

The Pain Dragon

As two boys share their battle against cancer, they also share an amazing secret to stay tough and fight the good fight.

“There’s no way a dragon has been in this hospital,” I said.

Jeremy had a nightmare during his afternoon nap, screaming about hearing roars and smelling smoke. I walked him to the window, rolling his IV stand behind us.

“If a dragon had been here,” I said, “would that fence still be standing?”

Jeremy scanned the hospital grounds and the tall, chrome, chain-link fence that shimmered in the sunlight, and shook his head. Exhausted, he shuffled back to his bed.

A few minutes later, our nurse Sylvia came back and started removing his IV.

“How’s he doing?” she asked.

“More nightmares,” I said.

“Did you calm him down?”

“As much as I could.”

Sylvia sighed.

“Poor guy,” she tucked him in and rubbed the wool cap on his head. She glanced at me, “You need to rest too, young man.”

“Yes, mother.”

Sylvia walked out of the room with a quick raspberry. I loved Sylvia. She was all I had left. My parents couldn’t handle my diagnosis and bolted after I came to the center. Can’t blame them. If I could run away from this, I would too.

My first few days here were awful. The treatments were unbearable and I was alone in a two-person room. I would stare at the empty second bed sometimes, wondering who used to sleep there.

Then Sylvia showed up.

Sylvia wasn't my first nurse, but she's the first one I remember. She found me feeling sorry for myself and wouldn't stand for it.

"Clever Trevor," she called me, "you can't sit around all day and let the sun forget your face."

As treatments became more intense, Sylvia kept me going. Even when I was too weak to go outside, she opened the windows every morning to bring as much sun into my room as possible. She was my Cancer Mom.

Before one of my treatments, Sylvia asked me a question.

"Tell me, Clever Trevor. What scares you the most?"

Maybe she thought I would say "getting sick" or even "dying" but I looked at her with wide eyes.

"Dragons!"

"Dragons? Really?"

"Yeah, big, scaly, fire-breathing dragons!" I got out of bed and stretched my arms like wings and flew around the room, screeching and laughing.

After telling her that, my treatments were never the same.

While Jeremy was sleeping before dinner, I asked Sylvia if we could share our secret.

"Are you sure it will help?" she asked. I thought about his fragile, post-treatment shell.

"Look at the kid," I replied. "It can't hurt."

She raised an eyebrow.

"Okay, maybe a little, but he needs this."

At dinner, I was heartened to see him eat most of his meal. He even laughed a little at my terrible jokes. I decided to ask him.

“Hey Jeremy, wanna hang out during treatment?” I usually did them alone, outside of our room, so this was a big deal.

“Really? Sure!”

“Cool,” I said.

Shortly after dinner, Sylvia arrived.

Jeremy jumped out of bed, but his body reminded him he was sick and he had to grab the side table for balance. Sylvia hooked up my IV and led us to the elevators.

“Where are we going?” Jeremy asked, still excited.

“Down,” I answered.

The elevator took us to the dark basement lobby. The gymnasium and the few offices down there were deserted. We walked to the gym doors and I was feeling woozy and nauseous. We had to get started soon.

Sylvia set metal folding chairs under the basketball net. Jeremy sat next to me and grabbed my hand. I was surprised, but gave his fingers a squeeze.

Sylvia sat on my other side and examined the IV.

“Okay, Trevor,” she said. “You have about twenty minutes left.”

My head was throbbing. I began to breathe heavily and closed my eyes.

“You okay, Trevor?” Jeremy asked.

“Keep watching, Jeremy,” Sylvia said, pointing to the dark gym.

With my eyes closed, I started to feel a familiar, frightening warmth. From the far side of the bleachers, a huge glowing figure writhed into view, then flew into the air.

“A- A DRAGON!!” Jeremy shouted..

“It’s the Pain Dragon,” Sylvia whispered. “Keep watching.”

I opened my eyes a moment as the Pain Dragon flew above us and shot a few puffs of fire toward the ceiling. The pain was horrible.

“Okay, Trevor,” Sylvia said. “You can do it.”

I closed my eyes again and tried to calm my breathing. Another glowing beast appeared on the other side of the gym.

“A lion!” Jeremy yelled..

It was a lion, somewhat. The beast was a giant combination of a lion and a brown bear. I continued to breathe and the Grizzly Lion swiped at the dragon, but missed, sending fresh pain through my body.

“Owww!” I moaned. Jeremy squeezed my hand.

I focused again and an immense bear paw connected with the dragon’s body, sending it into the wall. I smiled as the pain subsided a bit. Jeremy looked at me, then looked at the creatures.

“You?”

I nodded.

“Go Trevor!” he shouted. “Get the Pain Dragon!”

Another deep breath, and the Grizzly Lion leapt into the air, grabbing the dragon and slamming it to the floor. The lion-bear stood on the dragon’s body as it wriggled to escape.

“Almost done,” Sylvia said. The Pain Dragon screeched one last objection, and Jeremy watched it disappear. The Grizzly Lion bellowed a satisfied roar and lumbered away, fading from sight.

“Amazing,” Jeremy whispered.

“I know, right?”

Jeremy began having his treatments in the basement and I joined him a couple times. After a few months, though, his cancer worsened. The battles were getting tougher, and less successful. I cried when Sylvia told me the Pain Dragon had started winning and Jeremy had to be moved to the advanced care center.

“He doesn’t want you to know,” Sylvia said. “He’s embarrassed.”

“If you see him, tell him I miss him. And that I’m still fighting the dragon for the both of us.”