

Chapter 1

You know all those stories that claim fairies cry sparkle tears and elves travel by rainbow? They're lies. All lies. No one tells you the truth until it's too late. And then all you can do is run like crazy while a herd of unicorns tries to kill you.

Of course, I had no idea what I'd done to get the unicorns all riled up. So much for having a magical guide to help me with my adventures. Anthony was about as useful as a bent thumbtack. Still, I needed his magic if I was going to get out of this mission alive.

"Anthony!" I shrieked as I darted down a hill and away from the stampeding unicorns. "Anthony, help me!" Where was that carrot-headed gnome?

The unicorns' glittering horns were right behind me. Another minute and I'd be a marshmallow on a stick.

"All right, Jenny," I said to myself. "You can do this." I forced my burning legs to speed up. If I could just get far enough away, I might be able to hide.

I dashed behind a tree and pressed up against the trunk. A second later, the herd tore past at hurricane speed. But I wasn't safe for long. The unicorns screeched to a stop and whipped around to face me. Their golden eyes were tiny slits.

"Look," I said, gripping the tree trunk for support. "I was just trying to teach you guys how to share. If you want to keep fighting over that rainbow, that's your business."

The unicorn leader stepped forward. His horn was a full foot taller than all the others, and his head was decorated with tiny, bell-like flowers.

"Can't we all just get along?" I said. Cheesy sayings always popped out of my mouth during adventures, even when I didn't want them to.

"Nay," said the unicorn.

"What?"

"Nay!"

"Is that like a horse neigh or a 'no' nay?"

"Naaay!" the unicorn sputtered.

I fought back a hysterical giggle. Anthony had warned me that unicorns couldn't produce human speech, even though they could understand it. Still, I couldn't get over the fact that these mythical creatures could sound so much like...well, like regular horses.

“I already tried to explain to you. I’m an adventurer,” I told them. “I was sent here to help you. But clearly you don’t want my help. So if you don’t mind, I’d really like to get home now. My aunt’s probably worried sick about me.” This last part wasn’t quite true—Aunt Evie wouldn’t notice if I suddenly started walking around on my ears—but I figured it might help if the unicorns thought there was someone back home who would care if I disappeared.

“Naaaaaay,” the unicorn leader replied. Then he lunged forward and jabbed my elbow with his horn.

“Ow!” I cried as pain shot through my entire arm.

The unicorn came at me again, but I ducked out of the way just in time. Instead of spearing me, the unicorn’s horn sliced into the trunk of the tree. He whinnied and kicked, trying to get himself unstuck.

Seeing my chance, I jumped to my feet and sprinted away. From behind me came an angry, horse-like bellow. I didn’t need to speak unicorn to know what it meant.

I could hear the unicorns galloping after me. I tried to run faster, but my arm was throbbing. Were unicorns’ horn tips poisonous?

As the sound of hooves grew louder, I realized I wouldn’t last much longer. Besides the pain in my arm, my legs were starting to feel like lead. Any second I would run out of steam.

“Anthony,” I said, panting. “Wherever you are, please help me.”

A split second later, I heard a loud *Pop!* and Anthony the Gnome materialized in front of me. He was grinning from ear to ear and holding a giant ice-cream cone.

“Hey, Jenny-girl. Did you miss me?” he said.

I grabbed Anthony’s arm and pulled him along as I ran. “Get us out of here!”

Anthony rolled his eyes like he always did when he thought I was overreacting. But he held up his free hand and snapped his fingers, managing to lick his ice cream and keep running at the same time.

With another *Pop!* I was pulled out of the unicorns’ land, tossed around in the void between worlds, and spit back onto my bedroom carpet.

Home.

I rolled over onto my side and moaned in pain. My arm felt like it was melting.

“Looks like I missed all the fun,” said Anthony. “But I found the most amazing dairy stand—”

“Help me!” I croaked.

Anthony’s grin faded when he saw the blood gushing onto my sleeve. He balanced his ice-cream cone on my desk. Then he reached into the leather pouch around his waist and pulled out a glass jar filled with green goo.

“This should help,” he said cheerfully. He opened the jar and slapped some of the goo onto my arm before I could object.

“Ouch!” I said as my arm started to burn. “Ew!” I added as I caught a whiff of rotting seaweed. But a second later the burning stopped and my arm felt a whole lot better.

“You’re welcome,” said Anthony. He started wrapping a bandage above my elbow, humming a little tune under his breath.

“I’m supposed to thank you? I almost died!”

Anthony let out a deep laugh that made his round belly jiggle. “Always the drama queen. As if those unicorns would actually hurt you.”

“They *did* hurt me. Where do you think all that blood came from?”

“Oh,” said Anthony, waving his hand. “That’s just how they are. It’s nothing to worry about.”

“That’s what you said about the baby dragons last week before they tried to turn my head into a flaming volleyball.”

Anthony laughed again and tugged on his orange beard. “They were just playing. No harm done. You can barely see your scar.”

I groaned and lay back on my bed. My entire body ached. I couldn’t remember the last time I’d gotten a good night’s rest. All I wanted was to curl up in bed with a book about an everyday kid with everyday problems and let it soothe me to sleep.

“No time to loaf around, Jenny-girl,” Anthony sang. “I just got word from the Committee that there’s another adventure you need to go on today.”

I nearly choked. “Another one? Anthony, that’s the fifth one this week!”

“Everyone keeps requesting to be saved by you, Jenny-girl. You’ve got quite the reputation.”

I wasn’t sure what I’d done to earn that reputation. I didn’t even really *like* being an adventurer. But somehow I’d gotten stuck doing it practically nonstop for the past three years. If I ever figured out how to go back in time, I’d tell my nine-year-old self to run the other way

when a gnome showed up in her room promising a life of magic and adventure.

“There has to be someone else the Committee can send,” I said. “What about all the other adventurers out there?” I hadn’t actually met any of the others, but Anthony was always reminding me that they’d kill to be sent on as many missions as I was.

“You’re the one they want,” said Anthony.

I groaned again and tried to sit up, but my body weighed a ton and my arm was still throbbing. “I can’t. I’m too tired.”

“Have some candy!” Anthony pulled a bag of enormous gummy worms out of his pocket. “These will wake you right up.”

“I’m too tired to even chew. I need to get some sleep. If the Committee members can’t understand that, then I can go explain it to them myself.”

Anthony rolled his eyes. “You know you can’t do that. The Committee stays hidden for its own safety.”

I rolled my eyes right back. Maybe the Committee stayed in hiding because its members knew otherwise they’d have angry adventurers coming to find them all the time. Just because the mysterious Committee protected the magical worlds didn’t mean it could totally take over my life. I mean, hadn’t they ever heard of child labor laws?

“I’m serious,” I said, jamming a pillow over my head. “I need to sleep.”

“The Committee’s not going to like this,” Anthony’s muffled voice answered. For a minute, everything was quiet. I could picture him standing there with his arms crossed, impatiently tapping his foot.

Finally, I heard him sigh and walk over to my desk. I imagined him scooping up his ice-cream cone and giving it a big lick.

“And they say you’re the best,” Anthony muttered. Then there was a loud *Pop!* and he was gone.

I pulled the pillow off my head and stared at the empty space where Anthony had been. A small puddle of melted ice cream oozed across my math homework.

I tried not to let what Anthony had said bother me, but it was no use. Everyone expected me to be a superhero, but even superheroes had to sleep sometimes, didn’t they? Besides, I wasn’t really a hero. I just helped out magical creatures once in a while. No capes or masks involved. And in the end, I was still just a regular girl, wasn’t I?