

The Perfect Meal by Stephanie Burgis



Everything smelled so delicious, Ruby couldn't stop humming with delight. As she lifted the final tray out of her oven, she closed her eyes, folded back her wings, and inhaled the incredible scents of her favourite meal.

It had taken her ages to prepare this feast for her new friend, but oh, had the effort been worth it!

She couldn't wait to see Violet's reaction. The poor thing couldn't hunt, without sharp teeth or claws of her own, so she'd never had any proper food before.

The fairy's purple eyes would open *so wide* with delight when she saw these delicacies! They would show her exactly how much Ruby valued her friendship.

A bell chimed high above the kitchen-cavern. *She's here!* Ruby jumped with excitement and accidentally let out a puff of smoke. *Whoops!* Blowing it away, she bellowed, "Come in! Just follow the tunnel down to find me."

First, though, I have to make this perfect. She carefully sorted the hot treats with her claws, arranging them in the basket that was a cherished family heirloom. Then she scooped up the basket's handle with her teeth and ran with all four feet to her main cavern.

A sparkle of fairy dust showered at the far entrance as Violet arrived. Ruby grinned with pride, dropping her beautiful basket. "Ta-da!" she announced. "*This is all for you.*"

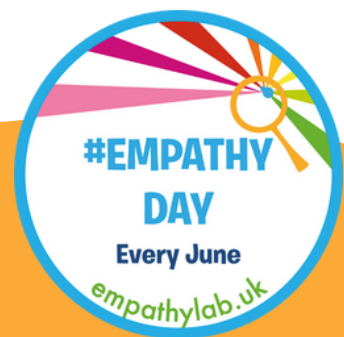
Violet's eyes opened wide, just as Ruby had predicted. But somehow, the expression on her tiny face didn't look quite the way Ruby had imagined.

Violet was afraid she might be sick.

Was that basket actually made of polished *bones*? At least they weren't small enough to be fairy bones--but they still made her wings whirl with panic.

Then she looked inside the basket.

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Where were the green leaves? She couldn't spot any juicy dandelion stalks or delicious drops of honey—not even a single clover! Instead, hunks of horrifying cooked meat had been stacked on top of each other in the basket of bones, like a funeral pyre.

"Didn't you make anything vegetarian?"

"*Vege-what?*" Hot smoke puffed out of Ruby's massive green nostrils, and Violet flinched.

Oh no! The dragon had always seemed so kind and friendly before. Was she furious now? Would she steal *Violet's* bones?

Ruby's big head drooped, and her wings sank to the floor. "I thought," the dragon rumbled, "you would like these. I made all of my favourite foods."

Violet looked at the disgusting pile of meat. Then she looked up at her friend's huge golden eyes...and took a deep breath.

"Well, then," she said brightly, "you should bring these with you. We'll have a picnic outside!"

"But..." Ruby's scaly wings bunched up behind her. "You still want to share a meal?"

"Of course!" Violet said. "You cared enough to show me your favourite foods. I'll show you mine, too."

When they finally sat down to eat, their chosen foods looked rather different—but both friends agreed that it was the perfect meal.

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