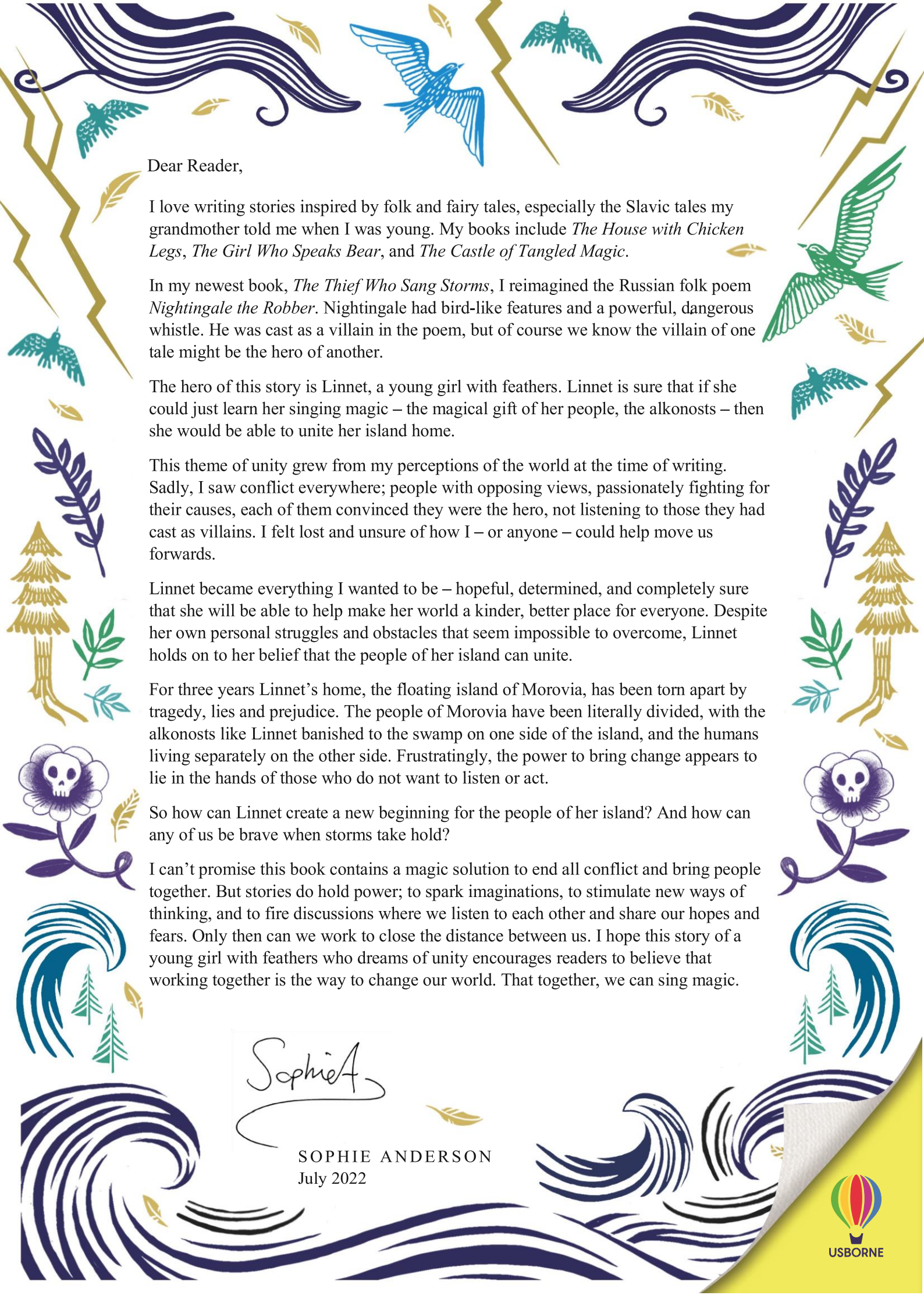




Dear Reader,

I love writing stories inspired by folk and fairy tales, especially the Slavic tales my grandmother told me when I was young. My books include *The House with Chicken Legs*, *The Girl Who Speaks Bear*, and *The Castle of Tangled Magic*.

In my newest book, *The Thief Who Sang Storms*, I reimagined the Russian folk poem *Nightingale the Robber*. Nightingale had bird-like features and a powerful, dangerous whistle. He was cast as a villain in the poem, but of course we know the villain of one tale might be the hero of another.

The hero of this story is Linnet, a young girl with feathers. Linnet is sure that if she could just learn her singing magic – the magical gift of her people, the alkonosts – then she would be able to unite her island home.

This theme of unity grew from my perceptions of the world at the time of writing. Sadly, I saw conflict everywhere; people with opposing views, passionately fighting for their causes, each of them convinced they were the hero, not listening to those they had cast as villains. I felt lost and unsure of how I – or anyone – could help move us forwards.

Linnet became everything I wanted to be – hopeful, determined, and completely sure that she will be able to help make her world a kinder, better place for everyone. Despite her own personal struggles and obstacles that seem impossible to overcome, Linnet holds on to her belief that the people of her island can unite.

For three years Linnet's home, the floating island of Morovia, has been torn apart by tragedy, lies and prejudice. The people of Morovia have been literally divided, with the alkonosts like Linnet banished to the swamp on one side of the island, and the humans living separately on the other side. Frustratingly, the power to bring change appears to lie in the hands of those who do not want to listen or act.

So how can Linnet create a new beginning for the people of her island? And how can any of us be brave when storms take hold?

I can't promise this book contains a magic solution to end all conflict and bring people together. But stories do hold power; to spark imaginations, to stimulate new ways of thinking, and to fire discussions where we listen to each other and share our hopes and fears. Only then can we work to close the distance between us. I hope this story of a young girl with feathers who dreams of unity encourages readers to believe that working together is the way to change our world. That together, we can sing magic.

Sophie A

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