

For the next hour Grandad had me hard at work. I'd left my hoodie, with the little dragon in the pocket, on a pile of dry grass cuttings. He'd seemed happy enough to stay curled up since the excitement at breakfast. But I couldn't help casting glances at it and smiling at the thought of what lay inside. I can't say I was all that heroic about the digging we were doing, but every time I started moaning Grandad popped a caramel toffee in my mouth.

We were just loading another wheelbarrow with tangled brambles when someone grunted. We both turned and saw a grim-looking man in faded blue dungarees wielding a hand fork like it was a lethal weapon. He was leaning across the wire fence that separated Grandad's garden from the one next door.

'What'd you think you're playing at?' he said, pointing at me.



'To be fair, I'm not sure he'd say this was playing,' Grandad chuckled.

Too right! I had blisters on my blisters from all the digging.

'I've had vandals in my garden, you know,' the man said. 'Caused all sorts of mess. Kids mucking about in those fields think they can go where they like, including my garden. No respect any more. I won't be having it. I'll be watching. And I'll be taking matters into my own hands next time it happens.' And he pointed a threatening finger at me as if I was the one to blame.

'Well, this here is my grandson and he's doing me a great favour by clearing the garden with me,' Grandad said, still friendly but his voice firm. 'He's a good lad. He won't need watching.'

The man glared at me, like he was waiting for me to show my true colours, and eventually growled, 'You just keep away from what's mine, you hear?'

I opened my mouth to speak, but Grandad popped a toffee in so I couldn't get the words out.



Then the man pointed his fork past us towards the ugly heap of debris we'd piled up from our digging. There was lots and lots of bongleweed.

'You'd better not let that lot near *my* garden. Blinking stuff – once it takes a hold you can never get rid of it. You won't get anything growing in there, not after that weed's dug its roots in.'

'Well, it's early days, but we'll get there,' said Grandad, ignoring the old man's tone. He was like a chirpy robin cheerfully making its nest on a Rottweiler's head.

'Blooming disgrace this,' the man said, waving in the general direction of Grandad's garden, and he turned away, mumbling something else under his breath.

'Who is that?' I asked.

'That's our new neighbour, moved in a month or so ago. Name's Jim.'

'Grim more like,' I muttered.

We watched him stomp off towards his shed, where he wrestled with the huge padlock. He slammed the door behind him and for a second we saw his face at the window, glowering out at us. Then a piece of ragged curtain was roughly pulled across.

'Poor fella,' Grandad said. 'Bet he just sat on a bumble bee.'

That's something that always amazes me about Grandad. He's brilliant at dealing with people. Even if someone is being horrible, he doesn't let it bother him. Not like it always

bothers me. Instead of feeling cross or being rude back, Grandad actually seems to stick up for them. 'Poor blighter,' he'll say, 'bet it was his birthday and everyone forgot.'

Me, I reckon some people are just like that. Rude, I mean. What was Grim's problem, pointing his bony finger at me? As if I'd go near his stupid garden.

I was pretty sure it wasn't vandals either – at least not the kind he was thinking of. Because I'd seen something that Grim hadn't.

There were dragon fruits littering the ground around the tree. They had burst open, leaving trails of messy pulp across the dirt. I counted them. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Six burst fruits.



But did that really mean there were six tiny dragons hatched and on the loose? If so, then where were they now?



As I walked home I kept my hand in my pocket. I needed to feel the little dragon, just to check that this was all truly happening. Because everyone always says I have a great imagination, and it's true – I don't just daydream, I daydream in Technicolor with



surround sound! So it could have all been wishful thinking, couldn't it?

But as I walked, I felt my dragon's claws gently scraping my palm. And then I felt him curl up on my hand, coiling his tail around my wrist. And I knew this was no daydream. This was the real deal.

I looked up at the clouds and imagined my dragon flying through the sky, fully grown. Soaring up into the blue, a jet of flame blazing from his mouth, me on his back ... Inside my pocket, his hot breath warmed my skin, and with every puff the dream of flying flared brighter.

But by the time I'd got home I knew that dreams of flying would have to wait. Because, let's face it, my dragon didn't even fill a shoebox. I wasn't going to get far on him. And as for jets of flame, the most he spluttered out were sparks. And that was mainly because he kept sneezing. He seemed to have a cold or be allergic to everything!

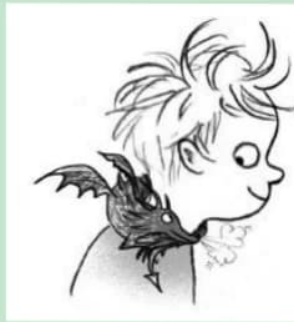
As I climbed the stairs, the dragon popped his head out of my pocket and sneezed for the gazillionth time. Covering my hand with the end of my sleeve, I caught the glowing spark before it could singe the carpet. I was going to be an ace cricketer at this rate – I'd have the sharpest reflexes in the school.

Safely in my room, I lifted him out and settled him on my desk. He hopped about, inspecting things. I wondered what I was going to call him.

Red? Scorch? Blaze?

I tried them out, calling them to him. They were all good dragon names. But none of them quite fit this little shimmering creature.

Obviously unimpressed by any of the names so far, he flew over to my cheese plant and started nibbling at the few remaining leaves. When he'd eaten his fill, he fluttered up to my shoulder and curled his tail around my neck. His scales glimmered turquoise, gold and back to ruby red. Like a contented wave of colour flickering over his body.



*Flicker.* I smiled and said the word aloud.

The dragon tilted his head and looked at me.

He uncurled himself, rose up into the air and sent out another spray of sparks in a glittering arc. And as he did, his scales flickered again, this time in the sunlight that shone through my bedroom window.

I laughed, racing to snuff out each spark. 'OK then. Flicker it is.'

