

Wu-lin the Dragon

By

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Written Especially for

BJ,

Jamie and Casey

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Once upon a sunny time, a summer or two ago, three children played in their backyard. BJ, a strong and brave little boy, loved to run and play chase. Jamie, the prettiest little girl anyone had ever seen, swung higher and higher on her swing set. And Casey, who was proud to be two and a half, laughed and watched as the two older children played.

Few days were as beautiful as this. The sun shone, sending its warm rays down on the trees, whose green leaves swayed in the calm breeze. The grown-ups, talking and laughing inside, said they had rarely seen such a perfect day. BJ and Jamie and Casey hoped it would last forever.

But it did not. While BJ was chasing a giggling Casey, and Jamie swung higher than she ever had before, a puff of smoke caught their attention.

“What’s that – “ Jamie started to say.

“Hey –“ BJ shouted.

“Hmm,” Casey gurgled.

The three children watched intently. As they stared, they saw a man in the smoke, an old man, a very, very old man, with wrinkles on his face and stringy gray hair falling from underneath his blue, cone-shaped hat.

“A wizard!” exclaimed Jamie.

“A magician,” said BJ breathlessly.

“Yeah!” shouted Casey. “A mizard!” Casey was still learning to talk and sometimes had trouble with his words.

The wizard brushed dust off his shoulders. Not a tall man, he nevertheless impressed the three children, who did not know what to say.

He stared at each of them, one by one: first BJ, then Jamie, then Casey, who giggled. Nobody talked.

“You – you are wondering *who I am*,” said the wizard finally. His voice was old and gravelly; Jamie thought it sounded like fingernails on a blackboard.

It was BJ who answered. “Yes,” he said firmly, for BJ did not fear the old man. “Who are you, sir? And why have you come here?”

“Aha!” cackled the old man. “You want to know, do you? Do you?” BJ nodded his head. “Very well then. My name is ...” and the old man looked around, first to one side, then the

other, as if he did not want anyone else to hear. His voice slipped to a whisper. “My name is...Shazalimo!”

“Shazalimo!” Jamie said it out loud, and laughed, thinking it a funny sort of name.

“Shama-lamo,” said Casey.

“Hello, Wizard Shazalimo,” said BJ. “We are very pleased to meet you. I am BJ, this is my cousin Jamie, and her brother Casey.”

“My name is Casey,” Casey confirmed.

“I know, I know,” laughed the wizard in his brittle scratchy voice. “I know who you are, for I am Shazalimo! Yes, I am!”

“Why, sir, have you come to visit us?” Jamie asked at length. She was always very polite.

He raised his finger to his lips. “Shh,” he said. “You must be very quiet, because it’s all a very big secret. Can I trust you?”

“Yes,” said BJ and Jamie together.

“Can I have a Popsicle?” asked Casey.

“Here, then, is the great secret,” Shazalimo whispered. “I, yes, I, Shazalimo, the Greatest Wizard of Them All, I am going to give you a Great Gift.” He looked at the children. “You are all very, very lucky.”

For a moment the three children looked at the old wizard. Nothing happened; all was quiet. BJ noticed the old man smiling slightly, and wondered that he had no teeth.

Then he said, in a great and powerful voice, “HOCUS POCUS DOMINOCUS!” And the children heard a great thundering sound.

Everything was blurry, cloudy, strange-looking. BJ and Jamie both rubbed their eyes.

Then they realized: they were not in their back yard anymore! Tall trees surrounded them, strange noises filled the air, the warm breeze was now – hot and sultry. They could see no houses, no cars, no swings.

“Shazalimo?” said BJ.

“Yes, BJ!” said the wizard. BJ could see him far above, standing on a tree branch.

“Shazalimo, where are we?”

“Listen carefully, you children!” said Shazalimo. “You must find the a glowing blue rock before you can come home. A glowing blue rock.” BJ noticed that the magician’s voice was starting to fade. In fact, his whole body was starting to fade!

“A glowing blue rock...blue rock...”

“But – but – where shall we look?” Jamie shouted. She was growing fearful.

“Where is my mommy?” asked Casey, who was himself concerned.

“A glowing blue rock...” the voice said. It was almost impossible to hear now.

“But where is it?” asked BJ in a firm voice.

“LOOK AT THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN,” boomed Shazalimo’s voice, and that was the last they heard of him.

“Top of the mountain,” muttered BJ. “Where is that?”

“Look over there,” said Jamie, peering into the distance. “I see a high mountain with snow at the top.”

“Yes, I see it too,” said BJ.

“We must climb it to the very top and fetch the magic blue stone which glows and then the powerful wizard Shazalimo will cast a spell and return us home,” Jamie said. “That is what we must do.”

“Are you sure?” BJ asked.

“Yes, that is what we must do, and we must do it right away!”

“Yes.”

“Sister?” said Casey, who had been quiet until now. “I pooped, clean me up.”

“Oh!” sighed Jamie.

After Casey got a clean bottom, the three intrepid children started for the mountain. BJ soon realized that Shazalimo had deposited them in a dense overgrown jungle, and they made their way slowly.

They reached the base of the mountain by lunchtime. Looking up, they realized it was going to be a long hike. “Jamie,” said BJ, “I think this is a volcano.”

“Oh. I hope it doesn’t erupt!”

“Me too,” nodded BJ.

Up the great mountain they climbed. Even Casey made it all the way, even though he was huffing and puffing as they went. After a time they saw no more trees, and it got colder as they climbed higher.

Up, up they went. Near the very top snow covered the ground, and the children’s feet were very cold. All three shivered.

“I hope we find the rock soon,” said Jamie.

“Where’s my mommy?” Casey asked, becoming homesick. His voice trembled slightly.

“Be quiet!” Jamie said impatiently.

“Jamie, little guys need to snuggle with their mommies several times a day,” BJ informed her. “That’s the way it is. We just have to find the glowing rock very soon.”

And then –

And then in the distance –

At the very top of the mountain –

They all saw it. They all saw a blue glow. It had to be the rock.

They ran to it, their feet leaving tracks in the cold snow. “The rock!” shouted Jamie, “the glowing rock! Yay!”

Then – they were all standing around it. It was not a big rock, in fact it was rather small. “This doesn’t seem like it could really be magic,” BJ said finally.

“Pick it up!” Jamie said.

“Yeah!” Casey added.

BJ looked at both of them. Actually, he was a little afraid, but he did not want to show it. What would happen? Would he be turned into a small animal, or into stone?

He leaned over and touched it. It was not hot nor was it cold. It was about the size of an apple.

He picked it up and held it in his hand.

The three children looked all around, at the top of the great mountain.

Suddenly there was a great roar! The earth began to shake underneath them.

“Ahh!” shouted Jamie and Casey and BJ. They were all very frightened. They looked into the crater of the volcano – something was happening! There was – something – *moving* – down there!

“BJ, I’m afraid!” shouted Jamie. BJ was too, but he didn’t say anything.

Something red was rising from the bottom of the deep crater. Up it flew, and it roared a very loud roar. BJ saw its glistening sharp white teeth; its scarlet tongue darted out here and there, everywhere. Its body stretched so long that it encircled the volcano’s peak.

It had a voice.

It said, “I HAVE BEEN ASLEEP A THOUSAND YEARS, AND SOMEBODY HAS AWOKEN ME BY MOVING THE MAGIC ROCK! WHO? *WHO?*”

BJ, even though he was very afraid, stood tall, and said, “I, BJ, hold the magic rock, as the great wizard Shazalimo has commanded!”

“BJ!” whispered Jamie. “It’s – it’s a *dragon!*”

And indeed it was: a great, enormous, red dragon with red and gold scales, and a huge tail, even bigger than seven houses. It flew in the air, far overhead above the mountain until its red eyes found the children.

“You! You moved the rock!”

“Yes, I cannot deny it. I hold in my hand the glowing blue rock.”

The dragon’s head moved to within an inch of BJ’s face. BJ could feel its hot breath. The dragon stared at him for a long, long moment.

Then it spoke again. “You have awoken me! THANK YOU! I am awake again, I, the great dragon Wu-Lin.”

“You’re welcome, Wu-lin,” said Casey.

“O brave children, I, the great and mighty dragon Wu-lin, have sworn a great oath many thousands of years ago, that whoever awakened me, I would be their very best friend forever! Tell me my great true friends, what favor can I do for you?”

“I would like a Popsicle,” said Casey.

“Casey!” Jamie shouted.

BJ thought a minute, and said, “First,” he asked, “where is this place? Where are we?”

Wu-lin the dragon sighed, and gently landed near the children. He took a deep breath. “The Diamond Mountains of Great Koryo,” he said softly. He closed his eyes tightly, and sighed again. “Yes. The Diamond Mountains.”

“Why are you here? Why are we here?” Jamie and BJ said together.

Wu-lin opened his golden eyes. “Listen, and I will tell you. A very long time ago I had a friend. His name was Chao-tzu, and he was my best friend; do you know how glorious, how wonderful it is to have a best friend of a pure heart? O! What adventures we had! We flew everywhere, we traveled to the five continents and the seven seas. We frolicked with whales, we chased elephants, we roared with the lions. When mighty armies and fearsome navies came to make war on us, we swooped down upon them and sent them home trembling with fear! Ah Chao-tzu! We were inseparable: everyone said, where there is the young Prince, so shall there be Wu-lin the dragon! And *nobody* would dare raise his hand at Prince Chao-tzu, for that rascal would have to answer to *me!*” Wu-lin raised his giant dragon’s head wistfully.

“But...” BJ started.

“What happened?” Jamie asked.

“Well, one day Prince Chao-tzu became *Emperor* Chao-tzu. At first...at first everything was as it had been. We played, we talked, I slept as I always had, outside his door. But then...”

“What?” BJ asked.

Wu-lin sighed again. “Being Emperor is not the same as being Prince, you know. Papers, treaties, ambassadors, laws, trade...suddenly Chao-tzu had no time for me, only for his Empire. And he grew old, and I became...lonely. And so...”

BJ wondered at what he saw: were the eyes of the mighty dragon growing moist? Were those shining crystals tears? “And so I returned here, to my ancient home, to sleep. Only the wizard knew my secret. Only Shazalimo knew: only children of pure hearts would awaken me.”

He turned to face BJ and Jamie and Casey. His fiery red lips parted in a smile. “And now here you are. Three children of pure hearts. Tell me, my friends, what shall we do next?”

BJ said, “I think it would be best if you could find a way for us to go home?”

“Ha ha ha!” The dragon laughed a great, immortal laugh, a laugh that only one who has slept thousands of years and then miraculously awakened can laugh. All the children laughed with him. “Of course! Of course! Climb on my back, my great friends, and you will ride a ride like no child has ever had in a thousand years!”

And they did. They grabbed hold of Wu-lin's great fin, and, in moments, the dragon was aloft, in the clouds, flying through the air. Around mountains, skimming the oceans, just above the treetops, around city skyscrapers, waving at the surprised airliners and fighter planes, Wu-lin and the children flew, faster than they could imagine.

Through their hair the cool air rushed! Just under the orange sun, and around the grey moon they flew!

"There, there!" shouted Jamie, seeing her home.

"Already?" Wu-lin asked. "But I was just getting started!"

"Land there!" Casey commanded.

So down they went.

BJ and Jamie and Casey went to get their parents. "Mommy, Daddy, look! Look at our new friend, Wu-lin the dragon!"

Everybody was very impressed. All the boys and girls in the neighborhood wanted to go for a dragon ride.

That night, Wu-lin grew tired, and lay down in the back yard to go to sleep. But before he dozed off, he said to the children, "I am so happy to meet all of you. I will be your very best friend – forever." And in the distance BJ and Jamie and Casey could see – was it? No, was it? Shazalimo? Smiling?

And they knew that the gift of a best friend was the very greatest gift of all.

* * *

Later, BJ's father went to visit the dragon. "Thank you," he said to Wu-lin, "for bringing the children back home."

"Of course," the dragon answered. "But I have a question for you!"

"What?" asked BJ's dad.

"Everyone seemed surprised by me -- except you. Why?"

"Well," answered Dad, "when I was a boy I had a dragon friend too."

"You did? What was his name?"

"Puff."