BRONTE TEMPESTRA
AND THE LIGHTNING STEEDS

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BEX HOGAN

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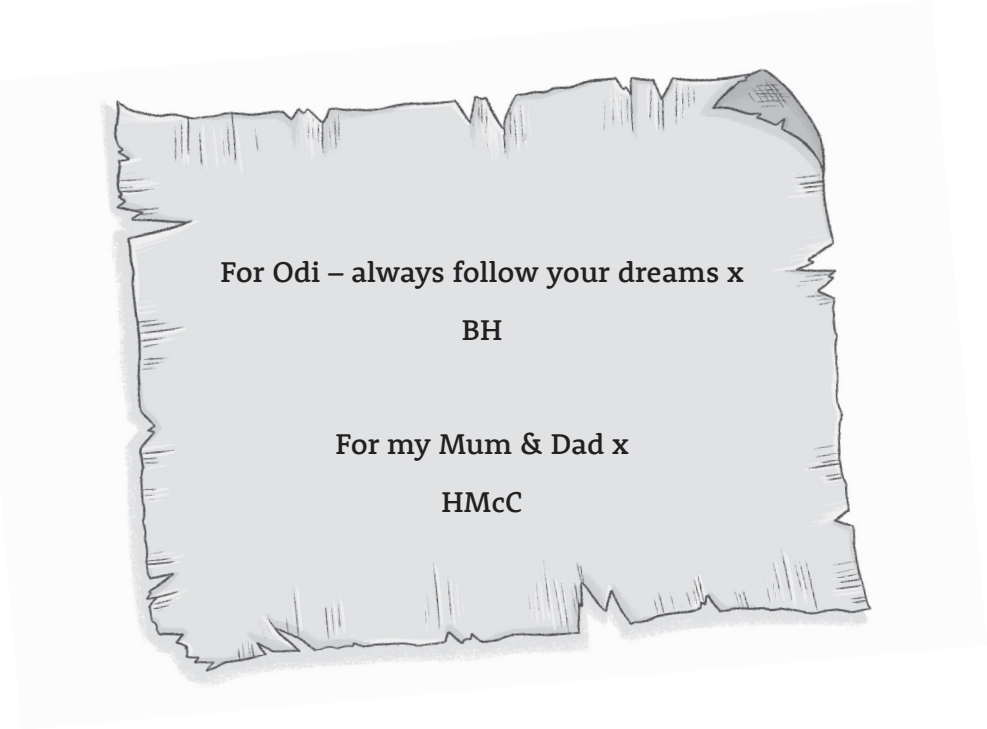
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For Odi – always follow your dreams x

BH

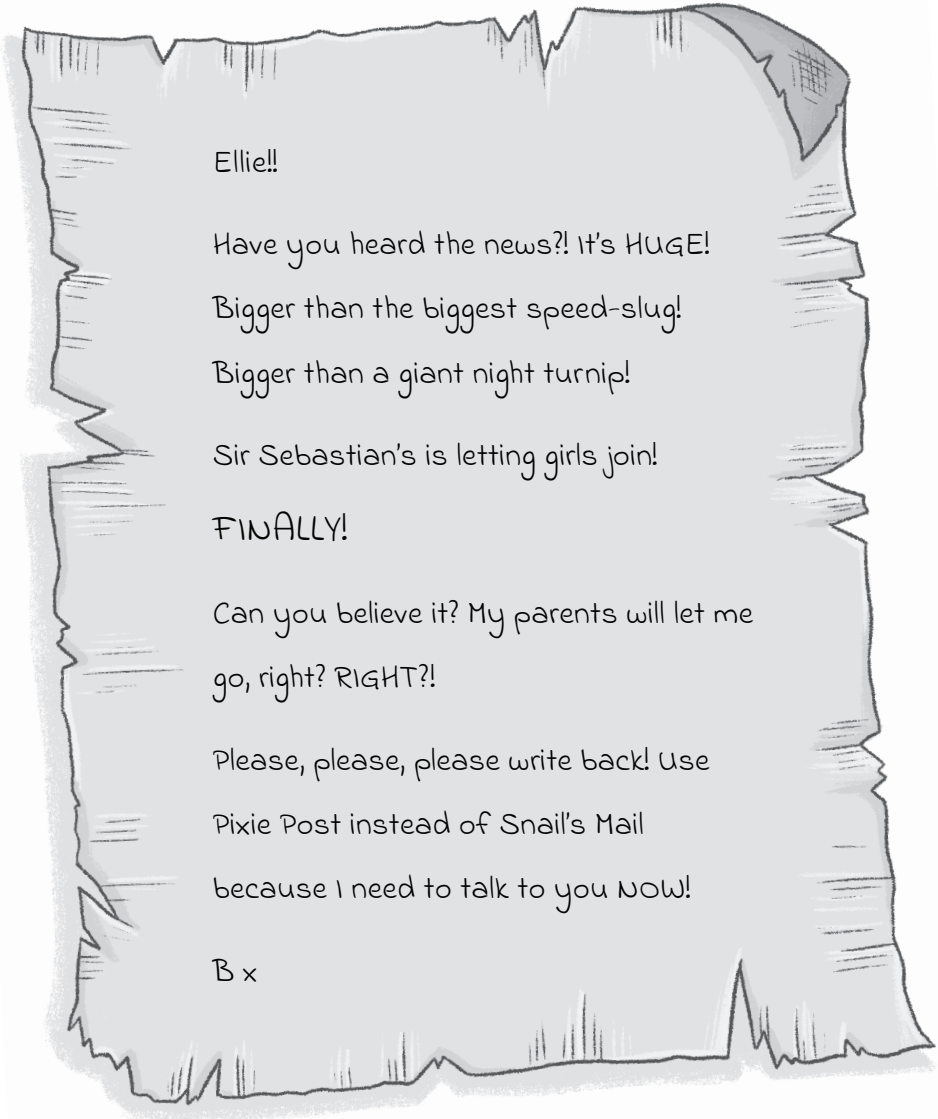
For my Mum & Dad x

HMcC


EVERDALE
THE WEATHER KINGDOMS
SUN
STORM
SNOW
MIST
THE CRYSTAL KINGDOMS
EMERALD
SAPPHIRE
RUBY
TOPAZ
HEART OF THE KINGDOMS
SIR SEBASTIAN'S
POOP
REALM OF EDUCATION
SICK
THE FLORAL KINGDOMS
POPPY
CACTUS
ROSE
IVY
THE ELEMENTAL KINGDOMS
EARTH
WATER
FIRE
AIR
THE FORGOTTEN KINGDOMS
?
?
?
?
CAT'S PAW ISLAND


ANCIENT RUINS
THE OLD FOREST
OAK
WEAPON TRAINING HALL
CHERRY
HEADMASTER'S TOWER
RIDING ARENA
TRAINING GROUNDS
TRAINING GROUNDS
TOURNAMENT ARENA


SIR SEBASTIAN'S
SCHOOL FOR SQUIRES
FIRE CAT
CAVES
WILLOW
DINING HALL
ARMOURY
MAPLE
ASSEMBLY
HALL
ENTRANCE
BOAR PENS
BOAR FIELDS
JOUSTING
FIELD
BOAR FIELDS



Ellie!!

Have you heard the news?! It's HUGE!

Bigger than the biggest speed-slug!

Bigger than a giant night turnip!

Sir Sebastian's is letting girls join!

FINALLY!

Can you believe it? My parents will let me go, right? RIGHT?!

Please, please, please write back! Use Pixie Post instead of Snail's Mail because I need to talk to you NOW!

B x

WAHHHH! B, that's perfect!! I'm sure they'll let you go! They know how much you've always wanted to be a knight, and it's not as if you're likely to be queen with six big brothers in line for the throne ahead of you! We all saw how perfect you were as Sir Pen Tine in the school play last year! Let me know what they say.

Are you having a fun summer so far?

El x

Summer Holiday Diary, Day 17

Super stormy day, even for the Storm Kingdom! The hailstones were big enough to play smash-ball with, and Barak and I got soaked catching them! Mum wasn't too impressed at the state of us. She threatened to take me dress shopping tomorrow. But I told her that I couldn't because Gale has been making new lightning beat-sticks, and we were planning to catch stray bolts. I'm not sure she thought that was a good excuse. And then the day after there's a jousting display and I know she wouldn't make me miss that. Hope the knights don't get blown off their battle boars!

Ellie!

Guess what?! Mum and Dad have said they'll think about it! EEEK!!

Yeah, having lots of fun! My brothers took me storm-skiing the other day - the rain is like a waterfall down the banks at the moment! And they've promised to make me some wind-wings so we can go gliding too. Tonight we're going to sit on the castle roof and see if we can spot the lightning steeds in the clouds! Wish you were here - maybe you could visit?

B x

Summer Holiday Diary, Day 22

Last night I stayed up REALLY late with my brothers watching for lightning steeds. We had lots of fun, but no luck spotting them – or the thunder trolls. Bolt says he saw the steeds once years ago, but I think he's just making that up. Flash says that you're more likely to see them when they come to ground, and that's super rare. But they do leave scorch marks behind and Dad says he's seen them before! I'm so jealous – I'd LOVE to see even their hoof-prints! Maybe one day! We'll keep looking though – we might spot a flash of black and orange in the sky eventually. I'm not so bothered that we didn't see the thunder trolls. Not with the noise they make!

Ellie!

GREEN GRAVY! MY PARENTS SAID YES!!!

I'm going to Sir Sebastian's!!!

B x

B!! That's SOOOO shiny! You are going to be the knightiest knight ever!

El x

Summer Holiday Diary, Day 35

Mum was helping me pack today. I've been so excited but then I got a bit tearful. I'm going to miss Ellie and the other girls. What if I don't make any new friends? But Sir Pen Tine wouldn't have let a pesky thing like nerves stop him . . . Would he?



Troll Trouble

Bronte Tempestra leaned out of the carriage as it frantically bumped along the cobbles. She brushed away the hair whipping across her face and screamed.

'Turn right, Hopper! NOW!'

The vehicle lurched sharply, moving just before a gigantic foot smashed onto the ground.

THWOMP!

Bronte gasped. 'That was *way* too close.'

'Hold on tight!' Hopper, the driver, called back, as he fought to keep control of the speed-slugs tugging on the reins.

This was *not* how things were supposed to be. Yes, it was true that a journey through the Storm Kingdom was always an experience, with the torrential rain and gusty winds shaking the carriage like a snow globe. But Bronte was used to that. This . . . this was something else.

Thunder trolls were falling from the sky!

Actual enormous thunder trolls, who were supposed to live *above* the clouds, were dropping down like monstrous rain, causing the world to shake each time one hit the ground.

The trolls seemed as confused as Bronte was and stumbled about so that the carriage had to swerve and dodge its way past their

clumsy – and lethal – feet.

This was a disaster! Thunder trolls and humans did *not* belong together!

The thunder trolls didn't look at all like Bronte had imagined they would either. Whenever she'd gazed into the sky, hoping to catch a glimpse of them, she'd expected to see hairy scary monsters leaping about. But there was nothing hairy about these trolls. At first glance Bronte thought they were made of stone, but then she realised it was cloud. They were far from floaty though – they were horribly solid.

'Incoming!' Hopper shouted, pulling the speed-slugs to a sudden halt.

Bronte braced herself, just as a vast tree landed with a thump in front of them. She gulped.

'Hang on,' Hopper warned her, before they set off again at high speed.



Bronte watched in horror as the thunder trolls plucked more trees from the Fundry Forest, like they were nothing more than hairs from an ogre's chin, and tossed them aside, oblivious to the destruction.

'What are they doing down here?' Bronte cried. How had they managed to escape the lightning steeds? The blazing horses were the only ones who could handle the trolls, keeping them running on top of the clouds and preventing them from doing . . . this!

'Haven't you noticed?' Hopper yelled above the chaos. 'No lightning!'

He was right! How hadn't she noticed that the lightning that usually illuminated the skies day and night was gone?

What was going on? Where were the lightning steeds? The trolls had only been here moments

and they were already destroying everything in their path. What if they trampled through the crop fields? Or suppose they destroyed the buffer trees that protected the villages from the worst of the storms? Or even worse, what if the trolls *squished* the villages?

It was hard to believe that only yesterday, when Bronte had set off on her journey, all had been fine. Better than fine – she was living her dream! As Hopper had loaded her trunk, Bronte's mum and dad – Queen Mira and King Roy of the Storm Kingdom – had given her a big hug. They had been as nervous and excited as she was. New term, new year . . . new school. Her mum had kept saying that if Bronte didn't like it, if it wasn't all she'd imagined it would be, then she could go back to her old school any time, but why the curly custard would Bronte leave? Training to become

a knight was all she had ever wanted . . .

BUMP! The carriage flew into the air so suddenly that Bronte hit her head on the roof. She clutched her much-loved knitted knight toy close to her chest.

'Sorry!' Hopper shouted. 'Debris in the road!'

Catching her breath, Bronte dared to peer out of the window again and was relieved to see the thunder trolls were now falling behind. *Phew!*

She looked up to the sky, all black and stormy but strangely empty without the flashes of light. It was worrying. Where the green gravy *were* the lightning steeds? Surely they would come to the rescue soon?

Sleepily Bronte closed her eyes. She imagined the powerful creatures swooping down to her carriage to take her with them. Just think! How amazing would it be to ride one of the

magnificent lightning horses, its black coat flecked with fiery reds and oranges. She could see herself now – galloping across the land, sword in hand, rounding up the troublesome trolls before chasing them back into the sky, the clouds catching in her hair as they sped along. Together with the steeds, she would save everyone from the trolls' havoc, and across the kingdom they would applaud her for saving the day, chanting her name over and over!

Bronte! Bronte! Bronte . . .





Sir Sebastian's School for Squires

'We're nearly there, miss.'

Hopper's voice woke Bronte so abruptly that she clonked her head on the window. Rubbing it better, she took in her surroundings.

The journey had taken over a week – south through the Storm Kingdom, then down through the Mist Queendom and into the Heart of the Kingdoms – and since that one terrifying day,

there had been no sign of the thunder trolls. Bronte had sent an urgent letter to her parents via Pixie Post, but Hopper had pointed out she wouldn't receive a reply while she was travelling.

'I'm sure those trolls will already be back in the sky,' he'd said to reassure her. 'Your family will have fixed things, mark my words.'

It *had* eased Bronte's concerns slightly, and in any case, she had no choice but to wait to find out what the green gravy had happened. But right now, she had other things on her mind.

The road they were on was unfamiliar. Normally they would have turned left at the grizzly-goat bridge to head east towards her old school in the Realm of Education, but not today. The closer she got to her destination, the more nervous she became.

All Bronte had ever wanted was to be a

knight – riding one of the legendary battle boars, dressed in shining armour, with a sword gleaming in her hand and a firecat at her side. She'd dreamed of dramatic rescues, of honour and chivalry. But there had always been one big problem – the knight school hadn't let girls attend.

Until now.

That summer, Sir Sebastian's School for Squires had announced that, for the first time in its history, they were going to admit *all* children. What had happened to change their minds? Who knew. But Bronte liked to imagine it was because some ancient text foretold of a knight who would be braver and more heroic than any before. That this knight would be a girl. That this knight would be her. That she alone would –

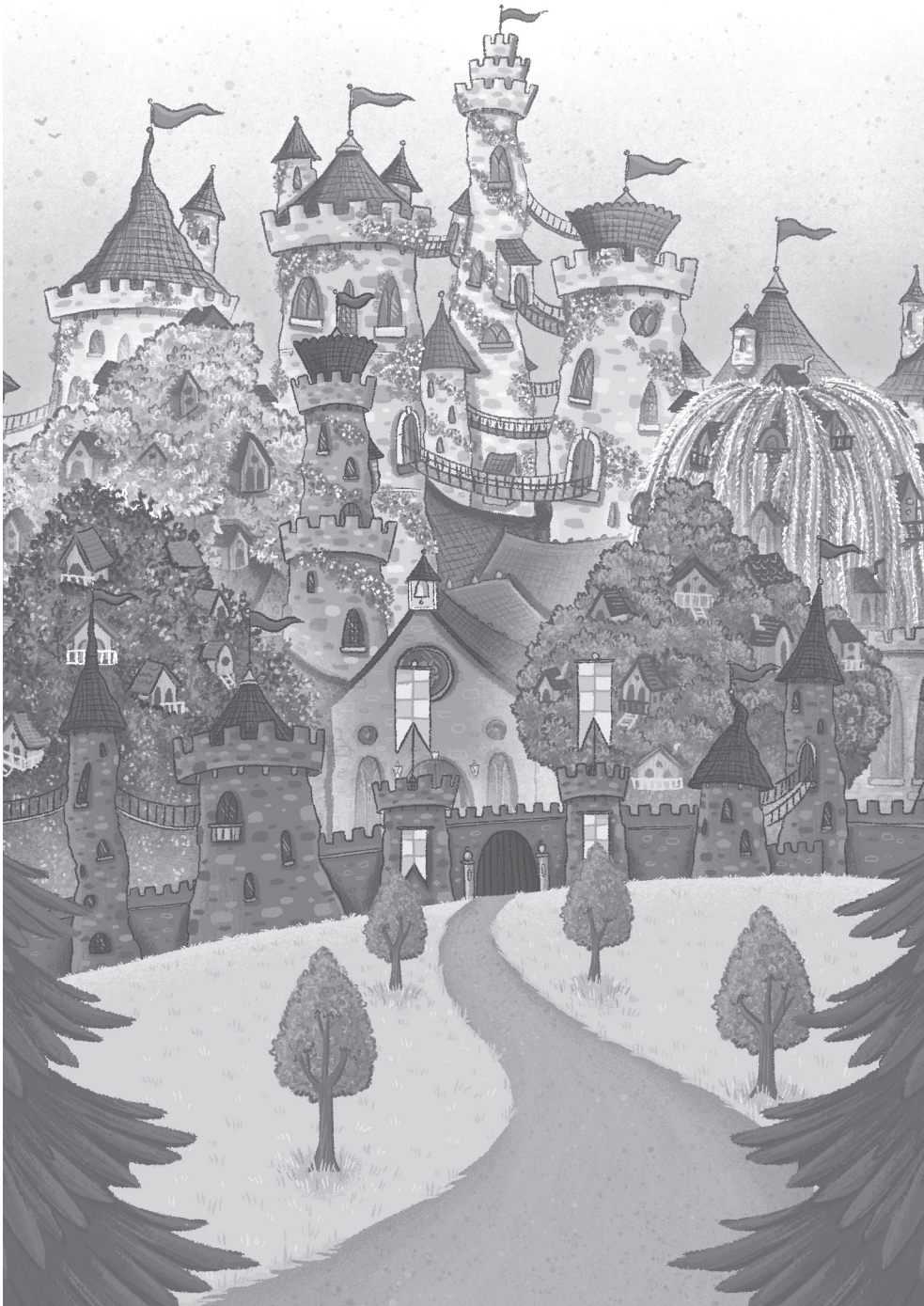
All daydreams blew away as the carriage

turned off the main road and the school finally came into view.

Bronte had seen some castles in her time but WOW!

Four unbelievably massive trees loomed before her, positioned in an irregular square shape. Treehouses filled their branches, and between the trees were towers and turrets, all linked together by rope bridges. Colourful flowers wound up the stone walls like maypole ribbons. From the top of the towers, flags representing each of the sixteen kingdoms flapped in the wind and Bronte searched until she found hers: a grey flag with a black horse in the centre, and bolts of lightning in each corner.

Bronte's excitement flipped to panic. What if no one liked her? Or worse, what if she was a totally rubbish knight?



The carriage stopped outside the entrance and Bronte climbed out, staring up at her new school nervously.

Hopper helped unstrap her trunk and noticed she had gone quiet. 'It's not too late to change your mind,' he said. 'I could find my way to your old school blindfolded and I'm sure they'd have you back in a flash. No one would blame you for wanting to be in the Realm of Education, rather than out here in the middle of nowhere.'

Bronte looked down at her toy of Sir Pen Tine. The legendary knight was her inspiration. He wouldn't turn back now and neither would she.

'No, this is where I want to be.'

'You sure, Miss Bronte?' Hopper glanced towards the school and pulled a face. 'Just a lot of prancing about, isn't it? Reckon you can do better than that.'

Prancing?! How could he call being a hero *prancing*?!

But she didn't want to argue with him, so instead she gave the driver a big hug. 'Please be careful on the way home. Watch out for the trolls.'

'Oh, I'm not worried about them, Miss Bronte. Those trolls and the lightning steeds have never left the Storm Kingdom in the entire history of Everdale. There'll be a letter waiting for you, telling you all is back to normal, you'll see.'

Yes, Bronte thought. He was right. The grown-ups would have fixed everything.

'Anyway,' Hopper added, 'don't worry about me. You just take care of yourself.'

One last hug and he was gone.

'Come on,' Bronte whispered to herself. 'You can do this. Feet firm, head high. Be brave.'

Bronte walked to the open gates, which were

set between two tall turrets. Before her was a courtyard bustling with students. They were greeting each other with boisterous knuckle-knocking handshakes and cheerfully exchanging friendly insults.

Huh.

That was weird. Boys here. Boys there. Boys everywhere. Surely . . . ? There was no *way* she could be the *only* girl! Frantically searching about, Bronte wasn't paying attention to where she was going until –

Oof!

She was knocked back, crashing down hard onto her trunk.