Begonia {part five}
by Emily Sparkles

The night seemed to come more swiftly from inside of Mezereon's cave, with its thick stone walls and heavy tree cover. The dragon was taking a nap, lulled into sleep after eating a large meal. As Isabella had watched the beast yawning, her bright mind went straight to work on a possibility to escape. Alas, Mezereon anticipated her thoughts and looped a delicate but oh-so-strong chain around her left wrist and his smallest finger-claw before drifting off.

"This way we will never lose one another!" the dragon had explained, somehow unaware of how dreadful this prospect was to the princess. Isabella was so overwhelmed by the day's events that she merely sighed in resignation and nodded her head glumly.

Now she was perched on a rock near the caves entrance, as this was as far as the chain would allow her to wander.

"So close to freedom…" Isabella murmured. As darkness settled into the woods, she prayed silently for wisdom, and especially for her dear parents' health. As she closed her prayer and opened her eyes, she noticed small, dancing lights blinking in and out between the trees. The magical twinkling went deep into the forest, like a lovely dance. Isabella was enchanted, and suddenly saw one of the light-makers blink hello quite near to her shoulder.

"Oh! Fireflies!" she exclaimed as she realized what these were. "Why, you're singing your love songs to one another!" she said to the bug, remembering having learned that long ago. "Oh, if only you could carry my love-song to Coriander," she sighed.

Little did she know that Coriander himself was just entering the very same forest from the village path. He couldn't explain to himself why he had settled on exploring the woods first, but after praying for guidance with his family, he somehow knew that to the forest he must go.

"Perhaps it is too dark for me to search effectively tonight," he mused aloud. Just ahead of him he saw twinkling lights; fireflies

just like the ones Isabella was watching; unbeknownst to our brave lad. Maybe the very same bugs were indeed carrying her love message to him! Encouraged by the sparkling beauty of the brilliant little insects, Coriander followed the narrow forest path as far into the forest as he could before the darkness became too dense.

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Isabella was awakened the next morning by the sound of jingling treasure. She stretched and opened her eyes to see Mezereon still sleeping, but rolling around as if having a bad dream. Gently, she laid her hand upon his large front paw and softly called his name. With a roar and short burst of flame, the dragon awoke, startled.

"My apologies, Isabella!" he said, somewhat embarrassed by having been caught by surprise. After all, he was a fierce beast.

"Were you having a nightmare?" the princess asked. Mezereon nodded his head; he might think of himself as a fierce beast, but he was quite honest. "You may talk about it if you wish; that usually helps me quite a lot," continued Isabella.

"Dragons are not afraid of anything! Well, we are not supposed to be…"Mezereon tried his best to act the part of ferociousness. But when he saw the girl's smile, which was full only of understanding, he decided he might indeed feel better after speaking with her. "It is the same dream I always have. I am flying, and it is difficult to see, everything appears quite distant. I feel completely alone, and I am looking for something to help me. And through all the foggy movement of people below, the only thing I recognize is treasure; gold, jewels, and the like. I swoop down, but I always awaken before I land. Yet somehow, in my dreams, I am certain that once I do land I will find what I've always been looking for! I've been having this dream for as long as I can remember."

"What do the other dragons think about it? Surely they would be better interpreters than I," said Isabella. Mezereon's large, emerald green eyes looked down. Drooping his long neck as he

spoke, he returned, "There are no other dragons nearby. I am the only one in these parts now."

The princess could not bear to see anyone suffer, and this giant creature was no exception. After giving him a moment to reflect she gently said, "You say you are the only one here *now*; how has that come to pass?"

In a subdued voice, the dragon told her his story. He had grown up far away, living happily amongst family and friends. Yet it was a dragon's duty to leave the community at a certain age and settle elsewhere. He also shared that once every 75 years the dragons all met for many days and nights of feasting and talking and flying races and fire tournaments, his eyes lighting up as he said so. "But every time we meet we are fewer in number. None of us are quite sure what is wrong. Yet we are all rather young, our eldest member is merely 706 years old. We lack the wisdom of the ages. All we have to aid us in discovering our purpose is hope and some old dragon depictograms."

The princess was quite astonished at the life span of these beings, as well as intrigued by their fellowship. "What are the depictograms of?" she asked; one of many questions swimming in her mind. Mezereon took a large, curled claw and began scratching a picture on the cave's earthy floor. He drew a group of dragons, with arrows pointing outward in all different directions: "Because we cannot live together once we are mature," he explained. Next, he drew a lone dragon, in flight. Below the beast were stick figures. Dragon and people alike had smiles. The next picture was similar, except the people were all reaching for money, gold, and jewelry, and no one was smiling at all. "I do not know what these last two mean; nobody in my group does. These drawings are older than any of us," said Mezereon.

Isabella thought for a moment, and then said, "I think your dream comes from the memory of these drawings. I know you smell the treasure and seek it, but do you think perhaps the dream and these pictures have something to do with your fondness for it as

well?" The princess briefly realized that she had forgotten about her own problematic situation in her curiosity about her captor and her desire to help ease his sadness. Mezereon began sifting handfuls of gold coins through his large, scaly paws before answering.

"I do not know," he finally said, looking the princess directly in the eye. He suddenly felt so happy that someone was there to spend time with and told her, quite truthfully, "but sitting here, looking at you, makes me feel something warmer than any fire breath or treasure ever has!" Isabella realized that this dragon had been very lonesome for a very long time. Although she was not sure just how long, she understood that his loneliness was the motivation for his kidnapping her. She was torn between trying to escape and returning to her family, who truly did need her support, or staying with the dragon and helping him to find a better way to ease his solitary blues. Mezereon interrupted her musings by announcing he was quite hungry and ready to break the night's fast. With a touch that was surprisingly tender, he helped Isabella to her feet and led her to the mouth of the cave. After shaking down more apples than anyone could manage to eat on their own (except perhaps a dragon) from a tree growing near there, he invited the girl to eat with him.

As they took their seats, Isabella spoke with all of her royal grace. "Thank you for the food, Mezereon Starwort. Would you like to join me as I thank the Lord for it, too?" The dragon was puzzled, but eager to please his new "pet" and so he agreed. "Dearest Lord, thank you for this bountiful meal and a beautiful day…please give us guidance in how to behave towards others and wisdom for the words we will say." The princess opened her eyes and smiled at the dragon, who was shrugging his massive shoulders. He was not sure what the girl was speaking about, but dismissed his curiosity in favor of feasting. While he gobbled up bushels of red, ripe apples, Isabella quietly munched on one of her own, thinking deeply all the while.

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Coriander was also in the forest, waking to the sound of singing birds and chirping squirrels. As he stood up and stretched

his young muscles, he thanked the Lord for keeping him safe in the woods during the night. Out of the corner of his quick eye he saw a striped chipmunk nibbling away on some food as it sat on a nearby log.

"That is a good idea, fuzzy one," said Coriander. He gathered some berries and nuts and shared a happy little meal with the woodland chipmunk he had just befriended. Soon he was loaded up with his humble gear and ready to begin the search for his love once more. To his surprise, the chipmunk scurried onto his shoulder.

"Ah, so you think you have found someone to find food for you always, is that it?" Coriander joked good-naturedly to the critter. Together they set off, going farther into the forest.

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