

Fire in the Sky-Part 4

“Do you think you could come visit me occasionally, maybe once a week or so?” she asked. “I’ve always loved company, but my children live far away, and my husband has been gone for three months now. I get rather lonely.”

“Absolutely,” I replied, relieved because that wouldn’t be too hard, and honestly, I got “rather lonely,” too. There was silence for a moment. Then, I realized that was only one thing.

“Mrs. Williams,” I asked, “What’s the other thing you want me to do?”

“We’ll get to that later, dear. Right now, I think you should be getting home. It’s past nine,” she said warmly.

I thanked her again for the tea and all her help, and Malcolm climbed back inside my backpack. She walked me to the door, saying she would call for my “help” around ten tomorrow morning.

I walked home, and snuck Malcolm back to my room before going downstairs to sit with Mom. She asked how my walk was, and I told her fine. I read a novel I had found at the library while she watched a crime show on TV. A little after ten, I went upstairs to go to bed.

I was faced with another question: Where was Malcolm going to sleep? After thinking for a few minutes, I remembered the sleeping bag from Girl Scout camp that was in my closet. I got it out, and folded it to the right size for Malcolm. After making sure he was comfortable, I turned off the light, crawled into bed, and quickly fell asleep. I was exhausted from my busy day.

The next morning, I was awakened by Malcolm sitting on the edge of my bed whispering, “Becca, please wake up. I’m sooo hungry.”

“Okay, okay,” I mumbled, “I’ll bring you some cereal.”

I ran downstairs. Luckily, my mom was still asleep, so I was able to smuggle two sets of bowls and spoons, the milk, and a box of Froot Loops back to my room. Malcolm really enjoyed it, exclaiming, "I love human food!"

I realized it may have been a mistake to give him sugary cereal, but it was too late now. I assured him he would be home in a few hours. There was nothing to do but wait for Mrs. Williams to call. Finally, at precisely ten o'clock, the phone rang.

"Hello, this is Eva Williams, your neighbor."

"Yeah, I know. It's me, Becca. I'll go ask my mom using the predetermined cover story."

She chuckled as I walked into the kitchen to find my mom, still holding the phone.

"Mrs. Williams, one of the neighbors, wants to know if I can go with her for a few hours to help get some groceries."

"Yes, certainly. Have fun!" Mom replied.

"Yup, I can go," I said into the phone, "I'll be right over."

I went to the bedroom, and put Malcolm in my backpack. He was very excited to be going home. We met Mrs. Williams in her driveway by her car, a light green Volkswagen Beetle. Malcolm climbed out of my backpack and into the back seat. I got into the front, and we were off to West Asiatican.

We drove farther out of my neighborhood than I was familiar with, down winding side streets and past tiny stores. Malcolm chattered excitedly, but Mrs. Williams and I were quiet. I felt a little bit sad that Malcolm was leaving; I had grown rather attached to him, but I knew he needed to be with his momma. After about forty-five minutes, we arrived at the edge of a large forest.

"We'll have to walk from here, but it's not too far," Mrs. Williams said. Malcolm and I got out of the car, and she followed.

“Oh, and stay close to me, Becca. Some dragons are rather hostile toward humans, after all that’s been done to them,” she added. She must have seen the fear in my eyes because she said, “It’s okay, dear. We’ll be fine. They know me, and Malcolm’s with us.”

I took as much comfort in this as one can in the protection of a slightly frail old lady and a baby dragon. The woods were dark for mid-morning, but I imagine most woods are. Malcolm flew close to my head, and I stuck near to Mrs. Williams, trying to be brave.

There was only one small incident. We had been walking for about ten minutes when I heard some rustling leaves, and saw movement. I screamed. It was a squirrel. Malcolm laughed, but Mrs. Williams just squeezed my hand sympathetically.

After another fifteen minutes, we arrived at a wide clearing. There were three big caves around the edge, and a few smaller ones between, all built from mud and sticks, except one that was stone. There was also a ring of rocks, maybe ten feet across, in the middle. It looked like a fire pit.

I was just talking all this in when I heard a deep voice, shouting, “I smell humans! Two of them!”

Another voice added, “We must get rid of them! Attack!”

I was terrified, and cowered behind Mrs. Williams. She calmly pulled a dragon-shaped whistle out of her pocket, and blew it three times. Then, she shouted, “For goodness’ sake, it’s only me! I brought a friend.”

Slowly, I saw a few dragons coming out of the caves. They were much larger than Malcolm. He was about the size of a bear cub, but they were larger than my mom’s minivan. One of the largest, a green one with brown speckles, stepped forward. He appeared to be the leader.

“Eva, why have you brought this girl into our midst? You know how hard we have worked to keep this place hidden from humans.”

“Her name is Becca, and she found one of your children who was lost. Somehow, instinctively, she came to me for help, and I brought them here.”

Mrs. Williams sounded so confident that I stepped out slowly from behind her and waved. “Uh, hi. Malcolm here landed on the sidewalk in front of me when I was walking home from school, and he said he and his momma were migrating to this colony,” I said, as I urged Malcolm forward.

“Malcolm, did someone say Malcolm?” A red dragon who looked a lot like Malcolm came barreling to the front of the crowd. She took one looked at him, scooped him up, and hugged him in a dragonish way. “Oh, my poor little boy, I was so scared when you were lost. I didn’t know how I would ever find you!”

Gathering her composure, she looked at me and said “Thank you, Miss Becca, for bringing my baby back to me. I’m very sorry if my brother,” she gestured toward the one that was the leader, “or anyone else scared you.”

“Oh, it’s okay,” I said, “And you’re welcome.”

Malcolm flew over to me, and wrapped his wings gently around my neck. I hugged him back as he said, “You should come visit some time, Becca, and, maybe, bring me some of those Froot Loop things.”

“We’ll see,” I answered. “I’m not sure how much your mom would like that.”

As Mrs. Williams and I were leaving, the leader asked, “Eva, have you found another Dragonkeeper yet?”

“Not yet,” Mrs. Williams replied, “But I think I’m very close.”

When we got back to the car, I asked her what he was talking about.

“You see, Becca, as dragons began to have problem with humans, they decided they need an ally among them, or more precisely, a pair of allies. After careful consideration, the first pair of Dragonkeepers was chosen. They had to be people who would believe in the dragons, not take advantage of them, and help them to the best of their ability. I was one of these people.”

“Was the other one your husband?” I asked.

“Yes, it was. I’ve been searching for the past three months for someone to take his place, but I haven’t found anyone who fits the criteria. That is, until precisely the right kind of person showed up on my doorstep yesterday evening.”

“You want me to be the other Dragonkeeper?” I was shocked she thought I could handle such a huge responsibility.

“After the way you helped Malcolm and took care of him, I think you would be the perfect candidate... That was the other thing I wanted you to do: Be the second Dragonkeeper. Of course, you don’t have to, but I think you would be the best choice.”

“That means I would still get to visit Malcolm, doesn’t it?” Mrs. Williams smiled and nodded. “I would love to be a Dragonkeeper! This is amazing!”

“It’s settled, then. I can start teaching you everything you need to know as soon as we get home.”

So, we drove home, and I began my new secret life as a Dragonkeeper. I learned a few important lessons that day. A surprise meeting may be the best thing that ever happens to you. You can often find the best friends in unexpected places. The most interesting people you meet are the ones that appear the craziest at first. And, most importantly, never give sugary cereal to a very young creature.

The End