

Darkness. All around me was darkness. A darkness so deep and pure, it was like being sucked into a black hole. My eyes strained to see something, but still, there was absolutely nothing besides the complete black that swallowed me.

The only sound came from the quick in and out of my breath as I waited, waiting for my fate. I closed my eyes, trying to calm down, but nothing soothed the fear that enveloped me, suffocating me as if someone was holding a pillow against my face. It coursed through my veins and sent shivers down my spine. I could hear my heart beating in my chest and felt my hands tremble.

Slowly, a tear leaked from my eye and travelled down my cheek, then to my chin, where it fell, landing silently on the cold, stone floor. I had been stolen from my home in the village by the huge creature weeks ago. Since then, I had been kept in the small cave for unknown reasons. I kept wondering why he hadn't eaten me already and how I had been able to survive for so long.

I didn't know exactly what time it was. There usually wasn't any light in the cave, and the only times there was, was when the dragon came back or went out to find food. But still, the cave was never open for more than what felt like an hour. To tell time, I had been relying on when I slept and woke up. Whenever I started to feel tired, I would guess that it was night time and whenever I woke up from sleeping, I guessed it was morning. The whole thing seemed pretty inaccurate though.

The past weeks, I had survived on the small bit of water that trickled in through a crack in the cave wall. It formed a small puddle on the ground next to where I was currently hiding. I reached over with my hand and ran it along the rock floor until I finally felt something ice cold and wet touch it. I cupped my hands together and dipped them in the inch tall puddle of water. I scooped up as much as I could then brought it to my dry lips and quietly drank it.

It tasted metallic and was full of dirt, but still I scooped up more and drank. The cold of the water made my hands numb and my throat burn, but I didn't care. I was too thirsty to care. The beast had been carefully guarding the water for the last few days which kept me from getting a drink. Only now, when he had finally left for only a while, was I able to come over here.

I used to try to get past the dragon to the water whenever he guarded it. On my first attempt, I had crept from behind the small rock that I normally hide behind, and went around the sleeping dragon. But that was as far as I got. There had been a sound coming from where the dragon had

slept, and I had scurried back to my hiding place full of fear, thinking about just how close I was to being burned to ashes.

After that night, I had not tried again for a couple days, still shaken by how close it had been. Soon, I knew I had to try though. I would die of thirst, if I didn't get water. Although I preferred dying of thirst to getting eaten by a dragon, I wanted to prolong my death. So three nights later, I had gathered up all my courage and waited patiently to hear the dragon's snores, indicating that he had fallen asleep.

I had waited for hours, listening to the dragon's slow breathing just to make sure it was completely asleep. Then I tiptoed across the stone floor and past the dragon, listening to the sound he made to locate him so I could avoid stepping on him. I made my way slowly across the rocks until my bare foot stepped into something freezing and wet. I smiled with excitement at my achievement and jumped down to drink as much water as possible.

After I drank most of the puddle, I walked back to my hiding place with more self confidence and a hint of hope. I was still beaming with delight at how I had somewhat defeated the dragon by passing him in his slumber. Safely, I made it back behind the tiny rock and slept with dreams of seas and oceans and of finally being free from the dragon's lair.

From that night on, I started to make it routine to sneak past the dragon and to the water puddle which was always refilled by the time I reached it. With my new-found bravery, I made it easily every time, never slipping, tripping, or waking up the dragon. As the nights went on and I kept getting the water I needed, the small hint of hope that I had on the first time I accomplished passing the dragon, grew and grew until I imagined that any day, someone would come and get me out of my prison.

Then two nights ago, I was going out again for my usual drink of water. It was exceptionally cold that night and my feet were numb and frozen. Just like on the other nights, I waited silently for the dragon to curl up and go asleep. I heard him begin to snore, and I didn't bother waiting long to go out. The last two weeks had all been successful and slowly I had started to cut down on the time I spent waiting for the dragon to be fully asleep.

So, that night, I came out from my hiding place and crawled across the floor. I had slowly began to memorize where certain rocks were and where the dragon usually slept as the days passed. Using this information, I had made an imaginary map in my head of the cave and what

rocks I had to pass. I concluded that crawling would make passing the dragon easier as that would allow me to feel all the rocks on the ground.

Suddenly, I felt something sharp stab the palm of my right hand. On instinct, I screamed. I quickly covered my mouth, worried that the dragon would wake, but it was too late. The dragon had already woken up.

*Sniff, sniff*, I heard. *Sniff, sniff, sniff*. I knew that the dragon could smell the scent of my blood. My father had told me that dragon's could smell the blood of a human from miles away and because I was only meters away, I had no doubts that that was the cause of his sniffing.

I stood there, frozen like a statue as I prayed and prayed that the dragon would fall back asleep. But that wasn't the case. There was a low growl as I heard a sound that sounded a lot like something moving. Then, there was a burst of light as I felt something hit my leg.

I screamed as my leg started to burn. Quickly, I tried to crawl away and somehow I made it back to my hiding place, but the damage was done. Touching it made it hurt even more and I was certain I would never be able to walk again. Once the pain subsided a bit, but not much, I realized the consequences of what had just happened. If I couldn't walk, I wouldn't be able to get water, and if I couldn't get water, I'd die. My hope had been crushed in the matter of seconds.

The next two days went by fast until finally the dragon went out for food again, giving me my chance. It had taken a long time for me to crawl over to the other side of the lair, but I finally did make it.

I thought about all this as I slowly started to pour water on my burn. The water made it hurt a little less, but only for a short amount of time. Once I finished with that, I felt a sharp pain in my stomach and knew that I needed food. Water wasn't the only thing on this side of the cave. There were also the remains of some animal I couldn't recognize lying against the wall a few meters away from the water. I only ate that every two to three visits to the water, mainly because of how gross it was.

I knew that I needed food, and it was the only food I had. It was just that after the first time I had found the animal and tried to eat it, I had almost thrown up. I learned from my mother and from experience that it took much longer to die from lack of food than it did water. This caused me to decide on eating the animal only when I desperately needed it.

In my village, food had started to become scarce as winter came and animals snatched many of our crops. Every day, I was only given a small slice of bread, and an apple twice a day, but as the conditions started to become worse, that changed.

Soon, I had to go days without eating which turned into weeks. Still, my family survived with only some bread and apples once a week. Then, I was taken by the dragon up to the cave where I was actually able to eat more than I did back in my village.

I crawled over to the mostly eaten animal, careful to make sure my burned leg didn't scrape against anything. I ripped a huge chunk of raw meat off and ate it, forcing myself to swallow. Again, I took a piece and ate it and then kept eating until I was satisfied. I settled back down against the rock, knowing that I would have to move back soon before the dragon came back.

For some reason, the dragon had spared me. I couldn't understand why. Lately, though, he seemed to become more and more interested in me as I hid behind my small rock. Sometimes I would catch him towering over me and I would close my eyes each time hoping it wouldn't be the last.

I had a feeling that he wouldn't last much longer and would just eat me. I knew he was very close to doing just that. If someone were going to rescue me, they would have to come soon or else all they'd be rescuing would be my ashes.

Right as I began to make my way back to the other side, I heard something that made my blood run cold. It was a loud thump. Then suddenly, there was another and then another. My fear from before had returned. My heart was beating so fast, I thought it'd jump out of my chest.

I hadn't moved fast enough. The dragon had already returned before I was able to get back to where I was supposed to be on the other side. I moved back so I would be completely hidden behind the rock. Finally, I saw a small shaft of pale moonlight penetrate the darkness which was both good and bad. The good part was that the entrance was open and I had a chance of escape. The bad part was that that meant the dragon hadn't closed it meaning he was distracted by something, and I had a pretty good guess of what that something was.

I squeezed my eyes shut as I heard one more thump, much closer this time, and then I felt the air around me slowly grow warmer and warmer. My eyes snapped open and I looked up to see the creature for the first time.

His yellow scales glittered like gold in the moonlight. Right next to the rock were his long black claws covered in dirt and what I guessed was blood. His huge wings, each the size of one

of the village houses, were tucked in as his tail laid curled up on the ground behind him. His beady eyes watched me as he slowly opened his huge mouth showing me rows and rows of teeth covered in grime and dried blood of his past victims.

I knew I should have run, but his beauty and deadliness tethered me to the ground by an invisible rope. I was completely frozen in place as the heat around me started to grow uncomfortably warm and then almost burning hot.

Finally, as I saw the fire start to come from the back of his throat, I leapt to the side and towards the door. I scrambled to the edge and without thinking, jumped right out of the cave into the fresh air of the night. My stomach jumped into my chest as I fell then landed hard on the ground and did a few somersaults before finally coming to a stop next to a tall pine tree.

I had millions of bruises and cuts, and my burned leg hurt like crazy, but I didn't care. I was free. I was finally free.