



The Curious Dragon

The curious dragon tucked his tail beneath his quilt and gave a great big sigh. Tomorrow was his first day at the little hill school, and his blue school satchel waited by the door, packed with a smooth slate and a plum-coloured pencil. “I must sleep before the night is over,” he told his gentle night-light. “But I do not feel sleepy at all.”





He shut his golden eyes and tried the bedtime breath his grandmother had shown him: in through his nose, out in a warm puff. But the moment he thought about breathing out, his claws gripped the quilt. The warm steam came in three jumpy squirts and curled around his ears. His heart began to patter like pebbles in a tin.





The dragon sat up. “Why does my steam make such a fuss?” He arranged his pillows into a high nest, then a low nest, then one with the round green cushion in the middle. None of them helped. Each time he tried to exhale, he waited too hard for the steam, and there it was again: puff, puff, puff.





From the open window came the silver smell of grass. The meadow beyond the dragon home lay under the moon, pale and still. The dragon made a choice. He slipped from his cozy bed, left his night-light glowing softly on the shelf, and carried no satchel at all. This was not a school-day task, he decided. It was a sleep task.

In the meadow, he found a stepping-stone shaped like a sleeping turtle. He placed one paw upon it and tried another breath. A thin ribbon of steam twirled straight up, then snapped into a little knot above his snout. The knot would not drift away. The dragon frowned at it until his forehead scales wrinkled.

Then something pale moved on the far side of the foxglove bells. A moon moth rested there, her wide ivory wings marked with soft grey circles. She did not flap quickly. Her wings opened, paused, and closed as slowly as curtains at bedtime.

“Good evening, curious one,” said the moon moth. Her voice was as light as a page turning. “I saw your steam tying itself in knots.” “I want to sleep,” said the dragon, “but my warm breath will not behave.” The moth tipped one feathery antenna. “Would you like a moonlit riddle?”





The dragon nodded. The moth pointed to a round patch of moonshine on the grass and asked, “What travels without feet, fills no basket, and becomes gentler when it is given more time?”

The dragon looked at the grass, at the moon, and at his little steam knot. He thought of tomorrow’s walk to school, but walking had feet. He thought of music, but music filled ears.

At last he watched the moth’s wings open slowly. “A cloud?” he whispered. “A cloud,” said the moon moth. “And your steam can be one. Do not push it out as if it must hurry somewhere. Let it go slowly enough to float.”



The dragon put both paws on his round belly. He breathed in, not too much. Then he opened his mouth the tiniest bit and let the warmth slide out. Hooooooooooo. His steam did not leap or knot. It rolled forward in a soft cloud, silver at the edges where moonlight touched it. The cloud drifted over the turtle stone and thinned kindly into the meadow air.

The dragon's claws loosened. He tried once more, slowly, and another warm cloud floated away. "Oh," he said, quieter now. "It likes having time." "Most sleepy things do," said the moon moth. The dragon bowed his head. "Thank you for the riddle and the cloud-breath." The moth opened and paused and closed her wings, and he understood her answer was goodbye.





Back in his dragon home, the blue satchel was still waiting patiently by the door. The curious dragon climbed into his cozy bed and pulled the quilt up to his chin. His gentle night-light made a peaceful glow beside the shelf. He breathed in once, then let out one last warm, slow cloud. It hovered above his pillow like a small soft moon, and before it faded, the dragon was asleep.





Good night.



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After the story



THE MAIN IDEA

A small, thoughtful step can make a difficult moment feel safer.

TALK ABOUT IT AFTER READING

After reading, ask which moment felt the warmest or bravest today.

AND TOMORROW...

At the little hill school, the curious dragon may discover what happens when a plum-coloured pencil begins drawing its own tiny clouds.





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On the night before school, a curious little dragon cannot settle his jumpy steam. In a moonlit meadow, a gentle moth helps him discover how to let his warm breath float slowly into sleep.

6 minutes of reading



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