

An Excerpt from my upcoming story: *Returning to The Dragon's Well*

The rain hit Archer's face and mixed with his tears. He walked down the street to his cottage, all the while his mind was spinning. Violet's words rang in his mind. "*We still need help. We still need hope.*" Archer pulled his key out of the black satchel he wore around his waist. He unlocked the door and walked through.

"Hi dad," Fiona called.

"Fiona? You're still awake?"

"She couldn't sleep so I was telling her about The Dragon's Well," Leo responded.

"That's the second time someone has brought that up," Archer mused quietly. He took his shoes off and walked slowly upstairs listening to his son retell the stories he and his wife once told.

"She soared through the sky with the wind blowing back her auburn hair. The Bandit closed her eyes and held her arms out to her sides. She could feel the strength of her dragon as it flapped its massive wings. The clouds parted and the sun shone on her like it was her very own spotlight. She breathed in filling her lungs with crisp air and with that air the power of the dragon coursed through her veins. She could hear them crackle as they became electrified. Her arms tingled as a layer of blue scales began to coat them. She released her breath and with that release wings sprouted out her back. Her wings extended to the right and the left and stretched to match her dragon's. She closed her wings forming a cocoon around her and slid off the side of her dragon. She took a nosedive towards rushing water spinning the entire time. Before she could crash into the waves, she unfurled her wings and angled herself upward. She flapped them to continue flying upward until she and her dragon were level. They flew to a cave covered by a waterfall.

The water was cold and beat against her intensely, but the layer of scales protected her from the pressure. The Bandit of Murdoch found the hiding place of the great elixir,” Leo told.

“That was your mother’s favorite story,” Archer said softly.

Leo smiled. “Mine too.” The family sat in silence a moment. “The Bandit gathered the elixir in vials and brought it back to Murdoch. She gave it to anyone who needed it.”

“The elixir could cure anything,” Fiona chimed in. “Broken bones, heart problems. Even the stuff that the doctors say is incurable.”

“I wish that elixir were real,” Leo mused. “It could’ve saved mom. Could save Sophia, too.”

“I wish it were *all* real,” Fiona said with a dreamy look on her face. “I realize it’s dangerous there being dragons and all. But I wish it were real. I wish we could go. It would be amazing to actually fly on a dragon and be like the Bandit helping people.”

“Our tavern helps people,” Archer chimed in. “It gives them a warm meal, a safe place from the weather and brings the whole community together.”

“I guess,” Leo said slightly deflated.

“In The Dragon’s Well, Arlo created four core dragons that give their riders powers, right? And then there are several smaller versions of them. Which dragon power would you want?”

Leo looked at his sister with tired eyes. “I don’t know, FI-FI. What do you think I should pick?”

“Well, I would want the power of prophecy,” she answered.

“No way,” Leo said. “Think of what a burden that could be. People always coming to you for a vision.”

“You make a good point. I hadn’t thought about that. Well then, I choose Healing.”

Her brother nodded. “Me too. Wisdom could also be fun.”

“That’s enough stories for tonight. Off to bed you two,” Archer said.

“Good night, dad.”

“Good night. Don’t let the dragons bite,” Fiona teased.

Leo chuckled and walked towards his room. Fiona climbed into her bed and Archer took her lantern and blew it out. He walked down the dimly lit hallway towards his room and grabbed a towel to dry his head. He changed into his pajamas and pulled back the sheets. As soon as Archer sat on his bed the tears began to flow, and Violet’s pleas for help intruded his thoughts. “*We still need hope.*” He felt like his heart had been pierced. The wound was gaping, sending sharp pains through his chest. He held his side as if the pressure would stop the throbbing. With each sting of his fractured heart, he let out a pain filled cry. *How could it still hurt this much?*

Archer recalled his wife’s face. Her checks were home to a splattering of freckles. Her emerald green eyes always looked like they were up to something. Her smile that grew larger with each person they were able to help. The last person was the local baker. She had black lung. Her breathing had been replaced with coughing and she could hardly keep anything down. The doctors feared she wouldn’t make it. Abigail had gone through the portal and returned with a vial of the miraculous elixir. When she gave it to the ailing woman her once pale skin had its color returned. She could breathe easy again and all traces of the nasty disease were gone. That was twelve months ago now. Since drinking the elixir, Archer could hardly recall hearing the woman cough from too much flour in the air let alone anything else. More tears flowed as he reached for the necklace his late wife had given him. Archer closed his eyes as he pictured the family all

together at the tavern. Abigail often told their children, "*do what you can to alleviate the suffering of others.*" Tears flowed even more now, and snot dripped down his nose. "I'm so sorry, my love. I don't know what to do. If I go back, I could orphan our children. And at the same time, if I don't I fear I am dishonoring you. What should I do?" His sobbing turned violent in the quietness of his cottage. He grabbed a tissue from his bedside table and blew into it. He discarded the snot infested square and grabbed another one.

Fiona could hear her father's cries. She removed her covers and swung her legs around til her feet hit the floor. She got up and began to walk to his room. "Fiona," her brother whispered. "Don't." Fiona entered her brother's room.

"Why not?" she whispered.

"Give him room to grieve. He needs it."

"What do you mean?"

"Think about it," Leo answered. "He spends every day at the tavern putting smiles on other people's faces, tending to their needs and dealing with the occasional drunken idiot. When he's not there he is here with us. He doesn't get a lot of time to himself. He lost his partner. That's something he should be able to cry about. So let him."

"I suppose," Fiona mused.

"Go back to bed."

"Bossy."

Leo smiled at his younger sister. "I love you," he whispered.

“Of course you do, I’m awesome. I love you too.” Fiona walked back to her room and climbed into bed.

Tears filled Leo’s eyes as he stared at the ceiling. “I miss her too,” he whispered to himself. “It’s not fair.” Leo began picturing his mother lying in bed with a blood-stained handkerchief. Her hand formed a fist around her head and her face was full of sweat. The doctor pressed a cold, wet rag to her forehead to try to cool the fever. Leo let the tears spill over his cheeks as rage filled his chest. “You deserved better, mom.” As he lay in his sheets, he recalled telling his mother the same stories she once told him and his sister about the Dragon’s Well. He drifted to sleep and dreamt about the Bandit of Murdoch, only this time he was the bandit. He was the one with wings that carried him with the wind. Leo was the one bringing elixir back to his ailing people.