



## CHAPTER ONE WYVERN WAY

The scientific study of dragons requires intelligence and courage above all else, as young dragonologists find out soon enough.

— DR. DRAKE'S DRAGON DIARY, JANUARY 1842

**I**n July of 1882, I was twelve years old and had never heard of Dr. Ernest Drake. I had certainly never met a dragon. In fact, the whole idea of fire-breathing, scaly monsters that could blast me with flame or tear me limb from limb couldn't have been further from my mind as I rode on a train through London. I was on my way to Waterloo Station to meet my parents. They were returning from India to spend the summer holidays with my sister, Beatrice, and me. I hadn't seen them in four years, and I was thinking about their last visit. I remembered how excited I had felt as they came striding down the gangplank of their ship wearing big smiles, bringing us presents, and talking of mountains and maharajas and elephant rides into the jungle. I was sure this summer was going to be even better. Four years is a

long time to wait before seeing your parents, but now the waiting was over.

The train pulled into Waterloo. Beatrice was already there. She was standing by her suitcase, her long brown hair tied with a ribbon under her straw hat. But she was holding a letter and biting her lip.

“Hello, Daniel,” she said, giving me a weak smile.

“What’s in the letter?” I asked.

Beatrice looked at the floor while she handed it to me. It was in my mother’s handwriting.

“It arrived this morning,” she said.

I took it and read:

*My Dearest Beatrice and Daniel,*

*I hope this letter finds you both well. As you know, Father and I had such high hopes of being able to return to see you this summer. But something terribly important has come up, and the Prince of Jaisalmer—the Maharawal himself—has made an urgent request for us to stay. You will know how important it is because we love you both so dearly and I feel desperate that I will miss another summer of your growing up.*

*Your father suggested that you might like to stay with Uncle Algernon, but we have talked things over and decided that it is time for you to get to know our old friend Dr. Ernest Drake. He has a house in Sussex and a little shop in London that he keeps as a sort of hobby. I have asked*

*him to meet you at Waterloo if he can. If for any reason he is not there to meet you, you can find his shop quite easily by going to Trafalgar Square and walking up St. Martin's Lane until you see a street called Wyvern Way. You can't miss the shop because there is a large sign with his name on it hanging above the door.*

*I must go now because they have asked us to go and see the Maharawal at once.*

*With our dearest, fondest wishes,  
Mother*

By the time I finished the letter, I felt my face burning. I handed it back to Beatrice, who was still looking at the floor, making little fists with her hands. This was the second summer that our parents had failed to meet us on short notice. The year before, there had been another mysterious emergency that had seen us packed off to Uncle Algernon's. Life there had been so monotonous that I had been almost glad to get back to boarding school.

"Who's Dr. Drake?" I asked.

"Don't you remember him?" said Beatrice. "He came to visit us when Father was ill. He has an enormous moustache that gets soup in it. All he ever talks about is dragons. Uncle Algernon told me that he has dangerous ideas and that we shouldn't listen to people like him if we want to grow up to be intelligent members of society."

I didn't remember clearly. I had a vague impression of a jolly man with a big moustache coming to stay with us when I was five. I remembered pretending to be an iguanodon and chasing him round the garden while he laughed. But I had no idea his name was Drake.

"Is he a real doctor?" I asked.

"No," said Beatrice. "I think he's a dracocologist or something. But I'm sure he got Father the job in India. I hate him."

"At least he sounds better than Uncle Algernon," I said.

We looked round the station. There were a lot of porters carrying luggage and people hurrying to catch trains, but no men with enormous moustaches, apart from a couple of guards.

"You see," said Beatrice after we had been waiting for an hour. "He hasn't even bothered to turn up and meet us. I expect he's too busy with his dragons."

"Does he really know about them?" I asked.

Beatrice laughed. "No one really knows about dragons, Daniel. They don't exist."

When we left Waterloo Station, it was drizzling, but it didn't take us long to reach the river and cross over towards Trafalgar Square. We found St. Martin's Lane and walked up past the church towards the axis of old streets that is called the Seven Dials. Our surroundings grew shabbier the farther we went. In Trafalgar Square everyone had been bustling about on some important business, but here people

seemed to have nothing to do but loiter about. Even though it was raining, they stood propped against lampposts or lurked in the doorways of the pubs with dark, dirty windows that lined the street on either side. In between the pubs were pawnbroker's shops, dingy grocer's shops and eateries, and in between those quite a few bird and rabbit fancier's shops.

"Are you sure we're going the right way?" whispered Beatrice, walking so closely beside me that our suitcases bumped together.

"The sign definitely said St. Martin's Lane," I said.

"Well, it's a funny place for a shop if you ask me," said Beatrice.

Suddenly, a woman in a tattered dress lunged towards us from one of the pub doorways. She was holding out a bunch of heather.

"Buy some lucky heather, my love?" said the woman as she reached over to place a bunch in Beatrice's pocket. Beatrice managed to dodge her, then stiffened and walked on. But the woman stepped round in front of us, barring our way.

"You're a pretty thing," she said, this time placing the heather in the band of Beatrice's straw hat with a skilled hand.

At that, Beatrice stepped in front of me, looked the woman in the eye, and said, "I don't want any heather, thank you."

Then she took the heather out of her hat and held it out to the woman, who withdrew her hand immediately. Beatrice let the heather fall to the ground and grabbed my arm.

“Come on,” she said, and we began walking away at a half trot.

“You’ll pay for that!” the woman called after us.

I looked back, emboldened by my sister’s courage.

“We haven’t got any money,” I said.

“We’ll see about that!” shouted the woman. She turned to a group of rough-looking boys of about our age, who had been playing marbles but who were now standing watching us.

“Vincent! Michael! Oliver! There’s a thief for you! She says she hasn’t got any money. If it’s true, there’ll be a shilling for you if you can take that hat from her and give that brat with her a nice shiner.”

At that, both Beatrice and I started running. But the three boys, who weren’t carrying luggage, as we were, quickly caught up with us and surrounded us in a shop doorway. Beatrice stood in front of me again and looked at them defiantly. Across the damp street, in the doorway of yet another pub, I noticed a well-dressed man watching us with some interest. He had a top hat, his collar was pulled up high, and he was carrying some sort of cane with a strangely carved top.

“Help us!” Beatrice cried to him.

But instead of helping, the man simply ducked back farther into the shadow of the doorway.

“He’s got to have his shiner,” said the largest boy, rolling up his right shirtsleeve and pointing at me.

“Come and give it to him then,” said Beatrice, standing aside a little.

I was horrified.

But as soon as the boy reached in to grab me, Beatrice got hold of his ear and gave it a tug so hard that he yelped. I was amazed. It seemed to knock all of the stuffing out of him at once.

“Go away,” said Beatrice.

“Ow!” he howled. “All right. We were only messing about. I wasn’t really going to hit him. It was a joke. Let me go!”

Beatrice let him go with a shove, then turned to the other boys.

“Are you going to give my brother a shiner?”

But the other boys were disappearing up the road as fast as they could. My sister really is quite remarkable at times.

I suddenly remembered the mysterious man. I looked over at the pub doorway, but he was gone. Then we turned round to look at the shop whose doorway we were standing in. In some ways it was quite like the rest of the small, dingy shops that lined the street, except for one important difference—its bottle-green windows were completely full of the most amazing array of statues and carvings of dragons that I had ever seen. And over the top of the shop window was a large sign that read

## DOCTOR DRAKE’S DRAGONALIA

“Ugh!” said Beatrice. “Dragons!”



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## CHAPTER TWO DR. DRAKE'S DRAGONALIA



To the experienced eye, it is easy to tell at once when a dragon's range has been entered, as well as exactly what type of dragon is being encountered.

— DR. DRAKE'S DRAGON DIARY, MAY 1842

There was no bell, but the door to Dr. Drake's Dragonalia was open, so I turned the handle and went in. I looked around and gasped. The shop was full of shelves stacked high with old books, vases, walking sticks, statues, games, and candlesticks, and every single one was decorated with pictures of dragons: dragons sleeping, dragons roaring, dragons breathing fire, and dragons carrying off elephants or fighting Saint George. But there was no sign of Dr. Drake himself.

"Oh, dear. He's worse than I thought," said Beatrice.

Her brow wrinkled in a frown.

"I wonder if that's why Dr. Drake wanted our parents to go to India," she said.

“Why?” I asked.

“To send him things like this,” she said, pointing to a small Indian statue of a snake with a man’s head coiled round a rock, with a little label that said, NAGA [JAIPUR, 1850] 10/6.

At the back of the room was a counter with a bell, and behind that was a half-open door through which I could see a staircase going down. As I drew near to the counter, I could hear distant voices coming up the stairs. One of them was shouting. I hoped that Dr. Drake wasn’t going to turn out to be one of those adults who are always angry. Since someone was sure to come up soon, I decided to content myself with taking a closer look at the things on the shelves. But Beatrice went straight round behind the counter, put her head through the door, and cried out, “Shop!”

At that, we heard a loud clatter coming from below, which, added to shouting, was rather alarming.

“Do you think we ought to find a policeman?” I asked. “In case there’s something wrong?”

“What, and nearly have my hat stolen again?” said Beatrice. “Anyway, lots of adults shout all the time. There’s probably nothing wrong at all.”

“Then let’s go downstairs and see if we can find someone who knows Dr. Drake,” I said.

“All right,” agreed Beatrice.

But we were only halfway down the stairs when I heard a horrible roaring screech coming from behind one of the

doors in the lower hallway. A young man in a chequered waistcoat and shirtsleeves burst out of it, followed by a large cloud of smoke. He slammed the door firmly behind him, ran towards the end of the corridor, opened another door, and disappeared inside.

The cloud of smoke in the hall soon vanished, leaving a strange, sulphurous odour, and we were left alone again, standing on the stairs. It was Beatrice who spoke first.

“Let’s wait upstairs,” she whispered.

“But we have to find Dr. Drake,” I whispered back.

I took a step down, while Beatrice took one up, glaring at me. I had become terribly curious about whatever roaring, screeching creature had caused the smoke. Surely it could not have been what I hoped—and feared at the same time—it might be? I took another step down.

“Daniel!” whispered Beatrice as loudly as she dared. “Come up here and wait!”

“I’ll only be a minute,” I whispered.

“Hmmp!” hissed Beatrice, pointing back up towards the open door. “Hmmpmp!”

I ignored her. Looking very red-faced, she turned and clattered back up towards the shop as noisily as she possibly could and rang the bell on the counter two or three times, crying, “Shop!” each time she did so.

“Shop! Shop!”

At first I froze, but no one seemed to notice Beatrice’s shouting. So I continued down into the corridor and quietly

approached the door. I was just about to bend down and look through the keyhole when the shouting started again at the opposite end of the corridor. I could only hear one side of the conversation, because the replies were uttered so softly, I could make nothing of them. This is what I heard:

“What if it gets loose? Have you thought of that?”

“You do understand the danger, I take it?”

“Never mind who reported it!”

“But it’s right here in London!”

“You are quite sure that *you* have not been hypnotised?”

“I can only hope that the Minister’s trust in you has not been misplaced, Doctor.”

And, “Believe me, if you do not, there will be the most dire consequences.”

The conversation continued, but by now I was even more anxious to see what might be in the room where the smoke had come from. So I turned towards the door again and put my eye to the keyhole. Everything seemed dark inside at first, but as my eyes adjusted, I was able to make out what lay beyond. The room, which was lit by two candles, was in a terrible state of disarray. Many of the books from the bookshelves that lined the walls had been knocked onto the floor. There were three desks piled high with bottles of liquids, oddly shaped specimen jars, and a multitude of other strange objects. At least two of the desks looked as though they had been ransacked, and one jar had been smashed, its contents gently fizzing into the stone floor. The same sweet,

sulphurous odour that I had smelt in the corridor was coming from the keyhole. Suddenly I saw a smallish creature spring out from behind one of the desks and dash round the room, half leaping and half flying. Was it some kind of large bird, after all? I decided to open the door just a little to see it more clearly. I gently began to turn the handle. Almost at once, I heard the bell ring again and Beatrice's shrill voice calling out, "Shop! Shop!"

*I'll "Shop" you!* I thought. As I turned the handle, the bird—or whatever it was—grew perfectly quiet. So I was very, very careful indeed as I edged the door open little by little.

BOOM! Something smashed into the door with such force that it knocked me over backwards. Something that I still could hardly make out was flying round and round the room. I could see wings, scales, and a wisp of smoke rising from its nostrils. I saw it fly over to the other side of the room, positioning itself directly opposite me. With wings outspread and claws at the ready, it fixed me with its beady eyes and began to fly straight at me.

BANG! Someone came up behind me and slammed the door shut. I looked up to see an old gentleman with a large moustache, leaning over me in a very disapproving manner, holding the door shut with one hand, and wagging his finger at me with the other.

"Daniel Cook, I presume?" he said.



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