

Santa's Workshop

ADVENTURES FROM THE NORTH POLE

BOOK 04

The Dragon with Hiccups



As told by

Imogen Quillworth

KEEPER OF THE STORY LIBRARY

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A Grand Entrance



Nellie painted one last gold line along her clockwork dragon's tail.

She held the toy up to the light, turning it to check the fine gold edge of each scale. When she opened its wings, a little cloth banner stretched between them.

That deserved a grand entrance.

In the Toy-Testing Room at Santa's Workshop, Nellie stood a folded-paper screen on the floor. She set the dragon behind it and tucked its banner between its closed wings.

Tilly watched her turn the winding key.

"What should it do?" she asked.

“Roll out. Spread its wings. Roar. Then bow.” Nellie checked that the tail would clear the screen. “In that order.”

Arthur put his tools down beside Tilly.

“Very good. Where would you like your audience?”

Nellie pointed to a place where they could see the dragon’s entrance without being run over by it.

“A sensible seat,” Arthur said, although he was standing.

Nellie crouched behind the screen. The gold lines were dry now. She brushed a speck of fluff off the dragon’s nose and released the clockwork.

The wheels began to turn.

Out rolled the dragon, with a gentle tick-tick-tick, its tail sweeping past the edge of the screen. Then its wings opened, lifting the banner.

Nellie straightened a little. This was the part she had been waiting for.

The dragon raised its head.

“Hic!”

It was a very small sound from a dragon with such wide wings.

Tilly pressed her lips together. Arthur looked down at his boots.

The dragon bowed.

Nellie looked from its solemn little head to its splendid banner. A laugh slipped out of her.

Then Tilly laughed too, and Arthur’s shoulders began to shake.

“A rather modest roar,” he said.

“That was a hiccup,” Nellie said. “It’s meant to roar.”

She picked up the dragon. Its wheels had stopped, and its head was still lowered in a bow.

Tilly knelt beside her.

“The wheels worked. So did the wings. Shall we check the sound?”

Nellie ran a finger along one gold-edged scale. The entrance had looked just as she wanted. She wanted to hear it properly too.

“Yes,” she said. “Let’s find where the roar went.”

A Proper Roar



Nellie spread a soft cloth on the floor and laid the dragon on its side.

“Mind the gold,” she said.

“I will,” Tilly promised.

Tilly opened the small panel underneath, and Nellie leaned closer to look inside. A little pouch was connected to a tube that led towards the dragon’s mouth.

“Air goes from this pouch through the sound tube,” Tilly explained. “The clockwork should give it a good squeeze.”

She moved the mechanism slowly by hand.

A small metal catch sat in the wrong notch beside the pouch. It stopped the pouch from squeezing all the way. Only a little puff of air came out.

“Hic!”

“There it is,” Nellie said.

Arthur examined the catch.

“This catch belongs in the notch beside it. I can move it across.”

Nellie held the dragon steady while he worked. With his pliers, Arthur eased the catch out of the narrow notch and fitted it into the next one. He checked its fastening, then moved it gently to and fro. Now the pouch had room to squeeze.

“Try it now, Tilly.”

This time, the pouch squeezed fully.

A proper roar came through the tube.

Nellie’s fingers tightened on the dragon. Even lying on its side, it sounded splendid.

Tilly wound the key a little and tested it again with the clockwork running. The pouch squeezed. The dragon roared.

“Both tests working,” she said.

Arthur closed the panel.

“One roar returned to its owner.”

Nellie set the dragon upright and checked the gold edges for scratches before lifting its head and folding its wings. Every fine line was still in place.

“Back to your places, please.”

Tilly and Arthur returned to their standing seats.

Behind the paper screen, Nellie wound the key. She released the dragon and watched its wheels carry it out.

The wings spread. The banner lifted.

The dragon raised its head and roared.

Then it bowed.

Arthur clapped. Tilly clapped too.

Nellie gave a small bow of her own. That was the entrance she had planned. All of it worked.

Yet she kept looking at the dragon's lowered head, waiting for something else.

"I liked that," Tilly said. "Though I was waiting for the hiccup."

"So was I," Arthur admitted.

Nellie picked up the toy. Before the repair, she had wanted a roar. Now she had one, and she missed that ridiculous little sound.

She turned the dragon over, keeping its wings clear of her fingers.

"We're not putting the catch in the wrong notch again," she said.

"Certainly not," said Arthur.

"But could it roar and hiccup?"

Tilly looked at the closed panel. Nellie looked at the dragon's grand gold chest.

She could almost hear it already.

The Little Button



“We could add a second air pouch,” Tilly began. “With another tube, and a little lever to squeeze it—”

Nellie opened her box of materials.

“Would this do?”

She held up a small squeaker with a button on one side. When she pressed it, the squeaker gave a tiny hiccup.

Tilly listened, then nodded.

“Yes. That would save us a pouch, a tube and a lever.”

“An excellent saving,” Arthur said.

Nellie held the squeaker under the dragon's chin. She could reach the button easily there. But it hid the gold pattern on the chest.

She moved it away again.

"Underneath, perhaps."

Arthur held it beneath the body, between the wheels, with the button just behind the dragon's front legs. Tilly turned each wheel while Nellie checked that she could reach it from the front.

Nothing rubbed or caught, and from the front the dragon still looked just as Nellie had painted it.

Arthur fastened the squeaker in place.

"The roar runs on clockwork," Tilly said. "This sound waits for you."

Nellie pressed the button.

"Hic!"

"Very patient," said Arthur.

They tried the whole entrance again. Nellie knelt beside the dragon's path so she could reach it.

The toy rolled out. Its wings spread.

Before its head rose, Nellie pressed the button.

"Hic!"

Tilly began to laugh. Nellie laughed with her.

The dragon roared, but Nellie was still laughing. She caught only the end of it.

Then the dragon bowed.

"I've put the hiccup in the roar's way," she said.

She reset the head and folded the wings around the banner, ready for another entrance.

Roll. Wings. Roar. Bow.

Nellie ran through the order once more in her head.

“After the bow,” she said. “When you think it’s finished.”

She wound the key for a practice run. This time, she kept her finger away from the button.

The dragon rolled out, opened its wings and roared. As its head began to lower, Nellie reached in from the front, beneath its chin.

Her hand caught the chin. The bow stopped halfway.

“Too soon.”

She drew her hand back. The head finished its bow.

Nellie waited until it was still. Then she lifted the head with one hand and slipped the other between the front legs, beneath the body. Her finger found the button.

She left it unpressed.

“Save that bit,” she said.

Nellie lowered the head again. The next hiccup would have its own place.

“Now,” she said, “let’s do it with a proper audience.”

Arthur looked at Tilly. Tilly looked at Arthur.

“I thought we were,” he said.

One Last Bow



Nellie checked the paper screen. It stood firmly, with room for the dragon to roll out beside it.

She folded the wings around the banner and raised the head. Then she wound the clockwork key.

Tilly and Arthur returned to their places.

“Ready?” Nellie asked.

“Ready,” said Tilly.

Arthur put his hands behind his back.

“I’m saving the clapping.”

Nellie crouched behind the screen with the dragon. She could see its gold tail and the two small wheels nearest her. Underneath was the button, waiting.

She released the clockwork.

Tick-tick-tick.

The dragon rolled into view. Nellie moved beside its path, keeping her hands to herself.

Its wings opened wide. The cloth banner stretched between them. The fine gold lines shone along its scales.

The dragon raised its head.

It gave its proper, splendid roar.

Tilly's smile widened. Nellie watched the head begin to lower.

Down it went, into a bow.

Nellie waited.

The wheels stopped. The head became still.

Arthur brought his hands round and began to clap. Tilly joined him.

Then Nellie lifted the dragon's head, just a little, and reached between its front legs to the button beneath its body.

She pressed the button.

"Hic!"

Arthur's next clap missed. Tilly folded forward, laughing.

Nellie laughed too. The gold-winged dragon stood between them, its great entrance finished with one tiny hiccup.

She lowered its head into another bow and bowed beside it.

This time, the clapping went on longer.

“Again?” Tilly asked.

Nellie glanced at the screen. She could tuck the banner away, fold the wings and wind the key for another whole entrance.

Arthur held up one finger.

“Just the little part, perhaps.”

Nellie lifted the dragon’s head.

Her finger found the button.

“Hic!”

Nellie lowered the head again and bowed beside it.

One last bow was quite enough.