



All next day at school I could feel Liam's eagle eyes watching me. I tried to act normal and thought I was doing a good job, until I saw Ted, Kat and Kai whispering and exchanging puzzled glances. Maybe I was getting normal wrong – or maybe I was being too normal? Was that even a thing? I didn't have the brainpower to work it out. My head was already full of Flicker and wondering what mess I was going to find when I got home at the end of the day.



That afternoon it wasn't just Flicker who'd made a mess though. I came into the kitchen and found Lolli covered in a crispy cornflake crust.

My feet crunched across a carpet of rice. Mum was sweeping cereal and dried

pasta into little mountains. A river of yoghurt flowed between them with splashes of ketchup along its banks. Lolli was sitting in the middle of the scene waving a picture at me.

'I only left her for a minute,' Mum sighed. 'I rather hoped we were over the painting-with-food stage.'

Lolli pointed to the mess on the paper and beamed.

'Yeah,' I said. 'Er ... Great work, Lolli.'

She frowned, looked at her picture and turned it the other way up. Then flapped her arms and made a roaring noise.

Now I'm not sure anyone else would have seen what I saw in her 'artwork'. But then Lolli and I were the only ones who knew there was a dragon living upstairs. Suddenly I could make out the ketchup flames and the scaly pasta wings and the gluey raisin eyes she'd dipped in glitter. She'd made dragons, and lots of them. She waved it at me again and I took it from her.

'Thanks, Lollibob,' I whispered. 'I'm sure he'll love it.'

And he did. After I pinned it to my wall, Flicker curled up in front of the picture and stayed there, rumbling with contentment.

Meanwhile, I cleared up the lurking poos and hid yet another shredded pillowcase. Feeling pleased with my efforts, I ducked downstairs for a drink – where Mum collared me.

'Grandad's been telling me all about his plans for the garden,' she said while scrambling an egg with one hand and dropping counters into Connect 4 with the other.

Lolli loved undoing the catch and watching all the counters clatter out. She slotted the last ones in and then jiggled up and down in anticipation.

'Sounds like the pair of you have taken on a bit of a project,' Mum continued.

I remembered us walking home the day before and how I'd promised him I'd go over today. I smiled awkwardly, a pang of guilt squirming inside my tummy. It was easy to get distracted with Flicker around.

'I haven't seen him fired up like this for ages. It's good.' Mum glanced up at me for a second. 'Don't leave it all to him though now, will you?'

I felt myself blush. Had she just read my mind? If she had, I hoped she didn't read any further and figure out I had a dragon in my room! Anyway, she was right – Grandad needed me.

'I'll go now,' I said, marvelling at her ability to catch the tiny astronaut Lolli had just launched into orbit before he splat-landed in the egg with one hand, while scooping up the scattered Connect 4 counters with the other. I sometimes wonder if my mum secretly has her own superpowers.



Flicker was only too keen to get out of the house, and he flitted happily from tree to tree as I walked to Nana and Grandad's house. But every so often, if there was no one in sight, he'd zoom down and send out a puff of smoky warm breath to tickle my ear.

When I arrived Nana met me with a freshly baked chocolate muffin and gave me a flask of lemonade for us both. I found Grandad down the garden with a handful of seed packets, a look of pure concentration on his face.

'Hey up, Chipstick. I've got a problem. I can't decide on the best kind of beans to try. I'm a runner-bean man myself, but there's all sorts here – haricot vert, scarlet runner, winged, yard-long. I never knew there were so many. It's up to you really. What do you say? Feel like something a bit more fancy?'

His eyes were twinkling and I could see Mum was right about him being fired up about the veg garden.

'Er ...' I said. 'I'm more of a baked-bean fan.'

Grandad chuckled and ruffled my hair.

It should have been difficult to get excited about any type of bean when I knew there was a dragon just metres away. I doubted even magic beans would beat a dragon.

But it was hard not to get caught up in Grandad's enthusiasm. You couldn't help

but enjoy yourself with him around. And it wasn't just the constant supply of caramel toffees either.

Flicker had been happily exploring the hedges and eating his fill of greenery. He was careful to keep out of sight, but every so often I had the feeling he was playing a game with Grandad, flitting down behind him and then zipping off again just as he turned round. Eventually I saw the bright shine of his scales dim a little, a sign he was getting tired, and he disappeared among the cactus-like arms of the dragon-fruit tree. When he didn't reappear, I breathed a sigh of relief. At least if he was asleep I didn't have to worry about Grandad spotting him.



After about an hour of digging and planting, and redigging and replanting when Grandad changed his mind, I leaned my spade against the old shed and rubbed the ache out of my arms.

'You know, I don't think we're going to get much jam out of that there tree, Tomas,' Grandad said, offering me a glug from the flask. 'Nothing left but the skins of the last

few fruit. Reckon the squirrels must have got them. And I've not seen hide nor hair of any more fruit. You sure we shouldn't just pull the old thing out?'

I leaped up and spluttered through a mouthful of lemonade.

'No, we can't! I'm sure there'll be more.'

Grandad didn't look convinced, and I could see him eyeing up how much more space there would be for his exotic beans without it.

I wished I'd found out more about the tree. The books in the library had shown me loads of different types of dragon, but they had all come from eggs, not trees. There was no mention of a dragon-fruit tree in any of them.

What if Grandad was right? What if there was no more fruit? I wouldn't be able to stop him pulling it out if one little crop of squirrel snacks was all the tree had to show for itself. He'd want it gone for sure.

