

Even Dragons Need Rescuing



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The Map

Chapter One

Chapter Two

Chapter Three

Chapter Four

Chapter Five

Chapter Six

Chapter Seven

Chapter Eight

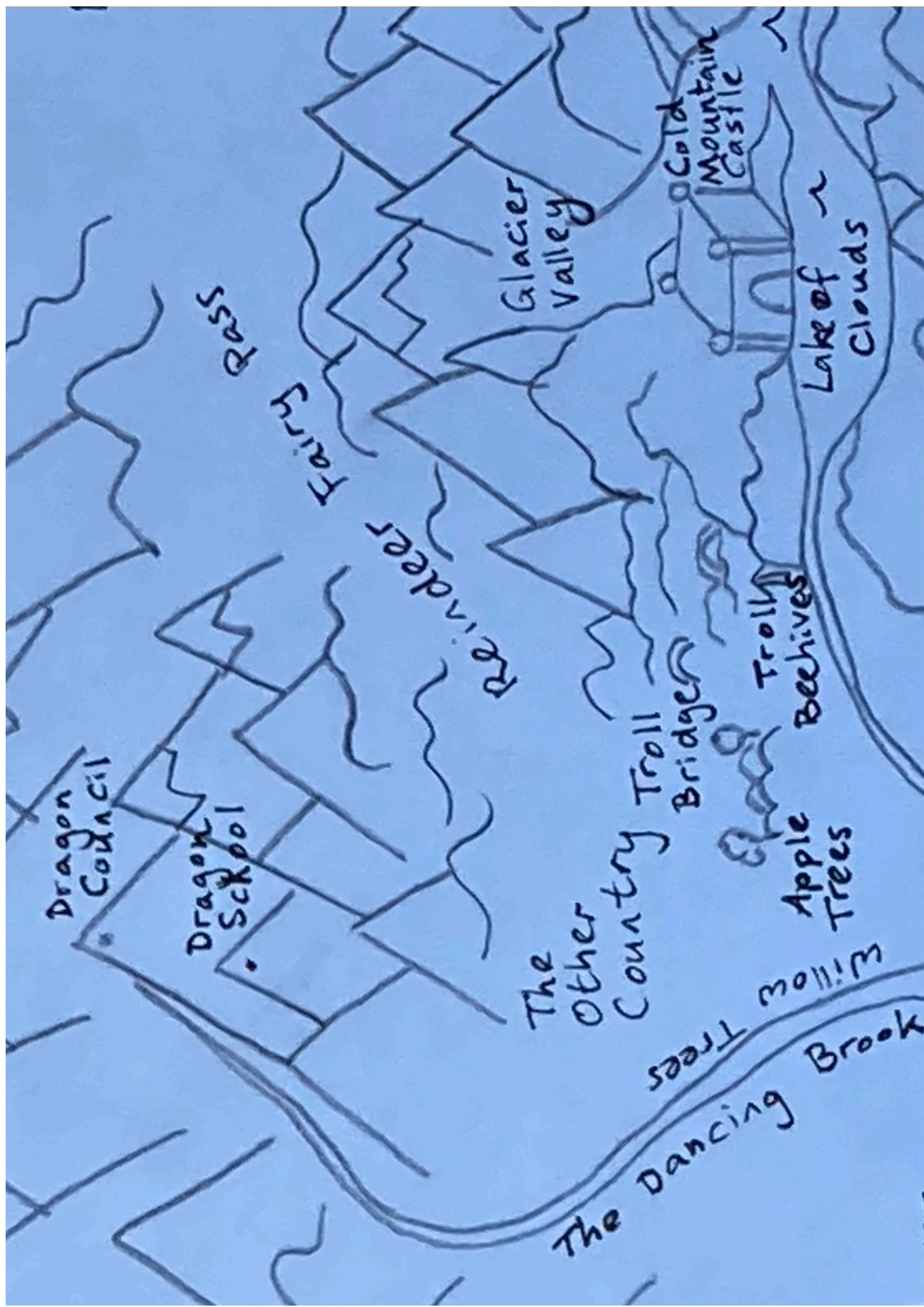
Chapter Nine

Chapter Ten

Chapter Eleven

Chapter Twelve

The Map



Chapter One

Once there lived two cheerful princesses named Annabel and Marietta. Annabel was fair and Marietta dark.

The princesses' uncle, Jacob (a bad man and a worse uncle), looked after their kingdom with lakes and mountains, with endless skies and lots of trees. The princesses, however, lived with their governess Sophie in a cold mountain castle at the very edge of this kingdom. Sophie was tall and kind and the princesses loved her very much.

In time Uncle Jacob declared himself king.

The mountain castle was cold in summer and very cold in winter – at the end of their kingdom there was no neighbour to fight over fence-lines. Just many empty mountains and even more sky.

Annabel began to study engineering so that if she ever became queen she could help fix the roads and water pipes for her people. Annabel was a very calm older sister for Marietta, as well as being very clever.

Marietta liked books and painting, and every so often she took her grey pony out all day into the mountains. Daydreams often found their way to Marietta.

Whenever Marietta disappeared all day (she always came back before dark) Sophie sent her to bed with an empty stomach. Sophie had grown up in the cold mountain castle and knew what could happen. So just to be sure, Sophie had given Marietta the grey pony which she had also had as a little girl.

On Marietta's eighth birthday, Sophie and Annabel came into her bedroom at breakfast to

give Marietta her presents in bed (with scrambled eggs and hot chocolate on a tray, two of Marietta's favourite foods).

Annabel gave Marietta a new bridle for her grey pony, which Marietta adored. The diamonds across the bridle would catch the sunshine and sparkle on her walks into the mountains.

Sophie gave Marietta a black stone ring, which felt very heavy and cold to touch.

“It's for protection, Marietta, for you and your pony. If you ever get into trouble in the mountains just wish for help. It will find you.”

“Thank-you Sophie, I promise” replied Marietta, secretly thinking to herself 'Yippee, now I can go out with my pony ALL OF THE TIME and still eat supper!'

Later that night, after a wonderful birthday roast dinner and chocolate cake, Marietta stood at her window and wished for help. When Annabel asked her later that night why she'd done this Marietta could only reply 'I don't know, it felt right.'

Something flew past Marietta's shoulder into her bedroom, making a swooping sound and hissing slightly.

Marietta could not see because it was so dark (even though her fire was always lit in the cold mountain castle) and she began to edge towards the fireplace towards its light.

“Princess” said a voice that hissed.

“Who's there?” asked Marietta, very politely under the circumstances!

“A friend.”

“I don't know you”, which was fair and true.

“You called for help. I came.”

And there, in front of the fire, was a small green dragon.

Marietta and the dragon stared at each other.

“Well, you don't seem to be in any danger so perhaps I'll head off” said the dragon.

“NO, not yet!” cried Marietta, who had always wished that dragons were real.

“Princess, I really should go. The ring is only meant to be used when you need help, and frankly, you look pretty safe in your bedroom.”

“But you came, so I must need help, mustn't I?”

Marietta and the dragon continued to stare at each other a bit more, both realising that this was a most unusual situation.

“Well, my name's Marietta” said our princess, as she was always polite. Also the silence was making her uncomfortable.

“Princess Marietta, I know. Well you're different from the others so maybe I can stay a bit. None of the others ever introduced themselves so early, but then I don't remember any of the others calling me when they were safe in their bedrooms either. Hmmmm.” The dragon shuffled his wings a bit and sat on his haunches thinking over this turn of events.

“There were others?”

“Well, you don't think you're the only child who ever needed protection, do you?”

“Oh.” was all Marietta could say. It is always nice to think your experience is the first but she also felt safer because her dragon knew what he was doing!

“I'm not your dragon, Princess.”

“What?” asked Marietta, who was now very surprised.

“You thought I was your dragon just then. If you could instead think that I'm a dragon who will help that would be better.”

“Then what should I call you?”

“You may call me Starnberg. The girl you call Sophie will know.”

But of course Sophie knew. Sophie knew everything, even the bad bits.

“Will you come again” asked Marietta.

“You only have to wish for help Princess, and I will come. Even if you're not in any danger it would seem. Humph.”

Starnberg then flew out of the window and away from Marietta, into the night. Clearly he had other matters to attend to!