PUFFIN BOOKS

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Lee enjoys adventuring, drinking ridiculous amounts of tea and giving his dogs a good cuddle – or a *cwtch*, as they say in Wales.

LEE NEWBERY

THE LAST FIREFOX

ILLUSTRATED BY LAURA CATALÁN

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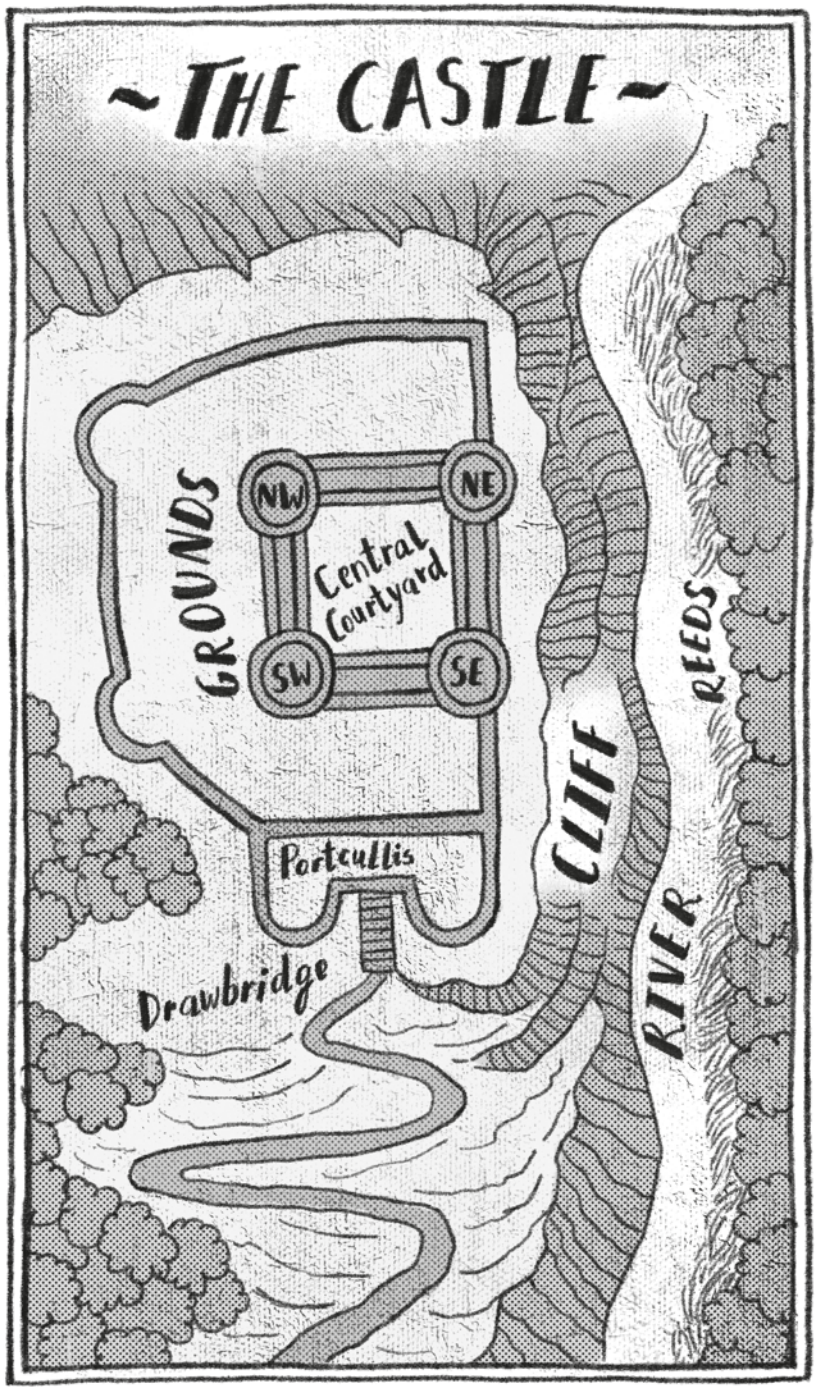
This, the book of my heart,

for Tom and Parker, the people of my soul



Chapter 1

I'm being chased to my death by a goose and it's all Lippy's fault.

If it wasn't for her and her crazy ideas, I wouldn't be in this mess. Take the pebble game, for example. She came up with it months ago, after reading about families hiding pebbles in parks for other families to find. First you paint a pebble and, when you find another one out in the world, you swap it for your own so someone else can find it, and so the game goes on. Well, Lippy decided we needed to do our own version.

And, when Lippy decides something, Roo and I have no choice but to play along. We take it in turns to hide a painted pebble somewhere around Bryncastell, where we live, and post a clue in our group chat. The first person who finds it keeps the pebble and gets to hide theirs next.

It was fun at first, but then Lippy's hiding places started getting more, well, let's just say *imaginative*. Only two weeks ago, Roo had to ask the man at the pet stall in the market to scoop Lippy's pebble out of one of the fish tanks. Before that, I had to rummage through a ball pit at the indoor play area in town, while little kids bounced on my head.

So, when Lippy sent her latest clue, Roo and I weren't exactly scrambling to get to the pebble first.

You will find it in the House of Ducks.

I don't know how she comes up with this stuff.

Roo took one look at me and shook his head. 'You can have this one.'

It took a lot of deciphering, but I finally decided

that the nesting box on the edge of the lake in the park was the only place in the whole of Bryncastell that Lippy could possibly mean by the 'House of Ducks'.

The nesting box is a small wooden hut built on a platform just a little way out on the lake. It's basically a mansion for ducks. All I had to do was hop on to the platform, lean through the tiny doorway and grab Lippy's pebble.

Sounds easy, eh?

And it was, to begin with. I made sure there were no ducks around and leaped on to the platform. Then I got down on all fours and poked my head through the doorway.

It was quite cosy inside, if a bit smelly. Lots of hay and other duck stuff. And there, nestled in the hay, was the pebble. It was perfectly circular and smooth, and painted on it was the sun, with warm yellow rays rippling outwards.

Aha!

My joy was short-lived. I was just reaching out to pick it up when I heard a nasty-sounding hiss from

outside. My whole body tensed, and I slowly retreated out of the wooden box, bottom first.

Until today, I didn't really have much of an opinion on geese. I know swans can be vicious, with their twisty never-ending necks and wings that can break your arm with a single beat, but I've never really given geese a lot of thought.

Well, now I know the truth: geese are the most fearsome beasts to roam the Earth.

This particular goose was enormous. It was definitely the boss goose. It had beady black eyes, full of rage, and a mouth full of tiny serrated spikes for teeth.

It fixed me with its glare and very slowly, very menacingly, said, '*Honk*.'

I let out a whimper. I had to get out of there.

As though it had read my thoughts, the goose stretched up high and extended its wings. It started beating them powerfully and lunged at me. I screamed and dived for the muddy bank a metre or so away.

And missed.

Turns out that reversing out of a duck house butt first is a guaranteed way of messing with your senses. I completely misjudged where I was and leaped in the wrong direction. Instead of the ground, my feet found water and I went under.

The cold was a shock. I don't like the cold. I like pyjamas that have just come out of the tumble dryer and socks with a little bit of extra fluff.

Well, the lake had no extra fluff. It had extra gunk and slime and sludge, oh yes, but *zero* fluff.

I broke the surface, gasping for air, with a lily pad stuck to my face. Then something soft hit my cheek and bounced into the water, like somebody was throwing marshmallows at me. I peeled away the lily pad and stared at the bank of the lake.

An old lady was standing there, and next to her was Lucy, a girl I recognized from school. She has golden hair and a winning smile, but right then she was gawping at me.

And then something else hit my face.

'Er, Nan,' said Lucy. I saw recognition flicker across

her features, but there was something else, too. Pity, perhaps? 'That's not a duck. You can stop throwing bread.'

The old lady lowered the loaf of stale bread she'd been tearing chunks from (apparently having completely ignored the '**Do not feed bread to the ducks**' sign just off the bank). She peered at me over the rim of her glasses. 'It's not? I thought it looked a bit odd. What is it, then?'

'It's, er, a hairless dog, I think,' said Lucy. 'And it's about to get eaten by an angry goose, so let's go.' She shepherded her elderly grandmother away.

Well, that was humiliating. My cheeks burned so hot I swear the water started evaporating –

Wait. Did Lucy just say . . . ?

There was a triumphant hiss behind me. I glanced over my shoulder and let out another whimper. The goose glared at me, sunlight glinting off its needle teeth.

'*Honk*,' it said again, and then rocketed forward.

'Aaaaaaaaaaaaargh!'

I didn't waste another second. I splashed to the shore and legged it, my pockets full of water and my shoes squelching fartily with every step.

Which brings me to now – running through the park with a goose chasing after me.

I think of my dads. I think of Lippy and Roo. I think of all the things I haven't had the chance to do yet, like have a bath in hot chocolate and hide in a comic-book shop until it closes so I can spend the night there.

This is rubbish. I'm going to be goose food.

And the worst part? I forgot to pick up that stupid pebble.