

## Sky People

By Michele Dutcher

The 7-year-old girl huffed loudly as she dropped down beside her grandma on the hillside steps. The old woman continued to look up into the night sky, but smiled gently, happy for the company.

“Are you counting the stars again, Nene?”

The old woman clapped her hands together and a small dragon raced across the pitch black yard, finally snuggling between the two humans. “I’m not counting the stars, Miss Boo, I am remembering their stories. Over there is Baeton the Astrogator,” she said, pointing out a cluster of stars. “And over here is Locky the Thinker.”

“I don’t like the sky people – they are all heroes, not losers like me.” The child reached down to the small dragon, slowly petting its wings.

“Who called you a loser?” asked grandma, straightening up.

“Buddy Miller. When I get the answer right in school he says I’m lucky. But when I get the answer wrong he says I’m a loser.”

The old woman chuckled to herself, remembering how her granddaughter and this boy were constant playmates, and knowing how things might develop between them over the next few years. “Among the sky people there is a woman whom everyone called a loser. In fact, she failed at everything.”

“Really?” gushed the girl, pulling the small scaled dragon onto her lap.

“Her name was Ouellette and she lived in the early times, many centuries ago. When she was a child, you would have thought the world was out to get her. She wore thick glasses, stuttered, and had a slight limp when she walked. I won’t say she was heavy when she was a teenager, but people said Ouellette was ‘big boned’ – and she had terrible acne. The boys teased her because she was so smart and made them look bad...boys will do that, you know.” Nene looked down at her granddaughter and winked. “By the time Ouellette was 19 she was unquestionably the most beautiful woman in her region. ‘Ouellette’s luck has turned’, said people. ‘She will make a good marriage.’ And she did – five times. Each time she married, however, her husband would die of clumsiness.”

“Clumsiness, Nene?”

“Oh, yes! One fell off the roof while he was repairing it, one stumbled onto a railroad track, another went hiking with Ouellette and ended up at the bottom of a cliff...well, you get the idea.”

“Sounds fishy to me, Nene.”

“The townspeople thought the same thing. This unlucky turn of events left her fabulously wealthy, but very lonely. She built a magnificent house on the outskirts of the town, and had a small garden, but the flowers always died. Other women would see her working in her garden and say, ‘The only thing Ouellette can grow is mold in the back of her refrigerator.’”

Miss Boo laughed a little. “I could grow mold too.”

“She tried opening a restaurant, but everything she cooked turned out black. People would say, ‘Ouellette worships her customers – she gives them burnt offerings.’ And really, that whole mold in the refrigerator thing didn’t help either. When Ouellette got old, she loved old holograms, soft shoes, and warm cakes – but the thing she loved most was her granddaughter. Her name was Miss Gwynn. Ouellette could deny her granddaughter nothing. One day, in the dead of winter, Miss Gwynn wanted to play in the snow inside the forest. Ouellette put on her snow boots and she and Gwynnie and their pet dragon went into the forest to hike. They played for hours in the trees and shrubs, noting the heights of the snowdrifts, but not keeping track of the time – which was probably a bad idea. Even the small dragon joined in the fun by blowing on piles of snow and melting them to make small ponds of ice.”

The pet on Miss Boo’s lap flew up, proudly circling the child before settling back down in her lap, happy with this turn of events.

Nene leaned in closer now, whispering. “But the darkness had overtaken them. The two humans realized they were lost in the night forest. Suddenly a liger appeared in a clearing. It was a creature of splendor, its coat was the color of sweet syrup and its voice was like the voice of an angel. ‘Ouellette, point the way home.’”

But the old woman was afraid to point the way because she always failed in everything.

Finally the liger said, ‘Home is this way. Put the child on my back and I will take her there.’”

Ouellette began to do this, but the small dragon hissed at the liger and beat his wings against the snow. She saw this and remembered the saying, “A man will walk into hell with his eyes wide open, but the devil cannot fool a dragon.”

The old woman picked up Miss Gwynn and put her on the back of the dragon who grew ten times its original size. She pointed the pair in the opposite direction and told them to fly home.”

Grandma Nene stopped for a moment, looking up into the deepness of space.

“What happened to Ouellette, Nene?”

“Miss Gwynn and her dragon got home safely, but Ouellette was never seen again. Legend says, however, that for her wisdom and love she was placed in the stars.” Grandma took out a flashlight and pointed it into the night sky. “These three stars are her skirt, this bright one is her

face, and these stars make up her arm. Cas is the tip of her finger and if you follow it this way..." Miss Boo was tracing the path now with her finger... "there's Vega, then Capella, then..."

"Sol, Nene. That's Sol."

"Exactly right! The woman, who could never get anything right, is still pointing the way home. I told you that you were smart." They sat on the steps for a while longer, as if listening to music of distant Earth.

The End