



## Drachenerwachen

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#### The Birth

The shopping centre where Mrs Tossilo worked was a very busy place, so busy that Mrs Tossilo had won the *Saleswoman of the Year* award five times in a row! She sold more shoes than any other shop assistant in all the shoe shops in Berlin. She was the friendliest person in the world when she was at work. Everyone wanted to be served by Mrs Tossilo, even though she always managed to convince people that they needed at least four pairs of new shoes in order to be happy.

But Mrs Tossilo hadn't sold a single pair of shoes over the last few days. Instead, she stood in the shop as if she wasn't really there. She couldn't stop thinking about the strange stone waiting for her at home. All she wanted was to sit beside it and look after it all day long.

'Have you got these Gore-Tex boots in size 6?' a customer asked.

'Excuse me?' Mrs Tossilo answered.

'Size 6? These boots here?'

‘Why?’ Mrs Tossilo wanted to know.

‘Why? Well, size five and a half is a bit small, and size seven is too big, you see,’ the customer said looking rather surprised.

Mrs Tossilo didn’t answer. She just stared at the boots absentmindedly. The customer shook her head, mumbled something under her breath and walked out of the shop.

At lunch time, Mrs Tossilo was still standing on the same spot. She didn’t go to the *Happy Chicken* for lunch, or over to the pharmacy to buy new lipstick. It wasn’t until her colleagues asked her ‘What is wrong with you today?’ that Mrs Tossilo slowly started to think straight again. *That stone must have bewitched me*, she thought. *Even if it is magic, it doesn’t belong to me! I’d better give it back!*

At last work was over and the day was done. Mrs Tossilo unlocked the door to her apartment. She shuddered as she hung up her white coat on a coat-hanger. She could hear those strange scraping sounds again. She got goose bumps. The noise was coming out of her bedroom. She crept into the kitchen. Her heart was racing. She took the frying pan off its hook without making a sound.

*Scratch, scratch. Bang, bang.*

She tiptoed over to the bedroom and peered round the door.

She hadn’t shut the suitcase or the casket this morning. The strange stone lay exactly where she’d left it on the sea-green velvet lining looking magnificent. Mrs Tossilo forgot all about the horrible scratching sounds as soon as she set eyes on it. She even forgot that she had made up her mind to give back the stone this afternoon.

Now she felt sure she could see a beam of light coming out of the stone towards her. It seemed to be waving at her, calling her, beckoning her.

She put down the frying pan and sighed with pleasure, sinking down beside the suitcase.

Her mobile chirped at her. The display showed a foreign number.

*Don’t answer it*, a voice whispered inside Mrs Tossilo’s head. *Don’t answer whatever you do*. It could be the owner of the stone. Maybe he wants to arrange

a handover time for the suitcase? Or more importantly, for what's inside the suitcase. A sick feeling spread through her stomach and centred under her tummy button.

At this point, Mrs Tossilo noticed the stone had developed a hairline crack. Or three cracks to be exact.

'Oh my goodness!!! How did that happen?' she whispered.

Then the scraping sound started up again. It was coming from the stone! Mrs Tossilo leapt to her feet. The stone started to wobble. She stepped backwards, appalled.

*Scratch, scratch, crunch.*

Then whatever it was started to vibrate before it suddenly jerked into the air. For a second, time seemed to stand still. The stone hovered in the air as if it had lost its bearings.

Then it made a loud cracking sound, fell down again – *KERAACK* – and burst into pieces.

A thick black substance oozed out. At the same time, an unusual smell filled the whole room. The smell of wood one minute and metal the next. A hint of damp grass and a whiff of petrol station.

'Oh my goodness. What ... what?!' Mrs Tossilo stammered. She didn't get any further. The top half of the stone blew off like the top of a volcano and ended up sticking to the ceiling. Meanwhile, there was something moving in the bottom half of the stone, in the black liquid, a wet and slimy writhing body, midnight blue, with golden veins. It shook itself. The slimy drops flew all over the place. Mrs Tossilo's pale silk blouse turned into a hand-dyed version spattered with black blotches.

'Yuck, yuck, yuck!!!' she screamed in disgust. The creature – it looked a bit like a slimy lizard or an alligator with closed eyes – paused for a moment.

It lifted its head and listened to all the yucks. It sniffed the air and then, with great difficulty, it started to clamber out of what was left of the stone. When it finally got to the sea green velvet lining, it wiped its face with its front paws until it got rid of all the black liquid. Then it turned towards Mrs Tossilo, took a gentle cooing breath and opened its eyes.

They were beautiful, round and black, ringed with amber. And wild! And they were staring right into Mrs Tossilo's eyes. Next of all, it opened its mouth revealing small, dangerous-looking fangs and made a gurgling sound a bit like Mmmu! Mmmu!

Mrs Tossilo's mouth dropped open, but she didn't say a word.

'Mmmuth! Mmmuth!' The alligator-like creature took a few steps in her direction. 'Mmu! Tha! Mu! The!'

What was going on?

'Mo! Ther!' the creature gurgled more emphatically and rolled its eyes. What did it want?

'Mother.'

Mother? Oh my goodness. Was this lizard-creature's mother here, too? Mrs Tossilo shuddered again.

'Mother, there! The golden blue creature lunged its head towards her.

Shocked, Mrs Tossilo looked over her shoulder. But there was just the wardrobe mirror behind her, not a lizard mother

'Me not mother,' Mrs Tossilo stuttered. Now she was losing her nerves. What was she doing talking to this creature? She was behaving as if it was really there.

'Calm down,' Mrs Tossilo said to herself. 'Easy does it. You are all right.' She gripped one hand with the other, trying to hold onto the last remnants of calm before they were gone. 'I'll just go into the kitchen, have a little something to drink and relax. Whatever I'm seeing right now is just a figment of my imagination. It! Is! Not! Real! Do you hear me? It can't be real. Because things like this don't exist!'

Still shaking, she went out of the bedroom without looking back and was just about to go into the kitchen when the doorbell rang. Usually Mrs Tossilo preferred people not to come calling at her door, but now she was glad. No matter who it was, it would be good to see someone just to calm down. She opened the door without taking a look through the spyhole.

'Hello', said Johann.

'We wanted to ask ...' Janka started to say.



## Mother Heart

Who could tell what was going on in Mrs Tossilo's mind? Perhaps that sigh touched her heart.

At any rate, Mrs Tossilo pushed her way past the children. She made a beeline for the freshly-hatched creature, bent down and gathered it up in her arms. The creature rubbed its nose on her sprayed blouse, rolled its eyes and the next moment it was fast asleep. All you could hear was a quiet gurgling sound.

Mrs Tossilo stroked the slippery head and slimy back very gently, as if she'd been doing it all her life.

The delicate creature snuggled up against her. Beneath the blue and golden skin, its little heart was beating. A sense of calm and stability flowed into Mrs Tossilo's hands and spread throughout her body. She hadn't felt this good for a very long time; perhaps she had never felt this good ever.

It took a while before she remembered that the two children from number 9 were still loafing around beside the door. They were watching her behind her back! She lost her calm at once. She wanted the nuisances gone and turned around abruptly.

'What are you staring at?'

'You, you seem to have ... is it ... it looks like, well ... I mean, it actually does look like a d-d-dragon?!' Janka said in disbelief, but her eyes were shining and her voice was full of admiration.

'And what makes you think it's a dragon, might I ask?' Mrs Tossilo said crossly.

'Because, well, err, because it looks like one,' Johann said sounding just as confused as Janka.

'And how might you know what a dragon looks like? Hm? Are you an expert or something? Or is this the kind of rubbish they teach you at school these days?' Mrs Tossilo's voice grew louder. 'Now get out of here! Breaking into my flat like that! I should call the police!'

Janka started to leave, but Johann wasn't going to let himself be scared away. After all, their neighbour was holding a creature that looked just like a real-life sleeping baby dragon in her arms! There was no way they were going to go home. Police or no police.

'Where, where ... how, did you ...?' he stuttered.

'Are we allowed to stroke him? Just once? Just a tiny bit?' Janka dared ask.

'You are not allowed to do anything!' Mrs Tossilo sounded really cross now. 'You can shift your backsides out of my flat, is what you can do!'

When the children still showed little sign of moving, she stormed past them, flung open the door and shouted: 'Get out!!!!'

The little creature in her arms was startled, and jumped. It made a soft whining sound and gazed up at Mrs Tossilo, looking disturbed.

'Now see what you've done! You've woken him up!' Mrs Tossilo snapped. She often blamed other people for things that were really her own fault. Then her face softened. 'You go back to sleep now,' she murmured to the creature.

But the creature didn't go back to sleep. It started to wriggle and kick and opened its mouth so wide you could see more razor-sharp fangs. They were pearly white like snowy peaks on a lovely summer's day. But the way it was snapping around wasn't lovely at all. It only just missed Mrs Tossilo's thumb.

'You'd better put him down,' Johann said sounding worried.

Mrs Tossilo gave an indignant snort, but she put the creature back in the suitcase. It started to scuff its way through the clothes as if it was looking for something. Back and forth and back again. Then it stopped and stood to attention before it suddenly pounced on something.

PSSSSHEW! The pierced spray-can made a hissing sound and the creature started to wheeze and sneeze. It kept trying to dislodge the can jammed between its teeth, but it was stuck fast. It tugged and tugged more and more fiercely, banging its little head on the side of the suitcase. Mrs Tossilo couldn't watch, even if those teeth were sharp. She bent down and grabbed the creature by the back of its neck with one hand, and the aerosol with the other. There was a scraping sound as she pried it off the rows of teeth.

The creature let out a sigh of relief and rested its head on the back of Mrs Tossilo's hand looking exhausted.

'I think he must be hungry,' Johann said.

'Do you now?' Mrs Tossilo muttered, 'Well, go to the kitchen then. There's half a chicken in the fridge!' The creature lifted its little golden blue head 'Only eat burtelsur. And nettles,' it said.

'Oh dear,' Mrs Tossilo said. Of course, she didn't have any nettles. And of course she had no idea what burtelsur might be.

'Green vegetables would do.'

'I don't have any,' Mrs Tossilo apologised 'No green vegetables. Or red ones, or white or yellow.'

'Will starve. Will die. Will have to leave Mother.' The dark eyes brimmed with tears and slowly closed.

But Janka was already running out of the flat. A few moments later she returned holding a bag of lamb's lettuce and the green end of a leek. All of it disappeared in a jiffy.

'Thank you my friend. Thank you. Dragons need lots of green. And a name.'

## Upsets

‘Is she just weird? Or is she really mad?’ Johann lay on his bed sounding desperate.

‘Calm down, will you,’ Janka said. ‘And stop being so loud about it.’ She turned on her side and hoped her brother would stop ranting in a minute. She wanted to talk. About the incredible things they had experienced today. But it wasn’t possible if he kept shouting!

‘I mean, Hellooooo? All of sudden, out of the blue, she’s got a real live dragon in her flat. I mean, that’s enough for one day don’t you think? And then she goes and calls it *Kurty*. Is this real?’

Janka didn’t answer.

‘*Kurty*? That’s not a name! It’s an insult!’

Their mother entered the room.

‘People, what’s going on here?! It’s really late and you’re still up. Don’t forget, it’s school tomorrow!’

Who cares about school when stupid Mrs Tossilo was going label that magnificent golden, midnight blue creature with a name like *Kurty*. Johann wasn’t planning to calm down. He couldn’t.

‘If you don’t quieten down right now, I’ll confiscate your mobile and your laptop!’ their mother told Johann dryly.

He swallowed. He could feel the anger rising inside him. He swallowed again. Their mother left the room.

‘At least she could drop the ‘y’,’ Johann insisted more quietly. Kurt didn’t sound quite as bad, but it was bad enough. Whyever did she choose something so unsuitable? Dragons had names like *Morgolit*, *Silfur* or *Quarzeye* at the very least.’

‘I’ll give you a *Quarzeye* in a minute,’ Janka whispered. ‘If you don’t stop making this racket.’

Johann didn't want to be quiet. This was an outrage. The dragon couldn't defend itself, could it? It was far too small at the moment. But it was going to get a lot bigger. And then it would be too late. The name would have taken hold. Whenever the dragon darkened the sky with its wide-spread wings and glowing eyes, people would go 'Oh look, it's Kurty.'

Wasn't that awful! Johann was determined to save the dragon from the humiliation.



‘Uff,’ it sighed, obviously relieved to see her, ‘want burtelsur. Starving for burtelsur.’

‘Yes, yes, it’s all right. I’m on my way. I’ll run to the shops and buy something green to eat,’ Mrs Tossilo declared. The corners of the creature’s mouth started to tremble and he flapped his quivering wings desperately. ‘Come, too,’ he puffed and his dark eyes shone. ‘Just need to spread wings. That’s all. Won’t take long ...’

‘Err, I don’t think that is such a good idea,’ Mrs Tossilo said. ‘I’ll just go by myself and be back in a minute!’

‘Leave me alone? All alone?’ The dragon’s eyes widened in fear and he rattled his scales. He started to twist and turn and scrape his feet. He tried to wipe his face but shiny tears kept running out between his claws. He couldn’t sweep them away.

‘Oh dear, oh dear,’ Mrs Tossilo cried. She sat down on the bed and held her hands out to the weeping creature

‘I won’t go then. I’ll stay here.’

‘Am hungry,’ the dragon cried. Green puffs of steam started to pour out of his soft scaly nostrils.

There’s nothing for it. Mrs Tossilo decided. I have to go out and he has to come with me. Carefully, she picked him up and popped him into her silver handbag. From inside the bag she heard a sigh of relief. Next there was the shrill sound of the doorbell ringing. DRRRRINNG

‘Whatever next! Now someone’s at the door!’ Mrs Tossilo muttered under her breath. She ran to the door with the dragon in her bag and peeped through the spyhole. She could see an unshaven man with a trolley standing in the starkly lit corridor outside. A huge dark-grey trunk was packed on the trolley

‘What can I do for you?’ Mrs Tossilo shouted without opening the door.

‘Murx?’ the dragon asked from inside the bag.

‘Mrs Tossilo?’ the man outside called.

‘You’ve got to be quiet, do you hear me! As quiet as a mouse!’

‘Am not a mouse,’ the dragon growled.

‘Just for now. Please.’

‘I’ve got your blankets. I need a signature please,’ the man boomed outside.

‘Ah, yes!’ Mrs Tossilo called. When she was in Mexico she had been lured into buying rather a lot of blankets at an organised sales event. Today was the delivery date. She’d forgotten all about it.

‘Am hungry,’ the dragon yelped

‘Just a moment«, Mrs Tossilo called. She was beginning to sweat. She ran into the living-room, put the silver handbag down on the leather sofa, dragon and all, dashed back to the door and opened it.

‘Right, well, err, good morning. In you come. You’ve brought the blankets. How lovely. I just have to... Come in. Don’t just stand there, yes that’s it. Could you put that down here please? Where do I sign?’

‘Aaaaaarrrr!!!!’

‘Oh dear, the baby!’ Mrs Tossilo shouted far too loudly and rubbed the sweat off her forehead. ‘Give me that pen. Hurry up. The baby’s crying.’ She drew a squiggle on the receipt and then pushed the confused man back out of the door very quickly

‘Aaaaaarrrrruuu!!!’

When she ran back to the living room, her cheeks were glowing. ‘Here I am my treasure. Do be quiet though. We’re leaving now. Everything’s going to be fine.’ She took a deep breath and stood up straight. She was about to open the front door again when she heard a tearing sound followed by a gentle thud. Something landed on the floor. The dragon’s claws had torn the bag to pieces. Mrs Tossilo was left holding the silver handles while the dragon twisted about on the cold hall tiles.

Startled, she picked him up again. Then she ran back to the bedroom and put a pair of shoes in the bottom of another handbag. She set the dragon on top and left the flat at last. When she pressed the lift button, the bag started to steam. Pale green wisps of steam wafted through the slits of the zip and clouded the hall in mist. Perhaps she should go back inside. But then ... PLING ... the lift arrived. There was a crooked-looking man inside, along with Janka and Johann who were just back from school.

‘Can you tell me where the Tossilos live?’ the crooked man asked.

‘Over here!’ Mrs Tossilo said, pointing at her cream-coloured front door.  
‘And I’m Mrs Tossilo.’

‘Your fruit drying machine has arrived. Please sign here,’ the man said and handed her a flat parcel and the signing machine

When she was in Mexico, Mrs Tossilo had also been to a sales event on how to dry fruit.

She had to put down the dragon in his bag. She drew her squiggle on the display as Johann stepped out of the lift.

‘Where is all the green mist coming from?’

‘I don’t see any green mist,’ Mrs Tossilo hissed and tried to hide the bag behind her legs.

Janka came out of the lift, too.

The delivery man was the only one not interested in the green mist. He said goodbye and went back down in the lift.

‘Are you spying on me?’ Mrs Tossilo asked as she grabbed the bag.

‘We’re not spying. Is he in there?’ Janka asked and stared at the steaming handbag. ‘You’re not going out are you?’

‘That’s none of your business’ Mrs Tossilo snapped, cross because the lift was gone again.

‘I don’t think it’s a good idea,’ Johann said.

‘Oh, you don’t do you? Have you ever tried looking after a baby dragon for a whole morning? Hm? A creature you can’t leave alone for a minute, who happens to be incredibly hungry? How am I supposed to stay here with him and fetch him something to eat at the same time? Answer that one if you can.’

The green mist had become so dense that they could hardly see each other. The walls of the corridor had completely disappeared.

‘We’ve never looked after a baby dragon for a whole morning before,’ Johann said and went to the hall window. He opened it and the mist lifted a bit. Johann held out his hand for the bag ‘but we *could* look after one all afternoon. We’ll take care of him while you go shopping.’

Mrs Tossilo would have loved to say, *oh you'd like that wouldn't you, smarty-pants*, but she managed to hold her tongue. Instead she mumbled. 'Won't your parents be home soon?'

'Mum doesn't get back until late, neither does Dad,' Janka said.

Mrs Tossilo still hesitated for a moment, but really she was relieved. The children were right. It wasn't a good idea to turn up at the shops with a steaming handbag.

'Oh, all right, but look after him!' she grumbled and handed the bag to Johann. Then she watched the two children disappear through the green mist to the stairs.

## How to Keep a Dragon, Part Two

Once they got to their room, Johann pushed his laptop, boxes of files and piles of pens out of the way and set the bag down on his desk. He undid the zip. A spiraling cloud of grey-green steam rose to the ceiling.

Janka stared in horror at the steaming creature as Johann carefully lifted him out from in between the high-heeled shoes. He lay in his arms like a drowned rat.

‘Is he dead?’

‘No. I can feel his heart beating.’ Johann blew at the lifeless dragon softly.

‘Hey little dragon, start moving,’ Janka whispered sounding worried. ‘Hey, Kurt ...’ ‘Don’t call him that, please, whatever you do!’ Johann snapped at her.

‘What else am I supposed to call him? Mrs Tossilo chose that name! Remember? Yesterday she said she would call him Kurty. When someone’s unconscious you have to call them by their name to get them to wake up. Everybody knows that.’

‘No! That name is why he can’t move anymore and why the whole place is full of steam.’ Holding on to the dragon with one hand, Johann fished his phone out of his pocket with the other. ‘You don’t understand how powerful names can be. If people called me Kurty, I’d start evaporating, too.’

‘I don’t think the steam is anything to do with his name,’ Janka retorted. But Johann wasn’t listening. He was focusing on his mobile, frantically running his fingers across the display. Janka opened the window. Fresh air came into the room along with the rustling sound of the last leaves on the tall poplar trees which grew around the block of flats.

Janka thought about what Johann had said. He was probably right. Kurty really was an awful name. ‘How about we call him *Kurmo*?’ she whispered almost to herself and turned back to Johann. *Kurmo* sounded very nice. She repeated it a couple of times quietly under her breath, as if she were testing it from every angle. *Kurmo*, *Kurmo*, it sounded soft and full of power at the same

time. It sounded simple yet mysterious. It sounded midnight blue and golden. It fitted.

‘*Kurmo* would be perfect, wouldn’t it?’

‘I hate the Internet,’ Johann said crossly, ‘there are eighty million single pieces of information about every scrap of rubbish, but I can’t find one post about how to fix an unconscious steam dragon.’

‘Why don’t I mix a green cabbage smoothie?’ Janka asked because she wanted to do something to help. ‘We can spoon it into his mouth. Maybe he’s weak from lack of food. I don’t think he’s had anything to eat today.’ Without waiting to hear what her brother might think, she ran out of the room to the kitchen.

Johann sat down on the edge of the bed with the listless dragon in his arms. The poor creature really seemed to be quite ill, but it was very nice to hold him so close. Johann stroked his delicate silky back and whispered. ‘Kurmo, can you hear me?’ He waited ‘Hey, Kurmo Silfur! It’s me, Johann. Can you hear me?’ Although the dragon still didn’t move, Johann felt certain that his words weren’t in vain.

Janka returned with a glass of green purée. She sat down next to Johann on the bed. She sucked some purée into a straw she’d brought with her, put her thumb over the top and then carefully pushed it in between the steaming dragon’s lips. Once, twice, and again and again. The steam slowly eased and finally stopped all together! Now they could hear a gentle snorting sound. And the dragon licked his lips hungrily.

Janka held her breath.

‘I think that’s done the trick,’ Johann said smiling suddenly and looking relieved. ‘Can you fetch something more solid now?’

Janka ran back to the kitchen and returned with three packets of frozen spinach. She threw two of them onto the bed and was about to open the third when the dragon suddenly plunged out of Johann’s arms onto the bed. He unlocked his jaw the way a snake might, dived forward and gulped down the frozen leaves in one go, packets and all, without chewing or even breathing properly. One final cloud of steam blew out of his nostrils and then he stretched

himself and fixed his eyes on Janka, or the last packet of spinach, to be more precise.

‘Drop it!’ Johann managed to yell just in time. Barely a second later, razor-sharp teeth snapped shut just where Janka’s right hand had been. The dragon fell back onto the floor with trembling wings. Janka was trembling, too. She felt as if her legs had suddenly turned to jelly. She needed to sit down.

‘Burtl!’ the dragon gurgled and rubbed his head on her side. ‘Burtl.’

‘I know,’ Janka managed to say faintly. ‘But I’d like less burtl please.’

‘Crux!’ The dragon pressed against her and gurgled again.

Janka breathed in deeply and tried to smile, but she didn’t manage it very well. The gurgling grew louder and turned into an ear-shattering wail.

‘That’s enough, Kurmo! It’s all right. Janka’s still got her hand and you’ll be more careful next time!’ Johann sounded brisk. Janka pulled herself together and patted the dragon’s head. Immediately he grew quieter. Unfortunately not for long, because as he looked up at Johann and saw the room for the first time he seemed to notice that something was missing. *Click, clack, clack*, he ran across the floorboards to the door and cocked his head to one side.

‘Err, we want to stay in here,’ Johann said quickly, who could see that the dragon was trying to reach the door handle. ‘I’ll go and get more to eat in a minute,’ he said, but the dragon didn’t want anything more to eat. He was full now. He wanted to go back to Mrs Tossilo. Now. This minute.

He let out a heartfelt sigh and tried to jump up to the door handle.

‘Your ‘Mother’ has gone shopping,’ Johann explained. And quickly put his foot against the door. ‘She’s getting you more munchies.’ As soon as the dragon heard this, he stopped jumping. And let out another sigh. He huddled up to the door looking like he was trying to think.

Johann was thinking, too. He was trying to work out what you did with a dragon in your flat.

There were various options according to the computer games he liked to play.

You could kill a dragon, or use it strategically to force the enemy out of ancient ruins and hidden corners, and you could always destroy everything with

dragon fire. In another game, you could win a dragon's friendship, then feed and tame it and ride through the air on its back.

The creature crouched by the door really didn't look as if anyone would ever be able to fly through the air sitting on his back. Johann stopped thinking about computer games. He suddenly remembered that there was one thing he could do though. He could save the dragon from lifelong humiliation.

'Kurmo!' he called in a firm voice. The dragon looked up and cocked his head again. 'Kurmo Silfur, come onto our green carpet and sit next to me. There's something I'd like to ask!'

‘Where is he? What have you done to him, you ... you ...’ Mrs Tossilo barked at Janka who was standing at the front door with the empty bag in her hands. Yesterday, Janka had been intimidated by her neighbour’s glaring green eyes and unfriendly words, but the afternoon spent with Kurmo had changed all that. Now she knew that Mrs Tossilo wasn’t going to hurt her. In fact, she was sure her neighbour would be grateful for all their help.

‘We gave him something to eat and then we talked,’ Janka said. ‘And he practised being quiet and learning to fly. He’s tired out now and has gone to sleep. I came to see if you were back already.’

‘Well, why didn’t you bring him with you?’ Mrs Tossilo complained, although she didn’t sound quite as annoyed as the moment before..

‘Like I said, I wanted to see if you’re back. And the bag,’ Janka held out the drooping handbag for Mrs. Tossilo to see, ‘is too small now. He can’t fit into my rucksack either. Have you got anything bigger? Then we’ could bring him down right away. ‘

In response, Mrs Tossilo made a gruff, grumpy sound that could have been yes or no. But she waved Janka into her flat and closed the door.

‘Come on then!’ They went into the bedroom. Mrs. Tossilo opened the wardrobe. She frowned as she rummaged through her collection of thirty-three bags in different materials and colours. Unfortunately, they were all about the same shape and size.

‘Let’s use that,’ Janka suggested, pointing at the pink suitcase still lying unpacked on the bedroom floor. ‘There’s plenty of room, and it’s where he was born, isn’t it?’

‘Poppycock!’ Mrs. Tossilo said. ‘Born in a suitcase? What are you talking about? Anyway, it’s none of your business.’ But she threw the chaos of clothes out of the suitcase onto the aubergine carpet and got ready to go.

‘When Kurmo wakes up, he’ll be glad you’re back,’ Janka said as they walked up the stairs. ‘We were fine, but I think he missed you terribly.’

Mrs. Tossilo stared down at the dirty white tiles on the stairs. No one had ever missed her before. She hid her smile so that Janka wouldn’t see what she was feeling. Then she looked up. What did this girl just say?

‘Kurmo? How could you forget? His name is Kurty. I told you last night. I said I’d call him Kurty.’

Janka frowned.

‘Kurty? Oh dear! We thought it was Kurmo. I’m really sorry. We called him Kurmo Silfur all afternoon.’

Mrs. Tossilo snorted in contempt as she put her foot on the last step up to the ninth floor.

‘Well, never mind,’ she said, more kindly. ‘He won’t have got used to the wrong name yet, especially if it sounds as silly as Silfur!’

Janka kept on nodding politely, mumbling ‘Yes, yes, of course.’ She didn’t mention any of the things Kurmo had told her brother and her during the afternoon. In between all the ‘cruxes’ and ‘burtls’, they had found out that their dragon was as old as life itself. That he was meant to stay inside the stone egg for much longer. That something must have happened, because here he was, nonetheless. He gurgled on about the ‘Creature of Renewal’, ‘Burtlurux’, about light and fellowship, and the ‘Great Balancing Act’. That was all Janka had been able to understand what with all the burtls and cruxes and everything.

The children had listened to the dragon with glowing faces. The things he told them about sounded so mysterious and exciting, and seemed to involve them somehow, too.

When the dragon stopped talking, they built a starting ramp out of piles of books and he had tried to fly. It didn’t work very well, but he didn’t give up until the ramp collapsed. Then he started talking again.

He talked about hatching. After a while she began to understand that the first person a dragon sees after it has hatched becomes its heartfelt person. And when someone from the human world calls a dragon for the first time, the name they choose will be its heartfelt name.

‘What is a heartfelt name?’ She had wanted to know.

‘It digs deep. It takes root, generates dragon power, can never be taken away.’

The amber circle around the dragon’s round black eyes shone even brighter than before.

‘Did Mrs Tossilo, I mean, did your mother call you by your name?’ Johann had asked cautiously, hoping he knew what was coming.

The dragon gently shook its head, and Janka and Johann smiled. Kurmo Silfur would never let the beautiful name they had found for him be taken away. Not by Mrs Tossilo, nor by anyone else.

## Stormy Weather

In the coming weeks, the city was hit by wintry storms. Gusty winds swept through the streets and blew the last leaves off the trees.

It took Janka and Johann almost twice as long to get to school and back now. It was very annoying because they needed more time at home. Since Kurmo had come into their lives, things were pretty stormy there, too. Stormy and crowded. The days were never long enough.

Mrs. Tossilo and the children had much more to do with each other than they used to.

After having spent the first afternoon with Janka and Johann, the dragon seemed to take it for granted that he would see them every day. And Janka and Johann loved looking after him.

Kurmo Silfur was growing up fast and was much calmer now, but he still didn't like being left alone. Although he tried, he just couldn't get used to it. Two hours of loneliness was all his dragon heart could stand before he started to panic. To prevent this from happening, Mrs. Tossilo had reduced the number of hours she did at the shoe shop. She stayed at home in the mornings and didn't go to work until Janka got back from school. Janka and Johann took it in turns to stay with the dragon in the afternoon. For the first time ever, it was an advantage having parents who were away a lot and didn't have much time to look after them.

It was a Wednesday afternoon. Janka and Lenya were climbing the silks under the circus dome. Mrs Tossilo was busy selling antiperspirant foot sprays. Johann and Kurmo were gazing out of the window of Mrs Tossilo's flat. It was already growing dark but Johann left the lights off so that they could see out and no-one could see them. The wind was blowing so hard that even the cranes opposite were swaying slightly. The building site looked a bit scary from this point of view with all the glaring lights shining down from the scaffolding.

'Want out,' Kurmo said.

‘Yeah, it looks cool. But we can’t go out there. I can’t just traipse through the streets with a dragon in tow, can I?’

‘Not walk,’ Kurmo said, ‘fly!’

Johann looked at the dragon and tried to work out if he was being serious? After all, Kurmo’s wings were still pretty small, and his daily flying exercises weren’t exactly a success. Did the dragon think the wind was going to carry him, or ...?

‘Want to breathe air and eat nettles and fly through the sky.’ Kurmo's round eyes shone.

‘We can’t,’ Johann explained.

‘Will be very quiet. Very quiet and very small,’ Kurmo pleaded.

What was the dragon thinking about? Even if he is small, someone would discover him, they lived right in the city centre for one thing, and besides, what would Mrs Tossilo say?

‘Please!’

‘No.’

The dragon’s eyes filled with tears.

Johann gave in.

‘All right then,’ he sighed. ‘We can do breathing air and eating nettles, maybe, but you really do have to be quiet. Capish?’ Kurmo dug his claws into Mrs. Tossilo's shaggy carpet and said, ‘Capish, crux! Do we need nail polish?’

‘No, we don’t need nail polish,’ Johann laughed. ‘But we need the suitcase. I hope you can still fit into it.’

Kurmo Silfur did still fit into it. He had to curl up tight, but he didn’t mind. Johann closed the clasps, put on his jacket and left the flat, pulling the case behind him.

As he stepped out of block of flats, the street lights came on. He battled the wind and crossed the road. There weren’t as many potholes on this side, and Kurmo wouldn’t be bounced about as much. It wasn’t until someone came towards him that Johann's heart suddenly started beating very fast. What was he doing here? Had he gone mad? He couldn’t just stroll through Berlin with a dragon in tow. What if ...? But the man walked past without even turning his

head. A draft of wind went under Johann's jacket and blew it open. Johann started laughing. They were cool. Nobody would ever guess what was in the suitcase. Not in a million years. And as if to prove it, a woman with a pushchair and two bicycle messengers appeared. Neither the woman nor the two men took any note of Johann or the suitcase. Kurmo didn't make a sound. Everything was fine.

Johann decided to take the dragon to the Volkspark. No one ever went there after dark. And there were stinging nettles everywhere. They could even visit the playground. If Kurmo went on the swings, he could even get a flying-through-the-air feeling that might do.

The fastest way to the park was to take the U-Bahn train. But when they got to the platform, Johann soon realized that things were more difficult in the brightly-lit station. The dragon, or rather the dragon in the suitcase, wasn't a problem. But the suitcase was. No boy his age would be seen dead walking through a place like this with a pink suitcase. The rhinestones on the handle didn't help, either. Fingers crossed that none of those teenagers at the kiosk see me, Johann thought. The two girls on the bench were already laughing. Luckily the train roared into the station. People poured out. Johann got in. Luckily, all the people in the carriage were over fifty. They didn't have a problem with pink suitcases. And anyway, they were all staring at their phones. There was nothing to worry about.