

The Dragon in the Mini

By: Chelsea Hindle

When my elder sister, Freya, suggested we go for a drive and have a coffee together, I raised my eyebrows and folded my arms.

“We’ve lived together for, what, seventeen years? And you suddenly feel like getting to know me?”

“Stop being such a teenager,” Freya replied, rolling her eyes. I was tempted to point out that eye rolling was a predominantly teenaged activity, but I resisted the temptation.

“Fine,” I replied, “But we’ve gotta be back before eight so that I can catch the final episode of *Sherlock*. I’m not missing out on *Sherlock* just so I can sit and watch you drink coffee.”

“Whatever,” was Freya’s reply.

Several minutes later we were in Freya’s ’70 model green Mini, rattling along the highway from our home. About ten minutes, she suddenly zipped onto a side road.

“Since we’re making a day out of it,” she told me nonchalantly, “We might as well take the scenic route.”

My dad was a fan of “taking the scenic route” and that usually ended us up lost. I should have taken control right then and there, demanded that we turn around and go on the highway or something. But I didn’t. I just sat there, determined to be grouchy and glared out the front windscreen.

At first everything was fine. I mean, other than Freya trying to absolute best to get me to talk to her about deep and meaningful things.

“Do you have a boyfriend yet, Sunny?” she asked me cheerfully, tapping her fingers on the dashboard in time with the Ed Sheeran song playing.

The Dragon in the Mini
By: Chelsea Hindle

“Nope.”

“How’s school?”

“Okay, I guess.”

“Do you *do* anything interesting?”

“Probably not.” I paused for a minute, watching the gum trees flash past and a bird neatly dodge the windscreen. “What about *you*? Have you been doing anything interesting?”

Freya considered this, still tapping out a tattoo on her steering wheel. “Probably not.” She finally answered.

“You hesitated.” I said, crossing my arms.

“What’s *that* supposed to mean?” Freya demanded.

“Well, you’re lying. You have been doing something interesting.”

Freya exhaled sharply and stopped tapping, “How would I know what you think is interesting?”

“I don’t know.”

Silence blanketed us for a long while and despite myself, I began to enjoy the trip, though I would never have admitted that to Freya. I found myself staring out the window, admiring the sleek white trunks of the eucalyptus, the never-ending fields beyond those of dusty yellow, dotted with sheep or cattle, the deep blue of the sky, the birds playing through the trees. *It’s kinda nice out here.* I decided.

The Dragon in the Mini

By: Chelsea Hindle

My attention was drawn back to the car by a funny squeaking sound, like the noise baby magpies make. Another sound followed it, something that sounded like claws scratching across metal.

I glanced quickly at Freya, who didn't seem to have heard anything.

“What's that?” I asked.

“What's what?” Freya replied. Had her face coloured slightly?

“Didn't you just hear it? Like, a squeaking sound from your car?”

“Ah... well, you know...you know my car, it makes funny sounds.”

I raised my eyebrows. Freya was definitely blushing that time. She turned the radio up and was just about to start singing, off-key, to an Icehouse song when there came a sputtering from the engine of the Mini.

There was another squawking, and the whole Mini shuddered.

The car coasted to an ominous halt just inside the boundaries of a tiny country town, beside the only concrete footpath in the whole place. Freya clambered out of the car, muttering under her breath. “Okay? What now?” she asked, maybe talking to the world in general, maybe talking to me, it was hard to tell.

“Pop the bonnet,” I advised, “Then you'll look like you know what you're doing.”

Surprisingly, Freya followed my advice and popped the bonnet and then stared into it, like she might stare at a page of Latin. Then a look of horror flicked over her face. “Hey!” she hissed, plunging into her bonnet. “Hey you! Come back!”

I stared at her, “You feeling okay?”

The Dragon in the Mini

By: Chelsea Hindle

Freya ignored me, grabbed at something inside the engine and then started back abruptly, sticking her finger in her mouth. “Burnd myfelf.” She mumbled, fingers in mouth.

I sat down on the pavement, pulling my knees up to my chin, and stared morosely at her. “Remember what I said about *Sherlock*!” I reminded her as she pulled out her phone.

“Drat *Sherlock*! There’s worse things to worry about!” Freya snapped back.

“What do you mean ‘drat *Sherlock*?’” I mumbled under my breath. “This was all your idea. It’s not my fault.”

Meanwhile, Freya was tapping a number into her phone. She ignored me, and dialed the number. “Hey...yeah, I know...yeah...” she frowned, “I didn’t mean to! I don’t go around just releasing—” she glanced sideways at me. “I have Sunny with me.”

Curiosity sparked by Freya’s weird conversation, I got up and peered into the Mini. In the depths of the gloom, I thought I saw something move there, like a flick of a lizard’s tail. I bent forward to get a better look, but Freya noticed and shooed me away before I could see it properly.

“I realise that!” she growled, “What can I do? The stupid creature’s blown up my engine and I’m stranded in the middle of nowhere. This wasn’t what I had planned!”

“Fine, fine, I’m coming!”

Freya snorted and hung up.

“You’ve got something in there,” I peered around her. “What is it?”

“None of your business.” Freya stepped in front of me.

The Dragon in the Mini

By: Chelsea Hindle

“There’s something in there! It’s a lizard thing.” I narrowed my eyes, “You weren’t at Uni, were you?”

Freya squirmed. Then something small and brown shot from the engine and latched onto her hand. She squealed, then grabbed the creature and stuffed it into her jacket. But not before, I saw something which looked uncommonly like a tiny... dragon.

“What *is* that?”

Freya opened her mouth, shut it quickly, and then opened it again. “Its, uh, well. Yeah.” Her shoulders suddenly sagged. “No, I wasn’t at Uni.”

I frowned at this admission, “What were you doing then?”

Freya glanced around, then retrieved the little dragon from her pocket and held it out on her hand. “Hey, calm down, little fella,” She crooned to the dragon. “It’s okay, Benedict, Sunny won’t hurt you.”

“So, if you weren’t at Uni, what were you doing?”

Freya grinned sheepishly, then winced as Benedict bit her finger again. “I was studying fantastical creatures. That’s how I came across Benedict. He needed a mum, so I’m taking care of him.”

I peered down at Benedict, whose long tongue flicked out and licked his nose. He tilted his head and stared at me with his big eyes.

“He’s...cute.” I said finally. It should have surprised me that my sister had a dragon in her car, but it really didn’t. I’d always thought Freya might be related to a dragon. This simply proved my suspicion.

Freya smiled shyly, “You won’t tell Mum and Dad?”

The Dragon in the Mini

By: Chelsea Hindle

I shook my head quickly, “No way! You’re suddenly a whole lot cooler than you were an hour ago.”

Freya blushed, “Thanks.” Then she rolled her eyes, “You’re only saying that because you want to hold him!”

I grinned back, “Nope, but...” I raised my eyebrows.

Benedict scampered onto my arm and Freya peered at her engine. “Well thanks a lot, for ruining my engine.” She muttered to him. “Hopefully, someone will get here soon and can take a look at this.” She blew hair out of her eyes. Then she turned to look at me and Benedict flapped back to her arm and crept into her jacket.

“I’m sorry about this, Sunny. I really hope we get out of here in time to catch *Sherlock*.” She said, actually sounding genuine

“Ah,” I waved my hand vaguely, “I don’t mind. I don’t even mind if I have to wait until it comes out on disc. This is the most fun I’ve had in ages!” I paused, “Thanks.”

Freya opened her mouth, probably to say something elegant and poetic, but she barked suddenly as Benedict emerged just long enough to bite her on the stomach.

“He’s—ow!—teething—ouch!”

I grinned, and then started to laugh. It was nice to laugh with my sister, laugh at my sister.

“Best day ever. You know, you’re okay.”