

# CHAPTER 1



*Vvvvvmmmmm*

The buzzing.

In the roots of my teeth.

*Vvvvvmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm*

In the thick of my tongue.

I search around on the shady forest floor.

Nothing.

I pull apart flat, feathered fern leaves.

Nothing.

*Vvvvvvvvvvvvvmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmmm*

I push bracken aside with my size tens. *Clodhoppers*,  
Grandad calls them.

Nothing.





“What’s Dad going to say?”

“Who’s going to tell him?”

He looks at the ground where the rabbit was.

I sit back on my heels.

Calm teeth.

Calm tongue.

Calm head.

OK, so I’ve aged again. Voice got a little bit deeper, arms grown a little bit longer. But it was only a rabbit. It’ll shorten a few days from me, a week at the most. Talents like this don’t come free, you know. There’s always a price.

Give a bit of life, lose a bit of life.

That’s how it goes.

Breathe, Lonny.

Breathe.

“Lonny?”

“Mmmm?”

Breathe.

“Did you hear that?” Midge. Fretting again.

“Mmmm?”

Breathe.

“Did you hear it?”

“Did I hear what?”

*Yap!*

“That,” he says.

I open my eyes.

*Yap-yap!*

*Yap! Yap!*

A dog darts out from the trees.

What. On. Earth?

A dog, in the middle of the forest?

In the middle of *our* forest?

*Yap!*

It runs towards us.

Midge’s hands clench up. “Told you we shouldn’t have come out this far.”

It’s a little white quiver of a thing, with a luminous pink collar, twigs for legs and a whipped-under tail. Not much use for anything at all, I shouldn’t imagine. Except trouble.

*Yap! Yap-Yap!*

It jumps up at Midge and – guess what – he falls over.

Unbelievable.

The dog slurps at his face.

“Lonny! Get it off me! Get it off!”

“Shush, Midge. Keep quiet.”

Thing about dogs is, they don’t wander around forests by themselves. Especially quivery little dogs like this. There’ll be people following after, sooner or later.

I listen.

*“Suuuuuuu-keeeeeeey!”*

There you go.

Suki. That’s her name, then.

The dog – *Suki* – stops still, two front feet on Midge’s chest. She cocks an ear.



*Erin and Katy.*

“And well done, Suki, *not*. You’ve got us proper lost now. How are we going to get back home? Dad’ll be livid.” She pulls something out of her pocket and peers at it. A mobile phone. I’ve seen them on Dad’s TV.

“Course,” she says, “it’d help if we lived somewhere you could actually get a signal. Like *anywhere else in the universe*.”

“Um...” Katy turns round on the spot, clutching Suki to her chest. She stops and points. “I think it’s this way.”

“All right, then,” says Erin. “That way it is. You’d better be right.”

“I am right – I’m sure I am. Farstoke, here we come.” They march off eastwards.

I lean back against the yew tree. Safe.

“Farstoke,” whispers Midge. “Did you hear that, Lonny? They’re from Farstoke.”

I heard it.

Midge sits on the ground. “Told you we’d come too far.” He swishes another couple of mayflies away.

I look up. There’s a whole cloud of them under the branches. Hundreds. Thousands. So many the air over our heads isn’t even properly see-through any more. They dance and dive and swoop and zoom. Having the time of their lives.

Those girls are gonna be a long while getting back to Farstoke. Should be heading southwards, not

eastwards.

“Lonny?” Midge sniffs.

“Mmmm?”

“Can we go home now?”

We wade back through the stream, squeeze the water out from the bottom of our trousers, and set off for home.