

LEE NEWBERY

**THE
FIRST
SHADOWDRAGON**

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PUFFIN





There's a unicorn butt poking out of our lawn.

You can tell it's definitely a unicorn, and not just your average horse bum, because its tail is glittery. If it was to do a poo, I guarantee it would be rainbow-coloured.

I can see it through the kitchen window, not far from the oak tree, surrounded by piles of loose earth. My heart stops when I spot it there because if it's not in the house that means Edie will freak –

'I WANT MADAM SUGARPUFF!'



Uh-oh. The door to the kitchen crashes open, and I nearly fall off my stool as a tiny red-faced toddler barges in, followed by a yapping fox cub, followed by a panting Pa, and finally a wide-eyed Dad.

‘Edie, just calm down! We’ll find Madam Sugarpuff,’ Pa exclaims as my sister tears round the room. Cadno bounces after her, his tongue lolling and sparks flying from his tail.

‘Charlie!’ cries Dad, clamping a firm hand on my shoulder. ‘Have you seen your sister’s magic horse?’



‘It’s a unicorn,’ I tell him, ‘and yes, I have.’

Pa’s head whips round when he hears my reply, and he stubs his toe on the corner of a cupboard. He lets out a blood-curdling howl, grabs his foot and starts to hop about the room.

‘Aaaaaarghwhereeeeeeeegaahhhhhhhisssssssiiiiiiiiit?’

‘I think what your pa is trying to ask,’ says Dad, ‘is where exactly have you seen Madam Sugarflump, so that we may . . . er, calm your sister?’

‘Sugarpuff,’ I reply, nodding towards the window.

‘And she’s out there. Buried near the oak tree.’

Dad follows my gaze. Pa grabs on to him for support, one foot still hovering off the floor. He growls when he spots Madam Sugarpuff’s bottom protruding from the lawn.

‘That fox has been at it again! Always burying things! Remember last week when he got the remote control? I had to watch nursery rhymes for the whole day! I was doing “Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes” in my sleep!’

‘It’s true,’ says Dad. ‘He even grabbed my toes once, thinking they were his. Got a big toe up his nostril for that.’

Pa glares at him. ‘And what about last week when he buried your car keys in the flower bed?’

‘All right, so the little thing’s getting up to mischief,’ says Dad with a shrug. Cadno is sitting on the floor now, staring up at my dads with big, blinking amber eyes and swishing his tail. ‘So what? Look at him. He’s just so *cute*.’

Dad *does* make a good point. He might have grown

a little over the past couple of months, but Cadno is still basically an adorable ball of fluff. OK, so maybe his new hobby *does* include snaffling every valuable object he can find and burying it in the garden. And maybe he does burst into flames every now and then. Just last week, he accidentally set Edie's discarded nappy on fire when Pa was in the middle of changing her.

That was stinky, let me tell you.

But he's still a good boy, doing normal firefox-cub stuff. No big deal. He'll grow out of it, and then Dad and Pa won't be so stressed. It's just been a lot since they adopted Edie a few months ago.

'No one's denying he's cute,' says Pa, his arms crossed. 'But he's also dug up our whole garden, set the sofa cushions on fire, singed the curtains *and* melted Charlie's homework.'

I grimace. Cadno *did* melt my homework a few days ago – a model castle I was building for our Welsh class because we're studying legends and mythology. It was looking good before Cadno

got his flaming paws on it.

That's what I'd been doing before I was rudely interrupted by the rest of my family: starting to rebuild my castle. I'd just got the matchstick foundations up, precariously held together by glue.

Pa sighs. 'I . . . I don't know if maybe this is all a bit too much for us.'

Dad places a hand on his shoulder. 'What do you mean, my love?'

'Look,' Pa replies, gesturing at Cadno, who has begun leaping up to try and grab a tea towel that's draped over a drawer handle, and at Edie, who is squealing as she swipes at his tail. 'We've got a furry firework from a faraway realm and a two-year-old who thinks she's the Queen of the Universe. We're out of our depth! We've never had a pet before. We should have started with a hamster or a goldfish, not jumped straight to *legendary magical creature who can set fire to things!*'

I feel a lump in my throat. Pa's not saying what I think he's saying, is he? Surely he doesn't want to *get rid*

of Cadno? It's not like we can anyway. We destroyed the portal to Fargone as soon as Teg, the boy from Fargone who originally rescued Cadno and brought him to Wales, had gone back through it. Cadno is here to stay, no matter how many socks he burns holes in or how many of Edie's toys he buries in the garden.

Edie snaps out of her game with Cadno and turns to lock gazes with Pa.

'I want Madam Sugarpuff *now*,' she says with a snarl.

Pa's face turns white. 'I'd better go and dig it up,' he mutters. 'Charlie, why don't you call on Lippy and Roo and take Cadno for a walk? I think he could do with burning off some energy.'

Uh-oh. There's the all-powerful word. *Walk*. Whenever Cadno hears it, it's like somebody has pressed a switch in his brain, and he turns into a runaway firenado.

No sooner has the word left Pa's mouth than Cadno lets out an ear-piercing screech and starts running round in circles after his own tail. His fur is getting

shimmery again. I can feel the heat coming off him.

Dad hoots. 'Ha! *Burning* off some energy. Get it? Because he's a firefox!'

Pa glares at him. Dad stops laughing and looks down at Cadno, then lets out a gasp as a dark puddle spreads across his shoes.

'Argh, Cadno!' he cries. 'You've weed on my feet!'

'He wees when he gets excited!' I say quickly.

'See!' announces Pa triumphantly. 'This is exactly what I'm talking about! Edie slipped in a puddle last week and ran round the house smelling of fox pee for the rest of the day!'

'All right,' I say, climbing down from my stool. Cadno rushes to meet my feet before they touch the floor.

'Come on, boy. Let's find the rest of the squad.'