

The Smoke Factory Dragon

Every morning, a black tail emerged from the chimney of the Vallfosc factory. It coiled around the bell tower and left a bitter smell in the streets.

“It’s the Smoke Dragon,” the adults would say. “He’s always lived here.”

The factory employed half the town. It made tiles, heated the school, and kept many shops open. That’s why no one wanted to talk much about the gray sky.

Joana, Malik, Oriol, and Ruth decided to look for the dragon. They entered through a broken window and followed soot trails to the boiler room.

There they found a huge creature chained to a furnace. It had gray scales and tired eyes.

“So you’re the one polluting the sky!” Oriol said.

The dragon coughed up a black mist.

“I only burn what they give me.”

Beside him was a mountain of coal. Every time the machines needed heat, a chain forced the dragon to swallow a shovelful.

“Why don’t you leave?” Ruth asked.

“If I suddenly stop blowing, the furnaces will cool down, the heating will stop, and many families will lose their jobs.”

The answer wasn’t as simple as defeating a monster.

The group spoke with the workers. Some feared the factory would close. Others had been coughing for years. The manager insisted that changing everything would be too expensive.

“What about changing it gradually?” Joana suggested.

They made a plan with the town’s technical school. First, they repaired the windows and pipes to prevent heat loss. They covered the warehouse with solar panels. They repurposed scrap wood that had previously been thrown away and installed a furnace that required less heat.

Each improvement removed a link in the chain.

The dragon began to eat less coal. Its scales turned brown, then green. Smoke no longer came from its nostrils, but a white mist like that of a winter morning.

There was still a long way to go. Not all the machines could be replaced immediately. Some decisions cost money and sparked arguments. But now, at the factory entrance, there was a marker showing how much smoke had been avoided and what remained to be done.

The day the last link fell, the dragon came out into the courtyard.

“You are free,” Malik said.

The creature stretched its wings, but didn’t leave. It helped bake the tiles with a small flame, fueled by the energy the factory could produce without darkening the sky.

It took years for Vallfosc to regain its blue. When they finally saw their first complete sunset, no one claimed to have defeated the dragon.

They had learned to stop feeding it what also hurt them.