Extract 2: Taken from Chapter 5 Message Hidden in a Castle



5

MESSAGE HIDDEN IN A CASTLE

The first thing I see is paper -
flashes of white,
dotted with the blurry ink of printed letters.
It's a castle.
It's *the* castle we're standing in right now,
a three-dimensional version made of newspaper
intricately folded and wrapped together,
with a subtle coating on top,
as if helping to hold it in place.
It's correct down to every detail:
the castle's long central column,
its turrets,
and small window gaps.

'Flipping frogspawn,' Idris breaths,
which I think is Brunstonian
for the same words that rush out of my chest
in a flurry of wonder and excitement:

'It's *amazing*.'

'Somebody hid this here,' Idris says.

'And I don't think they did it yesterday,'
I reply brushing dust from the box's lid.
'This has been here for a *long* time.'

Idris's eyes gleam with satisfaction.
'And *we*'re the first to find it.'

I reach in, gently lifting the castle out
and examining it, before passing it to Idris
to look at, too.
'*Why* would someone hide
something like this?' I say.

'And why *here*?' Idris replies,
humming, as if it is the sound his thoughts make
when they are doing their work.
He looks at the sign on the wall
above the desk, and whispers its words:
'Brunstane Castle is full of stories -
what tales do you have to tell?'
As he speaks, he gently turns
the castle side to side in his hands.
There comes a shifting, sliding sound,
like something within it is moving.

Idris pauses, and stares at the paper castle.
'What if it's not just the castle we're standing in
that's full of stories, but this one, too.'
He turns the castle again,
releasing the same shifting noise.

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Extract 3: Taken from Chapter 9 Strong Standards



SOMEONE LIKE YOU

As I leave Idris's house
I pass the set of framed images lining the wall
that I saw when I first arrived:
women with their eyes raised high,
faces strong.
My eyes catch one in particular,
a woman rising up,
her arm high in the air.

'Your aunt gave me that one,'
a familiar voice says behind me,
and I turn to see Hawa,
a playful smile on her face.
'I collect images of women's activism
- of women making a difference -
from around the world.
This one is from the women's marches in South Africa.'
She pauses, smiling softly at me.
'Part of your heritage, Estie.'

It feels like her words soothe
a part of me,
a part of that jigsaw-puzzle-like ache
that I've been carrying with me
ever since Hillworth.
Like they answer the questions
Mr Morton planted;
the feeling that I couldn't touch
what was mine.

I look back at the picture.
'Why do you collect these?' I ask.

Hawa smiles.
'To remind me, and all who come here,
to stand up for what's right.'

I shuffle. 'But what if -
what if you try to do that ...
and it all goes belly up?'

'Then you find your people,
the ones who will stand with you,
so you're not doing it alone,'
Hawa says, rubbing my shoulder with her hand.
'It is always better to know the truth inside you,
and stay true to it,
than to give in.
Than to live in silence.
These posters remind me of that,
help me remember I'm not alone.'

I look back at the drawing.
I hope the woman in it found her people.
I hope she wasn't living in silence.



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