

Chapter 1

What did people bring with them when they were about to zip off to a mysterious fairy land to rescue their parents? I had no idea, but I figured I should at least pack a toothbrush. That way, if the fairies decided to torture me with magic dust or something, I'd at least have fresh, minty breath.

"Almost ready, Jenny?" Dr. Bradley asked from his perch by my desk. My magical mentor looked totally out of place sitting next to the piles of homework I'd be neglecting for however long this mission would take.

"I guess." Even though adventurers weren't supposed to get nervous, I was shaking all the way to my toes. What if I couldn't find my mom and dad? What if they weren't even in Fairy Land? What if this plan turned out to be one huge mistake?

Stop it, I told myself. Then I zipped up my backpack and threw it over my shoulder.

I could hear Aunt Evie downstairs, whistling along with one of her parakeet patients. Part of me wanted to go hug my aunt good-bye one more time, just in case, but I didn't want her to worry. Besides, I *would* see her again. I just knew it.

Pop! Anthony the Gnome materialized in the middle of my bedroom. For some reason, my magical guide was dressed in layers of climbing gear.

"Hey there, Jenny-girl!" he said, his harnesses and ropes rattling. He adjusted his headlamp, which barely fit over his mess of flame-colored hair. "Time to go!"

"Am I missing something?" I said. "Is Fairy Land in a big cave?"

Anthony shrugged. "If we're going to get your parents back, we need to be prepared for anything." He clapped his pudgy hands. "Okey dokey. Let's get going!"

Dr. Bradley grabbed his cane and hobbled over to us. Then the three of us clustered together, preparing for the awfulness of spinning in between worlds. I took a deep breath and—*Pop!*—we were sucked out of my bedroom, tossed around in a rainbow void, and spewed out onto...

My bedroom carpet?

Yup. We'd been spit out right back where we started. "What happened?" I asked.

Dr. Bradley frowned and adjusted his small glasses. "I was afraid this might occur. Fairy Land has been closed off from the rest of the magical worlds for years. It's possible they have

blocked our attempt to transport ourselves there.”

“No problem-o!” said Anthony. “We’ll try again.”

“But if they’re blocking us,” I said, “then how will we—?”

“We just wear them down. That’s what I always do in these situations.”

Anthony certainly *was* good at wearing on people. Still, I couldn’t help giving his shoulder an affectionate squeeze. He and Dr. Bradley knew how dangerous this mission might be. In fact, they’d even gone against the Committee—aka their annoying magical bosses—to help me. I usually tackled missions by myself, but this time I was glad to have help.

As Anthony grabbed my arm again, I closed my eyes and got ready for more inter-world spinning. *Pop!* I felt the carpet under my feet disappear. Then we swirled around and around like dizzy snowflakes.

Finally, my feet were on solid ground again. I opened my eyes.

We’d left my bedroom behind and were now in a fancy chamber furnished in gold and red velvet. Weirdly, everything in the room was upside down. We were standing on the ceiling, looking down (or maybe up?) at the furniture. It was totally confusing.

“Oops,” said Anthony. He took my hand again and—*Pop!*

More spinning through the void. I was starting to feel like an ice cube in a blender. We bounced in and out of world after world after world:

A concrete parking lot that stretched on forever.

A crystal lake with squirrels zipping around on miniature Jet Skis.

An empty landscape with a giant banana.

An empty landscape with two giant bananas.

An empty landscape with *no* bananas.

And the set of a TV sitcom.

“Anthony, stop!” I finally cried, feeling seriously sick to my stomach.

We materialized in a grassy field dotted with enormous wild turkeys. As Anthony let go of my hand, I realized the creatures weren’t exactly turkeys. Their bodies were human-like, but they had droopy wings on their backs, and their oversized heads and necks were beakish and saggy. Gross.

“This is ridiculous,” I said, my head throbbing. “We’ll never get there at this rate.”

The turkeys froze at the sound of my voice. Then their black eyes swung toward us. Their

huge beaks opened, revealing flat, square teeth. Perfect for gobbling us up.

“Intruuuuders!” one of the turkey-monsters shrieked, flapping its scraggly wings.

“Get together!” Dr. Bradley cried as the turkeys started charging toward us.

Their beaks were only inches away when—*Pop!*—we managed to get out of there. I’d never felt so relieved to be sucked in between worlds.

“What were those things?” I said. My voice echoed for what felt like forever as colors swirled around us in a nauseating pattern.

“They were goblins,” said Dr. Bradley.

Goblins? Since when were goblins giant turkey creatures? Then again, if there was one thing I’d learned during my three years as an adventurer, it was that magical creatures were actually nothing like they were in books and movies.

Thud! We landed on cold, hard ground. This time, we were in the middle of an old courtyard. The stones around us were crooked and mossy and dotted with tufts of yellow grass. I was relieved not to see any killer birds nearby.

“Where are we?” I said with a groan. I felt like someone had plucked off my arms and legs and reattached them upside down. I wasn’t sure how much more world-jumping I could take.

Anthony let out a little squeal and pointed to a faded sign in the distance. “Welcome to Fairy Land,” it said. “The Place of the Future.”

“Fairy Land,” I whispered. I had no idea what all that “future” stuff meant, but I didn’t care. What mattered was that we’d finally made it! We were here!

I forgot all about my aching limbs and started to run toward the sign, grinning like a crazed monkey. Underneath it were rows of ticket booths, the kind you’d see at an entrance to an amusement park, and in the distance I spotted a crumbling roller coaster. I’d always thought “Fairy Land” sounded like the name of a theme park. It clearly used to be one, though it didn’t look like anyone had used it in years.

I turned to ask Anthony about it, when—

Pop! pop! pop! pop! pop!

A blur of small figures appeared all around us, locking us in a tight circle.

“Don’t move!” someone said. I couldn’t see who it was. All I could see was the razor-sharp spear pointed right at my head.