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Opening extract from

Draglins: And The Fire!

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CHAPTER ONE

"Mine's bigger than yours," Dennis boasted. "Look! It's HUGE!"

Danny watched the smoke ring circling Dennis's head. "Mine was thicker," he said hopefully.

"Rubbish!" Dennis sat back to admire his creation as it slowly floated up into the evening air.

Daffodil snorted. "Bet I can blow a bigger one than either of you." She took a deep breath and shut her eyes as she concentrated. A wisp of smoke escaped from the corner of her mouth, followed by a thick white cloud as Dennis flung himself on her and began to tickle her.

"DAFFODIL!" Dora, arriving to tell her brothers and sister that supper was nearly ready, gazed at the smoke in horror. "You KNOW we're not allowed! That's

REALLY dangerous!"



Daffodil sat up. "Don't panic, Dor," she said cheerfully. "No one's going to see."

"But they might!" Dora clasped her hands together in agitation. "Aunt Plum always says you never ever know when a Human Beanie might be watching, and they'll come running if they see smoke!" She went pale. "What if they've seen us already?"

"They won't have," Dennis told her. "And they never come down here, anyway – it's too full of prickly stuff." He waved an arm at the trails of ivy and wild blackberry looped round the old and broken-down shed that hid their home. "The uncles really knew what they were doing when they moved into Under Shed."

Dora tried hard not to look doubtful. She

could remember all too clearly when her family had lived in Under Roof, at the top of the tall tenement building that shadowed the far end of the overgrown garden. There had been no cats, no dogs – none of the many fierce and ferocious beasts that regularly gave her horrible nightmares.

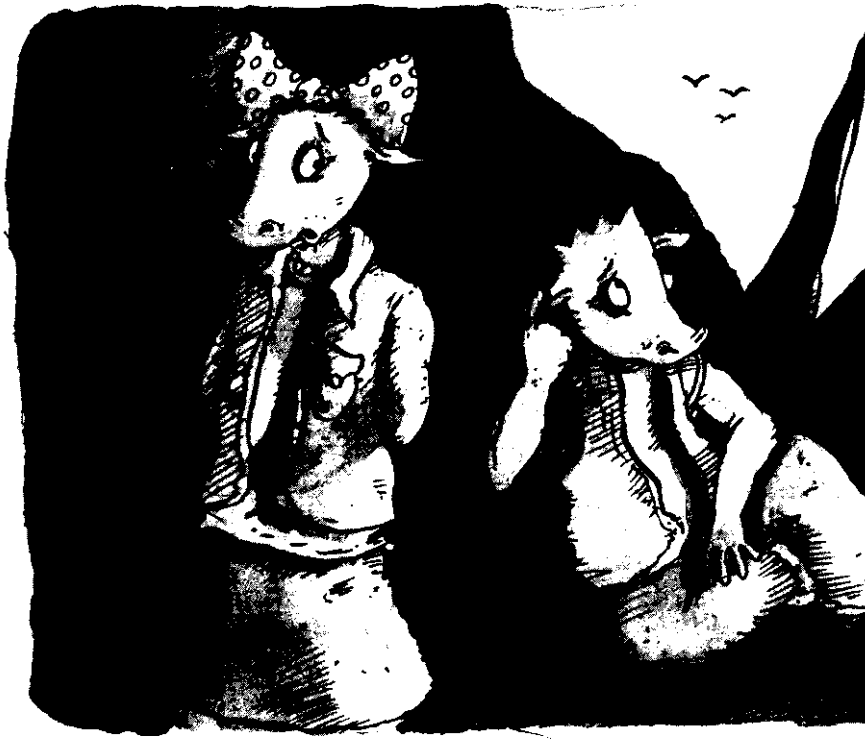


It might have been boring, and always the same, but it had felt wonderfully safe – at least, it had until the dreadful day when Uncle Damson had announced that they had to move, because humans were going to develop the flat below their roof space.

Under Shed was beginning to feel more like home, but Dora still didn't feel she could relax. And now her brothers and Daffodil were positively ENCOURAGING awful things to happen.

She took a deep breath. "I'll have to tell Uncle Damson and Aunt Plum," she said. "About the smoking. I'm sorry, but I really will."

"WHAT?" Three pairs of eyes stared at her in total disbelief.

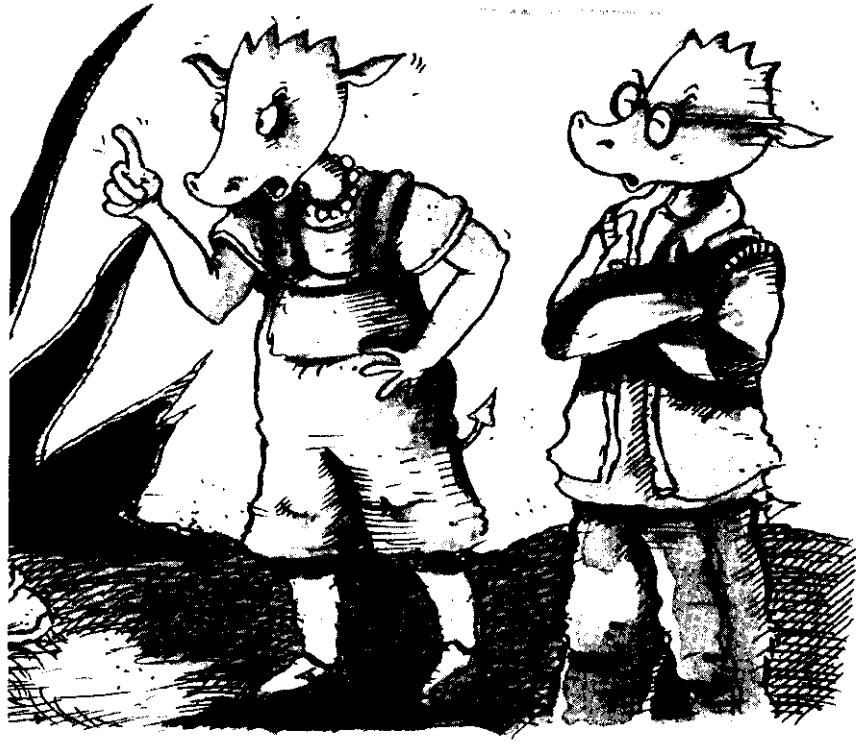


Dora went pink. "I'm not being mean – it's because I HAVE to. Don't you see? What if a Human Beanie found us? I'd never ever EVER forgive myself!"

"Dora Draglin," Daffodil said fiercely, "if you sneak on us, I'll never speak to you again!'

"NOR me!" Dennis agreed.

Danny scratched his ear thoughtfully. He was a fair little draglin, and – unlike Daffodil and Dennis – his conscience sometimes



troubled him. The four of them had already had a number of adventures since their arrival at Under Shed, and Dora had never let them down. Sometimes she had been positively heroic. And – Danny almost groaned out loud – she was right about the smoking. It was, after all, the most important rule in any draglin household. Uncle Plant and Uncle Puddle had a large sign hanging in the hallway saying,

"If you're angry, don't puff –

A wisp of smoke can be enough!"

Danny suddenly saw a clever way out. "Supposing we promised that we'd never smoke again?" he asked.

Dora sighed with relief. She knew Daffodil and Dennis wouldn't carry out their threat of not speaking for ever, but it would be for long enough to make her feel completely miserable.

"OK," she said. "I won't tell."

"Just a minute!" Daffodil folded her arms. "I'M not promising! I want to blow a bigger

smoke ring than Dennis!"

"And I'M not promising either," Dennis said flatly. "So there."





CHAPTER TWO

Danny looked at Dora, Dennis and Daffodil as they glared at each other. If he didn't think of something fast there would be terrible consequences. Once Dora had made her mind up she could be just as determined as either Dennis or Daffodil, and she would undoubtedly carry out her threat.

Danny shivered. The idea of Aunt Plum, Uncle Puddle, Uncle Plant and Uncle Damson ALL being furious was not one he fancied. The punishments would be dreadful, and as it was the beginning of the school holidays they would probably be grounded at home for days and DAYS – and he, Dennis and Daffodil had wonderful plans for adventures.

Danny looked round, desperate to find something that would distract the others.

They were sitting on the wooden floor of the old shed, surrounded by broken flowerpots, old leaves, and bits of wood. Underneath was their home; to reach their own front door all the little draglins had to do was scramble off the floor, climb over the end of a drainpipe, and slide down a makeshift ladder before making their way through the uncles' storage space.

It was the pipe that now caught Danny's eye; where did it come from? He looked up, and saw that it disappeared behind the remains of an ivy covered wall. And there was something else up there – but what was it? He screwed up his eyes...





"LOOK! There's a WATER TANK!" Danny leapt to his feet, pointing upwards. Daffodil, Dennis and Dora jumped up too.

"You're RIGHT!" Dennis slapped Danny's back. "Hey! We could go swimming again! Do you remember what fun we used to have in the water tank in Under Roof?"



Daffodil was already heading for the ivy. "Bet you I get there first!"

"I'll bet you you don't!" Dennis was after her at top speed.

Dora felt a huge load lift from her shoulders. For the moment the smoking crisis had been avoided. All the same, now wasn't the moment to go hunting for water tanks. "But we're meant to be going home for supper," she said. "And Aunt Plum's grumpy because she's got an awful cold..."

"Who cares about supper?" Daffodil called as she swung her way up, closely followed by Dennis.



"YOU should," said a deep growly voice, and Uncle Plant appeared beside Dora. He looked reproachfully at her. "Your aunt's worried you've got lost, you've been so long."

Dora blushed. "Sorry," she said.

Uncle Plant grunted, and peered at Daffodil and Dennis. "All your fault, I expect," he remarked. "Trying to look at the cistern, are you? Forgot to tell you that

was there. Used to have the odd swim when I was younger, but I'm too fat to climb up now." He laughed. "Had to block the end off, me and Puddle did. Kept dripping onto our stores. Proper nuisance it was. Come and have your supper. It'll still be here tomorrow." And he stomped off.



Daffodil and Dennis whizzed back down, grinning cheerfully. "It's EVER so easy to get there," Dennis reported. "Let's get up really early tomorrow, and have a swim before breakfast!"

"YEAH!" Daffodil punched the air, and Danny and Dora nodded.



