

Tressa lay stretched out on the living room floor, concentrating very hard. Her green crayon traced a squiggly line between the purple and blue shapes on her page. She didn't notice Connor and his pumper truck coming nearer and nearer, making siren sounds.

“Hey!” she said, when his truck zoomed over the corner of her paper.

“Sorry” he called over his shoulder as the pumper truck continued on its way to the doll house. He noticed the great colors Tressa was using and asked her about her picture. “What are you making?”

Tressa held it up and smiled. “It’s my own map! The blue parts are woods and the purple parts are hills and the green line is the path.”

Connor studied it for a moment. “Doesn’t look like our street,” he commented.

His sister laughed. “That’s good, ‘cause it’s *not* our street.” She giggled and rolled the map up carefully. “This is the map to Faerieland! I’m going to have a real adventure, and I have everything I need. I packed my backpack.”

Now, as everyone knows, one needs a well-equipped backpack for any adventure. Connor watched Tressa as she laid out her supplies. Map, granola bars, juice box, a piece of twine, and three marbles. Hmm. Something was missing.

Connor scooted over to the toy box and rummaged around in the bottom. “You’ll need this,” he told her and held out a shiny whistle.

She took it with a big smile. “Right! A noisemaker!” She packed everything away carefully in the backpack then looked up - he was still watching her with wide eyes. “Do you want to come, too?”

Connor could hardly believe it! He nodded his head. “I would love to go on an adventure!” He ran to his room and found his rock collection, which they added to the backpack. Now it was so full that they had a little trouble closing it without squishing the map.

“Tressa, how do we get to Faerieland?” Connor asked.

Tressa was looking out the window, wondering the same thing. “Well, the first thing Mama does is she checks the map,” she said, slipping the map carefully out of the backpack again.

They lay on their tummies side by side under the Christmas tree, checking the map carefully. They could see the different hills and woods and paths in Faerieland, but couldn’t quite find the way to get there. Tressa suddenly had a triumphant figuring-it-out look, grabbed an orange crayon, and began drawing their house in one corner of the map, so they could see how it attached to the paths.

The two children were so intent on their task that they didn't notice a small voice at first. Only when they had heard it three or four times did they realize that someone was speaking softly just above their heads.

Connor craned his neck to see and oh! a tiny person was just a foot above him, near one of the lights of the tree! "Tress? Look up there!" he whispered excitedly. "It's a faerie!"

"Not yet," said Tressa, "I'm going to draw the faerie after the house..."

"No, Tressa, up *there!*"

She looked up just in time to see the tiny man zip around behind a branch and peer out at them. "Wow! Who are you?? What are you doing here?"

He looked very surprised. "I should ask what are *you* doing here? This tree isn't thoroughly inspected yet!"

"Inspected?" asked Tressa and Connor together.

"Yes, inspected," he said. "Each wire and light must be checked for safety before a family can safely snuggle under it. That's what I'm doing right now!"

Tressa and Connor knew all about checking things for safety; they had helped their Daddy and Mamma do it many times. But they didn't know that faeries did it to Christmas trees.

“Why, of course, we do! But I beg your pardon, children, I am Linden, Inspector General of Christmas Trees.” He flourished his clipboard and bowed deeply. He scooted into better sight and the children saw how he scooted around - Linden was riding on a tiny, *flying* motorcycle!

They giggled with delight. “I’m Tressa,” said Tressa, “and this is my brother Connor!”

“Well I certainly know who you are, children,” said Linden. He waved his clipboard. “It says right here which children this tree takes care of, and which tree these children care about!”

The children were just delighted, and asked Linden all about his job and how he checked the tree. He stifled a yawn and told them all about the Faerie Fire Brigade - inspectors and firefighters who kept electricity and fire in their places by checking on things and *sometimes* using water pistols to put out sparks that jump from wood fires. “Now this tree,” he continued, “has a string of electric lights, and they’re very new and safe. I’ve looked over all the wires from the base to the star, and all is in order. But I see one thing to be done that will help keep this tree green and safe. Would you like to help do it?”

Both children nodded their heads and looked and looked to see what needed to be done.

“Water!” cried Connor. “The water needs to be filled in the tree stand!”

Linden nodded. “Good job, Connor, why don’t you go fill a pitcher for us?”

Connor proudly ran to the bathroom and got one of his bath toys for pouring, carefully filled it at the sink, and emptied it into the tree stand while Tressa held the branches and wires aside.

The tiny faerie positively twinkled at them. “Well done, children!” He put his hand over his mouth, “Ah-h-h. Oh, excuse my yawning! I have a badge for each of you - Junior Faerie Fire Brigadoons!” He zipped over and stuck shiny silver badges to each of their shirts.

“Thank you, Linden,” said Tressa, turning the badge this way and that to sparkle. Connor thanked him politely, too, very proud that they were now official Brigadoons. Tressa looked up again. “But why are you so sleepy? Were there a lot of fires last night?”

Linden whistled. “I’ll say there were! There’s a baby dragon with the hiccoughs who just kept starting fires with every hic! We were kept very, very busy with our water pistols until the veterinarian could douse her fire with some

Super Snowmelt. No more fires, but the dragon is still hiccupping. The vet will have to wait until she's cured to relight her fire with some habaneros."

Both children were staring at Linden with open mouths. A dragon? A baby dragon? A really and truly baby dragon? "Oh, the poor thing," said Tressa, "I know how much it can hurt your tummy to have hiccupps!"

"Hey," said Connor, "maybe we could make the hiccupps go away! Can we help? Please?"

"That's right," said Tressa, "we *are* official Brigadoons. We could at least take care of the dragon while you get some sleep..."

Linden stared at them for a moment, as though he were trying to think of why not. Finally he nodded. "You kids are definitely good helpers. And all of us down at the Fire Station are needing sleep. I'll go get her!"

He zipped away, right behind the Christmas tree, while Tressa and Connor giggled together. They were definitely having an adventure. "We'd better make a soft bed for the dragon, Connor," said Tressa, and the two of them gathered a box, some dolly blankets, and a pillow. By the time they returned to the tree, they could hear Linden returning.

"Right this way, Leelee," he was saying, "come on, gal, you'll be OK."

Connor and Tressa got back down on their tummies so they wouldn't look big and scary. Linden led a four-inch-tall green and orange dragon around the base of the tree and right up to them. They stared at her tiny claws, her shiny scales, and her big, sleepy eyes. "Hic," she said loudly.

"The poor lass isn't able to sleep either, she's hiccoughing so much," explained Linden.

Tressa wrinkled her brow. "How did the hiccoughs start up anyway?"

"Well," Linden rubbed his eyes, "she belongs to our village - each faerie village has a dragon to help heat the water and keep watch. Our old dragon decided to go off to university, so this new hatchling came to live with us. She can't tell us her name yet - it takes about ten years for dragons to gain the power of speech - so we call her Leelee." He gave her an affectionate scritch under the chin. "Each dragon eats something different. The dragon's friends have to find out what each one eats by trying everything. Leelee doesn't like pizza, water, green beans, or even water pistols. We tried everything we had. I'm afraid she was eating so very fast that that's how the hiccoughs started."

Tressa looked in amazement. "Do you mean that she's hungry, too?"

Linden nodded. “Definitely hungry. If you can try her out on things here, we’d be grateful.”

Connor told Linden, “You go sleep. Just leave everything to us!”

Gratefully, Linden strolled off to nap in the branches of the Christmas tree.

Tressa and Connor looked at each other and down at Leelee. She was nuzzling Tressa’s hand and trying to eat her fingernails. “No, no, Leelee,” said Tressa, extricating her fingernail from Leelee’s little mouth.

“Hic,” said Leelee with big, sad eyes.

“How about a spoonful of sugar?” asked Connor. “Isn’t that supposed to cure hiccoughs?”

While Tressa let the tiny dragon cuddle in her hand, Connor ran to get some sugar for her. He returned with white dusting all over his clothes, and some sugar in his hand. They held their hands close together, and Leelee sniffed at the sugar. She took a big lick, but right in the middle of it, she hiccupped and splattered the sugar everywhere. She rolled her big eyes apologetically to the children.

“Oh, that’s OK, Leelee,” said Tressa, stroking the little scales and long tail. then she thought for a moment. “Wait a second, Connor! What was it that Grandpa always said about hiccoughs?”



Both children thought hard and spoke at the same moment, “Drink a glass of water upside down!” They laughed and Tressa told Leelee, “Don’t worry Little One, Grandpa’s cure works every time.” Transferring the baby dragon to Connor’s hands, she ran for her doll tea-set. The cups were just the right size for a drink for Leelee.

Gently, Connor rolled Leelee onto her back. When she tried to turn back over, he tickled her belly so she would stay upside down. Tressa held out the cup of water, and Leelee stretched her neck out to reach the water. It took a few tries, but she managed to swallow at least half of the cup of water upside down.

The children rolled her over and set her gently on the pillow in her bed. They watched her. She watched them. Suddenly, she made a big burp, and settled down on the pillow, all comfortable.

“We did it!” Connor exclaimed. Tressa smiled, too. They had cured Leelee of her hiccoughs!

“Well, we didn’t exactly go *out* on an adventure...”

“This is great,” Connor smiled. They began unpacking her backpack and spreading the things out.

Leelee poked her head up out of the bed curiously. She tasted a corner of the map quietly. She tried a crayon. She barely sniffed at the twine. Suddenly, she sat up straighter. She stared at the rock collection. She sniffed at the rock collection. She licked at the rocks one at a time. When she licked at a gray one, she licked again and began crunching it. Quickly, she gobbled up all the gray rocks in the collection.

Connor and Tressa looked at one another in amazement.

Leelee made another big burp and settled right down to sleep.

Just a little while later, Linden awoke, stretched, and zoomed over to the children. “Well, how is... How on Earth did you get her to sleep?”

The children laughed and told him. “We used an old trick of our Grandpa’s to stop the hiccoughs. Then we found out what she eats.”

“Granite!” said Connor proudly.

Linden was very pleased. In not too long, he had rigged a little trailer on his flying motorcycle so he could tow Leelee home in her bed without waking her.

“Well done, Junior Faerie Fire Brigadoons, you’ve done a good turn for Leelee and our whole village.” They said farewell to their new friends, but knew for sure they

would see Linden and Leelee again in the summer. After all, who inspected the fireflies and cleared them for take off?

When the tiny faerie and baby dragon were gone, Tressa and Connor lay under the Christmas tree, staring up at the lights. “Wow!” said Tressa. “Just think of what we learned on our adventure!”

“Yeah,” said Connor. “Never go out without your rock collection.”