

Horrible Horace



The dragons of Kilve had blue-green bodies and silver wings. Their eyes gleamed like huge rubies and their claws were curved and bright.

When the morning skies were brim-full of sunshine, the dragons soared between the clouds and dived the seas for fish. In the evenings they stretched out on the cool stony shore beside the Dragon Master, and together they sang and told stories, boasted of feats of flight, laughed at jokes and scratched each other's scales. Sometimes, they walked along the cliff tops as the sun slipped silently into the sea.

In the chilly darkness, the weary dragons curled up under the Dragon Master's cloak of stars, and slept. With gentle dreams, he took the dragons' sorrows away so each morning started fresh.

One sparkling dawn was particularly exciting, for at the back of a cave, a long-forgotten dragon egg was beginning to crack. By lunchtime, a tiny, turquoise hatchling had crawled out from the leathery shell, shaken his transparent wings and yawned.

The older dragons were delighted and they called him Horace. It was many years since they'd had a new baby so whatever Horace wanted, he got.

Flamethrower built him a beautiful rocky nest lined with seaweed. But then he had to move it, for Horace didn't like the cave it was in.

Igneous spent all day catching the fattest fish because Horace was always hungry. But he would eat only cod, so the older dragons were left with the mackerel, which was rather indigestible.

Others brought treasures from their own hoards for Horace to play with. Ember found a

mermaid's hair ribbon and hung a crystal on it to catch the light. Fireworks performed coloured smoke displays and deaf old Fizzle smuggled him chocolate biscuits when Ember wasn't looking.

Everyone adored Horace – but he was getting fatter and greedier.

One day he was lying on his back, sunning his tummy, when suddenly he pointed a long silver claw towards the sky.

'Want!' he demanded. 'Gimme!'

'What, dear?' asked Ember.

'Ball!'

'I can't see a ball, dear.'

'That ball. Gimme!'

Ember looked up to where Horace was pointing. 'That's not a ball, dear, that's the sun,' she said kindly.

'Want!' he screamed.

Hearing the rumpus, the other dragons swooped down from the sky, crawled out of the sea and gathered around.

'What's up?' demanded Igneous.

'Has a crab pinched his tail?' Furnace asked.

'Maybe the Nidhogg's nibbled his nose?' Flamethrower growled, looking around nervously.

When Pumice told them what was going on, they laughed, which made Horace even crosser, and he howled for the rest of that day.

When the Dragon Master came in the evening, everyone was too tired and upset to talk, so he pulled his cloak of stars over them all and hoped they would get some sleep.



Day after day, things got worse. Horace grew thin and pale and his scales dropped like turquoise leaves. He wanted the golden ball so much!

At last, the dragons could stand no more. They could not bear to see their only baby so ill – and they were quite worn out with worry. They no longer walked with the Dragon Master at sunset. They forgot to hug and laugh together. Everyone was very unhappy. Something had to be done.

'There's nothing for it,' Flamethrower sighed. 'Tomorrow, we'll have to fetch the sun down for Horace. He'll soon learn it's too hot to play with.'

Next morning, leaving Pumice the old wingless dragon to look after baby Horace, Flamethrower led the dragons spiralling into the sky, and between them they carried a huge bag.

Up and up they flew, but as they climbed, the sun became so big, bright and hot, they couldn't breathe and their wings ached. They dropped the bag and one by one they fell spinning and twisting back down to the sea. Wet and exhausted, they crawled into their caves.

They didn't even notice the Dragon Master sadly spreading his dark cloak and lighting the stars.

Next day, the dragons decided that instead of flying *up* to get the sun, they'd fly west in the evening and catch it as it sank *down* into the sea.

So they flew to the Midnight Forest and cut a tall pine tree. They chewed off the branches until it was just a long pole with a fork at the top. Then they tied a strong seaweed net to the prongs.

They were going fishing for the sun!

As evening approached they set off towards the sunset. Now dragons can fly extremely far and fast, but however hard they flew, the sun was always just ahead. Before long it turned gold and slipped silently into the sea.

Exhausted, the dragons found a rocky island and slept.

At breakfast next morning, everyone was tired and miserable. Then Flamethrower had an idea. 'Let's set off really early and we're bound to get to the west before the sun does.'

Cheered by such a brilliant plan, the dragons took off. The sun rose hot and burned their tails, then it arched higher and scorched their backs. At last it slid ahead of them, glowed orange on their noses and sank into the sea once more.

On and on the dragons flew into the dark, beating the air with their aching wings and looking for somewhere to land.

Just before dawn when the air was filled with silvery light, Flamethrower pointed a claw. Look!' he roared. 'There are hills ahead... and... it's *Kilve!*'

'Don't be silly!' scoffed the others. 'We've flown for two days. We must be thousands of miles away!'

'Then we've gone in a circle!' Flamethrower groaned, gliding a steep spiral down to the rocky beach below.

One by one all the other dragons landed next to him. And there they stayed in exhausted heaps until the Dragon Master found them.

‘I’ve been so worried about you,’ he said sadly as he rubbed ointment into their sunburn. ‘Pumice has told me what’s been going on. Why didn’t you let me help?’

The dragons hung their heads. Ember eased a weary wing back into shape. ‘Do *you* know how to catch the sun?’ she asked.

‘I can do all sorts of things,’ the Dragon Master chuckled. ‘Bring me a big bucket of water and your bad baby dragon.’

So they did.

The Dragon Master had a little talk with Horace about not whining for things he couldn’t have, and how he’d put the big dragons to a lot of trouble.

Then Horace said, ‘Sorry’ to everyone and there were lots of ‘I still love you’ hugs.

Then the Dragon Master put the bucket in front of Horace. ‘Now look,’ he said.

And shimmering on the water’s surface shone... *The sun!*

‘Ball!’ squeaked the baby dragon, grabbing for it with his claws. Then he started to cry loudly. ‘Ball broken!’ he wailed.

‘Just wait,’ said the Dragon Master.

The water stilled and Horace clapped his wings with delight. ‘Ball back!’ he giggled.

Now,’ said the Dragon Master firmly, ‘you can play that game as long as the sun is high. But when the bucket goes dark, you’ll know it’s time to come and look for me.’

‘But what happens if we need you when the sun is still in the bucket?’ asked Ember, who liked everything done properly.

The Dragon Master laughed and scratched Ember behind her ear. He pointed to the glittering light in the bucket. ‘I’m here now, aren’t I? I’m never far away, especially if you really need me.’