

# The Egg

Chris Johnson 2008

They stroked the sky,  
above and behind her,  
at heights uncertain but always seeming close  
if just out of view.

Great  
black  
wings  
immersed in blacker night.

She felt them  
arch and pump against the sky,  
felt the sinew stretch,  
the muscles grip and heave,  
felt them in her own wings,  
folded now,  
the tumble of their chilling eddies  
shuddering down her spine.

They were vigorous and silent,  
and she was afraid.

She huddled near the water  
as if it offered protection.

But even its gentle lapping was too loud –  
she struggled to hear around it.

Past the manic creak of crickets,  
the sudden skitter of small nocturnal prey,  
the endless stream.

But there was nothing more.

Whatever certainty she had,  
that ponderous wings were taut and flexing,  
had not, did not  
come to her through sound.

Camouflaged against the stars,  
occasional scales echoing back  
the glint of earthen light,  
she could not ascertain;  
her helpless vision rendered mute as well.

But still,  
she knew  
each time they plunged and soared,  
spined and leathery,  
bringing talons near.

But time went by.

No menace manifested  
in her physical space.

Her certainty,  
or perhaps her attention,  
waned.

And the world,  
which had grown so loud in her vigilant silence,  
was drowned out by a thought,  
and then a dream.

The next night was better.  
A moon in its majority glowed,  
    ruddy cheeked,  
    a cherub with his shadow pom-pom askew.

She had moved her egg  
    to a cave near the water,  
    and she felt less afraid.  
Land-bound dragons, too, had powers -  
    Protector!  
    Bringer of Light!

Still, she was drawn to the pool.  
The moon's reflection,  
    more silver than orange,  
    peeked through the head-standing silhouettes of trees,  
    their blackness more an absence  
    than a threat.  
Tonight, the sky was vast and empty,  
    a great soft parachute  
    that dangled her toes in the pool.

And as the dragon pondered,  
    a woman in white appeared,  
    walking the water's edge.  
The woman had a wolf beside her,  
    wagging and bounding like a pup.  
She laughed  
    and egged him on,  
    heading away from the dragon,  
    the lustrous folds of her undulant gown  
    luminous as pearl.  
Her graceful joy bespoke to the beast of flight.  
Human to dragon  
    was never an easy map,  
    but for a moment the dragon felt  
    what it was to be her.

The woman turned.  
Their eyes met and held.  
Slowly, the woman pointed up  
    to the overhanging moon.  
When the dragon could finally  
    break her gaze,  
    she looked to the orb, higher now,  
    and saw the human's hand,  
    rising in front of her face  
    as if it were her own.  
Extending the length  
    of a crooked and scaley arm,  
    the hand, more articulate and fragile than a dragon's claw,  
    precisely pinched the funnel of lunar light.  
Once it had clamped it firmly,  
    it slipped that slice of the beam aside,  
    the gap quickly filled  
    by the ever-outpouring moon.

“Try the unexpected!”  
the woman said,  
and the dragon swung back to her face.

At once, the hand  
plunged the bright coin of moonlight,  
cool and noiseless,  
into the deep.

Well set,  
the hand moved on,  
vanishing behind the water,  
leaving the incandescent disc  
to illuminate the pool from within.

The dragon was stunned at the sight.  
She saw how the water  
hung in its bowl,  
and the moonlight hung in the water.  
Void now, the sacred ricochet  
from sun, to moon, to surface, to rounded eye.

Instead,  
the source had been submerged,  
and the pool was therein made whole.

Blue-green,  
iridescent,  
a liquid mass of light.

Both transparent and substantial,  
it seemed the truer image  
of a swollen summer sky,  
visibly tangible,  
turgid with gleam  
and the moisture that stayed hidden in air.

Here the moisture  
had luminous weight and breadth,  
swelling to a contoured and motile body of water,  
suffused with a radiance  
cooler than the day,  
but every bit as resplendent.

She moved with trepidation  
along the edge of the pool –  
all rules of dark and light  
had been reversed.

The path,  
in habit, faintly lit from above,  
was tonight transformed  
to impenetrable shade,  
in abject subjugation  
to the sheen from the pool.

The familiar inked surface had vanished,  
the illusion of distance  
to the treetops and sky  
unmasked as flat super-position.

Tonight  
she had access to depth,  
direct.

And in that revelatory light,  
she saw what the night had concealed.

She saw every sunken rock and twig,  
every light/shadow dyad  
of divot and of mound.

She saw how the silt did rest,  
in perfect communion,  
and rise up, in agitation,  
as a swirl of whirling individuals,  
until losing their spin,  
they fell, in slow motion,  
to lie together again.

She saw life, and knew  
there was far more than she could see.

She even saw the pool's  
own illusions,  
the rough walls refracted in improbable curves,  
and wobbled in otherwise imperceptible currents.

Such truth was invincible,  
and she was defenseless before it.

Without removing her gaze  
from the mesmer of light,  
the dragon collected her egg.

She knew what she must do -  
although it turned her breath to steel  
to think of it.

She clutched the egg  
and made their way  
toward the moon-born disk.

As she stood on the edge above it,  
a terrible cry,  
head-flung and piercing,  
screaled from her sulfurous core --

*I do not want to die!*

And an image of racing fire,  
of shimmering scales  
of oxblood and emerald green,  
bank, dive, arc and drive,  
all too beautiful to lose!

How tragic, evil,  
stupid it would be  
to sacrifice the best of night  
for the mere possibility  
of diurnal life...

But dive she would,  
and douse her fire,  
to carry the egg to the light.