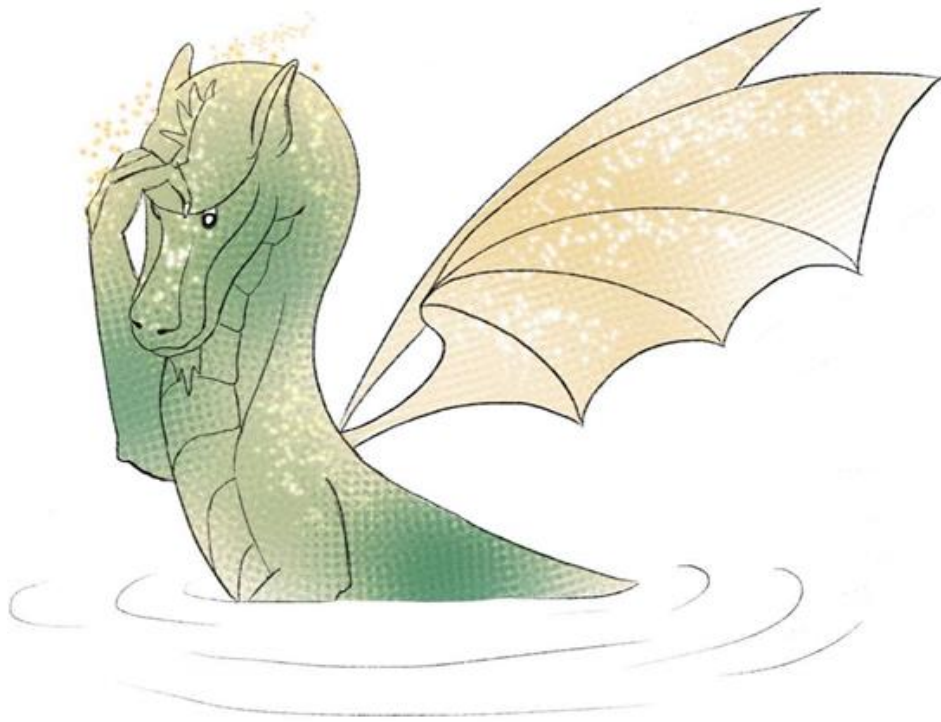


Serpentine and the Magic Bubbles.



by

Amanda Barrass (Author) and

Sarah Hercod (Illustrator).

Once upon a time, in a faraway kingdom, there lived a family of dragons. For as long as anyone could remember, this family of dragons had lived in an ancient, stone castle, so they became known as the Castle Dragons. In this family, there was a father dragon and three little dragon children. Onyx was the youngest and smallest of the Castle Dragon Family. She was a fun-loving, happy dragon with dark, sparkling eyes, a long neck and tailand black scales all over her body, that shimmered a beautiful golden colour in the sunlight.



One rainy day, Onyx was not feeling happy or fun-loving.... she was feeling fed up! Onyx was learning how to fly and she loved nothing more than to swoop and swish through the clouds. But she wasn't allowed to go out flying in the rain and, today, it seemed like the rain would never stop and everyone (especially her two big brothers) was bossing her about and telling her what to do! Onyx decided to take herself off to her Daddy's magic room and invent a spell, one that would make her grow really big and strong ...and powerful. "Then I will be the one who tells my brothers and Daddy what to do for a change!" she thought to herself and smiled.



Onyx had helped Daddy make a few simple spells before, but she knew she wasn't allowed to make magic on her own. Standing on tiptoes, Onyx carefully began pouring some things she thought might be helpful into the large spell pot. Being such a young dragon, she still wasn't quite tall enough to see over the rim. If she had been, Onyx would have noticed that in the bottom of the pot was a sludgy layer of an old magic spell - one her father had made a while ago and forgotten to do the washing up! One tiger's whisker, a splinter of lightning, a splodge of monster slime.... Onyx kept adding more and more ingredients until the pot was completely full!

At this point, Onyx gave the mixture a careful stir and as she did so, without Onyx realizing, the old magic mixed in with the new! With much excitement, Onyx uttered the magic words "Abra Cadabra!" But, instead of the whizzing, popping and puffs of glittering sparkles that normally happened when she and Daddy had made magic spells together, this time there was nothing. Confused, Onyx peered into the pot. It just looked like a muddy, gloopy mess and it smelt like a mixture of rotten eggs and farts. "Yuck! I am not eating that magic mixture!" thought Onyx.



Worried that she might get into trouble, Onyx decided to get rid of the gloop quickly. She tried to pour it down a drain but it just sat there wobbling like a stinky lump of jelly. She tried to stamp on it and rip it up with her sharp claws. But nothing seemed to work. In a panic, she took a deep breath and let out a long jet of fire. The mud-like gloop began to sizzle and steam. Then...



...the room was suddenly filled with a thick, dark cloud that shot up the chimney and disappeared into the sky!

"Phew!" thought Onyx, "I won't try that again! Thank goodness that is the end of that!"

But, unknown to Onyx, that was not the end of that. Her flames hadn't destroyed the gloop, just turned it into teeny-tiny bits of magic

mixture (far too small to be seen by a dragon's eye) that looked like smoke as it swirled through the air.

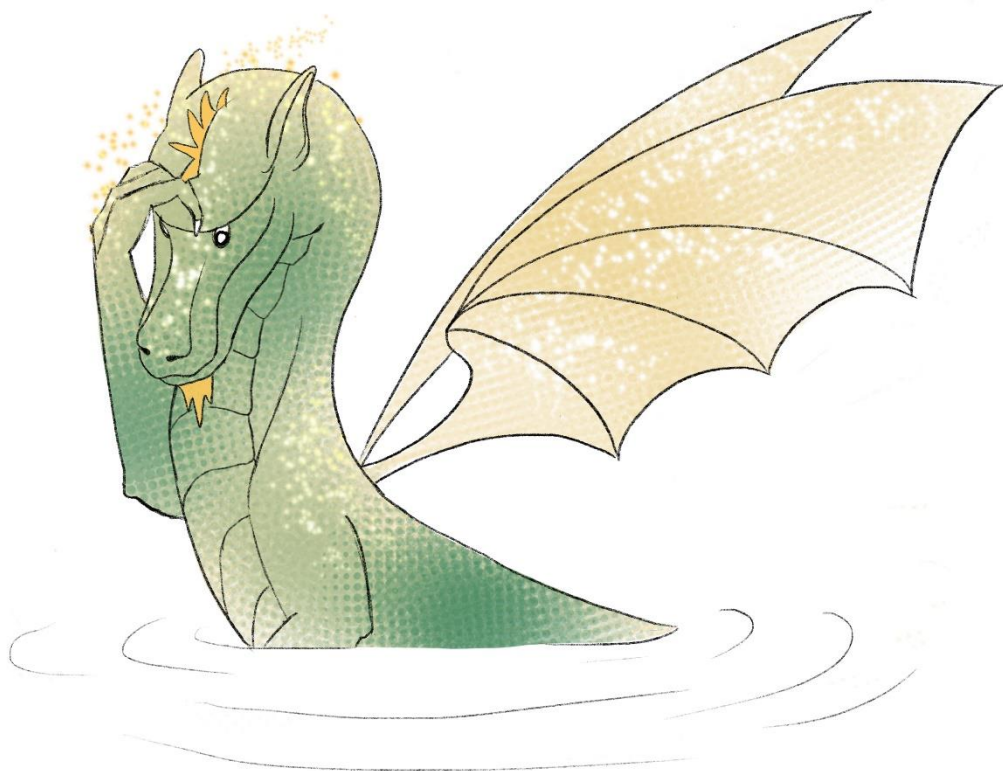
Silently, in the dead of night, a very thin layer of gloop-dust began to settle, all over the dragon kingdom.

The next morning, all the dragons woke up and went about their usual dragon business. As they did so, some breathed in bits of the magic gloop-dust and, before long, they began to feel hot and their tummies hurt. Some noticed that they could no longer breath fire and this made them feel very sad and frightened. As more and more dragons breathed in the invisible gloop-dust and became poorly, other dragons became so worried that they developed big, purple, worry-lumps all over their bodies. It was all very confusing. Dragons from all over the kingdom emailed and video-called each other - nobody knew what to do to help the poorly dragons get better and stop more dragons becoming ill.



Eventually, a group of older dragons decided to go to the edge of the Silver Lake and ask the advice of the oldest and wisest of the dragons, Serpentine (who, although he was the oldest and wisest of the dragons, didn't have internet access).

After much calling, Serpentine's pale blue-green head gently rose out of the rippling water. He listened to all that the older dragons had to say. Slowly, he scratched his scaly head with a long claw.



He told all the older dragons to make sure all the dragon families in the kingdom stayed in their homes, so they could keep all the dragon children safe, while he searched the land to solve the mystery. With that, Serpentine stretched out his wide wings and with a few powerful flaps, he soared into the sky and was gone. The older dragons did just as Serpentine had said and all the dragon families stayed safe in their homes, waiting and waiting for Serpentine to return.



Serpentine travelled many miles and had to rest often. After weeks of knocking on doors, he finally arrived at the home of the Castle Dragon Family. Quickly, Serpentine explained why he was there and asked if they had noticed anything strange. Daddy Castle Dragon and two of the dragon children shook their heads and said, "Sorry we can't help you." But Onyx suddenly had a horrible feeling in her tummy and her beautiful golden-black scales turned to a dull grey. Serpentine noticed the change in Onyx's colour and asked her if she was feeling OK. Onyx looked into her Daddy's big, kind eyes and started to cry, she told him and Serpentine about the magic spell she had made. Daddy gave her a big hug and thanked her for being brave enough to tell the truth. Serpentine nodded but said nothing at first, because he was thinkingthinking very hard. Then he smiled at Onyx and she

felt a warm glow begin to grow in her body and, as it got bigger, she saw that her scales had returned to their beautiful golden-black.

"I can't make any spell that will undo the power of the gloop-dust and it will be a long time until that magic runs out. But I do remember one spell that was passed down from my Grandfather, many years ago, that might stop more dragons from becoming poorly. A small sip of my Grandfather's magic potion will give each dragon an invisible bubble of protection when they go outside their homes," said Serpentine. "I must go and make some straight away!"

Serpentine flew back to his lake as fast as his creaky old wings could take him and immediately began working on his magic remedy. He worked all night and, in the morning, he began delivering little bottles of his grandfather's magic bubble mixture all around the dragon kingdom.



Soon, he arrived at the home of the Mountain Dragon Family, a warm, cozy cave where a mother dragon lived with her four dragon children, Jade, Jasper, Ruby and Jet. Mummy Mountain Dragon heard the flap of Serpentine's wings and lifted her slender, red neck to see who the visitor was. She was very excited to see wise old Serpentine standing there.



Serpentine explained all about the magic gloop-dust to Mummy Mountain Dragon. He told her that the gloop-dust was still around and could still be harmful to dragons. He passed Mummy Mountain Dragon a bottle of his magic bubble potion and explained to her that, if she and her dragon children took a sip of the mixture every day, it would make an invisible, protective bubble all around them, that could keep them safe from the invisible gloop-dust when they went outside their home. He told Mummy Mountain Dragon that, once they had their invisible protective bubbles on, the dragon children could go outside to play and fly - and even go back to dragon school!

Mummy Mountain Dragon was very happy, she explained that her dragon children had found it fun staying in the cave at first, they had played lots of Hide-and-seek and painted on the cave walls. But as the weeks had gone on, they were feeling more and more sad that they couldn't play outside in the sunshine, fly up high in the sky or see their friends. When Mummy Mountain Dragon told her four children that they could go back to school the next day, they cheered with delight and flapped their wings ...and leapt about the cave with big toothy smiles. "Hooray!"



The next morning, however, Mummy Mountain Dragon got ready to give the magic potion to each of her dragon children but she was very surprised that they didn't seem happy or excited at all!

First, Mummy Mountain Dragon went into Jade's bedroom. Jade was the oldest and the most sensible of the dragon children. She usually loved school, especially when her class got to write stories. Mummy was surprised Jade was still in bed and, what's more, she could see teardrops slowly trickling down the scales on Jade's dainty nose.

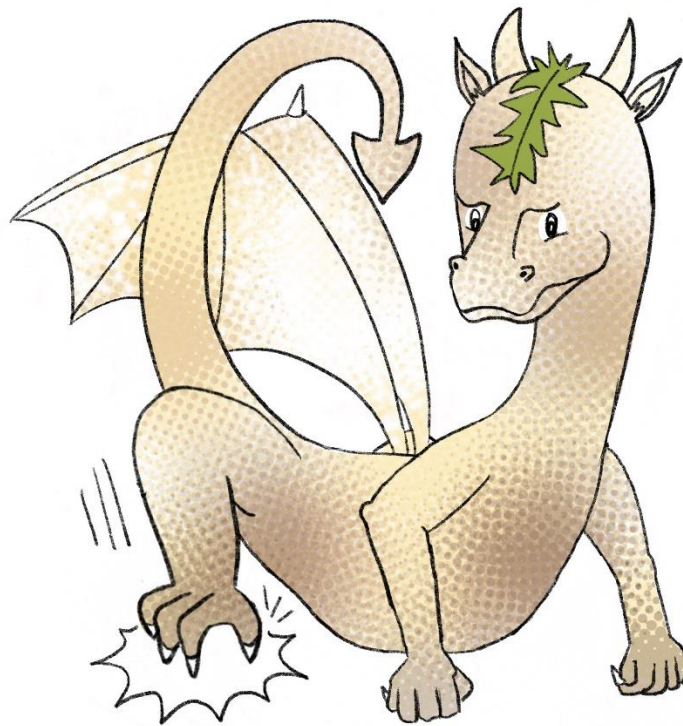
"I don't feel well," Jade said. "Maybe I will go to school tomorrow." And with that, she pulled her blanket up over her head so that only the tip of her pointy, green ears and her golden horns were poking out.



"Oh dear," sighed Mummy Mountain Dragon and went into Jasper's bedroom.

Jasper, the second oldest, was the bounciest of the dragon children. He found learning hard and did not really like his lessons very much - but Jasper *loved* PE and being part of the school football team made his little brown chest swell with pride. Mummy knew how much Jasper was looking forward to playing with his friends again and that he was

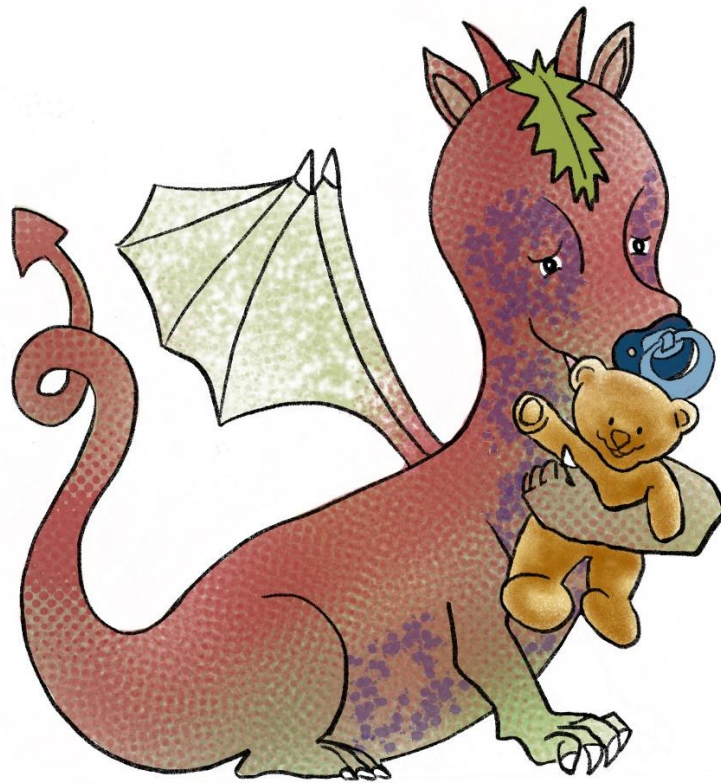
super-excited about having his own invisible, protective bubble. However, as Mummy poured out the magic potion onto the spoon, instead of bounding over to swallow it, Jasper stamped his foot, swished his tail angrily and shouted, "School is boring, I'm not going!"



"Oh dear," sighed Mummy Mountain Dragon and went into Ruby's bedroom.

Ruby, the third oldest of the dragon children, loved doing maths puzzles and cooking club at school. Surely Ruby will be dressed and ready for school this morning, thought Mummy Mountain Dragon. But

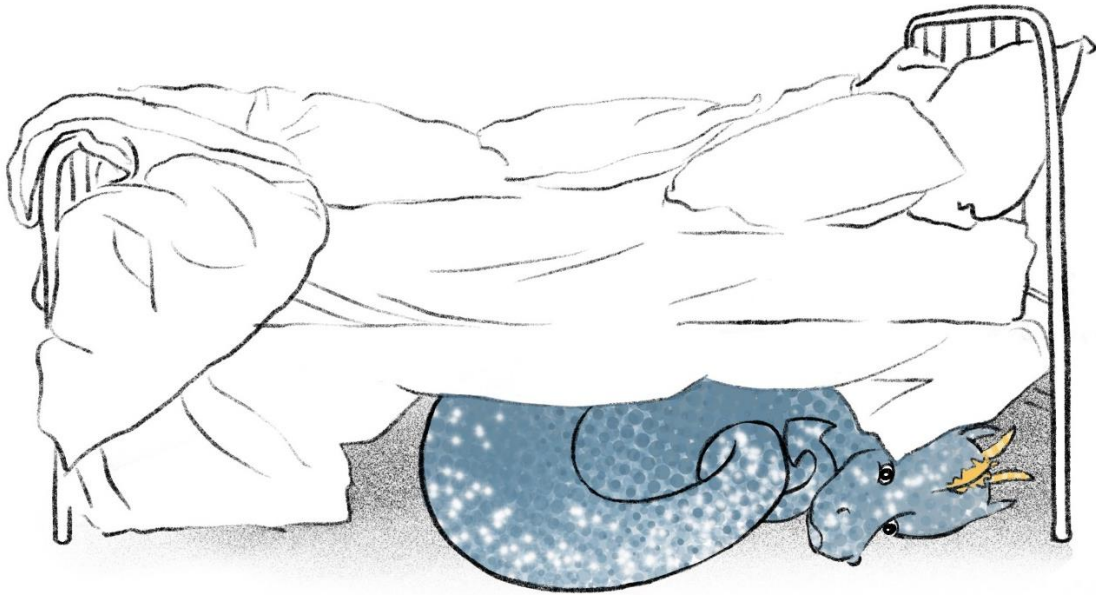
even Ruby didn't seem her usual care-free self, she was sucking an old dummy and cuddling a teddy she hadn't played with since she was a baby dragon. Ruby got her name because her scales were a deep red colour - but today, her little red body was all covered in purple worry-lumps!



"Oh dear," sighed Mummy Mountain Dragon and went into Jet's bedroom.

Jet was the youngest and messiest of the dragon children. Mummy felt sure he would be ready for school today - he loved all the painting he got to do with his friends. But where was Jet? After much

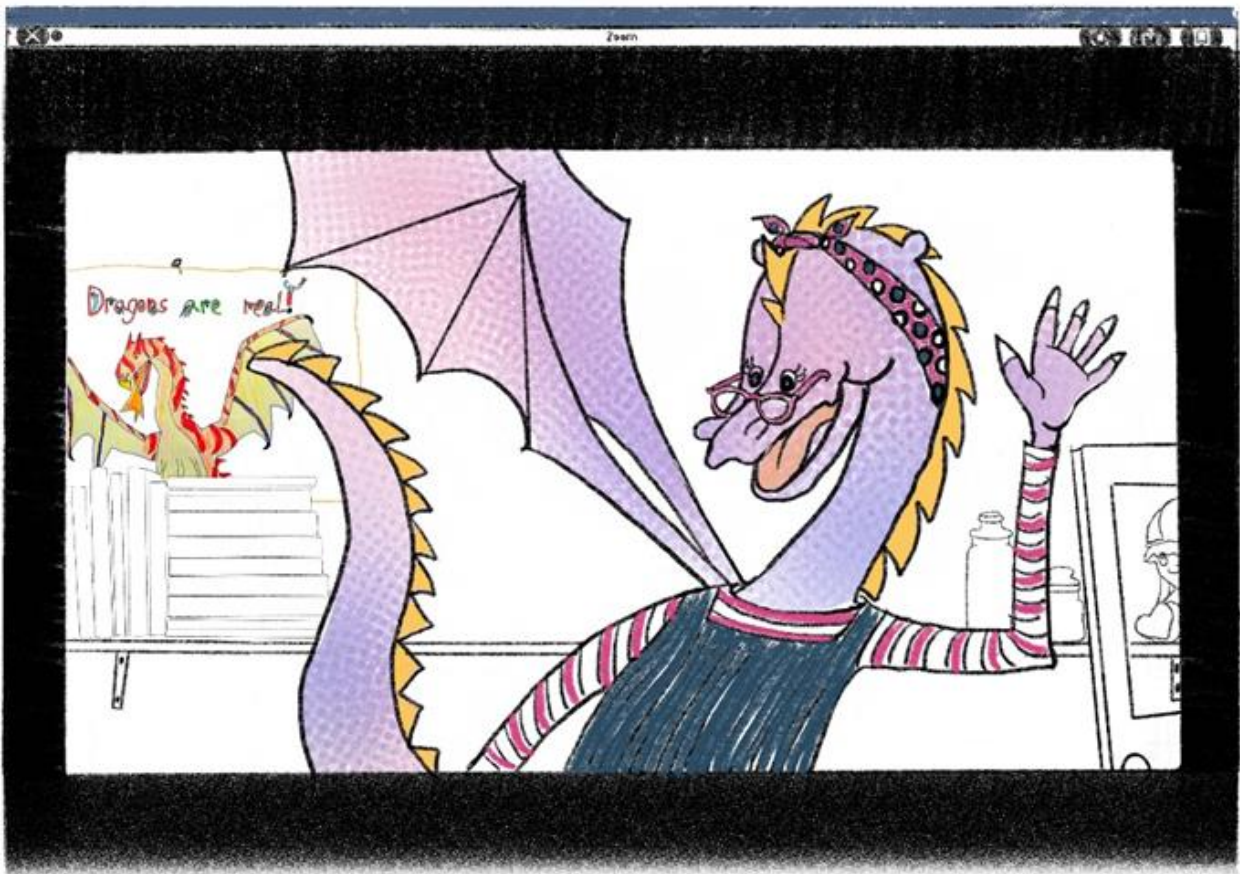
searching, Mummy could see Jet's black eyes shining in the shadows under his bed. He was hiding!



"Oh dear," sighed Mummy Mountain Dragon. She really didn't understand why her children were acting so strangely, yesterday they were so excited about going back to school and seeing their friends. She decided to video-call the children's teacher, Mrs Rose-Quartz .

Mrs Rose-Quartz explained to Mummy Mountain Dragon that everything that happened recently had been very frightening and confusing for little dragons. She explained to Mummy that little dragons could not always find ways to explain how they felt in words because they are only young, so their bodies showed their feelings in

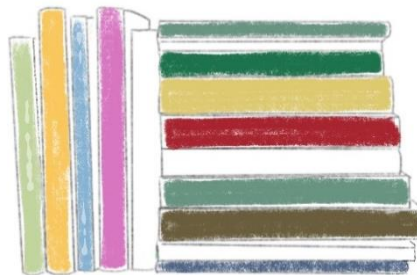
different ways. Mrs Rose-Quartz explained that it was normal for little dragons to be excited and worried about going outside their homes and going back to school. She asked if she could speak to all of the family together.



When they were all gathered around the family laptop, Mrs Rose-Quartz said, "Children, Mummy has let me know that you have all sorts of muddled up feelings today and you are feeling very wobbly about coming back to school. I am guessing that it will be scary for you to be away from your Mummy all day and trust that you will be safe in school. It is normal to have these feelings, lots of the other dragon

children will have big feelings when they start school today too, especially as we get used to wearing our protective magic bubbles and things are a little bit different to before."

"Jade, I may not be able to give you my usual dragon-hugs when we are wearing our protective magic bubbles but maybe, if your sad feelings get too big in school, you might want take a blanket, curl up and read a book in the book corner for a while," Mrs Rose-Quartz said reassuringly.



"Jasper, if your angry feelings get too big at school, one of our dragon helpers might take you outside so you can fly around for a while and breath out fire until all your anger has gone away."

"Ruby, maybe you might want to bring your teddy from home and keep it in your drawer. That way, if your feelings get too big, you can give

your teddy a cuddle and know that Mummy will be thinking of you and looking forward to seeing you all at the end of the school day."



"Jet, wanting to hide away is normal for little dragons full up of confused feelings. I have put a pop-up tent in our classroom for just those moments."

"Shall we give it a go and see how you all feel after your first day back?" asked Mrs Rose-Quartz.

When the children saw Mrs Rose-Quartz's smiling face and heard her voice, they suddenly didn't feel so wobbly. Jasper noticed one of his pictures on the classroom wall behind her and remembered painting it with his best friend, Lava. Oh, how he missed Lava! The dragon children looked at each other and looked at Mummy Mountain Dragon, they decided that going to school might not be so bad after all.

So, Mummy gave them their magic potion and, before long, they were all having fun feeling the inside of their soft, squishy invisible bubbles as they trotted off to school.

As they got closer, the Mountain Dragon Family could see Mrs Rose-Quartz smiling and waving at the window. The dragon children turned to give Mummy Mountain Dragon the thumbs up and quickly disappeared through the door.



Inside, there were some things that were the same - and some things that were different. The coat pegs were in the same place, the book corner was just the same, the same teacher and helper dragons were busy showing the dragon children what to do and where to sit. But not all of their friends were there ... and dragon children were sat in different places.

When all the dragon children had hung up their coats, put their snacks in their drawers and sat down, Mrs Rose-Quartz told her class how pleased she was to see them all again, she gave them all a big smile. This helped the dragon children feel a little less wobbly and they started to smile too. Mrs Rose-Quartz told her class that although knowing that the magic gloop-dust was still around was a bit scary, there were things they could do to keep themselves safe. She explained that coming to school in their invisible protective bubbles meant that the dragon children needed to keep a little bit away from their friends and the grown-up dragons. "If we got too close our bubbles might accidentally get popped," Mrs Rose-Quartz told her class. "But I understand that sometimes it will be hard for young dragons to remember, especially when they are playing, and sometimes bubbles might accidentally get burst. You mustn't worry if this happens because wise old Serpentine has left me a spare bottle of magic potion, just in case I need to make you a new protective bubble."



"Where are the rest of our friends?" asked Jade. "Are they poorly?"

"Oh no dear," Mrs Rose-Quartz explained. "Because our bubbles take up more space around the classroom, there isn't room for us all to be together and keep safe at this time. So, half the dragon children will come to school and do their learning in the mornings and the other half of the class will come in the afternoons. It won't be like this forever, just until the gloop-dust runs out of magical power."

Soon Jade, Jasper, Ruby and Jet were enjoying listening to their favourite stories, painting, dancing and doing dragon-yoga. They quickly got used to being careful with their invisible bubbles and stopped feeling so wobbly inside.



The time went very quickly and, before long, it was the end of their lessons. The little dragon children came rushing out and told Mummy Mountain Dragon all about their first day back.

Mummy Mountain Dragon was delighted to see her dragon children back to normal. "Ruby! All your worry-lumps have gone!" she said, smiling.

