

THE DRAGON

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Hot, scalding sparks of fire trickle into my palms as I swing the rings into the air. Four, five cheers immediately go out in the crowd surrounding me, watching my freak show. Coins drop into the basket in front of me before I began my usual show. I choose a different location every week. People love these distractions. Passing through a busy street on a Monday night, there are always people seeking some form of entertainment, something to distract them from their hectic lives. They happily drop a few coins in my basket as I create magic.

Yes, I believe playing with fire is magic. I have nothing in my life, yet I am satisfied. Not many people can freely admit that they are truly happy, but I can. Every Monday, I go out on the streets and I play with fire. I nourish it; I build it up; I teach it to dance. As I shift one ring from my shoulder to my neck, I take a deep breath. I knew what I put at stake. What if the ring caught on to my hair and I caught fire? What if the sparks burnt me to a point of no return? But am I scared? The adrenaline that courses through my veins as I fling the hoop into the air takes my breath away. The smiles, the awe on the faces of my beholders make my heart content. Satisfied. The feeling itself is indescribable.

People stare at me with wide eyes, as their eyes burn with the reflection of my rings. Their expressions change momentarily as I introduce a new move, maybe a twist or a turn. The hoops keep flying, sometimes I swing them around my neck, my arms, my wrists and even my ankles. I haven't mastered the art of swinging them around my waist yet, but I'm sure I'll get there, with time of course.

My palms are burnt, forming scabs that I peel off just to form new ones. My wrists and neck have burns all over them. I have passed the phase where the burns bothered me. It wasn't painful anymore but it was weirdly satisfying. I love it when the fire flows freely around my physique. I love it when I feel the heat of the fire drapes across me as the first droplet of sweat trickles down my forehead. My breaths



grow quicker as I thrive to keep up with the fire. One mistake, and I could destroy the entire show. The rings swing round and round as the fire

frolics around me. Finally, I end the show for the night. Scattered claps and cheers greet me as I offer a megawatt smile

and thank everyone for giving me their time.

Time to go home. I extinguish the fire and pack up my equipment and head towards home. As I open the door to my tiny two room apartment, a little figure comes running to me. She prances into my arms. The scent of her baby powder hits me as I hug her tiny frame to my chest. This is what I look forward to everyday of my life. Not the fire shows, but her. She leaves my arms and runs to her room with a barely concealed excitement. As I lock up my equipment, I hear her tiny footfalls behind me. Her tiny arms try to hide something behind her back.

"Close your eyes, daddy," her little voice commands me.

I close my eyes and hold out my arms as I feel a piece of paper in my hands.

"Open wide," her voice calls out as a tiny nervous laugh escapes her.

It's a drawing of a tiny dragon with flames coming out of its mouth. I'm a little confused in the beginning. I ask my princess what it means.

"It's you, daddy," comes her timid reply. "Do you like it?"

I laugh out loud as I comprehend what her drawing meant. It's perfect. I am the dragon in her fairytale. The dragon that protects the princess till she grows up into an independent, young woman.

"I love it, princess," the dragon replies.

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