



The LAND of ROAR

*Believing
is just the
beginning...*

**JENNY
MCLACHLAN**

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The
LAND
of
ROAR



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MCLACHLAN**

EGMONT



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*For my girls, who have never
stopped believing in Roar*



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CHAPTER 1

There is a wizard in Grandad's attic.

I'm sitting in his garden looking up at the attic window, and I can clearly see a dark shape standing just behind the glass. I give my sister a nudge. 'Look, Rose. You can see its pointy hat and everything!'



Rose swipes at the screen of her phone. 'There isn't a wizard in the attic, Arthur. Leave me alone. I'm busy.'

I glance over her shoulder and see that she's busy liking someone's picture of a puddle. When I look back at the window the strange shadow is still there. My eyes trace the outline of shoulders, a head and a slightly crooked hat, as I try to work out what it could be . . . A reflection of the trees? Some rubbish Grandad's dumped up there?

Then I see something that makes goose bumps prickle my arms: a tiny white patch – like a puff of breath – is misting the glass. I squeeze my eyes shut and rub them. When I open them again the white patch has gone. I smile nervously. Mum's always saying I've got an overactive imagination.

'It's probably the inflatable skeleton,' I say, 'the one Grandad got for Halloween, and the hat could be from the dressing-up box –'

'Be quiet, Arthur,' says Rose. 'You're annoying me.'

With a sigh I give up on Rose and wander around the garden. I peel some bark off a tree, kick a punctured football into a hedge, then hang from a branch. Tap, tap, tap goes Rose on her phone. I drop to the ground and look up at the attic window. 'It's still there,' I say.

'Arthur!' Rose snaps. 'Will you shut up about wizards? I'm not going to play with you!'

I groan and flop back down on the grass. Every summer Mum and Dad leave us with Grandad while they go camping. It used to be brilliant. Rose and I would spend the whole week doing whatever we liked – building dens, swimming in the sea, eating cereal three times a day – but since Rose got her phone she's become totally boring.

'Om-pom-pom . . .' Grandad drifts out of his shed, his grey hair and beard standing out against his dark skin. He grins at me, then starts hacking at a bush with a pair of rusty secateurs.

'Grandad, have you put a dummy or something up in the attic?'

He laughs. 'Not me, mate.'

I turn back to Rose. She can't stare at her phone all day. 'How about we check out the attic, then go and catch crabs off the end of the pier?'

'No.'

'Play ping-pong?'

'No.'

'Go to the arcade and pretend to be pirates and see if we can find money that's fallen out of the slot machines?'

She shakes her head in alarm. 'No way!'

'But you used to love doing that.'

'*You* used to love doing that, Arthur. I went along with it.'

Suddenly Rose jumps to her feet and stuffs her phone in her pocket. Mazen Bailey, Grandad's next-door neighbour, has appeared on the trampoline in her garden. Mazen Bailey is a horrible person, but Rose worships her because she's thirteen, two years older than us, and has her own YouTube channel called *Totally Mazen!*

Rose scrambles on to the wheelie bin and leans over the wall. 'Hi, Mazen!'

'*What* have you done to your hair?' shrieks Mazen, then she joins Rose at the wall and they begin a whispered conversation, every now and then glancing in my direction.

'Arthur,' says Rose, 'what was it you saw in the attic?'

I hesitate. They're smiling, waiting for me to say something stupid, so I say, 'A shadow.'

'Yeah, but what did the shadow *look like*?'

'A wizard,' I mutter, making them burst out laughing. I feel my cheeks burn and I point at the window. 'I'm not imagining it! Look!'

And they do look, but Rose shakes her head. 'There's *nothing* there, Arthur!'

'There is . . .' I protest, but then I realise she's right. The window is just a blank empty square. 'You've got to stand in the right spot,' I say, moving from side to side. 'Make sure the sun isn't reflecting on the glass.' But no matter what I do, I can't make the shape come back.

With a final giggle Mazen says she's got to go. 'Come round later, Rose. You can try out my trampoline.'

'Really?' cries Rose. 'Thanks!'

Mazen disappears inside her house and Rose jumps off the wheelie bin.

'*Really?*' I say, imitating her gushy voice. '*Thanks!*'

Quick as a flash, Rose throws her arms round my legs and sends me crashing to the ground. Rose is good at rugby . . . but I'm good at wriggling. I try to escape by twisting and turning like a snake, but Rose just tightens her vice-like grip.

'Let go of me!' I shout.

'Not until you stop being annoying!'

'I'll stop being annoying -' I try and fail to kick her off - 'when you stop being boring, which will be NEVER!'

Rose squeezes harder until my legs start to go numb.

'*Drain,*' she says in a deep, slow voice. '*DRAIN . . . DRAAAAIN . . .*'

This is something we used to do to each other - pretend we could drain each other of energy by holding on tight and not letting go. Rose hasn't done it for years, but it's still surprisingly effective. Already my legs feel weak and heavy, like lumps of concrete.

'Twins!' We look up and see Grandad standing over us. 'I don't want to break up your game, but I thought you'd like to know there's a surprise waiting for you in the attic!'

We jump to our feet.

I *knew* I saw something up there. Grandad's surprises are legendary. He's built us a tree house, go-carts with working lights, and even a raft that we take on the river. Whatever he's done in the attic, I bet it involves that wizard!

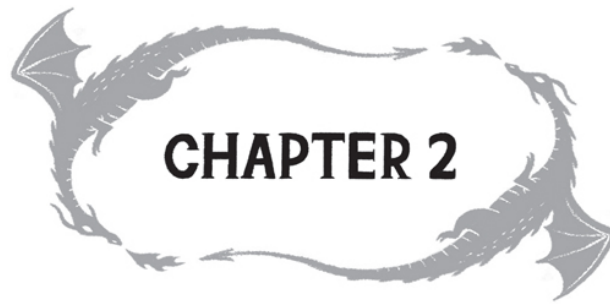
'Race you!' I yell, making a dash for the back door.

I've only gone three paces when Rose overtakes me. She shoves me on my shoulder, shouting, 'See you later, loser!'

I try to make my short legs work faster, but Rose is such a good runner and she drained me so well, there's no way I

can catch up with her. So instead I go with insulting her, and I shout the insult that I know annoys her the most, and I shout it all the way through the house and up the stairs.

‘You look like me! You look like me! YOU LOOK LIKE ME!’



CHAPTER 2

‘Whoa . . .’ I say, standing at the attic door.

I’ve not been up here for a few years, but it’s even messier than I remember. Bags and boxes are piled knee-deep across the floor and toys are scattered everywhere. There are broken bikes and a canoe tucked into the eaves, and I can just see the old sofa buried under a pile of blankets. It’s a tip, but just standing in this dusty, untidy room makes me happy. This is where Rose and I used to play – the best games that went on for hours.

‘I can’t see any surprise,’ says Rose, poking around behind the sofa.

My eyes go straight to the window. I’m expecting to see the inflatable skeleton, or a load of boxes . . . but there’s nothing there at all. For a second I’m disappointed – I was so sure the wizard was going to be part of Grandad’s surprise – but then the prickle of fear comes creeping back because *I’m sure* I saw something up here.

Just then Grandad comes wheezing into the room. ‘So what do you think of your surprise?’ he says.

I pull my eyes away from the window. ‘We can’t find it.’

Grandad laughs and throws his arms out wide. ‘That’s because you’re standing in it!’

Rose blinks. ‘What do you mean, Grandad?’

‘*The attic* is your surprise. Isn’t it amazing?’

Rose and I share a look of confusion. Grandad's done some pretty weird stuff over the years – including dying his beard green for Christmas – but he's never given us his attic as a present.

He looks at us eagerly. 'Do you like it?'

I nod. 'Yeah, it's really . . . surprising.'

Rose is less polite. 'Is this some sort of joke, Grandad?'

He walks around the messy room, kicking things out of his way. 'I know it doesn't look like much at the moment, but once you've cleared it out, I'm going to turn it into a den for the two of you. I'll put a TV over there, replace the sofa, put a popcorn machine in the corner. Whatever you want. It will be yours!'

I smile as I imagine how amazing it will look. Even Rose's eyes light up, breaking her number-one rule of never showing she's into something. 'I've *always* wanted a proper den,' she says. 'Not the sort of thing me and Arthur used to make with blankets. Can we have beanbags?'

Grandad laughs. 'Shaped like burgers?'

And that's when my mind catches up with what Grandad just said. 'Hang on. What do you mean, once *you've* cleared it out?'

'Well, look around! How can I make you an amazing den if all this junk is up here?' He pushes a wobbly pile of boxes. 'I'd like to help, but I can't, not with my asthma.' To prove his point he bends over and breaks into a hacking cough.

'Inhaler,' I say, and obediently he pulls out his asthma inhaler and has a puff.

'Nothing to worry about,' he says, straightening up. 'Now, after you've got the attic empty, we can spend the rest of the week painting.'

Rose groans. 'Do we have to, Grandad?'

I'm with Rose on this. In just over a week we start at Langton Academy – a huge secondary school that's packed full of big, scary kids and that has a no-talking-in-the-

corridors rule – I do not want to spend my last days of freedom doing DIY.

‘You have to if you want a den,’ says Grandad. Then he grabs a pile of comics and heads for the door. ‘I’ll be in my shed.’

For a moment Rose and I stand there staring at the chaos. Then Rose picks up a metre ruler – which for some reason is wrapped in tinfoil – and starts clearing a path through the middle of the junk. ‘This is my half,’ she says, then she tosses the ruler into the messier part of the attic, ‘and that’s your half.’ Next she opens a cupboard and starts pulling out books. After a moment, she says, ‘No wizards in here, Arthur.’

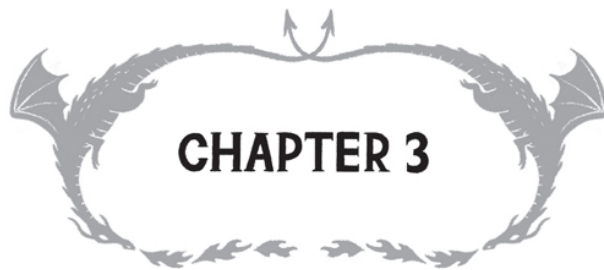
With a sigh I pick up a sports bag and start stuffing it full of *National Geographic* magazines.

Suddenly Rose gasps. ‘Hang on . . . I think I’ve found one!’

I can’t resist looking up.

Rose is grinning and holding up a large dusty book. ‘My mistake. It’s not a wizard. It’s a French dictionary.’

I go back to the magazines. Something tells me this is going to be a very long day.



CHAPTER 3

Rose decides that we're going to put everything in the garden before sorting out what's going to the tip and what's going to the charity shop, and 'Hurry up, Arthur!' soon becomes her favourite phrase. But it's hard to hurry up when there's so much cool stuff to look at.

I discover a magic set, a whole pillowcase stuffed full of Playmobil pirates, and I even find a wizard's hat perched on top of an oar. I wonder if this could be what I saw at the window, but the oar is right at the back of the attic. There's no way I could have seen it from the garden.

I put the hat on and creep up on Rose, planning to scare her, but when she turns round she just narrows her eyes and says, 'Didn't you once have an imaginary friend who was a wizard?'

She's right, I did. His name was Wininja and he was stealthy and a bit magical.

'He was a wizard-*ninja*, Rose. Big difference.'

She smiles. 'Is he standing next to you right now, Arthur, whispering in your ear?'



The moment she says this I have this sensation that someone *could be* standing next to me and I have to fight the urge to look. Rose goes back to her books and I glance around the attic, my eyes lingering on the darkest corners. 'Hurry up, Arthur!' Rose snaps.

While Rose takes her bag downstairs, I decide to get started on the dressing-up box. I take out an armful of clothes and dump them on the floor. I'm just trying to detangle a ball of beards and wigs when I spot a Quality Street tin buried at the bottom of the box.

I pull it out and feel the weight of it in my hands. It's round and dented, and has a picture of a soldier and a lady on the front, and when I shake it I can hear something rattling around inside. I sit down and prise at the lid until it opens with a shower of rusty flakes. All that's inside is a foil chocolate wrapper and a large folded piece of paper. The piece of paper has the word 'SECRET!' written on the front in my own handwriting.

I stare at the thick, yellowing piece of paper, holding my breath as I wonder what I once thought was so secret. Carefully I unfold it and spread it out across the attic floor. It's a hand-drawn map, covered in tiny pictures and carefully written labels, something Rose and I must have made years ago.

The map is of a wobbly land almost cut in half by a river. One side of this land is as colourful as a cartoon with emerald-green trees and bright blue lakes. The other half has hardly any colour at all. It's filled with blackened mountains, jagged grey cliffs and forests of stick-like trees. Written along the top of the map, again in my spiky handwriting, is one word: *ROAR*.

'*Roar* . . .' The word sounds so familiar when I say it out loud.

My eyes follow the zigzag waves one of us has drawn across the sea, and suddenly I remember the way those waves crashed against the cliffs and how there were so many of them the sea seemed to churn and boil. Just when I'm thinking that this map must have been inspired by some place Mum and Dad took us on holiday, I remember something else: me and Rose bursting into this attic and shouting, 'Let's play Roar!'

I smile. Roar isn't a real place. It's a game that Rose and I used to play, one that was so good, we drew a map of it.

As I gaze at the map the game comes creeping back to me. I see mountain ranges stretched between the folds of the paper and a curving coastline dotted with coves and cliffs. There's a cluster of jelly-shaped islands labelled *Archie Playgo*, a castle rising out of the sea, and three dragons soaring through the sky. Butterflies, or maybe fairies, are dotted everywhere and sly-looking unicorns peer from between trees. I can't actually remember sitting next to Rose and drawing these things, but still my mind tingles with recognition and something else. Something I can't quite put my finger on.

Rose's footsteps pull me back to the attic.

'What's that?' she says, kneeling next to me.

'It's a map we drew of Roar.'

She frowns. 'What's Roar?'

'That game we used to play. You must remember!'

'Not really . . . We played loads of games up here.'

‘But Roar was our favourite. There were wizards and mermaids and we’d fight and have adventures. We played it loads!’

Rose looks at me with wide, amused eyes. ‘If you say so, Arthur.’

I point at the blackened castle rising out of the sea. It’s labelled *The Crow’s Nest*. ‘That’s where the baddie lived, and look –’ I tap a black circle – ‘that’s my ninja-wizard’s cave. There he is!’ A smiling face peeks out of the cave, a pointed hat sitting on his head. ‘I’m sure you had a friend too . . .’

Rose searches the jelly-shaped islands until she spots something: a girl’s head poking out of the sea. She has blue hair drifting around her and the word ‘Mitch’ written by the tip of her silver tail. ‘*Mitch* . . .’ says Rose, frowning. Then she smiles. ‘She was a mermaid-witch!’

‘With a bad temper –’

‘And webbed fingers and a magic tail!’

Sun streams through the window and outside the birds sing. Just for a moment, it’s like it was when we were little, when we used to finish each other’s sentences and make stuff up faster than we could think it.

Together, we stare at the map. Suddenly Rose shakes her head and jumps to her feet. She grabs a bulging bin bag and drags it towards the door. ‘Hurry up, Arthur,’ she calls over her shoulder, ‘or we’ll never get our den.’

When I hear the bag thumping down the stairs I turn back to the map. I can’t resist.

My eyes wander over pathways and streams and mountain passes, and I start to lose myself in this strange place we invented. Then something catches my eye – a flicker of movement, a flash of light – and I find myself staring at the Crow’s Nest. I see something that I missed before. A face is looking out of a window. The face is pale with round eyes and a crooked stitched mouth. It’s a

scarecrow, a boy, and I can just make out two wings sprouting from his back.

‘Crowky,’ I say, the name coming easily to my lips. I stare at his black button eyes and his smile seems to stretch.

‘I’d almost forgotten about you,’ I whisper.



CHAPTER 4

After lunch Rose disappears to our room, and Grandad comes up to the attic to check on our progress.

‘Carrying all the stuff down the stairs is taking ages,’ I complain, staggering under a pile of magazines. ‘We need a quicker way.’

Grandad looks out of the attic window. ‘Maybe you could use this.’

I join him and I see that the garden is directly below us. ‘I suppose we could lower everything down on a rope . . .’

‘Or maybe,’ Grandad says, grabbing a handful of my magazines, ‘you could chuck it all out!’ And before I can say, *no, that’s a ridiculous idea*, he’s hurled the magazines out of the window. They flutter through the air and land all over the grass. He turns to me with a gleam in his eye. ‘Your turn, Arthur!’

‘Isn’t it a bit dangerous?’

‘Not if we only do the small stuff. And no glass or metal, right?’

‘Right,’ I agree, nodding seriously. Then, with a yell, I hurl out the rest of the magazines making Grandad laugh with glee.

Then we get down to the serious business of throwing the contents of the attic out of the window. We go into a bit of a frenzy, whooping and yelling as bags burst open mid-air and boxes explode on the patio.

Eventually, and predictably, Rose comes up to ruin our fun.

‘Grandad, your pants are hanging in a tree!’ she cries. ‘Why have you even kept them?’

‘I was saving them to use as dusters,’ he explains, then, possibly because Rose looks so disgusted, he shuffles off to collect them, coughing all the way down the stairs.

‘Inhaler!’ Rose and I call after him. Then Rose flops down on the sofa, pulls a piano keyboard on to her lap and starts randomly pressing the keys.

‘Do you want to chuck some stuff out?’ I ask, hauling a bag towards the window. ‘This one’s full of cuddly toys.’

‘Nah.’

So, while Rose’s creepy music fills the attic, I throw the cuddly toys out. Grandad appears and tries to catch them. When a stuffed Winnie-the-Pooh hits him in the face he starts to fight it. It’s really funny. I turn round to tell Rose to come and watch, but then I change my mind. There’s no way she’s getting off that sofa.

Rose used to be all right. No, she was better than all right. She was funny and laughed at my jokes and, except for the dark, she wasn’t scared of anything. It was Rose who jumped off the harbour wall one summer, right in front of all those teenage boys, and Rose who worked out that we could sledge down the sand dunes on trays. At school we were in the same class and played together every break time. I thought Rose liked this as much as I did, until our head teacher decided to mix up the Year Five classes.

We were given a piece of paper and told to write down the names of three people we wanted to be with. I wrote down one name: *Rose*. I didn’t need anyone else. But then our teacher left the pieces of paper on his desk and I saw Rose’s list. She’d written:

Angel

Nisha

Briony

Rose was really happy in 5A with her three friends. Across the corridor in 5B, I wasn't so happy. Then Rose got her phone and got into YouTube, make-up and her mates, and the Rose I knew just sort of disappeared.

I turn back to the window and shake out the last of the toys. Grandad is lying flat on his back now, letting them fall all over him. After the last teddy has bounced off his stomach I go to clear out the darkest corner of the attic.

I push aside a chunky TV and find myself staring into the sparkly eyes of a rocking horse. It rocks slightly, eyes wide, teeth bared, as if it's angry about being left in this dingy spot for so long.

I grab its mane and pull it out. 'Look who I've found, Rose!'

She looks up. 'What? It's just the old rocking horse.'

'Yes, but it's *your* old rocking horse, isn't it? It was you who painted it black and covered it in glitter, and then you said it belonged to you and I was never allowed to sit on it. What did you call it?'

'Prosecco,' she says flatly. 'You'd better put it in the charity shop pile. Someone might want it.'

Suddenly I want to make Rose admit that she used to love this rocking horse. I want her to look at it, and be interested in it, and stop being cool, just for a second . . .

'Hey, Rose.' I drag it towards the window. 'Do you think Prosecco would like to fly?'

She looks up. 'What're you on about?'

'He's been stuck in the attic for too long. I think he'd like to feel the wind beneath his hooves.' I'm at the window now.