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## DRAGONKIN:

### Prologue

A soft, evening wind rustled through the trees on the southern edge of Wyvernwood, shaking the last of the autumn leaves from the black branches and setting the high tops to swaying. In the west, the sunset shone down in beams of red-orange light through the stout trees and gnarly limbs, but its distant, fading warmth could not chase the chill from the air.

Marina lay curled up at the mouth of her cave, watching the dying sun with one eye as she measured the slow approach of night with the other. She felt old and weary and filled with a sense of sadness she didn't understand as she gazed down from her hill and across the ancient forest. It was the coming of winter, she told herself, that was responsible for her mood.

Quick, small footsteps sounded behind her, then suddenly stopped. Marina lifted her silver-scaled head and craned her long neck to look back into her cave, and she smiled gently at the dragon-child that stood there.

“Come closer, Puck, my little one,” she urged. And Puck did so, nuzzling down into the crook of her arm as she drew him near and sheltered him under one shining wing. “It’s too late to play outside, and it’s growing cold. Let’s just lie here close together and count the stars as they appear.”

Puck folded his arms under his narrow chin and kneaded his claws lightly on his mother’s arm. After a few moments, he began to purr cat-like, as was the manner of all dragon-children. Without lifting his head from her arm, he rolled his eyes skyward, searching. Suddenly, he sang out:

“I spy! I spy!  
High up in the velvet sky,  
The first star of night I see!  
Now my wish will come to be!”

Marina rolled him over and tickled his stomach. Puck squealed, but made no real effort to escape. Finally, Marina stopped and gazed down upon her dragon-child, and her sadness lifted a little. The sunset shimmered on his golden scales, and in its light he looked like a beautiful little bundle of fire. She loved Puck so.

“Show me your star,” she said.

He flipped over and resumed his former position stretched out beside her, his head resting on her arm, as he pointed. “There!” he answered. “Just above those trees. See how it seems to hang on the branches!”

Marina smiled again and drew her long tail up to encircle them both as she studied the star. It was Rono, the eternal dusk-time star, ever bright and ever constant, always the First Star.

“You have sharp eyes, little Puck,” she said. “Now tell me your wish, and perhaps I can help it come to pass.”

He squirmed against her, flexed the small, leathery stubs of his immature wings, and yawned. “I wish you’d tell me a story,” he said. “I love it best when you read to me from Stormfire’s Book or when you tell me tales from the old days.”

Marina closed her eyes briefly. A tale from the old days. But there were so many stories to tell, so many heroes to remember, so many adventures that needed passing on. She stroked little Puck lightly with one paw.

“A story from the old days, then,” she said, her voice little more than a whisper. “When the Age of Dragons was drawing to an end and Wyvernwood was young and wild and beautiful.”

“Wyvernwood was our home then, too?” Puck asked as he gazed out across the darkening forest.

“Our home and our refuge,” Marina answered. “Wyvernwood is vast and deep, and all the Dragonkin are gathered here. And the griffins, too, and the basilisks and minotaurs and manticores, and all the creatures that remain from the Ancient Days. But hush now, little Puck, and close your eyes and listen to the gentle breeze and the rustle of the leaves as they are swept away, and to the soft creep of approaching night, for they are the music that brings my tale to life.”

“And if you chance to open your eyes even for a moment, look to Rono above the treetops, and remember what I tell you now – that there are still dreams to dream and stars to be wished upon. Then close your eyes again and let imagination take wing.”

Marina sighed as her child relaxed against her, and she felt the soft vibration of his tiny body beneath her protective wing. “I am old,” she continued. “Older than you know, my pretty dragon-boy, but I remember Stormfire and the time when dragons and griffins warred in the Wyvernwood skies, and when the humans of Angmar to the north and Degarm in the south made a battleground of our homeland. The Redclaw Fortress did not yet stand and Undersky had not yet been found.

“The Age of Dragons was not yet quite past, and to Stormfire and his dragon-wife Sabu was born a rare clutch of three eggs from which came the triplets, Harrow, Chan, and Luna.”

“The Dragon Sabu,” Puck murmured without opening his eyes, “who went insane.”

“Do not speak ill of her,” Marina chided softly. “For it was all according to prophesy, and all that her children dared and accomplished was for the good of the Dragonkin. As I said, it was long ago, but I will tell the tale as if it were today or yesterday, and your imagination will give shape to my words.”

Marina looked at her child, and his eyes were tightly closed as he waited for the story to begin. She experienced a sudden warmth and peace, and the sadness she had earlier felt melted away. Beyond her cave, beyond the edge of the woods, the sunset faded and faded, and the violet night stole closer. Rono no longer shone alone in the sky;

a few more stars twinkled, and the glow of the rising moon cast tree-shadows over the earth.

“This is your wish, to hear a tale,” she whispered. “And it begins like this.”