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Chicken  
House

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*For my own extraordinary parents,  
Jim Lad and Joan Girl xx*

Also by Marie Basting

*Princess BMX*



## CHAPTER 1

# ROME PLAY

‘Come on, Livi! You know the drill!’ called Dad from the far end of the garden.

‘One potato.

Two potato.

Three potato.

*Fire!*

A perfect hit. The arrow glanced off the brass

door knocker and landed next door in Mrs Burden's hollyhocks. Sighing, I pushed the Roman gladiator figures out of the way and opened my bedroom window.

'Seriously, Dad, why can't you just use the doorbell like everyone else?'

'Where's the fun in that?' He grinned, **centurion** cape flapping in the wind. 'Come, daughter, Rome Play awaits.'

Dad had been wearing a cape and tunic for nearly a month now. He said he wanted to get to know his inner Roman better. Still, it was better than his mythical being phase, I suppose. Trust me, being woken up by a cyclops on a dark winter morning is not good.

Welcome to my world! A world of foam weapons, muddy fields and fantastical adventures. A world where you can be a centurion, cyclops or sorceress for the day and still go the chippy for your tea. The world of **Live-Action Role-Play – LARP**. It's part acting, part dressing up and one hundred per cent awesome!

I'm Silvia, by the way – Silvia Fortuna Juno De Luca. It's a bit of a mouthful, isn't it? The sort of name you'd expect to belong to an Italian celebrity rather than a twelve-year-old who needs braces. But this is what happens when your dad is obsessed with Ancient Rome – so obsessed, we live practically on top of **Hadrian's Wall**, in a tiny village called Once Brewed. He had a dream, you see: to set up a mega role-play event dedicated to all things Rome. There's been a bit of a delay, what with me coming along and my mum doing a disappearing act, but finally his dream is about to come true. Rome Play!

Picture it as a sort of festival. Only, instead of chilling and listening to music, people pretend they're from the Roman Empire and hit each other with fake weapons. Honestly, it's going to be brill. Better than brill—

'Come on, Livi!' Dad unclipped his keys from the plaited leather lanyard around his neck. 'Kenzo is waiting for the paint I just picked up!' He turned towards the beat-up truck, pausing to

breathe in the view of the sparse hillside where the late afternoon sun cast a golden glow over Hadrian's Wall.

Pulling the window shut, I legged it downstairs, slamming the door behind me.

'There she is!' said Dad as I shoved his sorcerer cloak off the seat and climbed into the truck beside him. 'My favourite daughter.'

'Dad, I'm your only daughter.'

'Not in Rome, you're not. I have seven. And you're still my favourite.'

I rolled my eyes – he was taking this whole in-character thing too far – but I couldn't help smiling. He was just so excited.

'Two more sleeps, Livi. Two more sleeps. I can't believe it's finally happening!'

'I know!' I returned his high five. 'You did it, Dad. You did it.'

Gravel scrunching, Dad pulled off, pausing where the drive met the road to tie his shoulder-length hair back in a ponytail with one of my old scrunchies. It wasn't very Roman.



‘I thought you were going to get you hair cut like Julius Caesar.’

Dad shrugged and turned up the stereo. ‘What, and lose the source of my great powers? Never!’

I laughed. I knew Dad wouldn’t be able to bring himself to cut his hair. Not after those women told him he looked like Aragorn from *Lord of the Rings*. You see, it’s not just fantasy Roman worlds Dad likes to escape to: Middle-earth, Camelot or Fantasia, you name it and the De Lucas will see you there. It’s what we do – leave our problems behind and escape to somewhere better. A world where shattered dreams, forgotten promises and absent mums don’t matter.