

Excerpt

A Dragonling's Magical Christmas

Dragonlings of Valdier Book 1.3

By S. E. Smith

“Oh, goodness gracious! The guys are still at it. I wonder which one it was this time that shorted out the power,” Ariel groaned as the lights flickered and went out again, leaving herself and Carmen in the dark. “You’d think they would learn to work together after they almost caught the palace on fire the first time. I don’t know why they don’t just ask Cara for some help.”

Carmen’s soft laughter echoed through the room as she turned on several small, self-contained lanterns that Cara had dropped off earlier in the day. This was the fifth day in a row that the power kept going on and off thanks to the guys. Carmen turned when she caught a slight movement out of the corner of her eye, near the table filled with fresh baked cookies that she and Ariel had just finished making.

“They are having too much fun competing against each other to see who can create the best light show. Phoenix, don’t you dare,” Carmen warned. “You are supposed to be in bed.”

Phoenix’s warm, brown eyes turned to look at her mother. It had taken a little while for Carmen and Creon to realize that Phoenix’s eyes changed with her moods. Right now, they gazed back at her with a twinkle of mischief as she froze, caught in the act of

pinching some of the delicious treats. Her body was stretched with her tiny claws gripping the edge of the table while the rest of her balanced on the chair. Spring was right below her with her mouth wide open, waiting to catch a cookie.

"Spring, you are supposed to be in bed as well, young lady," Carmen said sternly, ruining the reprimand by smiling.

Shifting, Spring gazed up at her mother with eyes the color of liquid gold. "Cookie!" Spring begged. "Hungie... Cookie, peese."

"You look so much like your father when you do that," Carmen complained with a soft laugh.

"Jabir does the same thing to me," Ariel commented, glancing at where Jabir lay sleeping in the crib that she and Mandra's symbiot, Precious, had morphed into.

Carmen chuckled again and bent to pick Spring up. "Just one, then it is off to bed. We have to save some for Daddy."

"I think we are going to have to make some more," Ariel pointed out, rising from the couch. "Phoenix has done a pretty good job of cleaning the plate."

Carmen turned and glanced down at Phoenix. A low groan escaped her when she saw that her youngest daughter was licking an empty dish. She would be lucky if she didn't have a tummy ache during the night.

"Oh, Phoenix," Carmen said with a sigh. "I hope you don't get sick."

"I's not get sick, mommy," Phoenix giggled, holding her hands up to Ariel. "Milk."

"Milk! I's want milk, too," Spring demanded, bouncing on Carmen's hip. "Milk."

"Shush," Carmen murmured against Spring's ear. "You have to be quiet, baby. Jabir is sleeping."

"Milk," Spring insisted in a lower voice. "And's cookie."

"You might as well, Carmen," Ariel advised as she glanced up at the flickering lights. "I have a feeling the light show is going to go on for a little while longer and the girls are too."

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"I thought you were supposed to know how all the power grids ran through the palace," Mandra complained as he turned to glare at Trelon.

"I do," Trelon snapped, running his hand through his hair in aggravation. "This time it wasn't me that overloaded it."

"No," Zoran growled in frustration as he stepped out of the dark passageway. "It was Vox and Ha'ven. I could hear them both cursing, and I swear I smelled burnt cat hair. Whatever it was, it stunk up the electrical room so bad that Ha'ven came out holding his nose and coughing. I think you're going to have to rewire the circuit panel again, Trelon."

"Dragon's Balls!" Trelon groaned. "That is the third time this week."

"Yeah, well, it's worse than you thought, Zoran," Creon warned as he and Kelan stepped into the open covered walkway near the central garden. "Vox set

off the fire retardant system in the East wing electrical closet.”

Kelan absently wiped at several black smudge marks on his arm. “You might need to take a look at the electrical closet on the second floor of the North wing, as well,” he informed Trelon with a wry grin. “Creon and I might have had a tiny accident in that one, too.”

Trelon’s groan sounded louder, echoing through the night air. It wouldn’t have been so bad if the amused, feminine laughter hadn’t answered it. All the men blanched when Cara’s voice rang down from the balcony above where they were standing.

“You needed to add another grid with the number of lights you have,” she hollered from above. “You can’t put an additional million plus lights on the primary circuit with everything else.”

“There are not a million lights!” Trelon yelled back.

“Uh, Trelon,” Kelan interrupted with a grimace, looking at Creon before turning his gaze back to his brother with a slightly crooked grin. “We might have added a few more since this afternoon.”

“True, but Vox and Ha’veen added more than we did,” Creon hastily interjected when he saw Trelon’s mouth tighten before the corners drooped.

All the men turned when the sound of footsteps, and the scent of burnt hair, reached them. Trelon grimaced and wrinkled his nose. His eyes ran over the spikes of black hair standing up on the huge Sarafin’s head. He couldn’t see if the tips were singed

or not, but from the scowl on Vox's face and the scent clinging to him, Trelon was pretty sure that they were.

"What did you do this time?" Trelon asked in a tired voice.

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Vox glared at Ha'ven, who shrugged his shoulders and stepped a touch further away from him. Why did everyone always think it was his fault when something went wrong? Just because he was the one holding the wires when the electrical panel caught on fire didn't mean he was the one who had shorted it out.

"Don't blame me," Vox retorted, jerking his head toward Ha'ven. "Mr. I-can-give-it-a-boost here is the one to blame. I want a new partner! He almost blew me up."

"Vox, is that you I'm smelling?" Riley called down. "I have to tell you, sweetheart, burnt cat hair stinks!"

"I know, Riley! It isn't like it is the first time I've almost been blown up, woman," Vox growled up at her. "Ha'ven almost roasted my balls."

"TMI, as Ariel would say, Vox," Mandra chuckled. "Roasted cat nuts isn't the visual picture I want stuck in my head for the rest of the night."

"Toasted kitty nuggets," Creon laughed.

"Baked cat balls," Zoran chuckled, glancing up at Vox's hair with a raised eyebrow. "Is that smoke coming from your hair?"

"It does look like his hair might still be smoldering," Kelan teased.

Kelan released a curse when a flash of white fur suddenly landed next to him. Glancing upward to the second story balcony, he stared into Trisha's worried eyes. His eyes softened before he followed her gaze to where Riley now stood on the soft grass, staring anxiously at Vox.

Vox turned just as Riley leapt over the small flowerbed lining the walkway. His arms rose as the beautiful white tiger shifted and fell into his arms. A low purr escaped him when her hands frantically touched his slightly singed hair.

"Riley, I'm okay," Vox promised, lifting his hands to grab hers. "It was just a small fire."

"You big lummoX," Riley retorted in a husky voice. "What about your...?"

The sounds of husky male laughter echoed as Vox silenced her other concern. It was several long minutes before Vox released Riley's lips. When he did, it was to scowl down at her in disapproval.

"Wait a minute. Did you just jump from the second story balcony?" He demanded.

"They said you were on fire," Riley snapped back. "You smell like you've been lit with a torch? What the hell were you doing?"

"It wasn't me," Vox retorted, turning to briefly glare at Ha'ven again. "It was Ha'ven. I just held the wires, he was the one doing the glowing thing to them."

Riley turned to look at Ha'ven in surprise. He gave her a lopsided grin. She guessed that the proverbial cat was out of the bag for Ha'ven now and everyone knew that he could do weird stuff.

"No one's allowed to blow Vox, but me," she growled before blushing. "I mean, blow up. No one's allowed to blow up Vox... Oh hell, you know what I mean." Her voice faded when all the men snickered at her gaffe. Turning, she looked up at Vox with a raised eyebrow. "I think you've done enough damage for the night. It's past Roam's bedtime and you know he won't settle down unless you're there to tuck him in."

Vox glared at the other men when they snickered again. It was hard to stay mad at any of them when he knew they felt the same way about their mates as he did about his. Wrapping his arm around Riley's waist, he pulled her close and brushed a kiss across her temple. In the past year, his life had changed dramatically, and for all the playful ribbing the others loved to give him, it had all been for the better.

"Let's go put Roam to bed, then you can show me just how much you love to blow me," he whispered in her ear.

A low grunt escaped him when Riley elbowed him in the stomach and pulled away. In a flash, she had shifted again and released a low, menacing snarl at the other men who chuckled. Obviously, he hadn't been as quiet as he thought.

His eyes turned to watch as Riley, in the shape of her white tiger, moved gracefully down the walkway flicking her tail as she pranced. A soft rumble of

approval escaped his cat before he could contain it, drawing even more snickering comments from his friends. Right now, he could care less. He'd get even with them tomorrow. Tonight, he had more important things to do, like tucking his son into bed so he could take his beautiful mate up on her unwitting offer.

"Oh my goodness! Trelon! The girls found your duplicator again," Cara called down in a harried voice. "I think they tried to use it on Symba. There's a bunch of freaky little gold things running all over the room."

"Freaky little gold things?" Zoran repeated, looking at Trelon with a sympathetic expression. "Good luck, Trelon. It sounds like you are going to need it."

"Just... don't touch anything until I can check out the panels again. I'll switch to emergency power," Trelon muttered, turning quickly and stepping over the plants so he could shift. "At least that will get us through the night."

"Dragon's Balls," Mandra groaned. "I thought for sure we would be done by tonight. We've only got a week to get things together if we want to be done in time for the day the women want to celebrate."

Zoran chuckled and slapped Mandra on the shoulder. "Come on, Mandra. You and Trelon can tackle your section again tomorrow. He has enough to worry about tonight."

Creon watched with a grin as Trelon took off for the second story balcony while Zoran and Mandra

chatted as they walked away. Turning back to Kelan and Ha'ven, he gave his brother and best friend a crooked grin.

"It seems only fitting that the night the women want to celebrate their 'Christmas' is the same night that the Great War officially ended," Creon added in a quiet voice. "It is a time that should be celebrated as peace settled over our worlds and we gained new friends."

"That is true," Ha'ven agreed, thinking of the day long ago when he, Creon, and Vox sealed their alliance and pledged to bring down those that would try to rule through deceit. "Too many lives were lost because of a few who wanted power. It is a time of celebration, for great friends and for our new families."