

## **Winter Boots**

Written by Ashlee Winters

I stare at my ceiling while I lay on the floor next to my vent that blankets me in warmth. The shaggy green carpet being the only thing close to summery grass fields I've seen in months. And with the persistent snowy weather I don't think that'll be a sight I see anytime soon.

Elliot comes crashing through the body length mirror landing on the floor next to me with an oompf. He rises and shucks off his boots.

"How's the kingdom, prince charming?" I ask.

"Cold, how's the modern world?" he asks, plopping back beside me. He hands me a tart wrapped in a cloth. I would praise him for stealing the pastry from the kitchens, but he and I both know he wouldn't want to deal with the confrontation of being caught. I sat up accepting the treat.

"Fun, I've been laying here for hours," I say with a mouthful.

"Why don't you watch something in the picture thing?"

"The Tv. It's Grans hour. She's watching *Family Feud*," I say, leaning back. "I want to go outside. I've been in this room forever."

"We can go to the dragon stables. One of the mothers birthed an egg."

"Not enough adventure."

I turn my head to look outside the frosted window. The flakes in the air finally turn to a light dusting and an idea snaps into place. I scramble for my phone and text my mom starting dinner downstairs. I shoot a look at Elliot.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he asks.

"Park," I say. I stand throwing my phone to my bed and stride for my closet. I find one of mom's old sweatshirts and put it on then toss the other to Elliot. It hits his face before he catches it and copies me. The phone *pings* and he glances at it on the bed.

"June said 'No, you're not going alone,'" Elliot reads.

"Mom always says no," I say. I pick up my phone and send her a reply saying, 'Yes.'

"Shouldn't we listen to her, Cecelia?"

"We are," I say, heading for the door. I hear footsteps coming up the stairs and decide to lock the door instead of opening it. I head back to my closet and grab the emergency window ladder. "Technically, I'm not going alone, and she never said no to that. Help me."

Elliot lets out a groan before he opens the window and I toss the ladder out and hook the ends to the windowsill.

"Cecelia," mom calls from the other side of the door. "Why don't you help me with dinner?"

"Can't um," I look at Elliot, searching for a lie but he's nodding to go with mom instead. "A baby dragon got through the mirror and went to the park. Bye."

"What?" June and Elliot said in unison. Elliot looks to the mirror and I roll my eyes grabbing his sleeve. I shove him down the ladder as my mom tries and fails to unlock the door.

He protests and says something about shoes, and I hush him saying, "No time." Once he's at the bottom I start my way down and the door bursts open.

I'm close to the end when her head pokes through the window and she grabs the ladder. It wobbles and I lose my footing. I fall a short distance and Elliot catches me. I stand hissing at the snow burning frost across my feet and find Elliot waving at mom with a smile.

"Hi June," he says. She gives him a smile and answers sweetly. I dramatically slap a hand to my heart.

"The inclination," I say. Mom blinks.

"Do you even know what that word means?" she asks.

I could try and wrack my brain for a quick wit's meaning, but honestly I heard it on the news mom watches every morning and I felt smart saying it.

"I've got a park to go to," I say, darting off with Elliot on my heels. My mom shouts as we round the house to the gate. Elliot hops onto the door to climb over and holds his hand out to help me. I stare at it and push on the wooden gate. It trails through the snow and opens.

"I thought you said it was broken?" he asked, jumping down and rejoining me when I started running.

"I lied. I just thought it would be fun to climb," I shrug. And it was fun to climb in the summer when the cold didn't bite when you fell. Even so, our only goal now is to get away from mom.

"Why lie?" he asks.

"It's just holding back the truth. You should try it sometime; it aids you in an adventure."

"I can lie," he huffs. Once the park is only half a block away, we slow. Our breath forms large puffs of smoke. I smile and shout, throwing my hands up in victory like I won a race. I

bend to pick up snow then toss it into Elliot's face and dart for the metal structure. It was the closest thing to a castle here.

We begin our celebratory escape when my mother's pants echo across the snow. I jump off the platform and look at the jogging woman who frantically put on snow boots and a jacket. I'm just about to laugh at Elliot's expression, but a big car and two puffy policemen are on the other side of the park walking toward us. *Not good.*

"Everything alright, kids?" one asks. Elliot whorls and I can tell the police are confused about the state we are in. Out of breath, tears from the cold in our eyes, and barefoot.

"Ye-" I start, but Elliot panics.

"She's trying to kidnap us," he says. I whip my head to him, eyes wide.

One man starts saying something into his shoulder and the other asks, "Does she have any weapons on her."

"She has a knife," Elliot cries.

My mouth widens. *Not good.* All too quickly, the man's hand leaves his shoulder and chauffeurs us to the cop car and we are in the back seat as my mom is tackled to the ground. She tries fighting back and her voice muffled through the window, "Those are my kids, damnit."

"I went with your quick thinking," Elliot says, proud.

"Maybe we should leave the thinking to me," I say.

"Well, what's going to happen now?"

"I don't know, El," I say, looking at Mom. "I don't know."

"Maybe they'll give us shoes."

"How about a birth certificate?"