

Begonia {part nine}

by Emily Sparkles

Night had fallen over the land of Begonia, covering even the border-country of the majestic mountains, at the tree line of which our princess and reptile had made camp. Mezereon was wide awake, large ears perked at attention, nostrils constantly flaring as he tested the air from all different directions. Isabella's words from earlier rolled through his mind, especially when he chanced to glance down at her in her slumber. She was curled between his front two legs, sleeping soundly. In fact, the dear girl hadn't slept so soundly since before learning of her parent's grave illness. It seemed to the dragon that her revelation from her God had truly given her the peace she had claimed.

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Miles away Coriander was stepping through the forest with a light but determined step. He was exhausted, but the terrors he imagined every time he pictured his beloved in the claws of a dragon were too intense to allow for sleep. At first, upon discovery of the state of things, he had been torn. Should he continue on his solitary journey to rescue Isabella? Or, should he return to the palace and inform Sir Bryony and the Royal Guard of what had befallen their princess? Before he'd even finished his inner debate (mingled with prayers for guidance and protection), he realized his keen eyes were already scanning the edge of the forest for signs of the dragon's passing. He couldn't waste a moment. If anything he'd heard about dragons was true, the giant scaled beasts could cover miles in the space of minutes with their powerful wings.

Tracking the monster had proven even more challenging than the experienced hunter had expected. In spite of the probable size of the dragon, based on his foot prints, it was almost impossible to detect it had passed through these woods at all. The tracks ended before the forest began, indicating that it had taken flight. Some

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broken branches at the forest mouth showed the point of entry, but after that, it seemed the dragon had simply disappeared. The personable chipmunk who'd adopted Coriander had been scurrying around the tracks, and the entrance. It showed no desire to leave the brave lad's side, and together the two stepped into the woods to find Isabella, stopping every few moments to analyze his surroundings for any indication of disturbance, Coriander moved deeper and deeper into the forests of the far side of the creek, headed towards the base of the formidable purple mountains.

