

Blizzard

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I lived in a cell for as long as I could remember. It's not that I did anything bad; I saw things. Well, I didn't see *things* most of the time. I saw him.

I see dragons. I see great big fiery red dragons streak across the sky at dawn. I see teeny-tiny pond dragons hunt for minnows in the river. I see leafy green dragons hunting for nuts and berries in the woods. But they didn't do anything to change my life. They didn't connect with me like he did. My name is Cassidy. I'm nine and I have only one friend. His name is Blizzard. And he's a dragon.

She was screaming again. She was a new occupant, in the cell on my right. Everyone else was accustomed to the boredom of sitting there day after day, bar the occasional kid who went crazy. They got taken away by the men in uniforms. No-one saw them again. This particular girl had been put in barely forty-eight hours ago. I got a look at her when she came in; she had a shock of frizzy orange hair, a face full of freckles and startlingly blue eyes. From what I overheard, her parents had given her over after failing to control her criminal side. I felt sorry for her; after living outside, this place was more than dull.

She *definitely* didn't like cells.

She screamed and screamed until I thought my eardrums would burst. The men in uniforms were coming, I could hear their boots clicking on the white tiles, ever closer. I could hear Blizzard calling to her, trying to calm her, but it was a wasted effort. Even if anyone else could see him, she was probably too gone to care. She wanted it to end. I could see them, their grey uniforms standing out in the white hallway. Wrenching open the cell door, one of them took the struggling girl in one hand. I was concerned for the girl, until I noticed the ring of keys hanging off the guard's belt. I didn't think twice. With careful fingers I unhooked it and slipped it into my pocket, stepping back and feigning interest in what the men were doing. My heart thumped erratically. *I can leave. Not now. I have to plan this carefully.*

It was late at night. The men took her away, and I was ready for anything. Slowly, silently, I took the keys out of my pocket. They were on a large metal ring that resembled prison keys. I shivered. I picked out a key, the numbers *61316* written on a small piece of tape. That was the number on my handcuffs and the chalkboard above my cell, so I knew it was the one I needed. I slid it into the slit on my cuffs and wiggled it around. With a tiny *click* they opened, and I was holding a hunk of useless metal. Barely able to contain my excitement, I turned to smile at Blizzard. 'Are you ready?' I asked.

He rose and stretched, his icy blue scales rippling as he stood up. He gave me a toothy grin. 'Whenever you are.'

I was thinking too far ahead. I was planning what I would do once I escaped, but I didn't think of my immediate problems. Such as how well-oiled the doors were.

I ran into an issue right away. The lock was on the other door, so I had to manoeuvre awkwardly to get my arm through the door and slot the key in the lock. After doing some

more first-rate wiggling, there was another *click*. But to unlock the door I had to press my whole body against the metal bars, meaning that when it was unlocked—*creeeeeeeak*

The hinges squealed as it was forced open after years of inactivity. So much for my silent escape. I froze as in unison, every sleeping child's eyes snapped open and focused on me.

Go, go, go! Blizzard roared in my head. I ran through the right corridor as the shrieks of the children pounded in my ears. I knew why they were screaming; I knew what they were saying without words. They screamed of trickery and betrayal, they wanted me caught. I ran faster. I knew alarms were going off; the lights above me were flashing red, bathing me in sickly light. I saw the shadows of the men in uniforms up ahead and made a split-second decision. They would be behind me now, too. I had to hope that I could pull this off...

I saw them, two heavily muscled men in grey uniforms blocking the path in front of me. I kept running. There was a gap between them that I could use to my advantage. Just before I was in reach, I slid between them, feeling a fresh rush of adrenaline. I scrambled to my feet.

One of them must have caught my shirt because now he was holding me up, a foot off the floor. I squirmed, but he must have been prepared. His grip was like steel. I could see Blizzard frozen in fear and I hoped that he would escape without me. But I knew him well enough not to translate it into thoughts; he would never leave me. He flickered, and I watched as he leapt at the man who was holding me. No-one saw him, no-one could touch him.

Why was I now on the floor?

The first thing that I registered once I struggled to my feet was Blizzard, his front talons planted on the guard's chest. That wasn't possible.

Blizzard looked up at me. 'I can help now. You're not alone.' He bared his teeth at the man on the floor and exhaled, frost glittering in the air.

I looked around. The other man was gone, we were out of time. 'We should go,' I said trying to keep calm, even though panic was making camp in my gut.

He nodded and giving one last snarl in the man's direction, he bounded off ahead of me. 'Exit, right up ahead,' he called. I made my way past one last turn when I saw it. The door looked sturdy, with a heavy-looking metal bar across the middle.

To stop families from breaking in, and patients from getting out.

Blizzard smiled, and I knew that our thoughts were still connected. 'You have me,' he said. 'Your personal crowbar.'

Standing on his hind legs, he lifted the bar effortlessly and laid it on the floor. I held my breath.

He opened the door.

The first thing I saw was light, seeping in the dark hallway we were in. Then I could see the outline of scraggy bushland and the deep hues spread across the starry sky above. I was used to grey and black, occasionally the blue sky outside my cells small, high window. But I had never seen this. Not since before I was taken away from my family. I was too young to know to keep my mouth shut about dragons. This world does not tolerate unrealistic things, even in the mind of a small child. Too many children are locked up, just like me, because they can see what I see. But they are all alone. They don't have what I have, they don't have Blizzard. He is the flip side of me, he can see our world too. He saw what the

other dragons, didn't see, and through the barrier, we were able to find each other. But now he's on our side, shattering that fragile wall in the process. Dragons are slowly trickling into our world for everyone to see, and it's time we changed things.

Children should not grow up in a cell.