

A FRIEND IN THE FOREST

The baby dragon blinked its wide golden eyes, glancing around the towering trees. Everything smelled damp and green, unfamiliar and vast. One moment, it had been chasing a butterfly near its den, and the next—lost.

A rustling in the bushes made the dragon freeze.

Out stepped a sleek red fox, tail flicking and eyes full of mischief.

“You look a little out of place,” the fox said, tilting its head.

“I... I don’t know where I am,” the dragon admitted, voice trembling.

The fox’s ears twitched. “Well, lucky for you, I know these woods better than anyone. I can take you home.”

The dragon’s scales brightened with hope. “Really?”

“Really,” the fox said with a grin. “But the forest has its tricks, and we’ll have to be clever.”

They started their journey, weaving through mossy trails and shadowed glades. Soon, they arrived at an enormous oak tree, its gnarled face shifting as it spoke.

“Who dares pass through my roots?” the tree rumbled.

The dragon shrank back, but the fox stepped forward. "It's just us, Grandfather Oak. We mean no trouble."

The tree's bark groaned. "I will let you through... if you answer my riddle."

The fox smirked. "Try me."

The tree's eyes twinkled. "What has scales but cannot swim, breathes fire but fears the wind?"

The dragon's tail flicked. "That's me!" it blurted.

The tree chuckled, shaking its branches. "Clever little one. You may pass."

As they left the tree behind, the fox gave the dragon an approving nod.

Deeper into the woods, they reached a shimmering river. But something was wrong—the water was flowing backward.

"How do we cross?" the dragon asked.

The fox grinned. "Watch and learn." It hopped onto a floating leaf, which drifted upstream instead of down. The dragon hesitated, then carefully climbed onto a rock.

As soon as their feet touched the surface, the current carried them in reverse, guiding them across like a slow-moving spell.

On the other side, the fox shook itself dry. “Almost there.”

The dragon sighed in relief—until the fox hesitated. Its expression turned strangely serious.

“There’s something I haven’t told you,” the fox said.

The dragon tilted its head. “What?”

“I know the way home because... I was the one who led you here.” The fox’s voice was quieter now. “I tricked you. I was lonely.”

The dragon blinked in surprise. “You wanted a friend?”

The fox lowered its ears. “Yes.”

For a moment, silence stretched between them. Then the dragon smiled. “Well, you don’t have to trick me next time. Just ask.”

The fox’s eyes widened, then softened. “Really?”

“Really.”

They stepped forward together. The dragon was no longer lost—because now, it had found something even better than home. It had found a friend.