



Albert and the Cheshire Dragon

Rae Leigh

Retold Fairy Tales

An abnormal and unsociable boy sat at the bottom of his favorite tree. While other boys tossed a ball or traded buttons, bugs, and reptiles, Albert was only interested in his books. Tales of dragons, fairies, and epic adventures were far more interesting to the young schoolboy than anything his peers had to offer.

As Albert leaned against the giant oak, he hungrily devoured every word of the tale about a knight who sought after his dragon-napped lover. He had been reading all afternoon and failed to notice the sun setting in the distance.

His head dipped forward and his eyes crossed over the words on the page, still he refused to allow the fatigue to claim him. His eyes closed for nigh a moment before he jerked awake with a start.

He had managed to prop his eyes open for only a few seconds, when suddenly, a rabbit thudded across his lap and knocked the book from his hands.

"I'm late! I'm late! Oh dear how could I be late!" The rabbit exclaimed and retrieved a pocket watch from the inside pocket of his waistcoat.

Albert jolted backwards at the sight of the talking dressed rabbit.

“I say, how curious! And who do you belong to pet rabbit? You are finely dressed and obviously very smart!” Albert asked the rabbit, leaning forward in attempt to touch the creature.

“I’m late! I’m late! That’s what I am, late!” It replied and quickly bounded off with Albert following as best he could.

“Wait Rabbit! Late to what? May I join you?”

The rabbit leapt over a log and disappeared down a burrow. Albert stopped at the entrance and knelt to peer into the hole.

“Rabbit? Please allow me to join you, I would very much love an adventure.”

Albert had hoped the rabbit would reappear, but his own echo was all that came back from the burrow.

He stuck his arm down the rabbit-hole, hoping to feel the rabbit, but pulled it back quickly when he felt air begin to suck it down.

“Hmmm.” He thought, and almost stuck his hand in again when a voice murmured something soft behind him at the same time that something fluffy brushed his cheek.

He looked away from the burrow and focused on his surroundings, but saw nothing.

“Hello? Who is there?” He stood.

A chuckle came from the tree next to him, but still, nothing was in sight.

“I’m afraid I can’t see you dear friend. How may I address you? I am Albert.”

The boy outstretched his hand and walked towards the tree, looking up to the branches. He expected to see a squirrel or other some such forest animal, but nothing appeared.

“Albert. A strong name I suppose.” The voice hissed in an eerie tone, hardly above a whisper.

“Of course it is a strong name. I’ve read of the bravest knights called the same. What is yours?” Albert replied, turning in a circle as he still peered into the tree tops.

The furry item touched his face again and he turned. A ball of white fur floated at eye-level, attached to

nothing. It resembled the end of a poodle's tail, just, without the poodle.

Albert reached to touch it, but it jerked away from him and before he could take a step to follow it, a massive black dragon appeared in the branches.

Its wings were folded on its back, and its tail rose into the air, almost taller than the tree itself. The dragon's black scales were outlined in red and its teeth were unlike anything Albert would have imagined belonging to a dragon; they were almost human-like. It also had a wickedly, mischievous smile on its face.

The dragon would have been a sight of pure terror if not for the white balls of fluff that adorned its body. Hanging from the claws of its wings, two from each ear, and all along its tail, the white "poodle-tails" made the dragon look like a Christmas tree. In fact, what came to Albert's mind, was that if this dragon belonged to a King's court, it was most certainly the jester.

"A real-life dragon!" Albert exclaimed.

The dragon dropped slowly from the tree with almost no noise, as if he were floating through the air. Albert thought that it was odd when certain body parts of the dragon disappeared and reappeared as it moved.

"Are you not the least bit afraid young Albert?" The dragon hissed again in his enchanting voice.

"I see no reason why I should be. Say, what is your name? Surely a dragon as unique as you has a title." He asked.

"Of course, they call me the Cheshire Dragon. You are a brave soul, young Albert. Would you offer me some assistance?" The dragon continued to blink in and out of visibility, as if he were struggling to exist.

"Well, kind dragon, I was just about to follow the rabbit-" Albert began.

But the Cheshire Dragon interrupted, "The rabbit can offer you no new adventure because he loves to relive the same tale over and over again." Then the dragon leaned forward and looked at Albert with those mischievous eyes before he said, "He is only late to tea."

Albert thought a moment and looked over to the rabbit hole, contemplating what he should do.

"Tea does sound rather boring." He finally said, still unsure which adventure would please him most.

“Of course it is, I’m sure you take tea every day.” The dragon replied with a sly smile.

“Very well Cheshire Dragon, I will help you. What is it that you need?” Albert made up his mind and waited for the dragon to provide him with more information.

But instead of answering, the dragon’s body disappeared; all except for its mouth, which had curved into huge, toothy smile. Then all at once, the dragon’s smile disappeared and Albert’s world began to swirl around him. The blurriness of everything turning and twisting made him nauseous and he let out a yell when the same feeling of his hand being sucked down the rabbit-hole suddenly surrounded his entire body, like a vacuum sucking him into the ground.

The forest he was vanishing from swirled and turned into only blurry colors as he felt himself falling... and falling... and falling....

Albert yelled as he fell through the waves of color. Blue, red, pink, purple, yellow, and so many other colors surrounded him, but they never mixed to make black. He felt as if he were descending over a waterfall made entirely of paint. He laughed when he thought of the more appropriate name: paintfall.

Then all at once, he fell through a ceiling and he crashed into a table. All the colors disappeared and he was left in a, now messy, dark room. The only light in the room came from what looked like a keyhole to a door; albeit a very, very small door in the corner of the room. Whatever light was coming through the such a small keyhole sure was bright.

The table Albert had landed on had apparently been holding dishes of food only moments before, because now someone’s lunch was strewn all across the floor.

“I do apologize.” Albert called out as he looked around for the owner of the table. “I seemed to have crashed into your table, completely by accident I assure you!”

No one answered. Albert’s eyes adjusted to the dimness of the room and he looked at the mess he had inadvertently caused. He felt bad.

“I’ll have it spit-spot in no time!” Albert called to the non-present owner and began picking up plates and cups

and placing them onto the table.

A small pot of tea was broken on the floor and Albert made his way to retrieve it.

“I wouldn’t touch that if I were you.” A voice said so close to his ear that he felt the being’s breath touch his ear and travel down his neck.

Albert jumped and spun around, despite having recognized that eerie voice.

“Please Cheshire Dragon, don’t do that! You frightened me!” Albert placed a hand over his heart and willed his breathing to slow down. The dragon slowly revealed its body from tail to head. He sure did like to be invisible.

“I was simply saving you from a grave mistake, although,” the dragon seemed to reconsider, “it would be a rather humorous mistake.” That toothy smile appeared again.

“I’m simply cleaning up the mess I caused. There is no mistake in that.” Albert retorted and quickly picked up the teapot from the puddle of liquid it had been sitting in.

His fingers only barely touched the liquid, but he felt the tingling sensation instantly. Traveling up his arm and then quickly covering his entire body until it reached his toes, then snap! He blinked his eyes and watched with horror as his surroundings shrunk, including the Cheshire Dragon.

His head bumped the ceiling of the room and he had to bend his neck forward to allow his body to fit. His shoulders and arms weren’t able to move because of the sudden nearness of the walls, and his legs cramped under the stress of being too long for the room. Then it dawned on him, his surroundings hadn’t shrunk; he had grown into a giant!

Uproarious laughter came from the floor and Albert realized that it was the Cheshire Dragon, now so small that he could probably fit in the palm of his hand. The dragon laughed and rolled around on the floor, changing colors and disappearing and reappearing as he did so.

“This isn’t funny Cheshire Dragon! Tell me how to be a small boy again!” Albert called, starting to feel the pain of being smashed.

“I told you not to touch it! So I’m entitled to a good laugh!” The Cheshire Dragon replied and continued in his over-dramatic hysterics.

Albert caught himself on the verge of hyperventilation, which was his normal reaction to closed in spaces.

“Please Cheshire Dragon! I feel as if I shall faint!” Albert begged.

The Cheshire Dragon stopped laughing and looked up at him, then turned invisible. Albert almost called for him again when he suddenly appeared, floating, at Albert’s eye-level. The dragon’s eyes were squinting, as if he were deeply assessing the situation.

“You do look pale. Alright! I’ll tell you.” The dragon said and then sat down on Albert’s nose. The white ball on the very tip of the dragon’s tail tickled the end of Albert’s nose and he tried not to sneeze. But the reaction happened too fast for him to control. He sneezed.

When he opened his eyes again, the dragon was on the floor once more. None too happy either.

“I’m sincerely sorry Cheshire Dragon. Your tail must have-”

“Yes yes I know! Just take two bites of the bread from the table and you’ll be normal again.” The dragon huffed and turned his back to Albert, now giving all of his focus to cleaning the mucus from his body.

“But I can’t reach the bread-”

“Well that’s too bad for you isn’t it? I’m busy.” The dragon interrupted yet again, still cleaning his body.

Albert craned his neck to see where he had placed the bread on the now itty-bitty table. There! Just on the far edge of the table. He was lucky his foot hadn’t squished the table as he grew to the unnatural size, but there it sat, unharmed, merely an inch from his left foot.

He tried to move his right arm to grab the bread, but his arm was stuck between the wall and his body. He struggled with it for a few seconds before trying with his left arm. It didn’t budge either.

“Cheshire Dragon I can’t move!” Albert complained, beginning to feel the severity of the situation. Both of his hands had begun tingling.

The dragon ignored him. Albert looked down at his left arm and he realized that if he leaned towards his right

arm, the left would come free. The only problem was, his right arm would probably hurt with all his weight against it.

Making up his mind to just get it over with, he pushed his body against his right arm and pulled his left arm free. The pain caused him to shut his eyes tightly, but once his left arm was free, he was able to readjust to give himself some more room.

Not even waiting a moment after his hand was free, he reached for the bread, which was the size of his fingernail before he touched it. Once it was in his hands however, it grew to the size of a normal loaf in his hands.

“Magic bread!” Albert exclaimed.

“Remember! Two bites!” The Cheshire Dragon called from his place on the floor.

Without hesitating, Albert bit off two giant pieces of bread, chewed them quickly, and then swallowed.

“Nothing’s happ- woah!” Albert wasn’t able to finish his sentence before he started shrinking. But, he shrunk too far. Before he was even able to stand at his normal height, he became the size of a small mouse.

“No!” Albert yelled, then overwhelmed with emotion, he sat down on the floor and buried his head into his knees. Trying to hold the tears back.

“Now now Albert, this is not a problem that can’t be fixed.” The Cheshire Dragon, now intimidatingly huge, said with a smile.

“Why did I shrink to this size?” Albert asked, looking up with tear stained cheeks.

“Because you took two bites of the bread, if you would have only taken one, you would be normal boy-size.” The dragon answered matter-of-factly.

“But-but you told me to take two bites!” Albert said as he stood.

“Yes, I know. I need you to be this size so you can go through that door.” The dragon pointed to the door that had been letting in light through the keyhole.

“Why do I need to go in there?” Albert wiped his eyes and turned to study the door from the distance.

“Because I cannot shrink to fit through it, the magic tea won’t work on me. And the crystal I dropped is in there.” The dragon plopped down onto its stomach, making the ground shake to the point that Albert almost lost his balance.

“You said you wanted to help me, so,” the dragon shooed Albert with his front claws, “off you go then.”

“But you just tricked me! How do I know you’re not going to trick me again?” Albert asked crossing his arms.

“The crystal makes these crazy white, fluffy ornaments go away okay! Do you think I like looking like this?” The dragon stood and indicated to the “poodle-tails” all over his body. He looked very ridiculous.

“Oh.” Albert muttered, suddenly understanding. He turned back to face the door.

“So I just go in there to get the crystal because you can’t? No tricks?” He asked.

“Well I mean, I’ve never been through the door so I’m not really sure what’s in there. But if there are tricks, they aren’t from me.” The dragon replied, waiting for Albert to make up his mind.

Albert nodded despite the dragon’s unconvincing answer, and made his way to the door. He had expected the door to be locked, so when it opened easily, Albert was not prepared for the blinding light that came from the other-side.

“What does the crystal look like?” Albert asked the dragon, squinting and focusing on the Cheshire Dragon’s face in order to keep his eyes from burning from the light.

“It’s the thing that is giving off that glow. Can’t miss it.” The Cheshire Dragon laid on its stomach and tried to peep through the small opening, but he sat up quickly and started rubbing his eyes.

Albert nodded and took a deep breath. Then, before he had time to change his mind, he closed his eyes tightly and stepped through the door-frame. The door slammed behind him.

Albert stood inside the other room for ten seconds before he opened his eyes. He knew that precisely, because he counted. One eye opened first and once he realized that the light wasn't as bright as it had seemed, his other eye opened too. It wasn't really that bright at all.

Albert gasped as he looked around the room and realized that it was a very good thing he had stopped as soon as he walked in. If he hadn't stopped, he would have walked straight off a cliff and fallen to his death.

"Oh boy." Albert muttered and leaned forward slightly to see if the bottom was visible. It wasn't.

Albert looked up and saw the crystal in the center of the room. Floating and rotating just above the ground was the shining crystal, shaped like a spade from his favorite deck of cards. The glow from the crystal, though not as intense as before, made Albert squint. He just needed to decide on how to get to the treasure.

The problem was, the crystal was on some sort of pillar in the middle of the room, with that chasm all the way around it. There was no way to get to the center pillar and retrieve the crystal. Unless....

Albert started walking around the room by the circular walkway. He hoped that there would be a bridge on the other side, but when he reached his starting point again, he was sadly disappointed. Standing back in front of the door, he studied the spade crystal and recalled all of the memories from stories he had read.

"Perhaps there's an invisible bridge?" He asked himself.

Slowly, he stuck his foot over the edge, feeling for any kind of solid ground. But Albert's foot only glided through the air.

"There has to be one somewhere!" He spoke to himself again. Then an idea occurred to him.

Getting down on all fours next to the edge, Albert placed his hand out over the chasm and began to crawl around the circle. He hoped that his hand would touch the bridge.

Again, after almost fifteen minutes of crawling, Albert arrived back where he started, just as disappointed as before.

"I don't understand." Albert complained, stuffing his hands in his pockets. His fingers touched the deck of cards in his pocket and he began flipping it over in his hand as he continued to think.

“This is a place of magic, so there must be a magical way to get to the crystal. The question is, do I go to the crystal? Or does it somehow come to me?” Albert scratched his head, deep in thought.

Nothing came to mind immediately, so he decided to sit down. While he did so, his hand, still clutching the deck of cards, came out of his pocket to steady himself. But the deck caught his eye and in his startled reflex, he threw them. Unfortunately, they went over the edge.

Albert’s face changed from surprise to despair as he realized what he had just done.

“Not my favorite deck!” Albert leaned over the edge in search of them, but all he saw was deep darkness.

Something dropped next to him with a soft thud. He looked over his shoulder and furrowed his brow.

“My cards?”

There they were. Sitting right next to him, just as if they had fallen out of his pocket. But what was more interesting to Albert, was the reason he had thrown them in the first place. His cards were glowing.

Slowly, he picked them up and pulled the cards out of the box.

“How odd. This is a new trick.” He muttered, setting aside the box.

As he studied the cards further, things got even more strange. Not all of the cards were glowing. Determined to figure this out, Albert scooted away from the edge and began separating the glowing cards from the normal cards.

After the deck was in two piles, Albert picked up the cards that suddenly had special powers and noticed something in common. They were all spades.

The pieces began to fall together in Albert’s mind and he looked up at the crystal.

“You’re a spade. These are spades. And I’m in a magical room. I bet I can build a bridge to you with these cards!” Albert stood and looked around the room for the perfect spot to build the bridge.

He walked back to the door he came through and looked along the edge of the chasm. He had seen a small spade carved into the ground as he had been crawling, so perhaps that was where the bridge needed to start.

There it was! He bent down and ran his fingers over it. There was a number two next to it which he hadn't noticed before.

"The Two of Spades begins the bridge and I'm sure they go in order after that!"

Albert placed the two directly onto the carved symbol and watched in awe as a sturdy, sparkling bridge piece, about two feet long, appeared. He took a step onto it and then looked down at the edge. Sure enough, there was a three next to this spade symbol.

He placed the three down and watched the bridge lengthen by another two feet. He did the same with the four, the five, and the six.

But when Albert came to place the seven of spades, he panicked.

"Oh no! I'm missing my Seven of Spades!" Albert gasped and shuffled through the cards in his hand, hoping that it was just stuck the back of another card, but there was no seven in his hand.

Albert looked behind him and then back to the symbol on the ground.

"I wonder what would happen if I place the eight here?" Albert asked nervously.

Slowly, he set the eight of spades down on the bridge. The bridge structure shook violently and for a moment and Albert thought that it was going to collapse. But then the next piece of the bridge fell into place. It looked to Albert as if two pieces had appeared, because it was much bigger than the previous pieces.

He took a step, prepared to continue his journey, but suddenly that piece of the bridge fell out from under him. He jumped backwards just in time to keep from falling along with it.

Up ahead there was still a piece in place, not attached to the structure he had started, or anything at all.

Albert was confused for just a moment, but then it made sense.

"I'm missing the seven but I have the eight. So I just have to jump over the gap, which was the seven, and onto the eight." He said to himself before backing up and jumping onto the next part of the bridge. Once he landed firmly, he looked back and nodded, pleased with himself for figuring out the puzzle.

Then he placed the nine, ten, Jack, Queen and King.

“Uh oh. I don’t have the Ace either?” Albert looked to see how far away the crystal was and his shoulders sagged when he saw that it would take at least a five foot jump to get there.

He sighed and walked back to the edge of the bridge where the eight was in place. Then he turned around and ran towards the crystal. At the edge of the King, he jumped!

His feet planted firmly on the ground of the pillar and he sighed with relief. Afraid that the bridge might have a limited time, he picked up the crystal and jumped the distance back onto the bridge.

The second time was much easier than the first.

His card bridge started to shake now that he was on it, so he ran quickly towards the eight. Then he jumped across his missing seven, landed hard onto the six and bolted across the remaining cards.

He had gained so much momentum in his running that he couldn’t stop in time. He thought he was about to hit the door, but it swung open and he was back in the room with the Cheshire Dragon. Albert tripped and then fell right onto his stomach.

“You have it!” The Cheshire Dragon exclaimed, jumping up and down. The room quivered under the dragon’s weight and Albert, who was trying to stand, begged him to stop.

The Cheshire Dragon stopped his jumping and held out his hand.

“Please let me have it!” he asked in way that reminded Albert of a child begging for cake before dinner.

Unable to say no to the pitiful looking creature, Albert cheerfully handed over the crystal saying, “There you go Cheshire Dragon!”

As soon as the crystal fell into the Dragon’s giant hand, it grew, just like the bread had done in Albert’s hand and a bright light almost blinded Albert.

When he opened his eyes, he was a normal boy again, sitting back against the trunk of his favorite tree in the forest. His book was still open in his lap and his neck hurt as if it hadn’t moved in a very long time.

Albert looked around in search of his new friend, but there was no sight of the Cheshire Dragon. He rubbed the

back of his neck and stood to stretch.

“What a strange dream!” He said, tucking his book under his arm and placing a hand in his pocket.

He felt his favorite deck of cards then, and out of curiosity, he pulled them into view and began flipping through the deck. Sure enough, he was missing the seven of spades and the ace of spades.

“How very strange indeed.” Albert mumbled and placed them back into his pocket.

He’d better start making his way back home, but first he needed to stop by the small shop in town. He needed to get a new deck of cards. Just in case.

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