

# **A Dragon Named Splinter**

**Ben L. Hughes**

## **Dragon Adventure Series, Jr.**

The Dragon Egg That Rolled Away

## **Dragon Adventure Series 1**

A Dragon Named Splinter  
The Blue Dragon  
The Dragon Wizard

## **Dragon Adventure Series 2**

Fire Dragons  
The Cave of Secrets  
The Lost Dragons of Fire Island



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## Chapter 1

Kevin's eyes lit up the instant his dad turned down the dirt road leading towards Wellington Lake. Not only was it one of his favorite places to camp in Colorado, his parents had also invited his best friend Emalyn to come along.

"How much longer until we get there?" Emalyn asked as she peered out the window at the passing trees.

"We should be there pretty soon, it's only ten miles to the lake," Kevin replied.

"How big is it?" Emalyn asked as she tried to picture it in her head.

"I think the lake is a mile long, but it's not that wide," Kevin replied.

"Can we swim in it?"

"We could, but the water isn't very warm. So unless it gets really hot, I doubt that we will want to."

"What do you do for fun?" Emalyn asked.

"I usually just play along the edge of the lake with my mom, and when I get tired of that, my dad likes to take me up to Castle Mountain for some off-trail adventures."

"Where is that?"

"It's on the back side of the lake. You can't miss it, it's a huge granite peak that towers over everything around it."

"Have you ever made it to the top of Castle Mountain?" Emalyn asked out of curiosity.

"No, the last time we tried we had to turn back because our dog couldn't make it past the boulder field that's just below the peak."

"Why is that?"

"She was old, and the boulders were too large for her to climb over," Kevin replied.

"You and I should try and reach the top... if your parents will let us go up there."

"I think they will. My dad calls me his mountain goat because I do so well off-trail whenever we go hiking. I know it's kind of silly, but I like it."

"What did you have to do to earn that name?" Emalyn chuckled.

"The last time we were here, my dad took me on a grueling hike around the base of Castle Mountain and then asked me to find my way back to the campsite without a map or compass. I

knew it was a test to see if I could navigate without him in case we ever got separated, or if I wanted to go hiking on my own.”

“Were you able to do it?”

“Yeah, the first thing I did was locate a couple of landmarks that I was familiar with, and then I used them to guide me back to the campsite... and that’s how I earned the nickname mountain goat.”

“That’s pretty cool,” Emalyn admitted. “If we reach the top, I want a nickname like that.”

“How about bark beetle?” Kevin joked.

“Eew, you know I don’t like those kinds of bugs,” Emalyn cringed.

“How about, centipede?”

“That’s even worse.”

“Meal worm?”

“That’s even more disgusting... maybe you should stop while we’re still friends,” Emalyn smiled since she was just kidding.

“Okay, I’ll try and think up something that you would like,” Kevin promised. “Hey dad, when we get to the lake can Emalyn and I go hiking up Castle Mountain?”

“We had kind of a late start, so I don’t think there’s going to be enough time to do that, but you can go tomorrow if the weather is nice.”

“Alright,” Kevin sighed as he turned and stared out the window. When he saw the lake in the distance, he tapped Emalyn on the shoulder so she wouldn’t miss it.

“That is a big lake,” Emalyn remarked with a look of excitement in her soft brown eyes.

“And that’s Castle Mountain right behind it.”

“Wow, it’s a lot taller and more rugged looking than I imagined,” Emalyn admitted.

“Do you still want to try and climb to the top of it?”

“Of course, you know how I like a challenge,” Emalyn smiled.

“I do,” Kevin replied as he thought about how neither of them would give up on a video game no matter how hard it was, or how frustrated it made them when they played it.

“We’re almost there,” Brian announced as he turned down the road leading to the entrance to the campground. Then he parked at the office so he could go in and pay for the campsite.

“How many days are we staying?” Kevin asked when his dad returned.

“I took Monday off so we can stay until then,” Brian replied as he pulled out of the parking area and started down towards the lake. When he looked in the mirror, he noticed a cloud of reddish dust billowing up behind the camper, so he slowed down a bit so he wouldn’t dust everyone out along the way.

“Which spot is ours?” Kevin asked as they drove past several that were empty.

“The one on the backside that is closest to Castle Mountain, and still has a nice view of the lake.”

“I love that spot!” Kevin exclaimed.

“I know, that’s why I picked it,” Brian replied as he continued around the lake until they reached their campsite. Then he backed the trailer in, and parked the truck in the shade.

Once everyone was out, he unhooked the pop-up from the hitch and started setting it up. While he was busy doing that, Kevin and Emalyn helped Josephine unpack the camping supplies and move the picnic table closer to the fire pit.

“The trailer’s ready if you want to go in and setup your beds,” Brian remarked after he finished leveling it.

“I’ve never been in a pop-up before,” Emalyn remarked after she followed Kevin inside.

“It’s small, but it beats sleeping on the ground,” Kevin admitted as he set both of their sleeping bags on the bed and started unrolling them.

“Can I put mine next to yours?” Emalyn asked after she noticed there were only two small sleeping areas on opposite sides of the trailer.

“Yeah, this is our side.”

“That’s cool, we’ll be bunk mates,” Emalyn smiled.

“If you need to use the bathroom there is an outhouse across from our campsite, but hold your breath when you go inside, because it’s deadly,” Kevin warned as he pinched his nose.

“Really?”

“Yeah. It’s so stinky that your eyes will water, but it’s either that, or the bushes.”

“Maybe the bushes would be safer?” Emalyn whispered.

“That’s what I use when no one is looking, but watch out for poison oak.”

“I know exactly what that looks like,” Emalyn remarked as if she had had an encounter with it in the past.

“I was going to go down to the lake, do you want to come with me?” Kevin asked after he was done setting up his sleeping bag.

“Okay,” Emalyn replied as she followed him down to the lake.

After they had walked half way around it, the sun disappeared behind Castle Mountain, which gave the sky a soft warm glow.

“It’s very pretty up here,” Emalyn remarked as she gazed out over the tranquil water.

“I know, I like how quiet and peaceful it is compared to home, and school, where it’s noisy all the time.”

“Does that bother you too?” Emalyn asked.

“Yeah, that’s one of the reasons I like coming here,” Kevin admitted.

“I just saw a little fish dart out of the shadows,” Emalyn remarked. “Look, there he is again!”

“Oh yeah, I see him,” Kevin replied as the tiny speckled fish darted around the clumps of algae looking for food. When the fish noticed they were watching him, he quickly swam out into the deeper water.

“That was neat,” Emalyn remarked after the fish was gone.

“There is a large boulder at the south end of the lake, if we climb up on it, we might be able to see some larger fish,” Kevin suggested.

“Okay, and even if we don’t, we can practice our climbing skills for tomorrow’s hike.”

“Weird, that’s what I was just thinking,” Kevin replied as he headed over to it.

“We’re such close friends, that maybe we know what the other one is thinking.”

“What am I picturing in my head right now?” Kevin asked.

“Pickles.”

“Ha-ha, that’s not even close,” Kevin laughed. “I was thinking about that fish we just saw.”

“Try me,” Emalyn suggested.

“I see a dragon hiding near a tree.”

“That’s exactly what I was picturing!” Emalyn replied as she tried not to laugh.

“Really?”

“No, silly. I was thinking about the raven I saw over by the campsite.”

“Was it the one sitting in the tree?”

“Yeah... I guess you weren’t that far off after all,” Emalyn admitted after she thought about it for a moment.

When they reached the boulder, Kevin helped her up the last little bit since her shoes were slipping on the surface of the rock.

“Don’t worry, I brought my boots along, so you won’t have to pull me up the mountain when we go hiking tomorrow,” Emalyn smiled.

“I don’t mind,” Kevin replied as he reached into his pocket and handed her a bunch of round stones.

“What are they for?”

“I thought it would be fun to see how far we could throw them out into the lake.”

“Thanks,” Emalyn replied as she launched one way out over the water.

“Wow, you have a really good arm.”

“I get a lot practice throwing a tennis ball for the neighbor’s dog.”

“It’s nice that I don’t always have to do girly stuff when I hang out with you,” Kevin admitted as he handed her a few more rocks.

“And I like how you look out for me at school, and make up fun games for us to play when we get bored in class,” Emalyn replied.

“I guess that’s why we’re such good friends.”

“It looks like your mom wants us to come back,” Emalyn remarked when she saw Josephine waving at them.

“It must be time for dinner,” Kevin sighed as he helped her down from the boulder.

“Are you kids hungry?” Josephine asked when they arrived back at the campsite.

“Yeah. Can we roast marshmallows after dinner?” Kevin asked when he saw that his dad had started a fire.

“That’s why we brought them,” Josephine replied as she handed each of them a plate of food.

“Thank you,” Emalyn replied before sitting down at the picnic table.

“Have you gone camping before?” Josephine asked.

“No, I’ve been hiking a bunch of times, but this is my first camp-out.”

“We’re cheating a bit with a pop-up trailer, but other than that, it’s pretty much the same thing.”

“Thanks for inviting me, so far it seems like a lot of fun,” Emalyn replied before taking another bite out of her hotdog.

Once everyone had finished eating, Brian opened the bag of marshmallows, and passed them around. Kevin took a handful and then put one on a stick for Emalyn.

“Have you ever roasted a marshmallow before?” he asked when she seemed a little hesitant about what to do with it.

“No, but I’ll give it a try.”

Kevin couldn’t help but laugh when she stuck it directly into the flames and it immediately caught fire and fell off the stick.

“Would you like me to show you how to cook it?” he offered.

“Yeah... I guess it’s not as easy as it looks,” Emalyn admitted as she handed him back the roasting stick.

“The trick is to hold it up above the flames while slowly turning it so it doesn’t burn. Once it’s golden brown, it’s ready to eat,” Kevin explained as he handed the stick to her.

“Like this?” Emalyn asked as she slowly rotated it in her hand while keeping it away from the flames.

“Yeah, that’s perfect,” Kevin replied as he handed her another marshmallow.

Once the bag was empty, they all sat quietly by the fire and watched it slowly burn down.

“Do you want me to add any more wood to the campfire?” Kevin asked when the last little flame died out.

“No, I think we’re about done for the night,” Brian replied after the distant rumble of thunder revealed an approaching storm.

“Is it coming our way?”

“I think so,” Brian replied as a gust of wind swept through their camp, breathing new life into their dying campfire. When he saw that happen, he picked up a pan full of water and poured it over the red-hot coals, causing a cloud of ash and steam to billow high into the air.

“Wow, that looks like an erupting volcano,” Emalyn remarked.

“My dad never leaves a fire unattended after he set fire to a tree on school property when he was a kid.”

“Kevin! That’s not something I’m proud of,” Brian scolded.

“I know, but it’s a good example of what not to do.”



“I suppose, but only if you tell the whole story and don’t leave out the key facts, like it was an accidental fire... or the fact that my older brother was the one playing with the matches. I’m not saying he caused the fire, because I was playing with sticks that he had lit on fire, and I might have caused it. Either way, we weren’t being very careful, and after we left the school a fire broke out in a cluster of trees where we had been messing around. Luckily, someone saw the fire and put it out before it got very big. They also saw us leaving the school right after it happened and they told our parents what we did. Even though it was an accident, we got into the most trouble you can ever imagine.”

“So would you say the moral of that story is, don’t play with fire, or you’ll get burned?” Kevin snickered.

“Nooo, not another bad pun,” Brian cringed.

“Oh dad, you love them,” Kevin laughed.

When another gust of wind swept through the camp, Brian got up and opened the door to the trailer, signaling it was time to go in.

“If you kids need anything during the night, just let me know,” Josephine offered in a motherly tone.

“Goodnight mom,” Kevin replied.

“Goodnight, and thanks again for inviting me,” Emalyn added as she climbed over Kevin to get into her sleeping bag.

“You’re welcome,” Josephine replied before turning off the lights.

As the storm approached, the thunder grew louder and the wind started to gust so hard it caused the trailer to rock back and forth unexpectedly.

“Are you alright?” Kevin whispered when Emalyn moved her sleeping bag closer to his.

“Yeah, that last bolt of lightning seemed kind of close,” Emalyn whispered back in a frightened tone.

“I think it hit Castle Mountain, at least that’s where the flash came from.”

“I hope the next one doesn’t hit the trailer.”

“It won’t,” Kevin insisted. “We’re not the tallest object around, and I read somewhere that that’s what usually gets struck.”

“Okay,” Emalyn replied as she scooted a little closer to him.

When the next few rumbles of thunder seemed further away, she closed her eyes and slowly drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter 2

The next morning Kevin and Emalyn got up early and helped themselves to some muffins and cold cereal. When they finished eating breakfast, Kevin tiptoed over to his dad and gently tapped him on the shoulder.

“What do you need?” Brian asked in a groggy voice.

“Is it okay if Emalyn and I go for a hike on Castle Mountain?”

“Yeah, take your cell phone and plenty of water so you don’t get dehydrated.”

“I already have both,” Kevin replied.

“Then have fun, be safe, and make sure you’re back in time for lunch.”

“Okay, we will,” Kevin promised as he opened the trailer door for Emalyn, and then followed her out.

“Your dad didn’t seem worried about us going for a hike by ourselves.”

“No, he trusts both of us, and he knows if we get into any trouble we can call him.”

“I didn’t think a cell phone would work up here?”

“Yeah, we’re high enough up that we can get a signal from the cell towers along the highway,” Kevin replied as he pulled it out and showed her it had a weak signal. “It will get stronger once we get out of the trees.”

“Then lead the way mountain goat,” Emalyn remarked in a light-hearted tone.

“If we make it to the top, you’re getting a special nickname,” Kevin smiled.

“I hope it’s better than the other ones you were suggesting.”

“Oh, you’re going to love it,” Kevin promised as he headed up a ravine that led towards Castle Mountain.

“Did the storm scare you at all?” Emalyn asked as she walked along side him.

“A little bit,” Kevin admitted. “How about you?”

“Yeah, I didn’t like it when the trailer began to shake, but at least it wasn’t hit by lighting.”

“That would have been shocking,” Kevin joked.

“You’re so funny,” Emalyn giggled. “I like it when you punned your dad last night.”

“I do that all the time just to tease him... and the worse the pun, the quicker he responds,” Kevin snickered as he continued up the slope.

When they reached a brushy area, Kevin slowed down and helped Emalyn through the worse parts of it so it wouldn't scratch her arms or legs.

"You weren't kidding about this being a difficult climb," Emalyn remarked once her lungs started to burn from the thinning air.

"Let's stop for a minute so we can catch our breath."

"How high do you think we are?" Emalyn asked after she took a few sips from her water bottle.

"My dad said the top of Castle Mountain is close to ten thousand feet, and I know the lake is about eight... so I'm guessing that we are somewhere around nine at this point."

"Wow, that's pretty high".

"You should take a picture," Kevin suggested.

"That's a good idea, that way I can show my mom what the lake looks like from way up here."

"When we get to the boulder field, you'll be able to see all the way to Denver."

"No way?" Emalyn remarked as if she didn't quite believe him.

"I'm serious, and if we reach the top, I think we can see Kansas."

"Then let's go higher," Emalyn said with a determined look in her eyes.

"Alright, do you want to lead for awhile?"

"Nope, I want you to be my trail guide," Emalyn replied.

"Alright, I'll take you higher."

As the slope continued to steepen, Kevin would stop every so often so they could rest, and take in the amazing views.

"We're almost to the boulder field," he remarked when the trees started to thin out. "Do you want to keep going?"

"Yes, I want to see all the way to Kansas," Emalyn replied.

"Alright Dorothy," Kevin laughed.

"Dorothy... as in the Wizard of OZ?"

"Yeah, wasn't she in Kansas when a tornado took her to another realm?"

"Your jokes are from another realm," Emalyn teased.

"Okay, maybe that wasn't my best material, but you're the only one who lets me joke around with them without making fun of me."

“I like your jokes, even the silly ones,” Emalyn admitted.

“Thanks,” Kevin replied before heading on.

When he passed by a large tree just before the start of the boulder field, he noticed that it had a spiraling mark running down the length of it.

“I think this tree was hit by lightning,” Kevin remarked as he stared at it for a moment.

“How can you tell?”

“There’s a burn scar spiraling down the trunk, and a pile of splintered wood fragments at the base of it.”

“Okay, I’ll be there in a minute,” Emalyn replied as she paused so she could catch her breath.

While Kevin was waiting, he knelt down and picked up one of the shards.

“What are you doing?” Emalyn asked when she saw him holding the shard up to his nose and sniffing it like a dog.

“I wanted to see if it smelled like burnt wood or not, and it does.”

“Toss me a piece.”

“Alright, let me find a better one for you,” Kevin replied. When he knelt back down to pull another one from the pile, he instantly jumped back when he thought he saw something moving under the wood.

“What’s wrong?” Emalyn asked after she saw what happened.

“I think there’s something living in there,” Kevin replied with an unsettled look on his face.

“Can you see it?”

“I just got a glimpse, but it looked kind of green and scaly.”

“Is it a snake?”

“I’m not sure,” Kevin replied as he used his foot to carefully move a piece of wood out of the way so he could see what it was. “Oh boy... it’s just a stuffed animal that looks like a dragon.”

“Who would bring something like that up here, and then leave it under a tree?”

“I don’t know,” Kevin replied after moving another piece of wood out of the way so he could see it better.

“Is it a girlie looking dragon, or the kind of stuffed animal a little boy would play with?”

“It’s a girlie looking one.”

“Pick it up so I can see it.”

“I don’t really want to,” Kevin replied since he was still a little spooked by the fact that he thought it was alive.

“You’re not afraid of a stuffed animal are you?” Emalyn teased.

“No I’m not,” Kevin insisted as he reached down and picked it up.

“Oh, that does look life-like,” Emalyn remarked as she stared at it for a moment.

“It feels funny too.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know... it doesn’t feel like fabric, it feels like scales, and it’s making my hand tingle.”

“Kevin... I just saw its eyes open for a second after you ran your hand over it!”

“Nice try, Emalyn!”

“I’m not kidding! It opened its eyes when you touched it!” Kevin slowly set the dragon down, and when he took his hands off of her, she looked up at him and let out a pitiful little cry.

“Emalyn, I think she’s injured, what should I do?”

“See if she will drink some water,” Emalyn replied as she tossed him the bottle of water in her hand. Kevin immediately poured a little in the cap, and then offered it to her. The dragon sniffed it for a moment, and then lapped it up with her little forked tongue. Then she reached for Kevin’s hand with her claw before collapsing.

“Kevin, I think she wants you to hold her.”

“Okay, she’s a dragon, but she’s little,” he muttered to himself as he scooped her up into his arms.

“I think the water might have helped,” Emalyn remarked after she came over to look at her.

“See if she wants some more,” Kevin suggested as he gently cradled her in his arms. Emalyn picked the cap up off the ground, and then poured a little more into it before offering it to the dragon. As before, she sniffed it for a second, and then lapped up a little more before nestling her head in the crook of Kevin’s arm.

“She’s so cute, do you think I could touch her?”

“She seems to like it when I do,” Kevin replied.

“Okay, I’ll just gently run my finger over her tail... wow, she really does feel life-like.”

“Like a real dragon,” Kevin smiled.

“Yeah, I thought they went extinct after the middle-ages... when there were knights, and castles, and ferocious dragons eating people.”

“She doesn’t look very ferocious, and she’s a little too small to eat anyone,” Kevin joked.

“Maybe the history books had it wrong, or maybe she’s a baby dragon?”

“I don’t know... but we can’t leave her out here now that we know she needs our help,” Kevin replied.

“You could wrap her in your jacket, and we can take her back with us.”

“Okay, but what should I tell my parents?”

“Well, they can see that she is an injured animal, so maybe they will let us help her until she gets better.”

“Emalyn, she’s a dragon, and adults think they are mythical creatures. Don’t you think they might freak-out when we show her to them?”

“They can clearly see that she is not a mythical creature, and your parents seem pretty accepting of stuff.”

“Alright, let’s take her back and see what they say, but I warned you,” Kevin agreed as he gently wrapped his jacket around her, and then held her in his arms.

As they made their way back down the mountain, Emalyn stayed close to Kevin so that she could help him over fallen logs, and through the brushy spots so that he wouldn’t risk dropping her.

“How is she is doing?” Emalyn asked when they reached the ravine across from their campsite.

“I think she’s asleep, would you mind taking a peek to make sure?”

“Uh Kevin... I don’t see her!” Emalyn remarked as she peeked under the jacket.

“What do you mean? I can feel her in my arms,” Kevin replied as if Emalyn had overlooked her somehow.

“Nope, she’s gone!” Emalyn insisted as she pulled open the jacket so that he could see that she wasn’t there.

“I don’t understand,” Kevin replied in a frantic voice as he shifted the jacket into one hand so he could feel around with the other. When he felt her cool scales against his hand, he gasped. “Emalyn, she’s not gone... she’s invisible,” he blurted out as if he didn’t even believe it. Emalyn reached over to where his hand was touching her, and then looked on in utter disbelief.

“How is that possible?”

“I don’t know, but I think we should wait to tell my parents about her until we know more.”

“Yeah, they might have been able to accept that dragons are real, but it’s going to be hard to explain one that can disappear at will,” Emalyn replied.

“Would you mind holding her for a few minutes so I can go tell them that we are back from our hike? I don’t want them to get worried or come looking for us.”

“Sure,” Emalyn replied as she gently folded the jacket back around the dragon before lifting her out of his arms.

While he was gone, she gently caressed the little creature, partially to comfort her, and partially because she couldn’t get over the fact she could hide in plain sight.

“What’s that?” Emalyn asked when she saw Kevin walking back with a small bag in his hand.

“I grabbed a few things in case she might be hungry.”

“Like what?” Emalyn asked as she moved over so he could sit next to her.

“I brought a carrot, some blue berries, and a hotdog since I don’t know if she eats fruits and vegetables, or likes meat.”

“Hotdogs aren’t found in nature, so I would try the carrot or the blueberry first,” Emalyn suggested.

“Good point, I’ll break off a piece of carrot and see if she takes it.” When nothing happened after a few minutes, he tossed the carrot aside and put a blueberry in its place.

“If she’s a carnivore, then maybe she would like the hotdog,” Emalyn remarked when she showed no interest in blueberry.

“Alright, it is meat, although I have no idea what kind they are made from,” Kevin chuckled as he broke off a piece of it and placed it next to his jacket. Within a few seconds the dragon appeared, gulped down the treat, and then quickly changed color to match the jacket.

“Kevin, did you see that... she’s able to match her surroundings just like a chameleon!”

“That’s so cool. I wonder if she can match a stick,” Kevin remarked as he picked one up and placed it under her tail. A split second later, a thin narrow line appeared on the surface of her scales that matched the stick’s color and texture perfectly.



“Let’s try something really challenging,” Emalyn suggested as she removed the stick and replaced it with a piece of foil. With a few seconds, her scales changed to a bright silvery color, mimicking not only the foils reflective surface, but its crinkled texture as well.

“Wow, she can match anything,” Kevin remarked as he looked on in amazement.

“Kids, it’s time for lunch,” Josephine called out.

“Okay mom... we’ll be right there.”

“What are we going to do with her?” Emalyn asked as she looked down at the dragon for moment.

“I’ll go get our lunches, and then we can share them with her if she’s still hungry,” Kevin replied.

“Will your parents get upset if we don’t eat with them?”

“Not as long as I don’t skip out on dinner since that’s family time,” Kevin remarked before running off.

When he returned, he was carrying two large plates of food with an extra hotdog on each one.

“Did they ask you why you took so many hotdogs?”

“Yeah, and I told them they were for our pet dragon.”

“That’s a good one,” Emalyn laughed.

“I know. They didn’t believe me even though I was telling the truth.”

“Won’t they be surprised when they find out you weren’t joking.”

“Yeah, that’s going to be an interesting conversation,” Kevin admitted as he sat down on the other side of where his jacket was sitting. No sooner had he set a piece of hotdog down, then the dragon changed back to what appeared to be her natural green color, and ate it.

“Do you think she is changing color so that we can see her, or so that we know she’s hungry?” Emalyn questioned.

“I don’t know,” Kevin replied as he handed the rest of the hotdog to her.

After she gulped it down, she looked over at Emalyn and clawed the air.

“Wow, she’s really smart... you’re still eating your hotdog, but she’s begging from me as if she knows it’s my turn to feed her the extra one on my plate.”

“How could she possibly know that?”

“Maybe she’s read my mind like you were doing down by the lake, or maybe she understands our language,” Emalyn joked.

“That would be really cool, but I’m sure she just saw that you had more food on your plate than I had on mine.”

“Yeah, that makes more sense,” Emalyn replied as she fed her a piece of the hotdog off her plate.

After she finished eating the second hotdog, she curled up on the jacket and vanished from sight.

“I guess that’s all she wanted,” Emalyn remarked.

“What would you like to do while she’s resting?” Kevin asked.

“Well, she seems pretty content, do you think we can go play down by the lake as long as we come back up and check on her every so often?”

“Okay, let me put my jacket in the shade, and then we can go down to the lake.”

After they had been splashing in the shallows and skipping rocks across the water for over an hour, Kevin headed back up to check on the dragon. But when he looked under the tree where he had left his coat, it was gone and he started to panic.

“Mom, did you move my jacket?” he yelled out as he ran towards the campsite as fast as he could.

“I put it in the trailer,” Josephine replied. Kevin raced past her and into the pop-up. When he saw his jacket laying on his sleeping bag, he ran over to it, and started patting it with his hands.

“Whew!” he sighed in relief when he felt a dragon sized lump tucked inside of it.

“Is everything alright?” Josephine asked as she poked her head inside the trailer to check on him.

“Yeah. I was concerned when I didn’t see my jacket under the tree.”

“I noticed it was kind of heavy, have you been collecting rocks again?”

“Emalyn and I found something cool on our hike and I tucked it in my coat for safe keeping.”

“Can I see it?”

“No, you can’t really see it right now, but I would be happy to show it to you later,” Kevin promised.

“Alright, I’ll wait for the surprise,” Josephine smiled. “When you’re done being mysterious, would you please let Emalyn know we’re about to have dinner?”

“Oakay,” Kevin replied as he moved the jacket so it would be nestled between their sleeping bags. Then he returned to the lake to get Emalyn.

“So your mom didn’t even know she was in your jacket when she moved it?” Emalyn asked after he told her what had happened.

“No, she noticed the jacket seemed kind of heavy, but I often collect stuff when I’m out hiking, so she assumed it was an interesting rock or something like that.”

“Just help yourself to the food,” Josephine remarked when they returned to the camp.

“Thanks mom,” Kevin replied as he picked up two plates and handed Emalyn one of them.

After they finished eating, Kevin looked over at the trailer and yawned.

“I’m kind of tired, would it be okay if I got ready for bed.”

“What? No marshmallows?” Brian asked with a surprised look.

“No, I had so many last night that I’m kind of tired of them.”

“What about you Emalyn? Are you going to stay up and roast some marshmallows with us?”

“No, that hike really wore me out.”

“Okay, we’ll be in in a little bit,” Brian replied.

After Kevin and Emalyn had gone inside, Brian looked over at Josephine, and shrugged his shoulders, as if he didn’t quite understand what had happened.

“They were out hiking and playing all day,” Josephine remarked in a low voice.

“Yeah, that’s true, but when I was a kid, I played all day and half the night.”

“Not every kid was a robot like you were growing up,” Josephine teased.

“I was not a robot,” Brian replied in a robotic voice.

“Maybe not, but you were a little different from the other kids your age,” Josephine smirked.

“What are you talking about?”

“Not every child built a chemistry set to test rocks and minerals when they were ten.”

“I might have been a bit of a nerd,” Brian admitted.

“Just a bit,” Josephine smiled.

“Since nobody wants to roast marshmallows, what do think about turning in early?”

“It’s not because I’m teasing you, is it?”

“No, I’m actually tired, and since we’re on vacation why not get some extra sleep?”

“Sounds good to me,” Josephine replied as she followed him into the trailer.

After they turned off the lights and went to bed, Kevin nudged Emalyn with his elbow to see if she was still awake.

“What is it?” she whispered.

“If the dragon needs to get up during the night, can you pretend that you need to use the bathroom and take her out with you.”

“Okay,” Emalyn replied.

“Thanks, I sleep like the dead, and I’m afraid I won’t wake up if she needs something.”

“No problem, I’ll make sure she can get out if she needs to,” Emalyn replied as she put her arm around the little dragon to comfort her.

### Chapter 3

When Kevin woke up, the first thing he did was reach over and patted his coat with his hand to check on the dragon, but it was empty.

“Emalyn, wake up,” he whispered in an urgent tone.

“What’s wrong?”

“Did you take the dragon out last night?”

“No, she never woke me,” Emalyn whispered back.

“I can’t find her... feel around on your side and see if she moved during the night.”

“I don’t feel anything,” Emalyn replied after a thorough search. Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw something moving over on the counter. “Kevin, I think she’s trying to get into the bag of jerky on the counter,” Emalyn whispered. Kevin immediately looked over and saw the bag being tugged on as if a phantom was clawing at it.

“I’ll see if I can catch her,” Kevin replied as he got out of bed and quietly tiptoed over towards the counter. As he slowly reached out to nab her, the bag suddenly tore open and several pieces of jerky went flying into the air. Kevin instinctively grabbed the ones he could, but one of the pieces flew straight towards his dad’s face, and fell right into his half open mouth, instantly waking him from his slumber.

“What is going on?” his dad demanded after he pulled the jerky strip out of his mouth.

“Oops,” Kevin replied innocently. “I thought you were awake, and you looked really hungry!”

“I was sleeping you joker!”

“I’m sorry, I’ll go back to bed,” Kevin apologized as he quickly retreated to the other side of the trailer. Brian gave him ‘the look’. It was the one that said, ‘don’t you dare bother me again, or else!’ Every parent had it, and every kid knew exactly what it meant. After Brian closed his eyes and rolled over so he was facing the other way, Kevin slowly knelt down and waved a piece of jerky back and forth hoping to entice the little troublemaker over to him. Within a few seconds, the little green dragon appeared, and he quickly picked her up and put her on his lap.

“I got her,” he whispered to Emalyn, before motioning that he was going to take her outside. Emalyn nodded and then quietly followed him out after she grabbed the partially clawed bag of jerky off the counter.

“That was close,” Emalyn exclaimed.

“I know. I thought my dad was going to kill me when the jerky flew into his mouth and woke him up.”

“Did you see the look on his face, it was priceless,” Emalyn chuckled.

“I just hope he was groggy enough to forget it ever happened.”

“You played it off pretty well,” Emalyn remarked as she tucked the bag of jerky into her pocket.

“Can I have another piece?” the dragon asked in a soft voice as she eyed the pocket that Emalyn had just put it in.

“Holy goose-bumps... you can talk!” Emalyn blurted out in disbelief.

“Of course I can talk,” the dragon replied as if there was nothing unusual about it. Emalyn glanced at Kevin, who was in such a state of shock that he couldn’t even speak.

“Do you have a name?” Emalyn asked as she pulled out the bag of jerky and handed her a piece.

“I... I can’t remember it,” the dragon admitted after gulping down the dried meat.

“Do you remember what happened to you before we found you?” Kevin asked.

“No, where was I?”

“You were buried under a pile of splintered wood half-way up Castle Mountain.”

“I wonder what I was doing up there?”

“I don’t know, but when I found you, I thought that you were a stuffed animal.”

“You thought that I was a toy?” the dragon snorted indignantly.

“Sorry, you’re the first real dragon either of us have ever seen,” Kevin admitted.

“Really? You’ve never seen another dragon?”

“Not a real one,” Kevin replied.

“That’s not good... and why can’t I remember what happened to me?”

“I think you have amnesia,” Emalyn suggested. “My mom is a nurse, and she told me that when people lose their memory it’s usually because they hit their head, or had an accident that knocked them out.”

“I won’t ever know what happened to me?” the dragon cried out.

“No, it’s not permanent. My mom said most people get their memory back after they recover from their injuries, so I bet you will too.”

“I do feel better today than I did last night, but everything is still really fuzzy.”

“What’s the last thing that you remember?” Emalyn asked.

“I remember the names you call each other by... Kevin and Emalyn.”

“Do you remember anything further back than that?”

“No,” the dragon replied as she looked around, hoping that something would seem familiar to her.

“Well, we can’t keep calling you ‘dragon’ all day long, so is there a name that we can use until your memory comes back?”

“You can pick one for me since you were kind enough to take me in.”

“Do you like the name Sparkle? It matches your iridescent scales, when you’re not hiding,” Emalyn smiled.

“It’s cute... do you have a suggestion? She asked as she looked at Kevin.

“How about the name Splinter, since we found you under a pile of splintered wood?”

“I like that, what do you think Emalyn?”

“I like Sparkle a little more, but it’s up to you to choose a name that fits you best.”

“I think cutesy names are fine for stuffed dragons, but we’re tough, and our name should reflect that... so I think I’ll go with Splinter.”

“Hey, you just said dragons are tough,” Kevin remarked. “That’s a memory from your past. Do you remember anything else about dragons?”

“I do... I know that there are three types of dragons; Water Dragons, Fire Dragons, and Pigmy Dragons, and I know I’m a Pigmy Dragon!” Splinter announced with pride.

“See, your memory is coming back. What else do you remember about the different types of dragons?” Kevin asked, not only to help her to remember more about her past, but so he and Emalyn could find out more about dragons in the process.

“I know that Water Dragons are very elusive and they only come ashore to lay their eggs and care for their young. I remember being told that Fire Dragons went extinct in medieval times... but I don’t remember why.”

“Do you have any memories that might explain what happened to you?” Kevin asked.

“No... I think I have a brother, but it gets fuzzy when I try to remember anything else about him,” Splinter sighed.

“I’m sure it will all come back to you,” Kevin said in an encouraging tone as he gently patted her on the head.

“I hope so,” Splinter remarked as she took another piece of jerky out of Emalyn’s hand.

“Kids?” Josephine called out. “It’s time to pack-up. We have to head back home soon.”

“Okay mom,” Kevin yelled back as he glanced down at Splinter for a moment. “Emalyn and I have to leave... but you are welcome to come with us if you want to?”

“How far away do you live?”

“We both live in the same small town just north of Denver, which is a little over an hour’s drive from here.”

“That doesn’t seem too far away,” Splinter remarked as she looked at Emalyn for a moment.

“If you come with us, Kevin and I can take care of you until your memory comes back. Then you can decide what you want to do after that,” Emalyn suggested.

“Okay, I’ll come with you,” Splinter agreed.

“There is one thing... you need to keep out of sight because most people think that dragons are mythical creatures, and those that don’t, think they went extinct just like the dinosaurs. So you can’t let anyone see you including my parents, at least until I have a chance to tell them about you, and the same goes for Emalyn’s family,” Kevin warned.

“Okay, I’ll be careful and stay hidden when there are any other humans around,” Splinter promised.

“Kids, let’s get going,” Josephine called out again. Splinter changed color so she wasn’t visible, and Kevin wrapped her in his jacket before headed back over to the campsite.

Once everything was loaded back into the truck, Kevin put his jacket on the back seat, and he and Emalyn hopped in.

“Did you have a fun trip?” Josephine asked as they pulled out of the campsite.

“It was really fun, and I don’t think Emalyn and I will ever forget it.”

“That’s for sure,” Emalyn remarked under her breath.

“I’m glad you both enjoyed it,” Josephine smiled.

“Thanks for inviting me, I had a really great time.”

“You’re welcome, and if you want to come with us the next time we go camping, we would love to have you,” Josephine added before turning back around in her seat.

“That was nice of your mom,” Emalyn whispered.



“Yeah, she’s pretty cool,” Kevin admitted as he looked out the window as they passed by the lake.

Once they got back out on the highway, Kevin played games on his phone, while Emalyn drew pictures of dragons in her notebook to pass the time.

When they arrived back at Kevin’s house, Emalyn helped Kevin take his things up to his room and then said good-bye to Splinter.

“Don’t worry, I’ll bring her by tomorrow,” Kevin promised. “And once she knows where you live, she can fly back and forth as long as she remembers to stays hidden,” Kevin added as he looked down at her for a moment.

“I know, I can’t be seen by anyone other than you two,” Splinter remarked.

“I just want you to be careful now that you’re staying in a city.”

“I will be, don’t worry.”

After Emalyn had left, Kevin cleared a spot on the top bunk of his bed so Splinter would have a place to sleep.

“You sure do have a lot of stuffed animals,” Splinter remarked.

“Yeah, I collected them when I was younger, and now I’m reluctant to get rid of them because they have sentimental value.”

“What is that?” Splinter asked since she had never heard that word before.

“It’s something that’s special because of the memories that are tied to it.”

“Oh…” Splinter sighed as she looked away for a moment.

“Don’t worry, you will get your memories back, and even if you don’t, you’ll make new ones,” Kevin promised as he gently patted her on the side.

## Chapter 4

Over the next few days, Kevin and Emalyn took turns watching over Splinter while she adjusted to living with them in the city. When no one was around, they played games with her, and comforted her whenever she was sad or after a memory fragment raised more questions than it answered.

“Kevin, I notice some of your stuffed animals look like dragons, and you seem to have a lot of books about dragons... why is that?”

“I have been fascinated with dragons long before I met you,” Kevin admitted.

“If you thought we were extinct, then why would you care about us?” Splinter asked, not to be rude, but because she didn’t understand why he would take an interest in a lost race.

“I don’t know, dragons are cool, and I feel connected to them in some way.”

“I noticed your mom wears a dragon pendant and your dad has a dragon tattoo on his arm. Do they feel connected to us in some way?” Splinter asked.

“I’m not sure... my parents are descendants of a tribe called the Celts, and from what I have read, they revered dragons.”

“Well, that should make it easier for you to tell them about me.”

“Yeah, I was thinking about doing that pretty soon, since I don’t like to keep things from them. I just wanted to see if your memory would come back first, that way it won’t be an issue if they won’t let you stay,” Kevin remarked.

“I’ll let you decide when it’s the right time to tell them about me, I just don’t want you to get into trouble is all.”

“I will take full responsibility for my actions, and accept the punishment if there is one,” Kevin insisted as he changed into his pajamas before getting into bed.

“I appreciate you and Emalyn helping me,” Splinter remarked as she curled up on the part of his pillow that he wasn’t using.

“You know you have your own bed,” Kevin smiled.

“Emalyn lets me sleep next to her when I stay with her.”

“So she doesn’t mind sleeping next to a dragon with hotdog-breath?” Kevin asked as he tickled her side.

“My breath is minty fresh, see...” Splinter replied as she exhaled in his face.

“Why is your breath so fresh?” Kevin asked with a suspicious look.

“I saw the mint flavored paste in your bathroom, and I tried it.”

“You’re not supposed to eat that, it’s for brushing your teeth so you don’t get cavities.”

“Are you sure? It’s pretty tasty stuff.”

“Please don’t tell me you ate very much of it, otherwise you might get sick,” Kevin asked with a concerned look.

“No, I only licked a little of it off the brush you squirted it onto,” Splinter admitted.

“Eew, you licked my toothbrush?”

“Yeah... I pre-moistened it for you,” Splinter snickered.

“That’s gross. Now I have to get a new toothbrush and brush them again,” Kevin sighed before heading back into the bathroom.

When he returned, Splinter had taken most of his pillow, forcing him to make do with the corner of it. He knew he could have moved her over, but she was so darn cute, he couldn’t bring himself to do it.

The next morning, Splinter poked him with her tail to wake him up.

“I thought dragons liked to sleep in,” Kevin moaned.

“You’re not going to believe it, but my memory came back!”

“Really?” Kevin replied as he rubbed the sleep out of his weary eyes.

“Yeah... and I remember everything that happened to me.”

“You do?”

“Yep, but I have to start at the beginning, otherwise it’s not going to make any sense to you.”

“Okay,” Kevin replied as he sat up in bed and waited for her to begin.

“Remember when I said that Fire Dragons went extinct... well, the sad truth is that there was a war between them and the humans, and when it ended, so did their reign. I’m not blaming your ancestors, or anyone else, I’m just telling you what happened so you will understand what happened next.”

“Okay,” Kevin nodded with a look of concern in his pale green eyes.

“After the war ended, the Water Dragons and Pygmy Dragons agreed to never have any contact with your species from that day forward. It’s known as the universal law of dragons, and

that's why your species thinks that all dragon went extinct after the middle-ages, not just the Fire Dragons."

"That makes sense," Kevin replied.

"In order to make sure every dragon followed the law, the dragon elders made the penalty for breaking it very harsh. Regrettably, my brother and I got caught breaking the law, and we were taken before the Dragon Council atop Castle Mountain to be sentenced for our crimes. Even though we only broke the law to save another, we were given the full sentence, which seemed unjust. So when the thunderstorm distracted the elders, my brother and I escaped. As fate would have it, the tree that my brother and I hid in was struck by lightning, and the next thing I remember was waking up in your arms."

"If going back there puts you in danger, you can stay here with us and no one ever has to know."

"I would love to stay with you and Emalyn, but my brother Striker is still out there somewhere, and I can't just leave him on his own. If he was recaptured, then he will be severely punished for his crimes," Splinter replied with a look of regret, and fear.

"If you only broke the law in order to save another dragon, then why would they insist on punishing you?"

"We didn't do it to save a dragon," Splinter admitted. "It was a human child..."

"What happened?"

"A little over a week ago my brother and I saw a little boy slip and fall into the lake. At first we thought his parents would come get him when they heard him cry, but he must have hit his head because he didn't make a sound. When we realized that he was going to drown if we didn't help him, we immediately flew over and pulled him to the shore. As soon as we got him turned over so he could breathe, he suddenly woke up and saw both of us as clear as day. What we didn't know at the time was that an elder dragon had also seen what happened and he reported it to the elders. My brother and I tried to explain what we did, but we were still sentenced to death for violating our most important law," Splinter admitted with a look of shame.

"You were sentenced to death for saving a child's life!" Kevin gasped.

"Dragon laws are few, but strict."

"Why weren't you camouflaged when you went to rescue the little boy?"

“We were, but our color reactive scales don’t work very well when we get wet, and he clearly saw us after we pulled him out of the water.”

“So what! No one would ever believe a little boy who claims to have been rescued by two dragons,” Kevin insisted.

“That’s probably true, but we still broke the law, and we may have altered the future in some unforeseeable way.”

“Is that what the Dragon Council accused you of?”

“Yes, they are concerned that one event might ripple out into something terrible, and my brother and I would have caused it,” Splinter admitted.

“That’s unfair because it assumes you were not supposed to save the child, when in fact that might be exactly what was supposed to happen,” Kevin argued.

“I hope that’s the case, but it won’t change the fact that we broke our most sacred law, and if they have my brother he will face judgement on the Stone of Punishment come dies Saturni,” Splinter revealed, as her eyes began to tear up.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know what that means.”

“Dies Saturni is Latin for Saturday, which is the day of punishment,” Splinter replied as she burrowed her head under his pillow.

“Don’t worry, Emalyn and I will help you find your brother before it’s too late,” Kevin promised.

“You would do that for me?” Splinter said as she peeked out at him.

“Of course, you’re our friend, and friends help each other,” Kevin insisted as he picked her up and hugged her.

“I could fly back there tonight, and look for him on my own so you don’t get into trouble for helping me,” Splinter offered.

“Don’t be silly, we want to help you. At least let me talk to my parents before you go off on your own,” Kevin insisted.

“What are you going to say?”

“I’m going to see if they will take us back to the lake for another camp out.”

“Are you going to tell them about me?”

“I don’t want to try and explain all this to them until we know that your brother is safe. That way you can stay there with him if they freak-out after realizing dragons are real.”

“Is that likely to happen?” Splinter asked.

“I don’t think so, but sometimes adults have a hard time believing in things once they have decided they’re not real. In any case, I need to let Emalyn know what is going on and see if she can come with us if my parents are willing to go back to the lake,” Kevin replied as he texted Emalyn.

“What did she say?” Splinter asked when she saw his phone light up a moment later.

“She has permission to go with us, so as soon as my dad gets home from work, I’ll ask him to take us back to the lake.”

“Thank you so much,” Splinter said as she nuzzled him several times to show her appreciation.

“You’re welcome,” Kevin replied.

For the remainder of the day Kevin did what he could to comfort her whenever she seemed anxious or upset. He could tell that she was a very brave dragon, but the thought of losing her brother was clearly weighing on her.

“Splinter, would a hotdog help pass the time?” Kevin asked when he noticed his dad was running a bit late.

“Two of them might,” Splinter replied.

“Alright, I’ll go get you two of them.”

When Kevin returned, Splinter gulped them down, and when she was done, she flew over to the window so she could look out at the road.

“I know it’s hard, but try not to worry, my dad will be home any minute and then we’ll have an answer,” Kevin said in a reassuring tone. Splinter nodded and then laid down between two of the stuffed dragons so she could stare out the window without being noticed.

“Is that him?” she asked when a silver truck pulled into the driveway.

“It sure is... wait here, and I’ll be right back.” Splinter camouflaged herself and then anxiously waited for him to return.

“Hi dad, how was your day?” Kevin asked the moment Brian walked in the door.

“Long and boring, how was yours?”

“Pretty good,” Kevin replied as he followed his dad into the office.

“Did you need something?” Brian asked when he noticed Kevin was hovering.

“I was really, really hoping we could go back to the lake this weekend for another camp out.”

“It’s kind of short notice.”

“I know, but this might be our last chance to go camping before school starts.”

“Did you already ask your mom?”

“Yeah, and she said it was up to you.”

“Alright, we’ll go since the trailer is still packed and you and Emalyn had so much fun last time.”

“You’re the best dad ever... I can’t wait to tell her we’re going camping again.”

“I would like to get an early start, so would you please tell her that we’re going to leave at seven in morning instead of noon.”

“I will,” Kevin replied before running up to his room so he could call her, and tell Splinter the good news. The minute he opened the door, Splinter flew into his arms.

“Have you been eavesdropping?”

“I can’t help it if dragons have excellent hearing... and I might have peeked out when no one was looking.”

“I figured as much,” Kevin smiled as he put her down so he could text Emalyn. A split-second later she responded with a smiley face, and Kevin showed it to Splinter.

“Does that mean she’s coming?” Splinter asked, since she didn’t know what a smiley face meant.

“She is, and my dad wants to get there early Saturday morning so we should have plenty of time to rescue your brother if they have him.”

“You have no idea how much this means to me!” Splinter replied as she flew back up into his arms to nuzzle him again.

“I had no idea dragons were so cuddly,” Kevin chuckled as her little horns tickled the underside of his chin.

“I’m not being cuddly, I have an itchy spot on my head.”

“Okay,” Kevin smiled.

## Chapter 5

The next day Kevin got up early so he could sneak Splinter into the truck before his dad came out to hook-up the trailer. On his way back, his dad stopped him at the doorway.

“You are awfully eager to go camping,” Brian remarked with a suspicious look.

“It’s my new favorite place.”

“You know, that I know, that you and Emalyn are up to something, right?”

“Dad, we’re kids, of course we’re up to something.”

“Would you mind telling me what that is?”

“It’s nothing bad, we’re just helping a friend in need,” Kevin admitted.

“An imaginary friend, or a real one?”

“Imaginary to you, and real to us,” Kevin smiled.

“Alright, just don’t get into too much trouble or we’ll all have to answer to your mother.”

“We won’t,” Kevin promised as he continued inside to get the rest of his stuff.

When he came back out, Emalyn’s mom had just dropped her off.

“Hi Kevin,” she called out when she saw him.

“Hi Emalyn, you’re early.”

“I know, I didn’t want to risk being late for such an important day.”

“Yeah, I already put you know who in the back seat,” Kevin whispered as he helped Emalyn put her things in the truck before getting in.

When Emalyn saw Kevin’s jacket sitting on the seat between them, she gently patted it and then smiled when she felt Splinter.

“What’s the plan?” Emalyn asked in a low voice.

“Splinter thinks that her brother might have been recaptured and taken back up to the top of Castle Mountain, so we need to get up there as quickly as possible.”

“Won’t he camouflage himself the instant he sees us? It’s not like he’s going to know we’re there to rescue him.”

“Splinter told me that dragons can see colors that we can’t, like infrared. So she will be able to spot him even if we can’t. The reason we’re going up there is so that the other dragons won’t try and capture her, or stop us since we are humans.”

“I hope we find him,” Emalyn replied.



“Shush... here comes my mom and dad.”

“Oh, there you are,” Brian remarked as he glanced at the back seat.

“Yep, we’re ready to go,” Kevin replied.

“I hope we have everything,” he added after Josephine buckled in.

“I’m sure we do... and if not, we’ll still have a fun time,” Josephine smiled.

“That’s true,” Brian remarked as he started the truck and pulled out of the driveway.

It took a little over an hour to get to the lake since the traffic was lighter than usual, which made everyone happy.

“Kevin, can you bring me the crank for the pop-up?” Brian asked after he unhitched the trailer.

“Yeah, where is it?”

“Under the back seat.”

“Okay,” Kevin replied as he handed Emalyn his jacket for safekeeping.

Once the trailer was ready to go, Kevin and Emalyn quickly unpacked their things and made their beds in record time.

“You both seem to be in a bit of a hurry,” Brian remarked.

“That’s because Emalyn and I want to go for a hike before lunch.”

“Okay, but make sure you take your cell phone and some water along.”

“I know... we were just here last week,” Kevin replied as if he already knew what to do.

“Hey, you’re lucky to have parents that care as much as your mom and I do,” Brian glared.

“I’m sorry, we’re just eager to hit the trail.”

“Alright, be safe and make sure you’re back by lunchtime.”

“Okay,” Kevin replied as he and Emalyn grabbed their backpacks and headed out.

As soon as they were out of sight, Splinter flew out of Kevin’s jacket and landed on a large rock just ahead of them.

“We need to hurry, if they have my brother, the sooner we get to him the better.”

“Lead the way, and you can tell us your plan along the way,” Kevin suggested.

“Alright,” Splinter replied as she took to the air. “When we reach the top, I’ll call out for my brother, and if he is there we’ll want to get him and leave as quickly as possible. The faster we act, the less time the elder dragons will have to respond to our rescue.”

“I thought the dragon law prevented them from being seen by us?” Kevin questioned.

“It does, but once they realize you guys are helping me, I doubt that will matter,” Splinter gulped.

“Why not?”

“Because they’re going to know you have already seen a dragon, so seeing them will no longer be a violation of the law.”

“What will they do once they realize we are helping you?” Emalyn asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Will we be in any danger?”

“If they think you are a threat, you could be... perhaps you and Kevin should turn back. You have already helped me more than I can ever repay.”

“I’m not turning back,” Emalyn replied with a determined look on her face.

“Neither am I. You are our friend, and we’re not going to let you go up there all alone.”

“Then promise me that if they start to get aggressive, you’ll turn back with or without me,” Splinter insisted.

“We will,” Kevin promised as he crossed his fingers behind his back.

“Good, I don’t want anything to happen to either of you,” Splinter snorted as she continued up the slope.

When they reached the top of the mountain, Splinter stopped and looked around so Kevin and Emalyn could catch their breath.

“Are the dragons using their camouflage?” Kevin asked after his lungs stopped burning.

“No, I don’t see any dragons at all. They might still be in their dens sleeping, or they may have gone out on a hunt.”

“Where would they be holding your brother if they have him?”

“In one of the abandoned dens on the far side of the peak,” Splinter replied as she started heading over in that direction.

“Striker? Are you up here?” she called out once they reached the area where the old dens were. When there was no reply she poked her head into one of the larger dens and called out his name several more times.

“Maybe they never caught him,” Kevin remarked in an optimistic tone.

“There are a few more abandoned dens across from the Stone of Punishment, but I can’t look,” Splinter admitted in a nervous tone, uncertain if his blood might have already been spilt on it.

“I’ll go,” Kevin offered when he saw the fear and sadness in her eyes.

As soon as Kevin saw that the stone was unsoiled, he turned to call them over, but much to his surprise, Splinter and Emalyn had been encircled by a bunch of angry looking dragons.

“Don’t you dare hurt them!” he yelled out as he hopped up on the stone so he would look more like an adult.

“She has broken the law!” a large blue dragon snapped in return.

“We didn’t come here to fight, we just came for her brother!” Kevin insisted. The blue dragon ignored Kevin’s request and turned his ire towards Splinter.

“Not only have you been seen by these humans, you have brought them to our sanctuary! This is an outrage!” he snorted.

“I just wanted to see my brother,” Splinter replied in a timid voice.

“Bring him out!” the blue dragon ordered so she could see him punished in front of her.

“Let him go!” Kevin ordered when he saw the frightened young dragon being dragged out by his horns.

“You should not even be here!” the blue dragon snarled in disgust. “Our laws are clear, and their crimes must be paid for in blood!”

“If you let them go, I will stay and pay for their crimes with mine!” Kevin promised.

“You’re bluffing!” the blue dragon laughed in disbelief.

“I am not!” Kevin replied as he pulled out his pocketknife and extended the blade.

“No human would ever sacrifice themselves for a dragon.”

“Splinter and her brother saved a drowning boy, and if they were willing to risk their lives to save one of us, then I am willing to do the same for them,” Kevin insisted as he pressed the knife against his flesh.

“No, don’t do it!” Splinter cried out. “My brother and I broke the law, and we’ll pay for our crimes!”

“I won’t let you be killed for saving a child!” Kevin insisted as a drop of blood ran down his blade and onto the stone at his feet.

“Wait!” the blue dragon interrupted. “Are you really willing to trade your blood for theirs?”

“I am!” Kevin replied as his light green eyes started to tear up from the fear of what he was about to do.

“You know that your blood must be spilled on the Stone of Punishment,” the blue dragon insisted.

“I do, and if you let them go, I will take their place and their punishment,” Kevin promised as another drop of blood ran down the edge of the blade.

“Very well, let them go,” the blue ordered. Emalyn burst into tears, and then ran over to Kevin to try and convince him not to do it.

“Let’s just run for it,” she whispered into his ear.

“There are too many of them to risk it.”

“No, you can’t do this... your parents will never forgive me, and I will never forgive you,” Emalyn sobbed.

“I know it’s hard to understand, but this is what my heart is telling me to do, and there is another deeper feeling that I just can’t shake. It’s like the voice of destiny calling me to protect them,” Kevin admitted.

“What does that mean?”

“It means you have to go before they change their minds and try to punish us all,” Kevin insisted.

“Alright,” Emalyn reluctantly agreed as she wiped the tears from her face.

“You are my best friend, and I care about you more than you can ever know,” Kevin whispered before he pushed her away.

“I will never forget you,” Emalyn replied as she turned to leave. It was the most difficult few steps she had ever had to take, but she knew he was right. Striker and Splinter had saved a life, and if Kevin wanted to repay them with his, it wasn’t her place to try and stop him. The best she could do was take them with her, and protect them as he would have.

“I must admit that I did not think you would honor your word,” the blue dragon remarked after Emalyn and the dragons had disappeared from sight.

“I’m not afraid to die for something I believe in,” Kevin replied as he held back his tears.

“You are a very brave boy, and few are willing to do what you just did.”

“They were my friends, and they didn’t deserve to die for what they had done.”

“And neither do you, which is why I’m letting you go,” the blue dragon replied.

“You’re letting me go?” Kevin asked as if he didn’t hear him correctly.

“I never said you had to give your life for theirs, I only said your blood had to be spilt on the Stone of Punishment, which it has,” the blue dragon insisted as he pointed at the crimson stain at Kevin’s feet.

“I can go right now?” Kevin asked, stunned by what he said.

“Yes, you have honored your promise, and I have no desire to take the life of one who has yet to fulfill their true destiny.”

“Thank you” Kevin sighed in relief as he quickly put his knife back into his pocket and stepped down from the stone.

“You have a gift young man, don’t waste it,” the blue dragon warned as he and the other dragons moved out of the way so that Kevin could leave.

“I won’t,” Kevin replied as he ran after his friends. Whatever the gift was, it had just saved his life, and he wasn’t about to question it.

“Wait for me!” he shouted out when he saw Emalyn and the dragons making their way back through the boulder field.

“How did you escape?” Emalyn cried out with a look of shock and amazement.

“I didn’t, the blue dragon just let me go.”

“He did what!” she asked as if it was the most unbelievable thing that had ever happened.

“After a few drops of my blood fell on the Stone of Punishment, he said I could leave. Apparently that was all that was needed to fulfill my promise to him.”

“So he was just testing you to make sure you were really willing to trade your life for the dragons?”

“I guess so, and once he realized I was, he let me go.”

“Does that mean we can adopt a dragon?” Emalyn asked as she reached down and picked up Striker.

“If they will let us,” Kevin replied. Splinter immediately flew into his arms and nuzzled him, while her brother licked Emalyn on the cheek so that she would know he wanted to stay with her.



## About the Series

The Dragon Adventure Series was inspired by my son and his room filled with dragon art, books, and posters honoring the beloved creatures. In addition, my family's surname is of Welsh origin, so it seemed fitting to incorporate the Welsh dragon, *Y Ddraig Goch* into the storyline. I changed his name to *Draig Gogh* to make it easier for young readers to pronounce, and then added a host of friends to make the adventure come alive.

The rich mining history and unique geographical locations used in this series are inspired by real events and locations in Colorado, Wales, and Ireland. Some of the location names have been changed to fit the story, but anyone looking at a map should be able to identify their origin.

My hope is that this series will ignite the imaginations of readers young and old, along with anyone else who loves dragons. If you have any comments or questions, please feel free to contact me at the email address below.

Thanks again,  
Ben L. Hughes

Email: [kelso1900@yahoo.com](mailto:kelso1900@yahoo.com)