



the legend of  
**Draeko**

*As told by  
The Kids of West Fife*

*Sunday, 20 May – Mountfleurie, Dunfermline and various other kids at Millennium Forest Festival*

In a far away place, so far away that people don't remember where it is, there lived a great many dragons who were at war with one another. No one knows why they were at war. Maybe the dragons themselves had forgotten. It had been going on a long, long time.

One dragon had had enough. Her name was Draeko, and she was carrying eggs. She knew that sometime soon she would lay her eggs in a nest dug in the earth, lined with leaves and soft grass. She wanted her little dragons to be hatched into a peaceful, quiet place.

So Draeko began walking – and flying, and walking and flying – until she came to a new place. A quiet place. A peaceful place, a green place, a place where no other dragons were. She circled the woods. She sailed lower, landed in a clearing, and waddled over to a sign to investigate. “Inzievar Woods” the sign said in English. Draeko couldn't read English, but the writing was like Dragon, and she pronounced it in Dragon: In-zhie-var. She liked the sound of that.

“Inzievar, Inzievar,” she whispered to herself as she slithered into a copse of trees. “It sounds like baby dragons roaring. That's a good sign. I'll make my nest here.”

So Draeko set to work. She couldn't find herself a natural cave, so she built one out of overhanging branches and dense green leaves. “I must be careful not to smoke in bed,” she thought to herself. “This green cave isn't like rock; it will be flammable.”

Then she made herself a pond, just the right size for a short swim every morning. Finally, she built a labyrinth using fallen logs, old tree stumps and living trees. Carefully, she uprooted the trees and replanted them, wrapping her tail round their trunks and using her powerful front claws to dig a hole. A few startled squirrels leaned out of their homes and chattered at her, but when she had very carefully put their trees upright again in their new holes, they calmed down. A few of them even spoke to her, but she couldn't understand what they said, because she didn't speak Squirrel. She gave them what she hoped was a friendly smile, and kept working.

When she was sure her new home was well hidden from prying eyes, she began to dig a nest. Finally, late on the morning of her second day of work, when the sun was high overhead, she laid her eggs in the nest. Exhausted, she retreated to her cave and went to sleep.

It seemed like only a few hours to her, but it was actually the next day when she was awakened by a loud crashing noise. Draeko was startled out of sleep and had a waking nightmare. “Another dragon is coming to fight me!” she snorted in alarm, then remembered she had left all other dragons far behind.

Another loud crash came from her right. Her nest was in that direction! Draeko rushed from her cave and travelled quickly over the ground. Trees were falling ahead of her! Strange sounds were coming from near her nest!

Draeko slithered to a stop at the edge of the trees that hid her nest. There were strange creatures there, tall and thin, all different colours, walking on two stick-like legs. All were wearing funny yellow helmets on what appeared to be their heads. They were taking the trees down with loud buzzing things. The sound reached Draeko's ears like a thousand angry hornets.

As she watched, one of the men (that's what they were, although she didn't know it) called out, "Right, boys, lunch! We'll tak a break an' clear doon by yon pond after oor piece." The men put down their buzzing things, and went away.

Draeko waddled to her nest, fearfully looking inside. All her eggs were intact, still covered with their camouflage of leaves. Thankfully, carefully, she replaced them, and thought a moment.

Whatever those creatures were, they were destroying this peaceful, quiet place. They were endangering her nest. She would have to kill them.

But Draeko remembered the dragons, killing each other for who knew what reason. Her heart sank. She didn't want to kill anyone, not even these strange creatures she had no name for. She was done with killing.

What could she do, then, to protect her nest yet frighten away these loud, buzzing things?

*Monday, 21 May – P5 and 6 from Holy Name, Oakley*

Draeko decided a barrier, an impenetrable barrier like the one around Sleeping Beauty's castle (all dragons like stories) was the best choice. She set to work, ripping up trees and tossing them into high walls. But her desperation and hurry left her no time to carefully uproot and replant them, as she had before. She ripped and tossed, pulled and threw, with the strength of a hundred men.

Just then, above her head a voice sounded. "Haud on you great beastie! What dae you think you're playing at?! Dae you want tae wreck the hale forest?!"

Draeko looked up. A bird with a tail like a kite string was flying around in front of her face. She swatted irritably with her tail. "Get out of my way! I have to finish this before those creatures come back!"

"They men?" the bird shrieked. "You're makin' enough noise tae bring the hale lot running! And you're brakin' up the place! Stop it richt awa'!"

Draeko glared menacingly at the bird, her tail searching behind her for another tree. "For the last time, whatever-you-are, I have to defend my territory. Go away and leave me to get on with it, or..." Another tree came ripping out of the earth. Cries of forest creatures and shrieks of other birds could be heard.

The bird glared back. “I like that! **Your** territory? You just got here yesterday! I saw you! Noo for the last time pit yon tree back, or I’ll—”

Draeko didn’t hesitate. “Sorry,” she said briskly, “but I have to do this.” She drew in a small breath and sent a puff of flame toward the bird. The fire engulfed the winged creature as Draeko turned her attention to a leafy bush that was slipping from her grasp. Behind her, she heard the “plop” that she thought was the bird’s incinerated body falling to earth.

On top of her head, Draeko felt a series of sharp pricks, like a drill trying to get into her skull. She threw her head up—and the bird flew off.

“Think you can set fire tae ME?” the bird shrieked, laughing unpleasantly. “Dae ye no’ ken onything, you eedjit dragon?” As Draeko, momentarily startled, stopped what she was doing to stare at the bird, she saw that the bird was indeed on fire, head to tail. But it wasn’t burning.

Draeko dropped her tree.

“I’m a dragonbird, you bampot!” the bird said. “And you are a homewrecker!”

“A- - - what? And a what?” asked Draeko, still staring at the burning bird.

“A bam-pot,” said the bird slowly and distinctly, flying inches in front of Draeko’s eyes. “An eedjit. Stupid, dummkopf, ignoramus, imbecile—”

“Okay, okay,” said Draeko. “I get that part. What was the other one?”

The bird sighed. “Homewrecker,” she said patiently, the anger going out of her like a deflating balloon. She stopped burning; smoke rose from her tail feathers as she settled on the branch of a tree Draeko had tossed across the pathway. With one wing, she pointed dramatically.

Families of squirrels were exiting holes among the uprooted tree trunks. A mother squirrel clutched a baby in her mouth. The baby clutched a battered rag doll. A father squirrel and a teen-ager carried a box of broken crockery between them. Several other squirrels clustered behind, carrying battered nuts, bruised raspberries, and a teakettle with the spout bashed in. They glared at Draeko.

Draeko swallowed. “Uh, did I do that?” she asked apologetically.

The father squirrel chattered nastily in Draeko’s direction. Draeko didn’t speak Squirrel, but she understood the meaning. “Um, sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to hurt anyone. I was trying not to kill those—those, uh, those things on the stick legs, with the yellow heads.”

“Men,” said the bird, sighing heavily. “I telt ye, yon were men. An’ hoo is ripping up a’ they trees they men were cutting doon gaing tae help?”

Draeko thought a minute. “Well, I mean, I guess—Look, I have a nest of eggs about to hatch into baby dragons, and I can’t let those things find it. And I can’t let them crash a tree into them, not when the shells have gone soft. In a day or so, they’ll hatch. I left an awful place, a horrible place where everyone was mad at everyone, to find somewhere peaceful and quiet to raise my children. And this is it. Inzievar Woods.”

A loud hooting and hissing and snorting cut her off. Glancing around, she saw several creatures she’d not seen before, all laughing.

“Peaceful,” said the bird, ruffling her feathers and looking around at the creatures. “Peaceful, she calls it. I dinnae ken what your last place was like, hen, but peaceful this isnae!”

Draeko stared. “But, my baby dragons. The wars I left—”

“Wars, s’ mores,” said the bird. “I ken all about those. Yer hale breed is wipin’ itself oot. I’ve seen it mony’s the time my ainsel’. But jist because they’re aye fightin’ there disnae mean ye can tak what ye will here, without so much as askin’ the puir craiters as has tae put up wi’ sae much frae those men.”

Draeko sighed. “I’m sorry. I really don’t know what you’re talking about. I didn’t know anyone lived in the trees.”

“Did ye no’ see yon craiters yesterday?” the bird asked, pointing to the squirrels.

“Yes,” said Draeko uncomfortably, “but I thought they were just sitting in those holes. No one I know lives in a tree trunk. I never knew anyone would put a house in the air like that; it’s so unprotected. And anyway, it doesn’t make any difference. I’m building a barrier to keep those—men, did you call them—out, to protect my nest. If the homes of some of these,” she gestured with one claw, trying not to look at the assembled company of woodland creatures, “lose things in the process, well, I’m sorry,” she repeated, trying to look tougher than she felt.

The bird flew into the air. “Lassie,” she said in a tired voice, “they men are makin’ war on these puir craiters jist as sure as your kind are aye killin’ each ither. Only the men dinnae see it that way. They’re just daein’ their jobs, like. An’ their job is tae cut doon trees. And we’re runnin’ oot o’ places to live oorselves. So we dinnae need any big dragon-folk comin’ in here makin’ things worse with their tales of woe an’ their tails uprooting even mair trees!” The bird began to fly back and forth, punctuating her sentences with burst of flame from her tail.

“Excuse me,” said Draeko politely, “but did you know your tail is on fire?”

The bird didn't even look back. "Happens when I get angered," she said briskly. "And I'm gey steamed the noo, I can tell ye." Abruptly, she turned to the rabbits, foxes, hedgehogs, badgers, stoats, deer, mice, insects, and one sad-looking pine martin that sat in a half-ring behind the dragon.

"See, you lot," she said in Forest to the animals. Draeko couldn't understand a word. "She didnae ken aboot oor hooses. She didnae mean ony harm. So hoo dae we no' forgive and forget this time, an' maybe she can help us keep yon men oot o' the forest?"

There were mutterings from the animals. They didn't sound all that friendly. Draeko smiled as sweetly as she knew how. A few stoats moved back in alarm at the sight of her bared teeth.

"Really, I didn't know—er, did nay kin—that you lived in those trees," she said. "Where I'm from we don't have things that look like you." Her glance rested for a moment on a rabbit's long ears. The rabbit blushed and looked away.

"Anyway, I'm sorry, and I hope you'll forgive me, and if you want to keep the men out of the forest, so do I, so can we think of something, soon please, as they could come back anytime, and my nest is quite close by?" she ended in a rush.

The animals spoke to one another, then an elderly owl stepped forward and hooted to the bird a few times. The bird nodded, and turned to Draeko. "Benjamin wants tae ken, can ye understand him when he speaks?" Draeko shook her head. The bird turned to the animals, and made a few clicks and whistles. The animals looked at Draeko with interest then began to talk amongst themselves. The owl hooted again. The bird cocked her head, then said, " Benjamin says the animals are willin' to gie ye a secont chance."

Draeko looked at the animals, who were beginning to point at her and laugh. "Dinnae mind them," the bird said comfortably. "You'll soon get the hang o' animal speech. Meanwhile, I'll talk tae ye, and translate some. I'm cried Flame, for obvious reasons." Flame inclined her head toward her tail.

"Cried?" said Draeko.

The bird sighed heavily. "Called, named. My name is Flame."

"Ah," said Draeko. "Did you say you were a dragon bird?" she asked hesitantly.

"Aye," said Flame. "Dinnae tell me, let me guess. You've nivver heard o' the likes o' me."

"Well, no."

“Nae surprise. We usetae be all ower the place you came frae, but the wars has us almost gane noo. We cannae fly as fast as a dragon, and when you hae they air battles, weel, most onyone atween the twa gets crisped tae a cinder.”

“Oh,” said Draeko. “Um, sorry.”

“’S a’richt,” Flame said. “I doot we were most gone afore you were born oot there, onyways. What are ye onyway, nigh on a thoosand? Och, jist a bairn yersel’ and ye haein’ bairns! Noo, tae the problem at haund—we’ve tae keep these men oot o’ the forest, and we’ve tae think fast. I heard them say as they would clear by the pond after their piece.”

“MY pond?!” shrieked Draeko, a small flame escaping in her indignation. A hedgehog scampered aside as a shower of sparks fell, and looked at Draeko reproachfully.

“Er, tell him I’m sorry, please,” she said contritely.

Flame translated, listened to a deer, then turned back to Draeko. “The animals want tae ken, hae you got any ideas aboot how tae keep they men awa’?”

Draeko considered. “Killing’s out,” she said. “Aye, we think the same,” Flame said, nodding toward the animals.

“What about a good scare, something that makes them too afraid ever to come back?”

Flame interpreted. The animals looked at each other, then at Draeko. A new respect shone in their eyes.

“Right!” cried Flame, spiraling into the air. “Let’s get started!”

*Tuesday, 22 May, 2001 – Cairneyhill P4*

The animals and Draeko held a quick conference. Which animals could do what? The birds could imitate fierce-sounding jungle animals: lions, tigers, bears. The rabbits could scream. The badgers, foxes, and some of the insects could dig. Other insects could bite. Draeko could make smoke.

“Make *smoke*?” the animals said, when Flame had translated. “Then we can scare the men with a thick fog!”

“What would scare the men the most?” asked Draeko. “Should I show myself to them, or hide?”

“Hide, hide,” the animals told Flame, and she interpreted. “If they see you, they’ll come back with scientists and poltergeist hunters and who knows what, and that will be the end of our peaceful quiet woods.”

So plans were made, and traps laid, and the animals took their places near the pond. The foxes and other burrowing animals began to dig a large ditch, stretching across the path to cut the men off from their lorries. When the ditch was deep enough, other animals brought stinging nettles and threw them in. The birds took up positions in nearby trees. When all was ready, Flame gave Draeko a nod.

Draeko took a deep breath, and began to breath smoke. Heavy, thick smoke filled the area. The men began to yell to one another.

“What’s this? A haar settlin’ in? We’re no’ close tae the sea! Hey, whit’s happenin’?” And they began to stumble, blindly, toward the place where their lorries were parked.

The birds began to shriek. The roaring of lions, the growling of tigers, the heavy footsteps of bears filled the air. The rabbits screamed. The owls hooted. The place was full of sounds—all of them unpleasant. The men screamed, covered their ears, and rushed headlong in every direction. They fell into the pit.

“Ow! Ow!” they yelled as the nettles did their work. The insects came from every direction, buzzing and biting, flying and stinging. The men scrambled from the ditch, half of them going toward the lorries, half going the wrong way back toward the pond. Several fell in and splashed about. The others reached where their lorries had been—just in time to see Draeko’s flames engulf them. Tires exploded, the chainsaws melted into little silver pools. A gas tank went up with a boom and a cloud of black smoke.

The men stood, terror-stricken, watching.

From deep within the wood, a voice boomed out. It was Flame’s voice, but the animals had built an echo chamber from the trees Draeko had uprooted, so it sounded mightily impressive.

“Leave here and never return,” boomed Flame, feeling quite impressed with herself. “This is an ancient graveyard. The bones of Celtic warriors rest here. Men and women from the dawn of time sleep here. You have disturbed their slumber. If you do not leave at once, and never return, you will regret it for the rest of your lives. And your lives will be very, very short.”

Terrified, the men began running down the road. The ones in the pond screamed for help. The birds flew behind them, making horrible shrieking noises and herding them in the right direction, until they too found the road and took off running.

Flame emerged from the woods. The other animals came from the clearing smoke around the pond.

“No’ bad, no’ bad if I do say so masel’,” Flame said, flapping her wings with enthusiasm. “See how the puir craiters run!”



The animals admired the backs of the retreating men until they were out of sight over the hill. Then they went back to the forest, chuckling to themselves.

The next day, just to be on the safe side, Flame directed several of the squirrels in the painting of a sign. It said, "Historic Trust Propertee. Keep out. Arkeological Dig In Progress."

"That'll dae," said Flame, as the squirrels cleaned their tails in the stream. And it did. The animals were not bothered again.

*Challenge for tomorrow – the babies hatch; what will they eat?  
Wednesday, May 23, 2001 – Carnock Primary 6*

Draeko wasn't sure if the men would come back or not. She waited all the next day, prepared to do anything she had to do to defend her nest. But the men didn't return.

"Trust me, lass," said Flame, preening herself. "It's Wednedsay the day. If they were gaein tae work, they'd've been here by noo. They're too fashed tae return. They'll no' be back."

"Wednesday?" asked Draeko. Flame sighed, and explained the days of the week to her.

"Mmm," said Draeko. "My eggs are going to hatch soon. I should get some food together for the babies."

Flame stopped preening, and stared at Draeko intently. "What, if you dinnae mind me speerin', dae baby dragons eat?"

"Oh, meat," said Draeko carelessly. Then she stopped. "Umm, where can I get meat around here?"

Flame looked nervous. "Weel, you ken, lass, there's nae shops hereabouts, and you'd cause a fankle if'n you were tae gang tae a shop."

"Well, I can certainly get meat around here, can't I?"

Flame examined her claws.

"Flame!" said Draeko, exasperated. "Where can I get some meat to feed my babies?"

Flame sighed. "From the craeters. But ye'll hae tae kill them tae get it."

"I can't do that!" Draeko shrieked. "They've barely forgiven me for the mistake I made with the trees! If I start killing them, who will help me defend the forest from the men? Who will my babies talk to? They can learn a new language, even if I can't. There's got to be someplace else I can go and kill something for my children."

Flame looked at Draeko. "If'n ye gang tae anither place, and ye kill what ye fund there, how is that different frae killin' the beasts here?"

"Well, I wouldn't know those animals," Draeko said, with a funny feeling in her stomach.

"But their fathers and mithers and wives and menfolk and bairns would," Flame said quietly. "Deid is deid."

Draeko looked at the ground. Then she looked at Flame. "All right," she said, "if I can't feed them meat, what will I feed them?"

"Hoo dae ye no' try what my ain bairns eat?" Flame asked.

"What's that?"

"Berries. Leaves. Bark. Aipples."

"Aipples?"

"I'll show you," said Flame, flying away. Draeko followed. Soon they came to an apple tree. "These. Try ain," said Flame, tugging one off its stem with her beak and flying to Draeko with it. Draeko crunched it whole.

"Mmm, sweet!" she said through a mouthful.

They soon had a chance to try this new food, for the baby dragons began to hatch the next day. Draeko and her friends dragged bits of broken glass and old mirrors from the dump to a place not far from the nest. "This way," said Draeko to Flame, who translated for the animals, "when they babies are born, they can stay warm. The sun will reflect from the mirrors and keep them warm." When the reflectors were up, Draeko and her friends settled in to watch.

Soon five of the nine eggs had hatched. All the animals clustered 'round to see the baby dragons born. Flame looked at Draeko, who couldn't take her eyes off the bursting shells. Five were cracking merrily, but the other four remained as still as stones. One of the braver foxes touched them with his paw.

"Cold," he reported gloomily. "No signs of life." Draeko stopped Flame translating. "I know," she said. "Those won't hatch. It's all right."

"Dae ye no' mind they nae hatchin'?" she said, almost shyly.

Draeko sighed. "There are always a few that don't," she said. "This is my first brood. The more you have, the more hatch. Five out of nine is quite good for the first time."

The first dragon thrust its snout through the eggshell. Draeko huffed with pleasure and moved forward. Soon five baby dragons were tumbling about their mother, who purred with contentment as she nuzzled them with her snout, wrapped them about with her tail, and licked them with her gentle tongue.

The baby dragons began to cry. “Food! Food!” Although the animals didn’t speak Dragon, they could understand clearly what the babies wanted, and they edged away.

But Draeko was ready. She turned her head to a huge pile of apples, leaves, berries, and bark, and picked up an apple. The dragons watched, fascinated, as she gulped it down. Then she picked up a second apple in her teeth, and turned her head to a baby dragon. The baby put up its wee snout, and she gave it the apple. The baby chewed, and swallowed. A broad grin appeared on its face.

“More!” roared the baby, lurching greedily toward the apple pile. Soon all five dragons were attacking the berries. When all the food was gone, the baby dragons tumbled back into the nest, their stomachs round and full. Within minutes, all were asleep. The animals tiptoed away. Only Flame remained, watching as Draeko tenderly drew leaves and branches over her babies, tucking them in with her tail, humming a tune under her breath.

Then the two of them tiptoed quietly away, neither saying a word.

*Monday, 28 May, Tulliallan Primary 4 and 5 – the baby dragons get lost.*

Four days after they were hatched, the baby dragons had grown to about two feet high. The wings spread about two feet across on the oldest dragon, a girl. The youngest, a boy, still had a wingspan of a good foot.

Draeko named her children, in the order of their birth, Zusa, Dennis, Chacho, Jake and Cheeky Charlie. The youngest was named after a song Flame taught her. Flame had been flying over the west end of Fife, and she had heard some school children at Tulliallan Primary practicing the song on their recorders. She thought it was so pretty, she began whistling it. When Draeko heard her, she asked what it was. That was how Cheeky Charlie got his name, because he wasn’t actually cheeky at all. He was a small, polite dragon. Dennis was the cheeky one.

On their fourth day of being alive, the baby dragons woke up to find Draeko wasn’t there. She had gone to get some something for them to eat, as the food pile was quite low. But the baby dragons didn’t know that, and they were very hungry.

“What will we do?!” wailed Dennis.

Zusa thought a moment. “Well, we can get our own food. After all, we’re not babies anymore. We’re four days old! Stop whining,” she said to Dennis. “Come on.”

The four younger dragons climbed out of the nest and waddled obediently after her as Zusa, trying to look more confident than she felt, led them away from the nest, down the hill, and—unknowing—into the heart of the labyrinth.

They fell into ditches, they got stuck in Rhododendron bushes, they bounced on the bouncy bridge. They sampled leaves, looked vainly for apples, and Dennis caught a squirrel. He tried to eat it, but the squirrel got away and ran off, screeching at the top of its voice.

The baby dragons didn't know that the squirrel had gone to tell their mother they were out of the nest. The baby dragons did know that Draeko had always told them to stay in the nest if she wasn't there, but they had conveniently forgotten that just at the moment.

So Zusa, Dennis, Chacho, Jake and Cheekie Charlie made their way along the footpaths and bridges until they came to a dirt road. "Let's go down this," Chacho suggested. "Then our wings won't catch on the bushes." The dragons started down the single track, which led to the pond.

"Oh, we ken this place!" said Jake as they caught sight of the water. "This is where Mum takes us for our bath!" And all the dragons rushed forward.

Unfortunately, Cheeky Charlie rushed a bit too fast, and couldn't stop. He fell headlong into the reeds at the end of the water—and sank. A second later, his head bobbed up and he gasped, "HELP! HELP!" before he sank again, thrashing with his tiny wings and tail.

The baby dragons squawked and shrieked in alarm. Zusa stood on her tiptoes and tried to see into the reeds, but she could only hear Charlie coughing and thrashing and splashing in the water. She was so frightened that she began to flap her wings in panic.

A second later, Zusa heard Jake yelling, "Aaagh! Zusa!" Zusa looked down—and discovered she was at least two feet off the ground. The baby dragons screamed in terror, looking from Zusa in the air to Charlie in the water.

Zusa didn't hesitate. She flapped her wings and pointed her nose forward. It was hard to go in a straight line, but she moved over the top of the reeds to where the most noise was coming from. A second later, Charlie's head emerged again. Zusa aimed her nose to the water and dived. She snatched Charlie's back ridges in her two claws and pulled. He was almost too heavy for her, but it was only a couple of feet back to the shore, where she unceremoniously dropped Charlie on the muddy slope of the pond just before flying headfirst into a tree with an undignified "OOMPH."

The other dragons pulled Charlie, who was coughing and spitting water, and trying to get enough air in his lungs to cry, up the slope. He was bleeding where Zusa's claws had grabbed him, but otherwise he was unharmed. And he was yelling loudly. "MUMMY! MUUUUUUUUUUMMMMMMY!"

“Stop that!” said Zusa sharply, sitting up and shaking her head to clear the stars away. “You’re no’ hurt. You couldn’t yell like that if’n you were hurt. Get up.”

Sniffing, Cheeky Charlie and the other wee dragons stood up and moved toward Zusa. She stood, shook out her wings, and faced the other dragons. “Well, now we know how these things work, onyway,” she said, flapping one wing experimentally. “You all try it. Wait!” she shouted, as the dragons began to open their wings. “Let’s go tae the end of the pond where there aren’t ony trees first,” she said, frowning and rubbing her head.

The dragons trotted obediently to the clearing, and began to practice flying. Jake almost went headlong into the pond, but soon the baby dragons seemed to have the hang of it. Chacho was the best, doing loop-de-loops and fancy dives while Jake was still struggling to go in a straight line.

But the dragons soon discovered that flying made them hungrier than they had ever been in their entire lives. Dennis began to moan again. “Food! I want food! I want Mum!”

Zusa looked around quickly. High up in a nearby tree was what looked like an enormous piece of fruit. Little buzzing things were all around it. “See!” she pointed with her wing. “See yon big apple! I’ll go up and fetch that doon, and we can all eat it together.”

The other dragons watched as Zusa flew toward the beehive she thought was a big apple. When she got near it, she called down, “I wonder what these funny buzzing flies are? They—ouch! Ow! Oooh!” she shrieked, pulling her claw back from the nest’s stem, which she had been trying to pull off the tree. “Oooooowwww!” she dived back toward her brothers and sisters, who stared in horror as a cloud of the buzzing things followed her.

Zusa miscalculated, swooped over the heads of the other dragons, and splashed into the shallow end of the pond. The bees didn’t seem to like the water. She ducked her head, moved a few feet away, and came up from the water. The bees, confused, had fallen back. The other dragons watched, unsure what to do, as the bees flew back toward their nest. Then they ran toward Zusa.

“Are you all right?” Jake asked, stretching a claw to help her out of the water. Chacho gasped. “Your face! It’s got wee blotches all ower it!”

“Mmph,” said Zusa. “’s hurts.” The dragons looked on sadly as she waddled out of the water and sat down in the mud. Two big tears rolled down her cheeks. “I wan’ Mum,” she mumbled between swollen cheeks. “I wan’ go home.”

Dennis sat down beside her, stuck his nose to the sky, and howled. “I want Mummy! My feet hurt! I’m hungry.” Chacho joined in. “Mummy! My wings are tired!” Jake and Charlie began to bawl.

*Challenge for next day: how do the dragons discover they can breathe fire? Do they find their Mum?*

*Carnock Primary 3-4 – Tuesday 29 May*

That was when they made their second discovery. As Jake drew in a big breath to let it out in a sob, he felt something catch in his throat. As he blew out air, a puff of smoke went with it. Confused, Jake forgot to cry as he tried again. Air in, air out—and with it came a tiny flame.

“See what I can do!” Jake said, forgetting about wings and stomachs and sore feet and lost nests. “See me!” And he blew another flame. The other dragons, even Zusa, stared. “How are you daein’ that?” they asked.

Jake showed them how to gulp in air and let it out. The dragons sat on the bank of the pond, breathing in air, breathing out fire. Puffs of smoke and wisps of flame went into the sky—where Draeko, frantic with worry, was flying about looking for her babies.

“Could it be?” she wondered, and dived toward the pond. Just in case it wasn’t her babies, but might be men or something of that type, she went down on the other side of the pond from the flames. Her huge body rustled the leaves on the bushes and trees. The baby dragons heard it.

“Hush!” said Zusa, alert for danger. “There’s something big over there,” she whispered, pointing with a wingtip across the pond. “We have to hide. It might be those men Mum told us about.”

Creeping on clawtips, the dragons melted into the forest and lay down among the trees, almost invisible against the shrubs and plants.

Draeko moved quietly around the pond toward the spot where she had seen the flames. Nothing was there. The dragons had left no footprints. Disappointed, Draeko turned around and looked for a clearing large enough to take off into the sky again.

Inside the woods, Zusa looked out—and saw Draeko’s tail as it moved past. “MUMMY! MUMMY!” she shouted, rushing from her hiding place. The other baby dragons followed. Draeko enfolded them in her wings, cuddling them against her. She exclaimed over Zusa’s face, soothed Dennis’ aching feet, and kissed Cheeky Charlie on the head as he sneezed.

“Let’s get you home,” she said. “Climb on my back and I’ll carry you.”

“But we can fly ourselves, Mummy. See!” and the baby dragons sprang into the air—all except Zusa, who said her face hurt too much to fly. Draeko put Zusa on her back with her tail, and they all flew back to the nest.

*Challenge for next day: how does the story end?*  
*Holy Name Primary 4 – Wednesday, 30 May, 2001*

With all the baby dragons back safely, the animals rejoiced. Each came with a gift of fruit or bark or leaves for the babies. They sympathised with Zusa, and made compresses of mud and berry juice to draw out the stings. They listened to Cheeky Charlie explain again and again about almost drowning, and patiently watched Chacho do all manner of fancy flying stunts. They were so glad to have the wee dragons home again, they forgave them if they put on airs a little bit.

When Zusa's face was well, and Dennis had stopped complaining about his sore feet, Draeko called the dragons together. "I have something I want to ask you about, children," she said. "You're not just babies anymore. You know how to fly and how to breathe fire, and you understand how we must live in the woods, being friendly with the other animals and relying on one another in danger—and never trying to harm another creature," she added, looking hard at Dennis. The squirrel-eating incident had been reported to her. Dennis looked down.

"Now is the time, I think, for us to decide if we might like to find some of the other dragons from our own world." The baby dragons looked at her, confused. "Well, from my world, then," said Draeko. "From where I came from when I was carrying you as eggs."

"Oh!" said Jake and Dennis together. "That world."

"But you said all the dragons there were angry with one another, and wouldnae be at peace for anything or anybody," Zusa said.

"Yes," said Draeko, "but then again, they never got the chance, did they? Perhaps some of them, like me, long for something else. I wonder if it's worth going back to try and talk to them, to tell them that not every place is so full of fighting, and how different it could be."

"But if we go back," said Cheeky Charlie with a shiver, "they might hurt us!"

"Oh, I wasn't thinking of you going back, dear," his mother said, pulling him to her with his tail. "I was thinking of asking Flame and the others to look after you while I went back."

The baby dragons sent up a chorus of objections. "No Mummy no! It's dangerous! You cannae leave us. Please Mum dinnae leave!" Draeko raised her wings for calm.

"Now I won't go if you don't want me to, but think, children. Think what it would be like to be born in a world where everyone hates everyone else, for no reason at all. Think how nice it would be to hear of a place where that wasn't so. Wouldn't you want to know about it?"

The dragons were silent. Finally, Zusa raised her head. “Mummy, if you go, I want tae go too. I could tell the other young dragons about flying wherever I want, haein’ rabbits and badgers and bugs for friends. I could tell them about Flame! They’ll no’ hae seen a dragon bird.”

Draeko smiled at her eldest daughter. “No dear, it wouldn’t be a good idea for you to go, too, but it’s a kind thought.”

Jake stuck out his lower jaw. “I want tae go. I’ve nivver seen any dragons except us. They might be nice gin we play nice with them.”

Cheeky Charlie joined in. “I’ll bet they’ve never heard o’ a dragon wi’ my name! I could sing the song for them!”

Dennis wanted to talk to the other dragons, to tell them that fighting wasn’t nearly as much fun as playing.

In the end, Draeko gave in. “We’ll all go, but oh children, we must be careful!”

And they were. They flew into Dragonland at night, careful not to breathe fire or give away telltale puffs of smoke. They hid in an old cave Draeko knew about on the edge of a mountainous area. In the morning, Draeko flew into the sky, her children around her.

“Dragons! Dragons! Listen to me! You don’t have to fight any more. Give up this useless war, and make peace. My children and I live in a peaceful land. We live happily alongside marvelous creatures. Some have long ears. Some are great singers. Others can tunnel through earth as we do through rock. Dragons! Listen to me! All these creatures live side by side in peace. So can we! Stop fighting!”

There was no response from the countryside below. Zusa flew to her mother. “Are they a’ dead?” she asked. Her mother shook her head. “I don’t know, dear. I suppose they’re just hiding. They think we’re trying to trick them into showing themselves, so we can attack.”

At that second a burst of fire came from below. Chacho screamed. Draeko spread her wings and gathered her children to her, diving for cover. A large dragon emerged from the woods and launched itself toward them. Draeko dived into the cave, pushing her children in front of her. Chacho was crying. Her belly had been scorched by the fire.

“Shh, there’s a dear,” said her mother, turning to block the entryway with her fiery breath. The other dragon moved back. Draeko shouted out. “Who are you?”

“What does it matter?” the other dragon shouted back. “Come out and fight!”

“I won’t fight any more!” Draeko said. “My children and I are from a peaceful place. We won’t fight. But if you attack my children again, I will defend them. If I have to kill you to do it, I will!”



The dragon outside waited awhile, but then he got tired and flew away. Slowly Draeko inched toward the mouth of the cave. She looked out. The other dragon was gone. Then she heard a voice.

“Is it true?” She looked up. A young dragon emerged from behind a boulder above the cave.

“What? About my children? Yes, I would defend them to the death—”

“Noooo,” the other dragon interrupted. “About that other place. Where nobody fights. Is it a real place?”

Draeko nodded. “Yes, it is.”

The dragon hesitated. “Could – could you take me there?”

Draeko blinked. “Well, I came back to try and stop the dragons fighting here in Dragonland, so we could make this a peaceful place.”

The other dragon stomped the rock impatiently. “You won’t do that. No one can do that. A couple of years ago there was a dragon here telling everyone the same thing. They killed him. That’s his ribcage down there.” He pointed with one claw to a pile of bones near the edge of some trees.

Draeko sighed. “Then if I can’t bring peace to the dragons, perhaps I can bring some dragons to a peaceful place. Come inside the cave.”

The young dragon scampered down the rocks and into the cave. Zusa and the others moved back to make room. Draeko studied him. “If I go and look for some other dragons, would you promise to defend this cave with your life if need be? Will you keep my children safe?”

The young dragon nodded. “I will.” Zusa wriggled forward. “I’m going too!” So did Dennis. Draeko hesitated, then agreed. “Right. Charlie and Jake, stay with Chacho. Find some moss at the cave’s mouth to put on her belly. And if I’m not back by dark—” she gave the young dragon a meaningful look. He nodded his head slightly. Draeko, Zusa and Dennis left the cave and launched into the air.

The others waited for hours. Just as night was falling, they heard wings flapping. Looking out, they saw Zusa, Dennis, and Draeko –with about a dozen dragons behind them. Draeko landed. She had a scratch along her side. Dennis’ face had fire blisters, and one of Zusa’s wings was bleeding. “Now then,” Draeko said. “Everything all right here?” The other children crowded forward. She nuzzled them with her neck, and looked at Chacho’s stomach.

“We’ll go now,” she said. “These are our new neighbours.” She indicated the dragons waiting on the rocks outside. Together, the thirteen dragons and Draeko and her children launched themselves into the air, and flew back to Inzievar Woods.

And that’s where they live peacefully to this day.