

Georgia Sinclair and the Dragon

She stands astride her bicycle, and the beast tears up Main Street at the bottom of the hill. The smoke reaches her even here, the dread breeze of the Dragon's black wings pushes the hair from her face. She does not wear a helmet, because an older boy once told her they look stupid. He is one of the men in the rusty Ford truck now racing towards the monster which is ravaging the idyllic small town of Seline.

Already, the Dragon has desiccated both of Seline's police cruisers and its fire engine. They lie around it in a heap, engines burning, wheels still spinning. She wonders now, as she grips the handlebars and places a foot on one of the pedals, why three young men in an obsolete pick-up believe they will fare better.

The Dragon caught them by surprise, emerging from the lake without warning on this chilly October morning, spraying all of Seline with a shower as thick as rain. Her pink, downy hooded sweater still feels damp. The apartment tower, the tallest building in town at ten stories, was the first to be struck. The fireball sent debris tumbling through gardens and windows. She wears one piece now, a long, pointed remnant of piping held to her back by the strap of her messenger bag. She found it half-buried in her father's deck while her brothers and her boyfriend were inside the house getting out their shotguns. Each of them was eager to claim their glory with the Dragon's head.

At the bottom of the hill, the Dragon spots her brother's truck and lets loose another ball of fire. She has never had the opportunity to drive that truck, and now she never will. It swerves as the flame crashes down into the asphalt just metres away. The tires lift into the air. The truck rolls. The windshield crumbles. The Dragon lurches now towards the upturned vehicle, crunching across the blanket of metal, glass, and oil which covers Main Street. Gasoline spurts from the truck's undercarriage, a black, gushing fountain splattering down upon the apocalyptic devastation around it. Georgia Sinclair pulls the pipe from behind her back and kicks off down the hill.

The bicycle her father bought her is pretty, not fast, but the hill is steep. She reaches her maximum speed quickly, and now focuses her attention on steering with one hand while bracing the pipe with the other. The locket her boyfriend gave her in February slips from her collar and flutters next to her cheek. Townsfolk hidden in their homes and businesses see her zip past, and they feel certain that the girl with the pink, downy sweater and the hard-earned, expensive designer jeans will crash and tumble. They are not aware of her physical prowess. They are only tangentially aware of her part in Seline High School's girl's basketball team winning last year's tournament. They did not see her score the final, game-winning point. They did not see her fruitlessly scan the barely inhabited stands for the face of a loved one. They are not aware that she did not return to the team after the summer.

The Dragon, now perched hungrily above the truck, looks up from its quarry and sets its eyes upon Georgia. Here is a feast without a shell, a morsel which can be swallowed whole. The Dragon observes the spear at its side and decides that this creature may turn out to be more dangerous, if not as well-armoured. Unwilling to sacrifice the chance of nourishment, the Dragon lays a line of fire across Main Street and waits for the creature to slow its descent.

Georgia Sinclair does not slow down. She rides her metal steed through the flames, coasts along a searing piece of shorn sheet metal, and finds herself airborne. The rubber in her tires catches ablaze, shooting embers in all directions. She spent weeks saving up for these designer jeans, unsure of whom it would impress, and smoke now screams out of holes sizzling through the calves. The metal buckles of her messenger bag sear through the leather, and it falls away behind her. All in this instant, she flies

toward the Dragon, and she raises her spear.

The Dragon lashes out, its grisly black neck glistening with toxic ichor, and closes its jaws around the bicycle. Georgia slams her spear against its snout, but the scales are too strong and her pipe cannot penetrate them. It bends out of shape and spirals out of her hand. She rolls out of the Dragon's broiling mouth, needle teeth shredding her left sleeve and opening the bicep. The bicycle crumbles into so much painfully sharp dust. She can see where she will land – a relatively clear spot below where she may have the chance to retreat and reevaluate her plan. She extends her body and prepares to make the landing. A tightness closes her throat as she is jerked upwards.

Her boyfriend's locket is wrapped around one of the Dragon's teeth, and the chain is wrapped around her neck. The gold heart is scarred now, but it holds the chain with all its might. It is surprisingly strong for something purchased on the clearance rack of a shoe store. She remembers removing the price tag when he gave it to her. She remembers him grabbing her close and kissing her when she put it on. It is all she can think about while the Dragon flings her back and forth, confused and panicked at what is transpiring. Her thoughts go numb, her fingers scramble thoughtlessly at the chain around her throat. She fruitlessly scans Main Street for a friendly face, somebody who can help her. Everybody sane has fled.

The Dragon is panicking. The creature dangles from his jaw, just out of reach. He struggles to throw it off, but he can't even see it. He can only feel it bounce off his jawline when he whips his head around with enough force. He gnashes his teeth, hoping to chew the creature off, but it will not come loose.

Georgia has a moment of clarity in the midst of the fog in her eyes. She curls her fingers around the chain and pulls in opposite directions with all her might. The Dragon lifts up its head once more and the chain snaps. Plastic gold links are lost in the ever-growing sea of gasoline below. Georgia soars through the air, her arms spread wide, and through the window of the pharmacy. There is no glass here to break her fall – the Dragon smashed it the moment it arrived here. Instead, she continues to sail through the store and slams hard into a refrigerated display on the other side. This glass was merely cracked before, but it explodes when Georgia strikes it. The abrupt end to her trajectory brings the contents of the display pouring down over her and the floor. It is orange juice. Much of it spills, staining her pink, downy sweater and stinging the cuts on her arm. She barely notices.

Her body aches. She is unsure whether she will ever move again after what she has just experienced. She is not sure that she wants to, given her failure to subdue the Dragon or affect any change on its rampage at all. It is dark in here, especially compared to the intensity outside. The lights have been snuffed out, and a blue-grey pallor hangs over the ravaged remnants of this place. Blood and orange juice mingle on the linoleum at her side. She finds she can move her right arm, so she grasps one of the spilled cartons. After a painful moment of contemplation, she decides to drink, bringing the carton directly to her lips. The contents are refreshing, but do not give her the drive to try to stand up. She tosses the empty carton aside and slumps against the refrigerator's cold embrace.

The Dragon, angry and terrified at what just happened, gives chase to the creature he has just thrown off. He must ensure it is dead. He must ensure it will not threaten his dominance over these feeding grounds again. As he advances, two more creatures crawl from the last shell he upturned. He elects to ignore them as they flee, for they pose no threat to him in comparison to the one hidden in that cave. Besides, he can smell their blood, and he knows it will be easy to find and consume them later. He lowers his head to look for the creature he hopes he killed, and he sees it. It sits very still against the far wall. The opening is too narrow for him to fit his head. He elects to burn the corpse rather than eat it.

Georgia looks into the eyes of the Dragon and a new vigour, a new anger, enters her. She is not aware that her brothers have climbed from the truck and are now fleeing Main Street. She does not know that her sacrifice is allowing them to escape, or that one of them looks back for a brief moment and wonders if they could save their sister if they stayed. All she sees, all she knows, are the cold, calculating eyes of the Dragon, and it fills her with rage that it has decided to pursue her. It recoils to let loose an annihilating wave of flame. She leaps forth, sneakers slick against the cocktail forming on the floor, and dives behind the checkout counter near the front door. The pharmacy becomes a furnace. The walls and ceiling crack and groan. The shelves crumble to ash. Georgia huddles behind the counter, feels the oxygen burn out of the room, hears her shelter begin to collapse. Her back aches worse than anything she has ever felt before, but she is concerned more with the steam rising from her skin as her sweat evaporates in an instant.

The flames end, and Georgia immediately leaps over the counter. It dissolves. She can almost sense the surprise in the Dragon when she steps out of the pharmacy's front door. It strikes with its jaws. Just as quickly, her hands grab the lid of the steel garbage next to the door. The Dragon's teeth sink into the shield. It flicks its head back, tearing the shield from Georgia's hands effortlessly, sending it into the sky to be lost forever. Georgia wastes no time in darting between the Dragon's legs. She is heading for the truck. Her brothers and her boyfriend brought shotguns with them.

The truck has now stopped spurting gasoline. It has no more left to bleed. She can smell it as it pools around the undercarriage of the truck and waterfalls into the debris. She is almost there when the Dragon swings its massive, spiked tail across Main Street. She ducks in time to avoid her bones shattering, but the tail strikes the truck and sends it spiralling into the deli on the far side of the street. It lands upright, the front half hanging out the display window. She can now see her boyfriend in the passenger seat, blood streaming from his forehead. She does not know if he is alive or dead, but she has the urge to go to him. She wonders where her brothers went.

The Dragon follows his quarry as it sprints across the street. Twisting in the narrow space between these buildings is difficult, slows him down. By the time he is in a position to bite down on his adversary again, it has already fled into one of the other structures. He cannot tell which one. He inhales, determined to obliterate each of them brick-by-brick to ensure the creature does not escape.

Georgia opens the passenger side door of the truck. It separates from its hinges and she bears the weight of it in her arms. Her boyfriend wakes up now. Sees her. Says something. She realizes her ears are ringing. He is telling her to get lost, because he has this handled. She is stupid to have come here. He looks ahead and sees that the Dragon now stands in an ocean of gasoline, and she can see the idea form on his face. She begins to plead with him not to make the mistake he is planning to make, but perhaps his ears ring louder, because he pulls the lighter from his jacket anyway. He speaks again. Loudly, this time, he tells her to stop getting in the way. The Dragon releases an exhalation which vaporizes the bookstore next door. Her boyfriend flings the lighter through the windshield. It bounces off the Dragon's leg and splashes down in the gasoline. It roars up immediately, bathing the Dragon in powerful orange flame. The Dragon exults in the glory, letting loose a roar that is heard for miles. It is only in this second that her boyfriend realizes his mistake. He leaps from the truck, one of the shotguns in his hand, and pushes Georgia aside as he sprints away.

Georgia has time only to stagger backwards and raise the truck door in front of herself before the Dragon releases another fireball. Of the pieces of the truck which fly Georgia's way, most of them strike her barrier, impaling themselves in her new shield, sending shocks through her arms. One metal

shard penetrates her thigh, carving its way through from one side to the other and resting there.. She loses her balance. She rolls across the ruined pavement. By all accounts she should feel faint, having lost so much blood, but she has never felt more capable. She lies on her belly, and before her is the bent pipe she rode into battle with. She grabs it and rolls onto her back as the Dragon descends upon her. The sharp end of the pipe digs up into the roof of the Dragon's mouth. It pulls back in pain. Georgia comes with him. She pulls the pipe from his mouth. She rolls across its scalp and grabs on to one of its horns as tightly as she can. This time, she drives the pipe into its calculating eye.

The Dragon roars in pain. Half his vision is now gone. The creature's spear has come dangerously close to his brain. Were it not bent, he would surely be dead. As it stands, the creature struggles to bend it back into shape and finish him off. He can smell its blood. It washes his scales. It pours into his wound and stings. Soon, he will quench his thirst with it. He takes off into the sky, determined to shake it loose. The sky welcomes him. The town gets smaller and smaller below as he races toward the sun. He feels the creature's grip loosen.

She tumbles across the Dragon's back. Barely thinking, she grips the shrapnel in her thigh and pulls it loose. The pain is incredible, but she is beyond caring about it now. This beast will die with her. She sinks the shrapnel into one of the leathery wings of the Dragon. It splits like canvas. Gravity pulls her across it. The Dragon roars louder now. Flame pours from its mouth. They begin to tumble from the sky. She clings to her shrapnel, which in turn clings to the wing. They fall together in a corona of flame through which she can barely see. Main Street approaches quickly. The Dragon curls itself, hoping to break its fall. Georgia curls herself tightly into the Dragon's chest.

Main Street turns to dust when the Dragon lands. The beast falls through the pavement and lands in the town's sewer. The fire engine falls after it, crushing the Dragon's back as it tries to twist around. Georgia is already gripping onto its horns with both hands. It raises his head above ground level, and Georgia rides with it. She will receive no fanfare. None will parade for her, or sing of her triumph. She sees her boyfriend walk down the street towards them, with the shotgun in his hands.

She grips her spear and pulls it loose. The Dragon releases a fireball which misses Georgia's boyfriend by inches. It explodes at the base of the hill. The coward immediately ducks for cover. She drives the spear back into the socket, and this time the Dragon's breath lights the sewer around them ablaze. She tips herself forward, arcing around the Dragon's head and planting one foot squarely on the underside of its jaw. With all her might she pulls, feeling the spear bend back into shape in her hands. The Dragon opens its mouth to scream, and the spear straightens. It slips from its sheathe. Georgia falls, landing on her side at the edge of the flaming pit. Her glory will be ignored. Her strength will go unnoticed. The Dragon lurches forward, black blood streaming from the hole in its head. She stumbles to her feet, staring the beast directly in its remaining eye. She is resolved. The Dragon prepares for one final burst of flame. She pulls back the spear. Beneath the eye, she can see the orange glow of death curl between the Dragon's teeth. It is almost like he is smiling. She pulls her arm forward and the spear flies from her hand, meets its mark, buries itself in the Dragon's disfigured eye and then into his twisted brain. The final breath is released into the sky. The Dragon collapses, defeated, into the fires below.

Georgia turns and fruitlessly looks for a loved one amongst the ruins of Main Street. She finds none. Her boyfriend steps past her and begins to fire his shotgun into the pit. Each time he pulls the trigger, his whole body is pushed back. In a short while, he will be congratulated for saving her life. Georgia will not kill a Dragon again.