

Chasing Henry

It was a warm summer day when the three friends spotted it. There it was—just down the path, sitting in a shaft of sunshine.



“What is *that*?” Dilly the armadillo asked, quivering in her shell.

“Huh,” said Seth the sloth, poking it with his long claw. “No clue. Of all the strange things I’ve seen, this one takes the cake.”

“Why, it’s the biggest egg ever!” Opal the ostrich said.



She rubbed the egg gently. “This egg needs some tender loving care. If we just let it sit here all by itself, whatever is inside won’t come out!”



“Do we *want* it to come out?” asked Dilly.

“Yes, we do,” said Opal. “We’ll sit on the egg to keep it warm, and we’ll do it in shifts. I’ll start.” Opal settled herself on top of the egg.

When it was time for Seth’s shift, he had his own way of keeping the egg warm. “I’ll just hang out here,” he said, as he draped himself over the egg. Now he could take a nap *and* keep the egg warm. Moments later, he was dozing.

When it was Dilly’s shift, she gathered soft moss and piled it on top of the egg to keep it warm. Then she scuttled off to keep an eye on the egg from behind a tree.

And so it went for many days. Then one morning, the egg rumbled! Dilly jumped three feet in the air. “The egg is moving! Run!” she wailed.



“Don’t fret, Dilly,” said Seth. They all stepped back to see what would happen next.

The egg tipped one way, then the other.

“Today is the day we get to meet our baby!” said Opal proudly. “I’m on pins and needles!”

Seth pointed at a crack in the egg. “Hey! It’s coming out!”

It *was* coming out! A pointy nose stuck out of the opening in the egg, and then a green face. Next, a little arm popped out, and then a little ... wing?

The rest of the shell gave way, and a strange green baby wobbled to his feet and blinked in the sun.

“It’s a four-legged green thing!” yelled Dilly. “Maybe we should run!”

“Hold your horses,” said Seth. “He’s not going to harm us.”



The baby stared back at them with his round, dark-blue eyes. His scaly skin shone in the sun. He tapped his large feet on the path and wagged his thick tail.

Then he began to flap his wings. He flapped them harder and harder until he rose into the air.



“Run after him!” yelled Dilly, too scared to move.



Seth started to chase the flying green baby, but he was too slow and couldn't keep up. “Opal, it's up to you!” he called.

Running swiftly on her long legs, Opal chased the baby until he landed safely in a conifer tree.

“Well, one thing's for sure,” said Opal as she gasped for air. “It's not an ostrich!”

“I think it's a Henry,” said Seth, yawning. “And he's tiring me out with all this flying to and fro.”

“What's a Henry? Should we run?” asked Dilly.

“A Henry is a green thing that can fly,” said Seth.

“I think it's the sweetest Henry I've ever seen,” said Opal.

“He *is* sort of cute, if you like green things that fly,” said Dilly.

“We *love* green things that fly,” stated Opal. “And Henry is our baby now, so it's up to us to take care of him.”

Henry was a happy baby. It didn't take long for Opal, Seth, and Dilly to grow fond of him.

"He's the apple of my eye," Opal liked to say.

But as he got bigger, Henry became more of a handful.

For one thing, Henry's manners at suppertime were shocking! The friends gathered horsetail plants, figs, and grubs for Henry's snacks. Henry pounced, gobbled, and chomped, flinging specks and spit every which way.



"Don't make a mess, Henry!" said his friends.



Henry's sneezing was a problem, too. He sneezed every time he got a tickle in his nose, sending out flames and setting fire to whatever was in his path. It was an even bigger problem when Henry had a cold.

"Don't set everything on fire, Henry!" said his friends.

But Henry's strong wings were the biggest problem of all. He loved to fly, but he kept getting lost! Opal, Seth, and Dilly spent much of their time chasing him down and bringing him back home. Keeping track of Henry became a daily chore.



“Don't get lost, Henry!” said his friends.

Between picking up after Henry, putting out fires, and chasing him down, Opal, Seth, and Dilly were tuckered out. They wanted Henry to behave nicely, but their scolding didn't help at all.

Henry seemed to grow sadder and sadder. He was so sad that he didn't even fly as much, and he barely nibbled on his grubs and figs. Even his sneezes seemed smaller.

“What do we do now?” asked Dilly one day as Henry sat quietly sniffing.

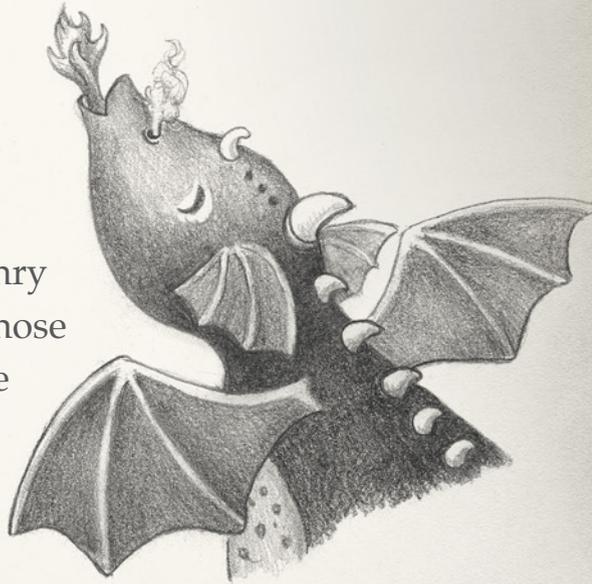
“I've been thinking,” said Seth. “Maybe we are scolding Henry too much. After all, he is a Henry. He can't help the way he gobbles his grubs. He didn't ask to fly. It's not his choice to sneeze fire. He's just made that way.”

Opal jumped up. “Seth! You are so wise! That must be the problem! We shouldn’t scold Henry for being a Henry—we should just *show* him how to be a Henry with better manners!”



That day, Dilly tucked a fern under Henry’s chin like a napkin and showed him how to munch his grubs with his mouth closed.

Opal showed Henry how to point his nose in the air when he had to sneeze.



Seth made a map for Henry and showed him the safest places to fly and the best ways to get back home.



Henry was the best student. Before long, he could tuck his own fern under his chin. He could point his nose at the sky to sneeze. And he could fly safely without getting lost.

“Henry, you are such a smart baby,” said Opal one day. “Let’s celebrate with a picnic!”

Dilly let Henry roast the figs and grubs with a very small sneeze. Henry tucked his fern napkin under his chin and ate quietly.

When they had finished their picnic, Seth said, “This is your day, Henry. What would you like to do now?”

Henry’s eyes twinkled. He began to flap his wings.

“Oh, he wants us to chase him—just like we used to!” said Opal. “Let’s go!”



The End

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