

2017 MCC Creative Writing Contest

Fiction Category

Second Place: “Someone Drunk, Something Lost” by Quinn Johnson

The midnight sky was calm, and though she was an energetic dragon, Anthaza felt the warm updraft lulling her to sleep. Breathing deeply, she relaxed for the first time in days, and relied on her instincts to keep her hovering. She was dozing when she heard the frantic flapping of another dragon’s wings.

“Captain, Captain!” An emerald green dragon parted the clouds beneath her and flew up to Anthaza’s position in the sky, breaking her sense of peace. The similarly colored armor he wore sparkled in the starlight. “Summons from the queen for you, Captain!” The dragon was breathing heavily, his wingbeats sluggish and irregular. “She... She would like you to meet her in her chambers as... as soon as possible!”

“Thank you, Simarin,” Anthaza said. “Wasn’t the Queen enjoying her hatching day party, though?”

“The Queen has sent Vermillion in her place, as she was...” Simarin took a shuddering breath. “Was too stressed and did not want to deal with all the royal responsibility tonight.”

Anthaza nodded in understanding. “Why there’s ‘royal responsibility’ at her own hatching party, I’ll never know. Go get some rest, Simarin. I’ll cover the rest of your patrol tonight, after I meet with the Queen.”

“Are... are you sure Captain?” Simarin looked worried. “You’re already covering for Themillo, and I’d hate to have you lose another night’s sleep.”

“Of course I’m sure!” Anthaza snapped. “You look like you’ve been carrying supplies for three weeks with no rest. Get some sleep before you become useless to the guard.”

“Yes, Captain!” Simarin gave a short salute, then dissolved his armor and slid beneath the clouds.

Shaking her head, Anthaza tilted her wings downward and dove through the clouds. The vapor trailed from her wings and claws as she flew toward the Queen’s palace, high above Duvahn. The building was decked out in the white dragonfire lanterns that were so common in the Aerie, and provided Anthaza clear direction to the palace entrance. Swooping in for a landing, she alighted herself on a landing balcony and entered through the door there. She walked along the ornate hallway, her claws causing sharp clacks as they hit the marble floor.

Pausing before a full-length mirror, Anthaza noticed her slightly rough appearance. Her armor was covered in small scratches, and the jet black surface had lost its reflective sheen. *After all, she thought. It’s in my best interest to look nice and presentable in front of my Queen. Though, she did want me to meet her as soon as possible. Never keep your Queen waiting, as she may get irritated and burn something by accident.* Making a snap decision, Anthaza removed her armor, feeling only the comforting feeling of her own scales on her hide. The electric blue suited her better than black, anyways.

Hopefully she isn't upset over something I may have screwed up. Could I have screwed anything up since I last reported to her? Anthaza ran a quick check on events that happened that the Queen would be irritated at, especially things she could have handled better. A large list came up, but there was nothing major that would irk the Queen enough to call her off of her patrols to a meeting in the middle of the night.

Taking a deep breath, Anthaza resumed her run towards the Queen's room, determined to help her Queen with whatever she needed. It may be her duty, but she felt like this summons was more important than that.

The Queen's bedchamber was just as ornate as the rest of her palace, with gold-laced dragonfire lanterns and gemstones embedded in her furniture. A large chandelier with soft green candles hung from the ceiling, far enough from the ground that no dragon would hit it by accident. One whole corner of the room was taken up by a massive, silvery-white bedpillow, upon which Queen Fyra laid. The majestic scarlet dragon was sprawled out on her back in a very un-majestic pose, her claws and feet stretched out, her crown laying off to the side. The poor crown, Anthaza noticed, had a couple of new dents in it.

"My Queen," Anthaza said, bowing her head. "You asked for me?"

"Uuuuuggggh," Fyra groaned in a queenly manner. "Don't do that royal respect crap at me, Thunderstrike. I'm so tired of people sucking up to me for their own gain and I can't lash out because I'll kill a human by accident or something. Just..." Fyra flipped over on her pillow, her wings covering her face. "Can we just talk for a bit? Please?"

"Of course, my Queen." Anthaza walked over to Fyra's nose and laid down. The small dragon was dwarfed by the size of the bedpillow alone. "What do you want to know?"

"Well..." Fyra moved her wings out of her face. "How is everyone holding up? In general, I mean."

"Your hatching day party is still going strong, my Queen." Anthaza took a moment to think, then said, "I suppose the copious amount of alcohol is helping with the happy atmosphere. If I may ask, why have you decided to skip it?"

"Didn't want to bother with the drunk prospecting males." Fyra grumbled. She got up off of her pillow and began pacing around the room. "Horny bastards just want bragging rights with their meathead friends." Slipping into a deep voice, Fyra said mockingly, "Yo, bro, I just mated with the Queen. Now I'm the King." Facing the other direction, she said, "No way, bro! Hey, make it a rule that we get free reign to party all weekend! That won't go wrong at all!" She shook her head. "I hate that I'm just an object of lust or a source of fear. Given, they should be terrified of me! Look how imposing I am, I'm half the size of most adults! Rawr!" Realizing what she said, Fyra quickly turned and said "Oh, Thunderstrike, my apologies. I didn't mean..." Fyra trailed off as she noticed that Anthaza was barely holding in her laughter.

"N-no, my Queen. It's alright," she said the giggles subsided. "Water falls from the sky, the sun comes up in the east, mushrooms taste terrible, and I'm a small dragon." Anthaza gave a shrug. "It's a matter of fact."

The queen nodded, and slumped on her bedpillow again. "Thank the Cinders that you're so understanding. It's irritating having to be on my toes all the time around dragons and humans who get offended easily. Of course, said thin-skinned dragons would be horrified to know that I know many humans who can take a joke better than them." She sighed deeply and curled back up on her pillow. "Racist lizards. I wish people were more sensible like you, Thunderstrike."

Anthaza gave a short start. "M-me, my Queen? I'm not a sensible dragon at all! I'm crazy impulsive."

Fyra snorted. "Impulsive, maybe, but your impulses are usually spot on and helpful. And you judge situations between humans and dragons fairly, unlike the majority of my subjects. It's

nice being able to rely on you.” She laid her head on the pillow and closed her eyes.

A thought occurred to Anthaza, and she said, “My Queen, may I be frank with you?”

“Mmm?” Fyra opened her eyes and, sensing this was a serious question, straightened up and acted queenly. “Of course, Thunderstrike. Speak.”

“What is the real reason why you have called me to you tonight? You’ve never asked to see me for anything as trivial as a conversation before.”

Fyra hesitated, then looked away from Anthaza’s curious gaze. “Maybe I’m strapped for conversation,” she mumbled.

“My Queen,” Anthaza said cautiously, “If I may be so rude, I can’t think of a much worse reason to call your head guard off of her patrols than being strapped for conversation. May I excuse myself?”

Fyra looked lost for a moment. Gathering herself with a shake of her head, Fyra asked, “Thunderstrike, when was the last time you took a break from your job?”

“My job is protecting you, my Queen.” Anthaza replied automatically. “Those who take a break from their jobs for no good reason are lazy and stupid creatures that pass their problems onto someone else. “

“Well, I’m taking a break from my job now, just because I want to. Are you calling me lazy and stupid?” Fyra teased.

“N-no, my Queen, never!” Anthaza stammered. “I just... I’m already covering for a subordinate who got too drunk at your hatching day party and I have a little bit of an issue with that. In addition, if I take a break, then no one is watching you and keeping you safe effectively.”

“So...” the queen said slowly. “You don’t trust your fellow guardmembers to protect me as well as you do?”

Anthaza paused. *It’s not that I don’t trust them. I trust them fine. It’s just... she’s MY queen. I protect her, no matter what.* Slowly, she said, “No, my Queen. Not as well as I do. I would rather protect you personally.”

“Mmm.” Fyra got up off of her pillow and walked towards Anthaza. “Have you been getting much sleep lately, Thunderstrike?”

“No, my Queen. This will be the fourth night I have stayed awake through.” At Fyra’s concerned glance, Anthaza snapped to attention. “N-not that it will affect my performance as a guard!”

“I’m not so sure about that, Anthaza.” Fyra tapped her claws on the floor. “You may be a high energy, high stamina dragon, but everyone runs out of fuel at some point. What if you hurt yourself because you’re tired?”

“You don’t need to worry about that, my Queen.” Anthaza said. “If I am hurt, I’ll get fixed up and back to your service in no time.”

Fyra coughed. “Well, sleep is good for everyone, Anthaza. Why don’t you turn in for the night?”

Anthaza explained, “I can’t, my Queen. I have to cover yet another patrol, I promised.”

“Mmm. Let me rephrase that, then.” Fyra came close and hugged Anthaza to her side with a wing. As she did so, Anthaza caught the fruity smell of ale in her nose. *Is she drunk? It would explain a bit about her... looseness with me.*

“I think you need to rest, Thunderstrike.” Fyra said with perfect clarity. “Why not share a night here, with me? You said that you want to protect me. What better way to do that than be as close as possible?”

Anthaza’s heart stopped for just a moment. *What did she say? Did she just offer me her bed? With her?*

Is that even allowed?

“I, uh... That’s one way of protecting you, my Queen. But don’t you think it’s improper?”

“I see I need to be more direct. Everyone’s a blockhead nowadays.” Fyra muttered. “I order you, Anthaza Thunderstrike, to take a nap in a proper bedpillow. Coincidentally, I consider the only proper pillow to be mine. Now, come here.” Twining her tail around Anthaza and wrapping her wing tightly onto Anthaza’s side, Fyra began slowly dragging Anthaza toward the bedpillow.

Anthaza let out another not-very-dragonlike squeak, and strained against the Queen’s iron grip. *What is she doing!?*

“Anthaza, please just let me hug you,” the Queen pleaded. “Just for a night. I can’t think straight anymore through all of my worries. With all the stuff going on, you’re the only thing that’s helped clear my head at all. Sure, alcohol may be a factor in my fuzzyheadedness, but you’re a wonderful stress reliever, solely because I don’t have to act like a queen around you.”

Anthaza stopped struggling for a moment and looked up at the Queen’s eyes. The scarlet and gold orbs begged her, beseeched her to stay, for Fyra was both worried about her and concerned that Anthaza might not respect her anymore if she left now. Anthaza could feel herself relaxing, and figured that it was just one night. How bad could one night go?

JUDGE’S COMMENTS:

Despite its fantasy-world setting, the conflict in this story is archetypal: a superior summons a subordinate and makes requests that can only be construed as commands because of their power relationship. The author of this story has successfully negotiated one of the most difficult challenges a fiction writer can accept – to tell an old story in a fresh, interesting way. Here, the fantasy setting is established in the first sentence, with descriptions and details throughout the story allowing the reader to journey into that world. Dialogue and description admit the reader into the protagonist’s mind as she decides whether to succumb to her Queen’s seductions.

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