

“McDragon”

by Pam G Howard

Chapter One

The dragon snorted as he slumbered, warming the rocks in front of him. He was dreaming about a boy, but not just any boy, he was picturing the one who dragon lore foretold might find that which had been stolen from them.

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He could see them waiting for him the other side of the school gates and Peter hesitated before he crossed the road, then he dropped his gaze downwards at the pavement and scurried forward as quickly as he could. Why on earth had he mentioned dragons in class yesterday? Just because he hadn't been paying attention he had said the first thing that had come into his head. He looked up briefly and saw some children near the main entrance point at him and snigger and then he heard the scuffling of feet near him and got a waft of bad breath and sweaty armpits. The dreaded voice spoke against his left ear.

“Nice to see you Dragon Boy! Dragons, I ask you.... what world do you live in Crip?!” and an elbow jabbed him painfully in the side pushing him hard against the wall. There was a nasty laugh as the voice threatened quietly, “We’ll catch up with you later! Have to make the most of the last day at school! Where are you going on holiday.... Southend again for the day?”

“Actually, we are going to a villa in Spain!” Peter blurted out hoping his nose wouldn't grow with the lie.

Biffy looked at him disbelievingly and gave him another shove in the ribs as he sauntered off down the corridor chortling to himself about dragons as he did.

Peter pushed himself off the wall and then plodded on towards his classroom. The school day always started the same way no matter what he did and he was sure that as it went on it was going to get far, far, worse.

He remembered the conversation with his mum that morning when she'd said they were going by car to Scotland for the summer holidays.

“Why do we have to go somewhere like that? Everyone else goes to Spain and Turkey or somewhere in an aeroplane!”

Mum looked at him quietly, “Dad has to go there with his work and we're lucky that we are all able to go with him. The alternative would mean we have to stay at home throughout the summer.”

His face fell. He could just picture Biffy Jones' face when he heard that “The Crip” as they nicknamed him was not going to a sunny fun place like everyone else. The Crip, so named because he had a hand with only two fingers and a thumb on it.

Apparently, the Isle of Harris was in the Outer Hebrides in Scotland and everyone knew that it rained there all of the time. Biffy was going to have a field day with him when he found out and as he'd trudged to school in the drizzle he made his mind up; he was not going to tell anyone where he was going on holiday.

When the bell went for lunch he dawdled and let everyone get out before him so that he could scan the playground and check where Biffy and his mates were. He clocked them giving little Steven Parker a hard time and nipped around the corner quickly in the hope he could eat his lunch undisturbed for once.

He gave a small shudder as he got the whiff of sweat nearby and, before he could move, he heard feet on the tarmac and realised that Biffy had crept up beside him. Biffy swung his arm out and knocked the sandwich box to the ground. White sliced bread with cheese and pickle oozed out from under Biffy's foot as he purposefully wriggled it from side to side.

"Oops! Sorry!" he smirked.

Peter froze, he knew better than to move a muscle.

"Rhonda spoke to your sister and it seems you are a liar. Not only are you a crippled idiot to believe in dragons but a liar as well to boot! Liar liar pants on fire!" the voice crowed in his ear, bad breath accompanying it. "This is what happens to liars!" Bully boy Biffy pulled a lighter out of his pocket. Rhonda was Biffy's sister and she was in the same class as Alice, Peter's sister.

"You're not allowed th..that!" Peter stuttered.

"Who's going to stop me Crip? You? This is what'll teach you to lie to me! We don't like liars do we boys?"

There was a murmur of agreement and then the lighter flicked and the inevitable small yellow and blue flame sprang up. Peter tried to move away but he was surrounded by the smirking group of five boys. The flame touched the back of his trousers and he could smell the material singeing and then the pain of a burn. It hurt. He gritted his teeth trying not to yell out.

"As I said, liar, liar pants on fire! Let that be a lesson to you Dragon Boy not to tell me lies! A poor boy like you couldn't go to Spain where the sun shines! You're going to Scotland where it rains all the time!" Biffy almost cackled as he said it. "Now, say sorry for telling lies!"

Peter fought back the tears and murmured, "Sorry Biffy."

"Louder!"

"Sorry Biffy," he shouted.

"What are you doing over there lads?" called a teacher on lunch duty.

“Nothing, Miss!”

Peter breathed a big sigh of relief as the gang moved away from him. He gingerly felt through the hole in the back of his trousers where the burn was raw on his leg. His mum was going to kill him when he got home!

He picked up his lunch box and looked hopefully at the bread on the ground. All that was left was a slimy mess of squashed cheese and brown pickle. He was going to be hungry.... again.

Chapter Two

There was one particular part of the long boring journey up the motorway to Scotland that Peter would always remember - the smell after Alice threw up out the window before his dad could pull over in time.

“Why is there always carrot and tomato skin in it?” he asked. His dad glared at him but didn’t bother to reply, they were too busy trying to mop up the stray bits of sick which had blown back in through the window. The smell took a long time to go away.

The weather seemed to change as they crossed the Scottish border, from sunshine to rain and Peter peered gloomily out of the window in the dusk.

The movement of the car rocked him gently and his eyelids gradually fluttered down as his head nodded, his chin resting on his chest.

He woke as he felt the car slow to a halt. They had made a couple of stops on the way so his dad and mum could have a nap and change drivers and they could also eat some squishy smelly egg sandwiches which someone had sat on, so they were very flat.

It was a great relief to everyone when they finally reached Uig where they were catching the ferry to Tarbert.

“You can get out and have a look about but don’t go far. Come back once you see the ferry come into the harbour.”

“And stay together and keep away from the edge!” added mum as they scrambled out of the car to huddle across the quayside.

“Look, Peter, what’s that looking at us?”

As he peered into the sea where Alice was pointing a head slipped back down under the surface. A moment later the sleek black head reappeared.

“Ohh, it’s a seal! Look there is another one!” and they happily spent their time trying to count the seals bobbing their heads up and down in front of them like a puppet show.

“Ten!” shouted Peter triumphantly, “I’ve never seen a seal before except at the zoo!”

Big seagulls shrieked noisily in the air landing on the jetty, squabbling every now and then over scraps of food they found on the dock. They looked very big and fierce with their long yellow beaks. The seals took no notice of them as they carried on their examination of the children from the safety of the water.

A shout summoned them back to the car and it wasn’t long before they were standing on deck watching Uig disappear into the distance.

“Bye bye seals,” cried Alice.

They had fish and chips on the ferry and, naturally, Alice was sick again.

“When we go mackerel fishing we won’t need to take any bait,” said dad dryly to Peter. “We can just feed Alice and let her be sick over the side of the boat. That’ll attract the fish!”

“Do fish like tomato skins?” enquired Peter and his dad just grunted in amusement.

“Will we get to keep the fish we catch?”

“Yes, fresh fish that you catch yourself is always much tastier than anything you buy.”

“I don’t think I fancy eating a fish that’s full of Alice’s sick!”

“I was joking lad! We actually don’t need to take bait with us anyway as the fish chase the shiny lures that are tied onto the lines and then get hooked up when you move the fishing line upwards. You’ll see.”

Peter was very relieved at that.

The car rolled off the ferry at Tarbert amidst the shouts of the seamen directing them. They stopped to pick up some supplies in the small shops in the village and then set off the short distance to the small house that dad’s firm had rented for them for the summer.

Peter looked about him, it was a totally different landscape to what they had been used to. Shaggy sheep could be heard bahing and he could see them dotted about on the grassy areas, some trailing wool that made them look like a bride with a long train.

“Dad, why do the sheep all look like someone has painted splodges on them?”

“That’s how the crofters know which sheep belong to which croft. The smaller sheep are this year’s lambs.” he said slowing down to avoid a ewe ambling across the road in front of them. Another just lay peacefully in the kerbside chewing contentedly with a lamb tucked safely into her side.

At long last they pulled into the driveway of a little white walled house.

Almost before the car had stopped Peter flung himself out of the door.

“Not so fast young man, we have work to do first. The white house is not where we are staying, they just let us park our car here. We have to carry all of our luggage a few hundred yards around the corner, along that track over there,” and he pointed to where they could just see a roof showing above the small hillside, a rough stony track leading to it.

The next half hour was tortuous as far as Peter was concerned. They each had to carry their luggage along the track at the top of the small cliffs and leave it by the house. Then they had to tramp back to the car and help with the other goods they had brought with them, and hump them along the uneven track. By his second trip Peter was puffing with the effort of carrying the heavy packages and was very relieved to see his mum signalling at the open front door to let him know that he could come in.

Dad told him where his luggage should go and left it to Peter to heave both his and Alice's cases, one at a time, up to their rooms. He dumped Alice's on her bed and then checked out his own room. It was very small with just a single bed, a wardrobe and a chest of drawers but he felt it was the nicest bedroom because his window looked down onto the little beach. He threw his belongings into the wardrobe and drawers and thumped down the stairs to find his mum cutting up a cake she had bought to go with a cup of tea.

"Can I eat mine by the sea?"

"Yes, but stay in sight of the house please."

He scampered along to the tiny beach, across the stones and pebbles and stood by the water's edge and took in a deep breath. It smelt amazing here, so very different to what he was used to.

"No Biffy either!" he thought contentedly.

He stopped to take a bite out of his cake and listened. There was a peep peep noise over by the rocks on the beach and he saw a couple of black and white birds with long thin red beaks take off and fly low across the water to the rocks on the other side of the beach. It was, well, just peaceful with only the sound of the water lapping on the shore and the birds communicating with one another.