Begonia {part four}

by Emily Sparkles

Meanwhile, back in the village, Coriander worked hard all day, mending shoes and cutting leather for new pairs. He molded each shoe carefully, just as his father had taught him. Each shoe was made expertly to keep toes like yours free from being scrunched, and every inch of the foot warm and dry in all kinds of weather. Yet with every snip and stitch he made, his heart was with Isabella and his whole self was eager to meet with her later that day. He prayed fervently that a way might be found for him and his beloved to marry.

Finally, the work day was over. As the villagers gathered around their family tables for a well-earned supper, Coriander straightened out his clothes and tried to comb down his unruly hair. He did not even think about food, but instead headed straight for the castle to meet with his princess. As he neared the royal abode, he saw a troop of guards leaving the castle and scattering in different directions, quite obviously determined in whatever their mission happened to be. As the last of the guards exited the castle door, Coriander saw the royal advisor, Sir Bryony standing in the door's frame, a worried look on his face.

“Sir Bryony,” said the young lad, giving the older man a respectful nod, “Is everything alright?”

The vizier shook his head gravely in answer, unsure of how much to tell this young villager. As he saw how open and honestly concerned the boy's face was, and as he remembered the touching scene between Coriander and Isabella the night before, he decided the lad could be trusted.

“It's the princess, young man. No one has seen her since this morning,” said Bryony. Immediately Coriander tensed up.

“Where was she last seen? Where did she go?” he asked, ready to run after her that instant. As Bryony explained that no one had any idea, Coriander realized that the guards had split up in order to cover as much ground as possible. Bryony could see that

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the young man was eager to join the royal guard in search of the princess, but he also knew that he would need a good meal and good advice before doing so. He invited Coriander in for food and discussion, which the boy had enough sense to accept.

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As the guards roamed the kingdom in search of their princess, the girl herself was being introduced to the dragon and his lair. He had brought her to his treasure-filled cave, and illuminated the home by lighting some torches with his fire-y breath, delighted with himself for the sparkly wonders within. Isabella tried not to cry out in fear as she saw this huge beast and the powerful burst of fire from his lungs. She had never seen a dragon before, although she had heard tales of them as a little girl in her nursery. All she could recall is that they used that fire to burn villages and their long, pointed claws and teeth to eat everything in sight. Yet in spite of her nervousness, she quickly remembered, too, that the dragon had carried her quite gently to his cave. With a quick prayer for guidance, she asked the beast his name.

“Mezereon Starwort!” answered the dragon in his deep voice. He was very excited that his new friend wanted to talk. “What's yours?”

“Isabella,” she answered, somewhat surprised that the dragon could talk, but also relieved, for maybe she could reason with him. Mezereon smiled his biggest smile at the princess, but to her it looked quite frightening; rows of gleaming, pointed teeth were what she saw, with wispy tendrils of dark gray smoke still wheedling their way out between them. Mezereon could tell something was wrong; he had noticed Isabella shrink back when he smiled. Quickly he turned around and grabbed a handful of his cherished gold and jewels, which he then presented gently to the princess.

“Oh!” she replied. “This is lovely, I'm sure…wherever did you find so much?” She asked him, for she only just realized that the dragon's cave was absolutely brilliant with treasure.

Mezereon was eager to talk. He had been lonely for a very long time, and was thrilled to have someone to listen to him. “Some

days, the wind blows in from a new direction, and as it passes through my cave I feel a stirring in my bones. My wings start to itch and my tail to twitch, and I know that I must go on a journey. I soar in the sky, above clouds and birds, following the scent until I find its source. Then I take what I need and return home again."

"Scent?" asked a puzzled Isabella.

"Scent!" answered Mezereon, holding the treasure up to his nostrils and inhaling deeply. Isabella was still a bit confused, but before she could ask any more questions, the dragon spoke again. "You must be hungry!" he said, and turned to another part of the cave where he stored his food. Isabella could not imagine that anything a dragon ate would be very good, but was pleasantly surprised when he returned with vegetables so fresh they still smelled of the good earth from whence they came. "Would you like some meat?" Mezereon asked.

"This should be enough for now. Thank you," answered the princess. She was not sure what kind of meat the dragon would find, but was sure that she did not want to risk it just yet.

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While Isabella was sharing her garden-grown repast with the mysterious dragon, Coriander was eating a warm bowl of fragrant beef stew in the commodious castle kitchen. Sir Bryony spread out a detailed map of the Kingdom of Begonia on the large wooden table and outlined the paths that the royal guards were to follow on their quest to find the princess. The land of Begonia had been at peace for so long that its guards were few in number. Yet although they were few in number, they were courageous of heart and superbly skilled.

"Surely the princess will be found very soon," said Sir Bryony. Coriander had full confidence in the guards, yet deep in his own brave heart, he felt that he, too, must pursue the missing young woman. The lad was quite right in this assumption, for the dragon's cave was not charted on the map; somehow it had been missed by the cartographer! Coriander told the vizier that he still felt the need to join the pursuit after swallowing the last bite of his nourishing

supper. Sir Bryony was uncertain; it was not his place to order common citizens what to do or not do. He feared for the boys' safety, for if a royal daughter could disappear, seemingly anybody could. He said a quick prayer for wise judgment, and felt that the young man could indeed do no harm at least if he were to join in the search.

“Alright, young man,” said Bryony. “But you must borrow some royal armor and weaponry, as well as food provisions. If you must brave danger on behalf of our land, the King and Queen would not want you to be ill-equipped, I am certain.”

Coriander had also been praying steadfastly for guidance and replied quite readily.

“I appreciate the castle's generosity, but this meal and your knowledge have already supplied me with all I will need for my journey. I know these lands well; I played in them as a child, and roamed them as a youth. In my more recent years I have hunted and harvested them. I am familiar with the fruits of the forest; I know how to live off of the land. I also know that I can move quicker in my own tried-and-true clothing, humble as it is, than in strange armor. As for weaponry, with the good Lord and my own hunting gear, I have faith I shall never be found wanting.” Coriander's eyes had a brilliant sparkle within them, and his voice was even and sure. Anybody watching him would have been invigorated by such a speech, and Sir Bryony was no exception. With a slight bow of his head, he acquiesced to the lad, and bade him best wishes and Godspeed.

Nighttime was quickly approaching. The sun was yawning, retreating behind the majestic purple mountains. He stretched his arms, which we call sun beams, as wide as he could before going to bed, revealing the pink, orange, and indigo colors he always shares with us at sunset. Coriander rushed home from the castle to gather what humble supplies he would need. After praying with his family for the Good Lord's blessing and guidance, he set off to use the few hours of light he had left in search of his beloved Isabella.