

# The Grand Ball

*By Astrid Lumley*

I sigh.

Rosie and I are sitting under a sprite tree, yet we are still bored. Rosie gently nudges me with her horn. Luckily Unipigs don't have very sharp horns. I look in the direction hers is pointing, right behind us. It's the Fairy Queen Titania and King Harold! But they look sad, and I wonder if it has to do with the smoke hanging around the kingdom. I am finding it hard not to cough and splutter myself.

"This smoke is making it so difficult to breathe -- we might have to cancel the Grand Ball!" I hear them say. My eyes widen. The Grand Ball is when anyone who wants to, comes together, and has a magical evening! It's never been cancelled, so I hope this year isn't any different. Rosie taps me again, and points at the plan in front of us. This may be a promising idea, but how do we stop the smoke?

"My scouts say it's the Fire Dragon up the mountain," the Queen says. Well, that was easy! Off to the Dragon's lair we go!

I never realised how tiring climbing the mountain would be. Let's hope talking to the Dragon is easier. Rosie and I trip every now and then, but we keep getting back up. Otherwise, this will all be for nothing. Wait...

"Rosie, look! The Dragon's lair! We are so close!" We break into a stumbling run, and don't stop until we're right outside. Why is the ground shaking though?

"Aa-ah-ah-chooooooooooooo!" I feel sorry for whoever that is. It sounds ghastly! We peer inside... and see a Dragon crying! I knock, as not to seem impolite.

"May I help you?" the Scarlet Dragon asks.

"Yes please. My friend Rosie and I would like to ask why you are so sad, and if any of this has to do with the smoke everywhere?"

"They are both my fault. You see, the Water Dragon asked me to take her to the Grand Ball and gave me this rose as a gift. I get hay fever, but I took it because I really want to go with her and giving it back might offend her. Now, my allergies have flared up and created all this smoke," he sniffles.

"Maybe we can help with that!" I say, my mind racing.

I request a handkerchief, then I summon all my courage and enchant it to clear blocked noses and calm the Dragon's mighty snot storm. "Here," I say, giving it to him carefully, "Give it a try."

We turn politely while he wipes his nose.

"See you at the Ball!"

We smile back. This might be the best ball ever.

And it was, because when the Ball was back on, everyone had the best time, danced, and made daisy-chains, including the Fire Dragon wearing his rose, with no sign of snotty-smoke anywhere. Rosie and I agreed it was pretty awesome, especially with the pavlova. And I don't think I've ever been happier.