

*The*  
**LAND**  
*of*  
**ROAR**

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**ROAR**



**JENNY  
MCLACHLAN**

EGMONT

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*We bring stories to life*

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## CHAPTER 9

Next morning, I eat my Crunchy Nut cornflakes sitting on the sofa in the garden. It was the last thing we dragged out of the attic and now it's wedged between the patio and the plum tree and covered in ash from Grandad's bonfire.

The sky is blue and the sun is shining. A blackbird hops around in the bushes. It seems like a totally normal day, but I don't feel normal. I drink the sugary milk from the bottom of the bowl. I feel jittery and uneasy and I can't stop looking up at the attic window.

Grandad wanders out of the house and blinks into the sunshine. He's wearing a cardigan, an old T-shirt – the one that says 'NO PROB-LLAMA!' – and his painting shorts. 'Hello, mate,' he says. 'Where's your sister?'

I nod towards the neighbour's garden. Rose's head appears above the wall, then disappears. There's a squeak of trampoline springs, then her head pops back up, her hair flying out straight and long.

‘Rose, you’re not doing it right!’ cries Mazen. ‘You look like there’s something wrong with you!’

‘Not got anything to do?’ says Grandad. ‘Rose doesn’t fancy going to the beach?’

‘No. All Rose wants to do is jump and look at her phone.’ I think back to the damp night’s sleep I’ve just had. ‘Right now Rose hates me and I hate her.’

‘You *hate* each other?’ Grandad chuckles. ‘You two have always got along fine.’

He’s wrong. We *used* to get along fine until Rose changed into that stranger I can see on the trampoline. But I don’t bother telling Grandad this. Instead I say, ‘Last night we had a fight.’

‘That’s normal. I remember your mum and Jack fighting like mad when they were little. They used to draw blood.’

‘Jack was a cat, Grandad.’

‘I know, but the point is they’d be cuddling on the sofa by bedtime.’

‘I’m fairly certain me and Rose won’t be doing any cuddling ever again.’

He laughs and ruffles my hair. ‘Come on. While you’re waiting for Rose to stop hating you, we can get the camp bed down from the attic.’

I get up, glance once more at the attic window, then with a heavy and slightly scared heart I follow Grandad back inside the house.

It’s amazing what a positive effect sunlight can have on

a room. If I ignore Prosecco glaring at me from the corner, there is almost nothing spooky about the attic right now.

Grandad grabs hold of the camp bed and starts to heave. ‘I got this thing up here, so presumably I can get it down again. Do you think we should chuck it out of the window?’

‘Better not. It might kill Rose.’

He laughs. ‘See? I knew you didn’t hate her! Now get over here and give me a hand.’

But I don’t move. Instead I just stand in the doorway, staring at the rubbish old camp bed, which was the start of the best game I ever played, a game that until yesterday I’d almost forgotten.

‘Unless . . .’ says Grandad, ‘you think we should leave the bed up here?’

Yes, I want to say, *leave it up here and let’s bring the swords and dressing-up clothes back up too*. But what would be the point? Rose is never going to play Roar or any other game with me. ‘No,’ I say. ‘It’s time to chuck it out.’ Then I grab the other side of the bed and start pushing.

We’ve only moved it a couple of metres before Grandad has to stop to catch his breath. We rest against the camp bed while he has a puff on his inhaler. ‘Arthur,’ he says, ‘do you remember when you had a funny turn up here?’

I think for a moment. ‘When I was crawling through the camp bed?’

‘That’s it! I came in and found you curled up on the floor. You had two teeth marks on your wrist.’ He points just below my hand at the pale scar I’ve had for as long as I can remember. ‘Rose said a dragon had bitten you, but I’m guessing she was the dragon?’ Grandad watches me, waiting for an answer.

It must have been Rose who bit me that day . . . so when I look at my wrist why do I remember my fingers touching rough scales, then hearing a warning-growl followed by a flash of movement and then the shock of sharp teeth grazing my skin?

With a start, I realise that this is what my memories of Roar are like. When I think about Win and Mitch, I don’t see me and Rose running around the attic talking to invisible mermaids and pretend ninja-wizards. I see a real girl swimming below the surface of clear water, her thick tail flicking from side to side, and a real boy sitting by a fire. The boy has wonky teeth and he’s grinning at me from under a wizard’s hat.

I take a deep breath. ‘It wasn’t Rose who bit me . . .’

Grandad turns to look at me. ‘Who was it then?’

I rub the pale scar, trying to decide whether to carry on talking or shut up. But I can’t keep quiet. Everything that has happened since we arrived at Grandad’s is too strange. I have to tell someone.

‘I was standing by a dragon.’ My voice is loud in the silence of the attic. ‘The dragon had scales and chipped

claws and smoke pouring out of its nose, and even though Rose told me not to, I brushed my fingers along its belly, and then . . .’ I look at Grandad, ‘it bit me.’

Grandad has an unusual expression on his face – one that I’ve hardly ever seen before. He looks serious.

‘Grandad, why aren’t you laughing and telling me I’m talking rubbish?’

He smiles and shrugs. ‘Because I believe you.’

Everything has gone quiet, the birds outside, even Rose and Mazen on the trampoline. The sun shines down on my legs and something warm, like magic, creeps through me. ‘What do you mean?’

He laughs. ‘Just what I said, Arthur: I believe you!’

Grandad is winding me up. He loves playing tricks on us – he loves playing full stop – and this is just another of his games. And yet . . . *I know* I saw a shadow at the window and heard the wings fluttering in the bed.

Just thinking about the wings makes my heart speed up. I jump up and look at the bed.

‘What’s wrong, Arthur?’ Grandad clambers to his feet.

‘Yesterday I heard something coming from in there.’ I can’t take my eyes off the bed. ‘It made me think of someone in Roar.’

‘A bad person?’

I nod. ‘A very bad person.’

‘And you think this person might be in the bed?’ Again I nod. Grandad puts his arm round me and pulls me close.

His cardigan feels soft against my face. It smells of coffee and his shed. 'Well, there's one way to find out, Arthur. You need to crawl into the bed.'



## CHAPTER 10

I stare at the sagging mattress, then back at Grandad. 'What? You think I should just crawl in there?'

Grandad nods. 'And visit Roar.' He says this like he's suggesting a trip to the pier.

'But Grandad, Roar was *a game*. Remembering a dragon biting me is my mind playing tricks on me.'

'But what if it's not, Arthur? What if you and Rose made Roar with your imaginations, then crawled through the camp bed and somehow found your way there?'

I smile and shake my head. 'If I crawl into that mattress, I'll come straight out the other side and you'll be standing there laughing at me!'

'Well, if that happens, at least you know you imagined the funny sound and being bitten by a dragon, and can get on with turning this attic into a den.'

'And if I do end up in Roar?'

I can't believe these words have just come out of my mouth.

Grandad's eyes go wide. 'Now wouldn't that be something?' And then he actually holds the mattress open for me and says, 'In you go!'

'I don't know.' I glance out of the window to make sure Rose is still on the trampoline. There aren't many things in the world she'd find more hilarious than the sight of me crawling through the camp bed trying to get to Roar. There she is, jumping up and down and trying to touch her toes. 'I'm sure I imagined it,' I say. 'It was probably a bird in the chimney or -'

A scuffle makes me turn round and I see that Grandad's head and shoulders are stuck inside the mattress. *What is he doing?* He must think that if he goes in first, I'll follow. He pushes in his arms and then starts wriggling from side to side, trying to get his bum in too. Then I hear a faint cry of 'Hear me roar!'

The sight of a seventy-two-year-old man attempting to squeeze his body into a folded camp bed is like a slap in the face. What am I doing? Rose is right. I'm way too old for this. I should be learning to surf, or skating, or fighting stuff on the computer. *Anything* would be better than playing in the attic with my grandad!

When Grandad comes out the other side of the bed I'll tell him I want to take the camp bed to the tip. It's time for me to grow up, or I really will be eaten alive at secondary school.

'Hear me ROOOOOAAAAR!' Grandad cries, then

with a final lurch he gets his bum and legs into the bed too. Then he just sits there, a big bulge in the middle of the mattress. It reminds me of the time I saw a nature documentary about a snake that had swallowed a pig. It's pretty funny actually.

'All right, Grandad. You can come out now.' I try to give the bed a shake but it weighs a ton with him in there.

Grandad's hand pops out and waves around.



'Are you stuck?' I grab hold of his hand and his fingers wrap round my wrist and I start to pull. But he won't budge, and now I'm laughing because Grandad has got me to play, just like he wanted to. 'Come on. I might have done a wee in there, remember?'

Suddenly Grandad's fingers tighten round mine. 'Ow!' I say, still laughing. Then I sit down on the floor, put my feet against the bed and pull as hard as I can. But Grandad doesn't budge and his big hand squeezes even tighter round mine. In fact, his fingers are going white from the pressure and my hand starts to hurt. 'Grandad, stop it!' Panic rises up in me as the pressure increases. It feels like the bones in my fingers might break!

I pull harder than ever, but I'm not trying to get Grandad out: I'm trying to free my hand. 'Grandad, you're hurting me!'

Suddenly he lets go and I tumble backwards. Then, with amazing speed, his hand shoots inside the mattress. *What?* I cradle my squashed hand to my chest and stare at the bed. The lump has gone!

'Grandad?' I jump to my feet and circle the bed, patting the springs. 'Grandad? Where are you?'

Silence. My heart thuds against my ribcage. I grab the headboard, ready to pull the bed open . . . but something stops me. It's the memory of Rose saying, *Never open the camp bed, Arthur, or everything in Roar will disappear.*

I let go of the headboard. *Rose was talking rubbish*, I tell myself. *There is no Roar; there can't be any Roar.* But I still can't bring myself to open the bed. The attic feels unbearably hot and I'm shaky with panic. I brush a tear off my cheek. 'Come on, Grandad . . . It's a good joke, but you can come out now.'

I know I'm talking to myself. I know he isn't in there.


In a daze I check every corner of the attic, even under the bed, but except for Prosecco, the attic is empty. I tell myself that Grandad *has* to be in the bed and I kneel down, take a deep breath, and push my hand into the mattress.

It's horrible. The hairs on the back of my neck prickle as I feel around, desperately hoping that my fingers will touch some bit of Grandad, but my hand just keeps going further and further into the mattress until, finally, I do touch something. But it's not Grandad's trainers or hair. It's a load of spiky, prickly stuff. I grab it and pull it out.

When I uncurl my fingers I have to squeeze my mouth shut to stop myself from being sick. I'm holding a pile of yellow straw and greasy black feathers. I chuck the whole lot on the floor, then reach forward and pick up the largest feather. It's inky-black and the quill is sharp and warm, as if moments ago it was attached to a living thing.

A living thing with wings and stuffed full of straw.

I jump to my feet. I have to tell Rose!



## CHAPTER 11

As I walk across the garden – my heart still thudding in my chest and my hands trembling – I wonder how I’m going to do this. I can hear Mazen’s voice, shrieking at Rose and bossing her around. If I just say what happened, they’re going to collapse with laughter. Mazen is going to think I’m sad or crazy, or both. I pull myself on to the wheelie bin. *It doesn’t matter*, I tell myself. What matters is that Grandad is missing. I’ve just got to tell Rose and then she will help me find him.

I look over the wall. Mazen is standing with her hands on her hips, watching Rose. She senses my presence and her head swivels round like a velociraptor. She gives me a long, hard look, then turns back to Rose. ‘It’s your brother,’ she says.

Rose lands on her bum, then bounces back to her feet. ‘What do you want, Arthur?’

I cling to the top of the wall. ‘I need to speak to you.’  
‘Go on then.’

‘Not here.’ My eyes flick to Mazen. ‘On our own.’

Rose rolls her eyes. ‘Just tell me, Arthur.’

‘Grandad’s disappeared!’ I say in a rush.

‘Grandad’s *what*?’

‘He’s *disappeared*. One second he was in the attic, and the next he was gone. Please stop bouncing, Rose. Grandad’s gone and you’ve got to help me find him!’

With a sigh she comes to a stop.

Mazen stretches, then says, ‘He’s probably lost in all the mess he keeps up there.’

‘All his “mess” is in the garden. There’s nowhere to get lost in the attic now!’

Mazen shrugs. ‘Just saying. He’s a messy person.’

‘He’s not messy. He’s . . . a collector!’

‘He’s messy, Arthur,’ snaps Rose, hands on her hips. ‘Now hurry up and tell me what happened.’

‘Grandad crawled through the camp bed –’

‘*What*? Why would he do that?’

‘It doesn’t matter *why* he did it; what matters is that he crawled into the middle of the mattress then disappeared!’

Rose doesn’t look worried or shocked; in fact, she bursts out laughing. ‘Arthur, he’s playing a trick on you!’

Anger rises up inside me. Every second I stand here talking to Rose is another second that Grandad is missing. ‘He’s not. I was holding his hand. I felt him being pulled into the bed. I saw his hand shoot inside!’

‘Then he must still be there.’



‘He isn’t. I checked!’

She rolls her eyes. ‘Well, check again.’

I reach into my pocket and feel the feathers and straw that I picked up before I ran out of the attic. ‘There’s something else . . .’ I lean over the wall and open my hand. ‘I found this inside the bed seconds after Grandad disappeared.’

Rose takes a step closer and alarm flashes across her face. ‘Crowky . . .’ she whispers, but then she shakes her head. ‘It’s Grandad. He must have put them there.’

‘Really? Because I’ve never told Grandad about Crowky. Have you?’

‘What *are* you two talking about?’ interrupts Mazen.

‘It’s nothing,’ says Rose. ‘Just Arthur trying to get me to play with him.’

I’m so angry I throw the feathers and straw in her face, and Mazen screams, ‘Get that gross stuff off my trampoline!’

Rose gathers it up and chucks it back at me. ‘Leave me alone, Arthur! Why can’t you accept that I don’t want to hang out with you?’

My foot slips out from under me. ‘Do you honestly think I’ve made all this up so that you’ll spend time with me?’

‘Yes,’ she says, making Mazen laugh.

‘Well, guess what, Rose? I don’t even like you much these days, and I’m only talking to you right now because Grandad has vanished and I think Crowky has got him!’

Now both of them are laughing.

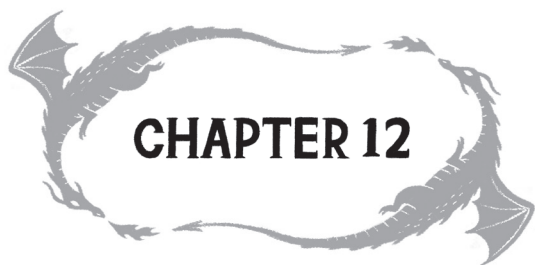
‘Fine,’ I say, my cheeks burning. ‘If you won’t help me, I’ll just have to find him on my own.’ I jump off the wheelie bin, slip on a rotten crab apple, scramble to my feet, then stride towards the back door.

‘When you get to Roar, say “hi” to Mitch!’ Rose shouts.

I turn round. Rose is watching me with a sarcastic smile on her face.

‘You’ve changed so much Mitch wouldn’t even recognise you,’ I say. Then I walk into the house and let the door slam shut behind me.





## CHAPTER 12

Back in the attic, I stare at the camp bed. I've looked for Grandad everywhere. Even though I know he couldn't have got out of the bed, I've still checked every room in the house, the cellar, the shed and even the garage, and opening the bed isn't an option. Some truly weird stuff has happened in the past hour and I'm not about to do anything that might permanently erase my grandad.

He disappeared inside the mattress so that's where I've got to go too.

Trying to ignore the feathers and scraps of straw, I get down on my hands and knees, then push my head inside the bed. I want to pull it straight back out, but I keep my eyes squeezed shut and wriggle further in. 'Hear me roar,' I blurt, pulling my legs up behind me. The bed wobbles, then becomes still.

I'm crouched in the middle of the mattress, surrounded by darkness. It feels damp and lumpy and it smells like the

PE cupboard at school. The springs from the mattress dig into my skin and I can't find enough air to breathe. All I want to do is get out, but I force myself to stay where I am while I wait for something to happen.

When Rose and I played Roar I'm sure this was when the game began. I don't know how it worked, but when we came out the other side we'd be in Roar. I crouch there, the mattress pressing into my face, until I can't stand it any longer. I crawl forward, my head bursts out into bright light and I gulp fresh air.

I see dusty floorboards and straw and feathers. Outside, the sun is shining and I can hear Mazen Bailey laughing. I pull myself all the way out of the bed, feeling relieved and scared and stupid, all at the same time, then I walk back round to the other side of the bed.

Grandad is still missing and I'm going to keep crawling through this mattress until I find him.

And for the next ten minutes that's exactly what I do.

Soon my eyes are itchy, I'm sweaty and my hair is massive and crackling with static.

I'm wriggling on to the attic floor for the thirty-second time when I see Rose standing in the doorway, sucking a blue ice pop and watching me.

'I've looked for him everywhere,' I say. 'This is the only thing left to do.'

She does a long hard suck on the lolly, then says, 'I'll admit it's strange that he's vanished.'

I'm so relieved to hear her say this that I jump to my feet and rush over. 'I told you: Grandad's vanished inside the bed and somehow we've got to go there, go to Roar, and get him back!'

She sighs. 'Arthur, we never actually *went* to Roar. You know that, right? The whole time we were playing up here in the attic, pretending.'

'But when we played Roar, it didn't feel like we were in the attic. It felt *real*.'

All the time I've been talking Rose has been sucking hard on her ice pop, draining all the blue out of it. 'I suppose it felt different to other games,' she admits. 'But do you remember when I said I could fly? I got you all to come and watch, and it turned out it was just me jumping down the stairs flapping my arms.' She shrugs. 'Kids have got big imaginations.'

'That's exactly what I thought, before I felt Grandad being pulled into the bed!' I show her the marks on my hand where Grandad's nails dug in. 'And there's another thing . . . Just before he disappeared Grandad basically said he believed that Roar was real.'

Rose laughs. 'Arthur, this whole thing is a massive practical joke! I bet Grandad's had this planned for ages.'

'Grandad would never scare me like this.'

She raises one eyebrow. 'Wouldn't he?'

'No, he wouldn't!'

Rose shrugs like she couldn't care less what I think.

'Suit yourself. I'm going to town. Mazen says there's three-for-two on at Claire's. Before I went I thought I should check you hadn't vanished too.'

And that's when I realise it's hopeless. If Rose is more bothered about hairbands and earrings than she is about Grandad, I don't want her to come with me. 'Fine.' I walk back to the camp bed, crouch down and roll up my sleeves. 'Hear me roar,' I mutter, as I stick my head back into the mattress.

'Hah!' says Rose.

I pull my head out and turn to look at her, eyes narrowed. I am in no mood to hear Rose's sarcastic hahs. 'What?'

'Nothing . . . Only I never said, "Hear me roar" because even when I was five I thought it was stupid. When I got into the middle of the mattress I just shut my eyes and imagined Roar, then when I came out the other side I was there.' She takes a last long suck on her ice pop, then turns to the door. 'See you later, loser.'



## CHAPTER 13

I pull my legs in behind me and I crouch in the middle of the bed, just like before.

Only this time I don't bother with any magic words. Instead I use Rose's technique: I close my eyes and I imagine Roar.

It's hard to begin with. Roar is buried at the back of my mind. Some details like Win's hat and Crowky's voice are crystal clear, but most of it is hazy and muddled, like my memories of Nani and the first house we ever lived in.

But then something comes back to me. The feeling of holding a soft creature in my hands. This thing has got wings and they're batting against my fingers. *Furry*. I'm holding a furry. I'm not sure exactly what a furry is, but suddenly I know there were loads of them in Roar.

Then my mind is full of furies - I see them hovering like dragonflies and sunbathing on stones, and Roar comes rushing back to me as fast as the furies' beating wings.

I see me and Win standing on a ship - the *Raven* - and I

feel the spray from the Bottomless Ocean stinging my eyes. I hear a shout to my left – ‘Get back! Before he burns your hair off!’ and I turn to see Rose tossing bits of doughnut to a hovering dragon.

Crowky lands with a thump on the deck of the *Raven*. His black wings billow around him like a cloud as he grips hold of my arm and hisses, ‘*I’ve got you now, Arthur Trout!*’

Keeping my eyes squeezed shut and my mind stuffed full of Roar, I start to crawl further into the mattress. Left hand, right hand. I see Mitch – her blue hair trailing behind her, tangled and encrusted with shells. Left hand, right hand. I smell the bonfire and popcorn smell of Wininja’s cave. Left hand, right hand. Somewhere at the back of my brain I register that I should have fallen on to the attic floor by now, and that this is taking far too long, but I push the thought away and picture Roar’s night sky crammed so full of stars it looked like a bag of glitter had been thrown across black velvet.

There were millions of stars in Roar – blue, green, pink, purple – and their light was as warm as the sun. Those stars used to shine down on me and Rose when we were floating in Mitch’s lagoon. They made patterns on our skin.

I freeze, snapping back to where I am. But something has changed. My hands aren’t pressing into a soft and spongy mattress any more. They’re touching something cold and hard. Holding my breath, I feel around. The mattress has gone. I’m kneeling on stone!

Icy fear rushes through me. This is what I wanted to happen, wasn't it? I wanted to crawl into the camp bed and for something magical to happen, but now rock is digging into my hands and knees, I'm so scared my whole body is shaking.

I force myself to open my eyes. Thick blackness surrounds me, but far ahead I can just make out a tiny pinprick of green light. And the air isn't dusty any more. It's cool and damp, and I can hear rushing water.

I start to crawl towards the green light. My head scrapes against the roof of the tunnel and rocks graze my hands, but I don't stop until I reach the very end and the green light has become a curtain of leaves with light shining through it. Before I can change my mind I push my head through



the leaves and crawl out into dazzling sunshine.

I blink and rub my eyes. I'm on a narrow ledge. I lean forward and see that the ledge is set into a cliff and far below me is a deep round pool. Trying to ignore the terrifying drop, I look straight ahead. I'm staring across a valley with a river winding through it. The river passes forests and mountains and glittering lakes. One side of the valley is bright and alive and bursting with leaves and colour, while the other half is shadowy and barren. The river has a shifting, swirling rainbow shine on its surface and it leads to a wild sea. Far, far away, beyond the sea, are snow-topped mountains.

Gazing at this unbelievable sight, I should feel lost and scared. But I don't . . . because *this* is Roar.





