

Lanette the Dragon Tamer

By Brandon M. Dennis

There was once a town in a low valley called Burningham. At one time it had been nestled in the middle of a large forest, filled with animals that were so tame they would come up to the villagers' doors. A river had run along side of it, and it had been filled with fishes of all kinds—silver fish, blue fish, red fish and spotted fish. The townsfolk of Burningham had lived well off the land, but things had changed since then.

The forest had been burnt away, and all that remained were smoking stumps. The animals all ran off and the river flowed slowly, without a fish to be seen. The cause of all this mayhem was a particularly nasty dragon named Glowscale. Glowscale lived in a cave at the top of the valley and every now and then he would fly out of it during the night. When the moon was full his shadow would engulf the entire town and he would bathe the farms and gardens in flames.

Every time the dragon burned down their farms the townspeople would sow them again, for the valley was their home and they refused to leave. And so one night, as was his custom, Glowscale arrived in all his fiery terror and burnt the farms and gardens to the ground. The dragon screeched and snorted and swept up, high into the air, and flew back towards his cave with mighty a roar.

The townspeople cried and moaned and set to work mending their farms, but there was one girl who had had enough. Her name was Lanette, and she was the daughter of the local cobbler. The cobbler made the finest shoes in the region, and Lanette helped her father with the sewing. But Glowscale's latest attack had burnt the cobbler's supply shed into ashes, and all his leather and cloth and threads were destroyed.

"O, what will I do!" cried the cobbler in dismay, sifting through the charred ruins of his shed. "I fear that at last we will have to leave Burningham forever and set up shop elsewhere."

"No we won't!" said Lanette to her father, and she wore a stern frown. "I grew up in this town, and I know everyone by name. I won't let this dragon push us out of our homes!" With that, Lanette put on her most comfortable pair of shoes and walked to the blacksmith to ask for a weapon.

“What will you do with a weapon?” asked the blacksmith, eyeing the young girl curiously.

“I am going to confront that dragon and make sure he never burns our homes again!”

“But that is such a dangerous task for someone so small,” said the blacksmith very worriedly. “We villagers are no match for such a large, angry dragon, and he could eat you whole!”

“When the big are afraid, the small will do what they can,” said Lanette.

The poor blacksmith did his best to convince the girl to stay behind, but she would hear nothing of it. And so he gave her a sharp metal hook to use against the dragon.

“Thank you,” she said, grasping the hook, and next she went to see the tailor.

“I need some clothes that will allow me to sneak around quietly,” said Lanette to the tailor.

“What will you do with them?” asked the tailor.

“I am going to sneak into the dragon’s cave and I don’t want him to hear me coming.”

“You can’t do that!” said the tailor, and he clutched his face in fear. “Leave that to the boys of the town, for the dragon would stomp you into dust!”

“When the boys are afraid, the girls will do what they can,” said Lanette, and she again asked the tailor for some clothes.

“If I can’t talk you out of it, I had best find something nice for you,” said the tailor, and he rummaged through his box of clothes. He found a soft, roomy shirt and a pair of comfortable britches, which delighted Lanette very much.

“Thank you,” she said, putting on her clothes, and she moved so silently that the tailor didn’t notice her leaving his shop. Lastly she came to the chandler of the town, who made candles and lanterns. She asked the chandler for a bright candle to light her way, for the path up the hillside was long and winding.

“What will you do with a candle?” asked the chandler.

“I will use it to light my path to the dragon’s lair,” said Lanette courageously.

“Don’t go there!” exclaimed the chandler, trembling in terror. “Leave such things to the adults, and stay in the village where it is safe.”

“When the adults are afraid, the children will do what they can,” said Lanette, and the chandler could not make her change her mind. And so he gave the girl a small lantern with a bright candle inside, and he said that it would last as long as she did.

Lanette walked over to the path that led up the hill and gaped with wide eyes at its twists and turns. It was a steep path littered with many rocks, but she lifted her lantern up high and marched forward.

The night was dark and the winds howled. The winter trees were all bare of leaves and black birds perched on their limbs, staring at Lanette curiously. Brush and dead leaves clattered across the path and the full moon was obscured by thick, dark clouds. But her lantern was strong and bright, and she saw her path clearly in the night.

It wound up, up and up! and it hugged the valley closely. At times the path narrowed so that Lanette had to step sideways with her back to the valley far below her, and she moved slowly and carefully so as not to fall. At other times the trail widened and tall, barren trees made it hard to follow. But her lantern was not daunted by the trees and always found the path.

At last she reached the top and turned around. Burningham was far below her now, and she could not make out the houses. A mist had formed and filled the valley, making everything within it murky. A chill wind rose up and she shuddered, but she held her roomy shirt closely and turned away from the valley.

She stood before a large cave, the inside being black as coal. Large boulders and chipped stones were scattered all over the place, and the mouth of the cave had deep gashes in it. A light smoke trickled out of the cave with a *huff!* and a *puff!* but Lanette shook her head and stepped forward bravely, ready to face the dragon.

She put her foot down on a wobbly rock and it gave way beneath her. She slipped with a shriek and fell down hard on the rocks. The lantern clattered away from her and went out with a flicker.

“Oh no!” said Lanette, and she crawled on her hands and knees, searching for the lantern. “What will I do if I can’t see in this darkness?” She fumbled around the rocks until her hand hit something with a *clank!* The lantern! She grasped its handle and stood

up. As soon as she did, her lantern lit up brightly, and the flicker of the flame inside danced about.

“Thank you Mister Chandler, for the wonderful lantern!” said Lanette happily, and with a grin she crept towards the mouth of the dark, charred cave.

She chose her steps carefully as she tiptoed along. Inside, the walls had all been rubbed smooth by the belly of Glowscale, and the light from her lantern reflected brightly down the cavern. As quietly as a beetle she crept deeper and deeper into the cave until the dim light from the moon had disappeared behind her. She could hear her own heavy breathing and so she calmed herself down by thinking about cherry trees in spring. Oh, she loved to play in the cherry trees, for their flowers were so bright and pink! The tree near her house had thick, sturdy limbs, and she would climb to the very top, for the best cherries were always at the top of the trees. A little bird had made a nest in her tree, a green bird with white tips on its feathers, and it never flew away when it saw Lanette coming. She would stay up there with the bird and pick the cherry blossoms and weave them into necklaces for her father. But the tree had long since stopped blooming and the bird had been scared away. It was all because of Glowscale, that mean old dragon!

Before she knew it, the cave opened up into a wide chamber. It dimly glowed red so that she didn't need her lantern anymore. She set it down on the ground and it blew itself out. Now, when most people think of dragon caves, they imagine large piles of gold and jewels everywhere. But it was not so with this dragon's cave at all. A pile of nuts filled the center of the chamber, and there were many kinds of nuts. Big golden nuts, small brown nuts with hard shells, long curly nuts and round melon-shaped nuts. But what caught Lanette's attention and made her eyes open wide was the dragon himself.

Glowscale sat on his large pile of nuts and every time he exhaled a small tongue of flame burst from his nostrils. The nuts before his nose got all warm and toasted so that the chamber filled with the wonderful smell of toasted nuts. Lanette inhaled deeply and it made her smile, but she remembered her mission. She took out her long, hard hook and crept up to the snoring dragon. She tiptoed around the beast until she saw his back. The dragon's scales were thick and grooved and so Lanette crept closer and took hold of them. She stopped for a moment to see if the dragon would stir, but he snored away, toasting his pile of nuts, and she sighed in relief.

“Thank you Mister Tailor for the sneaky clothes!” she said to herself, and with the hook in hand she began to climb up the dragon’s scales. It was a long climb and the dragon’s back heaved up and down, but Lanette made it to the top, right above his shoulders and lifted her hook up high.

“This is for my cherry tree!” she said out loud, and she brought the hook down as hard as she could between the dragon’s wide shoulders.

The hook struck the scales and sparks flew.

“Ouch!” shouted Lanette and the hook flew out of her hand. She held her hand in pain and looked at where she had struck the dragon. No mark was there, not even a scratch, and she wondered why the hook had failed to harm the dragon. But she didn’t have time to think of such things, for the cave around her rumbled. The pile of nuts clattered and the dragon moaned and yawned. A gust of flame burst through the cave and it was so hot that Lanette covered her face. The dragon rolled over onto his back and Lanette was cast aside. She fell onto the pile of nuts and watched in amazement as the dragon’s face appeared before her.

It was a blunt face with a short snout. It was all black with hard, small scales, and it had long, white eyelashes. His ears were round and they twitched every now and then. His teeth curved up from his lower jaw and seemed very impractical, but scary nonetheless. The dragon yawned and smacked his lips and then opened his large eyes. They were black eyes with white pupils, and they changed shape until they were vertical, peering right at Lanette. The poor girl had found her hook and lifted it up to protect her, but her mouth gaped wide and she couldn’t say a word.

“Mmm, arrr, what’s this now?” said the dragon tiredly. He blinked a few times and peered at the girl. “What’s this I have in my cave? Is it food?”

Glowscale reached over with one of his clawed, stubby hands and picked up Lanette by the shirt. The girl shrieked as she was lifted into the air, but the dragon did not eat her. Instead he rolled onto his back, supported by his pile of nuts, and placed her on his belly.

“No, no, you are not food,” said Glowscale in his deep, dark voice. “You look like a girl. A human girl. What are you doing in my cave, human girl?”

Poor Lanette was trembling all over, but she managed to stand herself up. She looked right into the eyes of the massive black dragon and raised her pointed hook.

“I’m here to kill you, mean dragon, for burning down my trees and fields!” The dragon blinked.

“Trees and fields, trees and...oh! I remember. You must be from that little town down there. I remember trees and fields being in the valley, but that was a long time ago. I never pay much attention to what crawls on the ground though, because I’m always too busy playing in the clouds. It’s so much fun to play in the clouds!” The dragon laughed a jolly, scorched laugh and his belly wobbled around. Lanette managed to keep her feet and she stomped real hard on his belly.

“Ow! Why’d you do that?” said Glowscale.

“Because you are a mean dragon!”

“Mean? I’m not mean. I’m a nice dragon.”

“No you aren’t! Nice dragons don’t burn down fields and trees. Nice dragons don’t burn down gardens and sheds.”

“But I thought that...” started Glowscale, but he stopped. He thought about it for a minute, and the light of realization glinted in his eyes. “I thought that no one would mind.”

“Of course we mind, you silly dragon. You ruined our pretty land. You chased all the animals away and everything is charred and black now! I can’t play in the green grass anymore, and I can’t play in the fields. I can’t climb the trees or swim in the streams, and I can’t run with the deer or wrestle with the bears. Because of you there is no grass and there are no fields. There are no trees and the streams are all dry. The deer and the bears have all left this place, and its all because of you.”

The dragon sniffed and he scratched his round nose. A big, watery tear filled his eye and it splashed to the nuts below.

“I-I’m sorry,” said Glowscale, and he rubbed his face. “You see, I have been alone up here for a very long time, and all I’ve wanted were some friends. The last friend I had was a squirrel named Nugget, but he left a long time ago. Before he left I asked him if he knew how to make friends. ‘Sure I do,’ he said to me, ‘and it’s really easy too. Just fill your home with nuts aplenty, and friends will come to you!’ And so I did, I found lots

of nuts, but no one ever came. Nugget used to scratch underneath my scales for me, but now there is no one to scratch my scales. I fly out, every now and then, to cry in the moonlight. But when I'm crying I breathe lots of fire, and I never know where it falls."

"I'll tell you where it falls," said Lanette. "It falls onto my father's shack and my friend's fields. It burns everything away. You have no friends because the squirrels have all left, and they left because there are no trees!"

Glowscale cried a big wet sob and flames burst out of his nose.

"Oh, what have I done!" he said with a snivel. "You are right, young girl, to come here and kill me, for I have been a bad dragon." Glowscale lifted up one of his scales which was nearest to Lanette, exposing the skin underneath. "Do what you came to do," he said, and he turned his face away.

Lanette walked up to the scale and kneeled before the soft, white skin. She lifted up her hook but stopped. She peered at the dragon who was looking away, and he whimpered. Lanette felt awfully sorry for the big brute and she couldn't bring herself to kill him. Instead she took her hook and lightly scratched underneath his scale.

"Ooo!" said the dragon, and he giggled. Lanette smiled and scratched harder.

"Ahh!" said Glowscale, and he chuckled. Lanette got on her feet and grasped the hook with both hands. She scratched as hard as she could and the dragon rumbled beneath her.

"Hahaha! Ooo!" said the dragon, and he belched a fiery laugh.

"Thank you blacksmith, for making me such a fine scratching hook!" she said to herself. Before long the two of them were rolling around laughing, until the dragon was well enough scratched.

Lanette crawled up to the face of the dragon and planted herself on his nose.

"You must promise me," she said, "never to cry in the moonlight again. In return I will come here every day and scratch underneath you scales for you, for no dragon should ever be without a good scale scratching."

"Oh, little girl, you are so kind to me, but I don't deserve it."

"Good people are nice, even to those who don't deserve it."

Glowscale smiled and his belly rumbled.

"You have a deal, little girl! I will never cry in the moonlight again."

As the years went by the land healed, and the trees all grew back. The cherry tree blossomed again, and the green bird returned to make a nest. The bears and the deer came to play in the fields, and the stream surged back to life. The farms and gardens bore much fruit, and the town of Burningham flourished.

Lanette was hailed as a hero, and when she grew up she became mayor of the town. The poets made songs about Lanette the Dragon Tamer, and the children always came to her house to hear her stories. But every day before the sun had set, Lanette would put on her soft walking shoes, take her hard scratching hook and hike up the valley to the home of her friend to scratch underneath his scales. The valley would fill with their laughter, and when she returned home she always smelt of warm, toasted nuts.