

## Chapter One



# Dragon in the Forest

*Thump. Thump. Thump.* Erin's eyes fluttered open. She rubbed them sleepily. Moonlight streamed in through her open window. The shutter lightly swung in the night breeze, causing the thumping sound that had pulled Erin out from her slumber. She got up and went over to the window. The air was still warm even though it was night. She grabbed the rickety shutter and fastened it. The house she lived in was old. It had

been her grandma's and she had heard stories of her mom growing up here and even living in the same room Erin was in now. For many years, they visited and eventually moved in when Erin's grandma got sick. Erin had been very excited to move into the house. She loved it. The meadow and forest she could see from her bedroom window filled her with joy. Now that summer break was here, she could spend endless hours outside in her imagination.

Although, lately, she was dreaming more of her adventures traveling through the bubbles in the old bubble wand she had found in the attic. Her first adventure had taken her to a medieval village with a castle and a princess. Her second journey had been underwater where she had befriended mermaids and helped them save the ocean. She wondered where her next



adventure would take her. It had been two days since the film had appeared in the bubble wand, and she really hoped it would happen again.

Tucking her blond hair behind her ears, Erin leaned on the window sill and gazed outside across the meadow to the forest. Erin took a deep breath. It had rained during the night and Erin could smell the freshness in the air. The leaves on the trees glistened in the moonlight. She could hear the crickets softly chirping outside. She looked up at the twinkling stars in the sky peeking out from the moving clouds. She let out a sigh. The night was so peaceful.

A light flickered in the forest. Erin stood up, staring hard. At first, she thought she saw two pale eyes peering through the trees up at her. She blinked

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and looked again. Nothing could be seen but the blackness of the trees and the leaves in the moonlight. She decided it must be her imagination and turned to go back to bed.

She passed her bedside table which held the bubble wand that had started all her adventures. Moonlight came in through the window, illuminating it. Out of curiosity, she picked it up.

“No way, no way, no way!” she exclaimed excitedly.

A thin film covered the hole and shimmered in the moonlight. Erin blew on the wand. A single bubble formed and floated through her room toward the window. Quickly she caught the bubble on the wand. She held it up to the moonlight and looked carefully. Inside the bubble, she could see a hazy image

of a forest, not unlike her forest, but very dense. Nothing else could be seen.

“Here goes,” she said and touched the bubble.

*Pop!* Then her room went black around her.

Erin blinked. It was still very dark. The walls of her room had been replaced with thick trees. Overhead the leaves of the trees were so dense she couldn't see the sky. She didn't know if the darkness was the trees blocking the sun or if it was nighttime here like at her home. The trees were covered in moss and the ground she now stood on was a thick mat of raspberry bushes, ferns and grass. She started to walk forward. The thorns from the raspberry bushes scraped her feet and legs. She was still in her soft nightgown.

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*Next time, I need to put on shoes before I do this,* she thought.

She pushed a large tree branch out of the way and stopped short. In front of her was a set of large, emerald green eyes staring at her. She gasped and froze. A large creature was crouching in the bushes directly in front of her. Although Erin recognized the creature from reading lots of fairytales, nothing prepared her for what to do when she saw a real live one staring her down. It was a dragon!

Erin stood silent, unable to move as the creature held her in its gaze. Erin's mind raced. She glanced carefully at the trees around her. She didn't know if dragons in this land could fly or climb but she had a feeling it could outrun her. Maybe if she didn't move, it would

go away. The dragon didn't move either. It appeared to be sniffing at the air but didn't take its eyes off her. Suddenly, she heard something like a voice whispering inside her head.

“Ashlyn? Is that you? You smell strange.”

Erin took a deep breath and steadied herself.

“Was that you who spoke?” she asked in a hoarse whisper.

The dragon cocked its head to the side and took a step forward. It didn't growl or bare its teeth. It just looked at her in a curious way.

“You're not Ashlyn?” the voice came again.

“No,” she replied. “I'm Erin.”

“You can hear me though?”



Erin nodded.

“Odd,” mused the dragon. “Although, this could be a joke.” The dragon moved a little closer, sniffing again. “And you’re *sure*. You’re sure you’re not Ashlyn playing a game with me? You definitely don’t smell like Ashlyn.”

“I’m not,” said Erin, relaxing a little. “My name is Erin and I come from a different world.” And then as an afterthought, she added, “One that doesn’t have dragons.”

The dragon snorted a little at that. It looked amused. Erin wondered if that was the way a dragon laughed.

“I guess I’m not surprised though,” said the dragon. “Ashlyn has been acting strangely as of late. She asked me to wait in the woods here but she hasn’t come back. I thought maybe it was a game.”

The dragon looked at Erin again thoughtfully. “May I ask what you are doing in these woods then? You’re not really dressed for a walk at night.” The dragon eyed Erin’s bare feet.

“Well, I guess I wasn’t really prepared to come here,” said Erin. “I traveled here through a bubble.”

The dragon nodded as if this might be an everyday occurrence and bubbles a normal mode of travel.

“As for what I’m doing here, that I don’t know. On my previous adventures there was a girl. A girl that looked like me that needed my help.”

The dragon paused and considered this. “Well,” it said after a moment. “You look like Ashlyn. But I don’t know what kind of help she might need. I hope something bad hasn’t happened to her.”

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We were supposed to start on a journey. She told me to wait here and that she would be back but that was long before sundown. I should go look for her.”

“I’ll come,” replied Erin.

The dragon studied her again, then nodded its head and started to make its way back through the forest. Erin marveled to see such a large creature navigate the thick bushes and trees with such ease.

“May I ask your name?” Erin asked.

The dragon turned back. It pulled itself up on its hind legs. The dragon was very tall. Its mossy green head reached toward the tops of the trees. Its body was covered in scales except its wings were smooth and folded against its sides. Dark lines outlined each wing joint. Its forearms were short but strong

and ended in sharp talons. On one clawed finger it wore a golden ring.

“My name is Kaida Oleander Frostlake the Third,” she stated proudly.

“Woah,” breathed Erin. Then, she bowed respectfully. “Pleased to meet you Kaida Oleander Frostlake.”

The dragon snort chuckled again. “You may just call me Kaida,” she said and turned back to the woods.

The walk through the forest was pleasant. The air was cool and calm and the forest quiet. The chirping of a few far off crickets was the only sound Erin heard. Despite her size, Kaida’s movement through the forest made very little sound. She knew the way well and picked the easiest path. Erin was grateful. Her feet were beginning to get sore from walking barefoot. The forest

floor, although covered in moss, was still very prickly from the debris dropped by trees and bushes.

“So, what kind of journey were you two supposed to be going on?” Erin asked.

“Our mountain home is protected by a special stone, called the Dragon Stone. It’s acquired from a volcano that reaches up into the clouds,” said Kaida. “The magic lasts for 100 years and then a new stone has to be brought down. But only descendants from the first family to bond with the dragons can get it. Ashlyn is the only descendent so it’s our job to get another stone.”

“Oh. That sounds very important,” said Erin.

“Yes, very,” replied Kaida. “The Dragon Stone allows our village to stay hidden from raiders.”

Soon the path began to climb. The ground changed from moss and ferns to rocky ground. They came to a small opening and Erin could now see that they were on the side of a mountain. Trees filled the valley below. Small spirals of smoke could be seen through the trees ahead of them. Kaida was sniffing the air and pawing at the ground. She suddenly charged ahead and Erin had to run across the rocky terrain to keep up with her. They came to a small village built into the mountainside. Black smoke rose from the houses and a few were still engulfed in flames. Erin coughed from the smoke. Her eyes burned. Kaida was running from house to house anxiously.

Kaida turned aside from the village to a large stable nestled among the trees. It was unlike anything Erin had



ever seen before. Thick tree trunks supported a roof made out of a canopy of evergreen branches. It was ten times the size needed for a horse. It was clearly meant for dragons. The stable was partially burnt. Many of the huge trees had fallen over. Half the stable was nothing more than a pile of debris. Kaida pawed at the debris, sniffing.

“Erin! Come help me!” she cried.

Erin rushed over, shielding her face from the smoke. Kaida had gripped a large tree trunk with her tail and was pulling it away. Erin could see something bright red underneath. She started clearing rocks and burnt branches. It was a dragon’s wing! As soon as they had freed the wing it lifted up. Under the wing was a boy. Erin worked faster as Kaida pulled the larger debris off



the dragon. Erin grabbed the boy and pulled him out. He groaned and coughed. He was alive! Soon the red dragon was freed. It looked injured.

Erin turned back to the boy. His eyes opened and he coughed again.

“Don’t move yet,” said Erin. “Are you hurt?”

The boy looked over to Erin. “No, I think I’m ok. Silas protected me when the building was coming down,” he said affectionately. “How’s Silas?”

“Silas?”

“My dragon,” he said. He looked at Erin through half closed eyes. “Are you ok, Ashlyn?”

“Oh,” said Erin. “I don’t know. His leg has a nasty cut. And I’m not Ashlyn.”

The boy looked taken aback.

He paused for a moment looking at his dragon. They seemed to be in some sort of silent conversation. He turned to Erin. "Oh. I guess not." He gestured to his dragon. "Silas says you smell weird."

"I don't smell weird!" Erin said defensively.

"Ok, ok," said the boy. "Different then."

He got up and went over to examine the dragon's wound.

"He did say you smelled weird." She heard Kaida say in her head.

"I didn't really need that information," Erin replied. "By the way, why can't I hear Silas?"

"Dragon's communicate telepathically with each other," replied Kaida.

“Humans can't normally understand us unless we've bonded with them. So Grey can hear Silas, Ashlyn can hear me and somehow you can too.”

Erin nodded. She walked over to Silas and the boy. “How does he look?”

“The cuts are pretty deep,” the boy said as he was wrapping some cloth tightly around the dragon's leg. “But it doesn't look broken, so I think it will be fine once we can get him treated. I'm Grey, by the way.”

“I'm Erin. “Can you tell me what's happened?”

“We were attacked,” Grey replied, “by raiders.”

He looked over to Kaida. “You and Ashlyn were supposed to be getting the Dragon Stone. This morning Ashlyn said you had run away. She left looking for you.”

Kaida snorted.

“Not the case. Huh?”

Erin shook her head. “I don’t think so. Kaida said Ashlyn told her to wait in the woods, but then she never came.”

“Hm, that’s not good. Well, I think the elders thought we had more time before the old Dragon Stone ran out of power, but they were wrong. The raiders came around noon. We were lucky because they were spotted before they had made it far up the mountain so the elders had the village evacuated. Silas and I were the last. We were trying to get all the dragon eggs to safety. But the raiders attacked before we could get away.”

“Oh no!” cried Kaida.

Grey paused for a bit and nodded his head at Silas. Erin looked at the two.

Silas was very large. Rising above Kaida by several feet, he was bright red with deep black eyes. His large wings were folded neatly by his side. He looked very majestic standing in the moonlight. Grey was a tall boy, not much older than Erin. He had dark hair and dark skin and wore a leather riding suit. He turned toward Erin and Kaida.

“Do you think Ashlyn ran away instead of going to get the stone?” he asked.

Kaida nodded her head. “She was acting strange ever since the elders told her she needed to go. It’s very possible. I need to find her. I know of a place she might have gone if she was running away.”

Erin relayed the message.

“You two go check,” said Grey. “I

will stay here and tend to Silas. I don't expect the raiders to be back anytime soon."

Kaida turned to go.

"Um... Before we go, can I get some shoes?" Erin asked sheepishly.