

# Storytime with Dad

## The Ugly Duckling

Welcome to Storytime with Dad! Today we will be reading Dragons Don't Drive.

In the warm, breezy valley of Hatchling Hollow, every dragon family kept a tidy list of rules singed onto a scroll above the cave entrance. The Smokewing scroll had the usual reminders - Wipe soot from claws before supper and No tail-twirling near crystal lamps - but the boldest line read: DRAGONS DON'T DRIVE.

Spark Smokewing had always accepted the rule until the summer she turned eight (in dragon years - that's about third grade for humans). One sunrise, while perching on a grassy ridge, she saw a caravan of Meadowtown cars purring along the river road. Their wheels glittered like beetle shells, and their engines rumbled a tune she could feel in her chest. In that humming moment, Spark discovered a brand-new wish: she wanted to sit behind a steering wheel.

That evening she bounded into the cave, wings buzzing with excitement, and announced, "Mama and Papa Smokewing, I want to learn how to drive!"

Her parents' smiles drooped and crickets could be heard chirping in the background.

"Sweet scale," Mama said gently, "that isn't something dragons do."

"It's not safe," Papa added, talons tapping the stone floor. "Wheels wobble, wings work. Besides, Dragons don't drive - it's the rule."

Spark's shoulders sagged, but hope flickered behind her golden eyes. "Maybe the rule could bend, just a little?" she asked.

Papa's tail twitched in worry. "We'll... think about it."

The next afternoon, to show they were listening, her parents offered a compromise. Papa rolled out an enormous red wagon fitted with reins.

"You may practice pulling this," he declared, "to learn about steering something. No engines, no danger!"

Mama fastened fluttery ribbons to the wagon's sides and said, "We can call it 'ground-gliding.'"

Spark tried to be grateful. She hitched herself to the wagon, hauled it across the valley meadow, and turned tight circles around hay bales. It was... fine. But wagons moved only as fast as their puller, and steering with a rope felt nothing like guiding a rumbling machine along an open road. After a week the ribbons drooped, and Spark's enthusiasm drooped with them.

A few evenings later her best friend, Tina the Tortoise, skateboarded into the cave. "You look flatter than a week-old pancake," she said.

"Ground-gliding isn't driving," Spark sighed. "I appreciate the effort, but my heart doesn't boom the way it did on the hilltop."

Tina nodded thoughtfully. "Maybe your parents need to hear why it booms."

So Spark tried. Over marshmallow-puff pancakes she explained the inner fire she felt when engines growled, the pull of a wheel beneath her claws, the chug of new possibilities. Mama Ember stirred her cocoa. Papa rubbed soot from his scales. They loved their hatchling more than treasure, but images of skidding tires and twisted metal crowded their thoughts.

A day later, Papa proposed another middle ground: "What if we build a flight-simulator cart? No real road, no real traffic."

"Thank you," Spark said, forcing a smile. She practiced turns on the simulator, but the wooden levers squeaked, and nothing smelled of cinnamon-smoke or motor oil. The simulator, like the ribboned wagon, left her dream hungry.

Weeks passed. Spark still obeyed the rules, but her usual sparkle dimmed. One cloudy morning Mama Ember found her old car sketches. The wheels were wobbly circles; the lines uneven. Each drawing looked clumsy - exactly the way her first fire-puffs had looked years ago, before practice turned sputters into bright steady flames.

A memory fluttered through Mama's mind: the day she, as a young dragon, begged her own parents to fly beyond the valley. They had said no - storms were dangerous. But curiosity tugged so hard that she snuck past the cloud line anyway. She hit a gust, tumbled, and tore a wing-tip. Her parents found her shivering on a cliff ledge, brought her home, and - instead of scolding - taught her to read the wind properly. The rule against long-range flying had come from fear, but it had nearly clipped her future.

That night, long after Spark fell asleep, Mama Ember sat by the glow of the hearth and spoke softly to Papa. "Our rule was meant to keep Spark safe," she said, "but it's shrinking her spirit. She's older now, and I'm starting to think that rule was always just a shadow of our fears."

Papa listened to the rumble of distant thunder rolling across the peaks. He pictured Spark's face when she talked about engines. He remembered, too, how his own father once told him dragons didn't paint because the fumes were flammable - yet Papa had become the finest muralist in the valley after learning how to mix safe, water-based colors. A quiet realization warmed his chest: Love hadn't truly been guiding the rule, worry had.

The next morning they invited Spark to the breakfast ledge overlooking Meadowtown Road. "We've been thinking," Papa began, voice shaky but kind. "Maybe our rule needs an update."

Spark's wings twitched with her heartbeat. Mama went on, "Driving can be dangerous, and that scares us. But flying through thunderclouds was dangerous once, too, until we practiced and learned. If you're still eager - and willing to practice with every safety measure - we want to help you find a real teacher."

"Does... does that mean yes?" Spark whispered.

"It means," Papa said, wrapping a wing around her, "dragons don't drive - yet. Let's learn how, together."

Later that week they visited the crooked old barn at the edge of the valley. Inside, an elderly bronze dragon named Professor Octavius Piston polished a cherry-red convertible large enough

for four drakes. Rumor insisted he had once crossed the Serpentine Bridge on just two wheels. His goggles gleamed like twin moons.

"Welcome to the Barnyard School of Careful Cars," he trumpeted. "New students, please sign the pledge: I will drive slow before I go fast, and I will practice patience before power."

Spark signed with a flourish. Mama and Papa signed, too, promising to learn roadside safety and emergency repairs so they could coach instead of just worry. Professor Piston fitted Spark with a flame-proof seat cover, an extra-wide tail belt, and mirrored goggles big enough for two dragon eyes.

The first lesson was delightfully awful. Spark stalled, steered into a hay bale, and left a wheel-shaped dent in the barn door. But each splutter earned guidance instead of scolding. "Great start," the professor said cheerfully. "You've found three new ways not to turn left. Now we try again."

Day by day the hay bales stayed upright longer. Spark practiced gentle brakes, steady acceleration, and wide dragon-tail turns. Mama clipped reflective plates to her spikes so the tail belt wouldn't honk accidentally. Papa painted bright orange practice cones shaped like cupcakes to make the learning track feel more fun than fearsome.

Three weeks later Spark guided the convertible through a complicated figure-eight without a single bump. Her parents cheered so loudly a flock of crows burst out of a nearby pine. Professor Piston bowed, moustache flicking upward.

The real test came on the winding River Road. Spark eased the car onto the gravel shoulder. Rain sprinkled the windshield, but she remembered the wiper switch. Halfway up a hill she spotted a hedgehog family crossing. She braked smoothly, paused, and waved them along. Tina the Tortoise - invited as official cheering section - applauded from the back seat.

When they returned, the sun peeked through the clouds like a proud golden eye. Papa exhaled a puff of relief so warm it dried the raindrops on the hood. Mama's eyes glimmered. Their hatchling had steered not only the car but also her own path, powered by patience and protected by practice.

That evening the Smokewings rumbled into Meadowtown for celebratory milkshakes. Villagers waved as the glossy red car rolled in - a dragon driver at the wheel and two equally nervous, equally proud parents beside her. Inside Dewdrop Diner, Papa lifted a strawberry-swirl glass.

"To Spark," he declared, "the newest driver in town."

Mama clinked her vanilla shake. "And the safest!"

Spark took a chocolaty sip, goggles resting on her horns. "Turns out practice is just bravery in small pieces," she said. "I guess this means Dragon's CAN drive, once they get the seat adjusted."

Outside, the convertible sparkled beneath evening stars. The bold line on the family scroll would soon be rewritten: Dragons don't drive - until they practice.

And somewhere in the hush of the valley, new wishes revved their tiny engines, ready to roll.  
The End.



Well, I would like to send my congratulations to Spark. She really rose to the occasion, didn't she? What started out as a made up rule to protect her, really got her parents to think about why the rule existed in the first place. Before I go any further here though, I want to give a huge thanks to my listener Nova. You gave me the name of story and that pretty much sums up the whole thing doesn't it! Dragons Don't Drive! Well, I hope you like what I made up out of it, and thank you so much for your wonderful message. I hope you'll continue listening to my stories as I make many, many more to come!

So, back to the story, I know that wasn't a fun talk for Sparks to have with her parents. And the parents were just as worried and uncomfortable about it as she was. The parents wanted to protect her, and Spark wanted to grow up! I'm glad everyone was able to get what they wanted in the end, and I think even the parents grew as a result of Spark learning how to drive.

So, are there any rules that you think are silly but you still need to listen to? It's important that you say something, but also important to understand that the rules are meant to help and protect us even when we disagree with them. That doesn't mean the rule will be there forever, just that we respect why they exist.

And I hope all of you grow up to be big and strong, and smart, and eventually drive anywhere you want like Spark can, safely. Whether its on a bike, or in a car many years from now.

Please write to me and share what skills you've learned by practicing them at:  
hello@storytimewithdad.com.

I look forward to reading your messages.

Thank you for listening and I'll see you again next time.

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