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Opening extract from

Elf Girl and Raven Boy: Fright Forest

Written by

Marcus Sedgwick

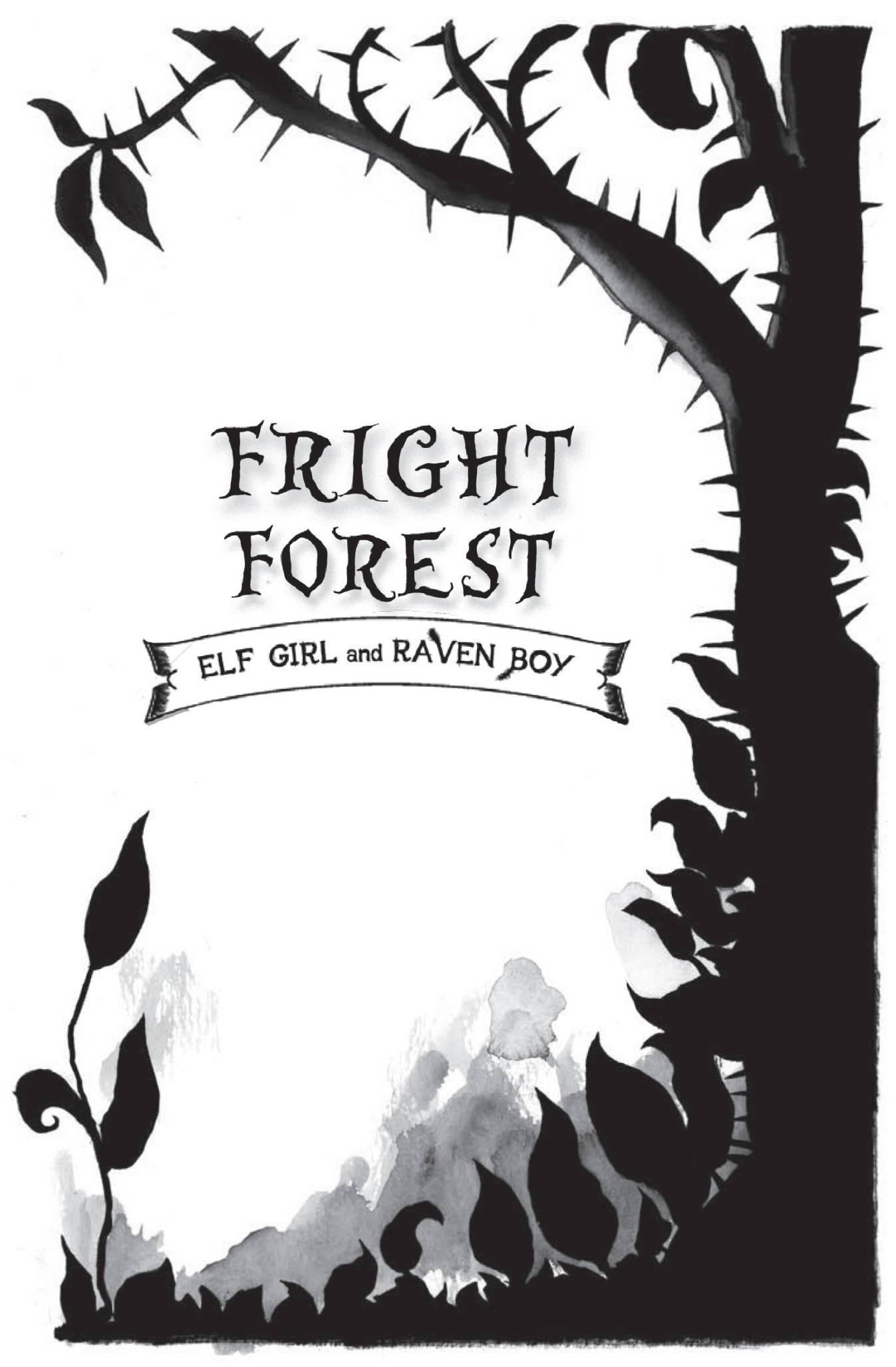
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ELF GIRL and RAVEN BOY

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FRIGHT FOREST

ELF GIRL and RAVEN BOY

MARCUS SEDGWICK
Illustrated by Pete Williamson

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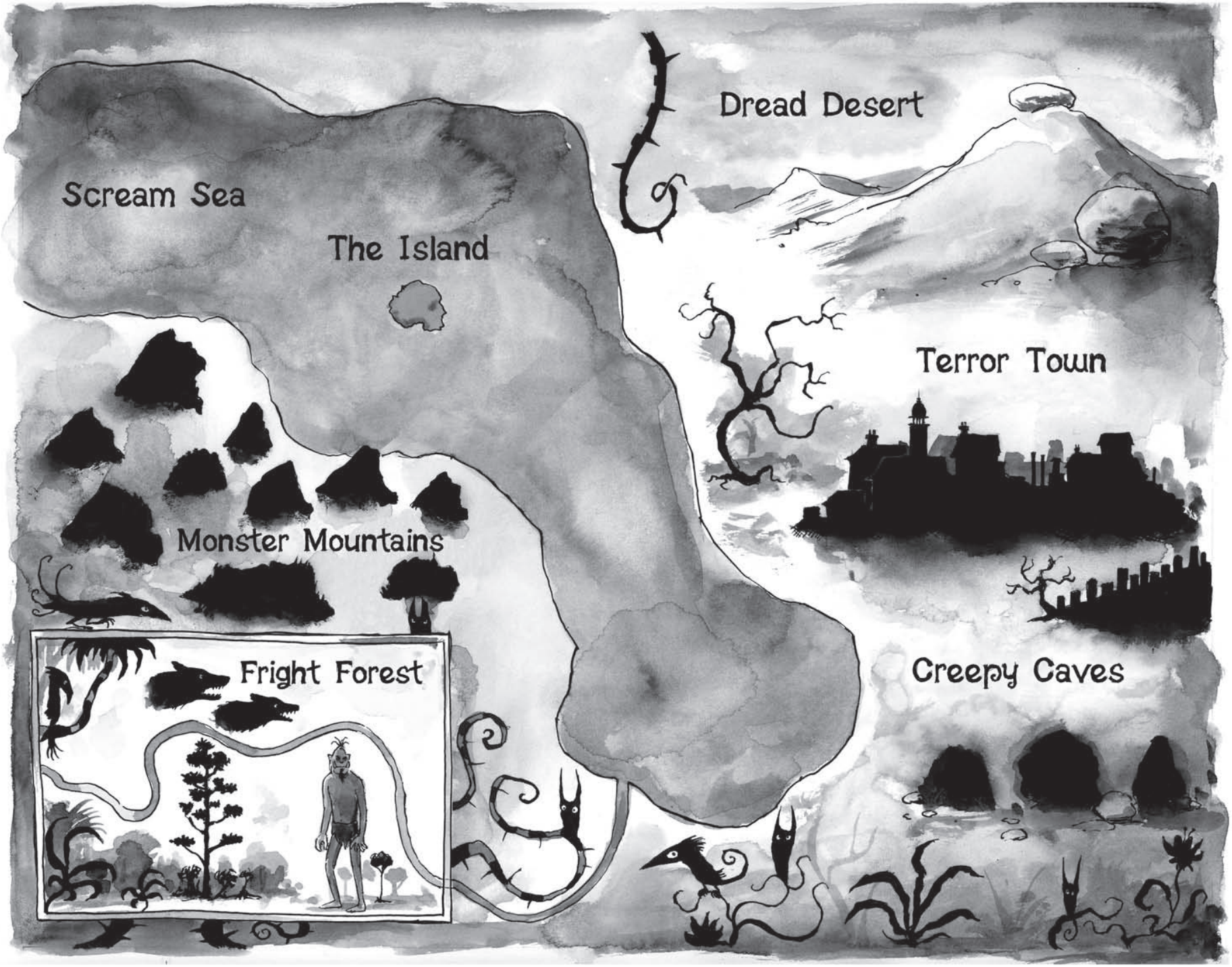
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Dedication TBC




Scream Sea
The Island
Dread Desert
Terror Town
Monster Mountains
Fright Forest
Creepy Caves



One

Raven Boy is *so* good at climbing trees that he goes higher even than really brave squirrels do.

When Raven Boy met Elf Girl, he was not called Raven Boy, and she was not called Elf Girl. Not then.

On the night they met, Raven Boy, as he would soon be known, was as usual sleeping happily in the top of a tall tree, the tallest he could find. It was the middle of the night, and the endless forest was quiet. No bats darted here and there, no owls hooted spookily, nothing rustled in the slightest.



It was quiet in a something-really-bad-is-about-to-happen way.

And then, strangely enough, something really bad did happen.

The tree in which Raven Boy was sleeping began to sway. Just a little bit at first, so he didn't wake up. He was dreaming about baby squirrels and he had a smile on his face.

Then the treetop swayed some more, a lot more, which was odd because there wasn't even the gentlest of breezes. It was swaying because it was falling down.

Raven Boy's eyes shot open.

'EEP!' he screeched and began grabbing at branches, but even with his amazing climbing skills, it was hopeless. The tree was hurtling towards the ground, smashing through the branches of other trees as it went.

He heard the loud squawk of birds and the terrible noise of the trunk splitting, and a second or two later, the tree smashed onto the forest floor. It was all he could do to jump at the last minute, and by chance he found himself hanging from a branch near the ground.

'Eep,' he said again, his eyes as wide as dinner plates.

He dangled for a bit, then felt stupid, even though it was the middle of the night and he knew no one could see him.

'Who are you?' said a voice. 'And why are you dangling in that tree? You look stupid. And why?' the voice sounded quite cross now, 'have you squashed my hut?'



The boy who would very soon be known as Raven Boy looked around. He had incredibly good night vision, so although it was dark, he saw the girl who'd spoken to him.

'Who are you?' he said.

'I asked you first,' replied a rather tiny and skinny girl.

'So?'

'So, what?'

'So you tell me your

name first.'

'Is that how it works?'

'Yes,' said the girl. 'It is.'

He thought about this.

'No,' he said.

'No? No what?'

'No, I won't tell you my name.'

'Why not?' asked the girl.

He had two reasons for this; the first was that he had a really silly name and he was very embarrassed about it, the second was that he was about to slip from the tree.

'Eep!' he said, and landed on the girl.

She rolled out from under him and stood up. She was so cross she put her hands on her hips and her ears turned pink. Then she pointed at him.

'You!' she said. 'Why are you covered in feathers?'

'I fell through a bird nest on the way down.'

That was true, but the fact is that he often had a feather or two poking out from his hair, or from his tattered coat – that's what

happens when you spend most of your time in treetops. You pick things up. Feathers, pine cones, leaves. Small creatures.

'You look more like a raven than a boy,' she said, laughing. Then she stopped laughing. 'Oh! Look at my hut!'

'What hut?'

The girl pointed at the tree trunk, from underneath which a splinter of roof poked out.

'You've flattened my home!'

'I didn't do . . . '

'What was that?'

She pricked up her ears, which he noticed were rather pointy. He'd heard the noise too.



'It's another tree! And it's coming this way!'

'Run, Raven Boy! Run!'

They ran, but not far enough. Because it was dark and they were a bit stupid, they didn't run to the side, but straight ahead, so that when the tree hit the ground, its topmost branches bopped them both and that was that.

Flattened, or very nearly, they were only

saved because they'd fallen into a large badger hole at the last moment.



By the time they woke up again, it was morning.

Sun beams were peeking around the tree trunk and down into the badger hole.

Raven Boy blinked, totally forgetting what had happened for a minute. Then he looked about him, at the badger hole, the tree above him, and at the skinny girl sitting next to him, picking leaves and the odd worm out of her hair.

'Why are your ears pointy?' asked Raven Boy.

'Same reason your nose is, I suppose.'

Raven Boy thought about this.

'You still have feathers in your hair, Raven Boy,' said the girl.

'So what's your name, then?'

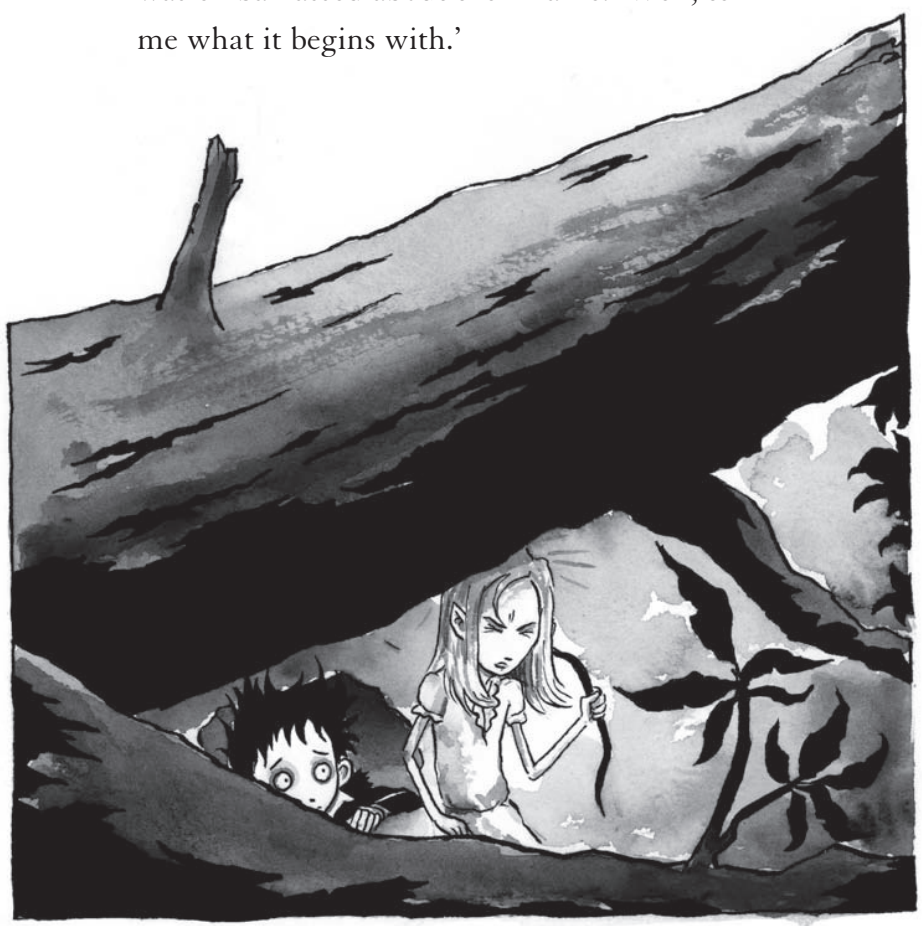
'I won't tell you.'

'Why not?'

'I have several reasons,' she said,

standing up and bumping her head on the tree trunk. 'Ow! First, because you won't tell me yours, but mostly because it's really silly and I'm really embarrassed about it.'

'Are you?' said Raven Boy. That was something to think about. Someone else who was embarrassed about their name. 'Well, tell me what it begins with.'



'Why?'

'So I can guess it.'

'E. But you'll never guess.'

'Elf.'

'No!' said the girl, 'that would be stupid.'

'Why? You look like an elf. Like an elf girl. Ha! Elf Girl!'

'I do not!'

'Yes, you do. You have blonde hair and you have pointy ears and you're tiny. Elf Girl.'

That seemed to make her very cross and she stamped on Raven Boy's foot.

'I AM not TINY!' she roared, in a tiny voice.

'No, you're just short for your height. I understand. Elf Girl.'

'Huh. Raven Boy.'

'Elf Girl.'

'Raven Boy.'

'Elf Girl.'

This went on for some time.

Then Elf Girl gasped.

'Oh!' she cried. 'We've been here all night. We must have been knocked out.

I remember trees falling, and seeing silver stars whizzing around inside my head! We have to get out! I have to see if my family is safe!'

'You're right. I shall summon the badgers to help us.'

Elf Girl snorted.

'You'll do what?'

'I'll summon the badgers . . .'

'Yes, I heard you the first time. Are you trying to tell me you can talk to animals? That's not possible. You can't do it.'

'I can! Well, not exactly, but I can communicate with them. I'll just see if they're around and can dig us out . . . Hey! Badgers!'

Elf Girl watched him for a moment, her mouth slowly dropping open.

'Good luck with that, Raving Boy. I'm going to start digging.'

And she did, but she'd only been digging for a few moments, when the black and white stripy snout of a badger suddenly pushed through the earth.

Elf Girl jumped with surprise and hit her head on the tree trunk again.

'Ow!'

Raven Boy noticed that the tips of her ears were going red, and her eyebrows were making funny shapes, and he guessed she might be cross again. But minutes later and there was a big hole, big enough to climb out through.

Elf Girl shook her head, picking soil from underneath her fingernails.

Raven Boy patted the badger.

'Good badger,' he said.



Two

Elf Girl's mother has a magic bow that she's been promising to give to her daughter for ages. But you know what mums are like.

'Okay, Raven Boy, I'm impressed,' said Elf Girl. 'Wow, in fact. But I've got to run. Goodbye.'

She turned to go.

'Wait!' said Raven Boy. 'Where are you going?'

'I'm going to find my family. We all have our own huts. My mum and dad. My aunts and uncles. They may be flat for all I know.'

'I'm coming with you.'