

The Lonely Dragon

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The average dragon's idea of a good time is to kidnap a princess, bum down a village, and scare the wits out of everyone. But Charles was a sweet, good-natured fellow who wanted nothing to do with those kinds of things, so he had no dragon friends.

Unfortunately, he looked exactly like all the other mean and nasty dragons, and no human ever stayed around long enough to find out how nice he really was. He was often lonely. One day Charles decided that he'd had enough of being lonely and was going to do something about it. He headed off across the countryside in search of a friend. The first person he met was a woodcutter in the forest. Charles managed to sneak up on him, so the man didn't have time to run away. "Will you be my friend?" he asked rather

timidly. The man realized from the tone of Charles's voice that he was not the usual fearsome sort of dragon. He took a minute to think. Then he said, "Friends are supposed to do things for each other. If I'm your friend, what will you do for me?" Charles thought a moment, then, he turned and knocked over five trees with a single blow of his tail. "Perfect!" shouted the woodcutter, and he took Charles home to supper. As Charles entered the woodcutter's yard, he turned to ask a question and knocked over the fence with his tail. He became flustered and turned around quickly to apologize and knocked a hole in the front wall of the man's house. "This will never do," the woodcutter said. "You are much too big to be my friend!" And he sent Charles back from where he had come.

Charles was very depressed, but he kept traveling. Soon he saw an old woman plowing her field. Luckily,

the old woman was nearsighted and didn't realize Charles was a dragon until he was right beside her. "Will you be my friend?" he asked, even more timidly. The old farmer peered in the direction of his voice. "Friends are supposed to do things for each other," she said. "If I'm your friend, what will you do for me?" Charles thought a moment and said, "I could go home ahead of you and start a fire and warm your supper. I'm very good with fires." "Perfect," said the woman. "I'm always too tired in the evening to fix myself a hot meal. A fire-starter is just what I need." That evening Charles went to the old woman's house, started the fire with one breath, and began warming her supper. The old woman's house was even smaller than the woodcutter's, but somehow Charles managed to control his tail and not knock anything over. His new friend seemed pleased with the supper he prepared, and she even gave him a kiss on the cheek before she went to

bed. Charles finally found a big enough space under one of the windows and lay down. He was so happy that he let out a long sigh of contentment. Unfortunately, his sigh set the curtains on fire. "This will never do," the old woman cried as she jumped up to douse the curtains with water. "You are much too hot to be my friend!" She sent Charles out the door and back from where he had come.

Now Charles was even more depressed. He walked slowly back through the woods. He hadn't gone very far, though, when he came upon a little man sitting in a clearing. The man was huddled in the morning sun with a blanket around his shoulders and a crown on his head. He didn't look any happier than Charles. Charles thought the man would run away. But he didn't. So Charles sat down and sighed. So did the man. Charles sighed again. So did the man. "I've had a rotten day," Charles finally said. "Me, too," the man replied. "Why

was your day so rotten?" Charles asked politely. "You first," the man said. "Well, it isn't just this day especially," Charles said. "My whole life is rotten." The man nodded, and Charles began telling him how lonely he was and how he had gone in search of a friend. He told him about the woodcutter and how his tail got in the way. He told him about the farmer and how his breath had ruined everything. "Why didn't you run away when you saw me coming?" he asked. "I thought you were the answer to my problems," the man said. "I figured if you ate me, at least I wouldn't be lonely any more." "You are lonely, too?" Charles asked. The man nodded and pointed to his crown. "See this?" he asked. "Do you know what this means? It means I'm a king. Wonderful. I collect taxes and rent from my subjects, have a party once a year, and that is the only time I ever have any fun." "No one ever comes to my door and says, 'Oh, I was just passing by

and thought I would pop in for tea.' Nobody asks me over for dinner, or wants me to come have a peek at their new baby. Nobody thinks a king would want to do any of those ordinary things. But I'm really just an ordinary guy." "To make matters worse I live alone in a drafty 300-room castle. I can never keep a fire going, so I'm always cold. Lonely and cold. That's the story of my life." The king sniffed and wrapped the blanket tighter around himself, and then he looked at Charles. "I don't suppose you'd be interested in being my friend?" he asked. Charles felt his heart leap, but he hardly dared to agree. "They say that friends are supposed to do things for each other," he said. "If I'm your friend, what can you do for me?" "Why, I'll be your friend," the king replied. "Perfect!" said Charles. The king took Charles back to his dragon-sized castle, and Charles got a fire going in the fireplace. They kept

each other company and roasted marshmallows and lived happily ever after.