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PROOF

THE WITCH
OF
TURLINGHAM
ACADEMY





THE WITCH OF TURLINGHAM ACADEMY



ELLIE BOSWELL



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ONE



Sophie peered round the stone pillar. She beckoned to the tall, curly-haired boy who was trying, not very successfully, to conceal himself behind the opposite pillar.



‘Come on, Callum!’ she hissed. She ducked out from her hiding place and ran on tiptoe down the corridor, dodging from sunlight to shadow as she passed the tall windows. Behind her, she heard a clatter and glanced round to see Callum’s arms fly out as he stumbled.

He quickly recovered. ‘We haven’t all got your dainty feet,’ he said as he caught up with her.





Sophie giggled. ‘Sorry! That tile’s been loose for ever, I thought you knew about it.’

‘Nope. Not all of us spend our free time memorising every single tile in the school.’ As they ran down the corridor side by side, he added, ‘You haven’t even told me what the welcome back prank is yet – it better be good after all this!’

‘Don’t worry,’ said Sophie with a grin. ‘It will be!’

Footsteps echoed down the corridor, and Sophie skidded to a halt.

‘Uh-oh. Sounds like a teacher, hide!’

‘Where?’

Sophie pushed him towards a display case containing the enormous silver Turlingham Academy Hockey Cup. They were barely behind it when the double doors at the end of the corridor burst open and a tall, thin woman with a sharp face came hurrying through. Sophie held her breath and exchanged a horrified glance with Callum. But the woman swished past without a glance, her smart shoes tapping out a no-nonsense beat. She pushed the next set of double doors and was on her way, leaving them swinging and squeaking behind her.

Sophie reeled out from behind the case, clutching





her heart in mock collapse. 'It had to be Mrs Freeman! Can you imagine if she'd caught us?' she wondered, making sure to keep her voice low.

'Yeah, gruel and solitary confinement for the rest of the year.' Callum grinned. 'What's she doing here anyway? I thought you said all the teachers were in a meeting?'

'Who knows – maybe she forgot her broomstick.'

They ran on, laughing quietly.

'Here we are!' Sophie came to a halt in front of a big oak door. A brass panel next to it read: TAMSIN MORROW, HEADMISTRESS.

Callum tried the handle.

'Locked.' He sighed.

'Not a problem.' Sophie reached up towards the top ledge of the door frame and jumped. Her fingers knocked something small and metal and the key skidded off the top. Callum caught it and handed it to her.

'Nice work,' he said, nodding in appreciation.

Sophie shrugged as she turned the key in the lock. 'Mum's accidentally locked herself out of her office so many times I suggested she should hide a spare key up here!'

She opened the door and stepped inside.





Behind her, Callum gasped sharply. ‘Um, hello, Mrs Freeman!’

Sophie whirled round, her heart beating fast. She saw Callum grinning at her . . . and no one else.

‘That was *not* funny!’ she said, and whacked him lightly on the arm.

‘Should’ve seen your face!’

Sophie shut the door and they leaned against it, holding their sides as they laughed. Portraits of previous headmistresses glared down from the walls. Callum’s laughter died away.

‘Wow, those aren’t the posters I’d want in my room,’ he said, grimacing as he gazed from one painting to the next. ‘They’re even scarier than the old headmasters in Dad’s office. Don’t they freak you out?’

Sophie shrugged. ‘I grew up here, remember? They feel like relatives.’ She started opening the drawers of the filing cabinets.

‘Okaaaay. Remind me never to come to your family reunions.’ Callum shook his head as if to get rid of the image. ‘So, what are we looking for?’

‘Aha!’ Sophie found exactly what they’d come for and picked up the cream squares of thick paper. ‘Blank report cards.’





She handed a pile to Callum.

‘Now what?’

Sophie grinned at his puzzled expression.

‘Now you use your imagination and your in-depth knowledge of your friends.’

‘Um, right.’ Callum looked dubious.

‘Thing about reports,’ said Sophie cheerfully, as she perched on her mother’s desk and started writing, ‘is they talk about all the wrong stuff. I mean, who cares that Erin Best is no good at History? In the really important subject of Gossip, however, she gets an A-plus.’

‘I get it.’ Callum smiled.

‘And for Daydreaming About Boys, she gets an A. All her practising is definitely paying off!’ Sophie filled in the report card as she spoke.

‘This is going to be fun,’ Callum said, grabbing a pen.

‘Told you!’ Sophie said.

They both worked in silence for a few minutes. Sophie tried to fill one in for as many of her friends as possible but was interrupted when Callum handed her a card. Sophie saw her own name – and also a very familiar one: Jareth Quinn. His movie posters were the ones that covered the walls in her room.





‘Sophie Morrow – A for Celebrity Crushes,’ she read aloud. ‘An A? I’m not *that* into Jareth Quinn,’ she protested, going red.

‘Think yourself lucky, I was going to give you an A-plus with distinction for extra effort!’ Callum looked down at the desk. ‘Hey, have we run out of report cards already? I’ve still got a couple to go.’

Sophie got up and peered back into the filing cabinet, but it was empty. ‘None left in here. I’ll check the desk drawers; you have a look in those piles of paper on the windowsill.’

She opened the top drawer and quickly searched through, finding nothing but scrap paper, pens and paper clips. She glanced at her watch. It was nearly eleven.

‘Hurry, Callum, they’ll be out of their meeting any minute.’ She opened the next one down. It was full of rubber bands, staples and Post-it notes. She pushed it shut and opened the bottom drawer. Inside was a stack of yellowing papers. Sophie grinned: her mother clearly didn’t tidy her desk very often! She felt a twinge of guilt for going through her mother’s things, but then remembered – term couldn’t possibly begin without one of her legendary pranks! She pushed the papers





aside. Right at the bottom of the drawer her hand closed on something firm and rectangular.

It was a package, wrapped in brown paper and string. As she lifted it out, her gaze fell on the address label. Even though the blue ink had faded to grey, she could still make out the firm, spiky handwriting. It read:

*Miss Sophie Morrow
Turlingham Academy
Norfolk*

Sophie's mouth fell open. The package was addressed to her. So what was it doing in her mum's desk?

'Callum,' she said.

Callum turned round.

'Look at this.' She held it up to him.

Callum came over and took the box from her, turning it upside down and around. He frowned. 'Check out the date,' he said, pointing out the postmark as he handed it back.

Sophie did some quick maths.

'Posted five years ago.' She shook it gently. Something





rattled inside. 'It's still sealed. Do you think I should open it?'

'Why not? It's addressed to you.'

Sophie hesitated, still unsure. Sneaking into her mum's office for a practical joke was one thing; uncovering secrets was another. But the package had been *meant* for her.

'Oh go on, open it,' Callum said. 'I'm curious now.'

Sophie unpicked the Sellotape. It was so old that the tape had turned yellow and the glue had dried up. When she opened the wrapping a plain white card fell out on to the floor. Callum picked it up.

'For Sophie on her thirteenth birthday,' he read. 'No name.'

'How weird! My thirteenth birthday was months ago – why do you think Mum didn't give it to me then?'

'Maybe she forgot, it was sent years ago.' Callum craned his neck for another look at the box. 'Do you recognise the handwriting?'

'Not at all. It might say who it's from inside.' She slowly lifted the lid of the box, her heartbeat quickening. Presents were exciting at the best of times, but a present from an anonymous sender ... She knew





she'd better open it quickly, or they'd risk getting caught.

Inside was a silver ring, with a stone shaped like a crescent moon. The stone was a milky white colour and it seemed to glow with a delicate, strange light – almost as if there was moonshine trapped inside. Her face broke into a smile. 'Oh, wow – it's beautiful!'

'Jewellery,' said Callum, sounding disappointed. He turned away. 'I'll look for more report cards.'

'It's totally gorgeous!' Sophie stared at the ring, then lifted it out of the box and slowly slipped it on to her index finger. It fitted. Perfectly. So perfectly that it gave her goosebumps. She shivered. It was *more* than goosebumps. It was like electric tingles running all over her skin.

'Whoever got me this is really, really good at choosing presents,' she said. 'Callum – who do you think it could be? Who could have sent it to me?'

Callum hesitated as he bent over the pile of papers. 'Well, there is one obvious possibility,' he said, not looking up.

For a moment Sophie couldn't think what he meant.

'Oh,' she said. 'My dad?'

'Well – yeah.'





Sophie hesitated. She didn't like to think about her dad. He'd been gone since she was three – just walked out without a word of explanation. *Do I want it to be from him?* she wondered. *Or not?*

'I doubt it,' she said, trying to keep her tone light. 'Why would he send a present after all this time? And why for my thirteenth birthday?'

'Well, who else could it be?'

Sophie bit her lip. In the silence she heard footsteps heading towards them, down the corridor, stopping outside the door. Sophie and Callum stared at each other.

'Quick,' gasped Callum. 'Hide the evidence!'

He threw the report cards into Sophie's bag. She shoved the empty box back into the drawer, pulling bits of Sellotape off her fingers, and, after two tries, managed to shut the drawer. The door handle was turning. She glanced around the room. There was nowhere to hide! They hadn't planned this properly at all. As the door opened, Sophie pushed her hands into her pockets to conceal the ring. A shadow loomed. Sophie just had time to hope it wasn't her mum, and *really* hope it wasn't Mrs Freeman.

As the figure stepped into the light she could see it





was neither of them. It was worse. Sophie couldn't help a groan escaping.

'You two are in *so* much trouble,' came a sneering voice.

It was Maggie Millar – the Head Prefect.





TWO

Maggie blocked the doorway, a triumphant smirk on her face. Sophie briefly considered the possibility of dodging round her and escaping, but another look at the Head Prefect's face convinced her not to try it. Maggie was the captain of the hockey team and a lot stronger than she looked.

'Maggie, it's so nice to see you back so ... early,' Sophie said with a smile pasted on her face.

Maggie looked at her with disgust. 'I knew you'd be playing one of your pranks. This time I thought I'd catch you red-handed.'

'It's just a bit of fun, Maggie!' Callum said.





Sophie tried to make a ‘Shhh!’ face at him. Explaining never worked with Maggie Millar.

‘Breaking into the headmistress’s office? Is that just a bit of fun?’

‘But—’

‘No excuses. You’re both coming with me!’

Sophie and Callum exchanged despairing glances as Maggie marched them down the corridor. There would be no getting out of this one.

Maggie pushed open the double doors to the hall and nodded Sophie and Callum forward. Sophie walked into the middle of the large space. Rows of plastic chairs had been laid out and every member of staff was there. Mr Pearce and Sophie’s mum were up on the stage, leading the meeting. Mr Pearce saw them first and nudged Sophie’s mum. Mrs Morrow broke off mid-sentence as she met Sophie’s eyes.

‘Sophie!’ she exclaimed. ‘What on earth—?’

Sophie could feel herself going bright red with embarrassment as chairs scraped and the other teachers turned round. A hundred pairs of eyes stared at them.

‘Mrs Morrow, Mr Pearce, I’m so sorry to disturb





you,' Maggie interrupted, batting her eyelids. 'I know you have such a lot to prepare for the new school term but I thought you should know . . .' She paused, waiting for the attention of the whole faculty. 'I caught these two burgling Mrs Morrow's office. They'd let themselves in.' Maggie hid a smile as a chorus of gasps greeted her announcement.

Mrs Freeman sat up straight as a stick, her lips pursed and frowning deeply.

'We weren't burgling!' Callum insisted.

'Callum Pearce, silence!' Mrs Freeman snapped. 'Maggie, thank you. You are impressively vigilant – and it isn't even term time yet.'

'A true Head Prefect is never off duty,' said Maggie, dipping her head in fake modesty.

Mrs Freeman turned to Mr Pearce and Mrs Morrow. 'As joint heads of this school, I'm sure you will be keen to punish these pupils severely, even though they *are* your children.'

'Of course,' said Sophie's mum, frowning at what Mrs Freeman was implying. 'Sophie has never had any special treatment, and I'm sure that Callum hasn't, either.' She turned to Sophie. 'Sophie, what on earth were you thinking? Term hasn't even started yet, and





you're already breaking the rules. Can't you see how badly this reflects on you?'

Sophie *could* see, and she felt awful for showing her mum up in front of her staff. She hung her head. 'I'm really sorry, Mum – I mean, Mrs Morrow.'

'And Callum, I'm very disappointed in you,' Mr Pearce added. 'As the headmaster's son, you should be setting a good example.'

Callum mumbled an apology.

'What were you doing in there?' Sophie's mother asked. 'You had absolutely no right to go into my office.'

'We were getting report cards. We were—'

'Forging reports!' said Mrs Freeman. 'Maggie, make a note of this.'

Maggie whisked a little red notebook and a pen from her pocket and began writing.

'It was just a joke.' Sophie pulled a handful of the cards from her bag, walked up to the stage and offered them to her mother.

Mrs Morrow took the cards and turned them over in her hand.

She read them to herself, then read aloud. 'Pupil: Erin Best. Subject: Gossip. Grade: A-plus.' Sophie cringed, they sounded a bit stupid read out in front of





the teachers. Her mum read on. 'Subject: Daydreaming About Boys. Grade: A.'

There was some sniggering from the teachers at the back. Mrs Freeman whipped round, looking annoyed. 'This is no laughing matter!' she said.

Her mum read the next card. 'Pupil: Kaz Fahmy. Subject: Fancying Callum Pearce. Grade: A-plus, top of the class!' Mrs Morrow raised her eyebrows at Callum. 'Callum, is this true?'

'No, totally not,' he muttered, going bright red and shuffling his feet.

'Oh, but it is,' contributed Mr Powell, the Geography teacher. 'If the notes she and Joanna Grey pass to each other in my class are anything to go by.'

The teachers all laughed, and even Sophie's mum smiled.

'Pupil: Mark Little. Subject: Hair Gel Gymnastics. Grade: B-plus.'

'I object!' called Mr McGowan, the History teacher. 'The boy deserves an A-minus at least!'

Other teachers laughed and Sophie stifled a giggle.

Her mum read out the last card. 'Pupil: Sophie Morrow. Subject: Celebrity Crushes. Grade: A.' She looked at Sophie and couldn't stop herself from smiling,





but she wagged her finger. 'And an F for Rule Keeping. It's a harmless joke, so I'll let it go this time,' she said, handing the cards back. 'But if you ever want to take something from my office again, you must ask, OK?'

Sophie nodded in relief. She thought of the ring, still on her finger, and felt a pang of guilt. But now hardly seemed like the best time to discuss it.

'Thanks, Mu – Mrs Morrow.' She looked around at the teachers. 'And we're really sorry for causing trouble – we didn't mean to.'

Callum echoed her. 'Yeah, we're really sorry.'

As they walked out of the hall, Callum whispered to her, 'Did you see the look on Maggie Millar's face when we were let off the hook? She was fuming. You'd better steer clear of her this term, Soph!'

She intended to do just that.

Sophie smiled to herself as she placed the last report card on Lauren's bed. She glanced out of the window, enjoying the fresh sea smell and the sound of the waves beating against the nearby cliffs. Down in the car park, a coach had arrived. Some of her Year 9 friends were already getting off it.

'Brilliant!' Sophie ran out of the dorm, down the big





stone staircase to the entrance hall, and out into the courtyard. Girls in Turlingham's red and grey uniform were unloading their suitcases, laughing and talking and greeting their friends.

'Erin, Lauren!' Sophie dashed through the crowd and flung her arms around her best friends. Erin's green eyes glittered with pleasure as she hugged her back, and little Lauren O'Connor joined in the hug.

'It's so good to see you again!' Sophie exclaimed. 'It's been ...'

'Only two weeks.' Lauren laughed. 'You were over at mine in August!'

'Yeah, but way longer for me!' Erin protested. 'Texting every morning just isn't the same.'

'How was your flight, Erin?' Sophie asked.

'Boring! It's, like, eleven hours from LAX and there were no cute boys on the plane.' They linked arms and walked towards the main school building together. 'But oh, girls, wait till you see the new photos of Buggy.' Erin flipped open her phone and Sophie and Lauren craned over, cooing at the pictures of the black Labrador puppy. 'He's sooo adorable – the best thirteenth birthday present ever!'

Suddenly Sophie was grabbed from behind by four





arms. She beamed as she heard a familiar loud laugh, echoed by a timid giggle. ‘Hey, Kaz, Joanna!’ She turned round and hugged them.

‘Hey, girls, good to be back!’ Kaz said. Sophie opened her mouth to reply, but Kaz hadn’t finished. ‘Listen, I’ve such a cool idea for tonight.’ She pulled Joanna and Lauren towards her, and beckoned the others in as she whispered, ‘A midnight feast!’

‘Ooh!’ Joanna gasped. ‘I’ve brought a bag of my mum’s cookies.’

‘The famous double chocolate chip ones?’ Kaz said in delight. ‘Jo, you’re a star!’

‘Awesome idea!’ agreed Erin. ‘Where can we have it? The big linen cupboard on the Year 7 floor?’

Sophie dropped behind as the others chattered happily. The feast sounded amazing, but at midnight she’d be away from all the action – at home in bed. As the head teacher’s daughter, she shared her mum’s private quarters rather than sleeping in the dorms with everyone else. She tried to look forward to hearing all about the midnight feast the next day, but it wasn’t easy. *I wish I could be with my friends all the time.* It was hard not to feel left out.

‘That sounds like so much fun,’ Sophie said, not meaning to speak aloud.





Erin turned round. ‘Soph! I forgot . . .’

‘There must be some way you can come along,’ said Lauren, scrunching up her face.

‘Have you ever asked your mum if she’d let you stay in the dorms?’ asked Kaz. ‘Just for a night?’

‘It’s worth a try,’ Sophie agreed.

She raced over to her mother, who was walking across the courtyard towards her office.

‘Muuuuuum,’ Sophie said, with a cheesy grin on her face.

‘Uh-oh, I don’t like the sound of this,’ said her mum, eyebrows raised.

‘Please can I stay in the dorms tonight? I want to be with my friends.’

‘Oh, I see, so you can get a really good night’s sleep and be rested in the morning for the first day of term,’ her mother teased. ‘Not so you can catch up on the gossip – of course not!’

‘But I haven’t seen them for ages,’ Sophie said. ‘If I get all my catching up done tonight, I’ll be able to pay much more attention in lessons tomorrow, won’t I?’

Her mother laughed. ‘I don’t know, Sophie. You’ve not exactly got off to a good start, have you?’

‘I’ll be good for the rest of the year, I promise.’





‘Hmm, a likely story.’ She glanced at her phone as it vibrated with a text. ‘Well, it’s true I’m rushed off my feet at the moment. There are two new pupils arriving tomorrow – a brother and sister – and the gym equipment I ordered *still* hasn’t arrived, if you can believe it.’ She put her head on one side and looked at Sophie with a smile. ‘On second thoughts, it might be nice to have you out of my hair for one evening.’

Sophie jumped up and down. ‘Yes!’

‘I’ll have to check with Mrs Freeman about putting a mattress down, as head matron it’s her decision really.’

‘Oh, Mum, you might just as well say no,’ Sophie groaned. ‘Mrs Freeman hates me.’

‘Don’t be silly, of course she doesn’t! I’ll make a good case for you, anyway.’ Her mum gave her a wink.

‘Thanks, Mum.’ Sophie gave her a grateful hug. ‘You’re the best!’

Sophie dashed back to her friends, smiling wickedly. ‘I know an even better place than the linen cupboard – how about we have our feast in the old lighthouse? Callum and I finally worked out how to get into it over the summer.’ She pointed up on the cliffs at the tall, red and white building that reared above the





school. 'We can get in and go right to the top, and . . . um . . . do whatever you do at a midnight feast.'

'Eat chocolate and talk about boys. *Duh*,' Erin chipped in, and everyone burst out laughing.

The dorm was absolutely silent, but Sophie knew that everyone else was just as awake as she was. She glanced at her alarm clock's glowing face: almost feast time! Mrs Freeman had turned out the lights ages ago, and she must have returned to her own room by now.

Sophie realised something was shining dimly in the dark room. The crescent moon ring. It was still on her finger.

I ought to take it back, she thought. Even though it had been meant for her, taking it felt like stealing. Deep inside, she knew that Callum was right – it was probably from her dad. She guessed that was why her mum had kept it from her.

Her memories of her dad were as patchy as a faded old photo . . . but they were good memories. For a moment, she allowed herself to remember the nice things: her father's warm brown eyes, the sound of his laughter. But before she could get too soppy, she





reminded herself that he'd just walked out on them: abandoned her and left her mum to cope alone.

Who needs a present from a dad like that? she thought. But perhaps he regretted leaving . . . perhaps that was why he had sent it? It was so puzzling that she sighed aloud.

'Sophie, that had better not be a yawn I just heard!' whispered Kaz, sitting up in bed. 'It's time to go!'





THREE

Sophie covered her mouth to stop herself giggling as she hid in the long shadows of the courtyard. Lauren and Joanna were behind her; Kaz and Erin were up ahead. Sophie saw Kaz turn and beckon them forward, and she ran, keeping to the gloom, across towards the Science lab. They made their way, single file, between the Science lab and the main school building, until they reached the fence that marked the school boundary. Beyond the fence was the cliff meadow, and the lighthouse rose from it, looming over them in the night.

Kaz pulled aside a loose plank in the fence and waved them through.





‘After you, ladies! One at a time – it’s a bit narrow.’

As Sophie waited her turn to squeeze through the gap, she hugged her hoodie closer around her. It was cold and there was a strong wind blowing in from the sea. She had a funny feeling that she was being watched. Her gaze lit on something white and spooky – the plastic skeleton from the Science lab, leaning against the window. She grinned and glanced up into the sky. Against the pale clouds, she saw a bird swooping. It passed close by her and she saw its hooked beak, black feathers and bright eyes. She felt a sudden shiver.

‘What’s up?’ Erin turned to her.

‘Oh, nothing. Just there’s a raven up there.’ She followed Erin through the gap in the fence, keeping in the shelter of the wall.

‘A raven?’ said Erin.

‘Yeah,’ Sophie replied. ‘I’ve never seen one here before. Lots of seagulls, but never a raven.’ But Erin was already running towards the lighthouse with the rest of the girls.

They piled up at the lighthouse door, Lauren bouncing with nervous excitement. Kaz tried the handle, then pushed.

‘It’s locked!’ Her shoulders slumped. ‘Is there another way in, Sophie?’





‘It’s alright, there’s a knack to it. Let me.’ Sophie stepped forward. ‘You have to lift the handle – like this – and then shove it with your shoulder.’

The door flew open and Sophie stumbled inside. The room was pitch black, narrow and round, and the winding staircase rose above them, spiralling up to the lantern room.

‘Yay for Sophie!’ Kaz tapped her hands together in a quiet clap and the rest gave a whispered cheer.

Sophie curtsied then held the door open to let her friends in. Just in time, too – she pushed it shut as the rain hit the ground.

‘Phew!’ said Joanna, with a shiver. She pulled out her torch and passed it to Kaz. ‘Here, Kaz, you take it – I’d rather not go first.’

‘OK, everyone,’ Kaz ordered, switching on the torch. ‘Onwards and upwards!’

They followed Kaz up the winding stairs, their footsteps echoing and mingling with the sound of the wind battering at the strong walls. The thin beam of light from her torch picked out cobwebs and cracks.

‘This is awesomely spooky!’ Erin whispered as they climbed. ‘But are you sure we won’t get busted?’





'Yeah, does anyone ever come in here?' Lauren asked, sounding worried.

'No way,' Sophie told them. 'No one's come up here since the lantern stopped working, and that was about fifty years ago. That's what Mum says, anyway.'

She stopped speaking as she realised Lauren wasn't listening, but staring at her hand on the rickety banister.

'Soph, I love your ring! Is it new?' Lauren reached up to touch the shining crescent moon.

'Um – yeah. I mean – no. Sort of.'

'Sort of?' Erin laughed as she stopped climbing to turn and look. 'What is it, a present from a secret admirer?'

'No!' Sophie laughed. 'I meant, I've had it for years, but I only just found it.' *Which is true enough*, she thought.

'Well, it's gorgeous,' said Lauren. 'I love the way it catches the moonlight.'

'Can I see?' Joanna leaned over.

'Your bracelet is nice, too, Erin,' said Sophie, wanting to change the subject. 'Where did you get it?'

Erin slipped the bracelet off with a proud smile. 'It's a family heirloom. Real gold.'





The girls gasped as they squeezed in to see, and Sophie quickly turned the ring around on her finger so the crescent moon wasn't showing. *I'll be putting it back in Mum's office soon anyway*, she told herself. *No point drawing attention to it.* Luckily the others were busy admiring Erin's bracelet.

'Yeah, it's been passed down for generations. My grandma gave it to me for my birthday. I really love it.' Erin put her bracelet back on and they continued to climb the stairs. 'The no jewellery rule totally sucks.' She shrugged. 'But I'll keep it in my bedside drawer and wear it when there are no teachers about.'

Kaz stopped as she realised they had finally reached the top of the stairs and a tiny door.

'This is it,' said Sophie. 'Just push.'

Kaz shoved the door open, and the distant noise of wind was suddenly much louder. Beyond were three more steps which led into a circular room about the size of Sophie's bedroom, but with walls made of glass. One by one the girls entered, Sophie last. She looked up to see the huge lantern looming above them, dominating the centre of the room. All around raindrops glistened and slithered, and the rain drummed fiercely on the glass.





‘Whoa! This is so awesome,’ Erin cried.

‘Yeah! Amazing!’ said Kaz, running to the window to look out. The others spread out, exploring the room. For a moment, Sophie heard only gasps of admiration as they took in the view: the black sea and sky on one side, and the moonlit gables and towers of the main school building on the other. Right below them were the modern additions to the school: the squat brick Science block and the new structure that housed the teachers’ facilities and sick bay.

‘I can see your house from here, Sophie!’ Kaz pointed. Sophie went over and smiled to see her little cottage, nestling below the wing that housed the girls’ dorms. The main school building looked spooky in the wind, like a huge bird hunched over with its wings spread out.

‘Hey, you guys are looking at the lame bit!’ Erin called from the other side of the glass room. ‘I can see the boys’ dorms!’

Giggling, they ran over to join her.

‘Ooh, is that a light on?’ said Lauren. ‘I wonder who’s awake?’

‘It might be Mark Little,’ said Erin, in such a lovestruck voice that they all burst out laughing.





‘Let’s flash him a message in Morse code!’ suggested Kaz.

‘I’ll do it,’ said Sophie, taking the torch from Kaz. She flashed it randomly out of the window. ‘Erin – loves – Mark –’

‘Sophie, nooo!’ Erin dived to grab the torch.

‘Erin, I don’t even know Morse code!’ Sophie laughed as they struggled.

‘Thank goodness!’ Erin giggled.

‘Hey, would anyone like one of my mum’s cookies?’ asked Joanna.

Together the girls spread out the blankets they’d brought with them, poured their sweets and snacks into the middle, and settled down to eat.

‘I think Mark might like me a little bit, though,’ Erin continued, once all the cookies were gone. ‘Because when the coach stopped in Turlingham village I saw him, and he asked to borrow my comb.’ She held it up proudly. ‘This very comb!’

Sophie nudged Lauren. ‘That definitely sounds like Mark!’ Lauren covered her mouth to hide a giggle.

‘I’m going to think of him every time I tidy my hair.’ Erin kissed the comb, then exclaimed, as the others fell about laughing, ‘Ooh, look – a blond hair! It’s got to be





his!’ She held it up. ‘Guys, I know: we should use his hair to cast a spell to make him fall in love with me!’

‘Yeah!’ said Joanna.

Sophie smiled. ‘Great idea.’ They’d played around with love spells before, but not for ages. *And if it helps Erin deal with her massive crush . . .* What was the harm?

Erin looked thoughtful. ‘Put my scarf over the torch so it’s nearly completely dark. That’s for the witchy atmosphere.’

‘Oh, this is a bit scary,’ said Lauren, shivering as the light dimmed. A clap of thunder sounded and lightning made the windows glare. The girls shrieked and jumped, but the shrieks quickly turned into giggles.

‘OK, shush now!’ Erin commanded. ‘This is very serious. Everyone gather round.’

The girls shuffled obediently into a circle on the blanket. Sophie squeezed between Lauren and Kaz. Erin solemnly placed the comb, with Mark’s hair still glinting, in the centre of the circle.

‘Close your eyes,’ she told them. ‘Clear your minds of all thoughts . . . Now . . . Hold your hands aloft—’

‘*Aloft?*’ There were sniggers from Kaz, echoed by Joanna. Sophie concentrated on keeping her eyes squeezed tight.





‘And repeat after me this solemn spell . . . Er . . .’

‘Hurry up then,’ said Sophie. ‘My hands are getting tired of being aloft.’ There were more giggles from Kaz and Joanna.

‘Um . . . I can’t think of anything to say,’ Erin admitted.

‘I’ll do it,’ said Sophie. She paused for a second before saying, ‘Forces of the Earth, hear us.’

There was a sudden lull in the storm, almost as if the wind and rain were stopping to listen to her words.

‘Forces of the Earth, hear us,’ the girls repeated, waving their hands slowly in front of them.

‘Forces of the Earth, hear us,’ Sophie repeated, her voice growing quieter. The words came easily. She no longer felt like laughing. Instead, she felt calm and peaceful. Her finger tingled where the ring was touching it.

‘Forces of the Earth, hear us.’ The girls’ voices seemed older, and stronger, and there was a strange echo in the room.

‘Earth, water, wind and fire,’ Sophie said slowly,

‘Earth, water, wind and fire,’ repeated her friends.

Sophie felt strangely alive, as if a kind of electricity was running through her. Her ring finger had pins and





needles in it now. For a second she wondered if what she was saying really did have some power.

‘Use your great forces to make Mark fancy Erin,’ she said finally.

The ring was really glowing in the soft torchlight, the crescent moon shining like a lamp. *It must have worked its way back round*, Sophie realised. She glanced around the silent circle of her friends, their hands still raised in the air.

Can they feel it too? she wondered. *Is something really happening?*

Kaz spluttered out a giggle, and the circle broke up as the girls fell about laughing.

‘Sophie, that was hilarious!’ Erin laughed.

For a moment Sophie felt disappointed, and then a bit silly. But before she could get embarrassed, Kaz interrupted her thoughts.

‘So, um, are you going to be seeing Callum any time soon?’ she said.

‘And why do you want to know?’ Sophie asked with a cheeky grin. *I just let my imagination run away with me*, she thought, *that’s all*.

‘Oh, no reason,’ Kaz replied.

‘As if! Kaz, you’re blushing.’





Sophie shone the torch in her face, and Kaz giggled and ducked, protesting, 'I'm not *that* crazy about him!'

'Oh, well, if you don't want him, I'll have him,' Joanna said. 'So would most of the girls at Turlingham, I bet.'

'No, no, I'll have him!' Kaz said hurriedly. 'Oh, Sophie, you're so lucky to be able to see him in the holidays too. I don't know how I managed to get through six weeks without looking at his face.'

Sophie shook her head, laughing. 'I just don't get this crush on Callum!'

'You don't have to get it, you just have to spill.' Kaz sighed. 'Tell me about life as Callum's next door neighbour.'

'Well, this summer we went to the beach and the village and hung out at the ice cream shop. Thrilling stuff, huh?'

'What's his favourite flavour ice cream?' Joanna demanded, sitting up.

'Yes, give us the inside scoop!' Erin chimed in, making all the girls giggle again.

'What's he into?' asked Kaz. 'What does he like?'

'Computers,' said Sophie, rolling her eyes. 'Talk to him about computers and you can't go wrong. He



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likes . . . pizza, and what else? Oh yes, that Roy Bears programme.'

'*Walking with Danger?*' asked Lauren.

'Yeah, that's it. But I don't think he could ever actually go on one of those wilderness camping trips – he would hate having no internet access!'

'What sort of girls does he like?' Joanna said, playing with her hair.

'I know he *doesn't* like girlie girls.' Sophie grinned. 'So you'll have to stop wearing pink if you want to impress him, Jo!'

Kaz sighed. 'I do not understand how you can be so cool around him!' A dreamy expression came over her face. 'Doesn't he make your knees go weak, and your chest go tight, and your tummy go funny—'

'Er, no!' Sophie laughed. 'Look, I've known Callum for ever. When you've seen someone pick their nose, the magic's gone.'

There was a chorus of '*Eew!*' and Kaz threw a wine gum at Sophie. '*Sophie!* Callum Pearce does *not* pick his nose – he's not capable of it! Now tell us how come you're immune.'

Sophie caught the wine gum, laughing back at Kaz. 'I prefer boys who are, you know . . . a bit more stylish.'





‘Oh, right, this would be your Jareth Quinn obsession!’ Erin said with a grin.

Sophie giggled. ‘Yeah, OK, maybe I’m holding out for the best!’

Just as she spoke, the room was plunged into darkness. Lauren squealed and clutched Sophie’s arm.

‘The batteries have gone!’ Kaz said, shaking the torch.

‘I hate the dark,’ Lauren said in a small voice.

Sophie could feel Lauren shivering, and wanted to make her laugh.

‘That’s OK,’ she said, ‘we’ll just magic some up. Oh, Forces of the Earth, let’s have some light!’

There was a split second of silence, then a clap of thunder, so loud that for a moment Sophie thought the lighthouse was collapsing. At the same instant, the windows flared with lightning and the shadows of the school stood out black and white. The lighthouse shook and the windows rattled.

Everyone screamed.

There was a sizzling bang and suddenly light blazed from the giant bulb in the lantern. Sophie saw the girls’ shocked faces lit up as they blinked.

‘Oh my god!’ shrieked Erin.





Sophie jumped up.

With a great grinding noise the ancient lighthouse's huge brass lantern began to turn. Whirling round. Working, for the first time in fifty years.

The girls screamed again and all ran for the door.

