

THE
ARCTIC
FOX

For Allison

HW

For Mum

DD

LITTLE TIGER

An imprint of Little Tiger Press Limited
1 Coda Studios, 189 Munster Road,
London SW6 6AW

Imported into the EEA by Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

www.littletiger.co.uk

A paperback original
First published in Great Britain in 2024

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ISBN: 978-1-78895-714-4

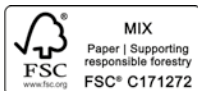
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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the UK.



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Holly Webb
Illustrated by David Dean

LITTLE TIGER
LONDON





“We’re really going?” Ellie whispered, looking up from the shiny holiday brochure at her mum and dad.

Her mum nodded – she was smiling so hugely, it made Ellie smile too. They beamed at each other. “We’re leaving the day after you break up from school,” she told Ellie. “For five days, so we’ll be back the day before Christmas Eve.”

“I can’t believe it,” Ellie said, looking down at the brochure again. *Holiday Adventures in the Arctic Circle*, it said. *Visit Beautiful Lapland.*

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“It looks so wild and wonderful.” The picture on the front was a huge stretch of snow, so shiny and silvery-white that it mirrored the sky above, which was streaked with pink and green light. The whole place looked like something out of a fairy tale, too strange and magical to be true.

But it was real, and in three weeks’ time, Ellie would be there, walking through the snow, looking up at the Northern Lights. Mum and Dad had mentioned they were going on a special surprise trip before Christmas, but she had never imagined anything as exciting as this.

“I don’t even know where Lapland is,” Ellie murmured.

“It’s the northernmost part of Finland,” Mum explained. “Further north than Norway

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and Sweden. The Arctic Circle is as far north as you can go!”

“It’s where Santa’s from,” Dad pointed out, giving Ellie’s little brother Taylor a squeeze. “And we’re going to the village where Santa Claus lives. We get to see the man himself!”

“We’re meeting Santa?” Taylor sounded confused. “At his house?”

Dad nodded. “Ellie, open the brochure and show Taylor. There’s a great picture of Santa in there. And his elves!”

Ellie flicked through pages about snowmobile trips and reindeer treks, until she came to the page with Santa Claus on it, then she handed the brochure to Taylor. Her little brother sat there stroking the shiny paper, whispering to himself about elves with stripey socks, while Mum and Dad smiled at each other.

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Ellie was excited about visiting the Santa Claus Village too, but it was the snow and the wild, glorious colours of the Northern Lights – the aurora – that she couldn't wait to see. Of course she'd seen snow before, but living in a city, it didn't tend to stay pretty and sparkly white for long. It quickly got churned into brown slush, and then it melted and froze and you just spent days slipping over every time you walked down the pavement. The snow in Lapland was real, deep, cold snow. It was going to be wonderful.

Santa's village had reindeer to meet too, Ellie noticed, looking over Taylor's shoulder. They looked huge in the photo, and really friendly, with children stroking them, and little silvery bells on their red harnesses. Perfect for pulling a sleigh! There would

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be other animals around too, Ellie thought – snow creatures that lived in the dark forest surrounding the village. She'd have to find out what they were, so she could try and spot them. She was trying to remember the last time they'd been to the zoo – what other snow animals had there been, apart from penguins and polar bears? Ellie was pretty sure Lapland didn't have polar bears. Maybe those fluffy white hares with the huge feet! She'd look it up on her tablet later on.

This was the going to be the wintriest, wildest holiday ever!



Ellie's school was getting Christmassy already. They'd been rehearsing for the Christmas concert for weeks now, and all the classes

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were making decorations and cards to take home. But in the last week of term the festive excitement reached its peak – there seemed to be something special happening every day.

Two days before the end of term, their class was going on a trip to a museum. Ellie had been looking forward to it for ages.

Their project for the autumn term had been Romans, and the museum had all sorts of Roman artefacts, as well as rooms and rooms of interesting things from all over the world. Or so their teacher Mr Jackson said. He was very, very excited about it, and he'd managed to get everyone in the class excited too. They were going there on a coach, and Ellie and her friend Leila had planned to sit together. Leila was going to have the window seat on the way there, and Ellie would have it on the way

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home. But all their plans had nearly been for nothing.

“You’re here!” Leila yelled, flinging her arms around Ellie as she hurried, red-faced, into the playground on the morning of the trip. “Come and see Mr Jackson – he’s got a list and he’s ticking people off and panicking that loads of us haven’t turned up yet.

The coach is here, did you see?”

Ellie couldn’t really have missed it – the enormous coach was parked right outside the school gates.



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“Taylor was in a strop and he wouldn’t put his shoes on,” she told Leila, still panting a bit. “Then he didn’t want to walk. Mum had to pick him up and we ran the last bit of the way. I was so scared we were going to be late!”

“You’re only a bit late,” Leila said soothingly. She dragged Ellie over to Mr Jackson, who ticked her off on his list, looking relieved.

“Nice to see you, Ellie, and don’t worry. Your mum’s already explained what happened. Now, time to get on the coach, everyone!”

The two classes started to pile on to the coach, waving excitedly to the parents who’d waited outside the gates to see them off. Ellie and Leila bagged seats together, and Ellie leaned back against hers, finally catching her breath. She’d been so relieved to see the coach still parked outside the gates.

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The museum was enormous – Mr Jackson had told them it was, but that still hadn't prepared Ellie for actually being there. The Roman gallery had statues and pots and armour, and even a huge mosaic floor that was covered in glass so you could walk on top of it and look at the patterns and pictures made from thousands of tiny tiles.



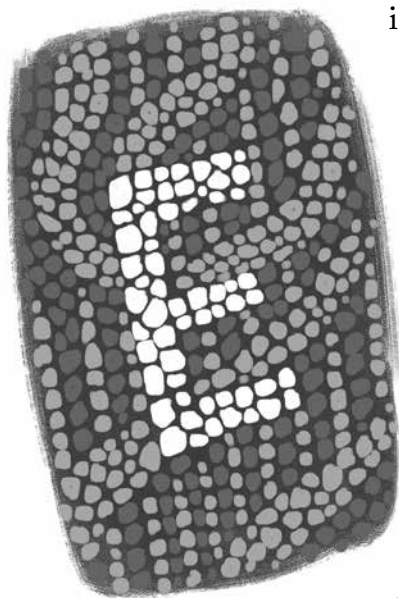
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After they'd looked around and done a worksheet, they all got to make mosaics of their own out of little glass squares, pushed into clay. Ellie made a big letter E, wrapped

in a swirling pattern that looked like the Northern Lights. She couldn't stop thinking about them, since she'd found out about their trip, and she kept trying to draw their wonderful sheets of colour across

the sky. It was tricky

with felt tips, though. Ellie had a feeling she needed paint – bright, bright paint to streak across the dark page.



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They left the mosaics drying and went to eat their packed lunches. Ellie's mum had put in ginger biscuits shaped like little reindeer, enough for Leila to have some too. She said gingerbread was very traditional in Lapland, and it was called *piparkakaut* in Finnish. Mum had found a recipe and tried it out in between packing everyone's warmest clothes for the trip. Ellie's bag was sitting in the corner of her bedroom, ready to go. It gave her a little shiver of excitement every time she spotted it.

After lunch, for the last hour of the trip, they were allowed to explore some of the different galleries in the museum. Ellie and Leila studied the map, and Leila begged to go to the costume galleries. She loved clothes, and even had her own little sewing machine at home. She'd made Ellie a scrunchie for her birthday.

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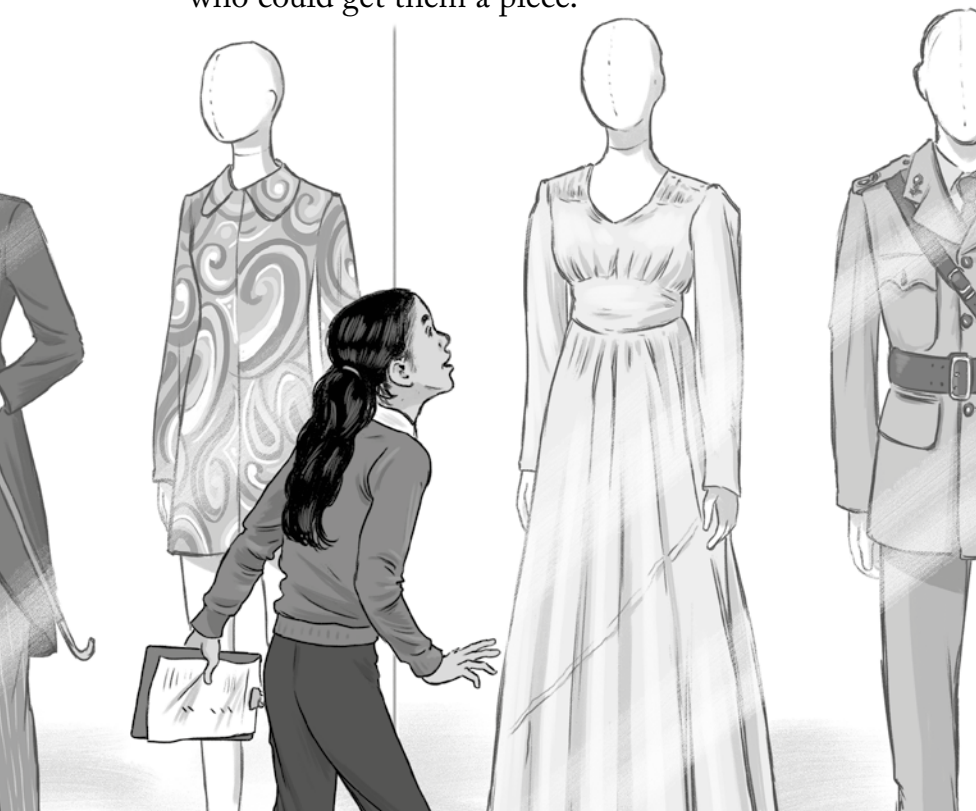
Luckily their teaching assistant Mrs Knowles liked the sound of the fashion exhibits too, and said she'd take a group to look at them.

Even though she'd really only gone to make Leila happy, Ellie thought the clothes were beautiful. She dawdled along in front of the mannequins, imagining the sort of people who'd have worn these different outfits. So many of them were fancy, covered in



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beads or jewels or embroidery, but some of them were everyday people's clothes too. There was a dress made out of a parachute from the Second World War. Imagine having no material and having to make a party frock out of a parachute! The label said that the parachute silk was a huge treat, and people thought themselves lucky to have a friend who could get them a piece.



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Leila was calling. Ellie dragged herself away from the wartime dress and hurried along a line of glass cases to find her friend. She wasn't really looking at the outfits on show – but one of the figures brought her skidding to a stop. For a moment she thought the woman in the case had a cat around her neck. Ellie's aunt Rosa had a beautiful fluffy white cat called Snowdrop who lay on her shoulders like that. Auntie Rosa said he saved her pounds and pounds on her heating bills, because he was like a huge, heated scarf. He slept on top of her at night like an extra duvet too. *Was* that a cat? There hadn't been pets in any of the other displays.

It wasn't. Ellie pressed her hand against her mouth, feeling a little bit sick. It was a fox. The most beautiful, white, fluffy fox, draped around the lady's shoulders. The fox was holding one

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of its paws in its mouth, so the fat floofy tail draped down over the front of the lady's black velvet coat. Its eyes were made of glass, Ellie could see that they weren't real – but the fox still seemed to be staring at her.

The outfit was from around 1910, the label said. Over a hundred years old. The fox had been dead for years and years, but it still made Ellie want to cry and break the glass and pull her out. She couldn't imagine ever wanting to *wear* something like that.

Black velvet ensemble with Arctic fox stole, 1910.

Arctic foxes were trapped for their furs, and became very rare around this time due to high fur prices. However, their numbers have now recovered and they are no longer endangered.



Arctic fox. And Lapland was in the Arctic Circle – did that mean this fox had come from Lapland, or somewhere near there?

“Ugh. That’s grim.” Leila had come back to find Ellie, and she was staring at the fox now too. “I think it would give me nightmares, just imagine it hanging in your wardrobe!”

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Ellie shuddered, and Leila gave her a hug.
“Are you OK?”

“Yeah ... I just don’t like it.” Ellie glanced at Leila, not wanting her friend to think she was being strange. “The fox looks so sad. And – and lonely.”

“I know what you mean.” Leila let go and grabbed Ellie’s hand instead. “Mrs Knowles sent me to find you. It’s time for our turn in the shop. I bet I’ve got enough money to buy some chocolate, that’s what you need.”

In the end Leila bought chocolate and Ellie bought fudge, as well as key rings with Roman gold coins on them. They ate most of the sweets on the coach on the way home, and Leila was looking very pale and almost green by the time the coach pulled up outside the school. Ellie had managed to squash the

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poor white fox to the back of her mind, but she hadn't really forgotten about her. She climbed slowly down the coach steps and gave Mum a tight hug.

"What's up?" Mum hugged her back and then pulled away, looking worriedly at Ellie.

"Did you get coach-sick?"

"No. I think Leila might be." Ellie slipped her hand into Mum's. Dad must be at home looking after Taylor. "I'll tell you on the way back." She waved to Leila – who still didn't look very well – and called, "See you tomorrow!"

It was hard to know how to start explaining about the fox. Ellie wasn't sure Mum was going to understand. Ellie wasn't even sure *she* understood.

Why was she so upset about something that had happened over a hundred years ago?