

# The Dragon Scale

By artyfangirl

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*First 5 chapters of this is on a laptop, which I don't have with me but Im bored so Ill put this chapter on anyway.*

*P.S. The harp is a present from him to her by the way (Chapter 6).*

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# 1 - The Loose Floorboard

## Chapter 1: The Loose Floorboard

Once upon a time, in a mystical planet called Tybolt, a beautiful baby girl was born, a princess. What her parents didn't know though, was that in twenty four years their little baby would one day save the world and everyone in it...

After a few days they named her Claire. Twenty four years later, Claire had grown to be a mature, intelligent woman who's looks were talked about throughout the land. She was so radiant and beautiful that men everywhere were literally queuing up at the door to be joined with her in holy matrimony. Claire didn't want any of them. They only liked her for her face. She wanted more, more than those vain pompous jerks out there could ever give her.

One day she was sitting at her bedroom window, looking at the latest losers that were lined up at her door. Some of them had been there all week, and didn't look like they were leaving anytime soon. "Do they ever quit?" Claire mumbled to herself, before pulling the curtains, standing and walking from the window.

She collapsed in a heap on her mahogany four-poster bed, then sat up, her white silk dress gliding across her legs as she did so. She grabbed a pillow and sat there, hugging it, trying to take her mind off the scandalous world she lives in. She scanned her room;

At her left was her wardrobe that stretched almost for the full length of the wall. It was mahogany too, like the rest of the furniture. A beautiful, swirl design was sketched on it, with amethyst jewels dotted at random throughout the drawing. It definitely was the most gorgeous piece of wood craftsmanship known to man, and the rest of the furniture were very close runner-ups. No matter how amazing the wardrobe was, it was what it contained that was important; hundreds of pieces of clothes were hung up, all made with the finest fabrics; silks, velvets, each as stunning as the next. Claire hated her furniture; she hated how many trees had been cut down just for...her; things shouldn't have to suffer for her to be happy. Her father had had them specially made for her, no matter what she thought of them, so why bother telling him and hurting his feelings?

In the right corner of the lilac painted room was a massive mound of gifts, all from the richer men that once wanted her, intending to bribe her into marrying them. They were turned away, and they stalked off on their horses, carriages and on random occasions, elephants. These gifts were from men from the earlier days, when there were fewer queuing up at her door. Now Claire didn't even bother to accept the gifts people brought with them, mainly because there were so many being offered, and also because she took it as an insult, as if she could be bought.

Fluffy teddy bears, heart-shaped boxes filled with posh chocolates, billions of bouquets, all horribly tacky gifts. No substance or any sentimental value. Not one person actually thinking what she would truly love to get. Except one. Claire had a hidden secret and she never, and would never tell anyone about it, about Him. 'His' gift she kept under a loose floorboard, the loose floorboard she had found in her room when she was six; She had been playing with her knights and dragons ("Unusual toys for a girl..." her father said every time he saw her with them) when she had accidentally overturned it. She kept her most private possessions in it ever since; a music box that was given to her by her mother on her first birthday, a toy dragon her father had given her which she had kept because even though her father thought that toy knights & dragons were for boys, he had still given her that ruby red-horned dragon. It was the first shred of a chance that he had shown that he had accepted her for who she is, or that he was beginning to. Last but not least, she kept the gift that "He" had once given her here. It was a scale.

A scale from a real, enormous, fire-breathing, damsel distressing, town destroying, winged dragon! The scale was of many colours; blues, blacks, purples, greens, pinks and it shimmered in the moonlight. When He had given it to her, six years ago, He had said to her; "This scale that you receive from me is from the first dragon that I ever slayed. It is heard that if a knight takes a scale from a dragon's wing and gives it to his first love, then no matter how far the knight and the damsel are apart, they will forever be connected, linked by their love for one another, and by the mystical power of the dragons." then he gave it to her, kissed her cheek, then disappeared into the dark of the night.

He had said it the night before he had to go to war, the last time she ever saw Him. He went to fight, and just, never returned. His body, they had said, had disappeared at the end of the final battle, and no one had even saw Him be struck down. They told Claire's parents (Claire listened from the top of the stairs) that there was only a minuscule chance that He was still alive, and that they should give up hope. They said that they were sorry for Claire's loss, but that they couldn't keep searching. After two years of looking, He was never found.

On the night that everyone who had been searching for Him had given up, and had condemned Him as dead, Claire returned to the place where she had received the scale. She stood on the cliff that she had seen Him for the last time on, and looked out towards the sea. Miles and miles of water lay ahead of her, and the sun was setting to the west. She had strung the scale onto a piece of ribbon to make a scale pendant, which she had been wearing around her neck as she stood there. She raised her hand & clasped the scale in her fist, then closed her eyes. She breathed in the sea air, and whispered, "No matter how far the knight and the damsel are apart, they will forever be connected, linked by their love for one another, and by the mystical power of the dragons. I'll wait for you." She opened her eyes as a single tear fell from the left eye, then she pulled up the hood of the cloak she was wearing, jumped on her white horse and galloped away, her cloak blowing in the wind as she went.

That was two years ago, and everyone supposed she had forgotten about Him, but she would never forget, never.

Back in the present now, Claire fell to the floor on her knees and lifted up the loose floorboard, ignoring the fact that her father would be angry if she dirtied up her dress. She lifted up a fancy silver and red velvet box that had a little silver winged dragon coiled on the top. She opened the lid, and inside, on a crushed-velvet cushion, was the scale, still on that piece of ribbon. Claire brought it out and went over to the huge full-length mirror that was on the wall to the right of the bed. She tied the pendant at the back of her neck and stared at herself in the mirror. The pendant swayed slightly, and then something happened. Did Claire's eyes deceive her, or did the scale just... glow?

## 2 - The Glowing Scale

### Chapter 2: The Glowing Scale

Claire stared, wide eyed, in disbelief. A glow? Surely she couldn't have seen what she thought she saw. She rubbed her eyes & blinked twice. She then stared again, and waited.

Nothing. No glow, not even a shimmer. She quickly untied it from her neck, and thrust it into the box. Her face then softened & she picked up the scale pendant & lay it gently on the velvet pillow.

"Claire? Where are you?!" Her father yelled from the bottom of the black iron spiral staircase.

Uh oh. Her dad was coming up the stairs! Claire threw the lid of the dragon box down, stuffed it into the hole in the ground and slid the floorboard quick as a flash over it, just as the door creaked open a smidge.

"Claire?" Her father, King Rufus, curved round the door. The door gave out a squeak. "I'll have to hire someone to fix that." Rufus muttered to himself, then he looked away from the door towards Claire.

"Ah! There you are! Claire, there is someone downstairs I would like to meet." Said the King, with a huge grin on his face.

"Dad, no. Please don't." Claire pleaded.

The smile faded from King Rufus' face and it turned into a full-on stern frown.

"Claire. You really have to start being less selfish, and actually do what your told for once! I am sick of you being so hard-headed! There are tons of perfectly good men out there and-"

"Perfectly good?!" Claire suddenly piped up, standing and facing her father. "We are talking about the same pompous losers aren't-"

"How DARE you insult your betters! They're worth TEN TIMES what you are so don't you DARE insult them, don't DARE!" King Rufus yelled, purple-faced & fuming.

"Why don't you just marry them YOURSELF then!"

"I will NOT BE SPOKEN TO LIKE THAT!"

"Well I will not be made to marry a jerk cause he has money!"

"Is that why you think that I want you to marry? You really think that I would be so SELFISH to put something as trivial as MONEY in front of my daughter? HOW COULD YOU THINK THAT!?"

"BECAUSE IT'S TRUE!"

"IT IS NOT TRUE!! It's time for you to GROW UP CLAIRE! This is the real world! You make sacrifices, and compromises for the people you care about!"

"You want me to sacrifice MY FUTURE HAPPINESS for you? Is that what you mean? REALLY!?"

"NO CLAIRE! I want you to ACT LIKE AN ADULT for once in your WORTHLESS-"

He paused in mid-yell, then backed off, and breathed deeply. He looked at his daughter, her eyes streaming with tears.

"If you do not pick one, I will for you." He hissed at her, then he stormed out the door, letting out a scream as he walked down the stairs.

Claire stared at the door for a few seconds, then she wiped her face with her hand briskly.

Another day, another fight. Fake crying was starting to get tiresome. Claire let to a sigh then she lay down on her bed. Manipulating her dad was starting to get really easy. If they fight, then she doesn't have to meet the latest posh rich jerk that her father has picked from a group of them.

"All that fighting tired me out. Think I'll have an early night." Claire thought to herself so she undressed, threw on her silk pyjamas and clambered under the sheets, falling to sleep almost on the instant that her head hit the pillow.

After a half-night of nightmares, filled with glowing scales, tears, cliffs at night, fire breathing dragons and her pushy father holding her at gun-point while she walked up the isle towards the richest, most pompous arrogant jerk you could imagine, upon reaching the altar, the Priest saying to Claire; "Do you accept becoming a bride, to never again be allowed to have any personal opinions and to be judged only by your looks for eternity? You have no choice anyway, you're just a girl!" "I'll...never say...I do...never say...I do... I'LL NEVER SAY I DO!!!!!!!" With that last scream, Claire awoke with a start. She had sat up, was drenched in sweat, had a horrible pounding in her head and she felt as the room was spinning. She opened her eyes, and gave them a rub. It didn't really help. She looked blurrily at the alarm clock. Either it said 3:16, or B;IG. Claire guessed it was the first one. She was already to go back to sleep, when she suddenly got the feeling something was not right.. She blinked hard, and then saw the most peculiar sight. A faint glowing was coming from the loose floorboard! She jumped out of the bed, and backed towards the wall of presents, so to get as far from the glow as possible. She pressed her self up against the wall, and slowly edged herself towards the door. Her mind was flickering with ideas of what it could be, when one thought made her stop moving. "The Scale!" thought Claire, realising that she had seen that glow before. "But, why? How?" Claire's mind was full of questions that just kept going over and over in her head. She moved cautiously towards the glow, back-stepping every once and a while, still not sure of what to make from the glowing. Once she had reached the loose floorboard, she got slowly onto her knees and with shaking hands, pulled it slowly & silently across. She turned slightly, closed her eyes & held her hand near her face to defend herself encase anything dangerous was going to attack her. She waited in this position for a few seconds, then opened one eye. Nothing. Just the three gifts, nothing more. No glow, nothing out of the ordinary. Claire went back into her normal sitting-on-knees position, and searched for the glow, even though she knew it was gone. She even picked up the dragon box and looked inside to see if anything different was there. No glow, just the scale pendant. She decided to make a pact; "If I ever see the glow again, I will not be held back by fear, but will go straight to the glowing, and suffer the consequences!" Claire thought bravely to herself, then she put back down the box, replaced the loose floorboard, and before going to sleep, thought to herself; "I really hope there aren't consequences..." Then she closed her eyes, and then she fell to the perils of her dreams.

### 3 - Father's Choice

#### Chapter 3: Father's Choice

Claire was awoken at 7:42 by a yell from her father from downstairs.

“Claire!? Claire get down here! Get changed & ready to meet your Prince Charming!”

Claire was drowsing on and off until that last sentence her father had said. She sat up on the second she heard the words “Prince Charming”. Her eyes widened and panic struck over her. She got a nasty head rush, and let out a squeal of pain. Her father took this as a “you got it”, and he smiled to himself.

“Maybe she’s coming around to my kind of thinking after all.” He thought.

Upstairs, Claire was now over her head rush and was now walking around her room in circles, still in her silk pyjamas, desperately trying to relax.

“It’s ok. I can do this. I mean, how bad can this guy really be? He can’t be the snobbiest guy in the world, right?” Claire slowed down a little after saying this, but then started going faster around in circles and continued ranting.

“WHO AM I KIDDING!? He’s going to be the worst of the bunch! I didn’t even know my dad was serious about picking my future... NOOOO! Husband! He’s going to expect me to MARRY this guy! What to do, what to do? No, think positive. It’s ok. Everything’s going to be ok.” She breathed deeply, and opened the bedroom door just enough so she could hear what her father and ‘Prince Charming’ were talking about. She could hear her father’s deep voice and also this horrible, snotty, faked English accent voice, which didn’t help raise Claire’s spirits, but it wasn’t only the voice, but more like what they were talking about that riled up Claire. She heard the snooty voice talk first.

“I believe charity to be a waste of time. All those... people who live on the street. When I see one, I just feel like running home and scrubbing myself from head to toe. TWICE. If they’re so poor, then why don’t they get off their bottoms & get a job the lazy beggars!”

[Lazy?! He is BEYOND horrible!] Thought Claire to herself, her hand curling into a fist. She now heard her father speak.

“Yes... well... I think its time to get on with business.”

[Business? What business? No he doesn’t mean..!]

The English voice spoke again.

“Yes. I think that with the vast, vast, vast, vast fortune that I have...”

[That’s why my dad picked him!]

“...it would be easy to afford any wedding that...that uh...”

King Rufus spoke: “Claire.”

“Claire! That’s it. Any wedding that Claire wants, she can have it.

[Wedding. No, it can’t be....]

Claire then heard her father speak again.

“Yes. Brilliant, absolutely wonderful! Now, where has Claire gotten to? I’ll go see if she’s ready...” And with that, her father started up the stairs.

Claire upon hearing these few words gasped and threw the door shut. She yanked open her wardrobe, grabbed something then shoved it on over her pyjamas, just as she heard her father knock on the door

“Claire? Are you dressed?”

“Yes, father. Yes!” Claire said with a panicky tone in her voice, and he father swung open the door, there being that squeak again.

Her father took a look at her then let out a sorrowful sigh. “Claire, you look a mess! Get ready! Prince

Hunmerdinkile won't wait for ever!"

Claire stared for a moment, thinking about what a horrible name that is, then came to her senses. "Yes father, sorry father. I'll be ready in a minute." Claire said, with a huge, forced smile on her face.

"Good!" Her father replied, wearing a smile almost as big as Claire's. but not faked at all. He turned to leave, but then paused for a second. He turned towards Claire again.

"Oh, and Claire?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you for not acting up about this. It really shows me how much you've... matured." He said with a smile, and then he hugged Claire, and walked out of the room, gently closing the door behind him. Claire stared for a while, still holding that grin on her face, then released and crumpled on a heap on the floor like a piece of soggy paper. She looked down at the floor, eyes closed, her mind blank. Slowly she got up and took off her pyjamas and the black velvet dress she had pulled out in such a hurry just minutes ago. She put back the dress and folded her pyjamas neatly and lay them on the bed. She searched through her wardrobe, not sure what she was looking for. She grabbed a white, lavender embroidered dress and her white pumps that hosted a collection of amethyst jewels. Her mind had went blank, so she just did as she was told, knowing that that's the way it would be for now on. She let her dark orange hair down and fashioned it into tousled curls, then she placed sparkling purple jewels in her hair that were designed to look like tiny roses. She then opened her bedroom door, heard the inevitable squeak, then closed it behind her. She walked to the top of the stairs, then paused. She closed her eyes as she took a deep breath, opened them, then walked down the stairs, towards her fate, not looking back.

## 4 - Th Scale glows Again!

### Chapter 4: The Scale Glows Again!

The night upon after meeting her future husband who she was to be wed to the morning after, Claire sat on her bed, still in the white dress with lavender embroidery, and her hair still containing the flower jewels and still in tousled curl fashion. She looked beautiful as she sat with her legs tucked into her arms, even in the dark. She sat blank faced, staring at nothing in particular, her mind swimming. She saw the darkness as what her future would be; cold, empty & unfulfilling. Full of orders, disappointment and suffering. In the darkness she would wither as if being a dying old house plant, that never meant enough to any one to be watered or nurtured. Horrible images flashed in her mind; her in the wedding dress hanging onto the arm of the sleaze-ball who she is to spend the rest of her life with, another of her sitting on a chair in this enormous house in the cob-web covered corner, looks gone, hair grey and lifeless, horrible grey sunken eyes staring into the distance and the worst vision by far, the name 'Claire Hunmerdinkile' bored onto a tombstone, in the middle of an empty, eerie cemetery, the tombstone covered with ivy and surrounded by dead plants. Forgotten, and un-loved.

Claire imagined how different things would be if 'Dragon Slayer' (the nickname she gave to her first, and only love) hadn't...disappeared. How different things would be if he had come home, came back... She saw pictures in her mind of him, their moments together. She saw the first time that they met, they were 5 years old then. He let her have a lick of his ice-cream, and they were friends ever since. It was impossible to exactly pin-point when they started to want to in their hearts be more than friends (maybe right from the start), but Claire did know & remember the day that they had agreed to be boyfriend & girlfriend. It was the day that he had come home from slaying his first dragon. Claire thought about that day. They were 15 years old, and Claire had been sitting by the lake when He had come running towards her, throwing pieces of armour off as he went.

"CLAIRE!!!" He yelled for her as he came running towards the lake. Claire heard her name being called so she looked around her. When she saw him coming she jumped up and ran towards him. When they reached each other Claire jumped onto him, pushing him down. He still had his helmet on. She helped him get it off, then said;

"Did you do it? Did you kill the Dragon?"

He looked up at her from the ground and with a cheeky grin said;

"Did you expect any less? I'm a fully functional knight, baby!"

Claire smiled and then got off & pulled him up off the ground. They jumped around in circles, then they both fell to the ground, and started laughing un-controllably. After the mild-hysteria had sub-sided, They stayed lying down in the soft green grass and looked up into the sky. The huge fluffy white clouds glided across the light blue sky as a flock of birds flew high over head. The gentle wind made the temperature just right, making the day...perfect. Claire looked at the boy, who had his eyes closed and was breathing deeply and peacefully. He was taking in the day, to preserve that moment in his mind forever. Claire lay her head back down on the grass, and closed her eyes. The boy opened his eyes, brushed down his clothes a bit, then turned his head to look at Claire. It's funny, even though he had known her for years, this was the first time he ever realised how beautiful she was. He looked at her long wavy hair, her dazzling smile and, even though they were closed, he could see in his mind her mystic emerald eyes, sparkling in the sunlight. He thought to himself;

"Would it really be so wrong if I did ask her, if I told her..?" At this moment Claire opened her eyes and saw Him looking at her, even though he tried to hide the fact that he was. She sat up and looked down



at him, gazing at him. He sat up and stared back. Claire was the one that broke the silence.

"I need to ask you something, but I'm scared encase you don't like what I have to say... It could ruin everything, or-"

"It could make it better than we ever thought it could be." He interrupted, to Claire's surprise. Her mouth was slightly open then she smiled, looked at the ground and nodded. She was picking at the grass, when the boy reached out and touched her hand. Claire looked up & stared at his face. His powerful dark eyes stared deeply into hers. Claire then said to him, in a quiet voice;

"So, is that a yes, Dragon Slayer?" Claire said with a nervous smile, unknowingly just inventing his life-long nickname.

Dragon Slayer, not averting his gaze, gave a small nod, then a small smile. Claire burst into a full-on grin then jumped onto him, causing him to almost fall over again, and they hugged, starting their relationship as a couple.

Claire thought about another moment between them. One time at the age of 17, on the eve of His 18th birthday, He had taken her all the way into the forest; through the branch-hidden road, Past the blackberry bushes (collecting some in their pockets along the way), under the bridge of trees and along many twig covered roads, when they saw a clearing. In the middle of this clearing was a beautiful little stone cottage, that had ivy growing up the left side of it. The cottage had on offer a roughly tiled roof and two small windows with shutters. The door along with everything else to do with the cottage was greyish in colour because the cottage was so old. Dragon Slayer said that one day they would paint the beautiful cottage, to bring it to it's full glory once again. Around the edge of the circular clearing, there were strawberry & rose bushes all the way around, all lined with bluebells, snowdrops, forget-me-nots and many a wild flower. He called it 'the land that seasons forgot'.

"It's beautiful." said Claire, with a smile on her face filled with awe & admiration.

Dragon Slayer looked from Claire to the house, then said;

"One day we are to live here. If you wish it." Then he turned and looked at her, awaiting her reply.

"Really? Oh I do, I do wish it!" Then she jumped into his arms & he twirled her around in the air, both smiling like a pair of idiots. When she came to the ground, she was still in his arms, staring into his deep brown eyes, pressed up against him. They held for a second, a moment that Claire wanted to last forever. He broke the silence;

"Lets go inside! I want to show you something!" He said, his serious, but happy face changing into a smile, then he grabbed her hand and pulled her indoors. He yanked open the door with such force it was a miracle that it hadn't broke off it's old hinges, then he ran in, trailing Claire behind him.

"Close the door." He instructed her, "and close your eyes." he said with a mysterious tone in his voice. She did so, then he took her a little farther into the house, and went behind her. He curled his head round hers, and whispered in her ear;

"Open them."

She did so, and she scanned the room. In the middle of the small dusty, grey, cobweb covered room, their was a beautiful, golden harp. It had been recently polished, and all the strings had been recently replaced. Claire gasped in awe, then walked slowly towards it. She stroked it's golden frame and closed her eyes to get the full effect. When she was half way down it's edge, she felt something touch her hand. She opened her eyes, and saw that Dragon Slayer had placed his hand over hers, and that he was standing half way behind her, and half beside her. She turned her head and stared into his eyes once more. She felt her hand move, and realised that The Dragon Slayer was moving her hand ever so slowly and gently towards something on the harp, but he was still staring into Claire's emerald eyes. He stopped moving her hand, and Claire felt something bored onto the frame. She moved her gaze onto where her hand was, and saw that her name was bored professionally on the instrument in calligraphy style letters.

“For me?” Claire asked in a quiet voice while rubbing her fingers slowly in the dents, then she looked from the harp to Dragon Slayer.

“Yes. I hope you like it.” He said with a smile and then looked at her face. “and look there.”

Claire followed his finger and saw that on both sides of her name were two emerald jewels, both princess cut.

“They’re beautiful. Thank you.” Claire said with a smile and she looked at his face. He smiled back, then he grabbed her hand, and lead her slowly out of the house into the garden. They stayed there all day, but their happiness couldn’t last. Under the stars he said to her, staring into the sky, his voice deep with sorrow and despair;

“I am to go to war the day after tomorrow.”

Claire became un-mesmerised by the stars after he said those few words, then she sat up and gazed down at him, her face filling with dread.

“No! No you mustn’t! I won’t let you.” Claire said to him, eyes starting to fill up.

He sat up beside her and looked at her crying face.

“I must, I have no choice. You know as well as I do that I have to go. I am a knight,” With this he looked up at the sky, away from Claire’s crying face. “and it is my duty as a knight to protect my country, to protect you.” He said, and then he looked at Claire, who was staring at the ground, making small sad sounds and weeping. He touched her hands, then held them as she looked up at him, her face wet with tears.

“I want to see you tomorrow night, before I go. I have to see you again ... encase it is the last time I have a chance ... but we mustn’t speak about this war thing anymore today. I want the rest of tonight & tomorrow to be filled with happiness, filled with beauty and laughter.” Dragon Slayer then looked at the stars, and Claire knew it was because he thought it may be the last time he would see a peaceful night sky. She squeezed his hand a little, then he looked back at her. She gave him a weak smile, then talked to him.

“I will make it so. If you wish it.” She joked, then he let out a small laugh, and they were about to kiss, their heads leaned in and they shut their eyes, when he lost his nerve. He stopped and shook his head, looking at the ground.

“I should probably get you home.” He said, looking up at her, and she noticed that he had a single tear on his face. He pulled her up, and they ran home hand in hand.

Back in the present, Claire’s eyes had welled up, and as Claire closed them in silent but sorrowful grieving over her past & future, a single solitary tear fell from her left eye.

Suddenly the ground began to shake, and Claire gave out a short, high-pitched scream. She grabbed at her bed covers, hardly moving, partly paralyzed with fright. She shut her eyes and clung harder to the bed until the rumbling stopped. She still held for a few seconds after it had stopped, then she opened her eyes. The glow! It was back! Instantly forgetting her troubles, Claire pushed herself off the bed and slid across the floor on her knees, stopped at the loose floorboard, threw it to the side, picked up the dragon box that the scale was in and yanked up the lid. Without a seconds pause, a huge greenish yellow light blew out of the box, and Claire was blown against the wall by the force of the light, and was knocked out cold.

When Claire came to, her vision was slightly blurred and the room was spinning. All she heard was a man’s voice calling her name;

“Claire? Are you alright? Claire?”

She blinked to try to get her vision properly back. Once she succeeded, she took a look around. She was in her room, and then she examined the man who had just spoke.

Claire stared, wide-eyed at him, frozen to her spot but not with fear. She knew that person’s strong brown eyes anywhere. With a dry throat, she spoke in a whisper;

“Dragon Slayer?”

## 5 - Dragon Slayer's message

### Chapter 5: Dragon Slayer's Message

The man that had just appeared gave a cheeky little smile as Claire stared at him in disbelief. The man was kitted out in full knight armour, all apart from the helmet. He looked about 24 years old, and he definitely would remind you of Claire's long lost love, even though there were a few changes; he had gotten taller and even though you couldn't see it, you could tell that he had been working out. These differences could definitely be explained though, the height cause of puberty & the muscular build because of the training you go through for fighting, for example a war. It was Dragon Slayer alright.

The man then spoke;

"Dragon Slayer huh? Haven't been called that in a bit. Course, I haven't been called anything in a while." The man said, with a tiny chuckle in his voice. His voice had got deeper from when the last time she had saw him, all those six years ago. It made him sound more mature. Claire snapped out of her shock and stood up slowly, still slightly hurt from being blasted back against the wall. She then stared at him, let out a tiny sigh, gave a smile and she ran into his arms. Claire wrapped her arms round him. Claire backed off a little after the hug, to get a good look at the man.

"Are you...back?"

After a slight pause, Dragon Slayer replied;

"That doesn't matter right now. I desperately need to talk to you about something of the utmost importance."

Dragon Slayer then looked deeply into Claire's emerald eyes. They gazed back at him, full of adoration. He placed his hands on her shoulders ever so lightly, then his face crippled slightly into a depressed expression. He shut his eyes, then moved his head in a sharp move to face the floor, giving it a slight shake. Claire's face went slightly confused, and she said in a caring and slightly worried voice;

"Dragon Slayer? What's wrong?"

The man looked back up at her, with a serious, sad look on his face. After a pause, he let go of Claire's shoulders then said to her;

"Claire, I need to tell you something, something I wish I didn't have to say. If there was any other way, any other way to stop what's going to happen-"

"What? What are you talking about? What's going to happen? Dragon Slayer?" Claire questioned as Dragon Slayer paused. He turned from her, but she touched his arm with her hand. He stopped, and gave out a deep sorrowful sigh as he lowered his head and stared at the floor with his eyes closed once again. He paused, then turned to face Claire again. Claire noticed that his eyes were starting to fill up slightly. He saw her looking then quickly wiped his eyes with his arm.

"I became a knight to protect people. To protect my family, my friends...to protect you. I would do anything to fulfil my mission, no matter what the consequences, no matter what the opponent, I would do what ever it would take. Now there is something I cant do..." He trailed off again and didn't seem to have the confidence to go on. Claire reached out and touched his hand.

"Dragon Slayer? What can you not do?"

He breathed deeply a couple of times, then said;

"Do you remember when we were 15, and I had just became a real knight?"

Claire nodded silently in reply.

"Well the dragon that I had slayed, it was a mother."

Claire's eyes widened, then she mouthed the words: 'a mother?'

“Yes, it had a child. When I had went to kill that dragon, I never needed to go into the cave because she was outside it, maybe waiting for me, I don’t know. What I do know though is that if I had went in, I would of seen the egg and maybe... maybe I wouldn’t need to do this. It’s my fault, and no matter how hard I try to fight it, I just cant think of any other way...” Dragon Slayer stopped again, still unable to declare what he so desperately needed to say.

Claire retracted her hand from his grip, and then placed her hands on his shoulders, so he was looking right into her eyes.

“Dragon Slayer.” Claire said with a stern but loving tone in her voice, “Tell me.”

Dragon Slayer gave a sigh, then said in a slightly laughing voice;

“I could never hide things from you. I would twitter on about the most random stuff to you, stuff that didn’t mean anything much, but you would always put it in perspective for me. It’s funny how it was so easy to talk to you about stuff that didn’t matter, but this thing I have to say, I have to, and you are the only one I can tell, it’s almost too hard. Almost.” At this point his voice went slightly panicky, “Right, here it is. The baby dragon, it-”

“Claire? Claire are you alright? I heard banging coming from your room.” King Rufus yelled from the bottom of the stairs, and the next thing Claire heard was her father’s footsteps on the stairs. He was coming up!

Claire’s eyes widened & they flicked from the door to Dragon Slayer, with a look of panic on her face.

“Listen to me. You have to leave your home now. You have to run, run to our house. I’ll see you there, just run!” Dragon Slayer instructed her, with a slight sound of fear in his voice.

“What? I have to go? Why?” Claire yelled, looking at the door. When she looked back, he was gone.

Once he had disappeared, the scale pendant fell from the ceiling to the ground.

“Dragon Slayer!!? What did you mean by our house? Where are you? Come back! Our house...? The cottage!” Claire suddenly realised in her mind. She was then awakened from her train of thought by her father trying to kick open her locked door.

“Claire! Open the door! Are you alright?! Claire!” Her father yelled from the hallway. Claire knew there was only two ways out of the room, and Rufus was blocking one.

The door finally burst open, and the King ran through the door way. He quickly scanned the room; no Claire, and the window, open. She was long gone.

Claire, at the point where her father had broke through the door, was galloping through the forest on her white horse, her clock flapping in the strong winds, the scale pendant tied round her neck. She kept her head low to avoid the cold, hard rain from hitting her face, and to also move as fast as she could. She needed to get to the cottage, she needed to find out what Dragon Slayer was going to tell her.

She sliced through the darkness, rushing toward the moment that would change her life forever.

## 6 - The Cottage

### Chapter 6: The Cottage

After galloping for an hour or so, Claire finally reached the cottage, their house, with the conversation she had just had with Dragon Slayer still going over and over in her mind. She instantly stopped thinking when she coming came to the clearing, and on her horse she slowly walked towards the garden. No Dragon Slayer. She took a look around. Everything she was thinking about just instantly vanished, as if it wasn't important enough to remember at the moment. This night the cottage looked different from the last time she had saw it. It was still in its shabby state, but it seemed more depressing. The house was drenched by the rain, but still stood firm. It was a dark, nightmare domicile, not a cosy cottage home like it used to be. Claire looking at this house started to forget all the happy hours she had spent here, as if seeing the building like this was sucking away her memories of this house ever being warm. The garden wasn't much better. All the flowers were limp and were hardly withstanding the rain. The soil had turned to mud, making the entire land become a huge swamp of despair. Claire was mesmerised by how heartbreaking this was, but then she shook her head and tried to think of something else. No matter how hard she tried to remember, her joyful thoughts were all slipping away. She closed her eyes and involved herself in immense concentration.

Claire? a man said to her.

She instantly opened her eyes, and there in the middle of the swampy earth, was Him. He was no longer kitted out in armour, the clothes he was wearing now looked similar to the ones Claire had last saw him in those years ago, but there was something different, but she couldn't bother to think about that now.

Dragon Slayer! Claire's face broke into a grin, and she jumped off her horse and ran into his arms. It wasn't until after the embrace that Claire realised it had stopped raining, the wind had settled down and the fog had cleared. Everything was peaceful and happy once again. Claire's lost memories returned to her as she gazed into Dragon Slayer's eyes. His hands slipped into hers and they stood there, in a trance, when Dragon Slayer let out a small sound from his throat, looked worried, then quickly shook his head and stepped back, dropping Claire's hands as if they were red hot poker.

Sorry, I & Dragon Slayer started, unable to finish. He then morphed his panic-filled face into a smile. He then gently picked Claire up, and carried her into the cottage, so to avoid her dress getting any muddier. There, in the middle of the second room stood the golden harp. This is where Dragon Slayer slowly lowered Claire onto her feet, and then paused with his hands round her waist. He started into her emerald eyes, then his deep brown eyes suddenly widened and he broke eye contact.

My message! He said under his breath, seeming to be reminding himself of something. He backed off from Claire, who was standing just beside the harp, fidgeting slightly with her dress out of nervousness. Dragon Slayer looked her up and down, and stopped at her eyes.

You look um& you&uh& Dragon Slayer burred, still as good as he was before at complimenting Claire's appearance.

Claire gave a small smile and a little laugh.

Thank you. She said, knowing what he wanted to say about how she looked.

Dragon Slayer giggled slightly too, then his face slipped into its depressed state once again.

No, we were so close at getting you to properly smile again! Claire said with a grin on her face, then realised this was no laughing matter for Dragon Slayer. Her faced changed into a worried expression

and then she ran towards him and slipped her hands into his.

What is your message? She said in a slightly desperate tone.

I wish& it was easier to tell you. Actually, I wish I didn't have to tell you at all-

We've been through this staling already Dragon Slayer. Claire interrupted in a stern but non-harsh fashion. Look at me. What is your message?

Dragon Slayer reluctantly looked up and gazed into Claire's eyes. He knew in his heart that he couldn't fight to hide it from Claire any longer. He had to tell her now.

The baby dragon I started to tell you about earlier, He began, well it grew bigger and wiser over the past few years, and with age, grew its hatred of the human race. It's blamed everyone for its mother's death, when it should only of been me that it never forgave. Anyway, now that the dragon is in its prime years, it has& planed to destroy Tybolt. Dragon Slayer spat out these last few words as if they were poison and Claire gave a frightened gasp as her eyes widened and she placed both her hands over her mouth. She backed away a few steps, as if this would stop it from being true.

No! She whispered, her voice filled with panic.

Yes! Dragon Slayer said, stating the horrifying truth. It will stop at nothing to complete its mission, to avenge its mother's death, and I can't do anything about it! Dragon Slayer breathed heavily here, then continued in a less short-tempered tone.

I need&help. He said quietly and pathetically, help from you.

Claire looked puzzled for a moment, and then the truth dawned on her. Her eyes widened then she gasped. Her mouth opened and closed as if she was doing a fish impression, but then she gave up. She closed her mouth, knowing that there was nothing she could say.

As Claire was going through her moment of shock and horror, Dragon Slayer watched helplessly from the sidelines, unable to save her from what she was going through, silently hating himself for that.

Claire then suddenly stopped panicking, and stood still. She then slowly lowered herself to the floor, and sat with her feet on the ground and her arms wrapped round her knees. For a moment, there was complete silence. Neither Claire nor Dragon Slayer moved.

He then slowly advanced towards her.

Claire? He said softly to her as he moved.

Shut up! Claire suddenly yelled at Dragon Slayer, stopping him in mid-step. He then walked in front of her, and kneeled down so that her head was level with hers. He was unable to see Claire's face because she had placed her head down on her knees. He said to her:

Claire. You're the world's last hope. The planet needs you. Your father needs you. I need you-

Don't you think I know that? said Claire, sharply raising her head to shout.

Just&let me think for a second, ok?

Dragon Slayer did as she asked, but remained in his kneeling position.

The minutes ticked by, and hardly anything has moved. Claire then opened her eyes, raised her head, then stood up and looked straight ahead of her, staring at nothing in particular. Dragon Slayer looked up at her, waiting to hear the answer, the only answer. Claire gulped, then said in a honourable, but quiet tone of voice as a tear fell from her eyes:

When do I leave?

## 7 - Morning Memories

### Chapter 7: Morning Memories

Claire opened her eyes to see she was alone. She felt terrible; Her mouth was dry, her throat was sore and she was freezing, even though the sun was beating down well outside. She painfully stretched up with her arms and stood up slowly, the thin dusty rag that had been her blanket the night before slipping off onto the ground.

She stared down at the hard dusty wooden-plank floor. It hadn't served well as a bed.

Dragon Slayer once again had disappeared with no warning, leaving nothing to show he was even there in the first place. Claire sat back down and tried to remember the discussion she and Dragon Slayer had last night; the message he had said still ringing in her ears, blasting as loud as a foghorn. After that he had then told her where she could get some armour:

A friend of mine can give you all you'll need.

Claire privately smiled to herself. Dragon Slayer & his nickname ran in her mind every night, and most mornings too. She still couldn't understand how he came back, but frankly, she didn't care. Her first and only love has returned, all her wishes had finally come true. Who was *she* to question a miracle, especially one that had happened in her favour? Tybolt's only hope & that's who *she* is.

Claire let out a depressed sigh and stood up. She brushed down her dress wearily, knowing it wouldn't really help get the thick layers of dirt and dust that was clinging to it. She walked slowly round the room, trying to take everything in. It could be her last chance to see this place & Claire quickly pushed that thought out of her mind and continued her look-around.

With the sun pounding in through the window you could see the dust particles in the air. They floated gracefully in the air, without purpose and without worry. Claire envied and despised the dots, so quickly turned her head to look at something else, which was lucky cause she would've hit her shin off the golden harp if she hadn't seen it in time. The rays of sunlight did this magnificent instrument justice, bouncing off the rim making it look majestic and as if it should be in an enormous ballroom being listened to intently by hundreds, maybe even thousands of ears. The item craved attention and an audience.

Claire took up harp at a young age. Her father had made her, and she was almost sure she would hate it. But the moment she touched those strings she was in her own world, playing for an audience of no one and everyone. She hated all her teachers, some smelled strange and others had no clue what they were doing. Until, it came to her latest one. He who she had known since the age of 6 became her teacher. Yes, it was Dragon Slayer himself. His mother being a famous harpist, he had been listening to harp all his life, and knew all the individual strings and their sounds. He knew many songs, and had watched his mother play all the time. Unfortunately, Claire's father would never allow a boy teach his daughter, even a boy of a famous harpist. She was banned from ever seeing him for lessons again, but Claire never really cared about what her father thought. She knew that his opinion didn't matter, so every Sunday she would say she would be going to the market, when she would really be off to Dragon Slayer's house, where no one but Slayer's mother would know where they were. Slayer's mother was kind, and always greeted you with a smile. She only allowed people call her by her first name, Sylvia, and she knew how to keep a secret. Sylvia, like Claire, thought King Rufus was a big bag of hot air, but she would never say so in front of Claire. Sylvia really was the only person in the town who wasn't



scared of the King, and everyone knew it.

So, Claire's lesson would last about 1 hour, and then she would take the food etc. from off the kitchen table that Slayer's mother bought so Claire's story was believable, she would then thank Sylvia, and then would be on her way back home, dreaming of her next lesson. She of course still had to have lessons from other people (her father was still forcing her to learn the harp), but these were irrelevant. She never really tried with them, and she was always thinking about what Dragon Slayer was going to teach her in a few days.

When he disappeared, Claire went one last time to his house to say goodbye and thank you to Sylvia. It was in the middle of the night so that no one else would be there, and also so she wouldn't have to tell her father a lie. She wanted to stop lying, stop committing sins. Maybe if she did, then Dragon Slayer would come back. Sneaking out at night was a one off, her last crime.

When she arrived at his house, she saw light coming from the kitchen. She let out a relieved sigh, knowing Sylvia was awake, then walked up to the door, and knocked twice.

In only two seconds the door was thrust open and there was Sylvia, hair wild, face filled with hope, only to be lost when she saw it was Claire.

Oh. Claire, Sorry I thought Sylvia said sadly, looking past Claire into the night, hoping to see someone else.

Come in. She said, and Claire walked into the cold house as Sylvia shut the door behind her.

Claire took a quick scan. The whole house was basically empty apart from a huge pile of cardboard boxes in the corner, some with the word FRAGILE written on the side.

So what are you doing here, up this late? She said, hardly caring if Claire was there or not.

Claire took in a breath and said,

Sorry, um were you waiting for-

What is it you came for? Sylvia interrupted, not wanting to continue with that topic, the smile that was usually on her face no longer there.

Claire shook her head then said,

Um I came to say thank you for everything. I know it was really risky for you to lie for me and me and Then Claire started crying.

Sylvia felt a sudden pain of sorrow and pity for Claire, knowing that they had both loved Dragon Slayer (she had overheard Claire use that name for him), even if Claire didn't know it herself. Sylvia walked over and placed her hands on Claire's shoulders, then stared into her sad face.

Claire looked up at Sylvia's face, examining the eyes, seeing a look of sympathy.

Sylvia still saw the little girl inside Claire, the one she had helped with a cut knee, the girl she used to tell magical stories to, with mystical unicorns running wild and horrible ugly witches casting curses and spells.

Thank you. Sylvia said at last. Now, you better be running along home again. Your father would be worried if he found you missing. Sylvia then walked Claire to the door. Claire walked out, but before she left, she turned around to Sylvia.

You're leaving, aren't you? You're packing up and moving away. Claire said, with a tone of grief in her voice.

Sylvia stared at her feet for a few seconds, then looked back up at Claire.

There are too many memories here, just too many. I think it would be for the best if I left. I'm sorry I won't be around anymore Claire, but good luck in your life. Big things are going to happen to you, you're just too special for them not to. Sylvia then smiled the last smile Claire saw her do.

Claire smiled too.

Goodbye Sylvia, and thanks for everything.

Goodbye Claire.

Claire then ran to her horse and sped into the night. Claire arrived back at her house and saw the lights were not on. Obviously her father had not yet awoken. She dropped off her horse into the stables and went to the side of the house. She saw the rope made of bedcovers etc. she had made to get out earlier, and now here she was climbing back up it again, which she discovered was a lot more difficult. She finally reached the top, then changed quickly but silently into her pyjamas and threw the dress she had wore into the back of the wardrobe, intending to wash it secretly later so her father wouldn't suspect a thing. She sank into her bed, and right before falling to sleep, she had a thought. She hadn't realised it until now, but it was true. With Sylvia's departure, Claire would lose her last friend. There would be no one left to talk to, no one left who properly knew her. She shivered and snuggled into her spare bedcovers, the other ones she had tore up to make a rope at the moment at the back of the wardrobe with her dress. Claire sniffled slightly, and then fell asleep, grief her lullaby.

Back in the present now, Claire was packing her horse, getting ready for the long journey ahead. She made the last preparations, and pulled herself onto the horse. Claire took the scale pendant out of her pocket and tied it round her neck. She held the scale in her hand, and smiled privately to herself.

This is your fault you know. She said jokily, then grabbed the reins and was off, beginning her pilgrimage, riding into the forest.