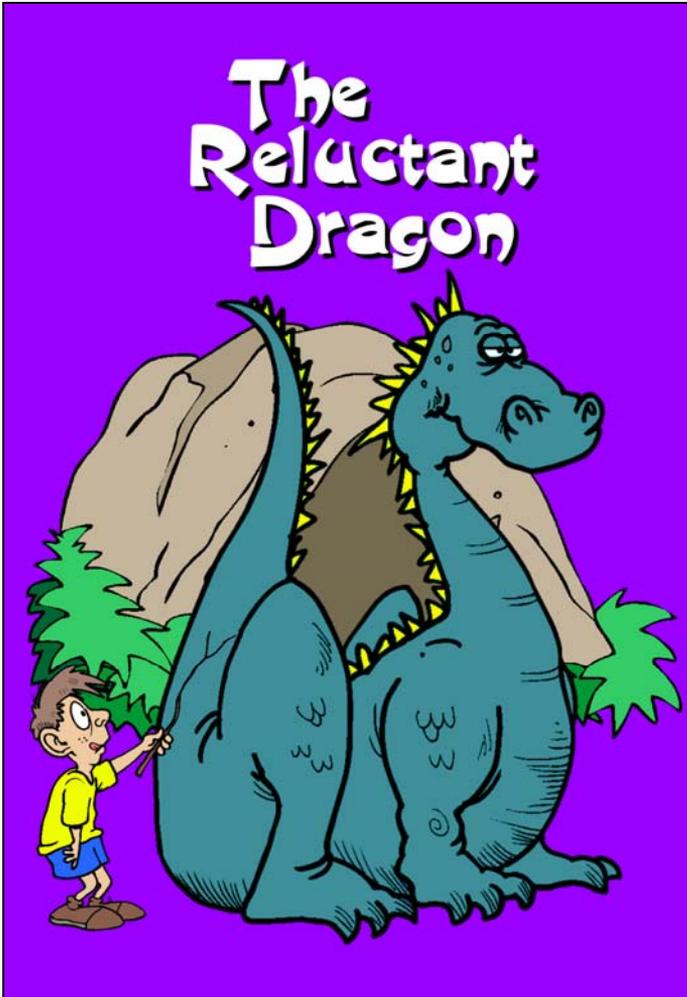


The Reluctant Dragon



C. Edward Wheaton

Adapted from the 1898 children's story by Kenneth Grahame

BIG DOG PUBLISHING

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The Reluctant Dragon

CHILDREN'S CLASSIC. The Village of Hampton is in a panic after a dragon is discovered lying on the ground peacefully meditating. Since no villager is courageous enough to slay this "ferocious" beast, the villagers send for a knight. Curious to see the dragon for herself, Esmeralda meets the dragon face to face and discovers that this dragon doesn't like to pillage, rampage, or fight knights. Instead, the dragon assures Esmeralda that he's a "live and let live" kind of dragon who doesn't have an enemy in the world and likes to write poetry. Since the dragon doesn't know how to fight and isn't even sure if he can belch fire, he begs Esmeralda to convince the knight that he is no menace. Instead, Esmeralda arranges for the knight to meet the dragon and the three come up with a clever plan sure to please the villagers.

Performance Time: Approximately 30-45 minutes.

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Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932)

About the Story

Kenneth Grahame was born in Edinburg, Scotland, and later lived in the Village of Cookham, which is thought to have served as the inspiration for the settings of many of his stories. "The Reluctant Dragon" is one of Grahame's most famous children's stories and was published in 1898 as a chapter in Grahame's book *Dream Days*. In 1908, Grahame's renowned children's novel *The Wind in the Willows* was published. Grahame died at the age of 73 and was buried in Holywell Cemetery in Oxford, England. His epitaph reads, "To the beautiful memory of Kenneth Grahame, husband of Elspeth and father of Alastair, who passed the river on the 6th of July, 1932, leaving childhood and literature through him the more blest for all time."

Characters

(3 M, 5 F, 10 flexible, extras)

DRAGON: Mild-mannered, friendly dragon who dislikes rampaging and pillaging and favors peaceful pursuits like writing poetry; purrs like a cat and is covered in blue scales.

ESMERALDA: Girl who befriends the Dragon.

RODRIC: A grocer's assistant who is good at spotting rotten produce but yearns to earn his spurs and become a knight; wears a makeshift suit of armor and helmet; male.

HUMPHREY/HENRIETTA: Pesky kid who likes to play "Knights and Dragons"; red hair with freckles; flexible.

IVOR: Villager who never had much sense and thinks he can annihilate the Dragon with a stick; male.

EDGAR/EDITH: Head of the Hampton Village Council; flexible.

SAMPSON: Traveling tinker and teller of tall tales; male.

MAN/WOMAN IN APRON: Villager who wants Sampson to slay the dragon; shirt sleeves are rolled up above the elbows and wears a leather apron; flexible.

DUNCAN/DUENA: Village of Hampton's volunteer fire "department"; carries two water buckets; flexible.

DEVIN/DEVINA: Sheep herder who discovers the Dragon on the Downs and wants someone to slay it; flexible.

PETER/PETULA: Villager who doesn't think the Dragon is a menace and wants to leave well enough alone; flexible.

CEDRIC/CEDRICA: Villager; flexible.

GILES/GILLY: Villager; flexible.

WILL/WILLEMINA: Villager; flexible.

MATILDA: Villager; female.

ELEANOR: Villager; female.

MAGGIE: Villager; female.

MOTHER: Esmeralda's mother and innkeeper at the Royal Pane Inn.

EXTRAS: As Villagers and Children.

Setting

The Village of Hampton in the Berkshire Downs in Oxfordshire, England.

Set

The Royal Pane Inn. A backdrop of an inn can be used. Out front is a table with benches and a water barrel SL. There is a sign hanging over the door.

Cave on the Downs. A backdrop of a cave can be used. There is a tree and some fake rocks large enough to sit on.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: The Royal Pane Inn.

Scene 2: Cave on the Downs.

Scene 3: Cave on the Downs.

Scene 4: The Royal Pane Inn, several days later.

Scene 5: Cave on the Downs.

Scene 6: Another part of the Downs.

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Props

Book
Pots and pans
Handcart
Stick
Lantern
Baskets of wares, for Villagers
2 Water buckets
Handkerchief

Special Effects

Sound of children playing

Roar

Horse neighing

Clash

Cloud of dust

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**“A good dragon?
Nonsense!
There is no such creature!”**

—Rodric

Scene 1

(AT RISE: The Royal Pane Inn, Village of Hampton. Out front is a table with benches and a water barrel SL. There is a sign hanging over door. A young girl, Esmeralda, is sitting on one of the benches reading a book. Her Mother emerges from the Inn carrying two pots.)

MOTHER: Esmeralda, when you see Mr. Sampson, the tinker, will you please give him these two pots to mend? *(Sets pots on the table.)*

ESMERALDA: *(Without looking up from her book.)* Yes, Mother.

(Mother smiles and exits into the Inn. Sound of children playing is heard. The sound gets louder and several Children enter. Esmeralda takes no notice of them. The Children stop playing. Led by Humphrey, the Children approach Esmeralda.)

HUMPHREY: Esmeralda, we are going to play Knights and Dragons and we need someone to be the dragon. *(Esmeralda takes no notice of him. Shouts.)* Esmeralda!

ESMERALDA: *(Looks up.)* Hmmm?

HUMPHREY: What's wrong with you? Didn't you hear me?

ESMERALDA: No.

HUMPHREY: You always got your face buried in a book.

ESMERALDA: I like to read.

HUMPHREY: Why? It's not natural. My father says it's a waste of valuable time and serves no good purpose, especially for girls. *(Esmeralda shrugs her shoulders and goes back to reading. Annoyed.)* Well, are you, or aren't you, going to be the dragon?

(Esmeralda takes no notice of him. Humphrey grabs her book.)

ESMERALDA: Hey! Give me back my book!

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(Esmeralda tries to get her book back, but Humphrey keeps it out of her reach. The other Children laugh. Sampson enters, pushing a handcart containing pots and pans.)

SAMPSON: *(Shouts.)* Here now! What's going on?! *(To Humphrey.)* Give her back the book!

HUMPHREY: Aw! *(Hands the book back to Esmeralda.)* Who wants an old book anyway?

SAMPSON: *(To Esmeralda.)* What are you reading about this time?

ESMERALDA: "Saint George and the Dragon." *(Opens book and shows him.)* See?

SAMPSON: Ah, yes. *(Pause.)* Did I ever tell you of my encounter with a dragon?

ESMERALDA: No.

HUMPHREY: You actually saw a dragon?

SAMPSON: Indeed, I did. But it was a long time ago when dragons were plentiful and they were the scourge of the countryside.

HUMPHREY: What happened?

SAMPSON: *(Clears throat.)* Well, as I said, it was a long time ago. I was travelin' across the moors when, suddenly, right in front of me, up rises this head of a dragon. I stopped dead in my tracks, and we just stood there and stared at each other for a moment. Then the dragon raises himself to his full height and length.

(During the following exchange, Man In Apron enters and quietly listens with his arms folded across his chest. The sleeves of his shirt are rolled up above his elbows and he is wearing a leather apron.)

HUMPHREY: How big was it?

SAMPSON: Oh, he was a 100 feet long and 50 feet tall, if he was an inch. Well, sir, he closes one eye and cocks his head... *(Demonstrates.)* ...as though he was sizin' me up for his next meal.

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HUMPHREY: What did you do?

SAMPSON: Well, I'll tell you right now, I was determined not to be his next meal. But what was I goin' to do? There I was, out in the open, no place to hide, and no weapon. Suddenly, the dragon lunged at me. I darted out of the way. *(Jumps to one side.)* To my surprise, although he was huge, he was slow. So, staying just out of his reach, I kept taunting him. *(Jumps from side to side.)* After each lunge, he became slower and slower. This went on almost all day. Finally, the dragon collapsed and died of sheer exhaustion.

HUMPHREY: Wow. Weren't you scared?

SAMPSON: Naw, I knew I had that dragon—

(A commotion is heard offstage. Devin rushes on, out of breath.)

DEVIN: *(Shouts.)* Dragon! Dragon! *(Peter, Cedric, Duncan, Giles, Eleanor, Maggie, Ivor, Matilda, Will and optional Villagers enter and gather. Villagers adlib, "What's going on?" "What's the matter?" etc. Shouts.)* A dragon on the Downs!

PETER: What are you talking about?

DEVIN: I saw a dragon!

CEDRIC: Aw, you're daft!

PETER: *(To Devin.)* Are you sure it was a dragon?

DEVIN: I swear as sure as I am standing here. I was up on the Downs looking for stray sheep and there, right in front of the cave, lay this dragon.

DUNCAN: What was he doing?

DEVIN: Oh, it was a terrible sight, I can tell you. There he was a-layin' on the ground, his chin restin' on his paws...meditating about things I should say.

PETER: That doesn't sound so menacing.

DEVIN: Who knows what evil thoughts he was thinkin'?!

GILES: Then what happened?

DEVIN: *(Dramatic.)* He, all of a sudden, raises his head. I thought my time had come.

CEDRIC: Well? What happened?

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DEVIN: I got out o' there as fast as my legs would carry me, that's [wot]! [*"what"*]

ELEANOR: What did he look like?

DEVIN: Oh, he was as big as four cart horses and covered in blue scales.

MAGGIE: What are we going to do?

PETER: He hasn't done us any harm. I say let's just leave well enough alone. Why provoke him?

DEVIN: Wake up! He's a *dragon*! And dragons are not known for being very hospitable creatures!

MAGGIE: I agree with Peter. I think we should ignore him and maybe he'll go away.

DEVIN: How would you like to wake up one fine morning and find that you had been eaten in your sleep, hmm?

MAGGIE: Aw, now you're just bein' silly.

(Ivor picks up a stick.)

IVOR: I say we go up there and annihilate him! Who's with me? Come on!

(Ivor runs off as the Crowd silently watches.)

MATILDA: *(Slowly shaking her head.)* Even as a child, he didn't have much sense.

(Crowd begins to debate the issue amongst themselves. Edgar enters.)

EDGAR: What's all the fuss?

MATILDA: There's a dragon on the Downs.

(Edgar stares at her a moment and breaks into laughter.)

EDGAR: No, really...what's going on?

CEDRIC: There is a dragon on the Downs.

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EDGAR: And who saw this dragon?

(Devin steps forward.)

DEVIN: I did.

EDGAR: That's ridiculous. There haven't been any dragons for as long as anybody can remember. Are you sure you weren't just seeing things?

DEVIN: Of course, I was seein' things, and the thing I saw was a dragon.

CEDRIC: *(To Edgar.)* You're head of the village council. What are you going to do about it?

EDGAR: The first thing is not to get excited.

GILES: Not get excited? With a dragon less than a mile away?

EDGAR: What would you have me do?

DEVIN: We have to send someone up there to slay it!

EDGAR: *(To Villagers.)* All right, who among you is willing to take up sword and spear and free the village and win deathless fame?

(Villagers look at each other.)

MAN IN APRON: Here is your man, right here!

(Man In Apron slaps Sampson on the back and pushes him forward. Sampson turns. He has a startled look on his face.)

CEDRIC: Who? Sampson?

MAN IN APRON: Sure. He was just tellin' us about his encounter with a dragon. Isn't that right, Sampson?

SAMPSON: Well, ah—

EDGAR: Is that true?

SAMPSON: *(Speechless.)* Well... *(Looks at Children and then at Man In Apron, who is smiling. Looks at Villagers.)* Yes...but...

(Edgar puts his hand on Sampson's shoulder.)

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EDGAR: Then what say you? Are you willing to risk life for deathless fame?

SAMPSON: Well, you see...I have all these pots to mend, and—

EDGAR: The pots can wait. This is far more important. How long will it take you to get ready?

SAMPSON: *(Gets an idea.)* Ah, not long...I have everything I need at my house. I'll be right back.

MAN IN APRON: I think someone ought to go with him...just in case he needs help. *(Smiles at the helpless Sampson.)*

SAMPSON: No, no, that won't be necessary.

EDGAR: Fine. Fine. You go and get ready. And should you survive, there will be a feast in your honor.

(Edgar slaps Sampson on the back. Pushing his cart, Sampson makes a quick exit.)

MATILDA: While he's up there, he can find out what happened to Ivor.

EDGAR: Ivor?

MATILDA: Yes. He grabbed a stick and went there to annihilate the dragon.

EDGAR: He never did have much sense.

(Lights down to denote passage of time. Lights up. Crowd of Villagers is becoming restless.)

MATILDA: Well, where is he?

ELEANOR: I can't stand around here all day wondering whether to take the washin' off the line or not!

EDGAR: *(Calls.)* Will!

(Will steps forward.)

WILL: Yes, Edgar?

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EDGAR: Go and find out what's delaying Sampson.

WILL: Right away.

(Will exits. Lights down. Lights up. Will enters, out of breath.)

EDGAR: *(To Will.)* Well?

WILL: He's gone!

EDGAR: Gone?

WILL: Lock, stock, and barrel.

MATILDA: Now what do we do?

ELEANOR: I know what I'm going to do...get my washin' off the line. *(Exits.)*

EDGAR: *(To Crowd.)* Listen, we will all gather here at the Inn this evening to discuss the matter and plan a course of action.

GILES: But what do we do in the meantime?

EDGAR: Everybody just go about your business as though there was no monster less than a mile from the village. And, in the meantime, I will order the volunteer fire department to stand ready. Where's Duncan?

(Duncan steps forward.)

DUNCAN: Right here, Edgar.

EDGAR: Are your water buckets in good shape?

DUNCAN: Yes, both of them.

EDGAR: Good. Now, everyone just go about your business until tonight.

(Villagers disperse, talking amongst themselves. Esmeralda and Humphrey remain.)

HUMPHREY: Did you hear that? A real dragon!

ESMERALDA: Let's go up and take a look at him.

HUMPHREY: Are you crazy? Not me! I don't want to become a dragon's next meal.

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ESMERALDA: And a fine meal you would make, too.

(Esmeralda pats Humphrey's stomach.)

HUMPHREY: *(Offended, slaps her hand away.)* Here now!

ESMERALDA: I'm going to see, even if you are afraid.

HUMPHREY: I am not afraid.

ESMERALDA: Then come with me.

HUMPHREY: Well, my mother wouldn't like it. She's rather particular about the company I keep. And she gets rather upset if I don't show up on time for dinner.

ESMERALDA: We'll go after dinner.

HUMPHREY: Well, I'm sure she would be upset if something happened to me. In fact, I think I hear her calling me.
(Shouts.) Coming!

(Humphrey runs off SR. Esmeralda watches as he exits and then exits into the Inn. Blackout.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: A cave on the Downs, early evening. There is a tree and some rocks. The Dragon is asleep in front of his cave happily purring. Esmeralda enters, carrying a lantern. As she approaches, the Dragon's purring gets louder.)

ESMERALDA: (To herself.) Well, we live and learn! None of the books I have read said anything about dragons purring.

(Dragon stirs, slowly opens his eyes, and stares at Esmeralda a moment. Dragon raises his head and starts to make a courteous effort to rise, but remembering his last contact, gives her a hard stare.)

DRAGON: Now don't tell me you are going to scream, too?

ESMERALDA: I have no intention of screaming.

DRAGON: Good. There was this very strange fellow up here earlier today. He just stood in front of me and simply stared. I tried to act friendly, but he would have none of it. As soon as I lifted my head to say hello, he let out a tremendous scream that nearly scared the scales off me and took off running down the hill, kicking up all sorts of dust.

ESMERALDA: That was Devin. He was looking for stray sheep.

DRAGON: Then shortly after him, there was an even stranger fellow. He came running at me waving a stick.

ESMERALDA: That was Ivor. What happened to him?

DRAGON: He stopped suddenly, looked around, and took off running in that direction. (Nods his head in the direction.) I thought the whole situation quite amusing.

ESMERALDA: People say he has never had much sense. You created quite a stir in the village.

DRAGON: I didn't mean to.

[END OF FREEVIEW]