

The Dragon Outside

When the old man heard the heavy CLACK CLACK of claws on his stone walk, he knew what it was. He quickly closed the curtains in front of him, but he knew that it was too late. It had seen him. He glanced around for something to arm himself, but nothing was there. What would work against such a beast, anyway?

“Old man?” boomed the monster, leaning over his house. “Come out and speak with me.” The old man thought about resisting, but it would probably tear the roof off and put him outside if he did that. He grabbed his threadbare coat from his chair, slipped it on, and walked outside into the night.

Above him loomed the creature. From its reptilian, alien eyes to its fanged maw, it was every inch an unstoppable killing machine. However, it didn't seem like it wanted to kill him now. Or maybe not just yet.

“Old man, do you know who I am? Do you know why I have followed you?” rumbled the creature, bringing its head down to his level. The old man frowned. He knew what it was, a dragon. Probably a red, though it was hard to tell in the gloom. He shook his head.

“I know you.” said the dragon. “There is an animal in foreign lands that is said to never forget an injustice. I am like that animal. And you have done me wrong.”

The old man stepped back, bewildered. “How- how have I done you wrong?”

The dragon loomed over him. “Do you remember? You were young, I think. You were a soldier. You and your squad attacked me.”

The old man remember. “But... but you attacked us!” he cried.

“Though I fought bravely,” said the dragon nobly, “and decimated the squad, you and ten others brought me down. And you planted the killing blow. Or what you thought was the killing blow. But I survived, and vowed revenge against you.”

The old stared in outrage at this remarkably skewed retelling of the battle. “It wasn't like that all!” he said.

“It wasn't, was it?” snarled the dragon. “I should roast you right now, I don't see why I shouldn't. But I am going to give you one chance to ask for my forgiveness.” The dragon straightened, snapping its jaws in pride at its generosity.

For a moment, the old man considered it. It would spare his life, certainly. But something was stopping him, that stubborn part of human nature that refuses to give in. Although he wasn't going to bow to the dragon, he wasn't foolish either. He needed a plan.

“Let me get an offering before I do.” asked the man. The dragon nodded, and let him pass. The man walked to the door humbly, with his head bowed. Once inside, with the door closed, he almost lost his nerve for the plan. He could run. Hide. But no, the dragon would hunt him down and flame him. The plan was his best shot.

He quickly gathered up his jacket, and ran to get a pair of work pants. He stuffed as many pairs of socks and gloves into the shirt and pants, shaped it into a crude representation of a human being, and shoved his straw hat on top. Then he grabbed the whole crude dummy, and shoved it into a seat at the table, so its back was facing the door. As he scrambled for some socks that had rolled away, he heard the dragon hiss “Old man! Are you coming?”

Now or never, thought the man.