“I’ll Be One Of Us By Myself.”

-or-

The Three Doors In The Pit

A Fairy Tale With A Sad Dragon, A Fuzzy Animal,
And Two To Five Children, Depending On How You Count Them.

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Chapter 1: Elizabeth

_Their name_ was Elizabeth. They were a ‘three,’ about _your_ age. Three children who formed together to create a ‘one.’ Ellie, Liza and Beth. Together called Ell-Liza-Beth. _Elizabeth_.

This was back when children did not sit inside and play video games or text each other, since there were no video games or phones. Not even the phones that plug into the wall like _my_ parents, _your_ _grandparents_ had.

As with most sets of two or three children back then, Ell-Liza-Beth … _Elizabeth_ did _everything_ together. If one of them went for a bike ride, all three went. If one of them decided to wear a red shirt that day, they all wore red shirts that day. And it was usually Ellie who decided for all three of Elizabeth.

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Elizabeth knew other ‘ones.’ Jonathan, who were two boys named Jon and Nathan. Jon-Nathan … _Jonathan_.

Annabelle, who were Anna and Belle, two girls. And Benjamin, who were two boys named Ben and Jamie and a girl named Minnie. Ben-Jamie–Minnie. _Benjamin_.

There were many other ‘ones’, of course, but we do not need to meet them, since none of the other ‘ones’ are in this story, except for Jonathan who we will meet later. In a deep pit. But, again, that’s later.

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As mentioned, Elizabeth, who is a group of three children who did everything together, were outside walking to school one day. The path they took was through the woods, which is how many adventure stories begin.

And, yes, _this is_ an adventure story. A fairy tale. And like some of the best fairy tales, it starts with a small, furry animal.
Chapter 2: A Small, Furry Animal

One day, while walking down the path through the woods, the three children together named Elizabeth came upon a small squirrel that was tangled in a kite string. The tiny squirrel was also covered in mud. It must have been tangled for a long time, since it was too tired to even struggle. It only looked up at them with big, sad eyes, hoping someone would set it free.

Ellie hurried along the path. She declared, “We'll leave it alone.” Ellie always spoke first.

“Why can't we help the poor little thing?” asked Liza. Liza almost always spoke second. And she asked a lot of questions. A lot.

Beth also wanted to know why they couldn’t help the tiny squirrel, but Liza had already asked the question.

“Because it's dirty and we don't want to be late for school,” decided Ellie.

“OK,” said Liza.

But Beth didn't think it was right to leave the poor little squirrel, tangled up in kite string and so sad, by the side of the path. What if its mommy missed it? What if a bigger, hungry animal came by?

So, Beth did something she almost never did. She decided to save the animal on her own.

She kneeled down and said, “Oh! My shoe has become untied. I'll catch up in a minute.” It was the best she could think up so quickly, and it was good enough. Ellie and Liza, the rest of Elizabeth, hurried along the path.

Beth quickly untangled the squirrel, which found new energy and ran up the nearest tree without so much as glancing back down at Beth. This made Beth sad – she was hoping for at least a ‘thank you’ hug or a ‘thank you’ lick – and also, her hands and shirtsleeves were now covered in mud.
Later, Ellie said under her breath to Beth, “I know you rescued that squirrel. If you do that again, that is, something we all agreed not to do, Liza and I will find a new Beth for Elizabeth.”

Beth didn’t remember agreeing not to save the squirrel, but for the rest of the week she did everything as Elizabeth.

**Chapter 3: The Three Doors**

Another day, Elizabeth were walking through the woods when they came to a huge hole in the ground that was never there before. At the bottom of the pit was Jonathan … *Do you remember them?* … the two boys named Jon and Nathan separately. *Jonathan* together. Though they never did *anything* separately. At least not yet.

“What are you doing down there?” yelled Ellie from Elizabeth.

“Did you fall?” asked Liza.

“No,” yelled Jon from Jonathan from the bottom of the hole.

“We climbed down,” added Nathan.

Then they both said together, “See? There’s a ladder.”

Beth wondered what it would be like to be part of a two-person ‘one.’ She expected she would be able to say more. But she knew that Ellie and Liza would never let her pick just one of them. If she left, as they threatened, they would find another Beth or simply turned into *Eliza*. A one made from two people. Ellie and Liza make ‘Ell-Liza’ … *Eliza*.

Elizabeth all looked and saw the ladder leaning against the side of the hole.

“Let’s go down,” declared Ellie.
“Is it safe?” asked Liza.

Before Beth could take her turn, Ellie, said, “Of course. Jonathan managed.” What it sounded like was, ‘If Jonathan could do it, then anyone could do it.’

While Beth wanted to mention that Jonathan often got into trouble and following them often got them into trouble as well, she said nothing. Ellie had decided and that was Ellie’s job in their ‘one.’

Elizabeth all climbed the ladder to the bottom of the large pit.

At the bottom, on one side of the pit wall were three doors.

“Interesting,” said Ellie. She often used big words that meant nothing.

With excitement, Liza added, “This looks like the start to an adventure.” A rare statement, not a question.

Beth said nothing, but she was also excited.

Jon said, “We are unsure which door to take.”

Nathan added, “We want to take the same door, of course, and there are three doors.”

< What did the doors look like? I’ll tell you.

One was dark red with a large carved sun on it, painted orange and yellow.
One was dark blue with carved clouds and stars, painted white and light blue.  
And one was dark green, with an incredibly detailed carved dragon on it. The dragon was painted the same color as the door. Not at all scary looking. Just very big.  
Which door would you choose? Why did you pick that?  
Now let's see what Elizabeth and Jonathan do. >

Ellie declared, “We’ll take the ‘Sun’ door.”  
“Are you sure that’s the best one?” asked Liza. Ellie simply glared at her.  
But Beth was disappointed. She wanted to go through the dark blue clouds and stars door. Or, at least, the dragon door.  
Jon said, “We were thinking about the dragon door.”  
“But it seems a little scary,” added Nathan. “What if there is a big dragon on the other side?”  
Ellie said, “I expect there is.”  
“Why would they paint a big dragon on the door if there isn’t a big dragon behind it?” asked Liza.  
Ellie goaded, “You just have to be brave.” And, as we know, if you want people to do things, especially stupid things, tell them to ‘be brave.’ Ellie knew this trick.  
Jonathan walked over to the dragon door, opened it, and they walked through. The door shut behind them loudly and quickly, sounding like a large book being dropped onto a wooden floor from a great height.
Ellie’s comment, however, had a second affect. Beth was still thinking about the clouds and stars door. She also decided to ‘be brave.’

She said, somewhat softly and meekly, “I think we should go through the clouds and stars door.”

Ellie declared sharply, “No! We’re going through the sun door. That’s what we decided together.”

Beth wasn’t sure she would get another chance to walk through the blue clouds and stars door. Still meekly, but using a word they hardly ever used, Beth said, “I – I – I didn’t decide anything.”

Ellie glared at Beth. “I? I?!? We are not an I, we are Elizabeth. If you do not come through the sun door with us, then you will not be one of us. Ever. Again.”

This terrified Beth, but she really wanted to go through the clouds and stars door. She needed to ‘be brave.’ So, she walked up to the clouds and stars door, opened it and stepped through.

As she did, she said what was possibly the bravest and most important thing she ever said in her whole life. But she said it softly and only to herself. “Then I’ll be one of us by myself.”

The door closed, quietly and gently, sounding like a little pillow being dropped from a very small height onto a soft sofa.

thudd.

< What do you think is behind the stars and clouds door?

Good guess! Let's find out. >
Chapter 4: All Alone. But Not Really

It was foggy.

It was like standing in the middle of a cloud. Beth couldn’t see an inch in front of her face.

It was also hot.

Not so hot that the clouds burned Beth’s face, but warm enough that she wasn’t enjoying it at all and quickly wished she had taken the sun door with the rest of Elizabeth.

She reached back for the door handle, but, of course, it was gone.

What else could she do but move forward? First, though, since she is smart, Beth bent down to the ground to feel what it was like.

She reached to the floor, which she could not see due to the too warm, too thick clouds ... and felt ... and felt ... and felt ... hmmm ... no floor at all! Her hand kept going down, down, down much farther than where her feet were.

There was a big hole by her feet!

She looked into the hole and saw ... nothing. Then her eyes adjusted and she saw stars, thousands and thousands of stars. She was looking at the night sky! Down at the night sky. This was exciting and beautiful, but also terrifying.
Had she taken one more step, she would have fallen … into the sky! She could, very barely, see that she was standing on a floor just like the one we're on right now, but hers had giant holes all over it. Holes that fell into the sky.

How could Beth walk anywhere knowing that her next step might be into a hole in the sky? She stopped walking and started to cry.

Just then, she felt a very gentle tug on her foot. Beth realized that this tug was not the first tug she had felt, but that something had been gently pulling on her foot more and more insistently. Harder and harder until she finally, really felt it.

She looked down and, of course it was the squirrel she rescued from the kite string and the mud. Now she was really glad she rescued it!

There were a few other squirrels there, too. Hard to see through the hot foggy clouds, but she thought she counted five of them.

Even more surprisingly, the squirrel spoke: “Come with us,” it said. “We need more help. Oh, and by the way, my name is Flizwix.”

Beth, who decided that a talking squirrel was the least amazing thing in this land of clouds and holes onto the sky, asked a question, “Where are we?”

The squirrel named Flizwix said, “No time for that, just walk where we pull your feet or you will fall into a sky hole and keep falling for the rest of your life. Also let me explain.”
Flizwix continued, “All these clouds used to be small fuzzy clouds, about the size of your bed, that you could sit on and ride. But the dragon next door has been in a bad mood and burning everything up over there, which has made our land so hot that the clouds turned from fuzzy and small into this hot foggy mess that makes it no fun to live here. And also very dangerous.”

“What can I do?” asked Beth, unsure she wanted the answer, since it likely involved a dragon.

“Very simple,” said Flizwix. “Just make the dragon happy again.”

This didn’t seem so very simple to Beth. But she let the squirrels lead her around the many floor holes, through the warm and thick clouds, and to a door.

< What she could not see through the fog was that the door had a picture of a large dragon on it, just like the door from the pit at the beginning of the last chapter. >

“Go inside and make the dragon happy, please,” said Flizwix.

All she saw, and just barely, was a door handle in the fog. She turned the door handle, opened the door and … but before she stepped through … she looked inside.

As I said, smart girl! Always look before you enter a room.

**Chapter 5: Behind The Dragon Door**

Good thing she looked down before walking through the door to DragonLand, since on the other side of the door was a ten-foot drop into a red … burning red … fiery river!
On either side of the river were riverbanks that looked like they were made from bed comforters, pink and blue and stitched with pictures of castles and knights and princes and princesses.

It felt to Beth as though she were stepping inside a fairy tale book, except for the fiery river … and the volcanoes. But we’ll get to the volcanoes later.

On one side of the bank, she saw Jon of Jonathon. On the other side, she saw Nathan, also of Jonathan.

“What happened?” Beth yelled.

Jon answered, “We were walking over the bridge…” Jon pointed to middle of the river “…which used to be right there, when then dragon flew by and breathed fire at the bridge and burned it up.”

Nathan continued, “We ran all the way across the bridge, just in time…”

Jon continued, “…but we ran different ways and are now we’re stuck on different sides of the fiery river …”

Nathan, concluded, “…and can't get across to get back together.”

Beth wanted to ask, ‘Why don't you simply go your separate ways and meet outside,’ but she knew they would never go anywhere alone. So, she asked instead, “Is the dragon very large and very scary and very angry?”

“No,” said Nathan. “He … or she … hard to tell … is very cute and small, like a stuffed animal. Just very sad.”

And even though the dragon had caused her friend Jonathan so much trouble and the squirrels in … let's call it CloudLand … so much trouble, she felt sorry for the small, sad dragon.

“Why is it unhappy?” she asked.

Jonathan (Jon and Nathan on separate sides of the fiery river) shrugged together.

A soft whispery voice right in her ear, said, “I’ll tell you.” This startled Beth, almost making her fall off the doorstep and into the fiery river.
Right by her ear was a small, flying dragon, which did, in fact, look just like the dragon on the door and a small, soft, cuddly stuffed animal at the same time.

Beth, again, smartly, asked, “Can we talk when I am not balanced between two worlds and in between a fiery river and fog-hidden holes into the sky?”

The dragon laughed, a cute ticklish kind of laugh. “Of course! Hold my tail!” It then added, “And sorry for startling you.”

Beth grabbed the dragon’s tail, which felt just like grabbing the tail of a small stuffed animal.

Impossibly, but clearly possibly in this story, she was being flown over the fiery river holding onto the tail of a creature much, much smaller than herself.

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Soon, Beth and the dragon were sitting on the top of a castle, with a great view of DragonLand.

DragonLand looked like a place that was once a fairy tale land with lots of small castles and even more small mountains and even even more small rivers with even even even more small bridges across them, but now was covered with volcanoes and fiery rivers and very few bridges that weren’t burned up.

“That’s too bad,” said Beth before she could stop herself.

“What’s too bad?” asked the Dragon.

“That’s this land used to be so nice and it’s now covered with fire.”

“Yes, that makes me unhappy,” said the Dragon.
Beth added, “And this fire makes the squirrels in CloudLand unhappy, too, since it turned their small fluffy clouds into large, dark and hot ones.”

“That also makes me unhappy,” added the Dragon.

Beth asked, “So, if it makes you unhappy, why don't you stop burning the rivers, bridges and small mountains?”

“I was already unhappy,” said the dragon sadly. “But this makes me unhappier,” it admitted.

Chapter 6: One By Myself

Making someone else happy is not easy, since everyone’s ‘happy’ is very different.

That being said, the first step to making someone else happy is to think about what makes you happy and then wonder if this would make them happy, too.

It was at this moment that Beth realized something very important: She was actually happy right now.

She was sitting in a castle trying to make a tiny dragon happy. She was on her own, that is, not part of Elizabeth, since there was no Ellie and no Liza. And while she wanted the dragon to be happy and DragonLand to not be on fire – or at least not so much on fire – she was actually happy.

So she said it. Aloud.

She said, “Being with you, here, dragon, makes me happy.”

“Moteef,” responded the tiny dragon, as a small tear leaked from his eye and then, of course, puffed into a tiny puff of smoke.

“Moteef?” asked Beth.

“That’s my name,” said Moteef, as another tiny tear dripped from his eye and puffed into another tiny puff of smoke.
And then Moteef leaned across and hugged Beth. “I am happy you are happy,” said Moteef. “I have never made anyone happy before.”

And then Beth had a great idea.

First, she and Moteef flew around DragonLand, putting out the fiery rivers and turning off the fiery volcanoes. This was harder than it sounds, unless it sounds hard and then it was exactly that hard, but they managed to get all the rivers turned back to cool, fresh water and all the volcanoes turned back into mountains (except one, which Moteef really liked as a volcano … but that’s another story.)

Then, as a last step, Beth asked Moteef to fly her back to the door between DragonLand and CloudLand, above the fiery river where Jon and Nathan were trapped on either side. While the river was no longer fiery, Jon and Nathan were still stuck on opposite sides.

Anyway, back to the door.

The door was still open and, as expected, Flizwix and four other squirrels were watching from the cloudy side of the open door. Before they could scurry away, Beth yelled, “Wait!” and “Don't be afraid!”

When Moteef and Beth landed, the squirrels were still there, scared and shaking.

< The dragon, though small, was much larger than the squirrels and, also, ‘fiery’ creatures are not good matches for ‘furry’ creatures ... or are good ‘matches’ if you use the play on words. >

Anyway, the squirrels decided to ‘be brave’ and stayed.

Beth said, “Moteef, the dragon, was sad because he was making people and squirrels unhappy. He simply didn't know that the fires turned your cute little riding clouds into hot foggy clouds, which made you unhappy.”
“Now that I know,” said Moteef. “I will never turn the rivers into fires or the mountains into volcanoes again. Even if I become unhappy.”

Then Flizwix did something even braver. The squirrel reached up its paw and shook hands with Moteef.

< A squirrel shaking hands with a dragon!

Can you picture that? Good, since I can't draw that well. >

“That makes me happy,” Flizwix added.

And, as you know, making others happy makes Moteef the Dragon happy, as well.

So squirrel and dragon were both happy.

“One last thing,” added Beth. “We have to remove this door so the two of you can go back and forth to visit each other anytime you want.”

Moteef asked, “May I?”

Flizwix said, “You may.”

And with a small breath of fire, Moteef burned the door between DragonLand and CloudLand to a crisp. Now all the creatures could go back and forth as much as they wanted.

**Chapter 7: A Reunion, But Not Really**

Beth and Moteef hugged each other and, at the same time, said, “Thanks for being my friend and making me happy,” and they both laughed.
Then Moteef flew Beth to Jon on one side of the river and then flew Nathan to the same side, so all three of them were finally together.

The three children: Jon, Nathan and Beth started walking back to the door to the pit.

Jon said, “If you like, you can join Jonathan.”

“Yes,” added Nathan, “we can call ourselves ... mmmf.”

< Mmmf?!? >

Before he could get any further, Beth hand put her hand over his mouth.

“I have a better idea,” Beth said. “why don't we three just be three friends and all be ourselves. Jon, Nathan and Beth. Three individual friends.

Jon and Nathan looked at each other and then at Beth. Jon said, “That might be better, since we can then go into different doors next time ...”

Nathan continued, “ ... and meet on the other side to share our stories.”

Jon finished, “That would be more fun!”

The two of them, Jon and Nathan, shook hands and that was the end of Jonathan.

Jon and Nathan and Beth walked, as three friends who shared an exciting adventure, to the DragonLand door, which now opened easily, and they were back in the pit.

In the pit were Ellie and Liza, who did not look like they had had such a successful adventure behind the Sun door. They looked very tired and very thirsty.

Without even saying, ‘Hello,’ or ‘So glad you are all safe and alive,’ Ellie looked angrily at Beth and declared, “We’ve decided that you are no longer part of Elizabeth!”
Liza added, “We are now Eliza. And you are no longer one of us.”

This did not have the affect they expected, which was to make Beth beg to be allowed back into Elizabeth.

Beth, smiling, said, “That's OK. I am much happier being one of us by myself.”

She continued, “…with my separate friends Jon (who bowed) and Nathan (who also bowed) and Moteef the dragon and Flizwix the squirrel.”

Eliza looked around for a dragon and a squirrel … and realized they must have missed quite an adventure.

< Which they did. >

Then Beth climbed the ladder out of the pit and walked happily – and all by herself – to school.

Since no time had passed outside of DragonLand and CloudLand (this is a fairy tale, after all) she arrived at school perfectly on time.

Eliza, that is Ellie and Liza, arrived on time as well, but instead of heading straight to class, they went to the water fountain and drank and drank and drank water. And then drank some more. This made Beth wonder what was behind the Sun door.

She would ask Moteef the dragon next time she went back there. Which, it turns out, was the very next day.

But that’s a story for another night.

**The End.**

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