

when a new Spellbound pony was about to arrive and an adventure lay ahead. There was a skip in Olivia's step as she made her way down the country lanes and along the pebbled driveway to the entrance of the long-abandoned stables.

'Eliza?' she whispered as she slid open the front door. 'Are you here? It's me!'

It was impossible to see anything in the gloom. And then out of the darkness Olivia spied two amber eyes blinking back at her.

'Eliza? Why aren't you speaking? Hey, wait! You're not—'

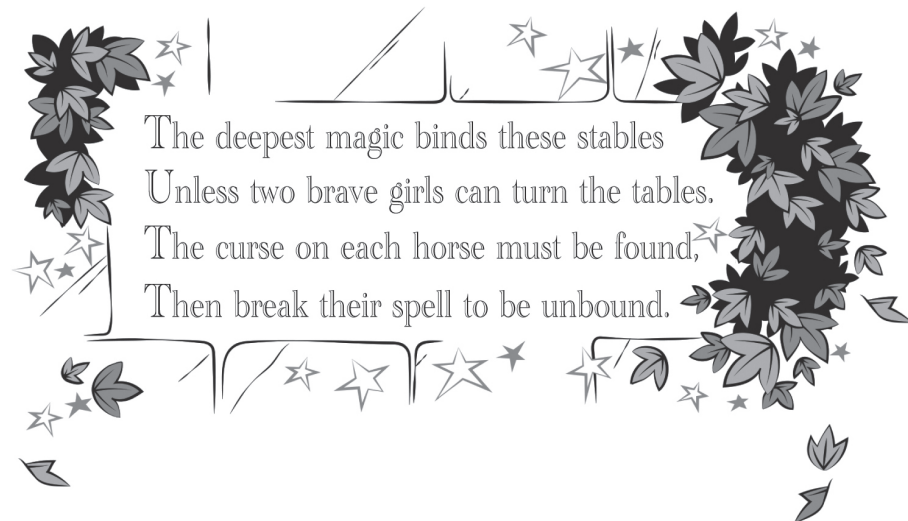
Suddenly, there was a fearsome flutter of feathers and beating of wings, and the next thing Olivia knew the glowing amber eyes were coming straight at her!

'Yikes!' Olivia shrieked, shutting her eyes tightly as the hoot owl swooped above her. When she

opened them again, the owl had flown outside to perch on top of the ivy above the stable door.

'You've got your feathers in a flap today, haven't you?' Olivia growled at the bird. The owl blinked back at her as if to say, *Well, it's your fault for waking me up!*

It was a strange coincidence, Olivia thought, that the owl had chosen to perch on that exact spot. Ignoring his bad-tempered glare, she reached up to the ivy and pushed the leaves aside so that she could read the words that lay hidden underneath, carved into the stone of the wall.



'Yikes!' Olivia spun round in shock. 'How many times have I told you not to sneak up on me like that? You totally made me jump!'

'Sorry,' Eliza said. 'Sneaking up is just what ghosts do, though. That was an excellent joke! Did you just make it up on the spot?'

'No,' Olivia confessed. 'I read it in a book I've been studying.'

'Studying jokes?' Eliza said. 'Why would you do that?'

'To brighten up Gus!' Olivia said as she strode ahead into the stables. 'I've got a plan to make him laugh. After all, you can't stay grumpy when you're laughing, can you?'

'True, true!' Eliza agreed. 'They do say laughter is the best medicine, so perhaps it will cure him.'

'Look.' Olivia showed Eliza a page of paper with notes scribbled all over it. 'I've written down loads

of jokes to tell him. All we need is the right sort of atmosphere to put Gus in the mood for a giggle.'

'Oooh! I know just the place!' Eliza enthused. 'Come on, let's go!'



When the girls entered Gus's stall the pony was lying on the floor staring blankly at the wall.

'What on earth are you doing, Gus?' Olivia asked.

Gus rolled over and groaned. '**I'm being miserable – obviously.**'

'Well, stop it!' Eliza said firmly. 'Pull yourself together and get up . . . we're going out!'

At these words, the enchanted mist began once more to rise up through the straw on the stable floor.

'**Oh no!**' Gus groaned. '**Not again! I shall get tuberculosis at this rate . . .**'

'Stop saying that!' Gus swished his tail and put his ears flat back. 'I'm not funny at all. I'm a nasty black storm cloud of misery!'

Lady Patience gave him a hearty pat on his neck. 'Nonsense!' she cooed. 'You seem like a very nice pony to me. Why, I'll wager you have the most marvellous trot. Shall we see?'

'HmMMM, very well, then,' Gus said grudgingly. 'I'll trot for you. But I won't like it.'

Before Olivia and Eliza knew what was happening, Gus had trotted off with Lady Patience on his back and was speeding across the lawn towards the lake.

'Gosh,' Eliza said, 'will you look at that!'

'He does have quite a spectacular trot!' Olivia said. 'Who knew?'

'He's going a long way away.' The Duchess of

Derryshire looked anxious. 'He will bring my darling Patience back again, won't he?'



Meanwhile, out on the bridle path, Lady Patience was in no hurry to go home.

'What a lovely time I'm having with you, Gus!' she giggled.

'I bet you're not really!' Gus grumbled. 'People very seldom have a good time when they're with me.'

'I'm sure that's not true.' Lady Patience gave him a sweet stroke on his glossy bay neck. 'I'm quite certain you have a lovely canter. Will you do a canter for me, Gus?'

'All right,' Gus said, 'but I won't like it.'

'Look at him.' Eliza was amazed. 'He's cantering!'

'And his ears are pricked forward,' Olivia observed.

‘Have we?’ Eliza was baffled. ‘When did that happen?’

‘Shush, Eliza,’ Olivia whispered. ‘Just play along. I’ve got a plan.’

‘May I have the suit and a pair of scissors, please?’ Olivia said.

The duchess sighed. ‘Very well, I suppose the costume is ruined now anyway, so I’ll give you the chance to fix things. But I can’t imagine what you’re going to do. Look at it – it’s in ribbons!’

‘Exactly!’ Olivia said.

She got to work with the scissors, chopping the ribbons into long lengths of rainbow silk. And then she spread out a picnic blanket and set up a sign on the lawn.

Make Your Own
Rainbow Friendship Bracelet

‘You see,’ she explained to Eliza as she braided three of the ribbons together, then measured them round her own wrist, bound the ends and tied them off. ‘We’ll use the ribbons so that all the kids at the party can make their own bracelets, and then each of them will have something to take home as a gift.’

‘Ohhhh, that looks amazing!’ Eliza admired the rainbow bracelet that Olivia had made for herself.

‘Oh, I say! Did you make this? It looks like super fun!’

It was Lady Lilibeth. She plonked herself down on the blankets, grabbed a handful of ribbons and began to braid herself a bracelet. Within minutes, Lady Patience was making one too. Soon the entire birthday party had joined them and everyone was wearing armfuls of rainbow friendship bracelets.