



The School Magazine

A world of words since 1916

April 2013 | Issue No.3

ORBIT



Code
talkers

and a code challenge too!

14

Meet magical
Edwena!

24

Edwena the wise

story by Marian McGuinness | illustrated by Vivienne To

EDWENA LIVED IN a pretty village in the Valley of Wye. It normally had a bubbling river and air sweet with blossoming apple trees. Baby birds usually sat in their nests cheeping for their dinner while bees flitted from flower to flower, collecting nectar for their honey.

But this year the village had changed. For eight long months winter's shawl of snow had never lifted. Every day an icy wind blew along the valley. Wooden shutters banged on their hinges, frozen birds fell off their branches and dead bees speckled the snow like polka dots. Snow covered the fields, snow covered the frozen river and snow covered the cows that could no longer graze on the once lush green grass. Spring had never returned to the village.

Edwena remembered the stories passed down by the Wise Women of Wye about Blayz the dragon, who lived

high in a mountain cave. Year after year, after waking from his winter hibernation, Blayz had melted the snow and heated the valley with his hot breath and flames. Blayz always brought spring to the valley.

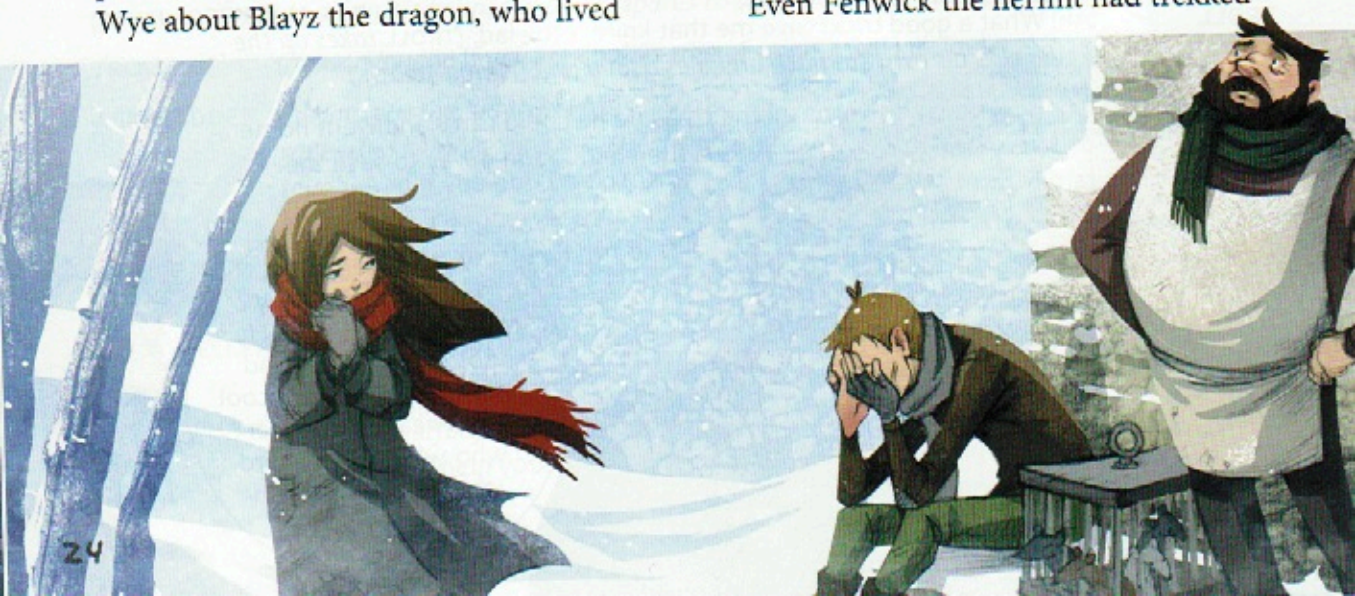
Not this year. Now, food and firewood had become scarce and the villagers were hungry.

Jake the rat catcher sat on the stone step of his house with his face scrunched into his hands. "There'll be no rats to make my living if this snow doesn't melt," he grumbled.

Thomas the miller looked up at the white sky. "If spring doesn't come soon I'll not have any grain to turn to flour," he grizzled.

Mathilda the shepherdess wrapped her shawl around her shoulders as she tended her sheep. "When will the wee lambs be born?" she wondered.

Even Fenwick the hermit had trekked



down from his hovel in the hills. He warmed his fingers in the glowing coals of the blacksmith's forge as the smithy hammered a red-hot horseshoe into shape.

Whispers spread around the village that something must have happened to Blayz, but no-one was brave enough to find out, for the thought of confronting a dragon turned the most fearless villager to jelly.

One night, when Edwena had finished her dinner of watery gruel (for that was the only food left in their larder), she looked into the bottom of her bowl. The leftover scraps of oatmeal had formed the shape of a dragon's head. Two splotches looked like tears.

"It's a sign," Edwena said as she showed the bowl to her mother.

"I'll not have you dilly-dallying in signs," said her mother as she cleared the table. "Signs are dangerous. You go mucking about with signs and you don't know what could happen. Best to leave it well alone, lass. Best to concentrate on your chores."

But Edwena felt otherwise. She knew what she had to do. That night, when her

parents were fast asleep, Edwena got out of the bed that she shared with her two younger sisters and put on her thickest coat. She tucked the bowl into her pocket to keep the dragon image from being ruined by the falling snow.

Edwena came to the last house at the edge of the village. A light glowed behind its shutters. The door was slightly ajar and Edwena pushed it open.

"The new-blood is here," came a voice from within. "Sit down, lass. Show us the sign."

Edwena faced the Wise Women of Wye. She saw their faces for the first time. Whenever they told their stories of old to the children, they always wore silken veils. Their gift of wisdom was known throughout the country, but it could only be sourced when the Wise Women decided it was needed. Edwena was amazed when she saw the three who sat at the table in the middle of the room. None wore veils now. She looked from one to the other, taking in who they were.

The first was Goody Parker, the baker's wife, and the second was Goody Marigold, the chicken butcher's wife. It was the third Wise Woman who surprised Edwena the most.

"Grandma Hettie?" Edwena could hardly believe her eyes. "You're one of the Wise Women?"

"Aye, little one," said her grandmother. "It's in the blood, but the Wisdom seems to have skipped your ma. She's not a believer." Grandma Hettie held her open hands towards Edwena, "Now, show us the sign."



Edwena placed the bowl in the middle of the table. Each Wise Woman took a turn to twist it as they examined its dried contents.

"It's definitely Blayz," said Goody Marigold. "I'd know that profile anywhere. There aren't too many with those double spikes."

"And they're definitely tears," said Goody Parker as she pressed her finger around the bowl's inside edge. "Something's upset Blayz, and you, lass, have been chosen to find out what that something is."

Grandma Hettie stood up and went to the pantry. She came back with a glass jar and handed it to Edwena.

"Now, off you go lass and don't turn back. You are the Valley of Wye's only chance of breaking free of the winter. You will know what to do with this jar when the time comes. Now be brave, use your wisdom and save our village." She put her finger to Edwena's lips. "And don't tell a soul about our meeting."

Edwena wedged the jar into her coat pocket. Grandma Hettie hugged her and then pushed her out the door. It closed behind Edwina as tight as a moth's cocoon; then the light that shone through the window was doused.

Into the cold Edwena went, past the blacksmith's forge, across the snowy fields and into the forest. *The track is different in the dark*, Edwena thought as she hurried along. An Elf Owl, perched on a snowy branch, *chee chee chee* as it followed her with its golden eyes.

Edwena glanced up through the jigsaw of dark leaves. The sky was invisible; no stars shone to guide her. She only saw her way as she followed the luminescent glow of the Moon Mushrooms that lined the forest path.

A Deer Mouse scampered away from Edwena's rag-wrapped feet. Dark creatures, disturbed by her presence, rustled and scuffled through the bracken.

The path finished at the end of the forest where the land rose sharply towards the sky. Edwena climbed in the snowy darkness, grabbing onto tree roots and rocks to help her. Halfway up the mountain she came to the Cave of Light. Without pausing for thought, she slid through the cave's snowy entrance, uncorked the glass jar and filled it with the multi-coloured fireflies that lived there.

Edwena continued climbing until she came to the dragon's lair.

Her heart beat hard against her chest. She shivered, not because she was cold, but because she felt brave and scared all at once.

For a moment, the moon shone through the clouds and falling snow, and in its brief light, Edwena saw Blayz. He was resting his head on his claws at the entrance of his cave.

He sniffled and Edwena scuttled sideways as a giant tear rolled towards her.

She thought he would look more ferocious, as a dragon should look who could melt the coldest winter with his breath.

Edwena coughed politely.



A scaly eyelid opened. The dragon gave a little huff. "What are you doing here?"

"Master Blayz," Edwena said gently, "I've come to see why you don't come out anymore. Our village is dying without your warming flames to melt the snow."

"Go away," Blayz said. "It's all useless. I thought I was a dragon; my mother told me I was a dragon; but now I know I'm not ... I don't know what I am," and he sighed a frosty breath over Edwena so that her hair froze behind her in horizontal icicles.

"Well, from what I can see," said Edwena as she leaned a bit closer, being careful not to break off her frozen hair, "you look like a dragon to me. You have enormous nostrils, bigger than Ma's cooking cauldrons, and you have plenty of scales, huger than any lizard's I've seen."

"It takes more than nostrils and scales to make a dragon," Blayz sighed again. "Look at me, child, what colour am I?"

Edwena tilted her head. "Why, you're the most beautiful green I've ever seen."

Blayz's eyes glazed over with tears and another great watery drop fell. It flowed into a nearby hollow and froze, just like all the tears before it, until it had formed a giant mirror in the snow.

"For the first time ever, when I woke from my winter sleep, I saw what I looked like. There! You can see it too." Blayz moved his giant head in the direction of the icy pool. He looked at the distorted image in front of him. "And I'm green. A green dragon. Frogs are green. Caterpillars are green. Mould and slime are green! Dragon's aren't green."

"Why, green is good, Master Blayz. Green is the colour of the earth and sky mixed together. Green is the colour of trees and moss and all the seas in the world." And then Edwena whispered, "And green is the colour of spring."

"But I want to be exotic. I don't want to be green."

"Let me see," Edwena said as she slid past Blayz into his lair. She took the glass jar out of her pocket and uncorked it. The fireflies flew around the cave until it looked like a kaleidoscope. Then they settled on Blayz. Edwena gasped.

"Why Blayz! You have only seen your face reflected in this ice pond. You are every colour of all the jewels in the world."

Blayz crept out into the moonlight. He unfurled his delicate wings before the ice pond and they shone like opals. He



turned to look at his scales, which were emerald green. Then he saw the rest. His spikes were purple like amethyst; his eyes the blue of sapphires; and his eyelashes as silvery as diamonds.

Blayz smiled at all the precious colours he was. He took a deep breath and breathed flames the colour of rubies.

"Climb onto my back, little one," Blayz said. Edwena used his scales like a ladder to reach his neck and sat behind his head.

Blayz looked to the sky and raised his magnificent wings. With a powerful flap, he launched into the air. He flew up through the snow clouds with Edwena gripping two purple spikes near his ears. It was almost dawn and the first rose-red rays of light beamed from the horizon.

Blayz turned and spiralled downwards. Edwena's coat and hair flapped behind her. Just as they reached the top of the cloud mass, Blayz exhaled. Blasts of ruby flames shot out of his nostrils and melted two gigantic holes in the snow clouds.

He looped and flew upwards again, blasting more holes with his fiery breath until all the clouds had evaporated.

Edwena held on tight as Blayz soared along the valley. He did figure eights along the river, across the fields and over the houses of the village. Each time, he blasted more flames to melt the snow.

The seeds in the fields began to sprout; the leaves on the trees started to bud; and the villagers rushed out of their houses to greet the spring.

Blayz whooshed over the houses of the Wise Women of Wye, who were watching from their front doors. Edwena waved and then ducked behind Blayz's head when she saw her ma tromping across to her grandmother.

The villagers cheered as the snow melted around them. "There's a rainbow!" they shouted as they looked to the sky.

But it wasn't a rainbow. It was Edwena the Wise with Blayz, in all his glorious dragon colours. ■