


JACLYN MORIARTY



THE
Astonishing
CHRONICLES
of
OSCAR
from
Elsewhere

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KELLY CANBY

— KEY —
A KINGDOMS
AND EMPIRES BOOK
— KEY —

THE
Astonishing
CHRONICLES
of
OSCAR
from
Elsewhere

— A KINGDOMS AND EMPIRES BOOK —

JACLYN MORIARTY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY
KELLY CANBY


ALLEN & UNWIN
SYDNEY • MELBOURNE • AUCKLAND • LONDON

First published by Allen & Unwin in 2021

Copyright © Text, Jaclyn Moriarty 2021

Copyright © Illustrations, Kelly Canby 2021

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher. The Australian *Copyright Act 1968* (the Act) allows a maximum of one chapter or ten per cent of this book, whichever is the greater, to be photocopied by any educational institution for its educational purposes provided that the educational institution (or body that administers it) has given a remuneration notice to the Copyright Agency (Australia) under the Act.

Allen & Unwin

83 Alexander Street

Crows Nest NSW 2065

Australia

Phone: (61 2) 8425 0100

Email: info@allenandunwin.com

Web: www.allenandunwin.com



A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

ISBN 978 1 76052 636 8

For teaching resources, explore www.allenandunwin.com/resources/for-teachers

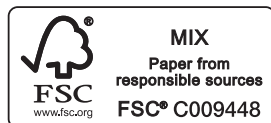
Cover and text design by Romina Edwards, hand-lettering by Kelly Canby

Cover illustration by Kelly Canby

Set in 9.5 pt Museo Sans and 10.5 pt Garth Graphic Pro by Midland Typesetters, Australia

Printed and bound in Australia by Griffin Press, part of Ovato

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



The paper in this book is FSC® certified. FSC® promotes environmentally responsible, socially beneficial and economically viable management of the world's forests.

www.jaclynmoriarty.com

TO MY GODSONS, CONNOR AND LOUIS,
AND THEIR LOVELY FAMILIES
AND TO MY CHARLIE



YELLOWSPOT



WAVERLEY EAST
NATURE SCHOOL

DUN-SOREY-LO-VAY-LO-HEY

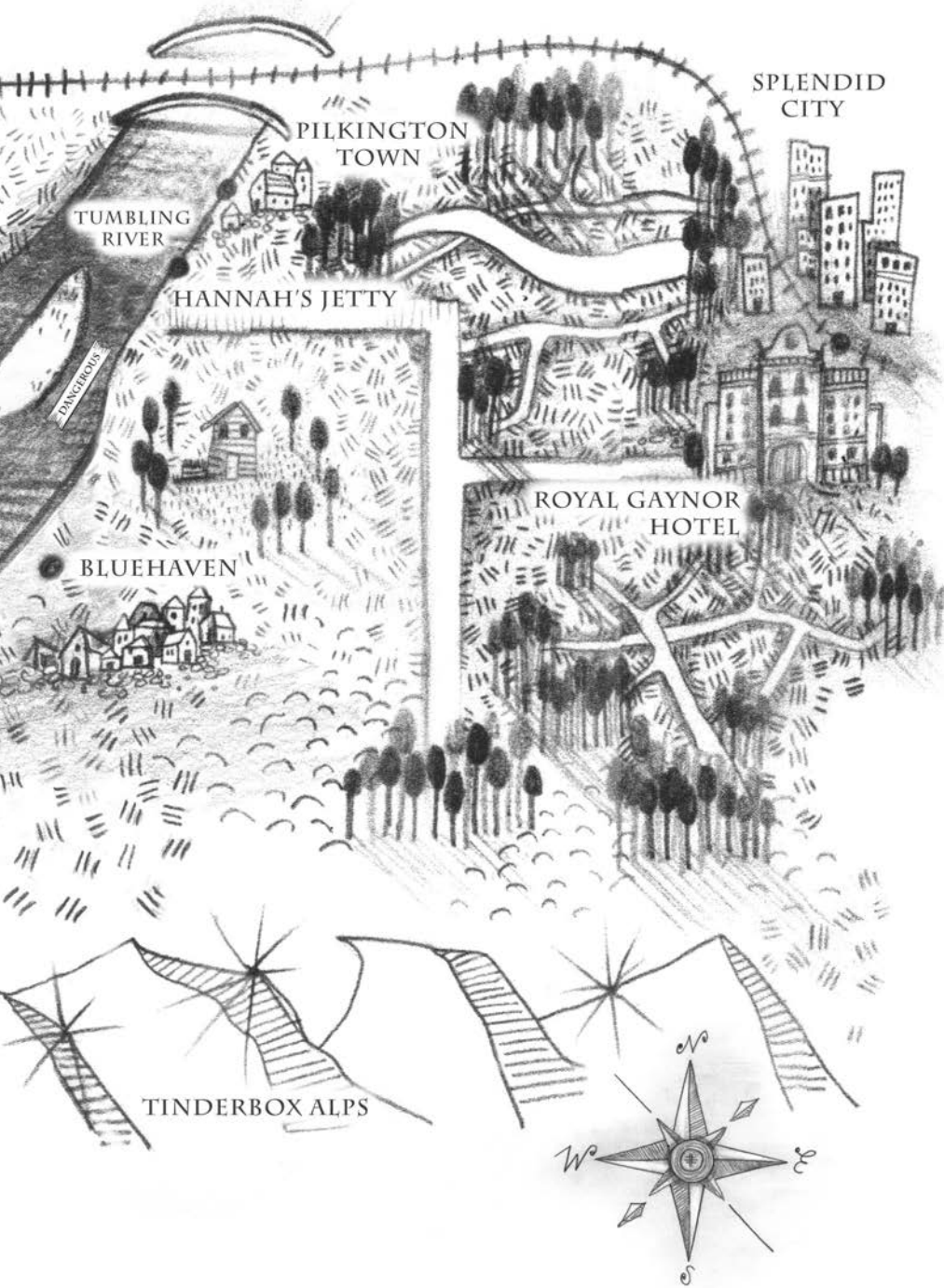
CURLICUE FOREST

RYAN CORDUROY'S
ROWBOATS

APPLE BLOSSOM
BED & BREAKFAST

VIOLIN
FALLS

BLUE
CHALET



SPLENDID CITY

PILKINGTON TOWN

TUMBLING RIVER

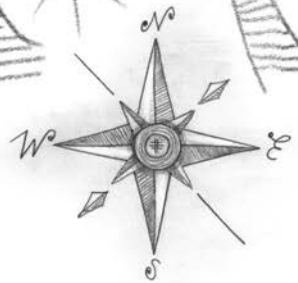
HANNAH'S JETTY

DANGEROUS

BLUEHAVEN

ROYAL GAYNOR HOTEL

TINDERBOX ALPS



THE
MONDAY
AFTER





Oscar

Monday morning, I was sent to Mrs Kugelhopf's office.

She's the Deputy Principal.

'Write a report,' Mrs Kugelhopf commanded, 'accounting for every day you were not at school last week.'

'Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday,' I replied, counting on my fingers. 'Five days.'

Mrs Kugelhopf nodded.

I nodded back.

Mrs Kugelhopf's office has a view of the wheelie bins. Her walls are the colour of green grapes that have gone slightly mouldy.

She shuffled her chair closer to her desk, hunching her shoulders to do this. She didn't look well, to be honest, but that was her emotions. She lets them get the better of her. 'You will sit outside my office today,' she informed me, 'and you will write that report.'

I frowned.

She frowned back.

'What report?' I said.

'The report accounting for the days you were not at school last week!'

I gave her a careful look. With teachers, you never know how much education they have.

'Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday,' I repeated slowly. 'Five days.'

She nodded. I nodded.

'Five days *altogether*,' I added, to be helpful.

'That is precisely the point!' she said.

'Yes,' I agreed.

We were stuck then. She looked at me.

Put her elbows on her desk, clasped her fingers together and rested her chin on the thumbs. A little shelf made of thumbs.

'Do you understand what you are going to do?' she asked.

Big question, but I gave it my best shot.

'For my career? Play rugby league for Australia. For lunch today? Bolognese from the canteen. Next weekend? Well, I'm thinking—'

'Oscar,' Mrs Kugelhopf interrupted.

Her chair is a big leather palace of a chair. Mine was a spindly little wooden one. Two other wooden chairs were lined up beside me, ready for other kids to get busted.

Right now, those chairs looked nervous. Sitting there, trying to be quiet.

'I meant *now!*' Ms Kugelhopf cried. 'What are you going to do *now?*'

'I'm on an in-school suspension,' I reminded her kindly.

Mrs Kugelhopf sighed. 'How old are you, Oscar?'

Surprising twist in the conversation.

'Twelve,' I replied.

'Exactly. You are twelve.'

'If you already knew, why did you ask?'

'And Oscar—' she ignored my laser-sharp question, '—do you remember the Friday *before* you decided to take an entire week off school?'

It seemed like a lifetime ago, that Friday, because my mind had been shut down and restarted since then (effectively). Still, I remembered it perfectly.

'Yes.'

'You were sitting right there.' She pointed at my chair.

Actually, I'd been sitting in the middle chair, but I let it go.



'You had been sent here for snoring loudly in class. Hilarious, I'm sure. Do you remember I spoke to you about the value you contribute to the world? Do you remember I mentioned my own son, Eddie, who is four years old?'

We both looked at the photo on her desk. Cute.

I nodded.

'And remember how I said—'

I decided to change the subject.

'What does "accounting" mean?' I asked, making myself a bit more comfortable.

'Get your feet off the chair,' she replied.

I did what she asked.

'Get your feet off my desk!' Anger vibrated her voice then, like an electric guitar.

'So where *can* I put my feet?'

'On the floor! Put them on the floor!'

She did some deep breathing. Then remembered my question.

'Accounting,' she said, and rubbed at her forehead quickly.

'Accounting is to do with financial records. Why do you—?' Her face grew wide like a balloon into which someone has just blown a huge gust of air. 'When I say *account*, I do not mean I want you to *count up* the days you were not at school! I want you to describe what you were *doing* on those days. We *know* that your father dropped you at the school gate before the bell rang each morning last week, Oscar, but then what? You didn't come *through* that gate, did you? So kindly explain why the valuable time your father spent driving you here—and he is so concerned about you, Oscar, what a lovely man he is—'

'The loveliest,' I nodded. 'And he's my stepdad.'

'All right, so Oscar, explain to me *why* the valuable time of your stepfather in bringing you here, and the valuable time of your teacher in preparing lessons, have been *wasted*? Because *instead*

of coming *into* the school, you chose to spend your time . . . doing *what*, Oscar? Tell me what!

All those words came flying out of Mrs Kugelhopf's mouth in a rush, as if the gust of air was screaming back out of the balloon.

'You should have just said that,' I suggested.

I'd known what she meant all along, to be honest.

Just messing with her.

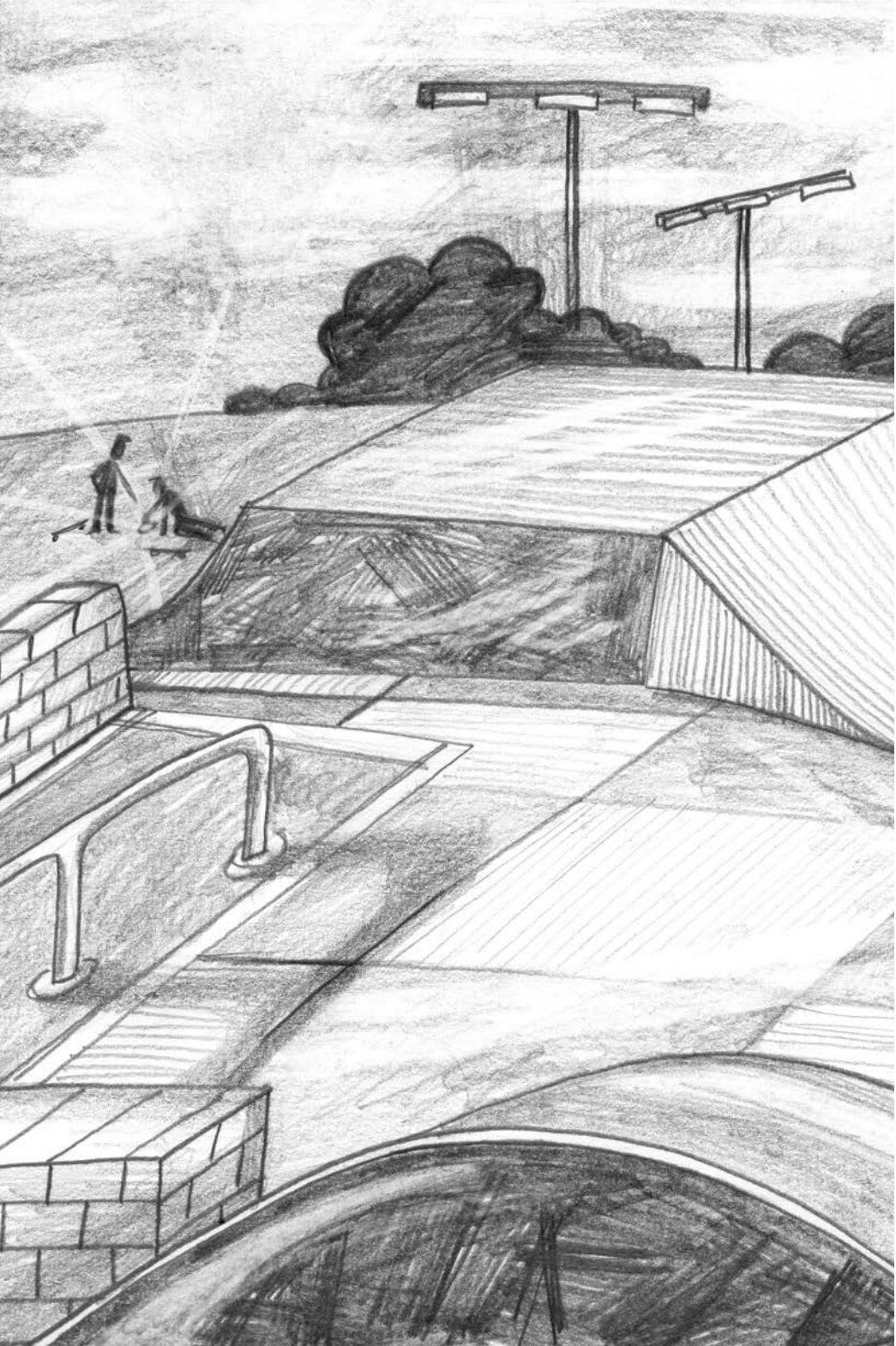
Also, listen, my teacher was fine without me last week. He had other kids to teach. I was not wasting his valuable time being gone. In fact, I waste a lot more of his valuable time when I'm there.

I told Mrs Kugelhopf that it was going to take a bit of time to write this 'account of Monday to Friday last week', and also that I'd need the help of a new friend of mine named Imogen Mettlestone-Staranise.

And that's how I came to write this. (Or half of it, anyway.)

Anyhow, here it is.

MONDAY





CHAPTER 1

Oscar

Monday morning, 9.45 am, I went to Cam.

That's the skate park at Cammeray.

It's always quiet mid-morning.

When I skated in, there was a dad with a little kid. Kid had a scooter; dad had a skateboard. The dad skated around a bit, showing off for his kid. The kid scooted, ignoring the dad. The dad attempted a trick right when the kid happened to glance at him. Trick failed. Kid stared at the dad kind of blankly.

'Right,' the dad said. 'Time to go home for a snack.'

And off they went.

That was when I realised there were two other people in the skate park. *Murmur, murmur*. Skated over to see.

They were sitting close together on the ground up the back. On the tufty grass that runs between the skate park and the soccer field.

Two guys. Older than me. About fifteen maybe. T-shirts, hairy arms. Their boards were lying in the grass and they were hunched over something.

It was a hot day.

Hazy air. Cicadas.

I coughed. They looked up at me.

One of the boys was holding a little round mirror in his palm. He closed his fingers over it, but not before it caught the sunlight.

I frowned.

'What ya doing?' I asked. 'Killing ants?'

'You do that with a magnifying glass,' mirror-boy told me. 'Got a magnifying glass?'

'I don't want to kill ants,' I said.

'Well then why did you just *mention* it?' he pounced.

That was unfair, and made no sense.

'What ya doing?' I asked again.

The other boy turned and looked at me more closely. He had a long, thin nose with flaring nostrils, like a jet plane. 'You're Oscar,' he said.

'Yeah.'

Mirror-boy glanced up again. 'Yeah?'

'Yeah.'

'You've had a haircut,' he told me. 'Didn't recognise you. I've seen you skate here before. You're good.'

'Cheers.'

I didn't tell him he was good. I'd seen both of them skate here before and to be honest, they're pretty average.

They were both studying me now. They glanced at each other, super swift, and mirror-boy raised an eyebrow.

The other one nodded.

'Thing is,' he said, and his eyes went shiny. 'There's meant to be another skate park. Size of a football field.'

'Okay,' I said. 'Where?'

'Right here.' He thumped his fist on the grass.

'Yeah, good on ya.' Dropped my board, ready to skate away.

'No, Oscar, wait.'

'We're serious.'

'Trust us.'

'It's real. It's right *here*.'

Both of them were talking at once.

'There's a secret way to get there,' jet-plane-nose boy explained.

'You hold a mirror in *just* the right place—' The other boy's hand darted around like a little bird, fingers still closed over the mirror.

'Only,' his friend put in, scratching his jaw, 'we can't find the right place. And we've gotta go.'

They both stood up slowly, kind of groaning like old men.

'Keep trying if you want.' Nose-boy looked over at mirror-boy.

'What?'

'Give him the mirror.'

'Why?'

'So he can try!'

They carried on arguing a while. Turned out mirror-boy had bought the little mirror at the discount store for two dollars, so he wanted to keep it. He was pretty sure I could use anything reflective, he said. It didn't have to be this mirror. Switch my phone to selfie mode? Or did I have one of those foil bags of chips?

The other boy kept urging him to give me the mirror, explaining that if *they* couldn't go to the 'killer skate park', *I* should be able to go.

In the end, he tried to grapple the mirror out of his friend's hand, and next thing, they were wrestling.

I started laughing. 'It's all right,' I said, holding up my hands. 'You can keep your mirror.'

They looked back at me from their wrestling hold. Mirror-boy sighed and tossed the mirror onto the grass at my feet.

'Try it,' he said.

'Trust us,' his friend added.

The two of them grabbed their boards and skated away.

'Good luck,' they called over their shoulders, heading out of the skate park, onto the path, and off down the road.

A car droned by. Another one.

Helicopter someplace in the sky.

Nobody around.

I went and got my backpack.

Brought it with me to the patch of grass again, sat down, and unzipped my bag.

Nope. No food.

Stood up, picked up my board and my bag, ready to go. Looked down at the mirror, still lying on the grass, facedown. Of course, I didn't believe them. A skate park you could reach with a mirror? Lost the plot, the pair of them.

All I did was, I turned over the mirror with my foot, caught a glimpse of my eyes staring back—



My eyes?

Wait, *were* they my—

And then, there I was.

Standing at the foot of the best skate park I ever saw.





Imogen

Only, it wasn't a skate park, was it, Oscar? It was the Elven city of Dun-sorey-lo-vay-lo-hey.

But you didn't know that at the time.

Hello, my name is Imogen Mettlestone-Staranise, and I am thirteen years old. I have been asked by Oscar Banetti to help him write this account.

At first, I said: 'No thank you, Oscar, I have no wish for additional homework.'

I was only joking. Of course I would help him. (Although, to be clear, I definitely have no wish for additional homework. In case any overexcited teachers are about to jump in.) The fact is, Oscar is quite clueless. This is not his fault of course, but it would cause him difficulty in describing Monday to Friday of last week.

And so would the fact that Oscar himself was dead for most of Monday.

Before I begin, though, you should know that I don't really believe in 'descriptive language'. My teachers are always saying things like, 'Well, *start* believing, Imogen!' I take no notice. A thing is a thing. Who cares what it's like or how shiny it is?

As long as we're clear on that, I'll get on with it.

Monday morning, 6.35 am, I woke to a loud knocking on the front door.

I was home from boarding school for the holidays, along with my younger sisters, Esther and Astrid. We live in the mountain village of Blue Chalet. It's said to be picturesque. Our cousins, Bronte and Alejandro, were staying with us at the

time. We planned to spend three weeks together swimming in lakes and climbing mulberry trees. (Alejandro is not *technically* a cousin, by the way, in case somebody is about to jump in and correct me. But he went to live with Bronte's family after escaping life as a pirate. So he's practically a cousin. Even if he *has* recently discovered that he's a prince and returned to live with his own royal parents.)

All five of us had been sleeping on mattresses on the living room floor, so we could chat through the night and have midnight feasts. When the loud knocking sounded early Monday morning, I stepped over the others' snoring bodies to reach the front door.

It was the postmaster. 'Urgent letter!' he said, and handed it over. 'It arrived last night and I've just discovered it, so I rushed it up here.'

He waited then, clearly wanting to watch me open the letter, but I said, 'Thank you,' and closed the door on him.

The letter was addressed to my sister Esther anyway. I turned it over to see the return address:

King Maddox HRH, Elven city of Dun-sorey-lo-vay-lo-hey
'Esther,' I said. 'Wake up.'

My sister Esther is a Rain Weaver. This means she can cure people who've been affected by Shadow Magic. She only discovered she's a Rain Weaver quite recently and she's been in pretty high demand ever since.

However, this was the first time, as far as I knew, that she'd had a request from an Elf. Certainly the first time she'd heard from an Elven king.

The letter was a bit hysterical.

'Please, please, please, Esther,' it begged. 'Come urgently, at once, to the Elven city of Dun-sorey-lo-vay-lo-hey and perform a cure! It's vital that you get here before 10 am on Monday!'



It already *was* Monday.

The letter suggested Esther take a coach to the north, perform the cure, and then take another coach home.

'*Nothing could be simpler,*' the letter declared, and then it spent several pages describing the beautiful countryside surrounding the Elven city. Esther skipped that bit, of course, when she was reading the letter out to us.

'I'll go ask Mother and Father if it's all right,' she said sleepily—she always takes a while to wake up properly in the morning.

Except Mother and Father had already gone out. There was a note from them on the kitchen table:

Gone to the Markets to get fresh pastries for breakfast! Back soon!

'The morning coach leaves at seven,' I said, consulting the schedule on the refrigerator. 'It should get us to the Elven city just before ten. If we're going to catch it, we need to leave now.'

I looked at the others. Their bright or sleepy eyes looked back at me.

'Are you fully recovered, Astrid?' I asked my youngest sister. She'd had an ear infection the week before.

'Completely,' she agreed. 'The antibiotics are finished.'

I thought for a moment.

'Let's go,' I decided. We scrambled into our clothes, grabbed a handful of silver and copper coins from the 'emergency saucer' on the kitchen counter and scribbled a note to our parents ('*Back Later!*').

Esther put the Elven king's letter in her pocket and we sprinted down the road to the coach stop.



At 9.45 am, we stepped off the coach. (It was a horse-drawn coach, by the way. We have very few motorised vehicles in our region, although they are popular in some other Kingdoms.)

We were now in the middle of the countryside.

We set out along a laneway.

I was leading, as I'm the eldest.

I was followed by my sisters, Esther and Astrid, and my cousins, Bronte and Alejandro. (I say that to remind you who was there.)

The weather was warm. There were fields and meadows. Also: cows.

At 9.49 am, we arrived at the Elven city of Dun-sorey-lo-vay-lo-hey.

Only, it wasn't there.

All we could see was a welcome sign—

Welcome to Dun-sorey-lo-vay-lo-hey!

Take care where you step.

—and a huge blanket of silver.

The silver blanket was bright in the sun and made us squint.

It was the size of a football field—which is also the average size of a large Elven city—and it was lumpy. The lumps were in the shapes of tiny houses.

It seemed pretty clear that the Elven city of Dun-sorey-lo-vay-lo-hey was *underneath* that lumpy silver blanket.

'Now why have they gone and done that?' my cousin Bronte murmured.

We all giggled. It was the way she said it.

I cleared my throat. 'HELLO?' I called. 'ELVES?'

Silence.

'HELLO? WE HAVE BROUGHT ESTHER, THE RAIN WEAVER, TO SEE YOU, AS YOU REQUESTED!'

Here Esther added a call of her own: 'THEY DIDN'T BRING ME HERE! THEY CAME ALONG TO KEEP ME COMPANY!'

True, but just a technicality. 'COULD YOU PLEASE COME OUT FROM UNDERNEATH THIS BLANKET?' I bellowed. 'AND BRING THE ELF WHO NEEDS CURING! SO ESTHER, THE RAIN WEAVER, CAN PROVIDE THE CURE!'

Elves are about the size of teaspoons and I was very interested to see what sort of shadow affliction this one might be suffering. I have seen Esther cure old men who can't stop dancing, young girls who can't stop crying, and children who've forgotten how to eat. Those are all examples of shadow spells.



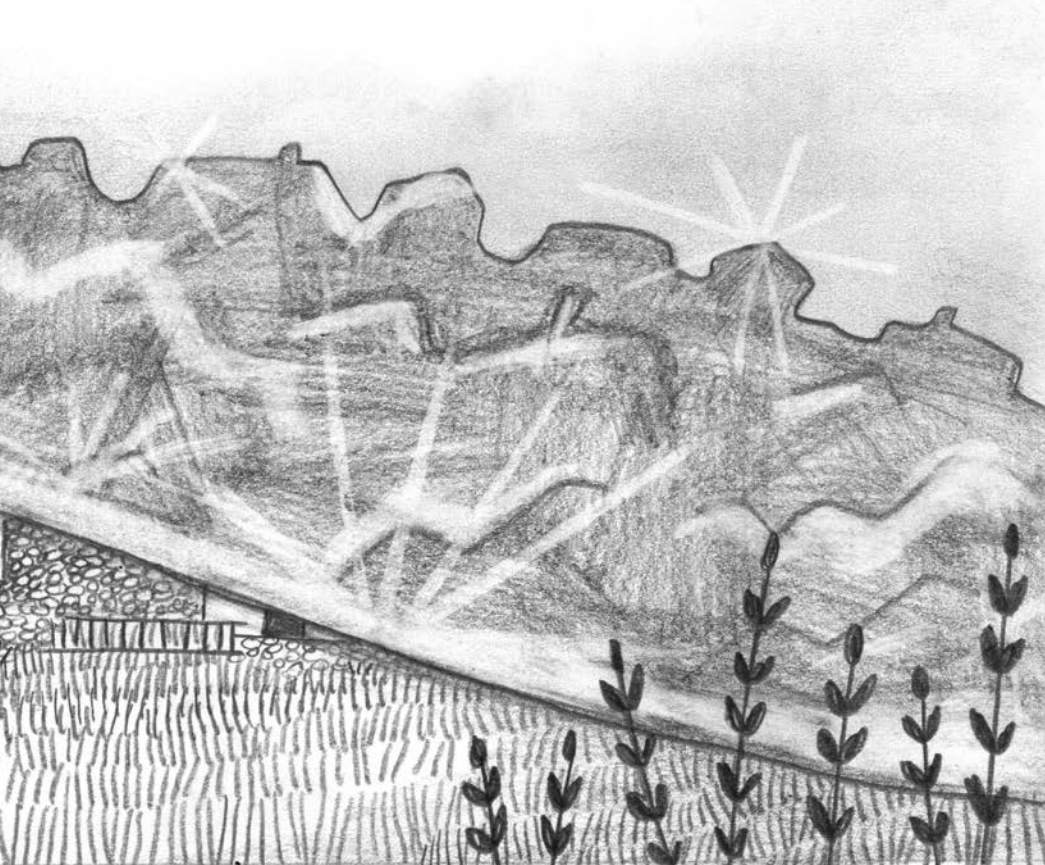
'HELLO?' I tried again. 'ESTHER, THE RAIN WEAVER, IS HERE!'

More silence.

'You don't need to keep referring to me as the Rain Weaver,' Esther muttered, a bit embarrassed.

But I like doing that. I'm very proud that my little sister is a Rain Weaver. She's the only one in all the Kingdoms and Empires. Not to be sneezed at. My other little sister can read people's moods and tell you if they're lying. I'm proud of her too.

We stood in a row along the laneway, glanced at each other and then at the silver blanket again. Our eyes followed the lumps, the bumps, the contours and the hillocks.



'Do you know what this is like?' my cousin Bronte asked suddenly. 'It's like children have been asked to tidy their toys and have flung the silver living room carpet over the top of the toys instead.'

Alejandro spoke up. 'Yes,' he said. 'Or no, it is more like a silver ocean.' His voice had become distant and dreamy, his accent pronounced. This always happens when Alejandro, the former pirate, gets near the sea.

Or near a big silver blanket that very slightly resembles the sea.

Bronte knelt at the edge of the silver and touched it with her fingertips.

'It's solid!' she said, surprised.

We all crouched then, and did the same, and she was right. It was not a blanket at all. It was a strange silver substance, as smooth and hard as glass.

That was the moment when uneasiness hit me.

If I were a descriptive sort of person, I'd say it was as if a deep shadow suddenly crossed my heart, the way a cloud crosses the sun.

'ELVES?' I shouted, sharply. My voice became commanding: *'ELVES! ARE YOU UNDER THERE? ELVES! ANSWER ME!'*

The others seemed to catch my uneasiness. Alejandro tried getting his fingers beneath the edge where the silver met the laneway, and lifting. It did not budge. He strained and strained—and he is very strong for his age, Alejandro—but nothing. We all began wrenching at the silver, groaning, using all our muscles.

'ELVES! ELVES! CAN YOU HEAR US!' The others were yelling along with me now, banging on the surface, at times trying to wrench it up again.

I caught sight of my reflection in the silver, and my eyes looked back at me—

Wait, I thought. *Those are not my—*

Then a hand touched my shoulder and I jumped in fright. It was only Astrid, my littlest sister. Her face was peculiar. She was staring.

'A boy,' she said, and pointed.

I looked across the silver.

A boy was standing perfectly still at the far end of the city. He carried a satchel on his shoulder and a short plank of wood beneath his arm.

'Where did *he* come from?' I exclaimed.

And that's when it happened.

OUT NOW




ALLEN & UNWIN