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Opening extract from

Ellie and the Sea Monster

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For Ewelina, with much love

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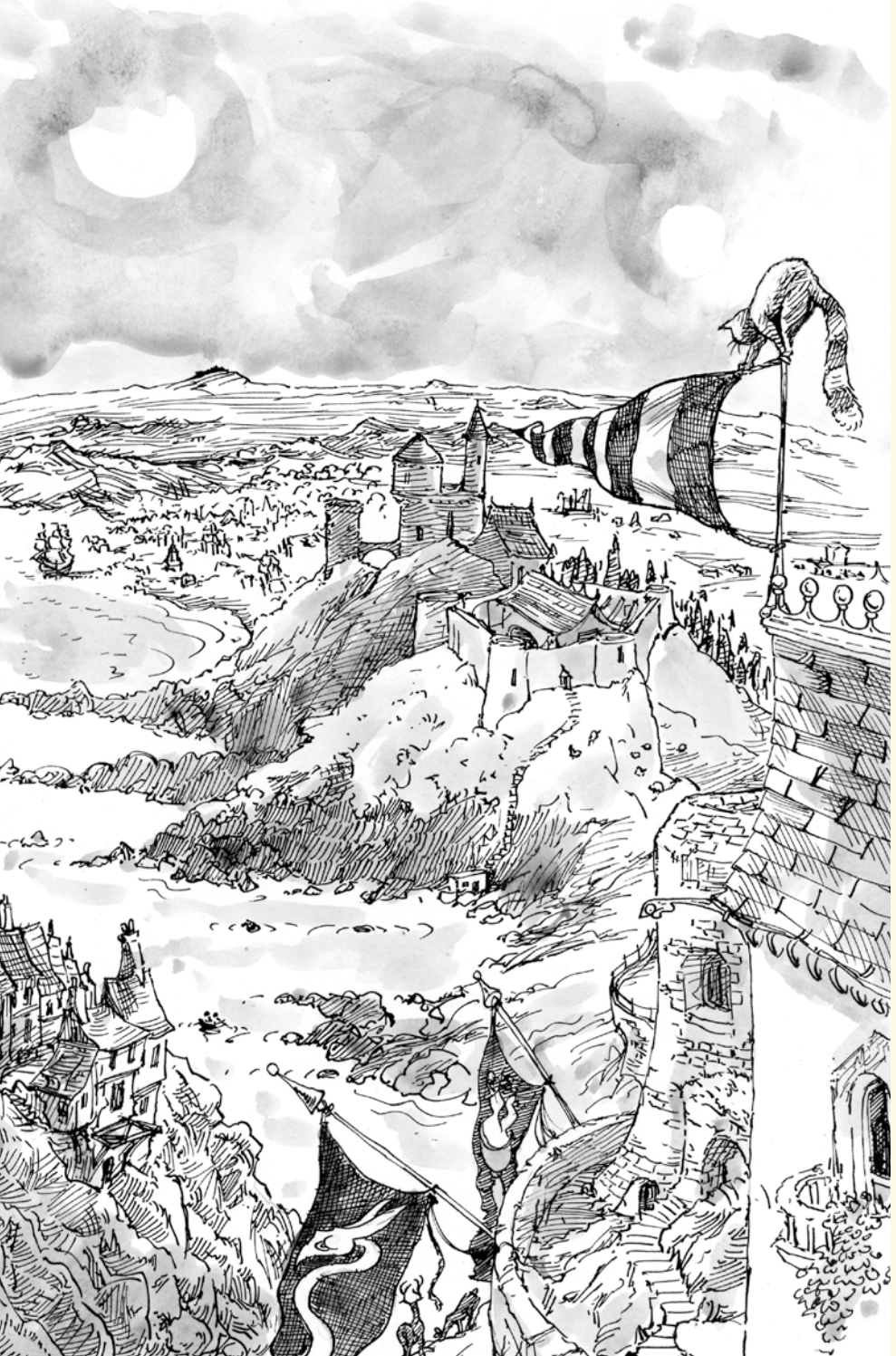
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Take a ride out past the moon, turn left before you reach the Milky Way, and you'll see Other Earth in front of you.

When you land, take a good look round. Other Earth isn't all that different from the Earth where you live. There are seas and rivers, hills and valleys, mountains and plains, towns and cities.

You may even wonder if you've gone round in a circle, and come back home again.

But don't think about that. Look at the suns. Other Earth has two suns. Oh, and a lot more magic. And wizards. And it's quite a lot smaller than our Earth. And ... no. I'm not going to tell you any more. Read the story and find out for yourself.

Chapter 1

Princess Ellie Has a Plan

Other Earth had lots of kings and queens, and for the most part they got on very well. They visited each other and played tiddlywinks together. Their children met each other at parties – there were a great many children and, of course, they were all princes and princesses. Some of the children went to school, but the rich ones had private tutors.

Princess Ellie was the youngest daughter of the Green King.

"Money and private tutors don't do anyone any good," Princess Ellie told her best friend Princess Pod as they walked home from school one day. "Rich people get so big headed."

Pod nodded. "You're right," she said. "My mum wants me to marry a rich prince. He's called Kittycat, or some stupid name like that. He sounds revolting. He won't even meet me. He sent a rude message saying I wasn't good enough for him. He wants to slay a sea monster, so everyone will think he's a hero, and then find a perfect princess to marry. Huh! Talk about daft! Doesn't he know that it's illegal to hunt sea monsters nowadays?"

"You're better off without him," Ellie said. "Much better off."

"I know." Pod kicked at a pebble. "Has your mum got any plans for you?" she asked.

Ellie shook her head. "No. My eleven sisters have worn her out. Twelve princesses are an awful lot to think about. And I told her I wanted to seek my fortune before I bothered with any of that prince stuff." She gave Pod a sly look. "Can you keep a secret?"

Pod looked surprised. "You know I can. I'm your best friend, aren't I?"

"Yes. Sorry." Ellie patted her friend on the back. "Listen … you know the Second Sun is going to set at the end of the month?"

"As if I could forget." Pod looked gloomy. "We've been doing Second Sun projects for weeks and weeks and weeks at school." She screwed up her face and imitated her teacher. "Princess Pod, I want you to write out 100 times in your best writing, 'A human life is short with all its cares – the second sun sets every thousand years!'"

Ellie giggled.

Pod sighed. "I hate Mr Gluefrog," she said. "It took me ages to write all those lines out."

"Well, that's your fault," Ellie told her. "You told him the Second Sun sets every 20 months!"

Pod did her best to look dignified. "Anyone can make a mistake."

"Well …" Ellie pulled her friend closer. "Do you remember what Mr Gluefrog said about the Hill of Promises?"

Pod's eyes opened wide. "Oh no … oh, Ellie! You didn't believe him? All that stuff about wishes?"

Ellie nodded. "Why shouldn't it be true? It's got to be worth a try!" Now it was her turn to imitate Mr Gluefrog. "'If you stand high upon the Hill of Promises as the Second Sun goes down, then a wish will be yours to keep.' Oh, Pod! It has to be worth trying! Just think – a wish!"

"What will you wish for?" Pod asked.

"I don't know." Ellie's eyes shone. "But I really want a wish. I have this feeling I'll know just what to wish for when I get it. I'm going

to find the Hill, and I'll see what happens. And, Pod – guess what? I'm going tonight!"

Pod stopped dead and stared at Ellie. "Tonight?"

Ellie nodded. "I've got it all planned. Half-term starts today, so I've got a week. If I can get to the other side of the Abominable Sea by tomorrow evening, I'll have loads of time. The end of the month isn't till Monday. I'll be sitting on the top of the Hill of Promises well before then. There'll be plenty of time for me to get back before school starts again. And I'll have my wish – my very own beautiful, sparkly wish!"

Pod still didn't look too sure. "What will your mum say?" she asked. "Aren't your family having a huge party for the setting of the Second Sun? Mine are."

"Yes, they're planning a massive beanfeast," Ellie said. "But that's why they won't miss me! Mum will be much too busy worrying about cakes and presents and fireworks and so on. And she's hoping my sister Rosetta will propose to Prince Biscuit the Second. They'll never notice I'm gone, just as long as I'm back by the end of the week."

Pod sighed. "You are lucky. I'd come with you, but my mum would have a fit."

"I'll tell you what," said Ellie. "I'll try to keep my wish till I get back. Then you can help me choose what to wish for."

"Oh, Ellie!" Pod beamed. "You're the best friend ever!"

"Can I tell Rosetta I'm staying with you?" Ellie asked. "Just in case Mum asks? I'm sure she won't, but you never know."

"Sure thing," said Pod.