

WILDSMITH

MAGICAL MOUNTAIN RESCUE






Praise for *Wildsmith: Into the Dark Forest*

'A lush, rich, page-turning adventure from one of the most versatile writers we have. There's no genre Liz can't write in.'
PHIL EARLE

'*Wildsmith* has everything I want in a story – magic, mystery and dragons! Liz is the mistress of dragons and in this thrilling adventure she has cast her storytelling spell with utter charm and skill. Children are in for such a treat! Thank goodness there's a sequel – I want more!'
JASBINDER BILAN

'Wildsmiths, dragons, witches and the protection of magical animals! What's not to love? An enchanting read. Beautifully written and utterly charming. I can't wait for the next adventure!'
ELOISE WILLIAMS







'*Into The Dark Forest* is packed full of the best kind of magic – I want to be a wildsmith!'
DAISY MAY JOHNSON

'Liz has crafted a stunningly rich world and characters – brimming with magic and wonder, yet wonderfully warm and familiar. The lush illustrations feel reminiscent of the beautiful animations of Studio Ghibli.'
GABRIELLE KENT

'Sneak inside the wonderful world of the wildsmith, and take a peek at the secrets and magic that lay hidden, deep within an enchanted fairytale forest. This is a fantastic first chapter book which will delight young fans of magic, animals and adventure.'
HARRY HEAPE

'A thoroughly charming book!'
THOMAS TAYLOR








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LIZ FLANAGAN

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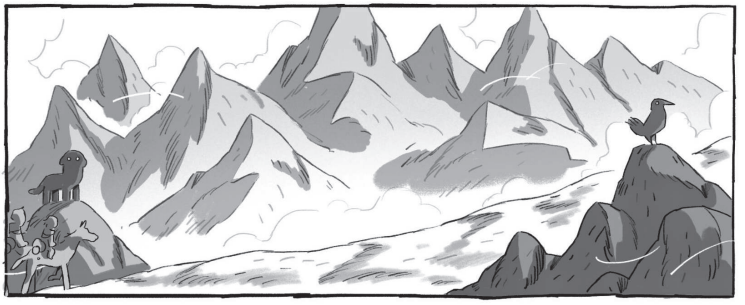
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This book is about friends old and new, so it's for those dear friends I've known since school – Sian, Helen, Jennie, Angela, Kirsty – with lots of love



CHAPTER ONE

ROWAN WAS DREAMING.

She was lost in a blizzard, scared and alone. A horse came thundering towards her through the trees; huge, fast and terrifying. She couldn't see the rider's face, but she heard their words.

'The prince has been kidnapped. The Estrians did it! You were wrong about them. You were wrong about everything!'

Rowan woke in the early morning, gasping, her heart pounding. She rushed downstairs to get a drink

of water. Then she stood at the kitchen window of Grandpa's house in the Dark Forest.

The snow had stopped. The world outside was dazzling white: the sky, trees and stable roofs. Even when she closed her eyes, she could tell how deep the snow was. Everything sounded different. Noise was quieter, softer, more muffled.

Rowan felt different too – sad and worried, as if everything good was hidden beneath a blanket of snow.

Something furry nuzzled her hand, then licked it.

'Thanks, Arto,' she said, stroking the white wolf's domed head. She felt comforted by his warm weight leaning against her. 'You're right,' she whispered. 'I don't want to leave either. I've only just got home.'

She'd arrived back in Gallren the previous evening, after a long and dangerous journey. Last night, everything had been perfect – the midwinter feast with her parents and Grandpa. And then the messenger had arrived from Queen Silvana, with terrible news.

Prince David had been kidnapped. Now Rowan's dad was needed, back in the city of Holderby.



'Morning, love.' Rowan's mother padded into the kitchen, yawning, and came to stand with her arm round her daughter, gazing out at the wintry forest. 'Are you sure you want to go with your father?' she asked gently.

'I have to,' Rowan said. 'It's not what I want, but I must.' She knew Prince David: they'd played together in the palace gardens. What a long time ago that

seemed now! Still, she knew she had to help bring him home again.

'Then we'll all go,' Mum said.

Rowan spun round. 'Really?'

She'd been dreading saying goodbye to Mum and Grandpa. But then her relief was chased away by new worries. Would it be dangerous? What if someone got hurt?

'Hurry, though,' Mum said. 'There's lots to do, if we're to get there today.'

For a while, there was no time for worrying. They rushed around, grabbing a quick breakfast, then putting on their warmest things – layers of woollen clothes, thick socks and boots – everyone trying to find their winter coats or cloaks, hats and gloves.

'At least you'll be warm, with your thick fur,' Rowan panted to Arto, feeling overdressed in all her layers before they left the house. 'But how will I see you against the snow? Stay close, won't you?'

Arto yipped and licked her cheek.

First they went to their neighbours' farm, where

Rowan's friends Cam and Will lived. Will opened the door, his large spotted cat, Sable, curling her tail round his knees.

He looked tired, and Rowan wondered if he'd stayed up all night telling his family about their adventures in Estria. She hoped he'd told them how brave he'd been. Yes, Will had betrayed Rowan once, but he'd also rescued her. She counted him as a true friend now.

Cam nudged her brother aside and hugged Rowan, her long dark hair flowing down her back.

'Morning!' she said. 'You're early. We were going to come and find you after breakfast and show Leo the forest.' Cam led Rowan into the warmth.

Rowan saw the table with its pile of bread rolls and a dish of eggs, Will and Cam's parents drinking coffee and waving hello.

'After that, we can go to Appledore,' Cam was saying, 'and have some spiced apple juice and biscuits, and then we can—'

'No, Cam. Stop.' Rowan hated to bring bad news, knowing she was about to wipe away all their smiles.

Her gaze moved past Cam and landed on Leo, her friend from Estria.

With his light-brown eyes and curly brown hair, Leo looked just like his mother, Elena Ravenwood. Elena was the brand new leader of Estria. She had finally taken charge of her country, with help from Leo, Will, Rowan, Isla the selkie and Leaf the green dragon.

'What's wrong?' Leo asked.

Rowan took a deep breath. She couldn't protect him from the news. What she was about to tell him might change both of their lives for ever.