

An Ancient Tale of Far Away

Chapter I

A long time ago and far away there was an immense dark void, nothing within and nothing without. A lone space cruiser saw what appeared to be a black hole and reported its presence to its base. There had not been a black hole previously charted in that area. Upon closer examination the crew of the cruiser noticed no gravitational force or other energy present in the blackness, so it was not a black hole but a true nothing. Fear suddenly gripped the members of the crew when they realized they were seeing the remains of a universe and what may be in their future. The emptiness then vanished and the stars and galaxies shown brightly again as if all had returned to normal. All except for a small lizard like creature, which hid in the ship's ventilation system. The dragon had returned.

As the beast grew in the ship all the crewmembers started to die, their blood drained from their bodies. Soon the ship itself vanished and all the stars shuddered as the monster began draining the light and energy from them as well.

On a distant planet a beautiful young girl was strolling through the forest. There she spied an unusual flower and stopped to smell its fragrance. The spirit of the forest appeared before her in the guise of a young man. Startled, the maiden ran away as fast as she could go. However, the vision she had kept pounding in her brain until she could no longer sleep. Desperate for understanding, she went back into the forest, deeper and deeper, until she was totally lost. She collapsed from exhaustion and fell into a deep slumber. She dreamed of a horrible dragon burning the forests and towns to ashes. She saw that there was no human capable of stopping the monster. Then she saw the spirit appear with all his friends, the birds, beasts, insects, even the trees and flowers, and they all started singing. The dragon froze, and then the spirit ripped the eye out of the monster. The creature, now blinded, flew off into the distant dimensions now powerless, collapsed in the void.

She awoke with the sunrise and as her eyes opened, the spirit man was kneeling beside her on the ground. He had in his hand the crystal clear eye of the dragon. He said to the girl, "please take this and guard it well, for all clarity, knowledge, and foresight reside within. She hesitated, but being lost and wanting to go home, accepted the gift. When she looked into the eye, she saw her way home and began to dance out of the forest. The spirit accompanied her to the edge of the town, when he had to stop. He had been banished to the woods millions of years ago for the crime of creating beauty without a permit and could not return to the world of humans until that curse was lifted. The maiden bid farewell and went home. The spirit returned to the forest, curled up inside a tree and cried till he fell into a deep hibernation.

The girl showed the eye to all her friends and family. At first they praised her for her courage, but then grew jealous of her power. One by one they attacked and clouded her mind. She soon began thinking that the spirit was evil and the crystal sphere was a tool of the devil. She ranted and raved until all around her feared she would go mad. The spirit heard her cries and woke from his deep sleep. Needing to go into town to help her, he called on a witch to release him from his curse. She said she could, but the price for one

day of freedom could be an eternity of isolation, not in the woods, but deep in space, frozen in iceglass.

He flew into town and appeared in the girl's room. On seeing him again, she fell into a rage, not allowing the spirit to even speak. Realizing he was doomed, the spirit grabbed the eye and vanished into space. The animals and plants began to scream in terror. Their only protection was now gone. They were now at the mercy of the humans, who began to eat and burn them all. Deep in the void, the dragon smelled the spirit trapped in ice and took back his eye. It then reproduced and sent out trillions of little monsters throughout the universe. One approached the girl's planet and flew into her room. She then realized what she had done and gathering her strength, ripped the little monster apart. Looking into its little eye, she saw the spirit frozen and alone, guarded by the biggest of all the dragons. She ran into the forest, but all that was left of nature was a lifeless stump with some fungus growing out of it in the last stages of decay. She pleaded with the mushroom to help her. But the fungus said, "sorry miss, you're on your own. If you want to undo the damage to this world, you must go into space and slay the biggest dragon, remove its eye and grow up to become a real woman." In the past, only men were dragon slayers and this was a new and untested idea fraught with danger. She accepted the challenge and gathering all the magic she possessed flew into the dragon's den. Armed with her superior wits and supremely confident of victory, she waited for the monster to appear.

Chapter II

While awaiting the dragon, she reflected upon all that had happened. She realized that forces beyond her control might be involved. A shudder of fear gripped her and then she saw an old man hobbling along in front of the dragon's cave.

Seeing this pitiful fool she relaxed and asked what such an old feeble impotent creature like him had being so far from civilization. The old man said he was lost and hungry, and asked her if he could have some food and water. The girl said she could not spare anything, because she needed all her strength to fight a dragon and save the future. Whereas, she felt that the old man had no future. The old man started to cry, but to no avail. She then told the hungry man to leave her alone so she could concentrate on the task ahead and she turned her back on him. Suddenly the temperature dropped to absolute zero and a skeletal hand grabbed the girl by the ankles and suspended her upside down in the air. Panic gripped the girl as she realized what happened. Her fear grew as she heard the sound of the dragon's wings as it made its approach.

The dragon appeared as black as night and hot as hell. Seeing the old man, the dragon said, "Hi dad, what brings you out on a night like this?" The old man said, "I was looking for that spirit of a brother of yours and figured that you may have had something to do with his disappearance." The dragon, avoiding the question, asked, "what is this little girl doing near my home?" The girl screamed, "I am not a little girl, I'm a woman and when I get down I'm going to destroy you, you monster." The dragon laughed and seeing her hanging upside down said, "lady from this angle you only look like a little girl to me and when I get bored I'm going to give you to the trolls to play with. The girl then broke down and cried and pleaded with the old man to let her go. The old man said, "if I let you go the dragon will burn and wrinkle your skin, destroy your beauty and you would have

to spend the rest of your life as a slave to the trolls. Your selfishness has once again shown me that you by yourself can never ever in no way shape or form defeat that monster, and since I am its father I too alone cannot stop its destruction of worlds. Only with the spirit of the forest together with energy yet unknown can we stop the beast. The dragon laughed and said, "So old man you think I am responsible for my brother's whereabouts, well I wouldn't tell you anything, and since you are now beginning to irritate me, it's best you return to the empty black death where you live and leave the little tart here for me to play with." The old man said, "you might be alive and you might be strong, but you can never match the infinite nothing." In a flash he vanished taking the helpless girl with him.

When she regained consciousness, she saw she was just floating in cold black emptiness just herself alone in the void. She realized where she was and why. All she had were her thoughts, those tiny electric sparks of life, and she started thinking about the spirit and how she must go and find him, melt the iceglass, revive his energy, and meet up with the dragon.

Chapter III

As the girl floated in the dark, she began to remember everything that happened in her life, her experiences, hopes and dreams. Then she became a woman and recalled all the memories of all the women who came before her, their lives, their loves, their being became her being, she felt all there was. She cried when she woke to see she now had nothing.

Suddenly in the midst of a torrent of tears she saw the spirit of the forest, the beautiful man, drift into view, his form completely covered in the clear iceglass. She grabbed him and held on with all her strength. Her cries fell on deaf emptiness and she finally realized that her power alone could not bring life back into a body so cold. Her despair deepened as endless time rolled on, just her holding a lifeless body of what was and could have been. When it seemed like an eternity had passed, a faint hum began to vibrate the empty space. The hum grew louder and louder, until it became a roar and space itself was ripping apart. Fear and death was awakening and she saw an immense horde of dragons rushing toward her and her beloved. But when they approached the look of terror in the dragon's eyes was so intense they didn't even notice her, but seemed to fly by as fast as they could go from what, she could not comprehend. The sounds of chaos became deafening and when the dragons passed a fireball of howling madness appeared. It was the old man burnt to a crisp, his powers gone, his rule ended. Holding the glass as tight as she could, she waited for the end.

The sounds quieted to a melodic whisper and it appeared. Not a man or a woman, just luminous everything. She saw all the dead pass, and then saw all the living glowing with an unearthly light. It stopped in front of her, an ever-changing form of lights and scenes from everywhere. As she faced death, she asked it, "why me? I'm too young for you. I have too much more life and experiences to have to meet with you now." But death in its infinity just glowed brighter. "Can you bring my spirit back to life again?" she asked. But death just quietly continued its sublime melody. Then she offered herself to death if the spirit could live again. But death just silently continued its seeming indifference to her

plight. Then she heard the voice of the spirit emanate from the luminous form. He said, "I have but one chance again to live but you must renounce your offer to die for me and we can be sent back to our home, where I'll resume my human nature." "But I want to die" she cried. "I want to die now, I can't take this torment and uncertainty. I can't stay still. I can't live with you. I'm a woman. I must have power. I must have all my wished granted and will obeyed. How can I share a human life with a thing? I'm still confused and lost. The spirit's voice told her to look into the iceglass. She did and saw that the spirit was gone. Only death remained and it began to grow dark. The woman then awoke, home in her room. The earth was forested again and life seemed the same as usual, as if nothing happened. She began to feel as though it had all been a dream.

A bell rang and her servant appeared to help her with her morning chores. When they finished, the woman went outside and she saw a caravan approaching. It was the entourage of a powerful lord. When a rider approached with the customary greeting, the woman swooned, for the rider; the son of the lord, was none other but the spirit of the forest, alive and real. He dismounted and held the woman in his arms. She regained consciousness and their eyes met and she saw he knew her and she knew him.