

The Dragon's Gem

Zakiya, Champion of the Skies, is not a name any townsfolk wish to hear. Legend says that her talons are sharper than any blade man can forge. Her fire is hotter than one thousand volcanoes erupting at once. She guards the most precious jewels in the Kingdom, one of which holding mystic powers that no one has yet to fully comprehend.

One evening, Zakiya curls herself into a tight ball to begin her slumber. She is unaware of the King's knight lurking at the mouth of the cave. When the sun disappears and sky is speckled with stars, the knight sneaks inside disguised in a peasant's tunic and carrying a dagger etched with a lion's head on the hilt.

He reaches a large cavern where he feels the vibration of the dragon's snoring under his feet. Gripping the dagger tightly, he spots a glint of the rare turquoise gem pressed under Zakiya's foot. He kneels and holds the gem, slowly pulling it towards him. He presses the dagger's hilt into the base of the foot to keep it from moving.

Just when he thinks he has it, he feels hot air on the back of his neck. Heart pounding, he looks up to see the glowing yellow dragon eyes. Zakiya opens her mouth and forms a ball of fire in her throat. The knight screams and drops the gem and his dagger before running away. Zakiya shoots her flames down the tunnel of the cave, then grasps the gem in her talons.

In one giant leap, she breaks through the top of the cave and soars through the sky. Loud chimes of the castle's warning bells echoes through the kingdom. Zakiya flies through the night to an old farm with one small cottage, and a barn for the livestock. She lands as light as a feather in the grassy field and growls, waiting. A tiny candlelight bounces in the distance, getting bigger as the person holding it comes into view.

"Zakiya," the farmer whispers, "What are you doing here? The Resistance will not be prepared to invade the castle for another week."

Zakiya turns over her paw to reveal the gem and huffs smoke from her nostrils.

"They tried stealing it again?"

She nods.

"We must find you a new home. One they can never uncover."

Zakiya lowers her wing, allowing the farmer to use it to hop onto her back. The farmer tucks the gem into his satchel. Before she can take off, an army of horse-riding knights with torches gallops across the field. Their collective shouting pierces their ears. Arrows and stones attack.

Opening her wings, Zakiya soars once again. An arrow sticks into her tail, but she shakes it off. The farmer holds onto the spikes of her back like the horn of a saddle.

"We must head to the Resistance Camp to warn them." The farmer looks down at the knights disappearing through the trees of the forest. "It's time for the fall of The King." He grins, and Zakiya's mighty roar brings nightmares to all those who hear it.

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