



“Radiates a glow
as golden as the
dragon’s scales.”

—*Boston Globe*

The Dragon of Lonely Island

Rebecca
Rupp

*The
Dragon
of
Lonely Island*

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REBECCA RUPP



CANDLEWICK PRESS

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and incidents are either the product of the author's
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Second paperback edition in this format 2006

The Library of Congress has cataloged the hardcover edition as follows:

Rupp, Rebecca.

The dragon of lonely island / Rebecca Rupp. —1st ed.

p. cm.

Summary: Three children spend the summer with their mother on a
secluded island where they discover a three-headed dragon living in a cave
and learn what it means to be a Dragon Friend.

ISBN 978-0-7636-0408-0 [hardcover]

[1. Dragon—Fiction. 2. Brothers and sisters—Fiction. 3. Islands—Fiction.]

I. Title.

PZ7.R8886Dr 1998

[Fic]—dc21 97-47759

ISBN 978-0-7636-1661-8 [paperback]

ISBN 978-0-7636-2805-5 [second trade paperback format]

21 22 23 TRC 13 12 11 10

Printed in Eagan, MN, U.S.A.

This book was typeset in Trump Mediaeval.

Candlewick Press

99 Dover Street

Somerville, Massachusetts 02144

visit us at www.candlewick.com

For Josh and for Ethan,
but most especially for Caleb,
who loves dragons

Many thanks to all who have helped in the making of this book, among them Amanda, Briana, and Jared Bliss, preliminary readers; Caleb Rupp, who suggested the puzzle box; Ethan Rupp, who repeatedly fixed the computer; Joshua Rupp, who made endless pots of coffee; Joe Spieler and John Thornton, agents and supporters; and very special thanks always to Randy, who makes everything possible, and to Amy Ehrlich, editor, without whose patience, wisdom, and imagination there would be no Fafnyr.



CHAPTER 1

The Island

The summer Hannah was twelve, Zachary ten, and Sarah Emily eight and a half, the Davis children went to stay at their aunt Mehitabel's house, which stood nearly all by itself on Lonely Island, off the coast of Maine. Aunt Mehitabel did not live in the house. She had an apartment in Philadelphia, which she shared with a miniature bulldog named Henry and an elderly second cousin named Penelope.

Aunt Mehitabel had blue hair, a pince-nez, and a walking stick from Egypt, with an ivory handle carved in the shape of a jackal's head. She was really Father's great-aunt, which made her the children's great-great-aunt.

"To be a great-great-aunt, she must be *very* old," said Sarah Emily.

"She must be in her eighties," said Mother, "but it's hard to think of Aunt Mehitabel as old."

Mother had asked Aunt Mehitabel about borrowing the house, because she needed a place where there was peace and quiet to write.

"No telephones," said Mother, "and no neighbors."

Mother wrote mystery novels, and the latest one — *The Secret of Silver House* — had to be finished by September. Mother's novels were published once a year. They all had pictures of girls in long white nightgowns on the covers, running away from castles or through forests or along the edges of rocky cliffs. Hannah, who liked romance, read them at night under her blankets, by flashlight. Zachary, who liked computer games, rockets, and complicated machinery, read *Scientific American* and *Popular Mechanics*, and Sarah Emily, who was shy and overimaginative, read fairy tales.

Sarah Emily was small and pale and wore thick round spectacles with gold rims. Hannah was tall and dark and had naturally curly hair. Zachary was freckled and indeterminate, but Mother said he would look just like Father when he grew up. Father was a marine biologist. He was spending the summer on a ship in the North Atlantic, studying the migratory patterns of *Hyperoodon ampullatus*, the northern bottlenose whale.

Aunt Mehitabel wrote from Philadelphia and sent Mother a set of spare keys to the house. The letter was

written in a spidery, old-fashioned script in raspberry pink ink.

"There are caretakers at the house," said Mother, reading from the letter, "named Tobias and Martha Jones. Mr. Jones will take us out to the house in the boat and will fetch our groceries and the mail every day from the mainland. Mrs. Jones will help with the cooking and cleaning." She peered at the children over the top of the page. "Aunt Mehitabel says that Mrs. Jones is not accustomed to children," she said, "so you will have to be on your best behavior."

Hannah made a face.

"Does she say anything else about us?" asked Sarah Emily.

"She sends her love," said Mother, "and says that she's enclosing a special message just for you. It must be in this envelope with your names on it. There's something heavy in it."

The envelope was sealed with green sealing wax.

"What's that?" asked Sarah Emily, pointing.

"Sealing wax. People used to stick letters shut with it a long time ago," said Hannah. "Before they had envelopes with glue on the flap. Sometimes they'd make a print in the sealing wax with a special seal ring to show who the letter was from. Don't you learn anything from all those books you read?"

"Does Aunt Mehitabel have a seal ring?" asked

Sarah Emily. "There's a print in this sealing wax. It's something with a long tail."

"It looks like a lizard," said Zachary. "Pass it over and I'll open it."

Zachary carefully slit the envelope open with his pocketknife, turned it upside down, and shook it gently. A folded slip of paper slid out, and a small iron key with an elaborately curlicued handle. A label was tied to the key. Hannah reached out and turned it over.

"To the Tower Room," she read.

"The tower?" repeated Sarah Emily. "Is Aunt Mehitabel's house a *castle*?"

"Don't be stupid," said Hannah, but Mother put her arm around Sarah Emily and explained that the house was Victorian, built in the 1800s by a sea captain. She showed them a photograph of the house and pointed out the tower. There was a weathervane on top of it in the shape of a clipper ship under full sail. An iron railing ran around the edge of the roof.

"That's called a widow's walk," said Mother. "The women used to stand up there, watching for their husbands to come home from the sea."

"What does the note say?" asked Zachary.

Hannah unfolded the narrow strip of paper. "'If you should find time hanging on your hands,'" she read slowly, "'try exploring Drake's Hill.'"

"What's Drake's Hill?" asked Sarah Emily.

"I have no idea," said Mother, folding the letter back into its envelope. "You'll just have to wait and see. But if Aunt Mehitabel suggests it, it's bound to be something interesting."

Sarah Emily picked up the note and ran a finger over the raspberry pink ink. "Aunt Mehitabel isn't just like everybody else, is she?" she said, but Hannah sighed and made another face.

"I think it all sounds boring," she said. "I don't want to be stuck all summer on some island looking after you two. I'd rather stay here and go rollerblading with Rosalie."

Rosalie was Hannah's best friend. She wore black turtleneck sweaters, took violin and modern-dance lessons, and spent every other weekend in New York City visiting her father and her stepmother. She hardly ever spoke to Zachary or Sarah Emily.

"It will be nice for you to spend some time with your brother and sister," said Mother firmly, "and the island is a beautiful place. You'll see."

Zachary had retreated to the corner of the couch and had buried his head in *Astronomy* magazine. "I think it sounds fun," he said. "There might even be a telescope."

"It's a very old house," said Mother. "There may be all kinds of interesting things."

Sarah Emily repeated dreamily, "Drake's Hill . . ."



They arrived at Lonely Island on a glorious day in early July. Mr. Jones met them at the harbor in Chadwick, where they stood on the wharf surrounded by luggage. They had suitcases, knapsacks, and a green canvas duffle bag. There were two sacks of groceries. Sarah Emily wore a backpack. From the unzipped top pocket protruded the fuzzy head of Oberon, the stuffed yellow elephant with one ear who had slept with Sarah Emily since she was two years old. Oberon's single ear flapped in the stiff sea breeze.

Mr. Jones was large, cheerful, and bald. He had a thick gray beard and was wearing a bright orange jacket with a hood. He grinned at Mother and the children and doubtfully eyed the mountain of luggage.

"Miz Davis?"

"And you must be Mr. Jones," Mother said, putting out her hand. Mr. Jones shook it. "And these are my children, Hannah, Zachary, and Sarah Emily."

Mr. Jones shook hands all around. "Very pleased to meet you," he said, "very pleased indeed. It's not often Mrs. Jones and I can look forward to company for the summer."

He gave another glance at the pile of luggage. "This all yours?"

"It certainly is," said Mother.

"The boat's over yonder," said Mr. Jones, pointing

with his chin as he bent down to hoist the two nearest suitcases. "You make yourselves comfortable. I'll load your gear."

They all helped load their belongings onto the boat, which was named the *Martha* — "After Mrs. Jones," Zachary whispered to Sarah Emily — and was painted green. Then they piled into it, Mother and Hannah on the seat in the middle, Zachary and Sarah Emily in the bow.

"Do you know anything about boats?" Mr. Jones asked the children.

"Not much," answered Zachary cautiously. Hannah and Sarah Emily shook their heads.

"Not to worry," said Mr. Jones comfortably, "you will before the summer's over. When you cast off, you unwind the line from this cleat"—he unwound—"and give her a shove." The *Martha*, shoved, bobbed up and down in the water and headed out to sea.

"I could do that," said Zachary.

Mr. Jones chuckled. "Sure you could," he said, "and next time you will."

The boat chugged slowly out of the harbor. The ocean was deep blue, spotted with whitecaps, and a cold salty wind blew the children's hair. Gulls circled and cried overhead. The children huddled in their windbreakers. Hannah, leaning her head against Mother's shoulder, had turned pale. "I wish you'd let me

stay home," she said. "This boat is making me sick."

Zachary and Sarah Emily leaned forward, eagerly peering over the waves for the first sight of the island. Suddenly, Sarah Emily gave an excited shout.

"Look!" she cried, pointing. "Is that it?"

Mr. Jones looked pleased. "That's her," he said. "Lonely Island. And that's your house there, dead ahead."

Aunt Mehitabel's house was painted gray, the same color as the rocks on the shore. It was the house of Mother's photograph: There was the tower, topped by the whirling weathervane. Beyond it stood a small cottage, also painted gray, with rows of window boxes planted with bright red geraniums.

"Who lives there?" asked Hannah.

Mr. Jones beamed at her. "I do," he said. "Me and Mrs. Jones and our cat, Buster. We just look after the big place for your auntie."

"Your house is very pretty," said Sarah Emily politely.

The boat pulled up beside a wooden dock, built out from a small rocky beach in a cove below the big house. From the beach, a flight of wooden steps climbed steeply to an iron gate, which opened, squeakily, onto a flagstone path bordered with red-and-black poppies. The path led straight to the house, to the veranda and the front door. The front door was old heavy wood, inset with little panes of stained glass in blue and gold. It was ajar. Mother and the

children pushed it open and, followed by Mr. Jones, stepped over the threshold. The house was warm and shining with wax and polish. It smelled deliciously of lemon oil and of cookies baking. Zachary put down his satchel and a bag of groceries and peered into the parlor.

"Look at that!" he said. "There's a stool made out of an elephant's foot!"

"That's horrible," said Hannah, without looking.

Sarah Emily tugged at Zachary's sleeve. "Zachary," she exclaimed, "there's a *telescope!*"

The telescope stood on a tripod next to a towering glass-fronted bookcase filled with old leather-bound books. Zachary gazed at it longingly. "I could track satellites with that," he said. "Or find comets. Or see the Ring Nebula even."

One by one, they tiptoed, fascinated, into Aunt Mehitabel's parlor. The room was vast and dim. The windows were hung with green velvet drapes tied back with tasseled gold cords. Against one wall stood a great Chinese lacquer cabinet with gold trees painted on the doors. There was a brass birdcage, a ship in a bottle, an abacus, and a chess set carved from colored stone.

"Jade?" wondered Zachary.

Mother gazed slowly around the room and then tilted her head back to look up at the high carved ceiling.

She took a deep breath. "My goodness, children," she said. "I never expected anything quite like this."

Mr. Jones poked a cheerful face in the door. "You folks make yourselves at home," he said. "I'll just go let Mrs. Jones know you're here."

"Mr. Jones!" Zachary called. "Who did the telescope belong to?"

"Now, that, I've heard tell, was the captain's own," said Mr. Jones, when Zachary showed it to him. "The captain what built this house a hundred years and more ago."

"Was he a pirate?" Zachary asked hopefully.

Mr. Jones laughed and shook his head. "No more than anyone else in those days," he said, and then, as Zachary's face fell, he added, "but it was a wild life all the same. His ship was called the *Dancing Susan*. That's her on the weathervane up on top of the house."

"Did you *know* the captain?" asked Sarah Emily.

"Of course he didn't," Hannah hissed. "Don't be *stupid*."

But Mr. Jones just shook his head and chuckled. "He was well before my time, little lady," he said.

Zachary reluctantly turned away from the telescope. "How do you get to the tower?" he asked.

Mr. Jones looked surprised. "The tower? Nobody's been up there in years. It's kept locked."

"Let's explore!" said Sarah Emily, hopping from one foot to the other in excitement. But Mother shook her head at her. "Slow down," she said. "We need to settle in first and then have some supper."

At that moment, the door at the end of the hall flew open and a short plump woman in a calico apron appeared. Her hair was pinned on top of her head in a bun, and there was flour on the end of her nose.

"You must be Mrs. Davis!" she cried, bustling toward them. "And Hannah and Zachary and Sarah Emily! I'm so glad to see you! We've been looking forward to this for weeks! You come along with me and leave Tobias to bring your suitcases up. There's a pot of tea just hot, and fresh lemonade, and raisin cookies just out of the oven."

She wiped her hands on her apron and hustled the children and their mother toward the heavenly smelling kitchen. Zachary, bringing up the rear, tapped Sarah Emily on the shoulder.

"Not accustomed to children," he quoted. "Be on your best behavior."

Sarah Emily giggled. "Even Aunt Mehitabel can't know *everything*," she said.



CHAPTER 2

The Tower Room

The children's bedrooms were on the second floor of the house, all next to each other in a row, with Zachary at the front of the house, Sarah Emily, who was afraid of the dark, in the middle, and Hannah, who was the oldest and bravest, next to the back staircase. On their first morning at Aunt Mehitabel's house, Sarah Emily woke early. Beside her head, sunbeams danced and flickered across the blue stripes of the wallpaper, and faintly through walls and windows came the rhythmic whoosh and splash of the sea. Sarah Emily stretched out her arms and legs luxuriously in the big four-poster bed. It was a beautiful day and the first real day of vacation. There were a thousand things to do and places to explore. Sarah Emily sprang out of bed, landing on the blue rag rug, and ran next door in her bare feet to wake Zachary.

She paused outside Zachary's door. At home,

Zachary hardly ever let anyone come into his room. He had a sign posted on his door that said NO TRESPASSERS! KEEP OUT!

"I don't like people coming in all the time and fooling around with my things," Zachary said. "I like to be private."

Sarah Emily hesitated for a moment. Then, cautiously, she knocked. "Zachary! Can I come in?"

The door opened. Zachary was awake, already dressed in a T-shirt, blue jeans, and sneakers. Behind him, his bed was made, the quilt pulled smooth, and his pajamas neatly folded on his pillow. Zachary liked everything kept in its proper place. He stepped out into the hall and closed the door firmly behind him. "Is anybody else up?"

"I don't think so," Sarah Emily said. "It's awfully early."

"Then go get dressed," Zachary said. "Let's see what else is in this house. This place is enormous. It must have about a zillion rooms."

"Don't go without me," Sarah Emily said. "I'll be really quick."

When she emerged from her room for the second time, in jeans, sandals, and her favorite pink shirt, Zachary was prowling restlessly up and down the hall.

"This floor is all bedrooms," he whispered.

"There's another big one across the hall next to Mother's and a little one beyond that."

At the very end of the hall a narrow wooden staircase led up and down.

"Where does this go?" asked Sarah Emily. She peered nervously into the shadowy stairwell. "It's spooky in there."

"There's a light," said Zachary reassuringly. He switched it on. "If you go down," he said, "you come out in the kitchen. Mrs. Jones told us so last night. If you go up, I'll bet you get to the attic. Let's go see."

The children tiptoed up the narrow stairs, with Zachary in the lead. The stairs creaked protestingly under their feet.

"Look how dusty these stairs are," Zachary whispered over his shoulder. "Nobody has been up here in ages."

At the top the stairs made an abrupt left-hand turn. The children found themselves facing two closed doors.

"Which one first?" asked Zachary. He deepened his voice in imitation of a magician the children had once seen at a stage show. "Anything could be behind the mysterious doors. A forgotten treasure map. The long-lost family jewels."

Sarah Emily giggled. "A magic carpet, all rolled up in a corner. A crystal ball."

"Or a skeleton," Zachary said. "Or ghosts!"

Sarah Emily shivered. "Don't, Zachary. You're scaring me."

Zachary closed his eyes and pointed dramatically. "I pick . . . the door on the left!"

Sarah Emily tugged nervously at his sleeve. "Maybe we should wait for Hannah."

"We can show her everything later," Zachary said. "Aren't you curious? Let's just take a quick look." He turned the wooden doorknob and pulled open the door. "Come on, S. E. Not a ghost in sight."

Before them was a long dim room, stacked floor to ceiling with odds and ends. There was a torn green velvet sofa with feet shaped like crocodile claws, stacks of crumbling magazines tied up with twine, old leather trunks, a wire dressmaker's dummy, and an aged upright piano with three missing keys.

"Look at all this stuff," said Sarah Emily, awed.

"This is *great*," said Zachary enthusiastically. "Look up there — I think that's a *sword*. We'll have to come back. Let's go see what's behind the other door. Maybe this place has *two* attics. It's big enough."

But the other door was locked. Zachary rattled the doorknob and shoved the wooden panels — "Maybe it's just stuck," said Sarah Emily hopefully — but the door refused to budge.

"It's locked," said Zachary finally. "We can't get in."

"Maybe the Joneses have the key," suggested Sarah Emily. "We could ask."

Zachary's eyes suddenly opened wide. "Wait a minute," he said. "Don't move, S. E. I'll be right back." He turned and raced down the stairs. In less than a minute, he was back, clutching something in his hand. He grinned triumphantly at Sarah Emily as he opened his fingers. There in his outstretched hand lay Aunt Mehitabel's little iron key, with its curiously curlicued handle and attached paper tag. "We *have* a key," he said.

Sarah Emily's eyes widened too. "Do you suppose . . .," she began.

Zachary nodded. "This must be the Tower Room."

The key fit. It slid precisely into the lock and turned with a sharp click. Zachary tried the knob once more and this time the door, released, opened. In front of them was an iron ladder leading up to a trap door in the boards of the floor overhead.

"It *is* the Tower Room," breathed Sarah Emily.

"Come on," said Zachary. "I'll go first. Let's climb."

Rung by rung, they mounted the iron ladder. Zachary pushed on the trap door — "It's heavy," he panted — and slowly thrust it open. It tilted back on its hinges and the children scrambled out onto the floor. They got to their feet and slowly looked around. "Wow!" Zachary said.

The children stood in a small octagonal room, completely circled by round windows that looked like portholes. They could see the entire island from the windows of the tower. To the north, at the far end of the island, a rocky hill rose up, topped with wind-blown trees.

"I'll bet that's Drake's Hill," Zachary said.

Sarah Emily turned away from the window.

"This was a kid's room once," she said. "A playroom. Look — the toys are still here."

"Maybe it was Aunt Mehitabel's," Zachary said, "when she was little."

On shelves along one wall, beneath the round windows, were rows of books and old-fashioned toys: a wooden doll with glossy painted hair, a jar of colored marbles, a folded checkerboard, a small blue china tea set with a chipped teapot. There was a collection of shells and chunks of coral. Two immense pink conch shells, too large for the shelves, were set on the floor below. There was a brass gong on a stand, with a little red wooden hammer hanging on a hook at its side. Sarah Emily gently unhooked the hammer and tapped the gong. It gave off a mellow bell-like chime.

"Look at this," said Zachary from the other side of the room. "Wouldn't you love to have a desk like this?" The desk closed with a wooden flap, fastened with a small metal hook. Opened, the flap folded



CHAPTER 3

Fafnyr Goldenwings

The children sat on the veranda steps eating homemade doughnuts sprinkled with powdered sugar, made just that morning by Mrs. Jones.

"This is the most wonderful place on earth," said Sarah Emily blissfully, licking her fingers.

They sat for a few minutes in stuffed silence. Bumblebees buzzed happily in the red rosebushes along the garden fence, and on the shore the waves rolled in and out, crashing against the rocks. From somewhere inside the house came the sound of Mrs. Jones singing "Amazing Grace" slightly off-key. Sarah Emily shaded her eyes with her hand and peered northward. There, small in the distance, the rocky hill topped with windblown trees was silhouetted against the sky.

"Drake's Hill," she said.

Zachary nodded. "It *is* Drake's Hill," he said. "I

asked Mr. Jones. He said that's what Aunt Mehitabel always called it."

"When do we go explore it?" Sarah Emily pursued. "Like Aunt Mehitabel said in her note."

Zachary jumped to his feet. "Right now," he said. "As soon as we can get ready. It's too nice a day to stay inside. It's probably farther to that hill than it looks, though. We should take some provisions."

"Doughnuts," said Sarah Emily immediately.

"Water," said Zachary practically. "Sweaters, in case it gets cold. Band-Aids. A compass, maybe."

"We'd better tell Hannah," said Sarah Emily. "Maybe she'll want to go too."

Hannah was in her bedroom with the door closed.

"Hannah doesn't like anything anymore," Sarah Emily had said to Mother when Hannah first started closing her door. "All she likes is that old Rosalie. And she's always saying that I'm stupid."

"You're not stupid," Mother had said, "and Hannah still loves you. She's just growing up and that's harder than it looks. Be patient."

Now Sarah Emily patiently tapped on Hannah's door and — when Hannah shouted, "What is it?" — explained the plan to explore Drake's Hill. Hannah decided that she might as well go along. "I guess there's nothing better to do," Hannah said ungraciously, strapping on her sandals.

They told Mother where they were going. "That's fine, darlings," Mother said. "Don't be gone too long—and, Hannah, take care of your younger brother and sister. I count on you to make sure no one gets hurt or does anything foolish."

Mrs. Jones told them that it was about an hour's walk to the hill. "There used to be a path there, but Mr. Jones and I don't go up that way these days; my knees aren't up to it," Mrs. Jones said. "You'll need a snack to eat along the way." Within the hour, the three children were ready to set out, carrying a picnic lunch—sandwiches, apples, raisin cookies, and a bottle of lemonade—in Zachary's backpack. The pack also held a compass, a flashlight, Zachary's Swiss Army knife (with six knife blades, a screwdriver, a corkscrew, and a tiny toothpick), a notebook and pencil, and—Hannah worried about her complexion—a bottle of sunscreen.

The day grew hotter as the sun rose higher, though the sea wind was cool. Gulls cried high in the sky, and in the grass beneath their feet, green grasshoppers leaped with a whirring of wings. The children headed straight for the hill. As they walked, a faint, worn track became visible. "There *is* a path," said Sarah Emily.

"Heading right where we want to go," said Zachary. "Let's follow it."

They strode along, single file because the old path was so narrow. Sarah Emily hummed as she walked. Zachary paused every once in a while to check directions on his compass. Hannah dabbed sunscreen on her nose. Soon Zachary and Sarah Emily were hungry again — “I can’t believe you two, after eating all those doughnuts,” said Hannah — so they paused, just at the foot of the hill, for a sandwich (peanut butter and Mrs. Jones’s homemade strawberry jam), a cookie, and a drink of lemonade. Zachary’s freckles began to come out in the sun. Sarah Emily crumpled the last sandwich wrapper and tucked it back into Zachary’s pack. “Let’s go to the very top,” she said, “and look for China.”

“Wrong direction and wrong ocean,” said Hannah. “Try France.”

“Or Greenland,” said Zachary. “Last one to the top is a rotten egg!” He grabbed the pack and began to run, bounding up the little path, winding in and out around scattered boulders.

Hannah and Sarah Emily — shouting “Hey!” and “Wait for me!” — dashed after him.

The hill was steeper than it looked. Soon the children were breathless, and one after another they slowed, panting, to a walk. They were hot, and the backs of Sarah Emily’s legs began to ache. They staggered up the last few feet and collapsed, laughing,

against the huge heap of piled rocks that formed the very peak of Drake's Hill. Zachary raised his fist in triumph. "Excelsior!" he shouted.

The view from the hill was spectacular. From their height, they could trace the coast of the island and gaze far out to sea. "I feel like I've just climbed Mount Everest," said Hannah.

"Let's get right up on top of these rocks," said Zachary. "Then we'll be able to see everything in both directions."

They scrambled up the side of the great heap of gray boulders, scrabbling for footholds as they climbed. The rocks were piled like giant jumbled steps. There were short heaving climbs — Sarah Emily, whose legs were short, needed to be boosted by Zachary and Hannah — then expanses of level flatness, then more steep climbs. At the last flat step, as they approached the peak, they came to a smooth, sheer wall, higher than Hannah's head, with not so much as a crack or a crevice in sight. "Let's go back," said Sarah Emily. "It's too high."

But Zachary refused to give up.

"Maybe we can get up from the other side," he said.

The step — more like a rocky shelf — curved around to the right, almost like a walkway circling the very top of the hill. The children cautiously edged their way around it. Sarah Emily, who hated heights,

refused to look down. On the north side of the rock face, the shelf suddenly widened out into a broad platform, high above and overlooking the empty sea.

"Look at *that!*" gasped Sarah Emily.

"A cave!" said Zachary.

At the back of the stone platform, a wide gaping opening led back into darkness.

"Let's go inside," said Zachary eagerly, but Sarah Emily hung back.

"Let's not," she said. "There could be anything in there. Bears or something. And besides, it smells funny."

Zachary and Hannah sniffed the air. Near the cave entrance, there was a strange odor: the smell of charcoal and smoke, with a hint of something tangier, spicy, alien.

"Probably just old campfires," said Zachary. "Maybe Mr. and Mrs. Jones used to come up here and roast marshmallows." He peered blindly into the darkness, then turned to fumble in his backpack. "Just a minute," he said. "I brought my flashlight."

He switched it on and cautiously stepped forward into the cave. Sarah Emily and Hannah crowded behind him. The three children, clinging to each other, edged slowly inward. As they moved into the cave, the sound of the sea abruptly shut off, as though someone had thrown a massive switch. The cave floor

seemed to slant downward into the hill, and inside, it felt enormous; there was a sense of soaring subterranean spaces. Zachary's flashlight barely penetrated the gloom. "It didn't look this big from the outside," Sarah Emily whispered. Groping, they stretched out their arms, left and right, to the sides.

"Can anybody feel a wall anywhere?" Zachary asked softly. Nobody could.

"This place is simply huge," said Hannah. "The whole inside of the hill must be hollow."

"It feels endless," said Sarah Emily nervously.

The children shuffled forward, feeling gingerly with their feet. "There could be deep holes," said Sarah Emily. The strange sharp smell — smoke? sulfur? — got stronger.

"You know what I wonder?" said Zachary. "Where did this hill get its name anyway? Was the sea captain who built the house named Drake? How come it's called Drake's Hill?"

There was a sudden shifting sound from the back of the cave, a heavy sandpapery scraping noise. Then there came a soft hiss in the darkness — the sound of a lighted blowtorch, thought Zachary — and a red-and-yellow flare of flame. The interior of the cave leaped into light. Before the children's astonished eyes, a vast expanse of gold flashed and glittered. There before them lay a long reptilian body, curled

comfortably on the cave floor, with a coiled golden tail, ending in a flat arrowhead-shaped point. Two eyes — sharp slits of jade green — glared at them out of the darkness.

"It is called Drake's Hill, young man," said a deep, raspy voice, "because *drake* is an ancient and honorable name for *dragon*. The hill is named after *me*."

The children clutched each other — so hard, Hannah said later, that her arm turned black and blue — and gaped unbelievably at the dragon.

"A . . . *dragon*?" said Zachary, in a high, unfamiliar voice. Hannah could feel her knees trembling. Sarah Emily burst into tears.

There was a frozen pause. The dragon extended its golden neck to its greatest length and peered intently at the three children, down the length of its golden nose. It seemed to be studying a trio of particularly unpromising scientific specimens.

Suddenly, Hannah squared her shoulders, put her arm around Sarah Emily, and stepped forward.

"You're scaring my little sister," she said.

The dragon drew back and its voice softened.

"My dear young lady," it said apologetically, "I never dreamed. . . . Nothing could be further from my intentions. . . ."

The golden head swiveled toward Sarah Emily.

"Despite my intimidating form," it said, "I am

quite peaceful. Consistently kindhearted. Almost invariably harmless."

"It's all right," said Hannah. She gave Sarah Emily a squeeze. "He's gentle. He won't hurt you."

"Please," said the dragon, "don't cry. I can't bear to hear children cry."

Sarah Emily sniffled and rubbed the back of her hand across her eyes.

"In all the fairy tales," she said in a tearful voice, "dragons are always burning down villages. And kidnapping princesses and eating them."

The dragon gave a sarcastic snort.

"Ridiculous," it said. "*Princesses!*" It repeated the word with loathing. "No self-respecting dragon . . .," it began. Then it seemed to change its mind. The golden head drooped sadly. "Clearly," the dragon said in a mournful voice, "I have been forgotten. Dragons used to be quite well known in your world, respectfully looked up to. Admired, even." There was a resigned pause. "Of course, that was a long time ago. And your kind is ephemeral. One cannot expect of humans the prodigious memory exhibited by dragonkind."

"I don't understand," said Sarah Emily. And then, in a whisper to Hannah, "What is he talking about?"

"Ephemeral means short-lived," Hannah whispered back. "He's saying that human beings don't last

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Ages 8–12
0506



CANDLEWICK PRESS
www.candlewick.com

U.S. \$8.99 / \$11.99 CAN
ISBN 978-0-7636-2805-5



EAN

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Also available as an e-book