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CHRYSOBERYL

"If I discovered a real dragon," says Mary Turzillo. "I'd convince myself that it was a gecko or a salamander. I mean, who wants to be labeled a nut?"

This editor does, that's who. But then again, I grew up in a household that encouraged a little nuttiness. In fact, for my seventh birthday I received a plaster cast of one of the dinosaur eggs discovered in the Gobi Desert. And I also received a certain novel by Mr. O. Butterworth to which "Chrysoberyl" pays homage delightfully. (You can look up the book--I'm pleased to report that it is still in print.)

Ginnie labeled the patient file, "CHRYS -- winged iguana? Owners: Jessica and Tod Fithian." She leaned back in the creaky old office chair -- her down payment on this farmhouse where she set up her new veterinary practice had left her little money for fancy furniture -- and gave the Fithians what she hoped was a sage and professional look. The three, father and two kids, were new people, part of the invasion of yuppies into this old farm community.

"We have to get rid of it," said Mr. Fithian. His nine-year-old daughter Jessica, who smelled of grape bubble-gum and baby shampoo, was clutching Chrys tearfully. "I'd turn it over to the Animal Protective League, but --"

Ginnie held her arms out for the lizard. "Does it eat anything besides kittens?" Chrys, warm and surprisingly light despite its distended abdomen, came to her and fastened its claws in her sweater. It smelled like soap and charcoal. In the spring sunshine streaming through the panes of wavy glass, its abdomen was gold, its top parts green as new grass.

"He only ate the kittens by accident," Jessica said, all belligerent defense. "We feed him mice and hamburger now."

"He toasts them himself," said Tod. Tod was six, and imaginative.

"Ha ha," said Ginnie, sorry for Tod, who was losing his pet.

The truth was, she had no idea what Chrys was. When her receptionist had ushered the Fithians into the high-ceilinged farm dining room which she had converted into a treatment room, she had thought it was an iguana. But it was the biggest iguana she had ever seen.

Not to speak of the wings.

"In your own words, kids, tell me where you found it," Ginnie said. The lizard (she refused, just yet, to call it a dragon) flicked its tongue out and licked her jaw. Its gaze fastened on her, like a puppy in love.

"We were out at Nelson Ledges," said Jessica. "Just climbing around, and we went in this big dark cave." Nelson Ledges was a local park featuring sandstone caves, once a lovers' hangout for the teen children of farmers, now an attraction for family picnics.

"It was way deep!" Tod added.

"Shut up, Tod, let me tell it," said Jessica. "Okay, we were back in the cave and we heard something moving, so I took out my flashlight that I got for Girl Scout camp -- "

"My flashlight, not your old stupid Girl Scout light."

"He's stupid," said Jessica. "Anyway, we shined the light in the corner, and it was moving like the dirt was heaving up."

"She was scared," said Tod. "I wasn't scared, but she was."

"Shut up! Anyway, Doctor Ginnie, I started digging to see what it was --"

"Just like kids, no caution," said Mr. Fithian.

Jessica rolled her eyes. "And we dug out this pretty egg."

"It was way big!" said Tod. "And it was green with brown speckles, and it was shaking!"

"So anyway," said Jessica, ignoring Tod, "I wrapped it in my Girl Scout jacket and we took it to the car."

"They didn't let on they had it," said Mr. Fithian.

"Describe the egg," said Ginnie, avoiding Mr. Fithian's gaze.

Mr. Fithian looked sternly at his children. "When we got home, they hid it, but I knew something was up. It wasn't a bird's egg. Seven inches long. Rubbery. And something was trying to get out. I let them use a knife -- "

"And we cut it a little and this little dragon flops out! He was all slimy and his tongue hung out and his eyes were closed and he was panting like anything and -- "

"They didn't know what to do," said Jessica, "but in my Girl Scout meetings they told us to keep little animals warm, so I put some baby blankets in the carton my in-line skates came in -- "

"And when he got too big you brought him to me," said Ginnie. The lizard -- or whatever -- was now a plump yellow and green creature, with membranous wings that folded almost like a geisha's silk fan on either side of its spine. And it

had eaten the neighbor's kittens.

"They named him Chrysoberyl," said Mr. Fithian.

"That's a green gemstone," said Jessica.

Fithian looked tired. "He eats five pounds of raw beef, once every nine days. He sleeps a lot after that, but when he's active he can be a real pain."

Reluctantly, he reached over and scratched Chrys's crest.

Ginnie carried the lizard across the room, the uneven floorboards creaking underfoot, and hoisted it onto the stainless steel examination table. It immediately tried to scramble back into her arms. "Sorry, baby," she said. "I'm still trying to figure out what you are." Ginnie was used to a variety of patients. She did treat the occasional barnyard animal, though most farmers were loyal to old Dr. Newton in the Falls. But the suburbanites, who supplied most of her patient load, sometimes chose exotic pet-store beasts: pythons, chinchillas, pygmy hedgehogs. "Can you tell what he is from the X-rays?" Fithian asked.

Ginnie sighed. "Not really. I need to do some research."

Chrys's temperature was a steady 102.5 degrees. Hot for a lizard. Its heart -or hearts, because she suspected it had another one at the base of its spine -- beat at about 120 a minute. Thank God it wasn't sick. Doctoring lizards was always chancy, and who knew how this one would respond to standard iguana treatment?

"Has he flown yet?"

Fithian glanced nervously at his children. "Well, that's a problem. He does, and he's fond of birds."

"He ate a robin," said Tod.

"But we told him he was only allowed to eat pigeons and crows, and he's been good since then," said Jessica.

Fithian rolled his eyes.

"I could keep him," said Ginnie.

"You realize, Chrys," she said, when they were alone, "you aren't allowed to eat people's kittens."

Chrys stared at her adoringly. He had topaz-yellow eyes with slit pupils, like a cat, but somehow he managed to convey doglike devotion with them.

"Your former master Mr. Fithian is a widower. Wish I had the nerve to flirt with him," she said. She was accustomed to discussing her problems with the livestock, and she figured Chrys wouldn't betray any confidences. "You'd think

in a profession where men outnumber women five to one I'd be Ms. Popularity. I bet I'm the only veterinarian in my graduating class that doesn't have a spouse and kids by now."

Chrys flap-clawed his way into her lap and licked her chin.

"You stop that! Want some hamburger? God, how am I going to feed you? I wonder if Alpo makes dragon kibble?"

Chrys looked small and lonely in the big farmhouse dining room. He leaned his head against her bosom.

"You're kinda cute," she said. "I guess somebody loves me."

Ginnie closed her rural veterinary clinic on Wednesdays, so that seemed like a good day to take Chrys up to the Natural History Museum in the city for an opinion as to his species and proper care.

With a touch of apprehension, she arranged a nest for Chrys in her station wagon. It was a good hour's drive to the museum. She hoped she could get him in a safe cage, but if he would just ride beside her, that was okay.

And he disappeared.

"Come out of there or I'll make a pair of boots out of you!" she yelled down the basement stairs. The basement smelled wet and very old, which it was. She poked every spiderwebbed cubbyhole with a broom, shone the light into every musty crack.

"Oh my God! I bet he ate Mrs. Begezda's cockapoo!" Ginnie flew back upstairs and did a quick count of the patients. None were missing.

At four thirty, Chrys sauntered into Ginnie's apartment, above the clinic. He placed his front paws on her lap, folded his wings back, and stared soulfully into her eyes.

"Where were you?"

Chrys jumped up in her lap, a chubby bundle of love, then jumped down and began clawing at the chipped enamel of the refrigerator door.

"Now it's too late to take you to the museum! No! No more hamburger! I don't even know if it's good for you."

She worked up her nerve to call and make another appointment. In preparation, she took pictures of Chrys in case he pulled another disappearing act.

Which he did.

Ginnie wore her best jeans, a pretty blue blouse, and jade pendant. She felt a

nice appearance would lend credence to her tale, undergirded by the photos. She drove through farm country mixed with new housing developments, then through city streets, into University Circle with its venerable stone edifices, and, screwing her nerve up, penetrated the hidden labs of the museum.

"Hey, these are great!" said Dr. Beasley, the head of the reptile division. They were in a large, cluttered preparation room gloomy with late afternoon sunlight streaming from windows high in the wall through dust particles suspended in the air. His assistant peered over his shoulder. "How did you do that? Is it supposed to be a pterodactyl? Cause if it is, you got the wings wrong, and it has too many -- "

"He's alive," Ginnie said. "Some kids brought him in. He hatched out of an egg they found at Nelson Ledges Park."

"Ha, ha, that's great," said Dr. Beasley. By this time a small crowd had gathered around the black table where Ginnie had spread the photos.

"Could you do some displays like this for our fall dinosaur display? We could talk about budget later," said the Special Projects director, Dr. Zinsmeister.

"He's not a model, he's real," Ginnie said. Her voice didn't carry very well.

"Give me a number where we can reach you. Anybody that can put something like this together, we can use. You ever volunteer here before?"

"I don't think it looks real," said a snotty-looking blond man.

"Come on, Phil," said Zinsmeister. "The anatomy is off a little, but I'm sure she can fix that up."

"You want to see the X-rays?" Ginnie asked softly. She pulled them out of an envelope and shyly passed them to Beasley.

"Hm," said Beasley. "That's a cute idea, too. Hoke it up so the kids can imagine the fossil skeleton is an X-ray."

"They're real," said Ginnie. But her mouth was so dry nobody heard her.

Almost in tears, she gathered her photos and fled into the dark hallway flanked by faded window displays of stuffed birds.

One of the volunteers, an Asian man of about thirty, came up beside her. "I'll walk you to your car," he said. "There've been some muggings in the parking lot."

Ginnie was too miserable and embarrassed to say anything, but she let him follow her through a maze of offices and labs, into the display rooms, and out the public entrance of the building to the lot where her rusty Ford station wagon was parked.

"Don't mind Phil," said the young man, "He's a pain."

Ginnie suddenly became aware of the fact that the Asian man, standing there with the breeze ruffling his dark hair, was quite cute.

"Well, here's my car," she tried to say, but her mouth was so dry nothing came out. She yanked on the car door several times before she remembered the locks were broken and she had to climb in through the tailgate. She managed a sickly grin and opened the rear door, hoping the young man would go away before she had to go through the ignominy of crawling in on hands and knees.

The young man lingered. His eyes were brown-black and suggested a playful nature. She wished he'd leave.

"Those photos were real, weren't they?" he said.

"Yes. That's what I was trying to say." Caught off guard, Ginnie discovered she could speak.

"How do you think the egg got in that cave?"

"That's what I was hoping they'd help me find out."

"But they had to act like airheads. Hm. I would love to see your dragon."

He called Chrys a dragon, thought Ginnie.

The young man said, "My name's David Yin. I'm a grad student in geology. May I drive out to your clinic and see the dragon?"

"I -- uh suppose." Ginnie's voice was drying up again.

"Fine. Tell you what. I'll take you to dinner."

"Oh, I'm sorry, that would be absolutely impossible. I'm tied up for the next two decades," said Ginnie. Or tried to say. Actually, her voice failed completely. David Yin smiled and shook her hand. His own hand was warm and strong.

Ginnie could hardly breathe.

A week later, David turned up at the battered screen door at the rear entrance of the clinic with a chuck roast and a camera.

Ginnie was wearing a gray sweatsuit with dachshund vomit on it. Her glasses had been repaired with a twist-tie and her socks didn't match.

"Where's the dragon?" David said, closing the screen door gently behind him. "I brought him a present." He plopped the roast on the exam table and started

unwrapping it.

"How did you know where to find me?" Ginnie tried to ask.

"Ancient Chinese secret. Phone book." David peeked around the door of the examination room. "You let him run free?"

"I think he's in the basement."

"Does he like beef?"

Ginnie led David down the creaky stairs into the basement, which smelled and felt cold as a cave. "Chrys," she called into the dimness of the light shed by one naked bulb. She kicked a cat collar off the broken bottom step. "That's funny. He usually comes running when I call."

David bent over and picked up the cat collar. "Did you lose this?"

The cat collar was a gold anklet.

She shook her head; she didn't recognize it. "Chrysoberyl," she called. "A nice man wants to see you. He has a treat."

The single bulb went out. "Dam! Must be a breaker. Let me get a -- "

A ferocious growl blasted them.

David grabbed her hand. "Was that -- ?"

Out of the dank shadows a flaming shape erupted. It rushed straight at them, flapping huge wings WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH and screaming YEEEEOWRRR. Ginnie pushed David up the stairs and scrambled after him. She slammed the door behind them and shut her eyes.

When she opened them, she saw that David's shirt was torn, burnt, and covered with blood. "Oh, no! Chrys has never done anything like this before." She pulled David into the smaller treatment room that she had created from the farmhouse pantry, opened the shirt, and examined the three parallel gashes in his chest. "I'm so sorry!" Shakily, she cleansed the wounds, applied antiseptic, and bandaged them.

"I just had a tetanus booster," David said, grinning and following her back into the lab. "Geologists have to be careful."

"But what about other diseases? Oh, God, Komodo dragon saliva is actually toxic!"

"Now, now," said David. "That obviously was not a Komodo dragon. How does he react to your other patients?"

"You mean the animals, or their owners? He's sweet as a kitten. People come here just to pet him. I've doubled my practice since I adopted him. Oh, Mr. Yin, I'm so sorry."

"Mister Yin? I hope you get over that before dinner's over."

Ginnie was suddenly aware that she was standing alone in her kitchen-turned-veterinary-lab with an attractive man who was naked to the waist. She blushed.

David cocked his head and looked at her. "You're bashful, aren't you?"

Ginnie felt the blush travel all the way down her neck, over her body, to her fingertips. "No," she said. But her voice was gone.

"Well, that's okay," he said. "Could you lend me a shirt?"

Wordlessly, Ginnie dashed upstairs into the rooms she had made into her apartment and grabbed an oversize flannel shirt. On the way past her bedroom mirror, she noticed what a mess she was. She pulled off her dirty sweatsuit, pulled on a cotton sundress, yanked a comb through her hair, and jabbed her contacts in. No time for makeup.

David was listening intently at the basement door when she returned. "He's making whuffling noises," said David. "Like he was crying. You think he's jealous?"

When Ginnie, sated with Turning Leaf Merlot and penne with clam sauce, returned that night, Chrys galloped up the rickety stairs and laid his head in her lap. He made small whining noises.

"Bad dragon! Bad!" she said. "What is wrong with you? Are you turning into a mean adult?"

Chrys was now as tall at the shoulder as a German Shepherd, so she was glad she had drawn the line by not allowing him in bed with her. She already had two cats, a mutt, and a lop-eared rabbit to snuggle with.

The next morning she explored the basement, using a powerful flashlight to pierce the ancient gloom. Chrys had created a nest for himself on the dirt floor -- out of junk jewelry. He had settled himself in the middle of it, and he raised his head inquiringly when she found him.

"You insane animal!" Apparently the cool metal must feel good to him. She wondered: perhaps he had a hot spot on his breast, like many birds, which made him want a cool egg underneath. Or cool metal.

He had nice taste, too. The jewelry was pretty. She felt guilty allowing him to keep it, but of course it was just costume junk despite whatever sentimental value it might have to its owners. And how would she ever find out who it



belonged to?

David called, this time to make an appointment for a friend's ferret, which needed to be neutered and descented. He arrived in a little red Honda, tires crunching on her new gravel parking strip.

Ginnie felt apprehension as she watched him drive up. On the one hand, he made her feel almost comfortable. On the other, she was impossibly awkward in front of men. They always saw right away that she was a complete nerdess (the feminine of nerd, in OSU veterinary school slang), and left her alone.

But she was dressed to kill this time. Silk shirt to match her jade pendant. New jeans with little zippers on the pockets. Contacts and eye makeup. She need only whip off her lab coat to be ready to impress him.

That was, if she could work up her nerve to open the door.

Recklessly, she figured she would go out into the driveway and welcome him.

"Oh, hi!" he said, smiling casually. "The ferret's in the back seat."

Also in the back seat was a box of rocks and a kit of tools. The ferret's beady black eyes fastened suspiciously on Ginnie as she lifted it out of its box, holding tight to its leash. "Is that Chrys up on the roof?" asked Dave as they walked to the clinic door.

Chrysoberyl was crouched on the high, gingerbread dormer, wings in menacing half-spread position like a vulture over prey. His eyes were full of fire and his lips drawn back in a snarl. She could hear the ancient roof slates cracking under his weight. He shifted from one foot to the other and leaned forward.

"Look out!" Ginnie screamed, almost too late.

"YEEEORRWLLLL," screeched Chrys, and swooped down at them. Ginnie instinctively shielded the ferret with her body, but she could feel the breeze from Chrys's wings on her back.

"Good lord," said David, getting slowly to his feet. "I don't think your buddy likes me."

"I didn't realize he could fly at that weight," said Ginnie.

David brushed grass and dust off her shirt. "Take the ferret inside. I have a feeling I'm not wanted in there."

Ginnie almost burst into tears.

Dave laughed. "But you come back out. I want to look at the cave where you say Chrys's egg came from."

The ferret, a hysterical lightning bolt of fur, was put into a cage in the kitchen-turned-lab in readiness for its procedure the next day. Ginnie and Dave spent a satisfying evening exploring Nelson Ledges. Ginnie led him to the cave where she believed the Fithians had discovered Chrysoberyl.

"Interesting" said Dave. "It looks like there might have been a nest of some kind here, arranged like hadrosaur eggs. But it's hard to tell. I'd have to excavate the whole area, maybe do castings."

They ate curly-fries and cave-dogs at a stand near the park.

By the end of the evening they were holding hands.

Ginnie couldn't believe it. "You seem to like me," she whispered.

"You're cute, and bright, and you've got a kind heart," said Dave. "Most people would try to put that dragon into a cage instead of giving it free access to their home."

"I don't think you should come in," she whispered. She glanced significantly at the high roof of the clinic. Back-lit by the moon was the brooding figure of the dragon.

"Now look," she told the dragon some days later. "You're getting too big for this behavior. Dave's the only one you don't like. What's wrong? He's a nice guy. He's trying to help me figure out what you are."

Chrys looked at her with sad, loving eyes. He didn't have to look up at her anymore. He was now as tall at the shoulder as she was. Had to be supplementing his diet, she thought. Maybe on stray cats, road-kill, or -heaven forbid -- local farmers' chickens and ducks. The side of beef she bought from a neighboring farmer had lasted less than a month.

"And you've got to stop stealing junk jewelry!" The heap in the basement was growing. She got the Fithian children to go down with a flashlight to see if they recognized any missing property, but Chrys just plopped himself on top of it and refused to move. He did roll over on his back and allow his belly to be scratched, but he wouldn't get off the treasure-trove until they left.

"I know I'm fooling myself," she said, stroking his crest. He closed his eyes dreamily. "You have to be a dragon. That's what you are. But dragons are a myth. So -- what are you?"

"Where's your jade pendant?" asked Dave, the next time they met.

Her hand stole to her throat. The ribbon was still around her throat, but the pendant was gone. "Oh, no! This time that pesky dragon has gone too far!"

"Listen, I'm worried about you. We don't know what's going on in that reptile's mind. If he developed an antipathy like that to me, what might he do to you?"

"I thought dragons were good luck."

"Oriental dragons. Chrys is clearly a St. George-type dragon."

"What should I do with him? Sell him to the knackers for dog food?"

"I don't know. Try to get Beasley to look at him again."

"In your car, or mine?"

Dave laughed and kicked at a rock. "Well, maybe I could talk Beasley into coming out here."

"Chrys would hide," she said miserably.

"He's hard to conceal these days. He's the size of a pony."

"But not as heavy. He can still fly, and he'd just flap away and lurk in somebody's barn until Beasley went home."

"And you don't think he's dangerous?"

"Not to me. He loves me."

"Because you're a virgin?"

Ginnie felt the world tilt. Her face went hot and red. "Yes."

Dave smiled, then went serious. "Have you ever thought why dragons love virgins?"

"It's like unicorns," she said. But she knew that wasn't so. "Or maybe they identify with virgins because dragons can reproduce by parthenogenesis. Isn't that part of the myth?"

Dave stopped in the pathway and held her hand. His eyes lost their customary playfulness. "Or -- maybe he's just waiting until he's big enough to eat you."

Ginnie decided she was in love with Dave. He was sweet, smart, funny, kind, and good-looking, too.

But it was a triangle. Chrysoberyl loved Ginnie; Ginnie loved Dave.

And Chrysoberyl was growing.

Winter came, and Chrysoberyl perched on the roof in driving sleet, or went for longer and longer flights. Ginnie would sometimes catch glimpses of him soaring over snow-covered cornfields or the rooftops of new housing developments, his great wings beating the air like the fins of a manta ray. He was glorious, he

was huge, and he was a complete mystery.

He still returned to the clinic, although now she had to trudge into the snow-drifted back yard to pet him. His warm breath melted the snow on her lashes, and his tongue felt like a big hot towel. "Chrys, are you going to eat me?" she asked him. "Would you let me ride your back, like a dragon in those science fiction novels?"

He still guarded the farmhouse and refused to let Dave into the downstairs clinic or the upstairs apartment.

And he was still able to crawl through the storm cellar doors into the basement, to guard his hoard. Anytime Ginnie brought anyone to look at the jewelry, he scrambled down the outer steps instantly, as if he smelled the intruder, and fended them off.

"He needs a mate," said Dave shortly.

"You need a mate," said Ginnie.

"You've really come out of your shell, haven't you?" asked Dave, scowling down his nose at her. He kissed her, and pulled her down in the snow with him.

"Bad! Bad geologist!" she said, laughing and washing his face with snow.

"Good geologist," he said. "Let me show you how good."

And then Chrys flew away, and didn't come back.

"So what do we do now?" she asked Dave. For the first time since she had met him, they were seated in the small kitchen she had made out of the farmer's bedroom, drinking mulled cider and eating cheesecake. One of the cats was sitting on Dave's lap; the bunny was chewing his shoes.

"Well, you could put an ad in the Crops and Shops section of the Country Herald. Unless you feel you're well rid of him."

She suddenly felt bereft. "Don't say that! He was a sweet dragon."

"If he was a dragon. I only saw him a few times. Maybe we hallucinated him."

"He was real!" She burst into tears. "The Fithian kids saw him. Lots of my patients' owners came and petted him."

"I guess he was real, then." Dave leaned over and stroked her hair.

"I can't put an ad in the paper. 'Missing: ten-foot-long dragon, green with gold belly; eats livestock and Chinese geologists.' Give me a break."

One afternoon Dave gave her a news clipping from the Cleveland newspaper. It was

a photograph of a gargoyle on a church in Ohio City, and sitting next to the gargoyle --

"Good Lord! That's Chrys!" said Ginnie.

The snapshot, taken by a seventh grader, had won first prize in a photo competition.

A few months later, she got a letter from Tod Fithian.

"Dear dr Ginnie, can I take some pichurs of Chrys? My sister says we can sell them to Ranger Rick. P.S. I saw him flying up over the lake but he wood not come to me darn it."

Twice as many UFO sightings were reported in Northeast Ohio as usual that year.

"Geese," explained an official source at Lakefront Airport.

Ufologists connected the sightings with the disappearance of cattle, sheep, and watchdogs, hinting of weird alien experiments.

"Careless hunters," explained the agent at the Agriculture Extension Service.

Mrs. Begezda, picking her cockapoo up after Ginnie had cleared up yet another gum infection, stopped short as she was walking out. "Whatever happened to that big lizard you had here?"

"It flew away. Every so often somebody reports seeing it, but it just -flew off." Ginnie's voice quavered a little.

Mrs. Begezda pursed her lips reflectively. "Do you know where I could get one like that for my grandson?"

The night before she married Dave, Ginnie had a dream. She was a girl again, maybe twelve years old, the age at which she had first discovered how she could indulge her love of animals all the rest of her life without being thought a loony. It was a wonderful revelation; she would be an animal doctor. She would save premature puppies and cats that had been hit by cars and horses with mysterious diseases. And she could keep as many pets as she wanted: snakes and turtles and goats and jerboas.

In the dream, she was climbing the highest tree in a stand of maples. Around her, the wind sighed and birds queried her presence. But she climbed upward, finding more and more precarious handholds, until she came out of the luminous green leaves into the sunlight. She looked down at a forest filled with life.

And a great bird beat its wings, soaring out of the sun. It was flying toward her, to bear her higher still.

Then she woke up, and it was time to put on her wedding dress.

That fall, just after Ginnie's amniocentesis revealed she was expecting a daughter, Dave decided to clean the eaves out. He came down the ladder, his face smeared with leaf-mold. "Chrys has been here," he said.

"He hast How do you know?"

"She. And I know because she left you a present."

Ginnie climbed the ladder, her abdomen bumping awkwardly against the rungs, and found the egg in an angle of the eaves between the porch and the main part of the clinic. It was green and brown, half covered with leaves. Parthenogenesis? Or had there been other eggs in that cave nest at Nelson Ledges?

And underneath, among the leaves, was her jade pendant, cool and smooth. She held it up for Dave to see.

He laughed. "The little -- er, big -- thief brought it back!"

"And what about the egg? Can it be a gift?"

"More a way of Chrys asking us to raise her daughter with our own."

"I would never -- after the way she treated you?"

"Oh, I suppose brute instinct convinced her I was her rival. But in the long run, she was what brought us together, you know."

"Oh, what hogwash! I should give this egg to the Natural History Museum." Ginnie held the pendant up to the sun, so that it glowed green, with flaws sparking golden lights, like Chrys's eyes. In her heart she knew they would never, never give the egg up. They would have to be very careful, of course, but they would hatch the new, tiny dragon.

And perhaps it would bear gifts to her daughter that, at this moment, she couldn't even imagine.