

I'm not known for my brilliant concentration in class. In fact Miss Logan has repeatedly said she wishes there was an Olympic medal for daydreaming because I'd win gold. By the time I'd absent-mindedly glued Amira's sleeve to the table and painted stripes across Seb's left hand, it wasn't just Miss Logan raising her eyebrows. But I couldn't help it. I couldn't stop thinking about what Flicker was doing and if I'd been right to leave him alone at home.

It was then that I noticed Ted's nose wrinkling. He leaned closer. Was he *smelling* me?

I edged away, giving my arm a sniff and scanning my clothes, wondering if I'd got so used to the whiff of dragon poo that I hadn't noticed I'd got some on me.

'Dude, what is with you today?' Kai whispered. 'You're being off-the-scale weird.'

But before I had the chance to blame any rogue tortoises Mr Firth strode into the classroom.

'Ready for the rounders competition, Miss Logan?' he bellowed. 'We've been looking forward to this all term. I hope you've had your class working on their skills after last term's netball fiasco.'

Miss Logan smiled serenely.

'I think we're ready for you, Mr Firth.'

'Oh, I doubt that, Miss Logan, but I suppose we must admire your optimism. Of course, my lot depend on ability more than wishful thinking. Anyway, the match has been scheduled for 2 p.m. I'll be taking Lightning Class out for warm-up beforehand. You're welcome to join us, if you don't think we'll scare the opposition.'

From the look he gave us as he said the word 'opposition' it was clear he didn't think we qualified as a serious threat. He didn't throw back his head like some dastardly villain and scoff outright, but we all knew Mr Firth thought his class was going to wipe the floor with us.

And even Miss Logan didn't look quite so serene after he'd left.

I could tell Ted, Kat and Kai wanted to quiz me properly when we were on our way out of class, so I hung on behind, pretending I'd lost my pen under the table. Part of me would have liked to tell them everything, but another part wanted to keep Flicker all



to myself. I'd never had anything as cool as Flicker before and I wasn't sure I was ready to share him. Not yet.

But I was beginning to realise that, with my terrible lying skills, keeping him a secret might not be as easy as I'd thought. The exploding poo didn't help either.

It happened while we were getting into our PE kits. I lifted out my shorts, and my heart sank. There were dark scorch marks across the bum. But it was the smell that everyone else noticed first. One of Flicker's dried-up poos had exploded, covering every inch of the bag.

Liam screwed up his nose. 'Ew, miss, something smells.' He looked in my direction. 'And I think it might be coming from over there.'

Everyone turned to look at me.

It was one of those times you wish you had a pop-up black hole in your pocket, ready to swallow you up.

'I think Tomas has had an accident, miss,' he said, pretending to whisper behind his hand but actually saying it loud enough for Class 3 to hear. Class 3 were two doors away. Liam was just loving this.

I looked to Ted and Kai but even they were backing away. I stuffed the shorts back inside my bag, cringing.





That's me stuck with 'Whiffy Liffy' for the rest of my life.



On Mondays Grandad picked me up from school. But when he saw me and asked how my day had been I just shrugged. I couldn't exactly tell him about the dragon-poo incident, and we'd lost so spectacularly in the rounders match I just wanted to forget the whole day.

'I've been thinking about the garden,' Grandad said. 'We need to work out what's going where. Got to get the right conditions for each plant or they won't thrive. What do you say? Fancy coming over and helping me plan it out?'

'Er ... can I come tomorrow?' I said, thinking of how I really just wanted to get home to Flicker.

As we walked on through the park, Grandad started telling me about how we were going to mark out the garden into areas. But I was too distracted to listen properly. I kept thinking about the burst dragon fruits I'd seen under the tree. Had more dragons really hatched? Could there be six dragons hiding out in our town? It seemed so unlikely. I mean, with the amount of mess my one little dragon was wreaking, if there was a whole pack of them out there, surely the news would be full of explosions and unexplained

fires? People noticed stuff like that, didn't they?

The nagging feeling I'd had during lessons grew even worse the closer I got to home. I started walking more quickly, my brain going over and over everything I'd done that morning. And then it landed on me like a cosmic cowpat – the thing I *hadn't* done. I grabbed the front-door key from Grandad's hand and ran, my panic rising. Because the one thing I'd forgotten to do was close my bedroom window!

At home, my fingers fumbled with the lock. I raced up the stairs and flung open the door to my bedroom. When I looked inside it wasn't the shredded curtain, or the dragon poo on my computer, that I noticed first. It was Flicker, perched on the windowsill – at the open window. For two days I'd had the coolest pet in the world. Two days. And now I was about to lose him. I stood frozen to the spot.

'Tomas,' Grandad called, coming up the stairs, 'you OK? Your pants on fire or summat?'

He paused halfway up and looked through the banisters towards my door. I quickly pulled it shut behind me.

'Nah, just checking Tomtom hadn't got in my room again,' I said. But my voice was far too squeaky to sound casual.

He looked about to quiz me but then said, 'Righto. I guess every man's entitled to his



secrets – hey, Chipstick?’ He gave me a wink. ‘I’m just downstairs if you need me. I’ll put the kettle on, shall I?’

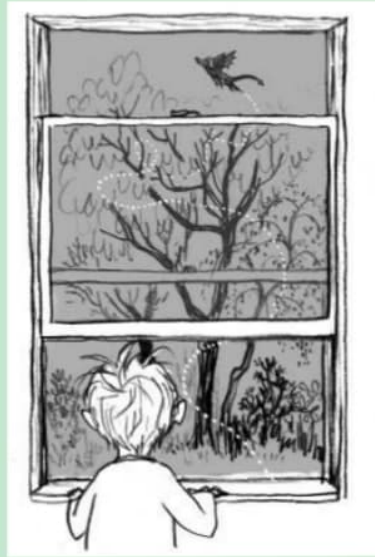
‘Yeah. Great. Thanks. Good idea,’ I said, already disappearing back into my room.

With the bedroom door safely closed, I turned to face the little dragon. He was still on the windowsill, staring up at the sky, his tail flicking from side to side.

‘Flicker,’ I whispered desperately.

He turned. I reached out a hand towards him, but he launched into the air.

For a heart-stopping moment I watched him soar up, up and away. I’d only ever let him fly inside the house. Now, sensing freedom, he was going to simply fly away and leave me. I raced over to the window, my eyes locked on the little shape flitting about among the leaves of the trees at the end of the garden. After a few agonising minutes he fluttered towards the tree in next door’s garden, the one nearest my window. He perched on a branch, his diamond eyes fixed on me.



I held my breath to see what he would do next. I waited, my heart ready to crack. Willing him to come back to me. Terrified he wouldn't.

Then, stretching his wings and with his eyes still locked on mine, Flicker flew back in through the window and settled on my shoulder.

And it felt like a firework display was going off inside me.

