



Cabbages

Bronte Tempestra crept silently towards her target. Her mission was simple: capture the villain. Her breath coiled in the cold air, slithering like a mist-snake before disappearing. She raised her weapon slowly. She must not be seen. That was essential to her success.

She could imagine the glory already! How, after she'd saved the school, everyone would cheer! The teachers would proclaim a half-day holiday in her honour and the students would be

so grateful they'd buy her presents and offer to do her chores, while the headmaster would award her a special commendation for exceptional bravery!

Bronte leaped forward, striking with her weapon and . . . **SQUELCH!**

She fell face first into the mud.

'Oh feathers,' she groaned, dripping sludge as she sat up.

The villain grunted loudly, as if he was laughing, and Bronte narrowed her eyes.

'Yeah, yeah, very funny,' she said to the tufty pigling. 'But I'll catch you eventually.'

She retrieved her weapon – in this case, a harness – and shook off the worst of the mud. There would be no heroic celebrations for her today.

'He is such a *nightmare!*' Bronte said, looking

over at Blue, her icekitten, who was wisely keeping well away from the mud. ‘Honestly, how many times has he escaped now?’


Blue huffed a puff of ice.

‘Exactly,’ Bronte said. ‘Too many.’

Despite it being Sunday, Bronte had woken early in a futile attempt to catch up with some of her homework, but before she had even begun to write her essay (*Hobgoblins: Friend or Foe?*) she’d caught sight of the fiendish boar trampling through the vegetable gardens.

The battle boars at Sir Sebastian’s were mainly fed clouds, but they really would eat anything. Ice, seaweed, prickles, sapphires, mudroot – *anything!* Pig was no exception, and he was also incredibly greedy. Vegetables might be waaaay down his list of favourites, but they were still food.





Bronte had felt certain she could catch Pig and return him to the pens before he ate *all* the vegetables, and so had hurried out into the chilly winter morning. But Pig clearly had no intention of being deprived of his very big breakfast.

‘Honestly, you’d think you’d be nicer to me, after I saved your life,’ Bronte said to him, as she trudged across the field. ‘If it weren’t for me and Blue, you’d be one of Ackley’s monsters, and I’m certain he wouldn’t be feeding you treats.’

Bronte drew closer to where Pig was munching a very large mouthful of carrots and parsnips.

‘If you come with me,’ she said, ‘I’ll bring you some leftovers from dinner. Crispy vine leaves stuffed with sweet paste and berries.’

Pig eyed her suspiciously, chewing slowly. Bronte crept closer.

‘And if you’re very good, I’ll crush some ice

cubes on top like sprinkles . . .' she promised in a sing-song voice.

It was enough. Pig allowed her to slip the rope halter over his tusks and around his head. Crushed ice was his absolute favourite.

'See?' Bronte asked, breathing a sigh of relief. 'Was that so bad?'

Pig replied with a massive

buuurrPPPPP!

'Charming,' Bronte groaned. Boar belches *stank!*

'Come on,' she said to Pig and Blue.

But they had only taken a few steps before Pig squealed loudly and bolted – stampeding through the vegetable patch and dragging Bronte behind him!

'Whooooahhhhh!' Bronte cried, still clinging to the end of the rope.

‘What are you two doing?’ A stern voice stopped Pig in his tracks and Bronte looked up, blinking the mud from her eyes. Lampton, who was in charge of the battle boars, was doing his best to look cross, but was struggling to hide his smile.

‘Pig escaped again,’ Bronte said, scrambling to her feet, and noticing that Blue was running towards the boar pens, leaving her to deal with this mess alone.

‘So I see. At least he didn’t break into the cloud shed this time and eat all the supplies.’ Lampton sighed. ‘What are we going to do with you?’ he asked, scratching the pigling’s whiskery snout.

Pig simply snorted.

‘It’s these sparkly tusks of yours,’ Lampton said. ‘Ever since you got them, you’ve broken through every door and fence.’ He glanced at

Bronte. ‘How *did* he get them, do you think?’

Bronte blushed and stared at the ground.

Only weeks ago, when she had first started at Sir Sebastian’s School for Squires, Bronte had uncovered a dastardly scheme in the old forest, where a scientist named Ackley had been mutating all the woodland animals into monsters. He’d hoped to attack the two schools for royalty in the Realm of Education – the Palace for Obedient and Outstanding Princesses (POOP) and the School for Independent and Courageous Kings (SICK) – as his first step to reclaiming the throne of the Oak Kingdom.

The headmaster, Sir Blake, had allowed it to happen, and then retired in disgrace. His replacement, Sir Calliphus, had decided to keep the whole situation a secret for the sake of the school’s reputation, and so he’d instructed Bronte

never to speak of what had happened. The only other people who knew were Bronte's best friends, Tonkins and Ellie, and her favourite teacher, Lady Fennel. Oh, and Lord Errol of the First Battalion of Griffins.

Sir Calliphus had explained Pig's new dazzling tusks away with a sweep of his arm, muttering, 'That sometimes happens.'

Lampton clearly didn't believe him, however. He'd already tried to coax the truth from Bronte several times. She wished she could tell him about how Pig had been mutated, and that although the changes had been reversed, the diamond tusks had stayed. She felt certain Lampton could be trusted. But she didn't want to get into trouble with Sir Calliphus.

Lampton sighed. 'I'll be fixing his pen today, then. Could you help me muck out?'

Bronte hesitated. She really needed to finish that essay, but she enjoyed helping Lampton. 'Can I change first?' she asked with a smile.

'If you want, but you'll only get dirty again. Oh, and you'd better go and tell Chef what's happened,' Lampton said rather apologetically. 'Warn him only the cabbages have survived.'

Great, Bronte thought as she traipsed back towards her treehouse. *Cabbages for tea. Not even Pig had wanted to eat them!*