

I

Steven woke up in the morning. He was tired, as he hadn't slept properly all night. He had been studying till late for a math test. "I can't mess up this test, my end-of-year grades depend on it," thought the boy. Still half-asleep, he dragged himself out of bed, washed, got dressed and ate some cornflakes, or rather attempted to, as he wasn't at all hungry due to stress. He met his classmates on the school bus. Like Steven, they had been studying hard for the test.

"I hardly slept at all. I kept waking up. I dreamed I didn't know any of the answers, and there was no-one to copy off," said John.

"You couldn't answer any of the questions? Yeah, right – you were always good at geometry!" laughed Steven.

John was surprised: "Geometry? We're being tested on fractions today!" He looked at Steven. "You really didn't sleep much, did you? Your brain's completely frazzled..."

Steven turned pale. "Oh boy, I muddled up the chapters in the textbook. This is going to be a catastrophe," he thought, terrified. The math test was being held during the first lesson. Steven started to panic; he couldn't compose himself; his hands began to shake. As they walked into the classroom, he was convinced that this was the end. "I can forget about good end-of-year grades." Everyone had already taken out their pens and the teacher was giving out the test, when suddenly the fire alarm blared out and a message was read out over the loudspeaker:

ATTENTION, EVERYONE!!! THERE IS A THREAT OF FIRE IN THE BUILDING.
PLEASE GO TO THE NEAREST EMERGENCY EXIT.

Everyone including the teacher was surprised. A moment later they made their way down the stairs in an orderly fashion to the school entrance. The school director was standing in front of the school with some firemen. One of them was holding a loudspeaker in his hand:

"Thank you for taking part in the fire drill. You all left the building in an orderly manner. You can be proud of yourselves! And now I invite you to have a look at the fire engines!"

"Well, it appears you'll be sitting the test tomorrow. You're off the hook for another day," said the teacher with a smile.

II

Kate had been waiting for this moment for a long time. In the afternoon she was supposed to be going with her dad to a basketball match featuring her favorite team. This would be the first time she had seen a league match live – up till now she had only seen her favorite team on television. When they were just about to go out, her mom asked her dad, “Did you pay for the tickets by credit card or cash?”

Dad looked horrified. “Tickets???? Oh no, I forgot to pick the tickets up yesterday!”

“What do you mean? How can you do this to me? I’ve been waiting for this match for so long!” Kate couldn’t believe this was really happening.

“Don’t worry, Kate, we’ll go early and try to buy tickets on the door.”

The drive to the basketball stadium seemed to last forever. Every traffic light seemed to change from green to red on purpose, and to make matter worse, when they were halfway there, there was an awful traffic jam, which had been caused by an accident that forced the closure of one lane. When Kate and her dad finally reached the stadium, they had just started letting in the first fans and the ticket hall was suspiciously empty. They went up to a window and Kate’s legs turned to jelly. “Tickets sold out” said a large notice pinned to the railing.

“Oh, great,” moaned Kate, “maybe we can still catch the second half on television ...” She was devastated.

“Kate, I’m so sorry... we’ll come in two weeks. I’ll buy tickets for the VIP stand.”

“As long as you don’t forget again,” thought the girl.

“Excuse me,” someone pulled Kate’s dad’s sleeve, “you look as though you’d like to buy tickets.” A man was waving a couple of tickets in dad’s face.

“Yes, but...”

“I was supposed to go with two friends, but they’ve fallen ill, I’ll gladly sell them to you.”

“They’ve fallen from heaven!” cried Kate, overjoyed.

“Of course we’ll buy them from you.” Dad quickly counted out the required amount of money and handed it over to the man. A moment later they were walking into the stand.

“So, we’ll be watching the next match from the VIP stand? Awesome!” laughed Kate and winked playfully.

III

Beyond seven forests and seven mountains stood a beautiful castle where the royal family lived. The king was a good and wise leader, loved by his subjects. He lived in the castle with his wife, the queen, and his daughter, Princess Caroline. Besides the royal family, in the castle lived servants and knights.

One morning, the commander of the knights came running up to the king, terrified: "Sir, we have a problem. Before the castle gates is a dragon, who won't allow anyone to enter or leave. Whenever anyone approaches, he breathes fire and waves his huge tail. We don't know what to do. Your subjects are terrified."

The king was very worried by this news: "What will I do now?" he thought. Throughout the day the king's men tried various methods to scare away the dragon. But the dragon was very stubborn. His knights would ride out valiantly on their horses and return in a state of terror, their armor blackened by the dragon's fire. The king's men even tried firing boulders from a catapult at the dragon, but the dragon just casually knocked them back with its tail and even seemed to be having lots of fun! The inhabitants of the castle were distraught.

"Dad, maybe I could try?" asked Princess Caroline.

The king smiled sadly and said: "You're a very brave little girl, but I'm afraid that won't save us. You see, that monster isn't afraid of anyone. It's given our best knights a roasting, and knocks back huge boulders with its tail as if they were tennis balls. I forbid you to leave the castle."

"Maybe I am a little girl, but I'm not afraid of the dragon," thought the princess and went to her room. After dark, she slipped out of the castle through the back gate and went up to the dragon. He was surprised at the sight of the girl. He looked down at her and stopped breathing fire.

"Mr. Dragon," said Caroline hesitantly, "please, please, stop breathing fire and waving your tail, because people are afraid of you!"

The dragon looked surprised and lowered his enormous head towards the little girl's face, as though he wanted to get a better look at her. Caroline thought to herself that he wasn't as ugly as people said, and there was even a hint of a smile in his eyes.

"As a sign of peace between us I can kiss you," she said and gave the dragon a peck on his huge nose. Suddenly there was a flash of light and clouds of smoke erupted. When the smoke had cleared, a prince appeared before the princess's eyes.

"Thank you, beautiful lady. I was afraid that no-one would lift this curse from me."

IV

Mom said to Jack: "Hurry up, son, it looks like a storm is brewing. If we want to go for a walk, we have to be quick." "I'm coming, mom." Jack quickly put on his shoes and donned his raincoat, buttoning it up as he galloped down the stairs. He thought he heard the patter of Dino's paws as he ran behind him. When they were halfway to the playground, his mother asked:

"Where's Dino?" "I thought he was running behind me, as he usually does," said Jack and looked round, but the dog wasn't there. "Dino!" shouted the boy and whistled twice. However, the dog was nowhere to be seen. Suddenly, the wind started to gust – a storm was on the way! "We have to go back," said mom, "once we've found the dog, of course..."

Mom looked worried. Dino never strayed too far during a walk. He usually walked close to her or Jack, which was why they virtually never put him on a lead. They look everywhere – in the small park, by the shop, and in the car park. When they got to the basketball court, the storm broke with a vengeance. The dog, however, was nowhere to be seen. "Let's go back. Maybe Dino has run back towards the house," decided mom. But you could hear from the tone of voice that she wasn't at all sure. "And what if we can't find him?" asked Jack. The thought that Dino might have got lost made him want to cry. "We'll look for him when the storm is over."

They approached the house, but there was no sign of the dog. Jack and his mother were increasingly worried. As they entered the house, Jack was already making plans in his head. He was wondering where he could print photos of the dog, so that could stick them up in the area together with a note providing contact details. When they opened the door to the house, in front of their eyes appeared... Dino. He wagged his tail upon seeing them, but looked rather sleepy. "Dino!" cried mom and Jack together. "He must have been here the whole time, he isn't even wet!" said the happy boy.

"Well, it seems we were in such a hurry to go for a walk that we forgot to take him with us," said mom and scratched the dog affectionately behind his left ear.