



It seemed an impossible task. A sheer cliff face of dirt and rock with no obvious handholds or footholds stretched above them. How would the sisters even begin to climb such a thing?

As if to underline the difficulty of what lay ahead, a helpless, white, fluffy seal pup nudged at Archeria's bare toes, tickling her with its whiskers. Archeria barely noticed for she was deep in thought. Stepping back from the seal pup, the youngest sister lifted her bow and shot an arrow straight into the face of the cliff, just a little above head height. Running towards it, she jumped up and caught hold of the arrow, which stayed strong and steadfast.

Catching onto the plan, Perceptua ran back to the boat and grabbed three ropes. Together, she and Chordia tied the ropes around one another, whilst Archeria shot steps made from arrows into the cliff face, all the way to the top. It took nearly all of Archeria's arrows to create the ladder and only one feathered arrow tip remained, sticking out of her quiver, which she pushed round onto her back before tying the last rope around her.

Carefully, the three princesses used their bare feet to cling to the arrow steps as they climbed up towards their kidnapped father. Breathless and smeared in the red dust of the rock face, the three princesses finally pulled themselves up and over the edge of the cliff. They were greeted by the mouth of the dragon's lair. The golden apple tree was half planted, not quite inside nor outside of the lair. Amazingly, it had survived the journey and seemed, although slightly lopsided, not entirely unhappy about its new surroundings.

Further back and behind the tree lay the dragon. Her huge head was resting on her scaly front legs, one clawed talon clenching in and out in time with her snoring. One of her yellow eyes was open, but it stared straight ahead, unseeing. Chained to a rock, on a pile of gold, was the king. When he saw his daughters walking barefoot in their torn, tatty nightgowns, all stained red from the cliff face, he cried out in alarm.

"My daughters! What are you doing here? Is that blood?" he said.

"Shhhh," warned Perceptua, putting a finger to her lips and pointing at the dragon, but it was too late.

The monster was awoken and her other eye opened, the pupils swelling huge then returning to tiny black slits in an instant.



“Who are you to dare to come into my golden lair uninvited?” roared the dragon.

As the beast opened her mouth to speak, Perceptua could see the key to the lock on her father’s chain hanging from one of the dragon’s teeth. She nudged her sisters to show them what she had seen.

“Prepare to be burnt to a cinder, you thieves,” the dragon shouted, rearing up, ready to blast the princesses with her fire breath.

“No, no,” cried out the king in alarm, and real tears began flowing down his face as he shook his handcuffs and tried to stand. “Don’t take out your wrath on them, they are...”

“...We are but simple musicians,” Chordia interrupted, cutting her father off before he could reveal their value. “Oh, majestic and most wondrous fire-dragon, we have come to entertain you,” improvised Chordia, and quickly, without waiting for the dragon to respond, she began to play.

It was a lullaby that the other sisters knew and they joined in, harmonising together beautifully with the notes from the violin.

*“Sleep, dragon, sleep. The heavens are white with sheep. Sleep, dragon, sleep.”*

Listening, the dragon remembered centuries ago when she was young and her mother would sing the same song to her. To hear the music and song again softened and calmed her rage. It had been so many years since she’d felt anything but anger and greed. It was nice to hear

the song again and she knew that it meant that she was coming to the end of her life and would soon be returning to the sea from where she was hatched. Slowly, softly she lowered her head and before long the music had worked its magic and once again the dragon fell deeply asleep.

Being the bravest of the three princesses, it was Archeria who, ignoring the frightened gasps of her father, tiptoed into the cave and right up to the head of the sleeping dragon. Gently, and with a respectful tenderness, Archeria lifted a section of the dragon's top lip. With her other hand she slowly reached into the dragon's mouth and unhooked the key from the tooth. The urge to drop the lip and run to her father to release him was strong, but instead Archeria gently lowered the dragon's flesh and began tip toeing over to where the king was enchained. All the time Chordia played her fiddle and Perceptua sang the lullaby, whilst keeping her razor-sharp senses switched on for any sign that the dragon might awaken.



Archeria unlocked her father's handcuffs first, then quickly moved to his leg irons. As she released the king she felt a warmth on her head and looked up to see her father was stroking her hair. He had a look of such tenderness and love that Archeria felt any resentment or anger she'd had for him slipping away. Archeria took hold of her father's hand and helped him to his feet. He was wobbly and bruised after his ordeal, but let his youngest daughter lead him out of the cave like a little lamb. It was then that they realised they could only take the king. The golden apple tree would have to stay behind.