

# The Dragon Rock

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## Short Stories: The Dragon Rock by Ellena Ashley

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### The Dragon Rock

This story begins with Once Upon A Time, because the best stories do, of course.

So, Once Upon A Time, and imagine if you can, a steep sided valley cluttered with giant, spiky green pine trees and thick, green grass that reaches to the top of your socks so that when you run, you have to bring your knees up high, like running through water. Wildflowers spread their sweet heady perfume along the gentle breezes and bees hum musically to themselves as they cheerily collect flower pollen.

People are very happy here and they work hard, keeping their houses spick and span and their children's faces clean.

This particular summer had been very hot and dry, making the lean farm dogs sleepy and still. Farmers whistled lazily to themselves and would stand and stare into the distance, trying to remember what it was that they were supposed to be doing. By two o'clock in the afternoon, the town would be in a haze of slumber, with grandmas nodding off over their knitting and farmers snoozing in the haystacks. It was very, very hot.

No matter how hot the day, however, the children would always play in the gentle, rolling meadows. With wide brimmed hats and skin slippery with sun block, they chattered and chattered like sparrows, as they frolicked in their favourite spot.

Now, their favourite spot is very important to this story because in this particular spot is a large, long, scaly rock that looks amazingly similar to a sleeping dragon.

The children knew it was a dragon.

The grown ups knew it was a dragon.

The dogs and cats and birds knew it was a dragon.

But nobody was scared because it never, ever moved.

The boys and girls would clamber all over it, poking sticks at it and hanging wet gumboots on its ears but it didn't mind in the least. The men folk would sometimes chop firewood on its zigzagged tail because it was just the right height and the Ladies Weaving Group often spun sheep fleece on its spikes.

Often on a cool night, when the stars were twinkling brightly in a velvet sky and the children peacefully asleep, the grown ups would settle for the evening with a mug of steaming cocoa in a soft cushioned armchair. Then the stories about How The Dragon Got There began. Nobody knew for sure, there were many different versions depending on which family told the tale, but one thing that everybody agreed on, was this:

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*In Times of Trouble  
The Dragon will Wake*

*And Free the Village*

*By making a Lake*

This little poem was etched into everybody's minds and sometimes appeared on tea towels and grandma's embroidery.

The days went by slowly, quietly and most importantly, without any rain. There had been no rain in the valley for as long as the children could remember. The wells were starting to bring up muddy brown water and clothes had to be washed in yesterday's dishwater. The lawns had faded to a crisp biscuit colour and the flowers drooped their beautiful heads. Even the trees seemed to hang their branches like weary arms. The valley turned browner and drier and thirstier, every hot, baking day.

The townsfolk grew worried and would murmur to each other when passing with much shaking of heads and tut tuts. They would look upwards searching for rain clouds in the blue, clear sky, but none ever came.

"The tale of the Dragon cannot be true," said old Mrs Greywhistle, the shopkeeper.

"It hasn't moved an inch, I swear," replied her customer, tapping an angry foot.

It was now too hot for the children to play out in the direct sun and they would gather under the shade of the trees, digging holes in the dust and snapping brittle twigs.

"The Dragon will help us soon," said one child.

"He must do Something," agreed another.

"I'm sure he will."

They all nodded in agreement.

A week went by with no change, the people struggling along as best they could. Some were getting cross at the Dragon and would cast angry, sideways looks at it when passing. The villagers were becoming skinny eyed and sullen.

Meanwhile, the children had a plan.

Quickly and quietly, they moved invisibly around town, picking and plucking at the fading flowers. With outstretched

arms and bouquets up to their chins, they rustled over to where the giant rock lay, as still as ever.

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The boys and girls placed bunches of flowers around the Dragon in a big circle. They scattered petals around its head and over its nose, then danced around and around it, skipping and chanting the rhyme that they all knew so well.

*In Times of Trouble  
The Dragon Will Wake*

*And Save the Village*

*By making a Lake.*

The searing heat made them dizzy and fuzzy and finally they all fell in a sprawling heap at the bottom of the mound. They looked up at the rock.

Nothing happened.

A dry wind lazily picked up some flower heads and swirled them around. The air was thick with pollen and perfume. A stony grey nostril twitched.

"I saw something," cried the youngest boy.

They stared intently.

An ear swiveled like a periscope.

The ground began to rumble.

"Look out! Run!Run!"

The children scampered in all directions, shrieking and squealing, arms pumping with excitement.

The rumbling grew and grew.

The Dragon raised its sleepy head. It got onto its front feet and sat like a dog. It stood up and stretched, arching its long scaly back like a sleek tabby cat. It blinked and looked around with big kind, long lashed eyes.

And then its nostrils twitched and quivered again.

The older folk were alerted by the screams and shrieks. The ladies held up their long skirts to run and the men rolled their sleeves up and soon the whole town stood together in a tight huddle at the foot of the hill, staring up at the large beast with mouths held open.

"AHHHHH AAHHHHHHHHH!!!"

The noise erupted from the Dragon.

"AHHHHH AAHHHHHHHHHHHHH!!!"

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The families gripped each other tighter and shut their eyes.

"AHHHHH CHOOOOOOOOO!!!"

The sneeze blasted from the Dragon like a rocket, throwing it back fifty paces, causing a whirlwind of dust and dirt.

"AHHHHH CHOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!!"

The second blast split open the dry earth, sending explosions of soil and tree roots high into the sky like missiles, and something else too ...

The people heard the sound but couldn't recognize it at first for it had been such a long time since their ears had heard such tinkling melody. As their eyes widened in wonder, their smiles turned into grins and then yahoos and hoorahs.

Water, cold, clear spring water, oozed, then trickled, then roared out of the hole, down the hillside and along the valley floor.

The torrent knocked over a farmer's haystack, but he didn't care.

The river carried away the schoolteacher's bike shed but she cared not a jot. It even demolished the Ladies Bowling Club changing rooms but they howled with laughter and slapped their thighs. When the flood sent pools of water out towards the golf course, filling up sixteen of the nineteen holes, the men just hooted and whistled and threw their caps up in the air.

What used to be a dirty, brown dust bowl, now gleamed and glistened in the sunlight, sending playful waves and ripples across the lake and inviting all to share.

"HMMMMM," sighed the Dragon sleepily, and showing his perfect movie star teeth. "Seeing as I'm awake ..."

And he lumbered forward with surprising grace and style and disappeared into the cool dark water with a small wave of a claw and flick of his tail.

They never saw him again.

After the families had restored and rebuilt the village, and set up sailing clubs for the children, and scuba diving for the grandparents, they erected a bandstand and monument in the spot where the Dragon used to lay. Every year to mark the occasion, they would bring garlands of flowers and herbs and arrange them in a big circle. The children would have the day off school, for it was known as 'Water Dragon Day' and wearing the dragon masks that they had been working on all week, would skip and clap and sing.

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*The Dragon helped Us  
As We said He would Do*

*Hooray for The Dragon*

*Achoo, Achoo, ACHOOOO!*

And that is the end of the story.