

The King's Paper Dragon



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In a bright palace by the sea lived King Aldric and his three children. The youngest was Princess Lina, a small girl with wavy chestnut-brown braids tied with red ribbons. She wore a pale-yellow festival dress with a red sash, and her apron pocket bulged with paper scraps. While others practiced bows, Lina practiced folding. She could turn a plain sheet into a frog, a boat, or a star.



The palace was busy preparing for the Festival of the First Bloom. Bakers baked, gardeners trimmed, and servants hung banners. King Aldric, tall and broad with a kind beard, checked every detail. Lina watched from a window, her hazel eyes sparkling. She wanted to make something special for the festival—something no one had ever seen.



In her room, Lina spread out a sheet of crimson paper. She folded and creased, her small fingers working carefully. A tail here, wings there, a curling neck. She painted gold whiskers and round white eyes with black dots. At last, a paper dragon sat on her palm, no bigger than a cat. She tied a thin gold ribbon around its neck. 'You are my festival dragon,' she whispered.



Suddenly, the paper dragon twitched. Its tiny wings flapped. Its head turned, and it leaped into the air! Lina gasped. The dragon zoomed around the room, its crimson body rustling. It darted out the door and down the hall. 'Come back!' Lina cried, running after it. The paper dragon was alive!



The dragon swooped into the great hall, where the royal baker was arranging a tower of cakes. 'Goodness!' cried the baker, his white cap askew. The dragon snatched a cherry and looped around the chandelier. Lina hurried in. 'I'm sorry! It's my paper dragon—it came to life!' The baker's twinkling eyes went wide. 'Well, it's certainly lively!'



King Aldric hurried down the stairs. 'What is all this commotion?' he boomed. The paper dragon landed on his crown and perched there like a red bird. The king froze. 'Lina, what is the meaning of this?' Lina's cheeks flushed. 'I made a paper dragon, Father, and it came alive. I don't know how!' The king frowned. 'The royal banquet is in two hours. That creature must behave!'



Lina called to the dragon, 'Please come down!' But the dragon was curious. It fluttered to a tapestry and tugged at the threads. Servants ducked as it zoomed past, leaving a trail of paper rustle. The baker waved his wooden spoon. 'Shoo! Shoo!' But the dragon only looped a loop and giggled—a tiny, papery giggle.



Lina thought hard. The dragon loved shiny things and sweet things. She borrowed a silver spoon and a sugar cube from the baker. She held them up. 'Look here, little dragon!' The dragon paused. It tilted its head. Then it swooped down and landed on her wrist. 'Good dragon!' Lina praised. She gave it the sugar cube. The dragon nibbled happily.



Now Lina had an idea. She folded a tiny paper hoop. 'Jump through!' she said. The dragon flew through the hoop and did a flip. Everyone clapped. Lina laughed. 'See? It's not naughty—it's just playful!' The king watched, his bushy eyebrows raised. The baker grinned. 'Clever girl!'



Lina began to teach the dragon some manners. 'No flying over the king's head,' she said gently. The dragon obeyed. 'No stealing cherries.' The dragon nodded. But when the baker brought out the grand banquet cake, the dragon's eyes went wide. It zoomed toward the cake! Lina called, 'Wait!'



The dragon hovered over the cake, its wings fluttering. Lina held out her hand. 'This is for the banquet,' she said softly. 'If you wait, you can have a special treat afterward.' The dragon looked at her. Then it flew back and landed on her shoulder. The baker sighed with relief. 'It listens to you!'



King Aldric knelt down. 'Lina,' he said, 'you have done something wonderful. Your paper dragon is special—because you made it with imagination.' Lina smiled her gap-toothed smile. 'Imagination is like magic, Father. It just needs a little patience.' The king nodded. 'You are right. I am sorry I was cross.' He patted her shoulder.



The banquet began. Lina sat beside the king, and the paper dragon perched on the back of her chair. It behaved perfectly, only nibbling a bit of cake when the king offered it. The guests marveled. 'How did you make such a creature?' they asked. 'With paper, patience, and a little imagination,' Lina said.



After the meal, the dragon danced in the air, looping and swooping to the music. The baker clapped his floury hands. The king laughed, a deep warm sound. 'Lina,' he said, 'from now on, you shall have a corner of the palace for your paper creations. Imagination deserves encouragement.' Lina hugged him. The dragon landed on her crown and chirped.



The festival filled the palace with joy. Lina taught the baker to fold a paper star, and he taught her to make a sugar mouse. The dragon flew among the lanterns, its red paper glowing. Everyone agreed it was the best festival ever. And King Aldric smiled more than he had in years.



From that day on, Princess Lina's paper creatures—frogs, birds, and dragons—filled the palace with wonder. But the red paper dragon with the gold ribbon remained her favorite. It slept in a tiny paper bed beside her pillow, and whenever the king felt too serious, the dragon would do a loop-de-loop, and everyone would remember: a little imagination makes life brighter.