to convince my mother that Orion was real and it wasn't exactly an easy feat. Every time I tried to do so, she would end up breaking down and start praying to God to return my sanity. I would've worried about her but all I could think about at that time was Orion and how I needed to get him out of the house.

I finally came up with a scheme that mother would agree to any day. I volunteered to spend every weekend with my grandma. Grandma's backyard led to a small forest, a perfect place for Orion to play at and since he was apparently invisible to mother, I wouldn't have any problem sneaking him into the backseat of our car. I would pack enough mangoes, which were all that he ate, and we would set off for the woods as soon as we reached there. Then Orion could play to his heart's content.

What I didn't realise though was that mother had filled grandma in with the stories of my 'madness' and as much as grandma loved me, she believed her. She observed my actions for three months, during which my plan worked perfectly, until one doomed weekend when

grandma had a guest come over.

The man's name was Dr. Scherbazetsky and he was a psychiatrist. When grandma introduced them, mother and the doctor shook hands for what seemed like forever. I had never seen her look at a man like that since father passed.

The three of them walked into the kitchen for some privacy, leaving Orion and I in the living room and I came to know that the doctor was blessed with an equally blaring voice as the other two. Grandma started telling him how last summer, some boys from school brutally beat up my 7-year-old pet dog Orion. It managed to limp back home somehow and crawled underneath my bed where it usually slept. She said I was the one who discovered its bloody carcass. The sight of it drove me insane and since then, I made up stories about how I had a pet dragon.

My insides revolted. How could someone lie like that?

Last summer, I found a baby dragon underneath my bed. I'm not sure how he ended up there but he did and I still remembered the first time I saw him, curled up in a ball and whimpering softly.

He was tiny and covered in goo and as I sat on the floor in front of my bed, assuring that it was safe out here, he groaned with fear in his eyes. I thought I would lure him out with some food so I stole a chunk of meat from the refrigerator but when I pushed it towards him, he scooted further away instead. I supposed it was just afraid so I kept the meat in a bowl and left it by the bed.

I sat there for hours, waiting for it to come out until I got hungry myself. I decided to treat myself with one of the mangoes mother had bought that afternoon and as I sliced through the yellow flesh with a little knife, I noticed the dragon slowly make his way out. He stopped shortly and eyed the mango, and when I

extended a piece towards him, he backed away a little. I held my breath as he inched towards me again and my heart leapt when he started nibbling the fruit. I noticed he had a slight defect on one of his wings and wondered if he was in pain. I held him in my arms while he ate I was going to call him Orion. Something about that name felt right.

When the doctor was about to leave, he walked back into the living room, placed a hand on my shoulder, smiled a disgusting smile and said, "Don't you worry, Jeremy. I'm your friend and I'm here to help you." He then looked at my mother and nodded reassuringly. Mother sighed. Orion gagged.

I didn't know what he was going to help me with but I knew I hated him. As a result, neither Orion nor I was the slightest bit pleased when grandma announced that we were to visit his chamber for therapy every weekend when we came to visit her.

By now, the sky had turned orange. Orion had set all the heaps ablaze and was resting under a tree.

I stood up and said, "Come on boy, we've got to go to the doctor's chamber."

Orion groaned and stomped a little.

"I'll buy you more mangoes on our way back, okay?"

I promised and with baby steps, he headed towards me.

As we walked side by side, I stroked his wing. There was a part of me that was glad Orion could not fly. It meant he could never go too far away that it became impossible for me to find him.

Maybe there was a part of Orion that was glad he could not fly too.

Shreyosi Endow is a tea addict who likes to read poetry and is obsessed with plants. Send her a mail at endow1211s@gmail.com