

AN EXCERPT FROM

THE
DEATH
OF THE
GOOD
WIZARD

RED MONOCLE: BOOK 2

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THE DEATH OF THE GOOD WIZARD — 73

“So if it’s not a dragon, what do you think it is?” Gregory asked Mildred.

“Yeah, tell us, Mildred,” added Yola with a giggle. “So far, the keenest scientific observation you’ve made is ‘Eek!’”

“Perhaps it’s a distant relative of the pterodactyl,” mused Mildred.

“Didn’t dinosaurs go extinct about 65 million years ago?” asked Yola.

“Well, I didn’t say my theory doesn’t have its problems,” replied Mildred. “But after all—as I deduced on our last trip—we *are* outside of time.”

“And outside of everyday reality,” added Yola. “So it could simply be a dragon.”

“A name some uneducated person might give to an unfamiliar kind of pterodactyl,” said Mildred.

“A fire-breathing pterodactyl?” asked Gregory doubtfully.

Mildred thought for a moment and added faintly, “I’m fairly sure there’s nothing in the fossil record that says pterodactyls *never* breathed fire.”

Gregory found himself fascinated by the creature’s gigantic, open jaws with their huge, sharp teeth.

“I don’t know, Mildred,” said Gregory. “It looks closer to a winged T-Rex than a pterodactyl.”

The creature was still watching them closely, looking back and forth from the wizard to the group peering over the rock. By then, Merlin seemed to have thought of a suitable spell. The wizard raised his staff again.

“Anger cool, and fire wane;
Cause no harm, and cause no pain.
Listen to these words I say
And deal with us some gentler way.”

Again the dragon swayed a bit, but did not move from in front of the cave.

“It’s no use,” said Merlin. “Much as I hate to, I’ll have to use something stronger.”

Then, raising his staff yet again, he chanted ...

“No more nonsense, no more fiddle;
Forgive me if this hurts a little.
And now ...”

“Wait!” called out Yola, interrupting Merlin again. “Your last spell *did* do something. Listen!”

Its head lowered, the creature was now making a low-pitched whistling noise—a sound that they hadn’t

heard from it before. There was no fire, just a hint of smoke on its breath.

“It almost sounds like music,” said Yola.

“You’ve got a pretty loose definition of music,” complained Mildred.

“It’s a change, anyway,” insisted Yola. “Merlin *did* tell him to ‘deal with us some gentler way.’”

Merlin lowered his staff and looked carefully at the beast. “Not exactly the result I’d hoped for,” he said. “It still hasn’t moved aside.”

“Let me try something,” said Yola.

Reaching inside her gown, she pulled out a small wooden flute—a recorder, it was called. Although Yola carried her recorder pretty much wherever she went, Gregory hadn’t realized that she had it with her now.

Yola raised the instrument to her lips and played a lovely melody.

“Oh, come now, Yola,” protested Mildred. “Do you think a lullaby will move that monster?”

Ignoring Mildred, Yola continued to play. The dragon answered with its low whistling sound, singing out several notes this time.

“Remarkable,” admitted Mildred. “Almost as if it’s trying to communicate.”



Gregory felt an odd tingling all over. It was the sort of feeling he sometimes got when he was starting to really understand something, but didn't quite yet know what it was.

"No more spells," said Gregory firmly, stepping out from behind the boulder and walking into the clearing.

"Gregory!" blurted Yola.

"What do you think you're doing?" added Mildred.

"I'm pretty sure you're right, Mildred," said Gregory, moving toward the dragon slowly. "It *is* trying to communicate. But somebody's got to show a little trust here."

"Get back here this instant!" snapped Mildred.

"Let him go," answered Merlin in a wise, calm voice. "The Taker of Risks knows what needs to be done."

Maybe, thought Gregory, queasily remembering Mildred's remark about the blurry line between bravery and stupidity. *Or maybe I'm just being stupid*. He was a little disappointed that no one tried harder to stop him. Still, he was relieved to see out of the corner of his eye that Merlin had his staff raised and ready.

Step by step, Gregory walked toward the dragon. It was even larger than he'd thought. The monster's head was nearly as big as Gregory's whole body.

"Keep playing your recorder, Yola," he called softly.

Yola came out into the clearing, answering the dragon with a few notes of a different tune.

The dragon listened intently, staring at Gregory. Those red eyes didn't look menacing at the moment, but they were still big and plenty scary. And of course, there were those awful teeth ...

Everything's okay, Gregory told himself, even though he felt his knees wobble beneath him. He had a fleeting image of how silly he must look, approaching an actual dragon while wearing a tunic, tights, and silly shoes from his school's theatrical department. He pushed the image aside and kept walking. Within a few moments, he stood three feet from the wyvern's enormous head. He could feel the warmth of the dragon's breath.

Fear nearly overcame him. At this range, one burst of flame—even a very small one—would be enough to roast Gregory alive. Still, he felt that tingle of understanding up and down his spine. Something in the creature's monstrous eyes seemed kindly and sad—and even familiar somehow.

Does it understand me? wondered Gregory. *Can I actually talk to it?*

"So—are you going to let me into that cave?" Gregory asked the dragon in a low, soft voice.

to be continued...

