

WILDSMITH



CITY OF SECRETS



Praise for *Wildsmith: Into the Dark Forest*

‘A lush, rich, page-turning adventure from one of the most versatile writers we have.

There’s no genre Liz can’t write in.’

PHIL EARLE

‘*Wildsmith* has everything I want in a story – magic, mystery and dragons! Liz is the mistress of dragons and in this thrilling adventure she has cast her story-telling spell with utter charm and skill. Children are in for such a treat! Thank goodness there’s a sequel – I want more!’

JASBINDER BILAN

‘Wildsmiths, dragons, witches and the protection of magical animals! What’s not to love? An enchanting read. Beautifully written and utterly charming.

I can’t wait for the next adventure!’

ELOISE WILLIAMS





*'Into The Dark Forest* is packed full of the best kind of magic – I want to be a Wildsmith!'

DAISY MAY JOHNSON

'Liz has crafted a stunningly rich world and characters – brimming with magic and wonder, yet wonderfully warm and familiar. The lush illustrations feel reminiscent of the beautiful animations of Studio Ghibli.'

GABRIELLE KENT

'Sneak inside the wonderful world of the Wildsmith, and take a peek at the secrets and magic, that lay hidden, deep within an enchanted fairytale forest. This is a fantastic first chapter book which will delight young fans of magic, animals, and adventure.'

HARRY HEAPE

'A thoroughly charming book!'

THOMAS TAYLOR





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Wildsmith: City of Secrets  
Wildsmith: The Hidden Sea (June 2024)  
Wildsmith: Magical Mountain Rescue (October 2024)



LIZ FLANAGAN

Illustrated by Joe Todd-Stanton

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CITY OF SECRETS

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*To Ada, Nancy and Ruby with lots of love*





## CHAPTER ONE

**R**OWAN DREAMED OF HER FATHER, NIGHT after night. Sometimes, the dreams helped. Sometimes they made her miss him even more. This time, she was dreaming of Dad's laughter, and his deep rumbling voice, as they worked together in the palace stables.

'You always had a gift with the horses,' Dad was saying, in her dream. And now we know why – you're a wildsmith!'

Rowan woke up with a jolt, realising she wasn't at home in Holderby. She was here, at Grandpa's





house near the Dark Forest. With a wave of fresh disappointment, she realised that her father was still miles away. She wished she could tell him she was a wildsmith: someone who could talk to animals and heal them. But Dad had stayed back in the city of Holderby when war broke out.

Meanwhile, Rowan lay safe in her cosy bed, a stripe of pale moonlight falling through the curtains. Arto, the white wolf, was lying across her feet. Now, he raised his head and growled.

Rowan heard it again: her father's voice, rumbling through the floorboards. It wasn't a dream. It was real!

'Dad!' she yelled, flying down the stairs with Arto at her heels. 'Dad, is that you?'

She burst through the kitchen door.

Her father was kneeling on the floor, holding a large bundle in his arms. 'I didn't know where else to take him,' he was saying to Mum and Grandpa.

Rowan shrieked and threw herself on Dad's back, clinging to his broad shoulders. 'Dad! You came!'

He was alive. He was safe. He was here. Finally!

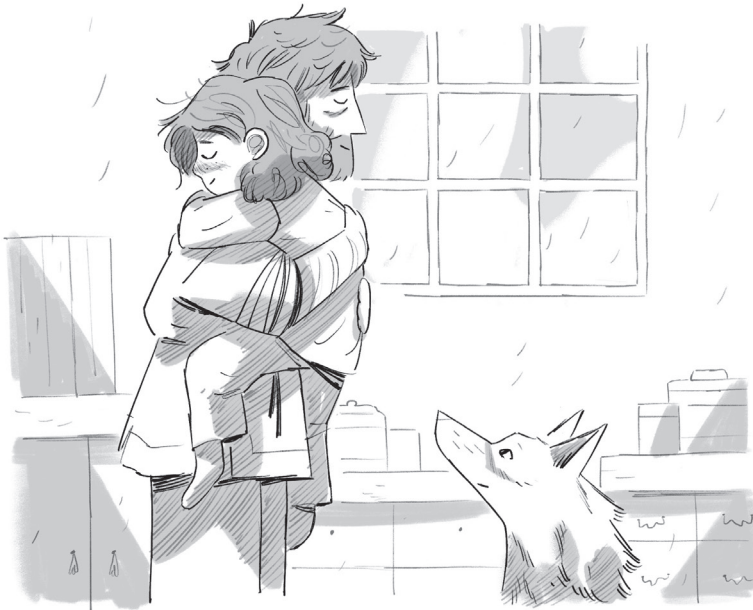




Rowan's grandfather rushed forwards to take the bundle from Dad before he dropped it.

Then Dad was standing, still carrying Rowan, turning and holding her in the biggest hug. 'My Rowan,' he said, and his arms were strong and warm.

She had so many questions that she didn't know where to start – what about the war? Why was he here? Were they all going home now? For a moment, she just clung on, like a bear halfway up a tree.





Over Dad's shoulder, Rowan could see her mother, laughing. With tears in her eyes, Mum watched them hugging. Everything was finally as it should be. Rowan's family was back together.

Rowan slid down. She wanted to take her mother's hand, so they could all stand together like they used to.

But as she moved, she got a clear view of the bundle her father had brought.

The old sack fell down, revealing a living creature inside.

There was a blackish-brown animal standing there, with:

Four long, slender legs.

A strong back.

A fuzzy little tail.

A beautiful curved neck.

A tufty white mane.

The foal had huge brown eyes, staring at her, half-curious, half-nervous.

Rowan stared back, feeling her heart blossom with love. 'Hello,' she greeted it, stretching out one careful





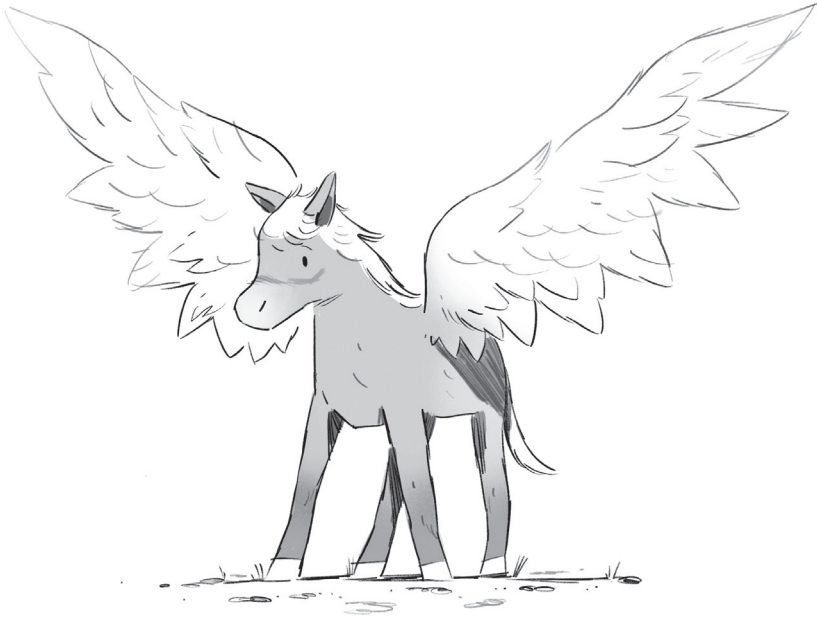
hand and letting the baby horse sniff her fingers with warm sweet breath. Its nose was velvet-soft with ticklish whiskery hairs. She laughed.

But what were those funny things on its back, like folded curtains? They were twitching, opening, spreading . . . flapping!

Rowan's mouth fell open.

This horse had wings.

'A pegasus!' Rowan breathed. 'Dad, why did you bring a pegasus?'





## CHAPTER TWO



LITTLE LATER, THEY ALL SAT ROUND THE table in Grandpa's kitchen, in his cosy house that was built between two huge trees. It was still dark outside: Rowan couldn't even see the stable yard or the forest beyond. Mum gave her a mug of creamy hot chocolate as a special treat, while the grown-ups drank coffee. Dad had given the pegasus foal the last of the mare's milk he'd brought along for their journey. Now the dark-brown pegasus was asleep in front of the fire, guarded by Arto.

Rowan wouldn't let go of Dad's hand. She sat on one







side of him, her mother on the other, Grandpa opposite. They all listened as Dad told them what had happened since they left Holderby on the day war broke out.

‘Did you see the fighting, Dad? Did the Estrians come right into our city?’ she asked him, licking her spoon.

Rowan’s father sighed. He looked older than before.

‘Yes, I saw the fighting,’ he told them. ‘But it was further west. The army kept the Estrians away from Holderby. It was my job to supply the horses and look after them. So I went right to where the battle was.’

He looked down at Rowan, and she guessed he was trying to decide how much to tell them.

‘We had heavy losses,’ he said finally, and Rowan focused on stirring her drink, trying not to think about what that really meant. ‘But the Estrians had more. We’ve almost won.’

‘That’s good, surely?’ Mum said next, extending her arm round Dad’s shoulders and squeezing him to her.

‘It is good,’ Dad said slowly. ‘The fighting will surely be over soon. I’ve heard the Estrians are getting tired





of this war. Tired of their leader, Kaine Stonelaw, who dragged them into it because he wants more land and power.’ Dad sounded tired himself.

‘But what’s that got to do with the pegasus?’ Rowan asked, peering over Grandpa’s shoulder to see if the foal was still asleep.

Arto raised his head and met Rowan’s gaze steadily, as if to say, *Don’t worry, I’m watching over him!*

*Thank you, Arto,* Rowan thought back to the white wolf, blinking slowly at him to show her affection.

‘The Estrians have been trapping magical animals to use in the war,’ Dad explained. ‘Sometimes they steal them for their abilities, as with the flying pegasi. And sometimes they take them because they think there’s magic in their horns or fur, as with dragons or selkies.’

‘Oh, we know!’ Rowan burst out. She told him the story of how she and her friends Cam and Will from the next farm had discovered an orphaned baby dragon they’d named Leaf.

‘We raised Leaf, after her mother was stolen by those awful Estrian poachers.’ She told him how they’d





rescued a whole clutch of red dragons too. ‘And we all worked together, the dragons and the witches, to catch the poachers instead.’

Then she looked down into the dregs of her hot chocolate and added gloomily, ‘We told the poachers never to come back. But they must have forgotten, because the witches have seen signs they’re returning.’

‘Hmm, because his people are turning against him, Stonelaw will do anything to win,’ Dad said. ‘He must have sent them.’

Grandpa’s frown made his bushy white eyebrows knot together. ‘So was this little foal caught up in the fighting? He’s a bit small for that.’

‘You’re right,’ Dad said. ‘The Estrians were trying to breed pegasi to use in the war.’

Rowan shuddered, imagining the Estrian soldiers flying overhead on winged horses.

‘After one of the battles, we found a captured herd.’ Dad’s voice grew deep and growly. ‘But those Estrians didn’t care for their animals properly. Pegasi were never meant to be caged.’

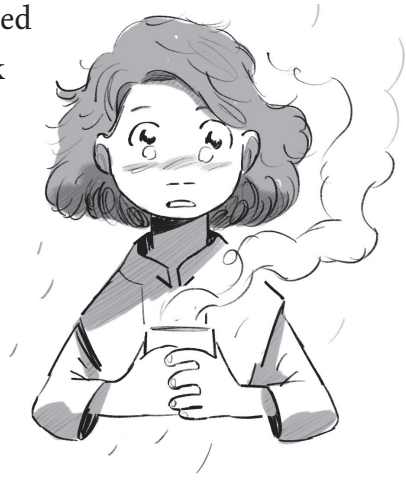




LIZ FLANAGAN



Rowan knew Dad hated it when people didn't look after animals properly. He called it *unforgivable*. 'He's only a baby,' she said. 'What happened to his mother?' Tears filled her eyes as she gazed at the sleeping foal.



'We don't know. We were ambushed by a group of Estrians as we freed the pegasi.' Dad stared into the fire, seeming lost in the memory. 'The winged horses helped us fight them off.' He told them the story of that night.

Rowan listened, gripping her mug so hard she thought it would break. She pictured her father running from the ambush with the newborn foal in his arms, dodging arrows in the darkness. The taste in her mouth turned bitter.