

## THE PRINCESS AND THE DRAGON

J. Penelope Baker

The princess awoke with a jolt. She sat up, trying to figure out what had awoken her.

“Die, dragon!” cried a male voice from outside.

A thunderous roar shook the stones of the tower and a burst of flames shot by the window.

“Oh, no,” the princess groaned, scrambling out of her bed. She wrapped herself in a thin robe as she moved towards the window and looked out.

The sun shone down on a golden-haired prince wearing shiny armor that had never seen battle. He held aloft a crimson shield in one hand and a sword in the other. “Don’t worry, Princess! I will save you!”

“No, please—”

Her reply was cut off when another roar sounded from the dragon perched atop her tower.

The princess turned away. “I need to get down there.” She searched her floor for the dress she’d worn yesterday. She found it in a pile near her bed, and quickly threw it on with shaking

hands. “Come on, come on...” she muttered. It took her 5 long minutes to change- all the while, she heard fierce cries from the prince intermixed with snarling from the dragon. Once finished, she raced down the spiral staircase and threw open the door.

The emerald dragon crouched between the tower and the prince. It let out another rolling growl that shook the princess’s bones.

The prince spotted her immediately. “Princess! Go back inside!”

“Please! You must—”

The princess’s voice alerted the dragon to her presence. At once, the dragon swung its huge head towards her. In that moment, the prince saw his opportunity.

He leapt, swinging his sword in a shining arc that ended in a ka-THUNK as it sliced through the dragon’s neck. Navy blood spurted out and poured onto the grass, surrounding the severed head.

“No!” the princess screamed. She dashed out to where the prince stood and dragon lay, staring first at the corpse then at the prince. “What have you done?”

The prince squinted at her furious expression, his sword and shield hanging limply at his sides. “I... slew the dragon?”

“Yes, I know! But why?”

“To rescue you!” he said, flashing her a grin and a wink. “It’s kind of my duty as a prince to rescue fair maidens from dragons.”

The princess stared at him, clenching and unclenching her jaw.

“That was a compliment,” he said, after a moment had passed. “The normal response is to say, ‘Thank you.’”

The princess’s eye twitched. “Can you please leave?” Her voice was carefully measured.

“But aren’t you coming with me?” he asked.

The princess squeezed shut her eyes and let out a long exhale before responding. “Why would I go *anywhere* with you?”

“Uh, because I *saved* you?”

“No.”

“But—”

“Leave!” she shouted, glaring at him. “I don’t want you here. So just go!”

“Fine!” The prince threw his hands in the air and marched back towards the woods, where he quickly was swallowed up by the trees.

The princess looked at the corpse of the dragon, finally allowing tears to fall. “Oh, Melinda. I’m so, so sorry. This never should have happened.” She covered her mouth as sobs started to rip through her body.

She fell to her knees, staining her pale gown with the navy dragon blood that pooled in the grass. Once she had stopped sobbing, she whispered, “You were the best protector- dragon-turned-maternal-figure a princess could ask for. Thank you, for everything.” She stroked Melinda’s emerald scales as she cried. Her cries slowed to a stop, and she clenched her jaw and hands, staring towards the woods where the prince had disappeared. “He shouldn’t have done this. And you know what, Melinda? I’m going to kill him.”