

Dragons of Jade



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To Mom.

Thanks for all those nights you didn't catch me reading
with a flashlight under the covers.

If I tried to name everyone who had a part in making this book happen, I know I'd never be able to remember everyone. So, I say thanks to my critique group, to all my online friends and those from Long Ridge Writer's Group who helped at the start of this story, along with my editor and publisher who helped finish it.

A special thanks goes to my family for their belief and support. From my husband who brought chocolate, to the kids who cooked and cleaned so I could write, thanks so much. I love y'all and count myself blessed.

I am second

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Dragons of Jade



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Chapter 1

Even the dragon agrees.

Jade Delaney sat at her desk and studied the note that had been left with her as an infant. The handwritten letters flowed across the page.

*This is my daughter, Jade,
It isn't safe for her here. Please take care
of her for me. Jade, I hope one day you
can understand. I love you more than life
itself but cannot protect you here.*

Even the dragon agrees.

Lilith.

Jade ran a fingertip across the signature. Lilith, her mother was Lilith. She reread the last line again, shook her

head, and sighed. There's no such thing as dragons. Even if she did dream of them on a regular basis.

At the front of the classroom, the professor cleared his throat, and scooted his chair across the floor. Jade slid down in her seat, folded the pages, returned them to their envelope, and sat staring at the open textbook. Footsteps approached so she glanced up. Mr. Smithers. And heading her way. He stopped beside her, laid a folded sheet of paper across the pages of her book, tapped them then moved on. She sighed and waited for him to return to his desk before picking it up. Must have done really bad on that test. Why couldn't anatomy be more interesting? She picked up the paper, opened it. *See me after class.* Yep, must have done really bad. She sighed, slid the paper between the pages of her book, and tried to concentrate on the canine reproductive system.

Jade waited until her classmates had left before approaching the front of the classroom. She stood before the desk of her professor and wiped a hand on her pant leg. Her stomach churned in dread.

Mr. Smithers looked up from the paper in his hand and into her eyes. "I don't understand it. We discussed this in class during the past week and yet you still barely pass. You know the material. What am I doing wrong?"

Jade shifted from one foot to the other. "It isn't you, you're a great teacher. I just don't enjoy anatomy." She cringed as she said it, but that was the truth.

He handed her the test paper. A large D minus in red sharpie at the top. "You have a natural ability with animals. I've watched you in the clinic; it's almost as if you can read their minds. But you need more than an affinity for animals to become a veterinarian." He shook his head. "You're a bright girl, good student, intelligent. I hate to see you wasting your potential. But maybe you need to change careers." He dropped his sharpie in the desk drawer, shoved it closed. "Today is Friday. Think about what you want out of life this weekend." He ran a hand through his thinning hair. "I'll see you Monday."

Jade picked her denim backpack off the floor, swung it over her shoulder. "Have a nice weekend."

"Think about it Jade, you're much too intelligent to be wasting your time like this."

"I will." She turned on her heels and strode from the room.

The classroom door closed behind her with a quiet click as she shifted the backpack filled with books. "That was fun, Jade." She brushed back a strand of hair from her face. If she knew what she wanted to do with her life, she'd be doing it instead of being here. Her footsteps echoed down the empty hallway as the light grew dim. She gazed around. A single light shone from the ceiling, illuminating a small spot on the door leading from of the building. In the light, an image shimmered on the door. Jade stepped in front of the door and gasped. She glanced

around searching the hallway, saw no one, and turned back to the door. Her backpack slid off her shoulder and thumped to the floor as she stared at the image of herself standing before Mr. Smithers' desk. Reaching up, she tentatively touched the scene. Her fingers warmed as they merged with the image then chilled with contact of the metal door. The picture shifted around her fingers to show her dressed in a cap and gown, diploma in hand. Jade sucked in her breath. So she would graduate. But how could this be possible?

She glanced around the darkened hallway again but still saw no one. The image shifted and swirled. A man appeared next to her, a small boy joined them. Her image-self reached down, picked up the child, and smiled. The picture blurred, and Jade wiped a tear from her cheek. She would be a mother one day.

A breeze played with her hair as the wall beside the image shifted and shimmered. Another door appeared in the wall, wavered, and became solid. Jade ran her hand across the wood. Gazing around at the empty hall, she brushed a stray strand of hair from her eyes. She turned back to the new door, watched it shimmer as an image formed. With a gasp, she stepped back from the door shaking her head. "That's not possible. There's no such thing as dragons." Jade swallowed hard, touched the dragon in the image. Her image-self stood before the dragon, hand extended.

The dragon turned toward her, met her gaze. *It's your choice.*

Jade snatched her hand away and shook her head. "There's no such thing as dragons."

The dragon turned back to her image-self and blew a plume of black smoke. Jade stepped back from the doors and watched the smoke rise in the air and disappear. Her gaze rested on the first image. She reached into the image and touched the child. Marriage and a family, but did she want that? Jade turned to the wooden door and let her gaze rest on the dragon then nodded and took a deep breath. "Even the dragon agrees."

She pushed the door open and stepped into green. Green that shifted and moved. Her stomach churned with the green. Jade's vision cleared, and she swayed a bit as the green came to a standstill. It turned into a grassy field and trees that stretched toward a clear blue sky. She looked around, a man stood in the middle of the clearing. His long dark hair was tied back, and he wore matching tan pants and shirt. A smile crossed his face. He held out a hand toward her.

"Thank you for coming. I am Draigh."