

# An Accidental Spell



**T**he day that Max accidentally discovered the frogspell started like any ordinary day in Castle Perilous. He and his sister, Olivia, were having breakfast late, as usual. Olivia had been trying to teach her pet dragon, Adolphus, a new trick, and Max had been making plans for his new spell.

He was still studying his spell book at the

dining table while absent-mindedly chewing a sausage, and Olivia was happily enjoying her second bowl of porridge.

Suddenly their mum, Lady Griselda Pendragon, burst into the dining hall, in a hurry as usual, and tripped over Adolphus.

“Aaarrghhh! Drat that dragon! Max, I need my broomstick! Have you been using it again? You know what Dad said last time.”

Max looked up from his breakfast. He couldn't actually remember what Dad had said last time, but he could make a pretty good guess. Sir Bertram Pendragon was a gruff, burly knight with a large moustache and a deep voice. He liked nothing better than a good flagon of grog and a trusty enemy to whack with his big sword, and he wasn't fond of wizardry. He considered it cheating. He tolerated Lady Griselda's witchiness and allowed Max to learn a few spells and potions, but he did not at all approve of letting Max ride a broomstick. It was too girly.

Max sighed. His father had probably

threatened to make him sleep in the pigsty if he were ever caught on it again.

“Max!” said his mother again, loudly. “Did you leave it somewhere?”

Max considered. He’d certainly used the broomstick recently, because he remembered pushing Olivia into the moat with it when they were pretending to be Sir Gawaine and the Black Knight of Doom.

He glanced over at his sister. She was wearing a long green dress and looking demure, but it was misleading. She spent most of her time wrestling with the squires or mucking about in the stables. It was a miracle he’d actually managed to push her in the moat — usually it was the other way round. Max was slight for his eleven years, with light brown hair that fell untidily around his freckled face. And he was not particularly well coordinated, so he usually missed any target he was trying to hit.

Suddenly he remembered where the broomstick was. He’d taken it to fly up to the top of the

Bell Tower to rescue Adolphus, who had somehow got himself stuck after chasing the castle cat up there. Then Adolphus had been too scared to sit on the back of the broom, so he'd had to carry him all the way back down the winding staircase.

"I think you'll find the broom is at the top of the Bell Tower, Mum," said Max, returning to his breakfast. "I saw Olivia take it up there when she was playing with her dolls."

Olivia looked up from her porridge and opened her mouth to protest that this was absolutely not true — she didn't even own a doll — and Max was a slimeball . . . But Mum had gone, and all that was left in the kitchen was a trail of green smoke.

"You are a big fat liar, Max," said Olivia, flicking a spoonful of porridge at him. He ducked and kicked her hard under the table.

"Oww! I'll get you for that!"

"Just try," said Max, getting off his chair and heading for the door. "But it'll have to be later, because I'm busy this morning. Leave me alone or