

DRAGONKIN

by Robin Wayne Bailey

Book One:
Wyvernwood

Chapter One

Bumble flew from one tree to the next, his tiny wings a blur of speed, his heart pounding with anger and despair. They were coming with saws and axes, long lines of dirty men with loud voices and thick ropes coiled over their brawny shoulders! Even as he fled, he could hear the powerful chop, chop, chop of their efforts resounding through the forest, followed by the terrible crash of the great mahogany tree he'd called home for three summers.

Panting, he paused in the branches of a redwood and looked around. He'd put enough distance between the woodcutters and himself that he could no longer see them, although the relentless pounding of their axes and the rasp of their saws continued to fill the air. Something more immediate caught his attention, however.

At the base of the redwood a wild rose bramble grew. It's blood red blossoms exuded a delicious and tempting perfume. Bumble wasted no time, but dived straight for the roses. A

hummingbird has to keep up his energy, he told himself as he dipped his long, needle-like beak between the petals and drank deeply from its pool of nectar.

“Ummmmm! So good! So sweet!” he exclaimed as he hovered over the bramble. “I must sample another, I simply must!” And he darted to a second blossom. Its nectar was as savory as the first. And of course, he had to try a third. After that, he landed on a tangle of branches, ignoring the numerous thorns, and patted his bloated little belly as he belched his satisfaction.

“I must remember this delightful smorgasbord!” he said. “I must remember!” He screwed his tiny face up suddenly and licked the last drop of nectar from his narrow beak as he listened to the saws and axes. “Oh, dear! I remember! I remember!”

He took off again, zipping through the forest at a frantic pace as he cried out for help in a voice that was barely audible over the drone of his wings. “Alert! Alert!” he shouted. “Invaders! Monsters! Gather your women and throw the children overboard! Be calm, but we’re all doomed!”

Bumble was a stout little fellow, but excitable and given to confusion. He zigzagged among the trees without direction or destination, screaming his warning until his voice gave out. In no time at all, he grew hungry again, for a hummingbird’s appetite was almost endless. He looked around for his next meal, and plunged toward a crop of daisies growing beside a stream.

Hovering over the yellow petals, he thrust his beak forward. “Oh, yes! Oh, rich!” he cried in a paroxysm of joy as he drank his fill. “So many tasty flowers! What a delightful golden treasure I have found!” He flew to an overhanging branch, fluttered his wings before folding them tightly against his body, and then stretched out on his back with his legs straight up in the air.

He felt so full and content as he stared up through the thick, green leaves at the blue sky beyond. Through a gap in the branches, he watched a white cloud slowly change from one shape to another as it drifted past. First, it looked to him like a huge chrysanthemum, so savory and delicious. Then, as the breeze pushed it along it became an amaryllis. Bumble groaned and licked his beak at the thought; nothing tasted so good as a fresh amaryllis! Well, except an orchid, which is what the cloud resembled next.

Bumble folded his wings over his round belly. Cloud watching was hard work, and he felt famished already. There were still daisies by the stream below he had not sampled. Indeed, as he flipped over to his feet and stretched his wings, he realized that he was in a part of Wyvernwood he'd never explored before. He gazed up and down the stream. On both banks it was bordered with the most delectable selection of wildflowers! The tree in which he found himself might serve him very well as a new home.

Oh, but he had a home in a beautiful mahogany.

Somewhere.

He hopped around on his branch, suddenly nervous and uncertain. There was something he should remember, but hummingbirds were cursed with notoriously bad memories. He glanced toward the daisies, and despite his unease, he couldn't help but admire the way those sweet blossoms reflected in the stream's clear water.

Perhaps a drink of nectar would help him recall what he had forgotten.

But a dark shadow skimmed the tops of the trees, and Bumble instinctively froze. Every taut muscle in his body quivered. When the shadow passed, he waited for long minutes with his eyes squeezed shut, letting the sunlight chase away the chill that had seized him.

“Never a good day when a griffin crosses your path.”

Bumble jumped, startled, though the voice was gently feminine. Further downstream, he spied a white unicorn reclining delicately on a bed of moss with her legs folded beneath her. The sunlight flashed on one exposed golden hoof as she batted her blue eyes at him.

He struggled to remember her name before exclaiming, “Miriam! What a wonderful sore for sight eyes you are!”

“Marian,” she corrected with a bemused smile. “What are you doing so far from your tree, Bumble, besides gorging that legendary tummy of yours? Even in Wyvernwood there are dangers for those who venture too far from home.”

Pushing his chest out, he answered, “I’m not afraid, dear Miriam.” He began to strut back and forth as he regarded her. With his shimmering green plumage and the distinctive white band around his throat, and his rapier-like beak, he knew he cut an impressive figure. “In fact,” he continued, “it’s well-known that I lust for adventure, that I spit at danger, that...”

Marian chuckled softly, but Bumble barely noticed as he stopped in middle of his boast. Danger. There was something he needed to remember. He strained his tiny brain, and his heart began to race again. Something.... Something!

“Alert! Alert!” he cried in sudden panic as he jumped up and down. “Danger, will...!” He beat the tip of one wing against his head, trying to jar his memory. “One if by land! Two if by sea!” He gave a squeal, a single, shrill note that hurt his throat. “In blackest day, in brightest night, I wish I may, I wish I might!”

Marian laughed. “You are a silly creature.”

Bumble stopped his pacing and shot her a stern look. “You can say that to me with a straight face and a horn sticking out of your head?” It was rude of him, and he regretted his remark instantly for one should never be rude to a unicorn, yet it jogged a memory. “Miriam! I

remember now! There's a herd of Men loose in Wyvernwood! They're cutting down the trees! They cut down my beloved mahogany!"

"Poor Bumble!" Marian murmured sympathetically. "No wonder you're so addled. It must have fallen on your head!"

"A grievous loss, indeed," Bumble answered, "and it's true I barely escaped with both my wings intact!" He looked around frantically, and his gaze settled on the daisies. He was so hungry! But there wasn't time to eat, because he remembered! He remembered!

"But it's worse than just my poor mahogany, Marian," he continued, at last getting her name right. "Much worse. They've got him! Got him bound in their cruel ropes hand and hoof and horn!" He pointed to her head with one wing. "That's how I remembered, because you have a horn, too! And we've got to do something! Call out the army...!"

Marian sprang up from her soft bed of moss, and though the shadows of limbs and leaves dappled her slender flanks, the sunlight flashed brilliantly on the tip of her proud spike. When she interrupted him, her voice was low and angry. "They've got who, you Bumble-bird?"

"My poor home! My poor home!" Bumble moaned, rubbing and wringing his wings as he paced again on his limb. "But Marian! I saw! The Men have captured Chernovog – the Minotaur!"

Marian tossed her mane and crashed a hoof on the ground.

"We have to tell Stormfire!" Bumble said. "Or Sabu, or...!"

"There isn't time," Marian answered sharply. "Lead the way, Hummingbird, and see that you fly straight and true. We'll save him ourselves!"

Bumble gulped.