



Dagmar H. Mueller / Sabine Rothmund
The Little Robber Dragon
Having to Kidnap Princesses · Vol. 1
5+ / 176 pp. / 17 x 22 cm / hardcover with
fabric-covered spine / € 15.00
ISBN 978-3-649-63612-0

English-language translation © Catherine Wolterman

The Big Day

“Not in a million years!” huffed the little dragon.

“Not in a million years and not for a hundred golden-haired princesses!”

And he stamped his fat little dragon foot so hard that sparks flew from his nostrils. “No! *Fire, smoke and sooty scales!* I’m never doing it and that’s all there is to it!”

The little dragon and his friends were sitting on the dragon playground in the middle of the dragon village. He was cross.

The dragon village, as everyone knows, is a long, long way away, nestled in the dragon mountains. It’s so high that there are only a few who can climb up there. And, of course, there aren’t any paths in the dragon mountains either. Why should dragons use paths when it’s so much quicker for them to fly?

The little dragon was sitting up there in the dragon village, feeling cross. And no wonder! He had just been made to spend the entire day hiding in the bushes on a little hill with the other dragon children. And not once had he been allowed to snort, stamp or even just go for a quick fly to stretch his wings. (...)

They had been crouching there for hours. Far too long for smart, fire-breathing dragon children. And when what was supposed to happen finally happened, the little dragon was so tired and grumpy from doing nothing for so long that he had almost lost interest in learning anything.

And today was supposed to have been the big day! He had been waiting for this day for so long. They had spent so much time in school preparing for it. It was the day the dragon children were finally allowed to be present at a real princess kidnapping!

Because kidnapping princesses, you see, is the one thing a dragon must be able to do. And do well! What sort of dragon would you be if you couldn’t even manage to kidnap the tiniest princess? The others would laugh themselves silly. But – hold on! – don’t start thinking that kidnapping princesses is easy! Oh no! The proper way to kidnap princesses is something that must be learnt. You can’t just turn up and say: “Hey, you! Princess! Consider yourself kidnapped. Okay, let’s go!” No, it’s not as simple as that! Any princess would just stick her tongue out at you. That much is clear. And then? Then you’d look pretty stupid. No! A dragon has got to do better than that. And the proper way for dragons to kidnap princesses was what the dragon teacher had been showing them today. At least, that had been the plan.

“Watch carefully!” the master dragon teacher had said. “I’m now going to demonstrate the right and proper way to kidnap a princess.”

With a single, majestic flap of his wings, he glided down to the street below and hid behind a pile of boulders, right next to a bend in the road, in the spot where the carriages would have to slow down to negotiate the curve. The master dragon teacher was clever, you see. He knew every trick and every strategy when it came to kidnapping princesses. The dragon teacher waited patiently behind the stones as hour after hour crawled by, until – at last – a big red carriage, drawn by four horses, appeared at the edge of the forest. (...)

The princess was singing sweetly to herself to pass the time on her journey. The wind carried the gentle song high up the hill to the bushes where the dragon children were still crouching, waiting to see what would happen.

(...)

The little dragon had rolled his eyes and pulled a face. Dragon children don’t tend to be fans of the sound of princesses singing. The carriage was fast approaching the pile of boulders where the old dragon teacher was hiding. The dragon children craned their necks so as not to miss anything. The carriage reached the bend in the road, the dragon teacher took a deep breath, jumped out in front of the carriage with two flaps of his mighty wings, opened his mouth and breathed a cloud of fire and smoke.

Here we go!

The horses spooked, the driver brought the carriage to an abrupt halt and the princess in the wagon yelled, “*Helllllp!*”

Everything was going perfectly.

So far.

Up in his hiding place, the little dragon had been looking on breathlessly, almost starting to summon up a feeling of excitement about the whole thing. But, just then, horses appeared suddenly at the edge of the forest. At least five or six strong-looking knights were galloping straight for the carriage.

“*HELLLLP!*” yelled the princess again, and the knights gathered even more pace, drawing their swords and swinging them menacingly over their heads.

“Hold on, fair princess!” they cried.

“Help is on its way!”

Yes, help was on its way. But not for the poor dragon teacher.

The dragon children could only look on in horror as their master dragon teacher struggled to turn and defend himself quickly enough as the fearless knights struck him with their swords.

Rivers of thick, black dragon blood flowed down the road and the master dragon teacher hadn’t even attempted to breathe fire. He simply fled as quickly as he could.

“*Fire, smoke and sooty scales!*” came the little dragon’s whisper, breaking his silence for the first time. “This kidnapping malarkey can really come back to bite you!”

But the master dragon teacher wouldn’t have been a master dragon teacher if he had let himself be discouraged by a few little scratches.

“*Burning red heat and black dragon blood,*” he cursed quietly, surreptitiously licking his wounds.

Because dragons never complain. And master dragon teachers most certainly don’t. And because a dragon’s work must be done, the dragon teacher only took a short rest before simply choosing a different bend in the road to kidnap a different princess. It wasn’t long at all before a new carriage came along the street. The horses spooked on cue, the driver brought the carriage to a halt and the

princess in the wagon gave her loud cry of “*HeIIlllp!*” And this time, as luck would have it, no sword-swinging knights appeared.

Yes, at last, everything had gone according to plan, and the helpless driver had no choice but to sit and watch as the princess was kidnapped in accordance with procedure. With the princess clasped in his dragon talons, screaming, “*Help, help,*” the master dragon teacher finally flew back to the dragon village, satisfied, with his dragon pupils following on behind him.

A Matter of Princes and Princesses

It didn't take long to get back to the dragon village; after all, dragons can fly faster than any bird in the world. And as the princess was caught in the talons of the master dragon teacher, it wasn't far for her either. Still, she put up a brave struggle.

Within reason, of course. Just the right amount of struggle for a princess who's just been kidnapped. And certainly not enough to risk falling. Princesses aren't stupid, after all. Who would want to risk hitting the ground from dragon cruising altitude?

So, the princess struggled a little bit and then had a nice rest so she could enjoy the journey. She had no doubt heard a lot about the beauty of the dragon mountains from other princesses who had been kidnapped before, but it was another thing entirely to experience such an incomparable view from this altitude for oneself. Every mountain top was decorated with powdery white snow, and in every valley, ten million flowers in every colour of the rainbow shone up at the princess. She had to make a concerted effort to occasionally remember to struggle, despite her amazement. After a while, she could make out the dragon village in the distance. The mountainside was strewn with colourful huts with thatched roofs and the entire place was crawling with dragons. Big ones and small ones.

There were mummy dragons and daddy dragons; granny and grandpa dragons; many, many dragon children; and a few terribly dangerous, terribly serious-looking ancient giant dragons.

Once they had reached the village, the master dragon teacher had deposited the kidnapped princess – in accordance with procedure – in a designated princess cave with a thick iron gate.

She was sitting there now, crying bitter tears. Because that's what one does when one has been kidnapped by dragons and now must wait to be rescued by a prince.

The princess's cave wasn't all that unpleasant, of course. Dragons are exceedingly friendly creatures. The cave room was thoughtfully equipped with a soft, fluffy princess sofa where the princess could sit and cry in comfort. There was even a dresser with lots of colourful hair bands and brushes, a large mirror and of course enough tissues to ensure the princess can pass the time making herself look beautiful while moping in true princess fashion.

You see, the whole thing wasn't that bad for the princesses at all.

“Being kidnapped is no big deal for these princesses,” grumbled the little dragon at lunchtime, as he sat with his friends on the dragon playground in front of the princess's cave. “They just wait for one of their stupid human princes, and then when he rescues her, they can just go off and get married.”

But, *fire, smoke and sooty scales*, what's in it for me? I'm not stupid! At the end of the day, the princess gets her prince and I get the beating. No! No and no, I'm not doing it!”

At precisely that moment, the master dragon teacher came limping around the corner. Yes, limping, because even dragon wounds don't heal that quickly. But, as you already know, a master dragon teacher tries never to let his pain show.

“*Red heat and dragon blood!* Who's not going to do what?” he asked the group sternly.

“The little dragon doesn't want to kidnap princesses!” exclaimed a cheeky dragon girl with summery fire-red scales. “But we dragons have to kidnap princesses, don't we?”

“Of course you have to!” the master dragon teacher confirmed.

“Kidnapping princesses has been the work of dragons for centuries! It is a great honour! Who’s supposed to kidnap the princesses, if not us?” The dragon teacher gave them all a scrutinising look. “And you know why it’s so important to kidnap a princess in accordance with procedure, don’t you?” Another dragon girl with beautiful, long, dark-green scales raised her claw and proudly recited from the dragon handbook:

“In order for the prince and princess to find one another. Because if the princess isn’t kidnapped, the prince won’t ever notice how much he misses her and how much he likes her.”

A dragon boy with a row of sharp, bright-yellow spikes on his back yelled: “Exactly! If the prince didn’t come to rescue the princess, then she would never notice how brave he is, and maybe she wouldn’t want to marry him.”

“I see you were paying attention!” the master dragon teacher was pleased.

“A dragon is tasked with kidnapping princesses so that the princes can rescue them and then the prince and princess can get married in accordance with regulations. That’s the way it’s always been and the way it always will be.”

“We know all this!” the dragon children interrupted their teacher, laughing.

(...)

The little dragon didn’t feel like laughing at all. ***“Fire, smoke and sooty scales!”*** he muttered.

He huffed petulant clouds of grey smoke out of his nose. “What kind of life is that? The best-case scenario is getting attacked by stupid knights every day and counting yourself lucky if you escape with most of your scales still intact? No, I’d rather stay at home.”

(...)

The dragon teacher narrowed his eyes until they glinted like polished marble. “At home? Doing nothing? What do you want to be when you grow up, little dragon? A dangerous princess kidnapper or a ***giant green bunny rabbit?***”

The other dragon children immediately started to laugh again.

“Bunny rabbit! Bunny rabbit! You’re just a green bunny rabbit!” the dragon with the yellow spikes taunted him.

“Pah,” huffed the little dragon. “Pah, see if I care!”

But he said it very quietly. Maybe it would be better for the master dragon teacher not to hear. Then the little dragon shuffled a few metres further to the big acacia trees on the edge of the playground and no longer felt cross, but sad. So sad, that fat dragon tears started rolling down his scaly cheeks. Why did the entire world want poor dragons to endure scratch after scratch, scar after scar? Just so that others could be happy? Where was the thanks in that? Had one single royal couple ever made their way back to the dragon mountains after finding one another and getting married? In all those centuries, had even the tiniest ‘thank you’ package ever arrived in the dragon village? Filled with ***raspberry liquorice sticks*** or ***chilli peppers with sugar frosting***, for example, or similar treats that dragons love, as all humans must know?

No, no and no! Nobody had ever given a second thought to the selfless, hard-working dragons, after they had dutifully completed their honourable task.