

MAGIC IS FUNNY IN THAT WAY: It chooses those who might not choose themselves. In fact, one of the many rules governing the world of magic is that if you pay attention, you will understand how magic has chosen you.



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The LANGUAGE of SPELLS

Garret Weyr

illustrated by Katie Harnett



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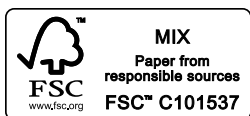
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is born in the Black Forest in 1803, the last year any dragon was born, and while
young he was trapped by the emperor's sorcerer, and turned into a teapot, which
was frustrating but kept him alive while magic and other dragons were disappearing—
until one day he meets Maggie, a poet's daughter, and the two of them set out to
discover what happened to all the other dragons.

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PROLOGUE

THE FAMOUS AND THE ORDINARY



SOMETIMES, EVEN TODAY, MAGIC STILL HAPPENS.

Sadly, it no longer comes from cauldrons or fairy godmothers with wands. Or even, no matter what you've read elsewhere, from wizards. Instead, it is tucked into shadows and corners, visible only if you look. But you might have found it, some years ago, on a cold, rainy night at a famous hotel bar in the center of an old city in Europe. Anyone who cared to pay attention that night would have seen magic coming out of its deep slumber at the exact moment when an old dragon and a young girl met for the first time.

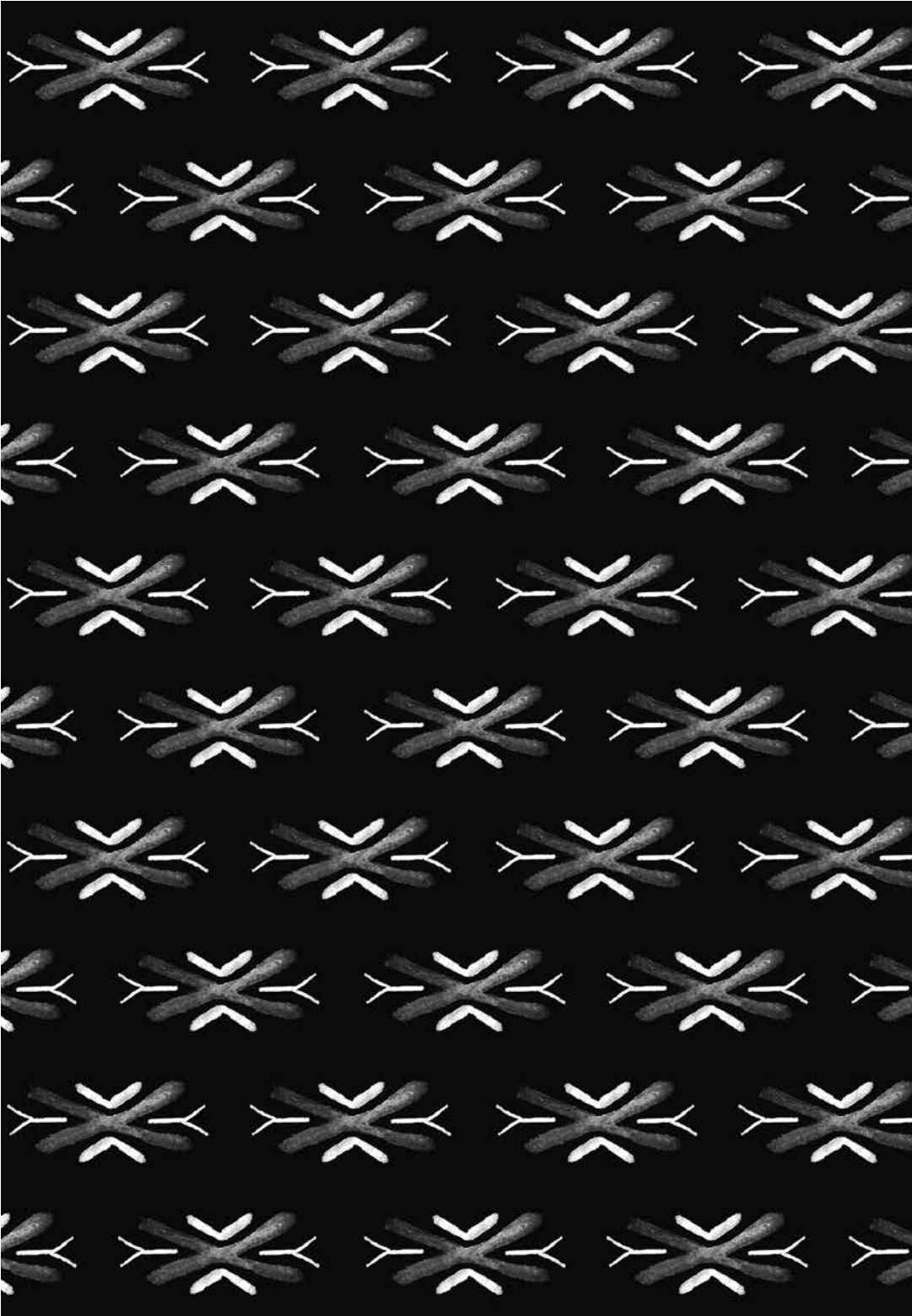
The dragon was no ordinary dragon, although Vienna, the old city with the famous hotel bar, was full of dragons all claiming to be famous and special. The dragon in question made no such claims. Indeed, he thought of himself

as hopelessly ordinary, especially when compared to his noisy friends at the bar. They never tired of telling their stories about armies, castles, or kings. Our dragon did have a particularly splendid roar, but he'd never used it in battle. Magic had yet to claim him for its purpose, as it had each of his friends. He would have been embarrassed if anyone had told him he was destined for great things. But, in fact, it was why he'd been born.

The girl, as it turned out, was no ordinary girl either, although she would certainly have told you that she was. She believed that mirrors don't lie, and her mirror showed a remarkably unremarkable reflection. The magic that existed in her world sang only in poetry, paintings, colors, or an excellent slice of almond cake. If pressed, she'd explain that her father, a famous poet, and her mother, a dead but still famous painter, were the special ones in her family. She herself, although finally eleven, was just a girl with no particular talents.

Magic is funny in that way: It chooses those who might not choose themselves. In fact, one of the many rules governing the world of magic is that if you pay attention, you will understand how magic has chosen you.

And why.





CHAPTER ONE

FOREST CREATURES



BACK WHEN THE WORLD WAS LONG AGO AND FAR away, deep in the Black Forest, a new dragon was born. The new dragon was known as Grisha, although his parents, in the strange and mysterious ways of grown-ups everywhere, had named him Benevolentia Gaudium. The grandness of Benevolentia Gaudium, meaning “kindness and joy,” was far too grand for daily use, but his parents liked the way it sounded. They had waited fifty years for his arrival, and were naturally thrilled with their son.

Normally it took thirty or so years for a new dragon to arrive in the world, but the special ones took an extra twenty years. No one knew why the world of magic selected particular dragons to be special, but the signs were always clear. One of those signs was the fifty years of waiting. The more obvious signs almost always had to do with an unusual appearance.

So after waiting fifty long years, Grisha's parents were baffled by his ordinary looks. The baby dragon had gold eyes (violet was the most common eye color for dragons, but there was nothing special about gold) and his scales were shades of green, brown, and orange. There was no fuchsia, no blue, nor any red on him anywhere. There was not even the splash of black along the neck that the very best warriors always had. His mother, a National Roaring Champion, and his father, a well-known Sword Warrior and Fire Breather, couldn't understand why they had waited so long for such an ordinary-looking dragon.

But they knew that sometimes magic made an occasional wrong turn. Either their baby dragon was a perfectly normal one, or his particular talent would have nothing to do with his appearance. Grisha's mother shrugged and his father went back to work on the battlefields of men. In a way, it was a relief, for now they would not have to hire one of the older, more experienced dragons to teach Grisha how to manage any extraordinary powers.

Grisha was born in the year 1803, which turned out to be the last year that any dragon, special or otherwise, was born. There is much debate about why dragons stopped being born, and no one knows the exact reason. Perhaps it is simply that in the years following Grisha's

birth, the steam engine was invented, railways were constructed, and light bulbs became a fixture in homes and on streets. As the world of men built new and extraordinary things, the world of magic began to decline. No creature lives beyond its own world, and a dragon is nothing if not a creature from the world of magic.

But back in 1803, the year of our dragon's birth, magic was still as common as electricity is today. Dragons, flying horses, and poisonous rabbits roamed Europe's famous forests in large numbers and were not considered, by men or the other woodland creatures, as anything strange or even wondrous. Instead, the dragons, flying horses, and poisonous rabbits were accepted as natural parts of the forest, much like the trees. And if the creatures of magic were obliged to perform various jobs and tasks in the world of men, it just meant that sometimes they were obliged to leave the forest.

Flying horses were used when someone was too ill to send for a doctor or when a message could not be trusted to a servant. Poisonous rabbits, who, save for a small black dot on the back of each ear, looked exactly like ordinary ones, served as both spies and assassins.

Dragons were created solely for battle. Even more than swords, guns, or cannons, dragons helped to sway

a military conflict. Almost always, the side with the most talented dragons won the fight.

Fighting was serious business. A good dragon could make or break a royal knight's reputation. Not only that, a single dragon could change the fate of entire kingdoms.

In order to prepare for such a future, you might expect that young dragons would be sent to training camps. Or be forced into childhood battle drills and endurance tests. Or simply take part in endless fighting contests against each other.

But that was not how dragons developed their particular talents. Their parents guided them in certain areas, but before that, new dragons were encouraged to discover their world. As children, all of magic's creatures learned about themselves by being curious about the forest.

It was only when Grisha first crept under a low bush that he learned he could change his size. I'm small, he thought with a mix of alarm and pleasure. What had once been a branch he could trample on was now hovering over his head. When he crawled out he returned to his normal size. To experiment, he sought out a large clearing and, sure enough, he grew in size, able to see over the surrounding trees. Although a bit painful if done too often or too quickly, all dragons are able to scale to size.

In this way, they can easily pursue a fleeing army into a palace or fort.

Grisha learned to fly the first time he'd wandered too far from home and had promised to return before sunset. Without even thinking, his wings spread and he soared into the sky. Over time, he learned how to use scents and an internal guide to stay on route. One trick he learned quickly was, on a return trip, to take off from the place he'd landed. That made it far easier to retrace his route.

Those were the lessons young dragons were expected to figure out on their own. When they were a bit older, their parents taught them how to breathe fire and to develop a unique roar. Tactical lessons in fighting and haunting came still later, after the forest had taught its living things that staying alive mattered above all else.

Grisha loved the forest and all the creatures he met, from the lowly field mouse to the much admired (if rarely seen) mountain lion. He loved the streams, the trees, and the mossy forest floor. Nothing—not a torn paw pad or scraped scale—ever dimmed his spirits. Other dragons were quick to take offense or find fault in the world, but not Grisha. Even when his father died in an unpleasant incident involving a prince and a magic spell, Grisha's

sadness was mostly for his mother, whose tears singed her face and gave her a terrible cough.

The older dragon's death happened well before Grisha had had a chance to form any lasting memories of his father. Many dragons born to famous fighters found themselves without one or both parents and without memories of the one who was missing.

Grisha did understand that with his father gone, he would have to teach himself to breathe fire, a task almost always left to fathers. This scared him a bit, as it could be dangerous to learn on your own. The fire dragons breathe is mostly absorbed by their scales, which are designed to help with both flying and fire extinguishing. In the beginning, however, there are always accidents. Grisha singed his lungs, got a very sore throat, and burned the scales all around his nose. Finally, though, he mastered it.

His mother finished grieving rather quickly, for in those days if you were a dragon and your husband went off to battle, the chances were good that he would not come home. She promptly set about teaching her son to roar. Her roar was, without a doubt, the best in the business, and in no time Grisha's roar sounded somewhat like eighteen trumpets, ten bassoons, and a pair of cymbals banging in your ear.

All dragons have roars that sound a lot like military music, but Grisha's had something extra. It wasn't an unusually powerful sound, but every now and again Grisha's roar would make his mother stop, think, and take a good look at the beauty all around her. Perhaps the ability to make others pause would be a valuable tool in battle, she thought. She was curious to see what would happen with her rather odd son.

"Now all that's left is fighting and haunting," his mother said, "but you have a few decades before you need those skills." She had no idea, of course, that those decades and many more would be stolen from him. Her son would never fight or haunt in the traditional sense. However, his roar held hints of what he would accomplish instead—more than she could imagine, which was probably just as well.

Grisha had no sense that either his ear-catching roar or his years-late arrival were the mark of anything special. He was simply relieved that he could put off fighting and haunting.

He usually tried to avoid dragons his age. Their boasting about the armies that they planned to slay and the cities they would one day terrify was fairly tedious. And so, short a father, but in possession of a roar and a

somewhat erratic fire-breath, Grisha returned to wandering happily through the forest.

He loved the way the air smelled of cinnamon and rotten oranges. His heart was glad when he heard the forest's streams rushing toward the basin where the Danube River began its journey across Europe. He ate only acorns from oak trees, preferring their dark chocolate taste to the sharp vinegar of a fir tree's cones.

Grisha knew in a vague way that he would one day have to leave. But for now he was content to follow the smells, the sounds, and the feel of the forest. He enjoyed the way his tongue moved to bring air into the part of his mouth designed for smell. Because dragons shoot fire out of their noses, they never use them to smell. For Grisha, breathing through his mouth was an excuse to linger over the first blooms of spring, the wet winter leaves, and the sharp, nutty scent of summer evenings. Grisha would move slowly through sun-drenched clearings, changing size when he pleased and luxuriating in the warm air against his scales.

He'd heard stories about the world of men and how its residents all lived indoors. That life seemed sadly small. Grisha couldn't imagine having to stay the same size to fit into a home's unchanging shape. The silence alone would

kill you, he thought. Dragons have such exceptional hearing that they detect even the small sound of a grasshopper hopping.

Most precious of all to Grisha was the ability he had to concentrate even as the most distracting and terrifying sounds were taking place. Men became paralyzed with fear and confusion by battle noises, but a dragon calmly went about the task of fighting. In the forest, dragons were the only creatures who slept through lightning storms, but also the only ones who could hear the first footfalls of an enemy. In this way, dragons bore the responsibility of using their abilities to warn and protect all who shared their home.