

THE ADVENTURES OF
PHILIP AND SOPHIE

The Sword of the Dragon King: Part I

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For my Students

*“May it be a light for you in dark places,
when all other lights go out.”*

—J.R.R. Tolkien

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PROLOGUE
THE ARGUMENT

Every morning, when the sun rose and a gentle breeze brought up the scent of lilies, a little bird named Sebastian Ploomberry would wake up, shake out his little feathers, stretch his little legs, and peer down over the edge of his little nest. He had been practicing all summer for what was to be the most exciting moment of his life: the moment when, for the very first time, he would get to spread out his wings and fly.

“Alright,” he repeated to himself confidently. “Just like we rehearsed. Feet tucked . . . back straight . . . beak pointed to where I want to go . . . and wings up-down, up-down!”

As Sebastian said this, he hopped up onto the ledge and began readying himself by pacing back and forth and taking a series of deep little breaths.

“Oh bother! Why does it have to be so high up?” he exclaimed. “I shall surely break my head if I fall! Then what would become of me?”

The sun seemed much brighter to Sebastian suddenly, and the wind felt much stronger. If any other little bird had been in his place, they would have more than likely gotten scared and turned back. But Sebastian was different from most other little birds—braver and more curious. For better or worse, he was very often able to talk himself into such things, even if it got him into trouble.

“No! No! No!” he shouted out. “I’m not going to chicken out again! Not *this* time! Not *this* bird! I’m going over, and that’s all there is to it!”

Sebastian then took a *very* deep breath (a breath so deep, in fact, that it made him look like he was about to burst or blow up into a puff of feathers), bent his knees, and began to count down backwards from three.

“If I do that,” he thought to himself, “then, perhaps it will be like someone is here with me cheering me on . . . Three! Two! One!” he counted. But it didn’t work. It was still too scary! He couldn’t move and felt very disappointed in himself. “Oh, dear . . .” he sighed.

But then Sebastian had another idea. One he was sure would work!

“Oh! Oh! I know! Perhaps if I close my eyes as I count . . . Yes, that should do it!” he thought. “You can’t get scared if you can’t see!” Once more, he started counting. “Three, two and one!” But the same thing happened again. What was he going to do? He was out of ideas.

“Oh well,” he lamented, “I’ll just have to do it the old-fashioned way, I guess. No tricks! No funny business!” He cleared his throat and prepared himself one last time. “Ahem, ahem! Wings, don’t fail me!” he cried out to the heavens. “Wind, lift me up! And . . . as for the rest of the world . . .” Sebastian was hurrying now because he realized he was stalling again. “Here . . . I . . . come!”

And with that, Sebastian yelled out the word “Go!” as loud as he could—and plunged himself forward with all his might! A cold gust of wind then burst up from under him and thrust his whole body into the air! He lost his balance for a moment, and the sun’s bright beams nearly blinded him, but he managed to straighten himself out.

“I’m doing it!” he exclaimed, flapping his little wings. “I’m flying! I’m really flying! How delightful! How wonderful! How—”

But before Sebastian could finish what he was going to say, he felt a firm clamp upon the tip of his little tail and a strong tug backward

—pulling him, in fact, right straight back to the place where he began. It was his older sister.

“Ouch! What was that for?” Sebastian whimpered, as he landed on his back with a thud.

“For your own good, that’s what!” his sister replied. “Just where do you think you were going?”

“I was *going* to fly,” said Sebastian, “until *you* interrupted me. It’s boring here! There’s nothing to do!”

Sebastian spoke as though he had been awakened from the most wonderful dream he had ever had, and was now being jostled out of bed. He stood up and began brushing himself off very grumpily.

“What do you mean there’s nothing to do?” said his sister. “I play with you, don’t I?”

“Yes, yes, but you’re a girl! All girls ever want to do is play ‘nest’ or sing! And Edward is always out helping mother.” Sebastian huffed. “Well, I for one have seen enough of nests for now. It’s high time I discover something new!”

The place Sebastian was referring to, and which he kept pointing at with his wing as he spoke, was the great green forest beyond the Ploomberry nest—a valley that was very old, very mysterious, and full of many wondrous

spectacles. Every day, Sebastian would imagine himself exploring them.

“First,” he would say to himself, as he held out his wing and squinted, “to the great snowy mountain to the East! And then to the rushing rivers! And then—” if that wasn’t enough, and if he “had time,” as he always added, “—to one of the many tall roaring waterfalls with rainbows over them!”

Sebastian’s nest was in the Life Tree. It was the tallest of all the trees in the great valley, and was right in the middle. That meant he had the best view. In every direction, there was something wonderful to look at! He used to day-dream about what might be there. Sebastian saw adventure! Excitement! But all Dorabella saw was trouble.

“You’re too little,” she continued in that tone that big sisters so love to lecture their little brothers in. “Your wings aren’t long enough. Your beak is too short. And you don’t even—”

“Ah, foey!” said Sebastian. “I would have made it . . .”

“Made it where, Sebastian? I still don’t understand. What is it you want to do down there, anyway?”

He didn’t even have to think about it.

“Why, go on an adventure, of course! Just like—”

But then Sebastian was interrupted again, this time by his older brother bird, who had just flown down and landed behind him.

“Oh, don’t tell me he’s prattling on about that old peacock’s tale again,” the voice sneered. “Really, Dorabella, you should not be encouraging him.”

Now, as you know, reader, you should never, ever try to hit one of your brothers or sisters, even when they say something mean you don’t like. It’s always better to use words to solve problems, or to call a grown up and let them sort it out. I’m very sorry to say, however, that young Sebastian did not do this. Instead, he lost his temper and charged forth towards his brother with an intent on dealing a most severe pecking! And his brother, too, did the same! Fortunately, their sister managed to get between them just in time.

“Now enough of that, you two! I said enough!”

“He started it!” cried Sebastian.

“I don’t care who started it,” Dorabella responded. “And you, Edward, stop behaving like such a child!”

“I’m only trying to teach the kid a lesson! The sooner he grows up and faces the truth, the better.”

Sebastian then scowled at his brother and stuck his tongue out. So did Edward.

“Stop it!” Dorabella got between them. “I’ll tell mother! I will!” They stopped immediately. “What in the world are you two arguing about, anyways?”

“Nothing,” grumbled Edward.

Sebastian clearly disagreed.

“It’s *not* nothing!” he corrected. “The whole forest is talking about it, sis! Something extraordinary has happened!”

“What’s happened?” she asked.

“There’s a *new* creature! A powerful one! Who fights on OUR side!”



THE MYSTERIOUS CREATURE

The forest was divided into the strong and the weak—and the weak were always preyed upon by the strong. That's why the news was so hard for everyone to believe. But the news was spreading fast! All the little chicks were chirping about it:

*There is a creature,
Big and strong,
Chirp, chirp!
Who was once very naughty,
and did much wrong.
Chirp! Chirp!
Until one day,
The creature switched sides.
Chirp!
Now our protector,
Guardian of nests, trees and hives . . .*

“The Legend of the Seven Labors” was what the chicks were all calling it—“seven” being the number of evil king-animals the creature had de-throned. Sebastian Ploomberry was one of these little chicks. He had memorized every riddle and song about the creature and hoped one day to join him. Either that, or become a hero himself and have his own adventures. But his brother didn’t believe it was really true and his sister was only learning about the legend for the first time. If he could only convince her, then maybe she would let him go. In his best storyteller’s voice, he began reciting the tale.

“He wanders around, they say . . . getting into adventures! Rescuing . . . fighting battles . . . chasing villains . . .” As he spoke, he sawed through the air with his wing like a sword, making swish sounds: “taking from the rich . . . giving to the poor . . . and protecting the weak from the powerful!”

But Edward wasn’t about to let him get away with it. He thought the story was silly.

“And who has hands, but no claws . . .” he interrupted sarcastically. “Skin, but no fur or feathers . . . And who can go invisible, weave spider webs, and fly without having any wings! Right!?”

Edward crossed his arms and rolled his eyes.

“That’s right!” answered Sebastian confi-

dently. "Except about the fur part. It does have fur, so I've heard—only it's all on the top of its head, rather than its body—"

"Oh, how convenient!" harped back Edward. He was so annoying. "Of course! Its fur is all on its head! How silly of me! By my beak—the next thing you'll be telling us is that this creature who wanders about doesn't even have a tail!"

"Actually," replied Sebastian, closing his eyes and pointing upward, "that is the next thing I was about to mention . . ."

Edward finally snapped. You could tell, because all his feathers began to stand up like a porcupine. He didn't like it when Sebastian told these kinds of stories. He thought they were dangerous. They made impressionable little birds want to go on adventures—which was a very good way of getting eaten up.

"That's it!" Edward cried out, flapping his wings. "I have heard enough of this nonsense, Sebastian! There is no such creature! And there will be no more talk of it! Or of any other silly myth you've made up! And that's that!"

But Sebastian would not be silenced. It was too important to him.

"You believe me, don't you, sis?" Sebastian asked as he hopped over and began tugging on her wing.

But Dorabella still wasn't sure.

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