

LIAN TANNER

Illustrated by Sally Soweol Han



SPELLHOUND

A Dragons of Hallow book





CHAPTER 15
We Have to Keep Searching

‘Maybe your parents have gone back to the Floating Forest,’ Flax said to the pup. ‘Maybe they climbed out a door in the dragon’s side and escaped. Maybe they’re in the den, right now, wondering where you are.’

The pup looked at her pitifully. ‘Dragons don’t have doors in their sides. You said so yourself.’

‘Yes, but maybe—’

‘We have to keep searching.’

‘But where?’ said Flax.

‘I don’t know. I don’t knooooOOOOOooooow!’

‘Hush, not so loud!’ Flax’s nose itched, which meant the *can’t-see-us-can’t-hear-us-can’t-smell-us*

magic was still working. But it was best to be cautious.

The pup's howl subsided to a wordless whimper. Flax put her head in her hands and wondered how on earth she was going to get him back to the Floating Forest.



Have you ever heard a dog howl with sadness and loneliness?

It is a heartbreaking sound, is it not?

Now take that sound and double it.

Triple it.

Quadruple it.

The howl of a Spellhound pup is like nothing else on earth. If you wish to pause for a moment and weep, I can be persuaded to wait.

But not for long. We are at a *crux*. A vital moment. A point where two halves of the story might come together – or might not.

So wipe your eyes and pay attention.



The moonlight slid off the dress covering the fish tank and touched Felicia's toes. In the royal park outside her window, something howled.

'OooooooooooooOOOOOOOOOooooooooo!'

It was such a desolate sound that Felicia scrambled to her feet and poked her head out the open window.

The howl turned to a whimper.

'It's a dog,' whispered Felicia. 'A puppy. What's it doing in the royal park? It must be lost.'

She imagined a puppy with sorrowful eyes crying for its mother.

She swallowed. 'A queen is *not* disobedient,' she reminded herself.

But surely a queen should be allowed to have a puppy? Even if it was just for one night?

It would disappear in the morning, of course,

just as the tapestry and the dragon book and the dressmakers had disappeared.

But morning was hours away . . .

Felicia felt a fizz of excitement in her tummy, and automatically pushed it down. But a tiny bit of it crept back again. Enough to make her feel brave. And rebellious.

She took her oldest shoes from the secret drawer (the ones she wasn't allowed to wear).

She took her oldest coat (which Aunt Delilah thought she had thrown away).

She removed the gold hairpins and tied her hair back with another ribbon.

Then she checked her pocket for her emergency supply of green jellybabies, slung her leg over the windowsill, and clambered out.





CHAPTER 16

A Human Girl

‘Are you sure we can’t go home?’ asked Flax.

The pup whimpered again.

But then he stopped whimpering and sat up. He stared towards the building. He sniffed the air.

‘There’s a human,’ he whispered to Flax, ‘coming this way.’

Flax put her ear to the ground and heard footsteps. ‘They won’t be able to see us or hear us or smell us. We’ll just stay here until they go past.’

But she drew her sword, just in case. Then she and the pup stood close to the tree trunk, and waited.

‘There,’ whispered the pup.

A shadowy figure crept between the trees. It seemed to be searching for something.

Not us, Flax reminded herself. *Can’t-see-us. Can’t-hear-us. Can’t-smell-us.*

The figure came closer. It was a human girl, and she was calling softly, ‘Where are you? Don’t be afraid. I want to help.’

What was she searching for? A bird? Another human?

She’s going to walk straight past us, thought Flax. *She won’t even know we’re here.*

But the human didn’t walk past.

She stopped. She stared at the pup. ‘Oh, you’re *much* bigger than I expected.’

‘Who’s she talking to?’ whispered Flax.

‘Me, I think,’ said the pup.

‘You can talk,’ said the human, clasping her hands in front of her. ‘A talking dog. A *huge* talking dog!’

‘I’m not a dog,’ said the pup. ‘I’m a Spe—’

‘Hush!’ cried Flax, leaping forward. ‘Don’t say it.’

The human bent down to take a closer look at Flax. ‘A pixie? With a sword? A talking dog and a *pixie with a sword!* Except you’ve got whiskers. And a tail. I didn’t know pixies had whiskers and tails.’

Flax and the pup looked at each other. ‘She can definitely see us,’ said the pup.

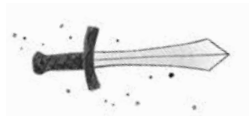
‘Of course I can see you,’ said the human. ‘Though I’ve never seen anything *like* you.’

Flax couldn’t understand how this human could see them when none of the others had been able to.

Unless...

She clutched her sword. She tried to look tall and dangerous (which isn’t easy for a minch-wiggin). ‘Are you—’ Her voice cracked. ‘Are you a w-w-witch?’

The pup rolled his eyes in horror. ‘A *witch?* NoooooOOOooooo! We’ve fallen into the hands of a *witch!*’



You may be wondering why Flax and the pup were so scared. After all, the witches *you* know are probably nice old women who live in forest clearings with their cats, and use their powers to help people.

They get rid of warts and cure the mumbling sickness. They find lost wedding rings, lost sheep and lost children.

The witches of Hallow are not like that.

The witches of Hallow work in the shadows where no one can see them. They gather on the edge of darkness. They have feathers on their elbows, and silence where their heartbeats should be.

The witches of Hallow do not concern themselves with lost children. Not unless they are making the invisibility potion, which requires *'three fyngers of small childe'*.

Then they will search harder than anyone.



CHAPTER 17

I'm Not a Witch

'No, I'm not a witch!' cried the human girl.
'I'm the Qu—' She stopped.

'The what?' demanded Flax.

The girl looked over her shoulder at the building. She looked back at Flax and the pup. She bit her lip. 'I'm the qu— the quite ordinary fourth chambermaid.'

Flax decided to believe her, because the day had been long and frightening, and she didn't think she could deal with a witch right now.

(Or ever, to be honest.)

But the sooner we get away from here, the better, she thought. We've got enough problems

without getting mixed up with humans. They're not as bad as witches or dragons or griv. But they're still trouble.

She sheathed the sword and picked up her satchel. 'Nice to meet you, quite ordinary fourth chambermaid—'

'My name is F— er – Rose.'

'Feroze?' said the pup.

'No. Just Rose.'

Flax put on a polite smile. 'Nice to meet you, Rose. But we must be—'

'What's a Spe—?' asked the human.

'Nothing,' Flax said quickly. She definitely wasn't going to tell the human about Spellhounds. Even if she wasn't a witch. 'I mean – um – it's a *special* dog. But only because he's so big. And he can talk. Apart from that, he's completely ordinary, aren't you, pup?'

'I am?' The pup tipped his head to one side.

'You are,' said Flax. 'Now, we must go.'

'But where did you come from?' asked Rose.

The pup, who was much too trusting, wagged his tail. ‘We come from the F—’

‘The Far Away,’ interrupted Flax. ‘The *Far*, Far Away. Too far for you to bother with. And it’s a completely boring place, no one ever wants to go there. Now, if you’ll excuse us, we must—’

‘Why did you come here?’ asked Rose.

And before Flax could think of an answer, the pup blurted, ‘The dragon.’

Rose’s eyes widened. ‘What dragon?’

‘It stole my parents,’ said the pup. ‘We’re going to find them and get them back.’

Rose put her hand over her mouth. ‘The dragon stole my parents, too! I – I want to go with you!’

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