

Dragon-Sister

Sweeping along the Shandong River, my older sister began, *Baba wished for love to blossom*. It was story night. I lay nestled underneath Barbie covers, watching with five-year-old eyes as my sister took up the rags of a spinster, drawing from silk reels of ancient fables to fashion together a masterpiece. Thread in place, she spun her wheel. Mama was a moon goddess who tumbled down from the heavens; Baba, a poor fisherman who won Mama's affections. And the two of us, my sister and I, were the daughters of golden dragons—hatchlings gifted to Baba and Mama on their frosty wedding day. *Two stunning winter blossoms*, she bound off her love story as I giggled and made feeble attempts at dragon roars.

Twelve years later, our fairytale twisted into tragedy in the dress shirt aisle of a Target store.

“Earth to sister. I've been looking all ov—why are you...here?” Catching her hastily shoving a black barrel-cuff back into the stack, I grinned, amused, and pointed to the large block letters on the shelf: **MEN'S**. “You lost or something?”

She wouldn't meet my gaze. “I just like ‘em, okay?”

“C'mon, let's go,” I laughed, “What, you got a girl crush?”

“I...uh I-I—”

My cheeks went hot.

Anticipating what might happen if she ever told Baba and Mama her sexuality, I sat rigid in the passenger seat while she drove us two home. Silence. Then as we pulled into the driveway, she stammered, “Mei, j-just wait. I—”

Mei. Little sister. But the thought of being her ally in future conflict was terrifying to me.

“Stop! Don't call me that!” Guilt and confusion stung my eyes as I scrambled out.

That night, my premonition came true. She confided in Baba and Mama, only to have them cut her down. I listened as they hacked away at the blossom tree they believed would never bear them fruit—*Absolutely no! Whack. Disgusting. Whack. Don't choose this. Whack. Not our daughter*—Thump. I crept back to my room in shameful regret, not able to unravel what had already been spun.

Her sobs echoed through the walls. I dreamt a crowd stoned her. "Dragon-child! Dragon-child!" they chanted. I was frozen. I could not move—could not blink—could not speak. *Will I not help my dragon-sister?* I watched, horrified, as she cried out one last anguished roar.

I became a muted dragon.

In waking hours, my voice withered and crumbled away. Then after the silent summer between us, she left for college—moved out on her own. Baba and Mama swept her room bare, cramming all that remained of her into stacks of ugly brown boxes. A daughter and a villain, or a sister and a traitor—who was I to be?

These days, I know my sister will sprout once more and dazzle in the brightest of colors, a perfect winter sapling. And though I had faltered when she withered, this time, I'll be ready for when she blooms. I dial the phone.

"Mei? Is that you?"

Thump. My heart. "J-Jie." *Big sister.* "I...uh—" My body begins to shake in soft whimpers.

"Mei, shh listen...it's okay. I missed you."

Through the receiver, I can hear her smile. Ours is a flawed love story. Its written chapters have been damaged, torn apart with the fracture of our family. I lost my sister and myself in between. Yet in the blank pages left holds my hope to heal our relationship and speak

up for my beliefs. From her forgiveness, I draw my bravery. And so, prying myself open at the seams, I spin together our two inseparable tales, setting forth the next patch about a young dragon, searching who she has become, and finding herself ready to shed the old skin of conformity. *Jie—big sister—I'm roaring again.*