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Opening extract from

Draglins: And The Bully!

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CHAPTER ONE

"SCHOOL? US? Go to SCHOOL?" Daffodil stared at Aunt Plum as if she had suggested her four nieces and nephews cut their own tails off.

Aunt Plum sighed. She had suspected Daffodil would be difficult. "Daffodil dear," she explained for the tenth time, "the uncles and I have decided it just isn't safe for you and Dora and Dennis and Danny to run wild out here. You were all brought up in the warmth and safety of Under Roof, and you don't realise how dangerous Outdoors can be."

Daffodil snorted loudly. "I can take care of myself," she said. "And so can Dennis and Danny. Send Dora to school. She'd love it!" Daffodil paused. If nothing else, she was fair. "Actually, Aunt Plum, Dora's pretty good at adventures. When she met that chat—"

"DAFFODIL!" Aunt Plum said sharply. "You're not listening to me! All four of you are going to go to school, and you're going to start tomorrow. And Pip is going to go to nursery, so you can take him with you." She sighed. "It'll give me the chance to give Under Shed a really good spring-clean. Your uncles are very fine draglins, but they are NOT tidy, and having all of us living here as well makes things ten times worse. Now, go and make the most of today. Uncle Puddle's going to take you to school at nine o'clock tomorrow morning – and that's the end of it. So no more arguing!"

As Aunt Plum trotted away into the kitchen Daffodil frowned horribly, and went to call a council of war. She found Dennis, Danny and Dora playing with Pip on the swing behind the uncles' house, and stormed over to tell them the dreadful news.

The area the draglins called Under Shed

was surprisingly large. Many years before, Human Beanies had built a wooden shed at the bottom of a row of shared gardens, and although the shed itself was now in ruins, the floor provided a splendidly solid roof for the uncles' house. There was also a huge storage space behind the house (much cluttered with the uncles' collections of Useful Things), and a safe place for the draglins to play.

Just the week before Uncle Plant had

rigged up a swing, and Pip happily spent hours swinging to and fro.

"Honestly!" Daffodil began, "you'd think we were BABIES the way Aunt Plum treats us! Do you know what she's done now?"

"She's sending us to school," Dora said. She tried not to look pleased. School meant a nice safe everyday life – and hopefully no adventures.

Danny nodded. "She told us earlier. It'll be OK. I'm quite looking forward to it, actually."

"It'll be great!" Dennis gave Pip a mighty push, and the little draglin squealed with excitement as he soared into the air. "We'll meet LOADS of other draglins! Uncle Plant says there's a bootball team, and all kinds of other stuff!"

Daffodil stared angrily at them. This was not at all the reaction she had expected. "Well, I'M not going!" she declared. "I can take care of myself, and I told Aunt Plum I could, so there!"

"You'll get really fed up hanging around here all day by yourself," Danny said in an irritatingly reasonable way. "You'll probably have to spend all the time looking after Pip."

"He's going to go to nursery," Daffodil told him. "Aunt Plum says she's going to spring clean Under Shed while we're out."

Dennis shuddered. "I'd MUCH rather be at school than be here while she's doing that," he said. "Don't you remember how horrible it was when she did cleaning in Under Roof?"

Daffodil did, and she became suddenly thoughtful. Aunt Plum was an entirely different sort of draglin when on a cleaning mission. Nothing stood in her way, particularly little draglins.

When they had lived in Under Roof at the top of the old tenement the annual spring clean had been a time of total misery while Aunt Plum dusted, mopped and polished.

There they had had to put up with it; now they had moved to the magical world of Outdoors, things were different.

"All right," Daffodil said. "I'll go to school, but only until Aunt Plum's finished."

CHAPTER TWO

Uncle Puddle looked at his nephews and nieces and grinned. Aunt Plum had begun her cleaning early; they were all spotless and, in Danny's case, still rather damp around the neck. Daffodil was inclined to glower; luckily she was a little in awe of Uncle Puddle, so he was spared the grumbling Aunt Plum had had to put up with all through breakfast.

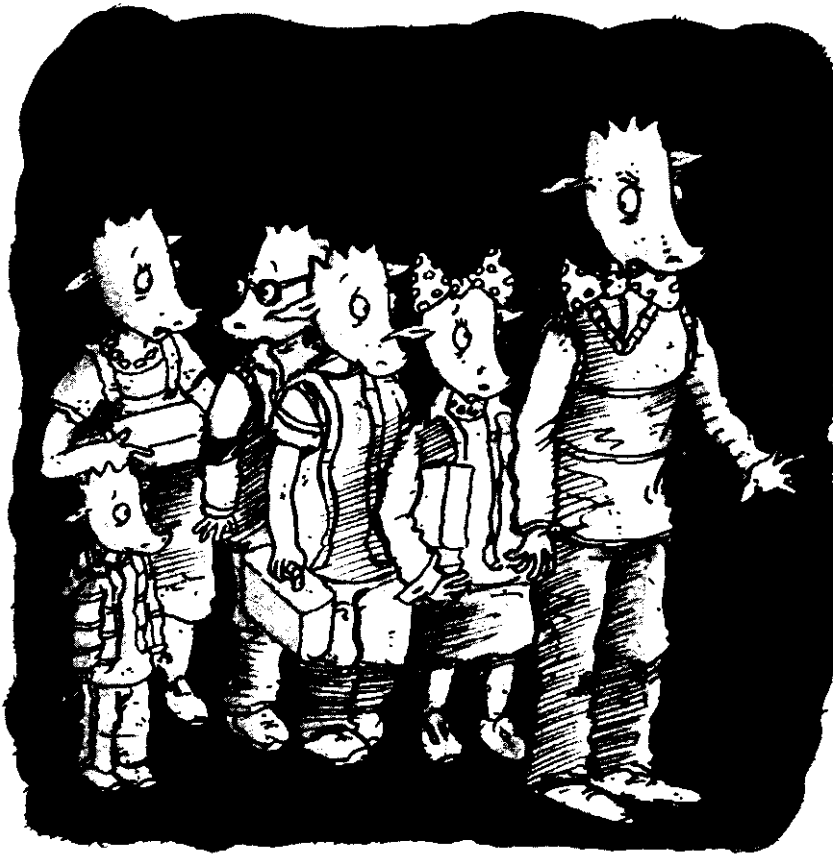
"Right," he said, "have you all got your lunchboxes?" His nephews and nieces nodded. "Good. Dora, you look after Pip on the way to school and take him into nursery. Daffodil, you collect him. Now, I'll be taking you there, but you'll find your own way home. I'm off Collecting later today."

Daffodil visibly brightened. "Cool," she remarked.

Uncle Puddle fixed her with a stern gaze. "School finishes at three," he said. "If you're not back here by half past three at the latest, you'll be in trouble."

Daffodil opened her mouth to argue, then thought better of it. "OK," she said.

The four little draglins and baby Pip lined up behind Uncle Puddle.



"Go and swing?" Pip asked hopefully.

"NO." Daffodil made a face at him. "Horrible horrible SCHOOL!"

Pip began to cry.

"Honestly, Daffy," Dora said crossly as she mopped Pip's tears. "Can't you ever think of anyone except yourself?"

"Sorry." Daffodil fished in her lunchbox, and gave Pip a biscuit. "LOVELY school for Pip!"

Pip sniffed. "Want swing," he muttered, but he stopped crying.

Uncle Puddle ignored the interruption. "We're going through the Underground, of course," he said. "Make sure you check VERY carefully when you're travelling Outdoors. The dangerous bit is the gap between the entrance and our front door."

"Yes, Uncle Puddle," Dora said politely. She was hoping her uncle couldn't hear Daffodil muttering "Yadda yadda yadda", and Dennis making horribly bored yawning noises.

Aunt Plum appeared, her head tied up in a duster. "Is the mud slide still there, Puddle dear?" she asked.

"WHAT mud slide?" Dennis asked.

"Is it a BIG one?" Daffodil's eyes were shining.

Uncle Puddle looked at his quivering nephew and niece. "It's just about dried up," he said, "and we've put a bridge over it." He turned to Danny and Dora. "It's where we used to get clay for making pots and bowls," he explained. "It's more of a clay pit than a mud slide."

"Oh." Daffodil lost interest at once, and Dennis drooped.

"If you're very lucky, you might get to make some lovely coil pots in handicraft," said Aunt Plum.

Daffodil snorted loudly.

"Time to be off!" Uncle Puddle said.

Compared to the Underground journey the draglins had made when they moved from Under Roof to the uncles' house, school was only a short way away.

Daffodil noted the fact with gloom, Dora with pleasure. Danny and Dennis were much too busy discussing what bootball would be like to have any thoughts about the journey, although they paused for a moment when the tunnel narrowed, and they trotted across a small wooden bridge.

Underneath was the clay pit; it wasn't much more than a hollow in the ground, but the yellow clay gleamed stickily in the faint light.

"Be careful when you're coming home," Uncle Puddle said. "We don't want you slipping in here. It's not at all deep, but you'd get your shoes messy, and I can tell you now that your aunt would NOT be happy about that!"

Dora took a firmer grip on Pip's hand. Dennis gave Daffodil a friendly shove. "Saved your life!" he said cheerfully as she staggered, and he pulled her back by her arm.

Uncle Puddle glared at him. "That is NOT funny, Dennis."

"Sorry," Dennis said, and went back to talk bootball tactics with Danny.

Daffodil trailed behind them, a thoughtful expression on her face.