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THE UNLIKELY DRAGON RIDER

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Being a one-legged twelve-year-old wasn't that bad most days; today, unfortunately, wasn't one of them. The mud they were tasked with slogging through worked its way through the joint and socket of Ren's prosthetic leg. He was far behind the other cadets.

"Renly, get moving!" yelled Cadet Coach Delmar.

"Yes, sir," he called, coughing on dirt. He pulled himself through the muck as fast as he could, but it was difficult to move with his metal leg slowing him down. Then, he got an idea. He reached down, unclasped his leg, and pulled it off entirely.

"What are you doing, Renly?" Coach Delmar called.

"I'm moving, sir." He held his leg in front of him with both hands, dug it into the mud, and pulled himself forward with it. He moved way faster! Soon, he caught up to some of the other cadets.

He reached dry ground and pulled himself from the mud. It took Ren a minute to put his leg back on, and it creaked unhappily when he stood. The other cadets were already standing in line when Ren took his place next to Stride. He hoped they'd never have to swim through mud again.

"Your leg okay?" Stride whispered.

"Never better," Ren said and bumped his brother's shoulder.

Stride smiled and bumped him back. The two were twins—thick as thieves and proud of it.

Coach Delmar stood in front of the line, looking at the cadets with a frown. "Well, that was interesting. Stride, well done on being the first out of the mud. Renly, smart move with the weird leg thing."

Ren grinned.

"However," Coach Delmar continued, "you kids will need to get stronger and faster if you want to make it in rider training. Dragon-riding is much harder than crawling through mud. Your first class starts tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," said the cadets.

Ren stood a little taller. Dragon-riding. He couldn't wait.

"Get yourselves cleaned up. I don't want to see any mud in the cafeteria. Dismissed."

"Yes, sir," said the cadets.

Stride walked next to his brother back to their quarters. "Did you hear that?" he said.

"Rider Class!"

"I wonder what kind of dragon I'll get," said Ren. "Maybe a Green Chortleback. Or a Red Fireshooter."

"I'm sure you'll get a good one. That trick you pulled today made Delmar proud," said Stride. "I think you're his favorite student. You're definitely the smartest."

Ren smiled. "You're the best in our class. Dad's gonna be so proud."

"Of you too," Stride said, but Ren had his doubts.

#

The cadets whispered excitedly as they walked into the dragon loading bay the following day. It was huge! The ceiling was a large circular dome, padded with lightning-proof rubber and fire-proof metal in case of any unhappy dragon attacks. A large floor-to-ceiling window of sorts rolled back on one side of the dome for dragon entry and exit. All around the base of the dome were tunnels that led to dragon stables.

A sharp whistle sounded.

"Cadets, line up!" called Coach Delmar, and they obeyed. A whistle hung from the side of his mouth as he spoke. "Here you'll take your first riding class. Each of you will be assigned a dragon that has been trained by Driver, our head trainer. You'll learn the basics of dragon communication, care, and eventually flight. Flight Master Gordon will be your teacher for this class." Coach Delmar paused and looked around with a confused glare.

"Um, sir." Melanie raised her hand carefully.

"What is it, cadet?"

"Where is Master Gordon?"

The whistle drooped from Coach Delmar's mouth. "That's a good question, cadet."

Suddenly, wind whooshed through the loading bay. A large red dragon swooped through the entryway.

Melanie shrieked.

"Hello!" a man with crazed hair and big goggles called from the dragon's back.

"Welcome to Rider Class!"

Coach Delmar sighed and folded his arms. "Cadets, meet your instructor, Master Gordon."

The dragon landed with a powerful boom, eyeing the cadets with a hungry smirk.

"Down, Bess," said Master Gordon. He jumped from her saddle and landed on the floor with a twirl. "Can someone get her a sandwich from the lunchroom? Pastrami is her favorite."

Melanie nodded and took off.

Ren stared at Bess. He hoped his dragon was just as cool.

"Now, let's get you kids some dragons." He whistled and a line of young dragonlings no bigger than housecats strode from a nearby tunnel, led by a group of handlers.

"This is so cool!" Stride whispered to Ren. He couldn't agree more.

Coach Delmar and Master Gordon spoke too quietly for Ren to hear. Delmar pointed at the cadets one by one as Gordon nodded and made notes on a clipboard.

"What do you think they're saying?" Ren whispered.

"They're deciding which dragon each of us gets," Stride said.

Ren stood a little taller when the teachers looked his way.

By then, the last handlers were lining their dragons up across from the cadets. Blue Slithers, Clouded Bellies, Yellow Snocks—dragons of every breed were present. Ren glanced at a Red Fireshooter two dragons down from him. He hoped that one would be his.

"Attention," Master Gordon called. He walked down the line of cadets with hands proudly on his hips. "Today you will be given your dragon. There will be no switching, trading, or questioning my decision. This isn't about which dragon is the coolest. It's about which dragon is best suited to you—your weaknesses, strengths, and unique personality." He eyed Ren, who stood very still. Master Gordon winked and strode over to Coach Delmar. He took the clipboard. "Now, Tony, you get Linda."

The Spotted Saddleback's handler stepped forward.

"Cool!" Tony strode to the dragon, who chirped and ran around his legs happily.

"Next, Griffith. You're with Ezra," Master Gordon continued.

Ren bounced ever so slightly as a Clouded Belly licked Griffith's hand. He'd never been so excited.

"Melanie... ah, I suppose Melanie is still getting that sandwich."

Coach Delmar sighed. "She might never come back."

"Right, next is Stride."

Ren glanced at his brother with anticipation.

"You're with Flare."

The Red Fireshooter's handler stepped forward.

Stride looked back at Ren. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Ren shook his head and pushed his twin toward the dragon he'd wanted since he first learned about dragons. Hopefully, his would be just as cool.

Master Gordon cleared his throat. "Cadet Renly, you'll be paired with-"

"That's not happening," a deep voice called.

The cadets turned and saw a tall man with a mustache and neatly combed hair striding from the north walkway.

"Dad," said Ren. His metal leg creaked.

"Director Merrick," said Master Gordon with surprise, goggles bouncing from where they hung around his neck.

"Sorry to interrupt your class, Gordon." He glanced at Ren, who suddenly felt very small.

"No dragon for Ren."

"Ren has passed all his classes so far," said Coach Delmar. "Though he is sometimes slowed by his leg, he's smart and always finds a way to make it work. He's one of my finest students."

"I appreciate your assessment, Delmar, but I don't want my son on a dragon. My decision is final." He turned and strode away.

Ren stood, shocked and still. His heart pounded in his chest as he watched his father leave with his dreams of being a dragon rider.

"O-okay," squeaked Master Gordon. "Moving on. Steph, you're paired with..."

But Ren didn't hear him. He ran down the north walkway after his father. "Dad!"

His dad turned to him. "Ren, you're supposed to be in class."

"You promised." Ren caught up to him. He was close enough that he could see the familiar warm brown of his father's eyes. "You said I could take classes with Stride, and if I prove that I can keep up with the class, then I get to work in Dragon Bay with both of you."

His dad sighed, placing a warm hand on Ren's shoulder. "I remember our deal, Ren, and I'm so proud to hear that you're doing well in class. I knew you could do it. But I never agreed to you becoming a rider." He squeezed Ren's shoulder. "Any other position at Dragon Bay is open to you. You'll make a great teacher, trainer, or behavior analyst. But not a rider. It's too dangerous for a boy with one leg."

Ren was shocked. He'd been a cadet for almost a year now. He'd worked so hard. "But," he whispered, "all I want is to be a dragon rider."

"I'm sorry, son, but it's too dangerous with a missing leg." His father ruffled his hair and walked away.

Ren walked back to the other cadets, disappointed. What was the point of him taking Rider Class if he wasn't a rider?

"Are you okay?" Stride said, coming up next to him.

"No." Hot air puffed along Ren's neck. He looked up at the little Fireshooter perched on his brother's shoulder. "Hey, Flare." He offered the dragon his hand, and a little snout nuzzled into it. "It's nice to meet you."

Stride offered a small smile. "I'm sorry, bro, but you're welcome to hang with me and Flare anytime."

Ren nodded, but he knew Flare would never bond with him like his brother. Dragons were particular that way.

A sudden roar on the far side of the loading bay caught the boys' attention. Ren's eyes snapped up, landing on a huge grey dragon with black spines sticking up from the center ridge on its back. Five trainers with ropes wound around her snout and legs tugged her toward one of the dragon tunnels, as she growled and pulled away.

"Oh, that's gonna be a tough one for Driver," said Master Gordon. "Adult Smokelaces are pretty tough to tame, especially when they use smoke to make it difficult to see around them, but I'm sure he can do it. He's got a perfect record."

Ren's chest suddenly felt a little weird. He looked at the dragon's face—its nostrils that flared in and out, its ears that flattened on its head, and its eyes that flashed around wildly. Ren gasped. It almost looked like the dragon...

Black eyes stared directly at Ren.

#

Ren plucked at a piece of cheese hanging from his sandwich.

"Dude!"

His head jerked up.

Stride sat across from him in the busy cafeteria, petting Flare's back as the dragonling greedily licked an empty bowl.

"What?" asked Ren.

Stride sighed. "I've been calling your name for a minute. You okay?"

Ren nodded, eyes focused on a man pulling his gloves off near the cafeteria entrance. It was the same man he'd seen with the smokelace. His name was Driver? "Yeah, today wasn't great, but I'm fine."

"Okay... I'm probably gonna take Flare to the dragon baths after this..." Stride kept talking, but Ren forgot to listen.

Driver and another trainer strode past, speaking just loud enough for him to hear. "...she's stubborn, that's for sure, but I've had worse. A night crate should help her calm down and be more manageable in the morning."

"You've got her in the south wing?" said the other trainer to Driver.

Driver nodded.

"Sorry, Stride, I'd love to help you bathe Flare, but I've got homework," said Ren. He grabbed his tray as he stood.

"Seriously?" his brother called. "You're choosing homework over a dragon?"

"Next time." He dropped his tray in a stack and strode out the south hallway, stuffing his sandwich in his backpack.

His fingers fidgeted as he entered the south wing. "Hello?" he called. His voice echoed down a dimly lit hallway with large metal doors lining it on one side. No one responded. Every couple yards or so was a large, garage-like door, big enough to fit even the largest dragon, with a human-sized door next to it. The human doors had little windows, and Ren stood on his tiptoes to peek through the windows one by one. Each crate was empty.

"Hello," he called. "Smokelace? I have a sandwich." He pulled the cheesy sub from his backpack and waved it over his head.

Something scratched from the inside of a crate down the hall.

Ren ran to it, metal leg creaking. "Smokelace?" he said, peeking through the window.

Giant nostrils huffed, fogging up the glass.

Ren jerked away. "Woah, hi there." He laughed.

The nostrils moved away, and a black eye peered back at him.

"Wow, you're big." Ren tugged down on a large handle on the door. Metal creaked as the door swung open slowly. It was heavy. Ren got the door open just enough to stand in the entryway. He stared up at large grey scales that glittered along a broad underbelly.

The smokelace stared back at him suspiciously. It backed into the far corner of the crate, tail curling around it like a cat.

"It's okay. You don't need to be scared of me. Want a sandwich?" Ren offered the sub.

The smokelace's head tilted to the side, as if unsure.

"Here you go." Ren waved it.

A large tongue flicked around the dragon's lips. Then, faster than Ren could blink, the smokelace darted forward and gobbled down the sandwich.

Ren's jaw dropped. "Woah. That was awesome."

The smokelace smirked and stuck out its chest proudly.

Suddenly, Ren was pulled back by his backpack straps. The smokelace growled, and the door slammed closed between.

"What do you think you're doing?" said Driver, his beady eyes glaring down at Ren.

"I think the smokelace likes me."

"She doesn't like anyone. That was very dangerous, kid," said Driver. He dropped the backpack straps.

"So, it's female."

Driver's eyes narrowed meanly. "It doesn't concern you. Get out of here and don't come back."

"But I-"

"Out!"

Ren nodded and creaked down the hall. He smiled to himself. She was beautiful.

#

Driver always took dinner breaks at six o'clock.

At six o'clock, Ren always took smokelace breaks. "Lacey," he called her, and she puffed out her chest happily. Her favorite sandwich, he discovered was cheese and ham, which was perfect because they were also his favorite. Neither of them liked onions. Onions were gross.

Ren flicked a nasty onion onto the floor of her crate.

Lacey's tail batted it away.

It'd been over a week since Ren started sneaking into her crate, and Driver hadn't caught him once. "You know," he said, "Driver's worried you'll break his perfect streak. You're the first dragon that hasn't listened to him."

Lacey huffed and dropped her snout into his lap.

His fingers stroked her scales. "It's okay. Soon we'll show my dad how well we get along. I'm sure he'll let me keep you then, and hopefully one day we'll even get to join riding lessons." Ren smiled.

Lacey licked his knee.

And Driver, unnoticed, slipped away from the door and strode down the hallway.

#

The next day, Ren's nose wrinkled as he shoveled dragon poop on the loading bay floor while the other cadets practiced teaching their dragons basic commands. He rolled his eyes as Melanie's Purpletail hid behind a plant. The girl's dragon was as much of a scaredy-cat as she was.

"No, Cadet Melanie!" called Master Gordon. "You can't let her do whatever she wants. You need to lead your dragon, gently and kindly. She will trust you better if you do. Just look at Stride and Flare."

Flare twirled and sat, obediently following Stride's instructions. The dragon chirped happily as Stride tossed him a treat.

"Yes, sir."

Movement from one of the tunnels caught Ren's attention. His eyes widened as Driver led Lacey, growling, out into the loading bay. She was muzzled, with long ropes connecting to a saddle on her back. Her dark eyes caught Ren's, and Lacey calmed ever so slightly, allowing Driver to pull her out into the center of the bay.

"Down," Driver commanded, and she laid down a few feet from Ren. "Stay." Driver glared at her, dropping the rope.

"Taking her out for a first flight, Driver?" Master Gordon said.

"That's the plan." Driver glanced at Ren, smiling strangely. "Please keep your students away from my dragon, Gordon. I'll be right back."

"Of course."

Ren glared at Driver as he left. He kept shoveling.

"Now, as I was saying students..." Master Gordon rambled on and the class continued.

Ren peaked over his shoulder at Lacey, who grumbled continuously beneath her muzzle. He inched closer to her, pretending to shovel more poop. "Hey, girl," he whispered, setting the shovel down and petting her long neck. "This thing looks uncomfortable."

Lacey snorted in agreement.

"It's okay. We're gonna get you out-"

Suddenly, a loud airhorn blew from somewhere in the dome. Lacey jolted up with a frightened huff. Smoke poured from her nostrils, spreading around her as her wings fanned out.

"What the-" Ren jerked away, metal leg tangling with her rope harness.

Lacey took off, rope catching on Ren's leg and drawing him into the air after her.

"Ren!" someone shouted, but there was nothing they could do.

The startled dragon tore through the air, dragging Ren's leg and Ren with her. He yelled, grabbing for the rope to untangle himself, but it was too late. They took off through the entryway and out into the wild. Lacey's massive wings pulled them higher and higher, and she bellowed as she went, trying to rip the muzzle from her snout.

"Lacey!" Ren shouted, but it was difficult to talk with so much wind tossing him around.

The smokelace glanced down at him. Her belly rumbled with surprise, and she immediately steered downward. They glided around, heading back toward Dragon Bay.

Ren's leg creaked in the turn. Something clicked. He glanced at the leg as it slid ever so slightly out of the socket. "No, no, no," he said as it continued slipping. He clung to the rope. "We're not gonna make it," he yelled. "We need to land now. I'm going to fall!"

Lacey's belly rumbled. Her wings angled downward.

Ren yelled as they flew toward treetops, his leg slipping.

Treetops cleared and a large lake appeared just as his metal leg slipped away. He fell into dark, murky water with a splash. With long pulls of his arms, he swam to the surface. The cadet gasped. He searched for Lacey in every direction, but she was nowhere to be found.

A large bellow shook trees on one side of the lake. Lacey stood along the tree line, struggling against a group of men who surrounded her, shouting and tugging her toward the forest with the ropes that hung around her.

Ren swam as fast as he could, struggling against the water.

"What's this?" one of the men said and tossed Ren's leg into the lake.

No, he thought and kept swimming as Lacey and the men disappeared into the trees. He'd need his leg if he was going to get Lacey back. When he reached the area of water his leg had been tossed into, he dove down, feeling through black water. It was impossible to see anything. Ren swam to the surface with a gasp. He dove back down and tried again. Again, nothing. He tried for hours. Light dwindled on the horizon, and his teeth chattered in the cold, but he kept trying.

Up. Down. Feel around.

Up. Down. Feel around.

Up. Down. Feel—there! Something solid and smooth poked up from the mud at the bottom of the lake. Ren gripped it and pulled as hard as he could, but it didn't budge. He strained harder, but still nothing. With little air left, Ren dug at the mud around his leg as fast as he could. His father's worried face drifted into his mind. "It's too dangerous for a boy with one leg." With one hard pull, Ren tore his metal leg from the lake. He swam to the edge and tugged himself out, tiredly.

Boy and leg laid on the beach next to the lake, staring at the stars. He sat up, shook water from the leg, and reclasped it. It squeaked beneath his weight, pinching ever so slightly as he faced the dark forest.

Somewhere past the tree line was his dragon. Ren limped forward.

#

It wasn't hard to find their trail. Lacey's long tail left distinct tracks that curved through soft grass and dirt. Renly walked for hours, hopping over fallen trees and across fields. The moon offered little light on his journey.

At one point, a large creature growled from a bush close to him. Ren was frightened, but he breathed deeply, pulled his metal leg off, and banged it against a nearby tree while shouting. The loud noise did the trick. Whatever was following him tucked tail and left him in peace. Ren reclasped his leg and kept walking. Having a metal leg didn't seem so bad.

He reached a clearing with a collection of brown tents just as the sun was beginning to rise. Ren slowed his steps, tiptoeing as close as he dared to a tree at the edge of the forest. Carefully, he peaked around.

A small camp with about ten tents in a circle surrounded a dragon. Lacey! Ren thought with excitement. She was tied down with so many ropes that she was difficult to see, laid flat on her stomach with only her ears and snout sticking out.

Ren's chest hurt at the sight. He peaked further out, searching for guards. Two men sat on one side of her body, snoring. They had large bows, with strange markings on them. Poachers, Ren realized. These men were poachers who hunted dragons for their meat and scales that could be sold for large amounts of money. Ren gulped. This wasn't going to be easy.

He patted his pockets. They were mostly empty. The training weapons all cadets carried must've fallen from his pockets during his upside-down flight. Everything except a small knife that Coach Delmar jokingly called a "toothpick." Ren frowned. It wasn't much, but it was better than nothing.

He looked at the camp, formulating a plan. The sun was coming up, which meant all the other poachers would be awake soon. He had to do something now before it was too late. Ren looked around the forest floor for something to help him distract the two guards. Nothing but grass and trees surrounded him. There wasn't a single twig, rock, or pinecone. All he had was his small knife and... his leg. Ren grimaced. As silently as possible, he unhooked his leg.

Lacey's ear flickered above her head.

Ren's eyes widened, remembering that dragon hearing was far better than human hearing. She probably knew that he was there, or at least that someone was there. "Lacey," he whispered. "I'm going to create a distraction. I need you to pretend to be asleep, so they don't guard you."

Her ears flattened.

Ren smiled at the dragon. She couldn't see him, but she was obeying—letting him lead. He took a deep breath and banged his leg against the tree he hid behind. Hopefully, it would be loud enough to alert the guards, but no one else.

Their snores stuttered and snorted.

He banged the tree harder, listening as their snores cut out.

"What's that sound?" a guard said.

"Don't know," said the other. "A woodpecker?"

Ren rolled his eyes. He took a deep breath, wound up, and tossed his leg as far away from the camp as he could. Goodbye, leg, he thought.

"What the—"

"Let's go!"

Ren squeezed against the tree as the guards dashed past him in the direction of the leg. He hopped into the clearing, hoping no one else was awake. It was difficult to move without his metal leg, but he didn't think much about it as he and his toothpick made it to Lacey. He knelt and began cutting at a rope close to her front foot as fast as he could. "Lacey," he whispered. "I'm going to free your foot. As soon as you can move, I need you to help me cut the others."

She huffed beneath the ropes.

One rope snapped, and Ren moved on to another. Quick as he could he cut through two, three, four. With one talon free, he moved on to another foot.

Lacey could still barely move, but she managed to cut a couple close to her head.

"You're doing great," Ren encouraged.

Distant murmuring drifted into earshot. "That was weird."

"They're coming back," Ren whispered. He kept cutting ropes.

Lacey cut faster. She was able to move more as ropes broke around her head and feet.

But her main body was still strapped to the ground.

"...was probably just a raccoon or something," said one of the guards, nearing the tents.

"We're not gonna make it," Ren whispered. He looked around, mind whirling. "Wait, Lacey, do the smoke thing. Not too much, just enough to hide the broken ropes on the side of your body that they'll see."

The smokelace huffed. Her body shuddered, and smoke drifted slowly from her snout.

"Good. Keep going but lay still so they think you're doing it in your sleep."

Lacey laid still as smoke drifted around her.

Ren crouched against her body on the opposite side of the guards, cutting ropes as quietly as he could. Luckily, her large body hid him well.

"It's smoking," said one of the guards. "I'll make it stop."

"No," said the other. "It's asleep, look. Just leave it. The dragon is completely tied down anyway."

Ren breathed as quietly as he could, trying not to cough against the smoke. It was getting hard to see the ropes in front of him, but he crawled along her side cutting rope after rope. When

he reached her tail, he stopped. Lacey's tail, hind leg, and other side were still tied, but this was as far as he could go without being spotted.

He crawled up to her head. "Lacey, I can't cut anymore. Do you think you'll be able to break free?"

The smokelace snorted.

"I'm taking that as a 'yes.'"

She snorted again.

"What's it doing? Is it waking up?" said a guard.

"Okay, you ready?" Ren said, smoke clogging his throat. He choked on it, coughing with sudden, loud bursts.

"Someone's there." a guard shouted. "Intruder!"

Lacey reared up, struggling against the ropes that covered half of her back and tail, as Ren pulled them off her as fast as he could.

"She's escaped! Get everyone out here!" Shouts sounded around the camp.

Lacey thrashed as fast as she could, pulling her back leg free from the ropes. Her wings spread, smacking the ground.

"Wait," Ren shouted, as he did his best to climb onto her back with one leg. It was a struggle. She stilled, arching to help him. He crawled between two sharp spines and held on tight. "Go, go!" he called, and she took off.

Shouts continued from the group below. A large arrow whizzed past the dragon and rider, barely missing Lacey's wing.

Renly yelled, digging his heel into her flank to steer her to the right as he'd learned in riding class. Lacey flew to the right, avoiding another arrow. "Good job, Lacey!" he called.

"Now, go the other way." He reached down and pressed his palm into her flank where his left foot would be if he had one. It was slower, but she flew left. Another arrow whizzed past.

Lacey's wings beat against the air in large swoops, carrying them up and out of the reach of poacher arrows. Ren whooped and cheered, holding tightly to her back as Lacey flew across the lake he'd fallen into. With the sun sparkling across the water, it no longer looked that scary. In fact, nothing seemed that scary.

After all, he was riding a dragon. Finally!

The entry window was open when Dragon Bay came into view. Renly smiled as Lacey flew down into the opening. Below, Master Gordon, Coach Delmar, Driver, Stride, his class—even his father waited for him. Everyone ran toward them as Lacey and Ren landed. His classmates cheered. Ren hugged her, carefully sliding off her back. "Great job, Lacey," he whispered, leaning against her side. Her chest puffed up proudly.

"Ren!" his brother called, jumping on him. "I can't believe you're home. You flew a dragon! An adult dragon!"

"I flew a dragon!" Ren said with a big grin.

"Good landing, Cadet Ren," said Master Gordon, clapping him on the shoulder.

"Thank you, sir."

"Were you scared?" asked Melanie.

"What happened to your leg?" asked Griffith.

"Driver got in big trouble for what he did," said Tony.

"Yeah, apparently he blew the airhorn," said Stride shaking his head. "He thought the smokelace would just scare you a bit."

"Director Merrick was very angry," said Steph.

As everyone spoke at once, Ren looked through the crowd at his dad, whose face was difficult to read. The man strode through the cadets, who buzzed around excitedly. Finally, he stood in front of Ren. He glanced down at Ren's missing leg.

Ren grimaced. "It got lost. I had to toss it into a forest to get Lacey away from poachers."

His dad's eyes widened with surprise.

"I'm sorry," Ren continued. "I know it's not easy to get a metal leg-"

Suddenly, he was being squeezed between his dad's arms in a crushing hug. "I was so worried."

"Sorry, dad." Ren looked down. "I know you probably don't want me to ride Lacey again..."

"Are you kidding?" said Coach Delmar. "After that stunt, you're gonna have to. That was some of the best dragon riding I've seen in years."

Renly looked at him with surprise as his dad put him down. "Really?"

"Yes, surely your father noticed it too."

Ren glanced at his dad.

His dad sighed, but a big smile spread across his face. "Fine. You can join the dragon riding class. Just wait until your new leg comes in."

Ren and Lacey whooped.

End