

*Secrets. Sorcery. Sabotage!*

# BRÖNTE TEMPESTRA

AND THE  
WEATHER WITCH

Illustrated by  
Hannah  
McCaffery

BEX HOGAN



**BRÖNTE**  
**TEMPESTRA**  
**AND THE**  
**WEATHER WITCH**

*The Bronte Tempestra series*

Bronte Tempestra and the Lightning Steeds

Bronte Tempestra and the Ice Warriors

Bronte Tempestra and the Weather Witch

*Look out for more*

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AND THE  
WEATHER WITCH



**BEX HOGAN**

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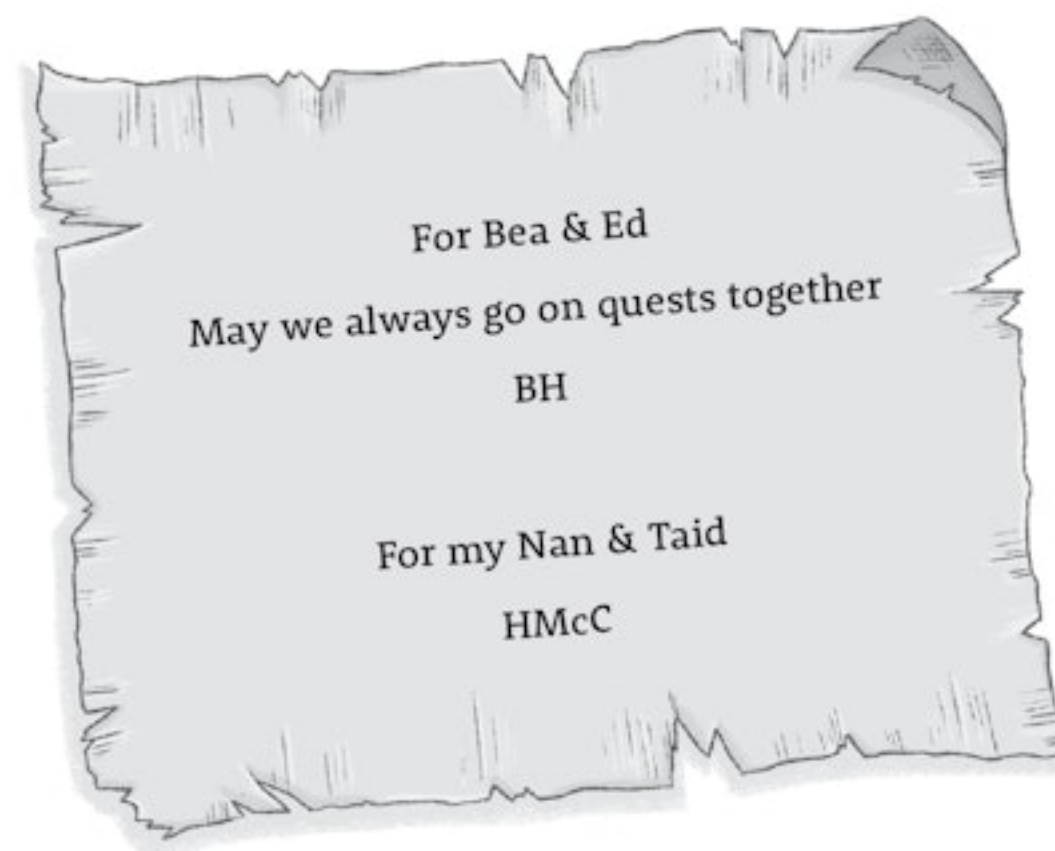
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Sir Sebastian's  
SCHOOL FOR SQUIRES





Dear Diary,

It's great to be back at Sir Sebastian's after the winter break. Today, Sir Calliphus made us write down three memorable events from our first term and of course I couldn't say what really happened! I listed some boring things for him, but here's what I wanted to write:

One: Tonkins wasn't the only friend I made at my new school - I also befriended Lord Errol, a magnificent griffin!

Two: I stopped an evil scientist, Ackley, from turning all the woodland animals into monsters



so he could attack POOP and SICK.

Three Ackley's brothers, Elon and Hollis, stole the ice thistle from the Snow Kingdom and hid it beneath the school. Turns out Ackley is also a weather witch and he used the ice thistle's power to bring ice sculptures to life, which then attacked our school!

Phew! I really hope nothing so dramatic happens this term!



## REALMS' ROUND-UP



### ONCE IN A BLUE MOON

Stargazing enthusiasts are eagerly awaiting the appearance of a blue moon. The rare spectacle is a once-in-a-lifetime event. Nobody knows for certain if it will definitely appear, but if it does, it will be best viewed in the north. Many will be travelling to the Weather Kingdoms in the hope of glimpsing the celestial phenomenon – although

probably not to the Mist Queendom!

### SICKNESS SWEEPING S.I.C.K.

The School for Independent and Courageous Kings has been quarantined since it was struck down by mumbleitis. The infectious illness is highly contagious, with symptoms such as sore throats and swollen tongues. It is expected that all students will recover within two weeks.



## SCHOOL TRIP PERMISSION SLIP

Sir Sebastian's School for Squires has the unexpected opportunity to join the Palace for obedient and outstanding Princesses on their annual pilgrimage to the Stones of Forgotten Secrets. It will be a three-night camp, filled with fun and educational activities. Please sign the permission slip ASAP, along with the form stating that any harm that befalls your child is not the responsibility of the school or its teachers.

Elliel

Are you going on the school trip? Please tell me you are! Can you believe it? We're going to have the most fun!

B x

B!

You bet I am! I wouldn't miss it for the world. I can't wait to meet Blue and Tonkins, and have the best adventures.

El x

P.S. Mariam says hi - she can't wait to see you either!

P.P.S. I have something super important to talk to you about too...

## SIR PEN TINE – THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

### An Accurate Account by Sir Simpson Swain

It has long been believed that the many deeds of Sir Pen Tine, along with his firecat Firkle and battle boar Hurkle, were nothing more than stories told for children. But there is increasing evidence that these tales of heroics were far from just myths, and were in fact true. If proved, it would be the single most important historical discovery of our age, altering the lore of Everdale

entirely. In this book, I will explore the facts behind the legends, including the truth at the heart of many mysteries of the kingdoms, such as weather wraiths and the mighty Swirklebirkle itself.





## A Rumble of Thunder

Bronte Tempestra, princess of the Storm Kingdom, was named after the thunder that could constantly be heard in her realm. And when she was really cross, she lived up to her name because her temper could be completely thunderous.

Today she was really, **REALLY** cross.

‘It’s just not fair,’ she cried, slumping on a stool in the herbery, where plants and herbs were made into potions and concoctions, and reaching





for the nearest pestle and mortar. Crushing dew-dusk pods into powder was a good way to release her frustration.

Blue, her icekitten, nuzzled her comfortingly.

Miss Shine, the Chivalry and Medicine teacher, as well as school nurse, was watching the human storm cloud with mild amusement.

‘Would you like to tell me what’s wrong, or are you happy to keep taking it out on the pods?’

Bronte smashed them a little harder beneath the pestle. ‘Sir Calliphus gave us our projects back.’

‘Ah.’ Miss Shine pulled out a stool opposite Bronte and sat to listen.





It had been such a fun assignment to work on. They had been tasked to write about a famous knight from history and present their important deeds. Bronte hadn't hesitated for a moment – of course she would do hers on Sir Pen Tine. He was, after all, her favourite ever knight. She had written about Sir Pen Tine's many quests, focusing especially on his slaying of the Swirlebirdle – a mighty beast that had terrorised the kingdoms.

'I failed,' Bronte said, her anger giving way to burning disappointment. 'I worked so hard on my project, but Sir Calliphus said that because I hadn't written about actual history it didn't count.'

'I'm sorry,' Miss Shine said sympathetically. 'But what about all your research? The book you found in the archive tower?'

Bronte had been delighted to find a copy of an old book called *Sir Pen Tine – the Story Behind the Story* by Sir Simpson Swain, in which the knight made a very persuasive argument for Sir Pen Tine having existed. She had quoted it in her project, but it hadn't convinced Sir Calliphus.

'He said that Sir Swain was an old relic who nobody took seriously when he was alive, and that I should have written my project on him and the nonsense claims he made instead,' Bronte sighed.

'Oh dear,' Miss Shine said, before adding, 'At least the school trip is tomorrow, that will cheer you up.'

The thought did coax a small smile from Bronte. Her first Sir Sebastian's camp. They were visiting the Stones of Forgotten Secrets, outside of the Kingdoms and up in the mountains. Even

better, they were going with her old class from the Palace for Obedient and Outstanding Princesses (or POOP, as it was known) which meant she would see her best friend, Ellie! Bronte couldn't wait for Ellie to meet her other best friend, Tonkins. And Ellie's roommate, Mariam, a shy girl who was second in line to the throne of the Mist Queendom, was also coming on the trip. They were going to have so much fun together, exploring, adventuring, sleeping under the stars...

'And I thought you might like to borrow this,' Miss Shine continued, interrupting Bronte's daydream and sliding a dog-eared book across the workbench towards her.

### **Sir Pen Tine and the Swirlebirkle**

'It's a compilation of all the many tales featuring the monster,' Miss Shine said, smiling as

Bronte gasped with delight. 'I'm sorry I couldn't find this old copy before your project – I was planning to give it to you to celebrate, but perhaps it might just cheer you up instead.'

'Thank you,' Bronte said, taking the book and staring at it in wonder.

'You should go and finish your packing,' Miss Shine said, standing up.

'Oh, I'm all ready to go!'

'Sunbeams, aren't you organised!'

Unfortunately, I still have a lot to do before morning... Miss Shine left the hint floating and Bronte caught it.

She tucked the book into her bag and hopped down from the stool as Blue leaped lightly to the floor beside her. Bronte had made it quite a habit recently to come and visit the new teacher. She was always willing to lend a supportive ear,



and Bronte was glad of it. She never wanted to outstay her welcome, and so bid her teacher goodnight, heading outside into the cool early evening air.

It was all thanks to Miss Shine that they were even going on this trip. It had originally been the annual joint school trip between POOP and SICK (the School for Independent and Courageous Kings) but then the boys at SICK had been struck down by an outbreak of mumbleitis. Miss Shine had been swift to suggest that the Year Four squires could go in their place, and everyone agreed it was a great idea.

The preparations had all been a bit of a whirlwind, but Bronte knew it would be worth it. The Stones were steeped in magical myths, as well as being a site of historical interest. Bronte was glad Sir Calliphus wasn't coming – he

would probably forbid them from talking to the Stones. Because that's what people did. It was a long-held tradition that people would travel to the Stones to whisper their secrets.

As Bronte walked towards her treehouse dormitory in the triple-trunk oak tree, she thought about what secret she should whisper to the Stones. She didn't really have any *total* secrets – she shared pretty much everything with her friends.

'Perhaps I'll tell the Stones that I think most stories are actually true,' Bronte said to Blue. 'Not just Sir Pen Tine tales, but all of them. Oh, wait, I just told you, so it's not a secret any more!' And she chuckled as Blue did a little skip in front of her.

But then Blue froze, and hissed out a little ice cloud.



Bronte frowned. 'What is it?' she whispered, looking for the danger.

And then she saw it. There on the grass, right in front of the triple-trunk oak, was a zombit!



## Packing Problems

'Stay back,' Bronte warned Blue, who moved to stand protectively beside her.

Bronte's mind raced. If the zombit didn't notice them, she might make it to tell a teacher. But what if it got into the treehouses and attacked her classmates? She had to do something fast! But what?

'You all right, Bronts?'

Bronte screamed and spun round to see Tonkins standing there with a wide smile.

She gasped. 'What are you doing here?'

'Been in the archive tower catching up on homework,' he said. 'Why are you so jumpy?'

Bronte grabbed his sleeve and pointed. 'There's a zombit, over there by the tree.'

'What?' Tonkins shrieked, and clutched her back, staring into the evening gloom. But moments later he let go. 'Um, there's nothing there, Bronts. You sure you didn't just see a nibbit?'

'I think I know the difference,' she said, searching around for any sign of the scary creature. 'Where's it gone?'

The zombits had been created by Ackley, whose wicked machines had turned the woodland animals into monsters. The cute nibbits had been transformed into vicious zombits who had tried to eat Bronte and Tonkins – an experience

Bronte wasn't keen to repeat!

'I think you must have imagined it,' Tonkins said, trying to reassure her. 'Lady Fennel made them all nibbits again.'

'She must have missed one,' Bronte said, certain about what she'd seen.

'Look, Blue and Dotty aren't worried,' Tonkins said, pointing to the firecat and icekitten.

He was right. Gone was all Blue's concern – he was now booping noses affectionately with Dotty. Bronte looked back to where she had seen the zombit and frowned.

'Everything's fine,' Tonkins said soothingly. 'I promise, there are no woodland animals or



ice statues trying to kill us for once, so let's just look forward to having fun at camp.'

Bronte smiled. It *had* been an eventful first term, what with Ackley's evil schemes and his brothers stealing the ice thistle from the Snow Kingdom. But so far her second term was proving to be a quieter experience. Her friend, Nix, who was a few years older than Bronte, had convinced Sir Calliphus to give them both some extra lessons, and slowly Bronte felt as if she was catching up on all the work she'd missed before starting late at Sir Sebastian's School for Squires – even if she was going to have to redo her project after the camp.

She was settled, she was happy . . . Maybe she *had* imagined the zombit? Perhaps things were going so well that she feared something bad would bring it all crashing down?

She shook all her worries out of her head and linked arms with Tonkins to walk the rest of the way to the tree, giggling as Blue and Dotty tumbled and played beside them.

When Bronte reached the room she shared with Nix in the treehouse, all thoughts of zombits disappeared.

Nix was sitting on the floor, surrounded by what looked like every possession she owned. She looked up at Bronte.

'Stormy, help!' she said, as Blue dived into Bronte's hammock and buried himself under her blanket to escape the chaos.

'What's going on?' Bronte asked.

'Well, the good news is that Sir Calliphus has said that I can come on the trip with you as a helper, seeing as I've never been on one before.'

'Oh, that's brilliant!' Bronte cried.



'But the bad news is that I haven't packed a thing yet and we leave in the morning!'

'You're not planning on taking everything, are you?' Bronte asked. 'I'm not sure there'll be room in the carriage.'

'No, of course not,' Nix said. 'But what if I leave something super important behind?'

'I don't think you're going to need goggles,' Bronte said, holding them up in amusement. 'The weather in the mountains is always crisp and clear at this time of year.'

Nix snatched them from her. 'You never know,' she said, groaning. 'That's the problem. I want to be ready for anything.'

'I'm sure the teachers will make sure we have everything important,' Bronte said, before considering this a bit more and adding, 'well, Lady Fennel will. Sir Ripple will probably just

make sure there's plenty of copies of *Knights Weekly* to go around.'

'We won't run out of toilet paper then,' Nix said with a grin. 'What are you taking?'

Bronte gestured to her bag at the foot of her hammock. 'Just what was on the kit list,' she said, carefully stepping past all Nix's belongings to reach her desk. She grabbed the piece of parchment and passed it to Nix, who read it, her eyes widening.

'That's it?' Nix was horrified.

'Oh, and Sir Pen Tine of course,' Bronte said with a smile, pointing to her favourite knitted doll. 'I'll add him in the morning.'

'I can't possibly leave so much behind!' Nix buried her face in her hands.

'Why not take two extra things,' Bronte suggested. 'Your tool belt always comes in handy.'



And maybe ... What's that?' She pointed to a strange looking device near Nix's knee.

'Oh, this is my latest invention,' she said, brightening up. 'A head lantern!' And she wrapped the strap around her head, so that a small version of a lantern dangled between her eyes.

'Wouldn't it just be easier to carry a lamp in your hand?'

'Would it though?' Nix asked. 'Not if you had a sword in one hand and a shield in the other.' She tapped the side of her head. 'I'm all about the forward thinking.'

'OK, that is pretty cool,' Bronte conceded. 'But I'm sure you won't need it at camp.'

Nix didn't look convinced. 'You should get some sleep,' she said to Bronte. 'I think I'm going to be a while.'



Bronte tiptoed across the floor, dodging all of Nix's things, and got ready for bed. Then she pulled the book Miss Shine had given her out of her bag and climbed into her hammock, snuggling down to read.

She knew every version of the Swirlebird tale like the back of her hand. It was mostly the same story told over again, just in different locations across Everdale. Bronte didn't mind – in fact, she loved the familiarity of it.

But as she flicked through, a heading caught her eye.

### **Sir Pen Tine and the Stones of Forgotten Secrets**

Her heart beat faster with excitement. She had never seen this one before. Was it possible her hero had travelled to the very place she was about to go on camp?

Bronte forgot all about her failed project, the shocking appearance of a suspected zombit and Nix's chaotic rummaging, and lost herself to the story.





## Squire Scores

'And so it turns out that when Sir Pen Tine slew the Swirlebirdle, he cut its head off and hid it.' Bronte looked triumphantly at Tonkins as they walked towards the carriages.

'Curly custard, Brontes, usually it's me who can't stop talking,' Tonkins teased.

'But don't you understand? This is huge!' Bronte exclaimed.

Tonkins looked at her. 'Why?'

Bronte sighed in frustration. 'Because

afterwards he travelled to the Stones of Forgotten Secrets, carrying the head with him!' She stared at him crossly. 'Have you not been listening?'

'I have,' Tonkins promised. 'I just don't understand why you're so excited.'

Bronte had been up half the night after reading the book Miss Shine had given her. She was exhausted but the seed of an idea had taken root. There had been several conflicting versions of where the heroic knight had buried the monster's head in the book, among other Swirlebirdle tales. But in all her research for her project, Bronte had never heard about Sir Pen Tine going to the Stones before. Sir Swain had never referenced it. This was Bronte's chance.

'If I can find the Swirlebirdle's skull, I can prove that Sir Pen Tine was real. And then Sir

Calliphus will have to give me a good grade for my project.'

Tonkins pulled a face. 'I dunno, Bronts. It sounds hard. How are you going to do that?'

'I'm not sure,' Bronte admitted. 'But I thought you could help me figure it out.'

The doubtful expression Tonkins gave her was far from reassuring. 'I'm not really a Sir Pen Tine expert like you,' he said. 'I don't even understand why he chopped the Swirklebirkle's head off after he'd already killed it!'

Bronte frowned as she tried to remember if that had been explained in the story. 'I think he was worried about it coming back to life or something.' She yawned, her tiredness catching up with her.

'Did you get any sleep?' Tonkins asked with a playful nudge.

'Not a lot. I was reading for ages, and then Blue kept waking me up, growling. I think Nix's chaos unsettled him.'

'Well, you can nap on the journey,' Tonkins said, positive as always. 'The firecats are flying, so they won't be in the carriage with us.'

That was true. Although Blue wouldn't exactly be flying himself – his wings couldn't manage more than a short flutter, but the icekitten was always happy to hitch a lift on Dotty's back.

Lampton was strapping all the children's belongings onto the carriages. He glared at Nix when she passed him her bulging bag.

'Do you think you have enough?' he asked, raising an eyebrow.

'No!' she said, still panicked. 'Should I take another bag? I have one ready in the treehouse.'

'Absolutely not,' Lampton said. 'The carriage



hire company won't send us another if we break one. And think of the poor speed slugs.'

Nix groaned as she reluctantly climbed into the carriage.

The fourteen students from Year Four were travelling in two carriages, plus three teachers and Nix. Bronte and Tonkins checked to see which of the carriages they'd been assigned.

'We're in the same one as Nix,' Tonkins said, studying the scroll. 'Oh.' His voice dropped. 'And Sir Ripple.'

'Coming through!' Sir Ripple appeared at that very moment, carrying a chest on his shoulder like it weighed nothing.

Lampton stared at him, unimpressed. 'What am I supposed to do with that? There's no room.'

'But it's my travel essentials!' Sir Ripple said. 'Everything a knight needs for the road. Armour,

weapons, a moustache-care kit . . .'

'It's a three-day camping trip,' Lampton said. 'I think you can afford to let the moustache grow a little.'

Sir Ripple gasped indignantly.

'It's all right, sir,' came a voice from behind them. Lance was striding over, followed as always by his bog-brush buddies, Leo and Pole. 'The carriages have room for ten and there's only nine of us in each. Your chest can come inside with us.'

'Ah, thank you, young man!' Sir Ripple beamed. 'Such initiative! You just earned the trip's first squire score!'

Lance smirked but Bronte frowned.

'What's a squire score?'

'A way for you all to earn points on the trip,' Sir Ripple said. 'Whoever finishes with the highest

tally wins an incredible prize!

‘Don’t even bother, Poop-face,’ Lance said to Bronte. ‘That prize is mine.’

Tonkins saw that Bronte was about to retaliate, and stepped in.

‘How about we find our places?’ he said, steering her away to climb into the carriage.

Nix was shuffling on her seat, restless with anxiety. ‘What if I’ve forgotten something important?’

‘You won’t have,’ Bronte soothed her, stifling another yawn.

She leaned her head on Tonkins’ shoulder and closed her eyes as the rest of the class boarded the two carriages.

She was asleep before they even left the castle. When she was jolted awake, a familiar view awaited her.

The Palace for Obedient and Outstanding Princesses was a dazzling sight to behold. Made of stone from the crystal caves of the Sapphire Kingdom, it shone in the sunlight, its brilliant blue gemstones gleaming. Each corner of the palace was marked with two towers twisting around each other, and long ribbons fluttered from the top of them. The roof of the palace itself acted as a giant nest for the large white birds that were the mascots of the school. With their fluffy feathers and long, elegant necks, the swomlings looked graceful and harmless, but they were strong and fierce. Every princess knew not to make them cross!

In front of the palace, grim gargoyles stood guard, patrolling up and down in a menacing fashion, daring anyone to attack the VIPs beyond.



'Yup, bet you're glad I overpacked now, eh? This might be useful,' she said, passing Tonkins a strange glove with lots of small wooden circles on it. 'Use that as a shield against the lightning zaps, I reckon.'

'Maybe Dotty can help us fight off the icicles?' Tonkins suggested, pulling the glove on and admiring it.

'Good idea,' Nix said. 'Ellie, pass me that ribbon flower you made earlier.'

Ellie did as she was told, and they all watched as Nix pulled it apart, taking the finest strip and tying it onto the goggles she'd extracted from her bag. Covering the lenses with the ribbon, she slipped the goggles onto her head.

'These will protect me from that awful shining light the weather wraiths are blasting out.'

She looked at Bronte in concern. 'I don't have

anything left for you.'

'It doesn't matter. Hopefully the wraiths won't be anywhere near the Stones. Steve can guide me to them with his clever nose.'

'Here,' Mariam said, untying the ribbon from her hair. 'Sniff this, Steve. It's probably faint now but should have the scent of the stone table where we were doing the arrangements.'

Nix nodded. 'OK, so does everyone know the plan? We'll stay here and help Lady Fennel defend the camp, while Stormy races up to the Stones and asks them to reveal the secret of how to stop the weather wraiths.'



Are we all ready?’

*As we’ll ever be*, Bronte thought, as the group reached out their hands for a group shake.

She was staking their survival on a story being true. And unlike proving whether Sir Pen Tine was real or not, or discovering a Swirlebirdle skull, this *really* mattered. This wasn’t about having her name in the history books. This was about saving her friends.

Tonight, she needed the legend to be real.



## **Attack!**

On the count of three, the group burst from the tent.

The campsite was pandemonium. Lady Fennel and Sir Ripple were hugely outnumbered by the weather wraiths, who continued to blast them with their weather powers. The firecats were growling and trying to catch the wraiths with their paws, but the eerie creatures easily evaded them.

Fleur and Posy were holding their skirts out



to shield Varney and Higgles from lightning attacks, while Lance, Leo and Pole had climbed into the water barrels for shelter. Mistress Moon was guarding a tent, brandishing a saucepan at any wraiths who dared attack.

Rufus Ranger and Skye Aura were valiantly beating a tent that had gone up in flames with their cloaks. The other squires who'd been inside were now cowering in a huddle.

Bronte was going to have to hurry!

Their plan was to protect her as far as the pathway up to the Stones, and then the others would join the fight.

But they hadn't gone far before a huge swarm of wraiths descended on them, unleashing mini bursts of all the weathers of the Weather Kingdoms. The children used Nix's defences and managed to hold back the worst of it to begin

with, but soon began to struggle.

'There are too many of them!' Tonkins shouted, as he flung his arm in front of Bronte to stop her getting shot by lightning.

'We need reinforcements,' Bronte said.

She turned to Mariam. 'How about the mist maidens?'

Mariam was picking her lip frantically. 'Right, yes, good idea.' And she rattled off the rhyme which had brought help before.

As they defended against icicles and torrential rain, Bronte thought for a moment that they might be swept away. But then it was as if someone had wrapped a blanket around them, shielding them from all the elements.

When Bronte lowered the arm that was protecting her head, she smiled. It wasn't just one mist maiden who had come this time. It was

a whole host of them, and they were blocking the wraiths' attacks like wispy warriors.

'You called once more,' said the mist maiden they'd met earlier, who it was now clear was the leader. 'Tell me, what for?'

'Can you help us fight the weather wraiths?' Mariam asked.

'They cannot be fought, they can only be freed. For peace and rest their souls do plead,' the mist maiden said mysteriously.

'Oh.' Mariam looked at the others for guidance.

'Could you protect us while Bronte goes to ask the Stones for help?' Ellie asked.

'Should you need us, here we'll stay. At your word, then we'll away.'

That sounded like a yes.

'OK, I'll be back as soon as I can,' Bronte said.

'Good luck,' Tonkins said. 'And take care.'

Bronte nodded. 'You take care too. And of Ellie and Mariam,' she said to him with a smile, 'Brave Squire Tonkins.'

'I'm not half as brave when you're not around,' he said quietly. 'I know you were mad at me for taking Ellie's side before, but I didn't want to let you down. I know you wanted to be her knight and I didn't want to disappoint you.'

All the knots of jealousy in Bronte's tummy loosened.

'You could never disappoint me, Tonks,' Bronte said. 'You're an amazing knight, and I'm sorry I was silly.'

The two friends hugged, and then Ellie joined in, swiftly followed by Nix and Mariam. None of the squabbling or envy mattered any more. They were all friends, and that was that.

Together, anything felt possible.





'Good luck, team,' Nix said as they broke apart.  
'And Stormy, hurry back.'

With a look of determination, Bronte nodded.  
Then she headed off, up the misty path.

It was eerily quiet as she and Blue followed  
Steve up the twisting track towards the Stones.  
She was very glad the clever zombit was there -

the last thing she needed was to get lost in the  
mist.

It was a long way up the mountain to where  
the Stones were, but the thought of her best  
friends fighting the angry wraiths pushed her  
on, even though her legs were tired and her chest  
tight. What if it didn't work again? If the Stones  
stayed silent, how would she save the camp?

*Please tell me what I need to know*, she silently  
pleaded to the Stones as she hurried along the  
steep path. *Please*.

Just when she thought she would never reach  
the end, she rounded the bend. Here the mist was  
pulled back, like a curtain around a stage, and  
the astonishing blue moon shone full in the night  
sky.

Bronte skidded to a halt as she stared in horror  
at the scene before her. Sitting on the stone slab

in the centre of the almost-circle was Miss Shine, who smiled brightly.

‘No need to be shy, Bronte,’ Miss Shine said. ‘I’ve been waiting for you.’



## The Weather Witch

Bronte stared at her teacher in confusion.

‘You were expecting me?’

‘Of course,’ Miss Shine said. ‘I knew your need to save the day would bring you up here.’

Bronte glanced about nervously. ‘So you are the weather witch,’ she said, wishing she’d never come.

‘Of course. For such a bright girl, you certainly took your time figuring it out. I was certain you’d recognised me with the gnomes earlier.’





'And it was you last term. You stole the ice thistle and used its power to attack Sir Sebastian's. Why would you do that?'

Miss Shine considered Bronte for a moment. 'You know, I am not the villain you think I am.'

'Oh, really? So you didn't sabotage SICK so they couldn't come on this trip?'

Miss Shine grinned. 'A teeny little illness – no harm done.'

'All so you could come here?'

At this, Miss Shine jumped lightly off the table. 'To ensure I was here at a very specific time, Bronte. Do you know how rare a blue moon is? I couldn't risk missing the chance to talk to the Stones.'

'What could be so important to ask them?'

Miss Shine tutted. 'Oh, really, Bronte, I expected better from you. Have you not realised yet

how similar we are? That we share a common purpose?’

Bronte glanced at Blue. What the green gravy was she talking about?

Oh.

It hit her like lightning. All the long talks about Bronte’s project. The tips for what to search for in the archive tower. The book Miss Shine had let her borrow.

‘You’re trying to prove Sir Pen Tine is real too!’

‘I couldn’t care less about him,’ Miss Shine said dismissively. ‘It’s the Swirklebirkle skull I’m after. I’ve been seeking it for many years, in all the various sites recorded in the tales. It is proving most elusive. I thought I had worked out where it was at last, but the mountain gnomes have found nothing. It is not here. My research is exhausted, and the Stones are my last hope.’

‘Why do you want the Swirklebirkle skull so much?’ Bronte asked suspiciously.

Miss Shine’s smile faded. ‘I am something of a collector, shall we say, and this would be the crown jewel of my collection.’

‘You’re not a collector, you’re a villain. You stole the ice thistle and used its power to make the ice statues attack Sir Sebastian’s.’

‘True,’ Miss Shine said. ‘And you forced me to do it sooner than I wanted. I wasn’t ready, and I’d hoped those buffoon knights would have carved more statues before I launched the attack.’

‘Why would you want to attack the school in the first place?’ Bronte still didn’t understand.

‘Because you ruined my plan to attack POOP and SICK!’ Miss Shine cried. ‘I thought if I could rid myself of the knights, there would be no one left to stop me from reclaiming what’s rightfully mine.’



At last, the final pieces of the puzzle fell into place. 'You're the boss that Elon and Hollis were talking about,' Bronte said. 'Ackley worked for you too.'

'Yes, my idiot brothers always did need someone to tell them what to do,' Miss Shine said.

'You're their *sister*?' Bronte's mind was racing. 'Which means you are descended from the Tree Kingdoms, just like Ackley. You want to reclaim the throne, don't you?'

'Of course I do.' She smiled. 'You say it like it's a bad thing, but why shouldn't I? You know, we're related, you and I. Very distantly. I believe it is thanks to one of my ancestors marrying Mabel Mizzle of the Storm Kingdom that I, Rainey Shine, possess my weather witch powers.'

'Your name is Rainey Shine?' Bronte

asked in surprise, before remembering her priorities. 'But how does retrieving a skull from the Swirlebirdle help you take back your kingdoms?'

'All you need to know is that soon my collection will be complete,' Miss Shine said. 'Because the Stones are going to tell me where the skull is hidden.' She paused before adding, 'More precisely, they're going to tell you where it is, and then you are going to tell me.'

'What?' Bronte could hardly believe it. 'No, ask the Stones yourself.'

'I did!' Miss Shine's frustration rang around the clearing. 'But there's one part of the story I didn't tell you. *Only to those who are pure of heart, shall the secrets of the Stones impart.* And as you have hopefully finally realised, I am far from pure!'

A wave of relief swept over Bronte. 'Well then, you should surrender now. Because I'm not going to help you. The only question I'm going to ask the Stones is how to stop the weather wraiths from hurting my friends.'

Now Miss Shine stepped closer, her eyes flashing fiercely, her lips pursed tight. She was so terrifying that Bronte wondered how she had ever thought the teacher was kind. That's what the mist maiden had meant about a mask – Miss Shine had been hiding behind her smile for a long time.

'I was counting on you being prepared to do anything to prove your beloved Sir Pen Tine was real. Only for you to decide to be all honourable and decent. That's why I had to release the wraiths, because I realised it would take something truly perilous to bring you here.

So really, if you think about it, the attack is all your fault. Now, if you do as I ask, then I will stop the weather wraiths. And if you do not, then your friends cannot be saved. So you'd better hurry, don't you think?'





## Secrets of the Stones

Blue hissed at Miss Shine, and Steve gnashed his pointy teeth, but she wasn't scared. She simply stared expectantly at Bronte. She knew the young squire would do as she was told, because what choice did she have? There was no way Bronte was going to let her friends suffer any longer than they already had.

'What do I have to do?' Bronte asked, bending to stroke Blue reassuringly as he clawed at her boot.

Miss Shine gestured for Bronte to approach the nearest of the towering Stones. 'You must be specific about what secret you wish to be revealed. Choose your words carefully, for I do not believe you will be granted a second question. We shall hear their answer together.'

Bronte held Miss Shine's challenging gaze before she gave a deep sigh and walked towards the Stone.

The last time she had pressed her palm to the rock, it had been cold, rough and unremarkable.

Tonight though, under the light of the blue moon, she could hear a humming from deep within the stone. Just as she had imagined it, she thought bitterly. But she'd pictured a moment of triumph. She had not guessed that this would be more awful than anything she'd faced since joining Sir Sebastian's. When she touched the

rock, she could hear the sound of thousands of faint whispers. There was magic in the air.

‘Hello, Stone,’ Bronte said, feeling it was only right to introduce herself if she was going to ask it to share a secret kept for long years. ‘I’m Bronte Tempestra. I was wondering . . . if the legendary Sir Pen Tine entrusted you with the location of the Swirklebirkle’s head, would you share the secret with me?’

The chorus of whispers swept around the circle of Stones, an indecipherable noise, until one voice seemed to rise to the surface, and very clearly the words could be heard.

*‘Sacred Stones, I have done it. At last, my foe is vanquished – the Swirklebirkle is dead. But I remain afraid. For it is said the beast will rise again one day. And so I have removed its head from its body and buried it in the place where it*

*all began, to remain hidden forever.’*

The voice became lost once more to the other whispers which slowly died away now that the secret had been shared.

Bronte looked over at Miss Shine, to see if the words had made any sense to her, but the weather witch looked as confused as Bronte.

‘Where it all began . . . What does that mean?’ Miss Shine cried in frustration.

But even if Bronte had known, she wouldn’t have said.

‘Think, Tempestra, what could it mean?’ Miss Shine pressed her hands to her temples, striding up and down.

‘Please, Miss Shine, call off the weather wraiths,’ Bronte begged. ‘Forget about Sir Pen Tine and the Swirklebirkle.’

Miss Shine ignored her though, until after a



moment she cried out, inspiration hitting her. 'I know where it is!' she exclaimed. 'At last! It shall be mine!'

She pulled a bottle from her pocket and chanted some words as she brushed her hand over it, speaking in a language that Bronte didn't recognise. A wild wind whipped up, and a gust swept down beside Miss Shine, who sat upon it like it was a broomstick.



'Where are you going?' Bronte shouted.

'As if I would tell you! Goodbye, Bronte Tempestra. We shall not meet again, of that I'm certain. You and your pesky friends won't survive the weather wraiths. You see, I lied before. While my powers allowed me to call them from their prison in the mountain, I do not command them, and cannot stop them. I think, at last, I have found a way to keep you from meddling in my business.'

She laughed as the gust of wind soared upwards, carrying her away from the mountain and leaving Bronte staring after her, speechless.

For a moment, she didn't know what to do. Usually, she was good at finding a way forward. At being brave.

Miss Shine had escaped. She knew where the Swirlebirdle skull was, and whatever her

intentions were for it, Bronte couldn't imagine they were good.

And worst of all, her friends and the camp were still in danger from the weather wraiths. If a weather witch couldn't stop them, then who could?

'What are we going to do, Blue?' Bronte asked, stricken. 'If we don't defeat the weather wraiths, we may very well never leave this mountain. And then what? Will the wraiths float across the kingdoms attacking everyone they pass?'

Blue puffed snowflakes in response.

Frantically, Bronte pressed her hand to the Stone once more. 'I'm sorry to ask again, but could you share a secret that will help me stop the weather wraiths?'

Now though, the Stones remained as silent as the first time she'd asked. Miss Shine had been

right that only one secret would be offered.

'Come on, Bronte,' she said to herself. 'Feet firm, head high. Be brave. What would Sir Pen Tine do?'

The truth was, she had no idea what he'd do. But she knew what *she* would do. Her friends had told her before – she was stubborn. She didn't give up. Sometimes that could be a bad thing, but right now it was just what she needed. She may not have been able to stop Miss Shine, but she could do her best to save everyone from the weather wraiths.

'Think, Blue,' she said. 'What was it the mist maiden said? Something about the wraiths not being fought, but freed?'

A seed of an idea took root in her mind. She didn't know if it would work, but it was the best she had.



'We better hurry!' she said, scooping Blue into her arms. 'Come on, Steve, I need you to guide me back to camp!'



## **Three Princesses and an Icekitten**

With Miss Shine gone from the mountain, the mist was fading as Bronte hurried to join the others.

Her idea was spinning round and round in her head, and she only hoped it would sound as good when she said it out loud.

Although the mist had gone everywhere else, the presence of the mist maidens at the camp

meant that it was still cloaked in cloud.

Bronte shielded her eyes as she ploughed in, only to be immediately attacked by a lightning bolt from a nearby weather wraith.

'Protect Bronte!' Mariam shouted from further in the mist, and two beautiful mist maidens came to escort Bronte to her friends.

They were standing in a circle, back-to-back for extra protection, and all looked exhausted.

'Where are Lady Fennel and Sir Ripple?' Bronte asked, unable to see much through the thick mist.

'Helping the mist maidens protect the tents,' Ellie said. 'Well, Lady Fennel is. Sir Ripple disappeared a while ago, we think he's hiding somewhere. Please tell us you know how to stop these things!'

'Do you want the good news or the bad news?' Bronte asked.

'Good,' Tonkins replied. 'Always good.'

'Tough, you're getting the bad news first. Miss Shine was waiting for me at the Stones. It's a long story, but the main thing for now is that she wouldn't let me ask the Stones for help.'

The others all stared at her in horror.

'No!' Mariam gasped. 'What are we going to do? The mist maidens can't protect us for ever.'

'That's the good news,' Bronte said. 'I have an idea.'

Ellie smiled. 'I knew you would. What is it?'

'Well, it was your story that inspired me,' Bronte said. 'The bit about how the wraiths were originally weather witches, descended from Weather Kingdom royalty.'

Ellie nodded, catching Bronte's train of thought. 'Like us.'

'Exactly! We may not be weather witches, but



we are weather princesses. I think maybe we can set them free by releasing them from the spell they're under.'

'It's worth a try,' Nix said with a sage nod. 'But wait, you're representing the Storm Kingdom, Ellie is the Sun, and Mariam the Mist. What about the Snow Kingdom? We don't have anyone here for that.'

'We have Blue,' Bronte said. 'I know it's a bit of a long shot, but he does embody ice very well.'

No one else looked convinced, and Bronte felt deflated. If they couldn't make this work, then she was out of ideas.

The mist maiden leader floated over to them. 'Don't be sad, don't be low, the answers you seek, you already know.'

Ellie frowned before lighting up. 'That's it! she

cried. 'Back when there was a council of weather witches, they only needed a majority of three votes from the representatives of the Weather Kingdoms. Perhaps this could still work?'

'Yes!' Bronte clapped her hands in excitement. 'You're so clever!'

'How exactly are we going to do this?' Mariam asked. 'I mean, I have no idea how to command ghosts, have you?'

Bronte considered this. 'Maybe we need to call a council meeting and cast our votes?'

'Ooh, I do love a good vote!' Mariam said with a smile.

Bronte held out her hand. 'Stronger together, remember?'

Ellie and Mariam both placed their hands on top of Bronte's and chanted the words back before they broke the handshake.

'Let's do this,' Bronte said, more determined than she'd ever been.

The three princesses broke away from the circle to face the nearest wraiths, who were dodging the firecats' best attempts to pounce on them by disappearing and reappearing close by.

The girls held hands, while Blue perched on Bronte's head. His vote might not count, but he was still a Snow Kingdom representative.

'I call this emergency meeting of the weather witch council to order!' Bronte shouted, gaining the wraiths' attention and trying to sound fittingly regal. 'We, the royal representatives of the four Weather Kingdoms, would like to put forward a motion to free the weather witches from the curse that has turned them into wraiths.'





The wraiths hesitated, pausing their attack as they regarded the girls.

Ellie cleared her throat. 'We shall now take a vote to see if this is the will of the council.'

'As second in line to the Mist Queendom's throne, I vote in favour of the wraiths being freed from the curse,' Mariam said.

'As heir to the Sun Kingdom, I too vote in favour.'

'And as a Princess of the Storm Kingdom, I also vote to end the curse,' Bronte said, as Blue finished with a blast of ice to make his feelings known.

'The motion carries with a three-vote majority,' Ellie said. 'The curse must be broken.'

Nothing happened.

'It hasn't worked,' Bronte said, slightly panicked.

'Try saying it at the same time,' Tonkins suggested. 'You know, stronger together.'

'The curse must be broken,' Bronte said, and she started to chant the words, the other girls joining in, and Blue providing as much ice and snow as he could muster. 'The curse must be broken, the curse must be broken.'

It was working! The weather wraiths clustered together and gave a deep sigh of relief. Slowly they floated upwards, fading as they went, like smoke curling away into the air. The girls kept chanting until the last wisp was gone, and peace fell over the mountains – in more ways than one.



## Peace at Last

With the danger passed, the mist maidens began to disperse too.

‘The threat is gone, the fight is won,’ the mist maiden leader said to Mariam. ‘And so, Princess, farewell for now, I leave you with a humble bow.’

And then, having done so, she scattered on the air, along with the last of the mist that swept away.

For a moment the friends all stared at each other, and then they burst out laughing. They

couldn’t believe they had done it.

‘Are you hurt?’ Lady Fennel came running over.

‘No,’ Bronte said. ‘But I do need to talk to you.’

‘All in good time, Tempestra,’ Lady Fennel said.

‘I must ensure everyone is safe and accounted for.’ And she hurried off to the next tent.

‘It’s been an interesting camping trip,’ Nix said, with a smile. ‘I think we might be leaving early. Something tells me Mistress Moon won’t want to hang about.’

‘Which means that Lance will win the squire score competition.’ Tonkins sighed.

‘Who cares?’ Ellie said. ‘I am the future queen of the Sun Kingdom, and I say you are a thousand times the knight he is.’

‘Ellie and I will have to fight over which of us gets you to defend our realms in the future,’ Mariam teased.



'Well, I'll be available to hire first,' Nix said. 'If you need any new inventions.'

'You'll be in demand,' Ellie promised with a grin.

'Perhaps we should help Lady Fennel?' Tonkins suggested. 'She looks like she needs a rest.'

They all agreed, but Bronte took a moment to hang back and help Ellie remove the rain defender from her head.



'I'm sorry we didn't get partnered up,' Ellie said to Bronte. 'I really hoped we would.'

'It doesn't matter,' Bronte said, but Ellie gave her a knowing look. Bronte decided to be honest. 'I guess I was a bit jealous that you and Tonkins got to hang out. And then Mariam was telling me about how much fun you both have together at POOP. I suppose I felt a bit left out.' She paused, before adding, 'Why didn't you tell me you won the dressage tournament?'

'Because it seemed so unimportant compared to all the amazing adventures you were having!' Ellie exclaimed. 'You were fighting villains while I was just prancing about on pronklets.'

'It's important to me,' Bronte insisted. 'I want to know everything you do. I don't want us to drift apart.'

Ellie reached forward to give Bronte a big hug.

'I am best friends with Mariam, just like you're best friends with Tonkins. It's nice that we both have someone while we don't have each other. But us? We're *best best* friends. It doesn't matter what else happens, that will never change.'

Bronte squeezed her friend back. 'And now there's just more of us to save the world,' she said. 'Which is always a good thing. Especially the way this term has gone.'

Ellie laughed. Then she looked worried. 'What happened with Miss Shine?'

Bronte's mood instantly darkened as she told Ellie what had happened. 'I need to tell Lady Fennel. I think the grown-ups should take over worrying about Miss Shine's plans to restore the Tree Kingdoms and figuring out how the Swirlebirdle skull fits into it all. I don't think there's much I can do about it.'

'Oh, I don't know,' Ellie said with a grin. 'We did just break an ancient curse and save the day!'

'True,' Bronte said, feeling a little lighter.

'Can you believe it?' Ellie asked. 'After all this time, you've discovered that Sir Pen Tine was real!'





Bronte looked around at her friends, who were trying to put right the havoc that had swept through the campsite, and smiled. 'It doesn't matter as much as I thought it would,' she said. 'So what if he was a legendary hero? I'm friends with a whole lot of them.'

Ellie smiled. 'Well my *best* friend is the knightiest knight of them all.'

'What were those things?' Sir Ripple's voice rang through the air as he finally emerged from wherever he'd been hiding. 'Have you seen what they've done to my hair? And don't even get me started on the state of my moustache!'

Bronte and Ellie shared a look and laughed.

Did they have a tale to tell!



# SIR SEBASTIAN'S SCOOP



THE SCHOOL'S FORT-KNIGHTLY NEWSLETTER

## SLEEPING BENEATH THE STARS

Last week several of our teachers took the Year Four students on a school trip to the Stones of Forgotten Secrets. The children participated in a variety of activities and had an opportunity to experience the many unique qualities of the mountains. They all had the chance to earn squire

scores while away, and the winner was Lance Arrowwood. Congratulations to Lance for winning a bonus handwriting lesson with Sir Calliphus. Time to perfect that cursive writing!

## JOB OPPORTUNITY

An unexpected vacancy has opened for a new school nurse. Additionally, they will be required to teach Chivalry and Medicine classes. Start date: immediately. To apply please contact the headmaster.

## NOTICES

**Lady Fennel** would like to request that whoever is leaving rubbish in the firecat cave to please stop. Anyone caught littering will be dealt with severely.

**Fixels** are coming out from their hibernation and are particularly grumpy, so take care not to disturb them during your Forest Care classes.

A new reading club is starting on Mondays after school. Please

report to the Archive Tower if you wish to join.

**Sir Ripple** is running extra jousting practice every day for anyone wanting to brush up on their skills before the upcoming tournament in a few weeks' time. He asks that everyone brings a change of clothing as the field is exceptionally muddy at the moment and you are more than likely to land in it.



# JOIN BRÖNTE ON ALL HER ADVENTURES!

