A detailed illustration of a dragon breathing fire. The dragon is dark brown and black with large, leathery wings. It is breathing a stream of bright orange and yellow flames from its mouth. The background is a vibrant sunset with a large, glowing sun in the upper left corner, casting a warm orange and red glow over the scene. The dragon's body is covered in scales and has sharp claws on its feet.

A FANTASTIC JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY FOR ALL AGES

DRAGONFIRE

A NOVEL

DONITA K. PAUL

AUTHOR OF *DragonSpell* AND *DragonQuest*

Praise for
DragonFire

“*DragonFire* is a soaring adventure. But I wouldn’t expect anything less from Donita K. Paul, as she always gives us a delightful read: intriguing, challenging, and full of blessing.”

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“*DragonFire* is not only a book for the young of age, but also for the young at heart. Donita K. Paul possesses a unique talent for instilling deep wisdom and spiritual truth in a story that is engrossing and satisfying for adults and children alike. She is one of my favorite authors.”

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“In *DragonFire*, Donita K. Paul has outdone herself! Though all of her dragon tales enchant, entertain, and inspire, this latest entry reveals even more profound depths in her characters—and in her magical winged creatures. This story will touch your emotions—and your soul.”

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“*DragonFire* is a worthy continuation of the endearing series begun by Donita K. Paul. Lovable, admirable characters, entertaining adventures

and misadventures, and breath-stealing plot twists—all deftly woven with sustaining strands of spiritual truth. Youth and adults alike will find these books impossible to put down until the last page is read.”

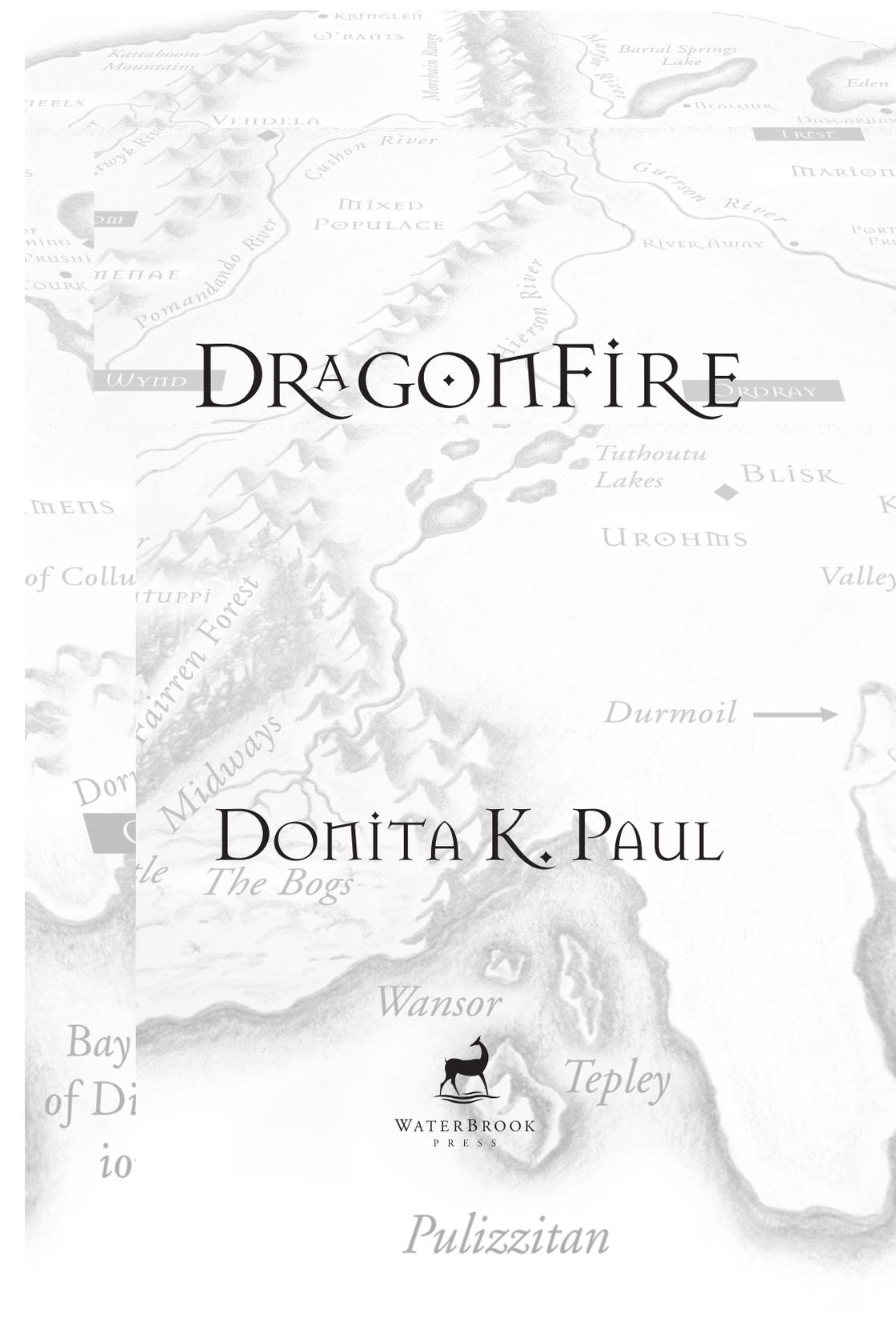
—JANELLE CLARE SCHNEIDER, author

“Another enchanting fantasy starring the Dragon Keeper, Kale. Even when she thinks she’s failed those she loves and who trust her, obedience and Wulder’s love guide Kale. Inspiring.”

—LYN COTE, author of *Blessed Assurance*

“Donita K. Paul has created another delightful tale featuring Kale, Barddon, and their enchanting friends. *DragonFire* takes the reader inside a wonderful world of fun and fantasy, with spiritual truths lighting each pathway. I loved it!”

—PEGGY DARTY, author of *When the Sandpiper Calls*
and *When Bobbie Sang the Blues*



DRAGONFIRE

DONITA K. PAUL

The Bogs

Wansor



Tepley

WATERBROOK
PRESS

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DRAGONFIRE

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This book is dedicated to these first readers,
who “test” my work for me:

Mary Darnell
Hannah Johnson
Alistair and Ian McNear
Rachael Selk
Rebecca Wilber

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	꺄꺄	ix
Cast of Characters	꺄꺄	xi
Map	꺄꺄	xiv
Treasure	꺄꺄	1
Batting Flies	꺄꺄	9
Unexpected Help	꺄꺄	16
Tea, Daggarts, and a Miracle	꺄꺄	22
Night Talk	꺄꺄	30
Druddums	꺄꺄	36
Another Danger	꺄꺄	42
Information	꺄꺄	50
Paladin	꺄꺄	56
An Evening Diversion	꺄꺄	64
Distinguished Visitors	꺄꺄	73
Talk	꺄꺄	83
Wizards' Conclave	꺄꺄	89
Fight!	꺄꺄	95
Preparations	꺄꺄	100
Missing	꺄꺄	105
Bug	꺄꺄	111
A Dragon History	꺄꺄	118
Bug's Box	꺄꺄	125
Botheration!	꺄꺄	133
A Tavern in the Town	꺄꺄	140
Just One Dance	꺄꺄	147
The Quiss Encounter	꺄꺄	154

The Doneel's Story	꺄꺄꺄	164
Unpleasant Surprises	꺄꺄꺄	170
Mountain Encounter	꺄꺄꺄	175
Another Surprise	꺄꺄꺄	182
Snakes	꺄꺄꺄	187
Enlisting Aid	꺄꺄꺄	194
A Ropma Village	꺄꺄꺄	200
On the Hunt	꺄꺄꺄	207
Today or Tomorrow?	꺄꺄꺄	213
The Frenzy Begins	꺄꺄꺄	221
The Next Move	꺄꺄꺄	227
Madness	꺄꺄꺄	235
In the Canyon	꺄꺄꺄	243
Grawlig Brawl	꺄꺄꺄	248
Caught	꺄꺄꺄	254
Mordakleeps in Your Dreams	꺄꺄꺄	259
Out of the Frying Pan	꺄꺄꺄	265
Good News, Mostly	꺄꺄꺄	272
Stiff as Stakes	꺄꺄꺄	278
From the Wizard's Lair	꺄꺄꺄	285
Who Are the Allies?	꺄꺄꺄	292
Who Is the Enemy?	꺄꺄꺄	301
Betrayal	꺄꺄꺄	308
Discovery	꺄꺄꺄	317
One Battle	꺄꺄꺄	322
Another Battle	꺄꺄꺄	327
Final Battle	꺄꺄꺄	334
Epilogue	꺄꺄꺄	342
Glossary	꺄꺄꺄	347

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Stuart Stockton
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Elizabeth Wolford
Laura Wright

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Alton—purple and black riding dragon, friend to Sir Kemry Allerion

Ardeo—white and gray minor dragon, glows in the dark

Armin—marione from Trese, in the employ of Paladin's army

Bardon—o'rant and emerlindian knight in service to Paladin

Becca-ree—blue minor dragon, a messenger

Leetu **Bends**—emerlindian in the service of Paladin, recently under-
cover in Creemoor

Benrey—a rare, red fire dragon and a riding dragon belonging to Sir
Kemry Allerion

Botzy—female marione innkeeper in Black Jetty

Farmer **Brigg**—marione who befriended Kale at the beginning of her
journeys

Brite—wolf friend of Granny Noon

Bug—male ropma collecting dragons for Crim Cropper

Wizard **Burner Stox**—evil female wizard, married to Crim Cropper

Wizard **Cam Ayronn**—lake wizard from Trese

Celisse—Kale's black and white riding dragon

Clive—one of Kemry's many major dragons

Colly—marione musician in Black Jetty

Wizard **Crim Cropper**—evil male wizard, experiments with genetics,
married to Burner Stox

Sir **Dar**—doneel diplomat and statesman

Dibl—yellow and orange minor dragon, reveals humor in situations,
lightens the hearts of his companions

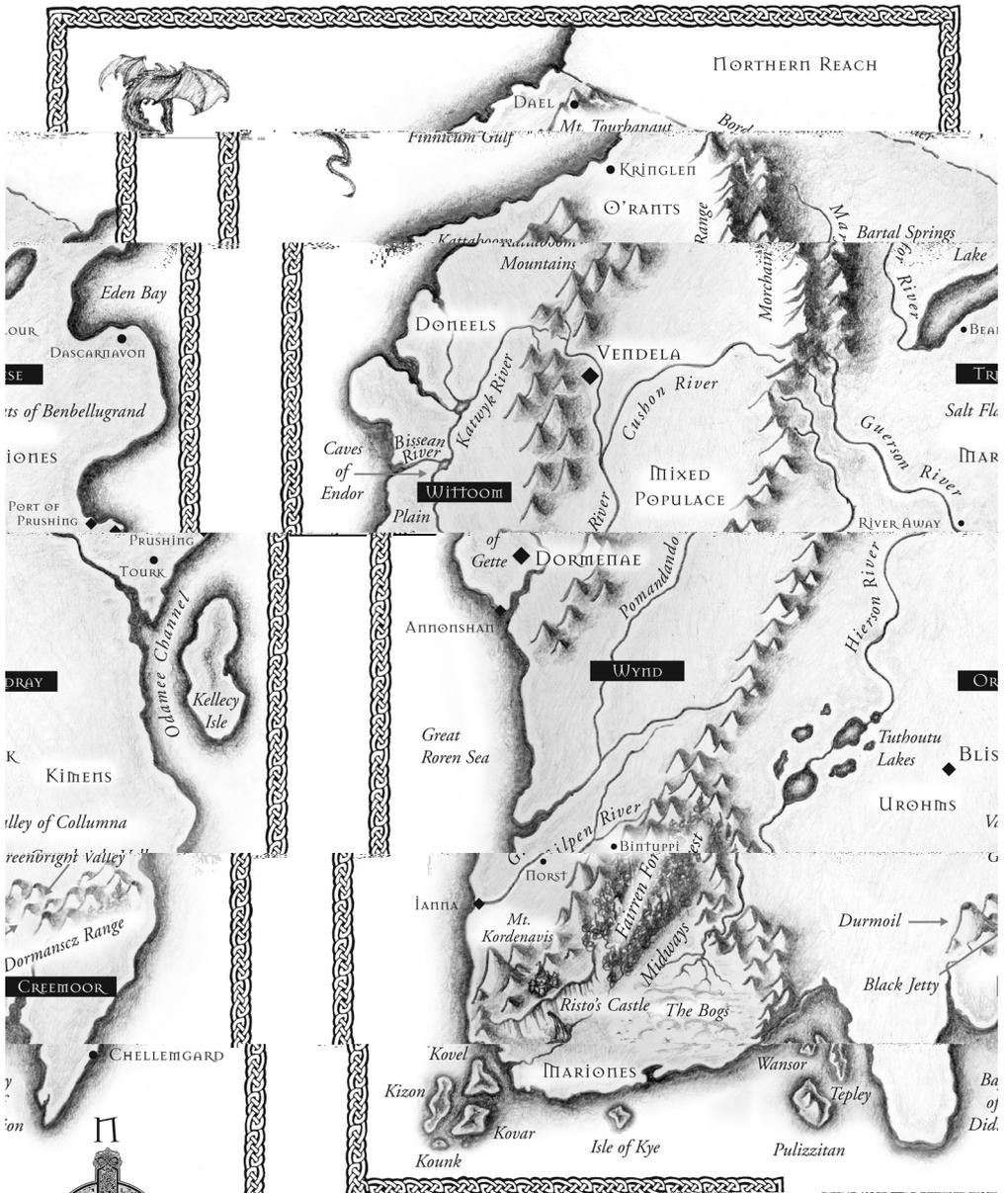
Dobkin—a slow-witted major dragon, friend of Kemry

Doxden—cook at inn in Black Jetty

Wizard **Fenworth**—deceased bog wizard from Wynd

- Filia**—pink minor dragon, enthusiastic about all things, collects knowledge, some of it quite trivial
- Gilda**—meech dragon, lives in a bottle to keep from dissipating because of a spell Risto put on her
- Greer**—Bardon’s riding dragon, purple with cobalt wings
- Gymn**—green minor dragon, heals
- Hollen**—one of Sir Kemry’s major dragons
- Lord **Ire**—another name used by Pretender
- Izz**—female kimen living in Trese
- Sir **Jilles**—Bardon’s uncle
- Sir **Joffa**—Bardon’s father
- Kale Allerion**—o’rant wizard and Dragon Keeper, married to Bardon
- Sir **Kemry Allerion**—Kale’s father, also a Dragon Keeper
- Granny **Kye**—Bardon’s emerlindian grandmother
- Lo **Kyl**—soldier in Bardon’s camp
- Latho**—bisonbeck spy
- Leemiz**—cook in army camp
- Librettowit**—tumanhofer librarian in Kale and Bardon’s castle
- Lyll Allerion**—Kale’s mother
- Lo **Mak**—soldier in Paladin’s palace
- Merlander**—Dar’s red and purple riding dragon
- Metta**—purple minor dragon, sings
- Magistrate **Moht**—judge in Paladin’s court
- Wizard **Namee**—Paladin’s right-hand man at court
- Mistress **Nidell**—housekeeper at Paladin’s palace
- Granny **Noon**—emerlindian, friend of Kale, Bardon, Regidor, and Gilda
- N’Rae**—Bardon’s emerlindian cousin
- Paladin**—ailing leader of Amara
- Pat**—chubby brown minor dragon, fixes things
- Poe**—one of Kemry’s many major dragons

- Prattack**—Cropper's servant
- Pretender**—ruler of the evil populace of Amara
- Rain**—Bug's wife
- Rigidor**—meech dragon, in search of a colony of lost meech dragons, likes fancy things
- Wizard **Risto**—evil wizard killed by Fenworth
- Sho**—philosopher and genius observer of ancient times whose mostly lost works have accrued legendary acclaim
- Grand **Sorn**—emerlindian in charge of Paladin's health
- Streen**—one of Sir Kemry's major dragons
- Granny **Toe**—curmudgeon emerlindian living in Trese
- Toopka**—doneel child, under guardianship of Kale and Sir Dar
- Traysian**—chambermaid assigned to help Bardon when he contracted stakes
- Veryan**—one of Kemry's many major dragons
- Leecent **Voet**—man assigned to be Bardon's batman while the knight recovered
- Wardeg**—one of Kemry's many major dragons
- Wulder**—the creator and one true, living God of Amara
- Yent**—kimen from Trese in the employ of Paladin's army



TREASURE

Sir Bardon gripped his struggling wife in his arms.

“You’re not rushing into that battered building, Kale.” He lowered his voice to a more soothing tone. “Come on, lady of mine. You can control this urge.”

With his arm encircling her waist, he felt her take a deep breath and let it out slowly. He loosened his grasp but remained wary. In this state she couldn’t be trusted. Her talent sabotaged her judgment. Perhaps words of reason would override her compulsion.

“Remember, Kale, we must find Regidor and Gilda before it is too late.”

Kale’s body tensed, and he reacted by tightening his hold just before she tried to lunge out of his arms toward the inn.

“Bardon, please.” Her voice broke on the last word.

“I’m just as determined to keep you here as you are to go. Relax, Kale. Think.”

He scanned the building she wanted to enter. One end had collapsed under the barrage of a recent battle. The other smoldered sullenly.

The muscles in Bardon’s face tightened. *Fire dragons. I wonder how many?*

A drenching rain had doused the flames. *How long ago? Where are the people to answer my questions?*

The rain had finally stopped. The villagers had collected their dead. But still the acrid smells of war permeated the air.

“I have to go in, Bardon.” Kale’s voice shuddered as she pushed ineffectively against his hold.

“Yes, I know. All I’m asking is that you think first. That you plan.”

She leaned her head back against his chest. Her skin smelled of citrus. He inhaled, relishing the fragrance, and rubbed his cheek against her hair. The brown locks in curly twists bounced against his face, tickling his nose.

Bardon regulated his breathing, willing Kale to fall into the same pattern, to draw from his reserve and strengthen her own.

She ceased twitching. “I’ll take Ardeo to light the way.”

“Good,” said Bardon.

Six minor dragons roosted on the saddle of Kale’s horse. Their varied colors distinguished them as belonging to a special species both intelligent and willing to work with the seven high races. Ardeo flew from his companions and landed on Bardon’s shoulder.

On this cloudy day, the dragon’s pale skin looked mottled. In sunshine, his coloring resembled old pasty porridge. But in the dark, the dragon glowed with a moonlike aura.

Kale quivered within Bardon’s arms. “I’ll take Pat to help me pick the safest route.”

Another of the minor dragons flew to roost on her shoulder. He snuggled his plump brown body under her ear, rubbing his head against her chin with affection.

“Good.” Bardon approved. The fix-it dragon would analyze the danger in the weakened building. Still, Bardon didn’t much care for Kale going into the inn.

Her muscles stiffened, and he tightened his hold. He spoke to focus her attention. “What else? Think.”

“I’ll wear my moonbeam cape. That’ll protect me some against splinters and scrapes.”

“Fine.” Bardon relaxed his grip. “You’ll move slowly, with caution? You’ll listen to Pat?”

“Yes.” Kale nodded, her eyes fixed on the charred front door.

Pat and Ardeo flew into the air and circled above the yard. Bardon dropped his arms to his side, and his wife took a step toward the shattered inn. Quickly, he placed a hand on her arm and turned her toward the horses.

“The cape,” he said.

“I forgot.”

He positioned himself between her and the building until she pulled the garment from her saddlebag and draped it over her shoulders. He grasped the front lapels and pulled her to him, fastened the tie at her neck, and kissed her forehead.

“Stay out of trouble.”

He watched her eyes focus, knowing her thoughts had finally settled on him, just him. A twinkle brightened the hazel gaze, replacing that distant look.

She mocked a curtsy. “Yes, my knight.”

Without a doubt, his wife was a winsome creature.

“Remember, you are *my* fair wizard.”

She tipped her face up with a saucy smile. Then he watched the awareness of him fade from her expression to be overtaken by the compulsion to enter that dangerous inn.

He sighed and tenderly, but reluctantly, turned her away. She stepped forward without another word.

“Kale, don’t be long. We haven’t time.” Bardon gestured to the two small dragons she had chosen to accompany her. “Pat, Ardeo, take care of her.”



Kale passed under a tilted entryway where the large beamed framework threatened to crash down around her. An ominous creak caused her to

hop over the mantel. Inside, a splintered door lay across piles of rubble. Most of the south wall had crumbled into a pile of rock and plaster. Above her, clouds provided a roof for the front third of the building. She zigzagged around broken furniture and rough boards that might have been part of the upstairs flooring.

With cautious steps, Kale made her way to the back. Pat and Ardeo darted through the air. Pat chirred his displeasure at the lack of stability in the building.

The ceiling sagged, and she ducked under a half-fallen beam. A cascade of bed linens flowed from a hole in the ceiling. Ardeo and Pat flew to the second story, circled, and returned. The light dragon twittered.

Kale nodded. "Not a living soul in the ruin. Fine."

No one to interfere with her mission. Pat's thoughts bombarded her with vivid details of the devastation to the inn. She wasn't interested in what remained above, except that she preferred no loose flooring fall on her.

She braced herself against the pull of her talent. Downward. She must move downward. She *must* find the steps to the cellar.

Stepping on a small pile of debris, she slid. Her foot landed on more secure flooring, and she steadied herself. A reminder. She must take care. She had made Bardon a solemn promise. Pat uttered a series of shrieks, another reminder.

In the kitchen, pottery, dishes, and cutlery had rattled from the shelves. A broken sack of flour spilt over a sturdy table. But the walls stood upright, and only a few piles of plaster from the ceiling showed the beating the structure had taken.

Pat's stomach rumbled. Kale glanced his way, expecting him to swoop to forage the table, but he took no notice of the scraps of food and concentrated on what he could see of the studs and braces. Kale stepped forward before he reported on their soundness, and he hissed a warning she ignored.

She moved along the wall, heading for a door that most probably hid

the pantry or the steps to the cellar. As she passed the hearth, she wrinkled her nose at the smell of old green stem vegetables in a pot. An unrecognizable boiled-dry mass lined the bottom of another kettle. Cold ashes lay in the fireplace.

The details of her surroundings helped her focus, helped her restrain the impulse to press forward. But her eyes locked on a door, and she felt a surge of urgency rush through her.

The cellar.

She stumbled across the room, one hand stretched ahead, ready to raise the latch.

Pat chirruped.

A mixture of words and images came from the small dragon's mind, urging her to change directions. Kale hesitated, then veered off to another door and swung it open, expecting to find a stairway. She jerked back, repelled by the foul odor of spoiled food. Pickled cucumbers, beets, and cabbage poured from broken crocks littering the floor. She lifted her arm to cover her nose with the moonbeam cape. Slamming the door shut, she glowered at the brown dragon sitting on a wooden counter.

“Pat! What in all of Amara were you thinking?”

The message came to her clearly. The dragon wanted her to slow down and be more cautious. He'd tricked her into opening the wrong door to demonstrate his point.

“All right. I understand your concern.” She used cleansing breaths to help her focus. Standing still took effort. Even as she inhaled for the third time, her feet started moving toward the other door.

“I promised Bardon.”

She managed to open the door slowly. The dark passage led downward over stone steps.

“Ardeo,” she called.

The dragon flew around her and downward. His skin glowed like moonlight as soon as he descended into the shadows below.

Forgetting caution, Kale plunged down the steps. Pat landed on her head and dug his claws into her scalp.

“Ouch!” She winced and batted at him with her hands. “All right. All right.”

She stopped on the last step and surveyed the crates and barrels, then pointed in the direction of the pull.

“That way.”

Ardeo flew ahead. Pat remained with his feet planted firmly in her hair.

Kale hurried, barely realizing that she had doubled back under the most damaged part of the inn. Pat sent her frantic messages to watch where she stepped, to avoid debris hanging from the sagging ceiling, and to slow down.

Kale moved with determination to a row of baskets hanging on ropes along one wall. The woven containers of various sizes reached across the space like clothes on a line.

Only one attracted her. She grabbed a creel-like storage bin and pulled it toward her. The rope gave way, and all the other baskets tumbled to the floor. Heedless of the spill, Kale plunged her hand beneath the covering cloth and pulled out a handful of onions. She threw them over her shoulder and reached in again. More onions. She turned the basket upside down and shook it. Nothing but onions. She dropped the basket and stared at the wall.

Placing her hands against the dirt, she felt energy swell within her fingertips. With her teeth gritted and her breath held, she tried to order her thoughts. To think instead of acting on the compulsion caused sweat to bead on her brow.

Move the dirt. Dig. With what? A spell. Pull. Pull.

The dirt crumbled into her hands. She concentrated.

Pull. Pull.

The hard-packed soil came apart and fell out of the wall. She brushed

more away and reached in. Another basket. She tugged it free and held it tightly to her chest. She'd found the treasure.

Ardeo landed on her shoulder. His soft glow illuminated a dirty cloth stuffed in the narrow neck of this peculiar container. The woven creation of straw and reed looked more like a gourd than any basket she had ever seen.

Kale pulled the disintegrating material from the top and looked inside.

"Four eggs," she whispered. "Four dragon eggs."

Pat slid down her hair to perch on the other shoulder.

"Minor dragon eggs. It's been so long since I found any, I almost forgot what the lure felt like."

Pat chittered.

"Yes, I know," she answered. "We have to find Regidor and Gilda. We should be asking for news of them in occupied taverns."

Pat and Ardeo chorused another warning.

Kale gazed at her find lovingly.

Pat put tiny teeth on her earlobe and pinched.

Kale jerked. "All right! I understand. The building is unstable. We'll leave now."

She transferred the precious eggs into the pockets lining her cape.

She crossed the cellar space and climbed the stairs. Now that Kale had her prize, she couldn't wait to get out of the inn. The urgent need to find Gilda resurfaced, and she almost ran to where Bardon waited. Pat flew in her face and batted his wings against her cheeks.

"I'll be careful. You're not helping, you know. I can't see where to put my feet."

Pat settled on her shoulder.

The pillars creaked. The walls bulged. The heavy rain of the days before pressed against the swollen seams of the building. She feared the whole structure would collapse before she reached the inn's yard.

She came back into the front room. The clouds above had thinned, and a ray of sunshine broke through. One of the horses outside nickered. Kale smiled and stepped cautiously through the debris.

“I found them,” she called to Bardon. “And I didn’t get into trouble.”

He didn’t answer.

“Bardon, I found them.”

Still no answer.

“Bardon?”

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