

Wesley's Stories:

The Hidden Tales

By

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For Jenna...The only person I need find if ever I wonder what passion looks like.

“Creativity with time,

yields dreams we walk in.

Like a spider weaving silk, our

imagination holds the morning dew

against a pale gold dawn.

Rising in the east the new day births

potential our mind identifies

and our hearts exceed.”

-MFS

Story 1

The Dream Dragon

With astonishing speed Wesley swept his foot in a half circle on the ground in front of him; completing the rotation, he used the momentum to bring his leg up and around the back side of his body while he jumped off the other foot. His furious leg swept around and delivered a finishing blow to his masked enemy. There were still four more around him. Circling in. Getting closer. He jolted to his right with a jab, but the movement was only a decoy to get the foe behind him to drop his guard temporarily. Stopping his fist a half an inch before the concealed face to his right, he ducked his body into a backward roll, planted his hands behind him then shot his legs and feet back up, somersaulting over his head and smashing his heels into the black ninja's face behind him.

He popped up just in time to see David running at the back of another opponent across the circle. Jumping in a diving position over the unsuspecting warrior below him, David grabbed onto the enemy's head and neck, and once his feet were planted, he ducked his body and used all the energy from his dive to hurl the masked samurai fifteen feet over Wesley's head.

They made eye contact briefly, gave a slight nod, and continued fighting the weakening bad guys. From his left Wesley watched the head of a spear dart dangerously close to his head. In a dash, he popped his head back, then forward under the bow, as the warrior tried to take his head-off with a side-swiping attack. The next second brought the other end of the bow around at Wesley's stomach, but before the wooden shaft could make contact with his abdomen, the young fighter jumped in the air and blocked the blow with the flat of his right foot. The owner of the spear dropped his foot back, circled the weapon around his head and in a downward thrust brought the spear-head down at Wesley

like the face of an axe against a log of wood. Waiting just a second, Wesley side-stepped, calmly, out of the way and let the blade smack the ground with a relentless “THUD”. Picking his left foot up he smashed the spear down into the concrete, and used the rest of the shaft as a ramp. With 3 quick strides up the black bow, he found himself vaulted over top of the black ninja’s head. Rotating his body backwards, while his body moved forwards he back-flipped and, mid-air, brought his right leg down directly on top of the skull of his enemy. Feeling the body instantly go loose, and collapse to the floor, he landed, and ducked as a 5-pointed metal star sliced through the air on course with his neck. That one was too close. Spinning 720 degrees, horizontally, he brought his right hand into his robe and shot three of his own 5-pointed metal stars back at the ninja who was still admiring his throw. The blades sunk deep into his chest.

Flat on the ground Wesley found a moment to gather a breath.

“Wes!!!”, Wesley looked up at David. His friend was making the shape of a “T” with both of his hands. Wesley quickly shot up onto all fours, and braced his hands and knees on the ground. Before he could look back again, David was using his back as a “table” and flew up into the air, landing two kicks simultaneously at two more ninjas that would have been on Wesley in a second.

Getting up to his feet Wesley put his back against David’s and watched. Out of the Shadows two more villains moved into the light. They circled the young boys like a pack of wolves. Gowned in all red Gi’s, with black belts, black masks, and matching dragon tattoos on their arms, they side stepped— no louder than the wind blowing through the forest floor.

Jumping onto his hands, then easing his body onto the ground the red ninja in-front of Wesley began the fight. He spun on the ground, rotating on his right foot, then shot onto his hands again and kicked at Wesley’s face while locking his body in a Handstand. Wesley pushed the attack away with his left hand and jabbed his right leg at a downward angle, at the upside down chest of the ninja: A blow

that would have splintered a tree. The skilled ninja picked up his left hand, spun his legs in a circle and lifted the fingers up on his right hand, causing his body to rotate two full rotations, upside down on his right palm. Completing the second spin, he stopped and somersaulted forward leaving his back too Wesley. The young boy took the chance to strike, and bringing his right leg up, he jolted forward and kicked at the back of the ninja. As if he was sensing the kick, the ninja sprang out of his somersault and instead of standing all the way up, which would have allowed Wesley's kick to hit him square in the back, he immediately arched his back in an un-natural way, leaving his back almost completely parallel to the ground and just a foot above it. Wesley, wisely planted his foot to the left of the ninja, and swept his left leg around, up over his head and, like a guillotine blade coming down on a decapitate-in-waiting victim: Wesley's heel crushed the face of the red ninja.

Turning around, he found David delivering a five punch combo to the masterful red ninja in front of him. A kidney shot with his left, a jab to the stomach with his right, an uppercut, a right hook and a spinning elbow that landed on the right temple of the dazed foe. David suddenly grabbed the left shoulder of the red Gi and spun the ninja around 180 degrees.

"Special Delivery!" he shouted to Wesley. Grabbing the collar of the red robe, and the middle of the back David rolled onto the ground backwards and used his feet to catapult the flailing ninja up and over his body. Wesley waited till the helpless warrior got within the appropriate distance, then leaping in the air formed both of his hands into a tight fist— a solid ball of knuckles. Just as the body of the red ninja looked like it was going to hit the ground, Wesley brought his balled hands down on top of the ninja's nose.

A blinding white light flashed in Wesley's eyes. The lights went out. It very suddenly felt as though Wesley was alone, and somewhere completely different. He felt his breath go in and out of his body, slowly. Like a bus, leaving him at a stop, he felt his dream pull away— a rolling tide washing back

out to sea. And again, all too suddenly, he felt his eyes flash open and glimpsed the ceiling of his room staring at him as blankly as the conscious stream in his mind. Letting himself sit in the rare moment between dreams and waking, he startled himself when he felt his arm rising towards his eyelids. As his fingers probed the skin against his eyeballs a deep breath filled his lungs. Pulling his fingers away, he became aware of the dry crusty substance that had formed on the inside of his eyelids by the bridge of his nose. "Eye boogers" as David had called them. He picked at them momentarily.

Tasting stale saliva in his mouth, he squinted his eyes together to focus on the red digital numbers of the clock on his desk a few feet away: 6:13am. Doing an almost impossible math problem in his head he concluded that that had given him a shade over 8 hours of sleep. Though his pillow seemed to pull his body back into a dreamy lull, he let his feet skitter out from the blankets and plant reluctantly on the floor.

He crossed the room and stumbling slightly, found his way into the bathroom. After a quick teeth brush, a gargle with some mouthwash and a liquid deposit at the porcelain bank, he made his way downstairs to the kitchen.

To no surprise, his dad was at the far side of the table, reading the paper, munching on half of an English muffin and enjoying what would be the first of many cups of coffee throughout the day.

"Hey there bugerloo," his father helloed.

"Hey there Poppa Bear," Wesley's standard reply.

"How did you sleep kiddo."

"I slept great! Apparently I am destined to be a powerful ninja."

"Oh yea? What makes you so sure?"

“This dream I had. Where, without flattering myself too much, I made Bruce Lee and Chuck Norris look like Back Street Boys.”

“Sounds like some real butt-kicking.” His Dad added. “And you handled all these guys—

—Ninja’s Dad, I fought black masked Ninjas, in ancient Japan.”

“Ninja’s, right, of course. You handled all of these masked Japanese ninja’s by yourself?”

“David helped a little.”

“Ah well, sounds like you’ve gotten your dreams mixed up with my life at your age.”

“I’m sure Dad.” Wesley’s father smiled and turned his attention back to the paper. Getting up to fix himself a bowl of Honey Nut Cheerios, Wesley felt a question itch down his brain and into his mouth. “I’ll tell you what I’m not sure about though...” Mr. Terrell looked up from his paper.

“Where do dreams come from?” Wesley had just finished putting the milk into his bowl, and was going to put the carton back in the refrigerator when he felt his dad’s eyes fixed on him.

“Dad?” Wesley said, opening the door and sliding the milk in.

“I have been waiting for you to ask me that for 13 years.” Mr. Terrell said, with a distant look in his eyes. Wesley sat down at the table, transfixed by his father’s sudden change in behavior.

“What? Wait, really? Why is that such an important question?” Wesley’s father put down the paper and a smile flashed on his face. The far-off look in his eyes seemed, now, to be a fire of excitement, a storm of adventure. It made Wesley’s insides twist with delight.

“There is only one way to answer this question, and it will involve two things: First, I have to call in late to work.”

“Wait, what?” Wesley felt his thoughts spin out of control, and his adrenaline coursed through his body like a rapid. In all his life his Dad had never taken time out from work, even with a fever and a cough in the dead of winter, his dad powered through.

“Is everything ok?”

“Yes, yes.” His dad assured him. Only, was this his real Dad? Was this another dream? “And the second thing we are going to need to answer that question is...” His Dad paused. Wesley felt a moment pass that felt like an hour before he beckoned:

“DAD!!! What do we need? What’s the other thing?” The question startled his father back to reality. What was going on!?

“We need my chest in the back of your Mom and I’s closet.”

“Why do we need that? Don’t you keep a gun in there? Are you sure everything is ok? How much coffee did you have?”

“Haha, Wesley I’m fine. Just excited is all, I had honestly forgotten about what’s inside the chest for quite some time now...and wait, Wesley, what? There are no guns in this house!”

“What’s inside the chest then!!!”

“Let’s go get it!” Mr. Terrell hopped up from his chair like a child going to recess. Wesley followed closely behind his dad as they bounced down the hallway, up the stairs and towards the master bedroom. A few feet from the door Mr. Terrell stopped suddenly and crouched down, an Indian on the path of a stag. He put a hand up to signal for Wesley to get crouched down as well. Like a flood of joy, Wesley all at once realized where he got his spirit of adventure from.

“Your mother is still sleeping. She doesn’t feel well today and I do not want to wake her.”

Wesley gave a nod, acknowledging the use of caution. “I want you to get in there, find the chest and bring it out here. I’ll stay on lookout.”

“Who is looking for us?”

His dad’s eyes seemed to flutter around at the ground for a moment, looking for an answer. He smiled then firmly pointed a finger in the direction of his bedroom. Wesley allowed a smile to escape his lips, and then elevated his body weight onto the pads of his fingers and toes. The hard wood floor underneath him felt cool. He let the chill of the boards seep into his fingers, let it control his heart rate, his focus, his mind and the mission. Like a white leopard scaling a mountain he rotated the joints of his shoulder blades and haunches. Crossing the floor in front of his parent’s bed he heard his mom’s breathing rise and fall.

The door to the closet was open slightly, so Wesley poked a finger through the crack, then eased his palm in, then his forearm, shoulder, and without a single decibel of sound he was in the closet. The carpet in the tiny space muffled his footsteps so he dropped his guard down and let eyes wander to the back wall. Beneath a shoe box and some luggage, an old beat up black leather chest rested stiffly on the beige carpet. Like a hound dog with droopy eyes it stared back at Wesley like it hadn’t moved in a long time.

Making sure that nothing dropped or shifted noisily, his hands guided the box out from the things on top and he brought the treasure up into his arms. His mind flooded with the desire to pop the chest open right then and there, but he looked down and saw a 4-digit lock pad. What in the world was in here!!!?

Poking his head out of the closet, and balancing the chest on his hands and knees he found his dad's eyes light up when he saw Wesley and the chest emerge. His father brought a finger up to his lips, hinting to Wesley to remain quiet, then rubbed his palms together up and down rapidly. His mom shuffled in the bed just as Wesley was about to exit the room, and it froze both of the Terrell boys with halted breaths. Waiting for an eternity they gradually heard Mrs. Terrell's breathing go back to normal. Wesley popped into the hallway and set the chest down between him and his Dad. Fireworks were exploding in his stomach.

"That was great! A ninja couldn't have done better!"

"I told ya dad, it is my destiny."

"My apologies for doubting your power, oh mighty one," Mr. Terrell teased.

"You are forgiven," Wesley played along, "but in return I ask that you penetrate this Ninja proof lock that is protecting this chest," Mr. Terrell bowed respectfully then got to work on the combination. Wesley watched his dad put in the numbers memorizing each one as he went.

"The combination is 7,2,5,8?"

"Yes."

"Dad, that's your birthday!"

"Yes..."

Wesley stared at his father.

"Dad, nobody makes their password their birthday, you might as well make it, 1,2,3,4."

"What's wrong with 1,2,3,4?"

“Uhh...it’s easy to crack!”

“Well who’s going to try and break in a chest in the back of my closet that only I know about?”

“Probably the same person that you were on look out for.”

“Alright, alright Mr. Smarty-pants, know it all, ninja master let’s take this downstairs in the family room.” Mr. Terrell offered, taking the lock off and putting it into his pocket. Wesley jumped to his feet and started down the stairs.

“Better yet kiddo, why don’t you get some warmer clothes on, your shoes, and go get us some more firewood. I’m going to make my call into work and tell them I am going to do a half day. Meet me by the fireplace in ten minutes.”

“We’re going to make a fire?” Wesley questioned.

“Do you want to know where dreams come from?”

“Yes, but I—“

“Well fires make Dragon’s, and Dragon’s make dreams...So best we start at the start, am I right?” Wesley felt a hatch turn loose in his head and a surging waterfall of tingles prickled every cell in his body. Without saying another word, or making eye contact with his Dad, he backed up the stairs, shot down the hallway and returned from his room, in a sweatshirt, hat, gloves and snow-pants within seconds. His dad was in his study on the phone, so he whipped himself down the stairs, out the front door and around the side of the house to the wood pile near the edge of the forest.

Punching through the few inches of snow on the ground, the thoughts in his head sky rocketed up and down and backwards and forwards and every direction he went he found his mind leaping and flying with the wonders of dreams and dragons. Was this real?!!!

He loaded some dry logs near the bottom of the pile, and some thin kindling-like sticks around the base into his arms and trudged up the steps of the wooden deck that overlooked the backyard. While he opened the sliding glass door into the kitchen he felt a warmth invade his body that wasn't related to the change in temperature from outside to in. Magic danced on the air that filled his lungs. His house seemed alive like it never was before. His heart pounded heartily in his chest, and his eyes felt larger, seeing things for the first time.

He kicked his shoes off by the doormat and turned the corner of the hallway that led into the family room. In-front of the fireplace was the black chest, flames licking at its back. It was staring at him again, only this time it called to him—beckoning him to unleash the mystery within. No longer was it a dusty old box with a metal lock on its nose. It was alive. It fumed with a life and a will of its own. As Wesley walked closer, peering over the logs in his arms, he felt his body rise up and out of itself. He no longer felt the floor beneath his feet, but walked instead on an elevated surface of nothingness. Orange light danced in his eyes. Heat pooled into his airway. His walk slowed. His eyes were fixed. In a far off place somewhere in his mind a warmth opened up to him and asked him to listen. As the fire sang its song and bellowed flames up to the sky, Wesley felt comfort in a way that nothing else had offered before. Not the fluffiest pillow, the warmest blanket or the longest embrace. It was home. Home as a feeling, as a powerful wonderful breathe of heaven.

“You can feel it?” his dad called to him as he entered the room. Wesley didn't take his eyes off the box and the flames that blazed like dancers behind it.

“What am I feeling?” Wesley heard his voice say from miles away.

“It is the silent song that Dragon's sing in the language of fire.” Wesley's Dad smiled at his son, then looked back into the fire and closed his eyes.

“It’s the most beautiful feeling in the world.”

“There was a time I thought that as well.” Mr. Terrell lifted his head slightly. “But then I met your mother, and realized there are other songs and other voices that don’t require fire to make you feel warm.”

“Is there a dragon in that box Dad?”

“Kind of,” his dad replied carefully. “But I think it’s time you find out..” Wesley’s mind snapped back into consciousness, and he shook his head walking the logs over to the crate next to the fire place. He dropped them in, and took a seat next to the chest. Across from him, his Dad gathered a few pillows and set them under his bottom.

“Are you ready, kiddo?”

“I don’t know what to be ready for. But, yes.”

Moving slowly Mr. Terrell reached down towards the box and just as his fingers touched the black surface they stopped. Wesley found he had been holding his breath and strangely, the stoppage of his dad’s hands seemed to release the breath from his lungs.

“Why did you stop?” Wesley exhaled.

“Before we do this, I wanted to tell you that I am sorry if I am not always around. I want you to know that I was young once, and I remember days where I didn’t have to put on a tie every morning, drink coffee all day, and sit in an office. I had a best friend just like you have David. And... I guess. I’m just glad to be sharing this with you– even if it is just this once.”

“I am glad too Dad.” Wesley looked deeply into his dad’s eyes and wanted to say more, but recognized in that moment that sometimes saying just a few word’s can mean more than saying a lot. His father realized Wesley’s sincerity and turned his attention back to the chest.

In his ears, Wesley’s heart beat thumped louder and louder. The flames in the fire flickered and jumped, twisted and whipped like a wild tribe banging on drums. And the heat! Though the fire was made of just a few logs and sticks, Wesley felt his forehead and face burning and crisping like a roaring bonfire was cackling in his living room. His heart thumped again, and again in his ears. A swallowing chasm of fire and warmth enveloped his thoughts, his vision, his mind.

When, like a breath of winter air, the chest was open. His dad rested the top of the chest back on its hinges, and it blocked the heat of the fire only slightly. Resting like a jewel more breathtaking than all the stars in the night sky, a delicate and vastly beautiful marble looked up at Wesley. The small glass orb was about an inch and half in diameter. Much larger than any marble Wesley had ever seen, this phenomenal sphere held in its center a coiling swirl of indigo, jade and gold. It rested on a black velvet blanket that covered the bottom of the chest.

“It’s a marble.” Wesley stated plainly.

“It is.” Mr. Terrell agreed.

“It is?”

“Yes, it is.”

“You keep a marble, in a locked chest in your closet?”

“Do you know what a marble is?”

“Well, aren’t marbles just made of glass?”

“Yes, almost all of them.”

“Well what are the other ones made out of?”

“I don’t think that question will lead to the answer you want. Let me try and explain it to you how it was explained to me.” Mr. Terrell straightened himself up and scooped up the marble that rested in the chest. “Dragon’s, Wesley, are the keepers of dreams. They live on our world just like all the other animals and reptiles and bugs on this planet. Only, unlike other living things, Dragon’s have the ability to hide themselves, and become invisible.” Though Wesley’s head swam with doubt, something pulled at the boy in his heart– a very small but real truth that Wesley couldn’t escape.

“If you have ever felt a gust of wind in the night that seemed out of place or irregular I would bet my annual salary it was a dragon flying by. Whenever you hear of ships, or planes getting lost in or around the Bermuda triangle, those are stories of people who stumbled into the forgotten lands of *Dreagon* the hidden island where Dragon’s live.” Mr. Terrell paused for a moment to be sure his son was following.

“Go on.” Wesley nodded, bouncing his eyebrows up.

“They live and exist completely independent from the rest of the world, except for every night when the moon is the highest in the sky they venture from the isle; hunting and soaring through the heavens. They survive through concealment, but that’s not all they do. Dragon’s control our dreams. It is the only way that humans are connected to dragons anymore and they don’t even know it. At night while we sleep, through ways that I still don’t understand, dragons find a way into our rooms and drop dream drops in our eyes.”

“They drop what?”

“Dream drops. You see, when humans are sad or hurt we cry, and our eyes produce tears. For dragons it is the opposite when they laugh or feel good their bodies shed “tears” and in their case the liquid that falls from their eyes contain dreams. I can’t say I know exactly how it works but I do know that there is proof of it almost every morning when you wake.”

“What!!! No there isn’t I would have noticed at least one time if a huge fire-breathing dragon dropped a dream potion in my eye ball!!!” Wesley erupted.

“Do you know the crusty stuff that gathers on the inside of your eyes?”

“You mean “eye boogers?”

“Yes, I suppose some people call it eyes boogers. Well it’s obviously not a booger. In fact, and this is the evidence, that flaky substance is a dried up dream drop.”

“What in the, who, how in the world would you possibly figure that out!!!???”

“Do you know what your Mom’s maiden name is?”

“Dad, why in, what in the, WHAT does Mom’s name have ANYTHING to do with this?”

“So that is a “no”. Mom’s maiden name is Aislin.”

“Yes, no, I knew that.”

“But do you know what Aislin means?”

“No.” Wesley was puzzled, defeated.

“In the old Irish language, Gaelic, Aislin means “dream”. Your mother and her family going back thousands and thousands of years are part of the sacred circle of dream keepers that have knowledge of *Dreagon* and the role Dragons play in our lives while we sleep.

“And tell me again, why there is a marble in that chest, and don’t get me wrong that is the most awesome marble I have ever seen in my life, but I am missing something, well...I don’t understand any of this really...but...”

“A marble is like a Dragon egg. The Aislin families are given a handful of marbles every century and when the timing is right we birth the Dragons.

“WHAT!!!”

“Pretty cool, huh?”

“That’s a DRAGON!!! That marble right there in our house, in Trumbull Connecticut, is a fire-breathing, man-eating Dragon!!!” Wesley felt his body igniting.

“It sure is kiddo”

“Well, wait. What? How did you get it? How do we hatch it? When do we hatch it? How was it made? Why, does it feel like I drank more coffee than you all of a sudden?”

“Hahaha, Wes calm down buddy, the answers will come. I know it’s a lot to take in. Your Granpa Aislin was the one who told me and I thought he was a senile old fart, so I understand how you feel.” Wesley felt himself take a deep breath.

“So I am a dream keeper then? And you are too?”

“Well not quite, Mom ‘s family are the real keepers. You and I are just married into the family, but they have been very kind in letting me attend some of the rituals and meet some Dragons.”

“You have met a Dragon!?”

“Oh yes. Remember a few years ago when your mother and I went up to Niagara Falls?”

“Yea, it was your anniversary-get-away.”

“Yes it was that, but it was also was a meeting of the Aislin families in North America and the high Dragon *Iraneth* attended.”

“Ok, so let me just back up here for a second. I am almost 14 years old and you and Mom thought it was best to NOT tell me that you have met *and own* a Dragon and that one comes into my room every night and puts liquid dreams into my eyes!!!” Wesley eyes bulged out of his head, and his hands flailed wildly.

“Most dream keepers don’t find out until they are 15 actually. None of your younger cousins on your mom’s side know, and I think your Aunt Elle only recently told Joey and he is 3 years older than you.”

“Oh, well that’s cool then I guess.”

“And in the Dragon world a hatchling must reach the age of 15 before he gets to fly among the humans and deliver us dreams.” Wesley gazed admiringly at the marble in his Dad’s hand. He let his mind wander back to all the times that he and David had played with marbles growing up: shooting them across the hardwood floor, watching their colors rotate and catch the light as they rolled into each other. Had they been bouncing around unborn Dragon’s the whole time!?

“And what’s even in there?” Wesley asked, sneaking his eyes closer to the sphere.

“Dragon’s tears are also part of their life source, so a drop of a dragon tear is inside here.” Mr. Terrell said holding the marble up between he and Wesley. “The plastic looking swirls of color are actually a Dragon scale that has been twisted and bent around the tear to form a little cocoon.”

“Well how did they get in the glass?”

“A glass worker.”

“What do you mean Dragon’s have people in *Dreagon* that just make babies for them?”

“No, no no. Glass workers, or Glaziers, on earth have a special bond with the Dragons, and in fact, most of them are Aislin descendants. Glaziers are given a scale and a tear only once in their entire career as a glass worker and they spend nearly a full year melting and carving and building a home for the future baby dragon to be held in before it’s time.”

“And when is this one’s time?”

“It is funny you ask that...” Mr. Terrell said, suddenly tossing the egg over to Wesley. Wesley caught the ball and brought it up to his eyes. He focused hard on the wonderful sparkles and swirls of color embedded in the glass circle.

“Why is that so funny?”

“Because that Dragon...” Mr Terrell paused and looked into his son’s eyes. “Is yours.”

In the kitchen a glass suddenly crashed onto the floor and broke into a dozen little pieces that scurried across the tiles. It echoed what Wesley was feeling in his chest. The loud bang jolted Wesley’s nerves and he thought he was waking from a dream. On top of that his father had just told him that he owned a dragon!!!

“Wesley,” his mom called from the kitchen in an excited whisper. Wesley turned to find his mom with her hands over her mouth and the shattered glass in front of her feet.

“Hey beautiful,” Mr. Terrell called over to her. He bounced up onto his feet and made his way down the hallway towards her.

Wesley tried to say something but all his words were stuck in the tiny colorful ball in his hand, catching the firelight and winking up at him. His dad gathered a dust pan and brush from the closet before the kitchen and after quickly cleaning up the glass he took Mrs. Terrell into his arms and kissed her on the cheek. Wesley's mom looked faint and weak, but she wore a smile that melted his heart.

"He asked me this morning," he heard his dad explain.

"Ok. Ok."

"Why are you crying sweetie?" Mr. Terrell tried to console his wife.

"He's just growing up so fast now," she choked back tears. Wesley was about to stand up when his parents made their way down the hall and sat in front of the fire and next to Wesley. His mom had on her morning bathrobe and used the sleeve as a tissue to dry her eyes and rub her nose.

"This is my Dragon?" Wesley asked, smiling into his mom's eyes.

"It sure is honey. And one day your kids will have one of their own just like I got one from my parents when I was around your age."

"But, dad you didn't get one?"

Mr. Terrell shook his head and smiled, "nah, I didn't get a Dragon. I got a wife." Mr. Terrell put an arm around Wesley, and an arm around Mrs. Terrell and pulled his family in close.

"When, and how will we hatch this one?" Wesley beckoned his parents.

"That actually, is up to you Wesley. I will notify the head of the Dream Keepers in Connecticut and they will pass the word on that a birthing ritual needs readying. It should only take a few days to get everything prepared and then, when you are ready, we will give the dragon life."

“Will you both be there with me?”

“Of course kiddo! I wouldn’t miss this for the world. I haven’t been able to see a birth yet so I am dying to see how it all goes.”

“Now John, please don’t get too far ahead.” Mrs. Terrell warned, taking her husband’s hand. She took a deep breath in, and as she exhaled looked into the flames of the fire then deep into Wesley’s eyes. “Wesley, as you might have naturally over looked, and as I am sure your Dad has probably left me to explain,” Mr. Terrell shrugged his eyebrows, “There is a danger that comes with being a Dream Keeper.” Wesley’s heart skipped a beat and a sour nausea crept down his throat.

“Listen up buddy, this is important.”

“Wesley I am sure that most of your dreams, if not all of them, are good, and adventuresome, fun and maybe even romantic at times. Am I right?”

“Yes for the most part. I have definitely had bad ones though.”

“Nightmares,” she paused.

“Why would a dragon ever give someone Nightmares? “

“They wouldn’t.” Mrs. Terrell continued. “A dragon’s tear’s and therefore, dreams; all come from a good place– a source of laughter and happiness. But there are creatures in the world that don’t believe humans should enjoy these dreams: Dark creatures that live underground. Goblin’s, Wesley, are stealers of dreams. They capture Dragon’s and steal them away to make dreams of their own and turn them into terrible nightmares.”

“I knew this was all too good to be true.”

“It is for you, and for us. And for other members of our family who are protected by guardians and defenders of the Dragon world. But as I am sure you understand, not everyone has a guardian. And the Goblin’s, like Dragons, are invisible to the eyes of humans.

“They are filthy little creatures, brown and grey. With deep purple veined eyes— blood shot and yellow in the center. They have sharp fanged teeth and crooked noses, back’s that hunch over and tiny legs and arms. Their knee caps and elbows are large and swollen and their brownish/green skin smells like dirt and rotting food. I have seen them only once, when I was a girl at a birthing ceremony for my sister’s Dragon *Tiamay*. They crashed into the circle, and stabbed daggers and knives into members of the Dream Keepers. I saw people get bitten and hurt very badly.” Mrs. Terrell stopped and looked up into the ceiling, recalling the terrible night in the past. Wesley felt his heart crack watching his mom and a wave of uncertainty enveloped him.

“Their lucky I wasn’t there.” Wesley’s dad chimed in, grimacing.

“That was a long time ago. And we have become better prepared on nights that there is to be a ritual of any kind. But the fact remains that Goblin’s are still killing Dragon’s and taking their dreams before they are dead.” Wesley’s mom stopped and rested her head against her husband.

“Nastly little guys Wes, from what I hear at least. But don’t let your mom get you too scared. We have means of defending ourselves and I plan on getting you well trained and up to speed on combat with Goblins before the birthing of your little guy there.” Mr. Terrell added bravely.

“This is a lot to take in guys,” was all Wesley found he could say.

“It is for everyone the first time they hear it.” Mrs. Terrell explained.

“And why do the Dragon’s give us the marble-egg’s in the first place? Why don’t they just keep the eggs with them in *Dreagon*?”

“For two reasons,” Mrs. Terrell started, “The first is that by spreading all of the eggs out over the planet with hundreds of different Dream Keepers, it allows for the Goblins to never be able to get their hands on a bunch of them at a time. In the old days when there weren’t as many Aislin families, there used to be dozens of Goblin attacks on *Dreagon* every year. That was when *Iraneth* decided it would be best to trust the baby dragon’s with humans. The second reason is that it keeps Dragons and humans connected in a more concrete way. If it wasn’t for humans caring for a Dragon, naming him, and birthing him, we would simply be vessels that Dragon’s drop dreams into. The bridge that forms between our two civilizations every time a birthing ritual is performed keeps our friendship strong. I truly can’t wait for yours to come Wesley, it will be a night to remember to say the least!”

“I get to name the Dragon too!?” Wesley almost choked on the words.

“You bet,” his dad confirmed. “Well listen, I gotta run into work for the rest of the day, and your mother needs to shower cause she its stiiiiink-E!!” Mrs. Terrell gave her husband a swift elbow jab to the ribs. “And then how about tonight you and I start on your goblin-fighting lessons?”

“That sounds awesome!”

“Well, I’ll be looking forward to it too, ok?” his dad said rising up. He started down the hallway then added, “Be good to your mom today, remember she is still sick.” Wesley’s mom turned with a pouty face then dimpled a smile.

“I bet you thought I was just some boring, cookie-making, stay-at-home, sissy girl didn’t you?”

“Well, I don’t know about all that. But I sure didn’t expect you or this family to be Goblin fighters and friends with Dragons!!!”

“Haha, you have to promise not to tell your cousins until it is their time, and Wesley, above all else, you may not ever tell anyone about our family. One day you can tell your wife and kids, and I

suppose we can let David in on the secret if he is willing to hold his tongue, and accept that if he does ever tell anyone he will have invisible fire-breathing Dragons chasing him for rest of his life.”

“David would never tell anyone this big of a secret,” Wesley reassured her.

“Ok, well I’m going to hop in the shower and I would love a cup of tea waiting for me when I get down stairs.” His mom cupped his chin in her hand and then floated away to her bedroom.

Wesley remained sitting in front of the chest, and the fire. Holding the marble up to the flames he looked deep into its center and tried to see the world of Dragons. He let his thoughts swallow his mind and a glaze fall on his eyes. He reached his conscious out towards *Dreagon*, and desperately felt for the Dragons there. He looked for large green mountains that rolled into valleys and caught the rain. A cliff face punctured with holes, caves for the Dragon’s to sleep in and commune. Letting the heat from the fireplace guide him onward, his thoughts reached out like fingertips into a black void. Dragon scales flashed as an image. Fire burst into madness and ate up the hole. A silent wind rustled the branches by a barn lit up by a full moon that watched it overhead. A window opened. Somewhere not so far away, Wesley felt a pocket of air catch in his wings, like a parachute was suddenly mounted on his back he felt his body rise and fall for a second, when – FLASH, he was swooping, diving through a puff of clouds and an icy wind brushed against his cheeks.

His eyes burst open, and still holding the marble in-front of him, he brought his other hand up to his cheek. To the touch, his skin was cold; frigid, like he had only just returned after being outside. He sniffled his now runny nose and was about to put the marble back into the chest when a miniscule movement caught his eyes. Inside of the magical orb the gold was swirling around the jade. The indigo was shifting and morphing, like a brilliant blue cloud thundering inside itself. The gold shard and the jade twisted around the silver specks inside, climbing and weaving around each other. The glass ball become hot, suddenly, in his hand, and Wesley found the heat was quickly traveling up his forearm.

Moving up his right side and on to his shoulder the warmth left the rest of his body feeling cold, aching for the heat. It rose up his neck, slowly, but steady— an undeniable current. His chin and his jaw fell subject next and Wesley felt his tongue and throat react like he had taken a sip of hot cocoa. Up higher into his ears the fire flooded his thoughts with a beautiful sound. From across the world came the cry of a Dragon. A shrill but calm feeling like the crashing of a wave left the boy's head feeling numb when in a flash as quick as a light bulb burning out the face of a Dragon appeared in his head and was gone. He blinked as his head was jolted back from the image. Opening his eyes he looked down at the orb and the swirls had stopped. The fire burned low against the logs. Wesley let out a deep breath and with a feeling as sure as the sun rising the next day: the Dragon had told him its name...

* * * * *

"It's ok buddy, try again," Mr. Terrell encouraged.

"I can't believe how hard this is," Wesley responded lifting his sword back up between him and his father.

The Terrell boys had been down in the basement for the better part of an hour discussing Goblin behavior, and crossing the swords that Mr. Terrell had pulled out of a hidden room, Wesley had no idea was there. When Mr. Terrell had gone into the linen closet at the back corner of the basement, a place that he was sure only held sleeping bags and boxes of old clothes and toys from his parents childhood; he had been amazed when his dad pushed in on the wall, heard a lock switch and then slid the entire wall to the right.

Inside the small room, Mr. Terrell flicked on an overhead light and Wesley had felt his insides tumble looking at all the weapons, gadgets and tools of the Dream Keepers. Mounted up on the wall

were three pairs of orange-lens glasses. There were axes and knives and other projectile looking weapons, but what caught Wesley's eye the most were the beautiful swords along the back wall. Three beautifully crafted blades perched there vertically, sheathed, like proud kings looking down at him and his dad. Wesley's heart almost leapt out of his chest.

The center blade had been his Dad's, the one on the left was his mothers and Wesley's was on the right. The swords were remarkable. The blades of the swords were crafted identically, with a magnificent stainless steel solidly embedded into the hilt. At its base the sharp edge carved out and split off, and metal flames protruded out from it. The flames came to several points about a foot and a half up the shaft of the sword, until the curves and splits came to a stop about half way up, and a firm, tall, silvery blade rose up out of the flames for another two feet.

Looking at the swords Wesley thought they would weigh a ton, but holding it in his hand he was stunned at the lightness of the weapon. His had the same weight as a textbook in school. The hilts of the swords were all completely different.

His Mothers was the head of a Dragon, whose mouth was open and purging out the metal fire. The handle was simply the creature's neck and though the sword offered no protection for the wielders hand, the sleek shape of the hilt allowed for devastating rotations of the blade, and several different ways to swipe and cut at enemies. The Dragon head was green on the top, with smooth scales that accepted the human hand nicely, while underneath on the neck of the creature, purplish-pink skin coated the bottom. Its eyes were a fiery storm of magenta and orange, and inch-long horns stabbed out of the snout. Though it was hard to picture his Mom holding the sword, it was not hard at all to imagine it piercing the skin of a crafty Goblin.

His Fathers sword was about six inches longer than Wesley's. The hilt of the weapon was intricately made and looked miraculous in his father's hands. Guarding the hand of the sword bearer

was a large arching Dragon wing that wrapped completely around the sword except for a gap to hold the hilt. Looking inside the wing, a metal dragon was wrapping itself up the blade. Its head looked around one side, and his body crawled up the other. An inch above his body the Dragons other hand reached up and steadied itself on the metal base of the blade. Its other wing was tucked in on its back and its tail swept out from under his body and continued down from under the wing-guard. Mr. Terrell's hand rested snugly on the body of the Dragon and Wesley quickly realized the sword was for hacking and striking powerful blows at any and all Goblins who oppose it.

Wesley's sword was a thing of magic. He felt an instant bond to the weapon as soon as he saw it, and holding it now in his hand it felt like part of his body. From the sides of the hilt two Dragon wings extended out to protect his hand. At its hinges the wings served as a perfect spot for Wesley to hook his finger and allowed for a comfortable way to grasp the sword. The neck of the Dragon was arched up and out of his mouth the flaming metal blade jettisoned up out of its jaws. The Dragons hind and quarter legs were tucked onto its body, so Wesley's grip was around the entire body of the beast. While the tail of the Dragon on his Dad's sword swooped out and curved up and away from the blade, Wesley's sword had its Dragon's tail pointing straight down like it was in mid-flight— racing into the sky. It served as a powerful dagger as well.

“Try and keep in mind that the tallest Goblin is only going to be about your size, and most of them are little grunts, like toddlers hobbling around on all fours. They are only armed with daggers so they will never try and swing toe to toe with you. Goblins facilitate quick poking jabs, and aim to pop you in the stomach, or liver,” his dad said jabbing a finger gently into his son's abdomen.

“And how we will we see them?” Wesley said, readying himself again. His dad lunged at him and answered:

“That's why we are wearing these glasses.”

“But everything just looks orange,” parry, block, parry. His dad stopped.

“The orange tint to these goggles, is caused be Dragons removing one of their scales and scorching it with their fire breath over and over till it is smooth and clear. The goggles allow us to see the Goblins, so someone in the Aislin family cleverly named the glasses: *Gobbles*.”

“Well that makes sense,” Wesley concluded.

“Alright kiddo, so I want you to think of these attacks as numbers. A side attack from your left, my right, will be 1.” Mr. Terrell made a thrusting motion with the sword and the point of his blade advanced on Wesley as a jab. The boy brought is sword up to deflect it. “Good. Remember that. Coming from the other side it will be 2.” His dad tossed the sword into his other hand and jabbed at Wesley’s liver from the right. Wesley blocked it again. “Good,” Mr. Terrell said again. “Coming straight at you from the middle will be 3.” Wesley swiped his blade down as the point of his father’s sword dashed playfully at his belly. “Very good. All of your counters were natural, effective and simple. Those are important terms to apply to sword play.”

“Thanks.”

“So we begin with those. As I make the strike you call out the number. Ready?” Wesley backed himself up and spread out his feet, bent at the knees, his blade held out six inches from his fathers.

“3...1...2” Wesley deflected and parried this cuts and jabs of his father’s blows. Though still non-threatening, his father had picked up the speed a little bit.

“Good Kiddo. Very good. Again.” They readied themselves.

“1,1...3...1,2.” His father was quicker than he had expected and he fell short just a little bit on the last series of cuts from the left. His father had stopped no more than an inch away from his son, showing the defeat.

“That’s ok, try again.” His father stared at him with rocks in his eyes.

“Ok. Ready.”

“3, 2, 2...1...3,2,1.”

“Good! Much better. You let your block from the previous attack, guide the movement of your next block. That is exactly what makes a great swordsman better than a good swordsman.”

“What are the other attacks?”

“I’ll show them to you now, but then we go back to the first three, ok?”

“Deal.”

“The 4th attack we will count from here.” Mr. Terrell stabbed the point of his blade towards Wesley’s feet. He stopped the point a few inches short and looked up to find Wesley’s face twisted like a puzzle. “What is it?”

“Why would a Goblin attack come from there?” Wesley asked.

“Goblins often try to pierce their enemies feet, so they are crippled and fall. While on the ground is when humans are the weakest, we lose our height advantage and strength from our legs. It is a common tale among Dream Keepers to be killed after having their foot stabbed then have a mob of Goblins on them seconds later,” Mr. Terrell paused and looked deep into Wesley’s eyes, “That is why we practice this strike.”

“Got it,” Wesley said a little shaken. He swiped his blade in-front of his shins and knocked away the point of his dad’s sword.

“Number 5 is from here,” Mr. Terrell poked the sword directly at Wesley’s eyes. Instinctively his sword flew up in front of him, parallel to the ground, and blocked the blade away from his head. “This represents an attack from a Goblin who is going for your eyes. They can jump pretty high kiddo, so always be wary of how quickly their attack level can change.”

“Got it.”

“Then let us go back to the basics.”

Over the next few hours, and long enough for Wesley’s shoulders and back to start burning from all the new movements, Mr. Terrell taught his son everything he knew about the art of fencing and sword handling. Though his teacher was harsh, Wesley never felt like his dad was pushing him too much. As challenging as it was learning the new skill set, it was strange to the boy how much threat seemed to be removed from the learned moves. He found himself identifying attacks as numbers. Of course, the numbers were only representations of an actual attack that would commonly occur in battle, but how odd to drill something over and over, and practice it to the point that, having never been in a fight with a goblin, Wesley was having fun, rather than focusing on why he was really learning these things.

It allowed him a moment to understand what it must be like to be a soldier: jumping barricades, and shooting targets, breaching rooms, and studying how best to kill a man. It made him wonder if those in war, humans fighting humans, ever stopped to consider that they weren’t just memorizing a number that represented an action; but that for them, and for Wesley— taking the life away from a living

creature, ending its ability to feel, speak and enjoy anything...must be a thunderous quake that shatters the soul and leaves practice and training for such a thing feeling like a hollow prologue to a terrible end.

Lying in bed that night, Wesley tried hard to remember every swiping angle of his Dad's blade. He tried to imagine the movements of a goblin and his dagger. He pictured his feet dancing and constantly moving, both to decrease the chance a Goblin would be able to strike at it successfully, and to keep his opponent off balance and guessing where the young boy would move. Closing his eyes, he ached to know of the birthing ceremony ahead of him. He reached his mind out to the figures and setting his consciousness imagined to be present in such an event.

Robin Egg Blue, and Violet robes flashed in his mind, the fabric, in and out of his vision like a car passing on the street. There was a fire. Feverishly wild flames jumped into the night. Jungle green grass gave the image a base and all around, like fire flies, tiny white stars seemed stuck in the air. A breathe of smoke. Wesley's eye lids brought an image of blackness into view. There was nothing. The boy breathed deep and became aware of the sheets against his skin when— like a blur a gold current of sparkling color raced into his mind. A firework gleaming with golden flames, trailing indigo and jade splashes of light that tickled his mind. A churning spray of warmth and oneness snuggled Wesley like a warm towel from the drying machine. Bouncing around in his mind as a zigzagging flicker, glowing brighter and brighter as it found Wesley's soul. Taking in a frigid breath from a mountain in the arctic, then feeling his muscles go loose and relaxed, he let himself go, diving and falling into a bottomless dream.

It was only in the briefest part of the first second of his dream, the boy could scarcely recall the sensation of a tiny drop landing on his eyelash, before his mind let go and sent his imagination flying.

“I think I am ready,” Wesley said scooping a spoonful of Wheaties into his mouth at breakfast. It was his Mom’s policy that there would be no sugar-cereals allowed until it was the weekend. Seeing as today was a Monday, the healthy oat-taste of the bowl of cereal in front of Wesley was a swift reminder that a new week of school was beginning.

“Oh, yea?,” his mom inquired, hiding a smile.

“Yes.”

“When do you think you want to do it?”

“Friday. It’s supposed to be about 72 degrees that day. I figure that will be a nice temperature to bring the Dragon into.”

“The hotter the better,” his mom teased.

“I’m ready,” the young Dream Keeper said with confidence.

“Well, good I was beginning to wonder if all the sword play you and your father have been doing over the last few days has blocked out your remembering of the Dragon Egg waiting for you.”

“No, not a chance I could forget that. In fact, it seems to be all I can think about,” Wesley concluded.

“I bet it’s all the Dragon thinks about too.”

“How do you mean? He isn’t born yet.”

“I think you know what I mean,” Mrs. Terrell said, throwing her son a wink. “And what makes you so sure it’s a ‘he’?” Wesley’s conscious flashed with the swirling image of gold and indigo.

“I’ve been seeing things and feelings things inside my head ever since I saw that marble.”

Wesley reminisced, letting his Wheaties get soggy. “Color’s mostly, and warmth: heat, like my thoughts are somewhere else, close to a fire.”

“Your Dragon is talking to you...” Wesley’s mom curled a smile on her face and shuffled a little too slowly out of the kitchen in her bathrobe, sipping a cup of coffee in an attempt to drown her excitement. Looking back as she got into the hallway she added, “Wouldn’t hurt to listen...”

At school Wesley found himself struggling with anything and everything that required more than a few seconds of his attention. It became blatantly obvious that it was going to be a long day, when entering the doors of his Middle School he had stopped the flow of students behind him by pushing, and pushing on the doors in front of him, trying to get in. To no avail, he had gotten to the point where he laid his shoulder into the glass and rammed his body weight into the door. It hadn’t budged. Just before he was about to admit defeat a 6th grader about a foot shorter than Wesley poked him out of the way, and *pulled* the door open instead of pushing.

“You PULL it, moron!” The 6th grader had so kindly offered.

Moping into class like he had chains on his feet, Wesley had barely even noticed that Steph was sitting next to him.

“Hey Wes!,” she helloed.

“Hi, Steph,” Wesley managed.

“You look a little stressed this morning. What’s on your mind?” She popped her shoulders and raised her eyebrows. He was about to say Dragons, when he stopped and thought of a more believable response.

"I..." He paused and retracted his decoyed reply, and for some reason felt a sense of trust creep up his throat. "Dragons, actually. I kind of have Dragons on my mind."

"Dragon's, huh?," she furled her brow but seemed more interested than freaked out. "I swear sometimes you and David just might be the most unique boys in this school." Steph looked at him deeply, and behind her eyes he caught a smile. Sitting up straight, Wesley couldn't help but hang on her words. Unique wasn't bad, right? Finding some courage he looked back over at Steph, who had turned her attention to the front of the classroom as their teacher Mrs. Duncan walked in.

"I think tha-your uni-k," he stuttered. Catastrophe.

"What was that, Wes?," She turned staring at him.

"I...I think. think...my pen is out of ink," Wesley felt failure shatter his body, but tried with all his might to keep it out of his eyes and hidden from Steph.

"Oh...well here ya' go," Steph said reaching into her bag and pulling out a *Bic* for him to use.

"Thanks." Wesley retreated and slumped in his chair.

The rest of class kept Wesley replaying his conversation with Steph over and over in his mind. He found himself mouthing the word "unique", at least a dozen times, and marveling at the ordinary blue pen that Steph had given him. It was a gift, really. He couldn't help but want to smell it, and was jolted with another torrent of embarrassment when Steph had looked over and caught him with the length of the pen under his nostrils, wafting for a scent of her.

Dropping his arm immediately, he smiled at her like everything in the world was completely normal.

Class ended and he raced to the bathroom. Ordinarily he would have walked over to David's classroom and met up with him there, but David was fortunate enough to be on an all day field trip to a morgue, for his science class. While Wesley certainly felt jealous of David getting the day off from school, he did not envy his friend's presence among dead bodies either.

The bathroom was empty which was a relief. And after dipping his hands into the cold water at the sink, he washed his face off—letting the cool liquid seep into his pores, cooling the burn marks from the redness his face had endured with his disastrous encounter with Steph.

He stood up and shook his head as a little bright golden light flashed in his mind... Then again a more rapid series of them, like dozens of small firecrackers going off in his mind, the golden bursts of colors kept his adrenaline rising. He felt a surging rush of heat in his chest. When, as suddenly as the golden flashes came, a terrible odor hit his nose. Wesley's eyebrows dropped. His eyes darted. A very distinct smell of rotting food seemed to be coming from the stall. Though, clearly, bad smells are a part of a boy's bathroom in a public school, this was not the usual smell Wesley would associate with toilets. This smelled like garbage and dirt.

Sidestepping slowly over to the stalls his breathe quickened. Golden lights flashed in his head like an alarm. His hand was just about to push open the door to the first stall when—BANG, the door to the bathroom crashed open and two boys walked in. They studied Wesley quickly as they made their way to the urinal, and just before Wesley could bring his eyes back to the stall, the window at the back of the bathroom flipped open and closed shut, and the aroma had vanished.

Wesley walked out quickly and felt a more balmy series of blues and gold's splash in his head like the trickle of water over wet stones. He let the sensation drift over his mind and carry him onward to his next class. The next several periods all blurred together as a sort of senseless blather of division

signs, breaking up sentence structure, running over the periodic table, and plummeting south into the civil war in history class.

Getting home at last he was overly eager to get to bed. The only part of the day, it seemed, that went by quickly and, as of late, had him flying over mountain tops, fighting with laser swords and saving the world from alien invasion. Awesome. His dinner went down smoothly though his stomach jumped and popped like the percussion section of an orchestra, thinking about the great ceremony that was to come at the end of the week. His parents were helpful in steering the conversation around other things besides Dragons. They seemed to sense Wesley's great mental struggle with everything and allowed the youngster a night to breathe and think.

The next nights, however, Wesley had gotten home from school and on Tuesday and Wednesday he had spent hours in the basement with the family swords, sparring and dueling his father. His mom and even joined in the exercise and stunned the boy with her combative awareness. She was quick and accurate like a bird floating, then ducking and rising and falling all in the blink of an eye. Her sword moved in front of her, as lightly as a piece of silk caught in the wind, then crashed against an opposing blade as a thunderous hammer. She was terrific!

On Thursday his parents had sat Wesley down next to a fire with a large leather bound tome. They went over the formalities of the birthing ceremony and where everyone would stand. They explained why people wore certain color robes and what the different hats and signs meant and Wesley tried as best he could to soak in the new culture and familiarize himself with the ways of the Dream Keepers.

It appeared as though in the world of Dragon's, colors played a very important role in identifying what kind of dreams a dragon produced. Furthermore, for humans, the Dream Keepers took great pride in boasting the Dragon's colors that they birthed. In fact, almost every color to ever be conceived

represented a certain kind of dream. The book described hundreds of kind of dreams and what colors went with each dream category.

Dreams about childhood were yellow. But more specifically if they were about babies the color was more of a whitish yellow like a brush of sunlight coming in through the window on a spring morning. If the dreams dealt with kids playing and laughing the Dragon was more of a dandelion color. Any Dream Dragon that conjured dreams where memories were seen like home videos, were blue. The happier the dream the lighter the color, like a clear windy sky above a meadow. The sadder the memory, the darker the shade, a melancholy color like something lost. Dreams about loved ones were from red Dragon's. Dragon's who developed visions of friendship and youth were green. It came as no surprise to Wesley that the color gold was meant for Dragon's who delivered adventurous dreams, that sent the dreamer running through castle's and soaring through the heavens on the wings of eagles. On and on the color scheme went and by the time Wesley was ready for bed that night, more visions of colors swam than ever a painter was able to muster.

He slept heartily and with deep elated breaths, for in the morning began a day that would undoubtedly change his life forever...

His mother had been kind enough to call Wesley out of school for half of the day on Friday. She claimed that her parents had done the same thing for her when she was a girl.

"It's not like you'd be able to pay attention anyway," she had justified to Wesley, who needed no justification for getting called out of school! Getting home he had found his parents had packed two medium sized knapsacks. One of them had the family's swords inside, and the other had Mr. and Mrs.

Terrell's robes inside and three pair of Gobbles, and of course, a black case with a marble inside, whose center was swimming and jumping like a minnow.

"And just where are we going?," Wesley delved, getting into the car.

"We are headed up to the Sleeping Giant State Park," his father had answered.

"Where in the world is that?"

"It's about 45 minutes to the Northeast of here."

"And it's actually called the Sleeping Giant State Park?"

"You bet, kiddo."

"The Aislin's have been friendly with the park for hundreds of years," his mom started, "we have an understanding with the State Police who monitor the area. We promise them a steady does of wonderful dreams, and they allow us our time in the woods undisturbed."

"I see." Wesley buckled himself in and felt his intestinal track start colliding with itself. His mother passed back a sandwich stuffed gently inside a Ziploc, and a bag of Nacho Cheese Doritos.

"I've got Gatorade up here too, Wes, if you get thirsty."

"Thanks, Mom."

"Best eat up too; I can guarantee you're going to need some energy tonight."

"Aye, aye Cap'n," Wesley played at his father, throwing up a salute.

The hunter green mini-van backed down the driveway and pulled away from Wesley's house on Salem Rd. His father switched on the radio and found an oldies station which his parents always

enjoyed together. “Stand By Me” gently sounded through the car stereo and Wesley let his eyes stare out the window, watching the familiar buildings of his home town come and go like people walking by him on the street. He saw the firehouse, and the grocery store, the Post Office and his Middle School, all blurring together like the entire make-up of his life was nothing more than a thirty second commercial break on TV.

Heading South on Route CT-25 he finished the small meal his mom had prepared, and dozily sat back in the captain’s chair behind his parents. The food sat well in his stomach as “At Last” hummed out of the radio like a breathe of hot air. Washing over Wesley his mind eased into relaxation as he saw his parents hold hands across from each other. They merged onto the CT-15 heading North, and the young boy in the back couldn’t deny that the night felt different than any other in his life before it. He was ready.

A flutter of gold formed itself in Wesley’s mind: a small sphere of glowing light– golden and simple. Oozing out calm waves of warmth– the image became a feeling. A lullaby that wooed at the boys senses, numbing them down into silence. Tucking away in some hidden space inside his own mind, the beautiful warmth floated through his body as the words of Etta James chased behind his fleeting thoughts, like footsteps down a dark hallway. The mini-van rocked and bounced slightly, and all the movements blended together as the sway of a rocking chair. His seat seemed to fold out underneath him, laying back and back, down and down. Sinking down into an ocean of golden warmth, Wesley’s breath let loose and swallowed his touch with the world around him

Wesley woke up with a peaceful breath, and instead of feeling any amount of grogginess at all, he felt his sight, sound, touch and hearing all amplified like someone had turned up a dial in his head while he had slept. Energy surged through him, and the calm golden sphere, was now a steady shiver of alertness.

“Glad you slept, honey,” his mom smiled as she opened the car door for him.

“I had some help, I think.” Wesley jumped out of the car and found an understanding grin on his Mom’s lips.

“Right this way, kiddo,” his father offered taking the luggage and pressing on into the woods. The Terrell family followed a path made of tiny wood splinters, a little larger than mulch, deep into the belly of the Sleeping Giant forest. An eerie fog caught above the top of the trees, and lit up like a puff of cloud when it caught in the moon light. The trees were thick monsters around them, casting mountainous shadows. And though Wesley was sure the weather man had predicted a warmly 72 degrees, the temperature inside the forest was thick with humidity. It must have been at least 90 degrees. Strange for a night in the dead of September.

Turning around a bend in the path and after walking for what seemed like a half an hour, the trio came upon a clearing that forced Wesley to stop and marvel. With their backs to him and his parents, two Dream Keepers were facing a roaring fire. The one on the right was clad in a Robin Egg Blue robe that was jet black on the inside. Standing to his left a woman in a Violet and Magenta robe turned to welcome Wesley’s mom with a hug, and gave his dad a quick kiss on the cheek, greeting him as well.

Looking past them and into the clearing Wesley saw a jungle green circle of grass poking out of the ground, thickly. A beautiful patch of miniature white stars, no bigger than the tip of a finger, enveloped the clearing. No matter how close anyone got to one of the small lights, no one ever seemed to be able to pass through them. They floated down from the heavens like snow-flakes falling in slow motion. The fire in the center of the gathering wailed and howled into the night, calling forth to Wesley, drawing him forward and singing the song of the Dragons of old. Only tonight Wesley felt in his chest a

new note was about to be sung: a golden harmony like a trickle in a creek bed that coursed forward and elevated beyond, to the highest point of the heavens— shouting adventure to the stars in the sky.

“This must be Wesley,” the cheeky woman in the Violet robe ventured.

“Hi. Yes, that’s me,” Wesley said, a little unsure if he was closely related to the woman or if she was a distant relative.

“What a handsome little boy,” she praised.

“Takes after his father I suppose,” Mr. Terrell added, then, “but, tonight I no longer consider my son a little boy.”

Wesley tried to say something, but he let his eyes speak to his father what words could not. Mr. Terrell gave him a quick, downward nod and ushered him forward towards the fire. His mom had gone around and dished out hugs and hellos to everyone at the gathering. She looked elated.

“Come to birth a Dragon, have you?” A tall man, with a full white mustache and an apple green robe said. His eyes were like dark emeralds, and though he was old, at least 20 years older than his father, the Dream Keeper looked stronger than any man Wesley could ever recall meeting. Long white hair fell out of his hood like curtains and his wiry thin frame wore the Dream Keeper gown well. While the man’s eyes fell over Wesley, the boy couldn’t not help but feel like those deep green eyes were reading him like book.

He reached up to shake the man’s hand, “Yes, I am,” Wesley answered confidently. Wesley tried to squeeze the old Keeper’s hand firmly, but the strength in the man’s grip was astounding.

“This is a special night, Wesley, one that you will not soon forget. The night that I birthed a Dream Dragon is still as vivid in my mind as the events of this morning. All who are with you in this circle can make that claim as well.”

“You’re the Keeper of *Iraneth*, aren’t you?” Wesley felt his heart explode as he asked.

The wise man took an extra second before answering, “I am.” Another pause, then, “Very good,” he said, but he was looking at Wesley’s father.

Turning back around he lifted his hands out from his sides, and gathered the attention of those in the clearing without saying a word. The fire boomed in front of him like a wild animal in a wood-burning cage. Behind the green-robed man, Wesley felt like a knight readying for battle. All became quiet, except the crackling flames.

“Keepers,” he began. “Dreams, in our world, have evolved into more than a series of images we see while sleeping. For one, to have dreams, is now to say that they have hope for the future. They have wishes they long to be fulfilled, be it: places to go, competitors to best, or things to obtain. Dreams, give us a reason to continue into tomorrow— to advance, extend our hands forward and reach for things that have not yet passed us by.” He stopped and motioned for Wesley to join him. Wesley stepped forward and the keeper of *Iraneth* guided him to stand in front him, a body’s length away from the fire.

“When I dream about tomorrow I hope to see hundreds of Keepers that are as wise, humble, and passionate as this young boy with us tonight.” Wesley felt the man’s hands grip tightly on his shoulders. “Family and friends, for the first time...I give you, ‘Wesley Terrell, Aislin descendant, Keeper of Dragon’s, Protector of Dreams, and the Future of our cause!!!’” The crowd erupted in cheers, and Wesley caught a glance of his mom with her hands covering her mouth. She caught his eyes, then lifted

her hands up in celebration and cheered him on. A fantastic rush of wind seemed to stir the leaves on the trees above, like a space shuttle had just launched into the sky.

“Thank you,” Wesley said loud enough for the old man behind him to hear, then smiled to the rest of the circle

“It is you who is deserving of praise,” he answered kindly. Lifting his head up to all those in the ceremony he shouted, “Let the birthing ceremony, BEGIN!!!”

His parents came up to him next and pulled him to the back of the circle while, the other Dream Keepers gathered together and prepared what seemed like an altar. They were all harnessing their swords and, strangely, they all put on gobbles as well.

Being the only one in the circle who did not have a robe on he had a felt a little strange, but as soon as his father took out his sword and fastened it around his chest, so that it hung on his back, he felt like part of the ritual. His parents had put on their robes and Wesley was stunned at how appropriate the colors looked. His mom’s robe was a wonderful sky blue, while his father’s was a burnt orange, brick color. Like all the robes of the Dream Keepers, they were sleek on the body, with hoods and long arms. The insides were all black and they seemed to be made of silk.

“We are so proud of you Wesley,” his mother said, kissing him on the forehead.

“But I haven’t done anything.”

“You are about to, sweetie. And I am proud of you every day, not just tonight, ok? You listen up well and do as Keeper Shade says.” She took a pair of Goblin goggles and put them on her son.

“The keeper of *Iraneth* is named Shade?” Wesley tried to clarify.

“Yup, he is one tough guy,” his father shared Wesley’s observations.

His parents gathered themselves up and joined the ring of Keepers that had formed a perfect circle around the fire. They too, had put on Gobbles, and had their swords on them as well. His Dad's was around his back, like Wesley's, and his mom's rested comfortably on her hip. Shade stood in the middle next to the flames. The hilt of his sword protruded from his back, over his left shoulder. The Dragon shaped grip stared at Wesley with emerald eyes. It was a two-handed cleaving sword, five feet long, with a handle that seemed bigger than Wesley's head.

"Bring forth the Dragon you have been called to release," Shade directed, as the inferno of flames scorched the night sky. Wesley knelt down to the black velvet bag at his knees and uncovered the chest from his Dad's closet. He moved quickly to the pad lock, and his fingers rotated the knob on its face: 7...2...5.....8. He pulled down on the metal body and it released. Popping open the top of the chest the marble rested in the center of the strongbox like a rattle-snake in a corner. Its colors bent and swam, sprawling over and under each other. The gold played with the indigo as the jade looked at Wesley with the eyes of a cat. The flaming orange light from the fire caught inside the glass orb, daring to crack it loose and unleash the dragon within. The tiny floating stars in the clearing shone brighter and brighter singing to the young beast, willing it to life.

Wesley reached in for the marble, when an odor hit his nose. A smell that made his stomach turn and his breathe halt, like sewage had bubbled up from the forest floor around the clearing and tainted the air around him. It was filthy. It was dirt and muck, garbage and manure. The foul stench invaded his nose and before Wesley could take in another breathe; he realized the Dream Keepers were not the only ones in Sleeping Giant Park tonight.

"Goblins!!!," someone yelled, and a dagger pierced the clearing, skimming through the air like a bullet. It hit a Dream Keeper in a yellow robe directly in the heart and she dropped down dead faster

than Wesley could believe. He snatched up the marble just as a small clan of Goblin's came into view from in front of him. Crawling quickly on arms and legs they advanced on the ceremony like wolves.

Putting the marble in his pocket with his left hand, Wesley unsheathed his Aislin sword, from his back, with his right. The blade sang in front of his body as it pulled from the sheath. It wanted the Goblin's. It willed Wesley to draw blood from his foe.

Two Goblins were on him at once, as the main attack on the Aislin family came from Wesley's direction. It was a band of Goblins made of about a dozen hideous creatures all screaming into the night and cackling at their enemy.

"Dreamy dreamses, we want the dreamses," a Goblin riddled his words in front of Wesley. The small grey Goblin watched the boy with purple and yellow eyes and pulled a dagger from his belt. He licked the blade than hunkered down into the grass and readied himself to pounce.

Wesley watched him closely, and let the action around him go on as it would. The grey creature shifted his weight, then popped the dagger in his right hand. Lunging at Wesley like a toad, the boy brought his sword up to his head and blocked the attack high. "5", Wesley said to himself.

The goblin landed and darted the dagger at Wesley's left side. Using an outside parry, he shifted his weight to the right, away from the attack. "1", he told himself calmly. *Effective and simple*, he heard his father say in his head.

"3...2...1," Wesley shouted out as he blocked the Goblin's attack on his middle, then right side, then left.

"Mus' be countin' down the shheconds of yo life boy." The Goblin lashed out at Wesley like an eel.

Before Wesley could reply, the tip of a blade slid through the Goblin's brain like a needle through fabric.

"He was counting down the end of yours," his father said. Wesley followed the blade up his father's hands, and then found his father's eyes; a fire burned there, hotter and stronger than the fire in the circle that night, and more powerful than any Wesley had seen before.

Mr. Terrell opened his mouth to speak when a sound came from behind him that left Wesley and his father stunned with horror. A woman screamed.

Over his dad's shoulder Wesley saw his mom falling to the ground. As his father turned, Wesley got a full view and felt his stomach wrench as he looked down and saw a dagger stabbed into his Mom's foot. Mrs. Terrell screamed in agony, and all the sounds in the world went silent except that aching horrid sound. Wesley focused on it, for it was all he could see and hear. The sound shook through him like the end of all things. A deep black sadness dropped on him like a fog. His chest heaved with his next breath, like the air had been sucked out of the clearing. His father ran to her, but it was in slow motion. Wesley's eyes filled with tears, his heart pumped tar, and his senses went numb except for the terrible cry of his mother. That was all that was left in the world.

When, like a great rumbling that seemed to come from underground, in his mind a damn broke loose and a roaring hellish ocean of golden current came flooding forth, capturing the young boy, sweeping him off his feet. The bright golden flood, flashed in his eyes, and jolted his muscles like an electric shock, he darted past his father and just as two Goblin's were about to bring their daggers down into his mothers abdomen and face...Wesley Terrell, Keeper of Dragons, and Protector of Dreams...was on them.

Stabbing his blade out in a flurry, the tip of his point pierced the soft jelly that used to be the Goblins eye. Turning his body on the blade so it was behind him in his right hand, he drew it out from the creature, and continued the motion of his body as a devastating forehand swing. The steel weapon whistled through the air and caught the brown Goblin right under his teeth, severing his chin and neck from the rest of his body.

“Wesley,” his mom called up to him in pain.

“Be still mom, Dad and I are here.”

Moving his eyes back to his right he saw a second wave of Goblins advancing on him and his father.

“Dad!,” Wesley shouted alarm to his father.

“Let’s take them son.”

The Terrell men stood over their mother, and wife, knees bent: Wesley’s sword angled to the right, his dad’s to the left.

The first Goblin was almost on them when Wesley felt something past brush his leg and watched a Goblin get pulled back by something that had speared his stomach. Looking down, he saw his mom retreating her arm. She had taken the dagger from the decapitated Goblin and thrown it from the ground!

“Get em’, Wes!,” she said, grabbing his ankle.

Wesley spun to his left as the first of the next group was on him and his father. He sliced his blade up and across his body, but the small Goblin he aimed for leapt to the side and out of the way.

Keeping the blade up in the air on his right side, Wesley kicked at the smelly creature then whipped the blade down and into the Goblins shoulder, past the collar bone and into its sternum.

Mr. Terrell lunged, extending his arm out with such a quickness the Goblin a few yards away had no time to react as the blade dipped in and out of his heart in a flash. A gurgling, moaning sound escaped his lips– followed by his life.

Wesley had two Goblins on him now. One with twitchy, spastic movements, he had earrings through his floppy ears and white saliva hanging from his lips. The other Goblin shuffled steadily to his left. He held one dagger up in his right hand, and another facing down in his left. Wesley stopped himself and brought his Dragon sword in the center of his body.

The two-daggered Goblin dashed at his left side. A parry and a block– 1, 1. The twitching Goblin jumped 3 feet off the ground and poked at Wesley’s eyes from the right. A sweeping parry– 4. Wesley waited. The two Goblin’s looked at each other and readied their next synchronized attack. Wesley waited, still.

Just as the Goblin was starting to jump Wesley sent the sword point right through hyper Goblins rib-cage. Spinning on his knees and maneuvering his body between the two enemies, he brought the blade back from the dead Goblin, and smashed the Dragon-tail-hilt of the sword into the other Goblin’s forehead. With a crunch the metal tail stuck inside the retched imps head and both the enemies slid down off his sword, falling to earth without breath.

Running back over to his Mom, Wesley watched his father spinning and cutting and slicing his way through the air like a sword master playing with puppets. All around him Goblin’s, or parts of Goblin’s, were flying through the air.

“Don’t ever...ever touch my wife, AGAIN!” his father was screaming, in a rage.

Wesley knelt down beside his crippled mother.

“Are you ok, mommy.”

“Ill be fine, sweetie.” His mom brought her hand up to his cheek, covered in blood. “You look like an Aislin out there.” Tears pooled in her eyes. One fell off her eyelash and splashed on her cheek. In that moment Wesley realized something as clear as day... He wasn’t done fighting.

Anguish swept over his chest– a striking pain that propelled him onward. Taking long strides forward he came upon a white-robed Dream Keeper with three Goblins surrounding him. His Aislin brother was wounded. A dagger stuck out of his right calf.

Wesley crashed on the Goblin’s like lightening splitting trees. His father’s training was out of his mind. Effective and simple wasn’t going to cut it anymore. He wanted blood on his steel.

“HEY!” Wesley shouted at the grayish/brown sprite before him. The Goblin turned and Wesley saw worry flash on his face, then anger twisted his features and he snarled at the young boy.

Wesley charged. He ran forward a few steps then jumped in the air bringing the sword above his head and swooping it down like an ax. The Goblin met his cut with his dagger but buckled slightly under the blow. Wesley faked a lunge to his left, then brought the sword down and back, and swung the blade up and across his body like a golf club. The Goblin was defenseless and the sword devoured him.

He jabbed his sword to the left with two hands and speared his weapon through the back of a Goblin fighting Shade. The old man lowered his chin, nodding with thanks. Wesley turned away from him and brought his sword around like a baseball bat cutting through the legs of a muscular Goblin behind him. The vomit smelling creature writhed on the ground, and Wesley ended his pain by stabbing into his chest.

He jumped over the fresh corpse, and blocked an attack from a nearby Goblin who had jumped at him. He parried low, then high, to the right, and just there— as the Goblin was retreating his attack Wesley saw an opening. The boy shifted his weight on his right foot and cut an attack forward. The tip of Wesley's Dragon sword dug into the creature just below his armpit, but Wesley didn't see the Goblin's right hand rear back to make a throw.

As the injured brown imp fell down on his back, a thud pained in Wesley's belly like a hot fire had burst in his bowels. The yellow, purple-veined eyes of the Goblin smiled at Wesley, satisfied with his wound, though his own life was ending.

Looking down, Wesley's hand drew back from his abdomen and the handle of a dagger was coming out of his gut. Blood was sticky on his hand, and he felt it leaking on to his jeans. His blood. The boy's head went dizzy from the realization. He was going to die, he thought. Nausea swept over him as flaming hot pain stung his stomach. He crumpled over. His face hit the grass, and his sword fell from his hands. The world began to go black. The skittle green blades of grass tickled his face as he dug his nose and mouth into the dirt, trying to muffle the pain.

Clamping his hands tight over the wound in his belly, he tried to keep his blood from falling out. That seemed important. He concentrated on the strength in his fingers. *"Don't let me die"*, he said to them. *Hang on tight.* He rolled over on his side and brought his knees up. Looking past the bodies of several Goblin's and the yellow-robed Dream Keeper he never got to meet, he saw two Goblin's walking towards him. Their daggers looked so sharp. He didn't want to feel their cold sting again.

They closed in on him, like a door shutting him into darkness.

It's going to hurt, Wesley cried to himself. *I don't want it to hurt again*. He cried again. Closing his eyes and searching for the calm watery feeling of the Golden light that had befriended him before, he felt a tear fall off his cheek and dampen the grass.

He looked up again as the Goblin on his right was making a downward thrust at his head. "4" was all Wesley could think as he bit down on his teeth and readied for the impact of the Goblin's blade. A second that should not have been there, passed. Then another.

Wesley opened his eyes just as a bright bellowing sword cleaved the two Goblins in half, in one crushing blow. It was Shade.

The boy looked up and tried to smile, but all that was there was the pain in his gut. It was so strong. It was everything. It was everywhere. It was taking him away from the clearing, from his birthing ritual and his Dragon.

"Come now, young Aislin. It's time for you to do what you came here to do."

Shade pulled up on Wesley's shoulder and got him to his knees. He shook Wesley once and forced him to look into his wise, emerald eyes.

'Focus Wesley, we have come now to the end. All will be in vain if you do not listen, and do as I tell you.'

His voice was so far away. Like the hollow call of a bird flying in the heavens. His head dropped forward anchoring down from the pain radiating in his belly.

"Stay with me Wesley, listen close."

Where were his parents? Was his mom ok? Would he see them again? Would he see Steph again?

“Wesley find the strength that is inside you. It is there. And we need it, we all need it.”

The boy’s hands shook on the hilt of the dagger inside him. He couldn’t find any words.

“Wesley give me the marble. Have you got it?”

Wesley looked into shades eyes and felt the heat from the fire call to him.

“Phy, My pocket,’ he managed, and tasted blood in his mouth as the words fell out.

Shade reached inside the boy’s pants and pulled out the glass sphere. Wesley found the marble with his eyes, though it seemed far away like a lighthouse in a storm, impossible to reach. The colors were calm but powerful. They seemed to look at Wesley with sad eyes. The jade and the indigo, like tears.

“Wesley, I can only do half of the birthing ceremony for you. I will walk up the altar and put the Dragon Egg on top of the fire, but in order to release it,” Wesley’s eyes were glazing over with the end of his life, “Wesley STAY with me.” Shade continued. “In order to birth the Dragon you need to call out his name. Sing his names into the song of the fire and join it with the flame lords before him.” Wesley heard the words like an echo, a faint brush of sound as soft as the wind. “His name Wesley! Call out the Dragon’s name!!” And that was it.

Shade jumped up as more Goblins jumped into the circle. With Shades support gone from his shoulder, Wesley fell forward and collapsed again on the grass. Darkness started to take him. His head and knees kept him in balance, but his abdomen curled under his body like it was trying to hide the burning hot pain from itself.

He lifted his eyes up and saw his father fighting across the fire. Resting his head against the grass, he found his mom screaming his name into the night. From far away, so far away, and so slowly

that the boy could not hear his mother's sweet voice. *She was such a wonderful woman*, Wesley thought as he choked on the blood in his mouth. He slumped over onto his side and found the beautiful white stars were falling at him, like tiny diamonds floating from the heavens. They shone bright, all that was left in the world. He watched them carefully. Effortlessly gliding down, dancing on the wind, like glowing angels. They fluttered their wings as stars from another world, and Wesley enjoyed the idea of the pain that they must not be feeling.

His eyes closed and he doubled over in pain. When he opened them back up he saw the carnage continuing. Fighting and death, like a volcano surging in the forest clearing. Amid the battle he saw Shade standing on the altar. He was whispering something up into the night sky, then down into the fire. And as though he was placing a bird's egg back into a nest, he slowly reached the marble into the flames of the fire. His hand came away unscathed and Wesley felt his eyes glaze with amazement as his Dragon egg hovered above the flames, rotating slowly. The contents inside began to tornado around, like Wesley had never seen— a violent swirling river of blue, gold and purple. The indigo, jade and hot glow of the gold spoke to Wesley. Not as an image his eyes saw, but as a voice in his head, like a second heart beat.

Then Shade's deep emerald eyes locked onto Wesley's, as he turned from the altar and the host of flames at his back.

"Call out your Dragon's name..." they said to him. And looking at Shade in that moment he saw the outline of a great Dragon form in the smoke above the fire. It was *Iraneth*, speaking to Wesley from his master's mind. The green Dragon coiled up its wings and waited with Wesley.

Using the muscles in his back Wesley shook with violent pain as he brought his upper body off the forest floor. His hands were no use anymore, so his arms clamped around his bleeding stomach. The boy sat back on his heels. He moved his knees apart giving him a more firm base. The pain took

over again and sent his head colliding with the soft grass, like a pillow waiting for him to sleep. An empty black void called to him from somewhere underground.

Wesley tried again. Almost sending his back into spasms he lifted his body up once more. His knees held firm under him as his body swayed with the gripping pain of the Goblins dagger inside him. Tears fell freely on his cheeks, though he wasn't even aware of the sobbing. His arms were shaking. He looked to the right and saw his father get cut on his arm by one of the last few Goblins left in the clearing. He tried to find his mom, for strength, but couldn't remember where she was. Everything was so confusing. Lost in a fog, Wesley couldn't find anything but pain, and the stream of blood that was pooling on his shirt and down his jeans.

The heat from the fire blazed before him. It hummed like the current of a river crashing into Wesley slowly, but surely. A song began. A bellowing resonance from beyond the clearing. Deep fiery harmonies like thunder in the clouds and the waves of the ocean. It was on him now. The heat. Hot vivid hands grabbing the boy's soul and holding him steady. A golden note added to the melody, like a sunrise. Opening up to Wesley, as a glowing splash of sunlight. It warmed his face.

Wesley basked in the warmth, as it moved through his body and tried to fight the pain. The pain. It wouldn't go away. It had him and was gripping onto his gut like a cold ice. The freezing hot sting pulled him down like a hook.

"FIGHT!" the golden voice spoke to him. "Fight for me!"

It was his Dragon. Calling to him, to his master. To the only boy in the world who could save him, release him, and give him life.

Wesley curled over and held onto the wings of the Dragon in his mind. His forehead pushed into the grass as his eyes jammed shut, blocking out the pain.

“Call my name!” the young voice spoke again. Wesley reached deep inside himself, it felt like he hadn’t talked for years. Hundreds of ages of silence found him. Shade’s voice chimed in, old and wise,

“It is time, Wesley!!! DO IT NOW!!!”

Letting go of the pain, like dropping a weight. The wings he held onto spread and caught the wind. Wesley flung his body up towards the sky. His head rolled back and he let go of everything except one, strong golden name.

“**ARUNAR!!!**” Wesley yelled into the night, from the deepest part of his body. The sound left his lips and swam into the air away from Wesley and into the flames.

Collapsing on his back and laying on the green grass motionless, with only the slightest hint of breath, Wesley lost his grip on the world.

In front of him and spinning over the fire, the marble quivered for a second than burst open sending dozens of tiny balls of light shooting into the air. The flames around the Dragon egg exploded with a new heat and in a rupture of flame and light– Dragon wing’s split the flames and a magnificent golden beast bellowed out into the night, flying above the fire and spitting flames above the trees.

Arunar circled back towards the clearing and fell down on the Goblins like a hawk. He smashed two of them into the ground, knifing his claws into their backs, and then scooped up two more into his mouth– crunching the bodies like blades of grass. They had injured his master! He threw the disemboweled bodies furiously over at two more grey Goblins that were shaking with fear. The golden beast arched his head up and spat out a river of fire at a Goblin who was charging at him. The flaming projection caught the little imp directly in the chest and hurled him into the woods as a smoking carcass.

Glancing around quickly to make sure all the Goblins were dead, *Arunar* bounded over to Wesley. He arched his long head down to the boy and pushed Wesley's head, gently, with his nose.

"Wesley!" his mother screamed coming to his side, and taking her son's hand into her lap.

"He's alive," Shade said calmly. The green-robed Dream Keeper bent down and carefully pulled the Dragon dagger out of Wesley's stomach.

"Wesley!!!," his mother screamed again.

"Hurriedly, he must be taken to the hospital. *Arunar*, you must take him. South of here there is a hospital, the Spring Glen Medical Center. There is an Aislin there who will assist you: Dr. Cohen."

Wesley's Dragon bent down as Mr. Terrell and Shade picked up the boy's body and set him on the beasts back.

"I'm flying with him." Mr. Terrell said. *Arunar* met him with glaring eyes. "That ok, big guy? I'm his father." The Dragon's eyes pooled with understanding and what seemed like an apology, when Shade spoke up from beside him.

"We are all going."

Mr. Terrell cradled Wesley's body in his arms, when all around him the surviving Dream Keepers began shouting up into the sky.

"*Iraneth!!!*" Shade called.

"*Fiala!!!*," the woman in the violet robe called.

"*Darquise!!!*," the Aislin in the Robin Egg blue robe called.

"*Cyanea!!!*," Mrs. Terrell yelled up at the night sky.

In a fantastic rush of wind eleven Dragon's appeared from the night sky above them. They landed in the clearing with mountainous thuds. The riders mounted each Dragon, and in a flash the clearing was vacant, except a roaring fire, and dead Goblin's...

* * * * *

Wesley woke up, in a hospital bed, an IV in his arm, and stitches on the right side of his belly. Looking around Wesley found that the room was empty, except for one chair pulled up close to his bed. David was dead asleep with his head hanging back over the chair, mouth open, snoring loudly.

Gathering himself up, he put his hands down to his side and tried to sit up in the bed. A deep pain surged through his body that quaked in his legs.

"Wow, wow...kiddo. I don't think so. You're not moving an inch." Mr. Terrell corrected as he walked into the room with a food tray.

"Hey there, Poppa Bear."

"Hey Burgerloo. Glad to see you're awake."

"Glad to be awake." Wesley ached.

"I better go get your mom she is in the cafeteria still. She will want to know you're up."

"Ok."

"But, before I go. Wesley." His dad paused.

“Ya, Dad?”

“You are one incredible young man.” His father said shaking his head slightly and kissing him on the forehead.

“Good genes Dad. Just good genes.”

Mr. Terrell smiled at him and ruffled his hair, then turned to head out the door. On his way out he gave David’s chair a swift kick. The boy jolted up, and murmured something as he wiped drool from his cheeks.

“WOW!!! HEY!!! Wes, your awake!,” David screamed as he stood up and over Wesley’s bed.

“Hey David.”

“How are you feeling, buddy?”

“I’m alright.”

“My cousin had to get his appendix removed too once, and he was better in no time. I’m sure you’re going to be just fine.”

“What?” Wesley’s head went blank with confusion.

“My cousin, Daniel. He had appendicitis too. Like you. And he was fine,” David tried to further explain.

“I...was...oh, yea. Right...”

“Geez, what do they have you on!?” David said, picking up Wesley’s IV and studying it quizzically.

Mr. and Mrs. Terrell came into the room next, and Wesley's mom practically jumped on the bed to give him a hug.

"Ow, OW OW!!" Wesley yelled trying to wrap his arms around his mom.

"You are the bravest...most wonderful young...UUGGHH!!! I am so proud of you!" Wesley's mom covered his cheeks in kisses.

"That's a lot of praise for appendicitis!" David stammered next to the bed.

"Alright, alright honey...Let the kid breath," Mr. Terrell started from the doorway. "Come on, he's fine now. Why don't you take David back into the cafeteria to get some grub."

"That sounds good!" David said starting out the door and wiping some crust at his eye. "I am starving! I was having this dream where I was in a pie eating contest, and," his voice trailed off down the hall as he explained his dream to Mrs. Terrell. "...and these hot girls were there cheering me on..."

"Well, Wes. In all my days, I never thought I would ever see anything like the birthing of your Dragon."

"Arunar, is he ok?" Wesley asked, recalling the events of the night in Sleeping Giant Park. "Did I do my job?"

"He is one of the most glorious dragon's I have ever seen. You did great, kiddo. Not to mention you wiped out about half of the Goblin army."

"Haha, they made me pretty mad." Wesley said, stomaching a laugh.

"I'll be sure to keep that in mind next time I tell you you're grounded."

Wesley laughed again.

“How long was I out?”

“A few days. They operated on you for three hours or so. Your mom was a wreck. But these Aislin doctors really know what they are doing and they patched you up just fine.”

“Ok, good to know. I’m assuming you didn’t tell David about the slaying of Goblins and the birthing of Dragons.”

“No, no,” his father laughed, “I leave that to you. Appendicitis is a perfect alibi for the time being.”

“Appendicitis, right.”

“You had a few other visitors besides David though, ya know?”

“Oh yea, who, people from church, and Grandma and Grandpa?”

“No not quite.”

“Well, who then?”

“A few girls from school.”

“Girls from school, really!?” Wesley almost split his stitches open.

“Yea, you bet.”

“Which ones, who?”

“Well I only caught one of their names.”

“Who! Dad, WHO!!!”

“Steph came by, with some of her friends.”

Wesley's head hit the pillow with a smile. He let a deep breath fill his lungs and let the moment sink in. He had done it. His Dream Dragon was alive in the world, flying free in *Draegon* and delivering dreams to humans all over the world. And on top of that, Steph had come by to see him!!!

"Sorry you missed it, kiddo..."

"That's ok," Wesley smiled.

"Oh?"

"Yea," Wesley grinned widely, "You wouldn't believe the dreams I've had over the last few days..."