

Begonia {part eight}

by Emily Sparkles

Now, you may be wondering how things were going back at the castle. The good King and Queen were still very ill. The people of the village worked hard at their duties, in spite of their sorrow over their ailing rulers and their missing princess. They knew that the best way to honor their royal family was to keep the kingdom in top shape. It wasn't hard to find, however, groups of villagers sharing information on the tenuous state of things, and more often than not ending such conversations in prayers for help.

The castle itself was much quieter these days. The royal physician was always about. Lord Bryony seemed never to sleep, for he had his own responsibilities to see to, as well as assisting with the King and Queen's while they rested. He was also frequently seen speaking with the Head of the Royal Guard, and most conversations went just like the one he was having now.

"I suppose you would like an update, Sir Bryony?" said Atratus.

"I would rather have a progress report that spoke of progress," Bryony said, shaking his tired, silvery head. "Forgive me, my good man. I fear my patience is wearing thin of late."

"Perhaps a good night's rest would help, my lord," ventured the soldier gently, before he went on to update his colleague. "The soldiers have moved in their troops in a 16 mile radius from the castle. Still no sign of her. The men are exhausted, but determined to find her. I am sending out fresh men in the morning."

Sir Bryony was listening intently and judiciously assessing the method of search and rescue. "The reason for the men being exhausted, and perhaps the reason they have found no evidence should be clear to *you*, Atratus, I would think." He looked the younger man straight in the eyes. "The men are moving much too fast. Speed is impressive, but they cannot possibly be paying enough attention."

“I have had the same thought, my lord. I am sure you are right. A case such as this can only be solved by noticing the most intricate of details. I fear my men are letting their concern for their princess cloud their judgment. I will speak with them; sternly.”

The two men nodded in understanding, gripped hands, and parted ways for their night's repast.

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Coriander had scoured the clearing around the stream thoroughly. This was no easy task, for he was impatient to be moving towards his beloved princess. Yet the lad knew, as we have mentioned, that the only way to truly find the missing girl was to pay attention to every detail. The most startling discovery he had made came in the form of giant reptilian footprints. He had clearly not expected such a find, as no one in Begonia had known that a dragon was living in their forest. So much had he not expected a dragon's footprint that he walked by, and indeed stepped in, several of them before realizing that Mezereon's tracks were indeed tracks at all.

Coriander had heard of tales of dragons; some stories made up to entertain kin around a fireside at night, some legends of yore, and some came more credibly as distant reports from far away kingdoms. The former were enough to have captivated his interest and the latter enough to have honed his awareness. Like a scroll spinning swiftly before his eyes, he deduced that the tracks around him could have been left by nothing but a dragon. “Father God, protect her,” he said as the gravity of Isabella's situation hit him.

