

FROM NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

CORNELIA FUNKE

INKHEART



SOON TO BE A
MAJOR
MOTION
PICTURE!

 SCHOLASTIC

1

A STRANGER IN THE NIGHT

The moon shone in the rocking horse's eye, and in the mouse's eye, too, when Tolly fetched it out from under his pillow to see. The clock went tick-tock, and in the stillness he thought he heard little bare feet running across the floor, then laughter and whispering, and a sound like the pages of a big book being turned over.

L. M. Boston, *The Children of Green Knowe*

Rain fell that night, a fine, whispering rain. Many years later, Meggie had only to close her eyes and she could still hear it, like tiny fingers tapping on the windowpane. A dog barked somewhere in the darkness, and however often she tossed and turned Meggie couldn't get to sleep.

The book she had been reading was under her pillow, pressing its cover against her ear as if to lure her back into its printed pages. "I'm sure it must be very comfortable sleeping with a hard, rectangular thing like that under your head," her

father had teased the first time he found a book under her pillow. "Go on, admit it, the book whispers its story to you at night."

"Sometimes, yes," Meggie had said. "But it only works for children." Which made Mo tweak her nose. Mo. Meggie had never called her father anything else.

That night — when so much began and so many things changed forever — Meggie had one of her favorite books under her pillow, and since the rain wouldn't let her sleep she sat up, rubbed the drowsiness from her eyes, and took it out. Its pages rustled promisingly when she opened it. Meggie thought this first whisper sounded a little different from one book to another, depending on whether or not she already knew the story it was going to tell her. But she needed light. She had a box of matches hidden in the drawer of her bedside table. Mo had forbidden her to light candles at night. He didn't like fire. "Fire devours books," he always said, but she was twelve years old, she surely could be trusted to keep an eye on a couple of candle flames. Meggie loved to read by candlelight. She had five candlesticks on the windowsill, and she was just holding the lighted match to one of the black wicks when she heard footsteps outside. She blew out the match in alarm — oh, how well she remembered it, even many years later — and knelt to look out of the window, which was wet with rain. Then she saw him.

The rain cast a kind of pallor on the darkness, and the stranger was little more than a shadow. Only his face gleamed white as he looked up at Meggie. His hair clung to his wet forehead. The rain was falling on him, but he ignored it. He stood there motionless, arms crossed over his chest as if that might at least warm him a little. And he kept on staring at the house.

I must go and wake Mo, thought Meggie. But she stayed put, her heart thudding, and went on gazing out into the night as if the stranger's stillness had infected her. Suddenly, he turned his head, and Meggie felt as if he were looking straight into her eyes. She shot off the bed so fast the open book fell to the floor, and she ran barefoot out into the dark corridor. This was the end of May, but it was chilly in the old house.

There was still a light on in Mo's room. He often stayed up reading late into the night. Meggie had inherited her love of books from her father. When she took refuge from a bad dream with him, nothing could lull her to sleep better than Mo's calm breathing beside her and the sound of the pages turning. Nothing chased nightmares away faster than the rustle of printed paper.

But the figure outside the house was no dream.

The book Mo was reading that night was bound in pale blue linen. Later, Meggie remembered that, too. What unimportant little details stick in the memory.

"Mo, there's someone out in the yard!"

Her father raised his head and looked at her with the usual absent expression he wore when she interrupted his reading. It always took him a few moments to find his way out of that other world, the labyrinth of printed letters.

"Someone out in the yard? Are you sure?"

"Yes. He's staring at our house."

Mo put down his book. "So what were you reading before you went to sleep? *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*?"

Meggie frowned. "Please, Mo! Come and look."

He didn't believe her, but he went anyway. Meggie tugged him along the corridor so impatiently that he stubbed his toe on a pile of books, which was hardly surprising. Stacks of

FROM THE AUTHOR OF THE
BESTSELLERS *THE THIEF LORD*
AND *DRAGON RIDER!*

One cruel night, Meggie's father reads aloud from *Inkheart*, and an evil ruler named Capricorn escapes the boundaries of the book, landing in their living room. Suddenly, Meggie's in the middle of the kind of adventure she thought only took place in fairy tales. Somehow she must master the magic that has conjured up this nightmare. Can she change the course of the story that has changed her life forever?

INCLUDES A BONUS CHAPTER FROM THE
BESTSELLING SEQUEL *INKSPELL* AND A
SNEAK PEEK AT *INKDEATH*, THE UPCOMING
CONCLUSION TO THE *INKHEART* TRILOGY!

New York Times Bestseller

USA Today Bestseller

ALA Notable Book

Publishers Weekly Best Children's Book

Kirkus Reviews Editor's Choice

Chicken House

 SCHOLASTIC

www.scholastic.com

Cover art © 2005 by Carol Lawson
Cover design by Elizabeth B. Parisi
and Leyah Jensen

\$9.99 US/\$11.99 CAN

Visit www.CorneliaFunkeFans.com

ISBN-13: 978-0-439-70910-1

ISBN-10: 0-439-70910-5



50999



EAN

9 780439 709101