



'Right, Chipstick, let's see if you're right. Come on.'

Grandad pulled open the door to the garden shed and disappeared inside. I followed him, trying not to cough at the dust and the earthy smell. The shed leaned awkwardly and I couldn't help wondering if it might just give up and collapse if either of us so much as sneezed.

On one side there were wooden shelves loaded with empty flowerpots, bits of string and ancient-looking packets of seeds. Grandad reached up to pull something from the top shelf. It was a huge old book. He swept dust from the leathery cover.

'I spotted this in here the other day when I was rootling about for a trowel. The old woman who lived here before must have left it. She left all sorts of bits and pieces as it happens. But unlike the Guatemalan rain stick, this might actually be useful. It's an encyclopedia of plants.'

We laid the book on the little counter-top under the window, brushing away as much of the dirt as possible first and sending a family of spiders scurrying to safety.

'A *World of Plants*, it's called,' Grandad said. 'I was thinking of using it to look up things to grow. Let's see if it's got anything to say about your tree, hey?'

The cover was thick with grime, but the lettering of the title was all fancy, like some old spell book you see in films.

I was sure it creaked when we opened it. Inside, the pages were stiff and yellowed, crammed with illustrations and information.

We flicked through, but there was no sign of the strange spiky dragon-fruit tree. Until at last Grandad cried, 'Bingo!' and thumped his hand down on the counter, half choking me with a dust explosion.

And there it was: the pitaya – our dragon fruit!

I ran my hand over the picture as if I could feel the spiky leaves on the page.

'Looks as if you were right,' he said. 'Says here we should get five or six crops of fruit at least.'

He started reading to me about flowers that bloomed for just one night but I only had eyes for one thing. In a swirly bordered box at the bottom of the page was a tiny picture of a dragon, and a paragraph of text.

I had found the legend of the dragon fruit! I read the first words, my heart jumping

around inside me, eyes skittering over the letters in my excitement.

Sadly, my excitement soon fizzled out. Legend had it that dragons were supposed to breathe out the dragon fruit. But it didn't say anything about dragons actually growing inside the fruit, like Flicker had.



I peered out of the dirt-streaked window, wondering if there really were more dragons out there or if mine was the only one.



At home again, muddy and tired, I set all the books from the library out on my bed. Maybe there was something I'd missed. Flicker flew over and started scratching at the covers, but I didn't think Mrs Olive would be too happy about that so I found him a cereal packet to destroy instead.

I read until late, until my eyes burned with trying to keep them open. Finally I gave in and wriggled down under the covers.

I loved night-time with Flicker, and not just because there wasn't so much poo and mess to clear up. You see, when I lay in bed, he left the toy box and curled up against me. I draped my dressing gown over him, just in case Mum or Dad peeked into my room, and lay there with him, listening to the murmurs he made while he slept, almost like a cat purring.

I slept so soundly with him beside me, and I had fantastic dreams too. I dreamed about flying over icy glaciers, with volcanoes erupting below me and ice storms swirling across the open land. The dreams were so vivid that I woke up remembering every colour and detail, as if I had really

been there. I always woke up with such a happy feeling. And sometimes when I opened my eyes and saw Flicker curled up, he was changing colour in flashes, one after the other, as if he was dreaming a happy dream too. His scales rippled from red to orange to blue to white, pulsing like a fiery kaleidoscope.

That night though, I woke up with a shiver. There was no warming breath across my chest. Flicker wasn't on the bed. I peered across the shadowy room, waiting for my eyes to adjust, searching for the glow of the little dragon.

I finally spotted him perched on the windowsill. No wonder I hadn't seen him straight away; he seemed to have turned a dusky charcoal grey in the darkness. I tiptoed over. He was staring out at the inky sky and the rain that was falling.

'Flicker,' I whispered. He swung his head round and saw me and a little wave of colour rippled down his body. He turned back, took one last look at the sky, then stretched his wings and flew up to my shoulder. As I scratched his head, the clouds parted and the moon cast its light into the room. I smiled as his scales shimmered their familiar ruby red.

I wondered what he'd been looking at. Was he searching for other dragons too? I still didn't know if there really had been dragons in all those fruit. I'd tried to look earlier,

but Grandad had kept me too busy. Seeing Flicker staring out like that, I decided it was time to find out once and for all.

