

THE STOLEN TREASURE

The morning sun peeked over the hills, casting golden light into the cozy cave where a small dragon named Ember lay curled around a shimmering blue crystal. It was her most prized possession, a gift from her mother, glowing with a soft inner light. But when Ember stretched and yawned, she felt only empty stone beneath her claws.

THE CRYSTAL WAS GONE.

Panic shot through Ember like a burst of fire. She frantically searched the cave, overturning pebbles and sniffing the air. A faint, musty scent tickled her nostrils—goblins.

Determined to reclaim her treasure, Ember bounded from her cave, following a trail of tiny footprints leading into the dense forest. Twigs snapped beneath her paws as she moved deeper into the trees, her sharp eyes scanning for any sign of the thieves.

Soon, she reached a clearing where a group of goblins huddled around a flickering fire. At the center of their gathering, sitting atop a rickety wooden chest, was her crystal, glowing faintly. Ember's tail flicked with excitement—she had found it! But retrieving it wouldn't be easy. The goblins were arguing, their sharp voices rising over the crackling flames.

"This is the best treasure we've ever stolen!" one goblin boasted, rubbing his hands together.

“But it’s too bright!” another whined. “What if someone sees it and comes looking?”

Ember crouched behind a fallen log, thinking fast. She could charge in and grab the crystal, but goblins were tricksters—they’d fight back. She needed a plan.

She took a deep breath and stepped into the firelight. “Excuse me,” she said, making her voice as small and innocent as possible.

The goblins jumped, turning toward her with wide eyes.

“What’s a baby dragon doing here?” one muttered.

“I—I got lost,” Ember sniffled, flicking her tail. “And I couldn’t help but notice your amazing treasure. It must be the most powerful crystal in the world!”

The goblins straightened, puffing out their chests. “Oh, it is,” said the tallest one. “It can grant wishes, you know.”

Ember gasped. “Really? Then surely you know how to unlock its magic.”

The goblins exchanged nervous glances. “Uh, well—”

“It’s simple!” one goblin blurted. “We just haven’t done it yet!”

Ember tilted her head. “Maybe if you give it back to me, I can show you?”

The goblins hesitated, but greed gleamed in their eyes. “Fine,” the tallest one said, lifting the crystal. “But if it doesn’t work, we’re keeping it!”

Ember’s heart pounded as she took the crystal in her claws. She smiled sweetly—then turned and bolted into the trees.

The goblins howled in protest, but Ember was too fast. She soared into the air, clutching her treasure tightly. Only when she reached her cave did she slow down, placing the crystal safely in its spot.

As she curled around it, she realized the real treasure wasn’t just the crystal—it was the thrill of adventure, the cleverness she had discovered within herself, and the lesson that sometimes, the journey was just as valuable as what she sought.