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Opening extract from

Draglins: Escape!

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CHAPTER ONE

Scritch! Scratch! Scrabble scrabble... "Dennis!" the voice was small and squeaky. "Dennis! Come back! We're not meant to be here – Aunt Plum'll kill us if she ever finds out!"

"I'm a dust monster!" said another voice, just as squeaky. "Wheee! Watch me fly!"

There was a second's silence, a sudden thump, then, "OUCH!"

"Serves you right," said the first voice smugly. "I told you not to...oh NO! Uncle Damson's coming this way! Quick! RUN!"

Pitter patter pitter patter patter...

The very old lady who lived in the top flat shook her head. She'd miss the little creatures who lived above her ceiling, although she'd never found out exactly what they were. They were no trouble – not like rats or mice.

Sometimes a biscuit or a slice of bread disappeared, but mostly they swept up her crumbs and took away her potato peelings. And any leftover sultanas. They loved sultanas.

The old lady sighed as she looked round at her boxes and bundles.

She was moving out today, and going to live with her niece in a smart modern house where not even the smallest of spiders was allowed. She loved her niece, but this had been her home for a long time.

RRRRRRRRRING! That was the doorbell. The very old lady picked up her suitcase...and paused.



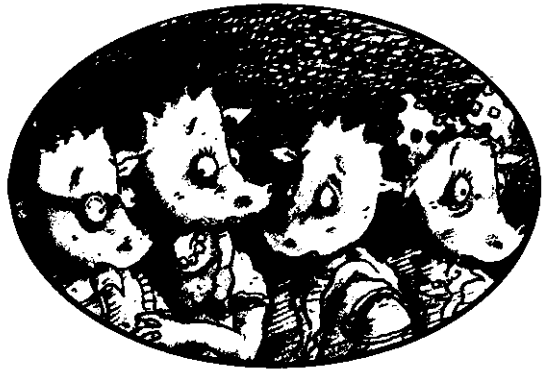
"Silly old woman," she said to herself. "Silly old woman...but no one will ever know."

She looked up at the ceiling.

"Little creatures!" she called as loudly as she could in her wavery voice. "Little creatures! I'm going away, so do be careful! My dear old home is going to get a brand new roof! Goodbye now! Goodbye!"

And the very old lady smiled as she went out of the door.

Up above the ceiling, in the dark dusty roof space, there was a stunned silence.



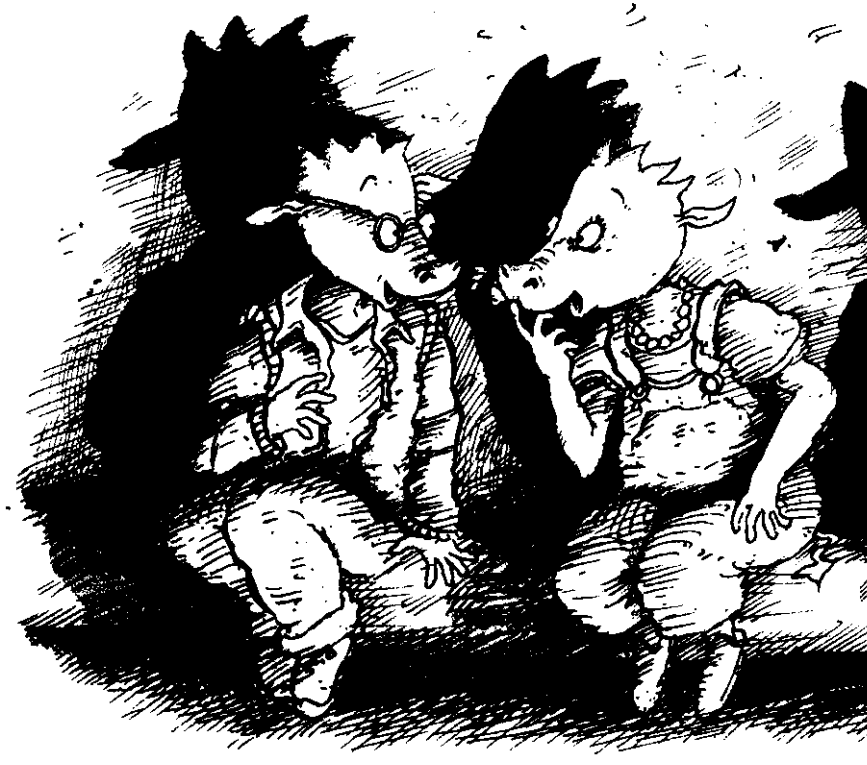


CHAPTER TWO

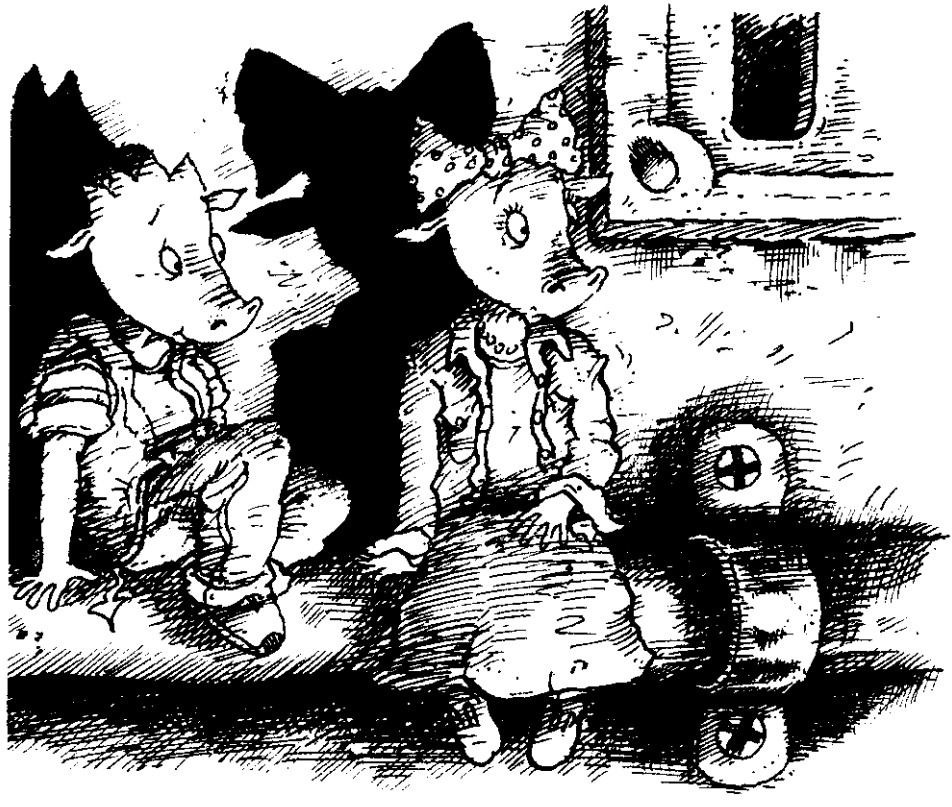
The four little draglins sat in a row on the rusty gas pipe that ran across the length of the loft. They were waiting for Uncle Damson to speak. Aunt Plum had told them at breakfast time that he had Something Very Important to say to them when he came home from Collecting, and they had spent the day discussing what it might be.

Daffodil, who was optimistic whatever the circumstances, was wildly excited. She was certain that Uncle Damson was finally going to allow them to have a baby beetle as a pet. She'd been asking for a beetle for as long as she could remember, and although Aunt Plum had told her over and over again that a dusty roof space at the very top of a tall old house was no place for a pet, she remained ever hopeful.

Dora, who was always nervous and expecting the worst, thought Uncle Damson was going to say that he and Aunt Plum were getting too old to go out to work, and that they were all going to slowly starve to death. She was the only one of the little draglins who ever thought about the dangers her uncle and aunt faced when they were collecting food and other necessities for their family, and she expected tragedy daily.



Whenever Uncle Damson was late returning home Dora convinced herself that he had been attacked by a brid, or stung by a swap, or carried away by a fiercesome wirrel. It was all too easy for her to imagine her aunt and uncle sitting in their armchairs, wrinkled, toothless, and unable to move a step to feed their ever hungry nephews and nieces...

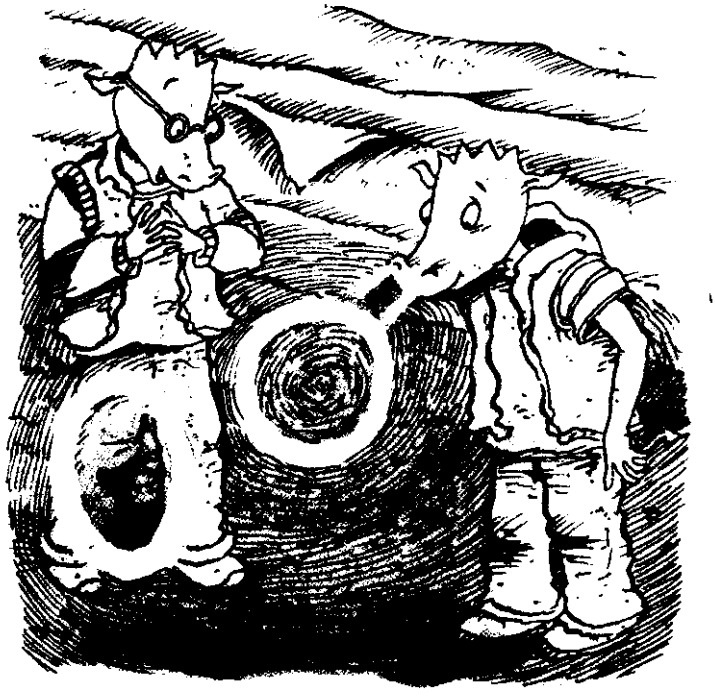


Dora blew her nose hard as she thought how sad it would be when all of them were a little row of bones. "And think of cousin Pip!" she said to Daffodil. "He's only a baby! His bones will be TINY!" And she blew her nose even harder.

"Rubbish," Daffodil said. "Don't be such an old worryguts!"

Danny was nervous too, but that was because he was feeling guilty. Normally feeling guilty was not something that Danny bothered about much, but the one rule that Uncle Damson insisted was never broken on pain of terrible punishment was NO SMOKING, and Danny and Dennis knew they'd had a smoke-blowing competition the day before.

On his better days Danny could understand that a dry wooden-beamed loft, full of piles of old newspaper and rubbish and dust, was a dreadful fire hazard, but Dennis always behaved as if



rules were made to be broken.

"It isn't as if we're going to breathe out *flames*," he told Danny. "It's only *smoke*!" Danny had allowed himself to be persuaded, and they had crept away from the neat area surrounded by piles of newspapers that was home to see if they could blow smoke rings. Somehow the smell of smoke had hung about them when they came back for tea, and still lingered in their sleeping space late that evening

despite wild flappings of Danny's jumper. Aunt Plum hadn't said anything about it, but she had looked very thoughtful as she came in to say goodnight.

Dennis was sure Aunt Plum hadn't noticed anything. He said he thought Uncle Damson was going to tell them to be good tidy little draglins, because that was what he always said. And as none of them ever took any notice it wasn't worth worrying about...but if Uncle Damson DID say something different, then at least it'd be a change. Dennis said it was time something changed.

"I'm so BORED," he complained, and Danny and Daffodil groaned loudly. Dennis was always moaning about being bored. They were bored too, but they didn't go on and on and ON about it like Dennis.

"Every day's the same," Dennis went on. "Get up, have lessons, learn about chats and dawgs and how WE MUST BE VERY CAREFUL BECAUSE THEY ARE SO DANGEROUS. But

it's just stupid telling us stuff like that. We never ever get out of here, so the worst thing we've ever had happen was when that eeb flew in. I want to have adventures! I want to SEE a chat! I tell you, if something doesn't change soon I'm going to go MAD!"

"Sh!" Dora said anxiously. "Don't say things like that! Change is scary!"

Dennis snorted. "Living in a dusty old place like this isn't MY idea of fun!" he said. "Nothing exciting EVER happens here!"

