



# Heat Wave



**"K**ara! The carriage is here!" Kara's mother called.

"Coming!" Kara called back. She peeled herself up off the storeroom floor. It was the only cool spot she could find in the shoe shop where her family lived and worked.

Kara tucked one last book into her bag and handed it to her father. He almost dropped it. “What did you pack in here?” he asked.

“Books,” Kara said. “And maps. And more books.”



“You’re staying with your best friend for two days. Do you plan to read the whole time?” her mother asked.

“Yes! It’s too hot to do anything else,” Kara said. She went to the cottage door. It might as well have been an *oven* door. When she opened it, a wave of hot air entered the store.

It was late fall, but the Enchanted Kingdom had been in a heat wave for weeks. Humans, ogres, mermaids, and all the other creatures in the land were miserable. Kara had even heard that the witch's gingerbread house had melted!

“We should get going,” Kara’s mother said. Her parents would drop her off at her sleepover on their way to a shoe fair.



Kara climbed into the carriage and squeezed between the boxes of shoes her parents had packed for the fair.



The carriage left the village and rode past Wishing Pond. It hadn't rained in weeks, so there was barely any water.

Soon they came to the cottage where Kara's best friend Zed lived with his grandmother. Zed was in the garden, picking cherries. Or maybe just eating them. His face was smeared with red.

"Have fun!" Kara's parents called out as they rode away.

Kara went over to Zed. "Isn't it too hot to be out in the sun?" she asked.



“No, this weather is great!” Zed said. “Look at all this food! Gram says I can eat as many cherries as I want. Do you want some?”

Kara rolled her eyes. Nothing bothered Zed as long as his belly was full.

“No, thanks.” She plopped down in a shady spot to read a book.

But a minute later, Zed yelled, “Nina, no! Don’t chew on that!” He ran over to his old pet goat.



Nina had pulled rolls of paper out of Zed’s bag. Zed was a royal messenger. He delivered letters for the princes and princesses of the land.

“What’s this?” Kara asked, picking up a scroll. Someone had written RETURN TO SENDER on it in red letters.

Zed shrugged. “A message for Prince Patrick,” he said. “I tried delivering it to him, but he sent it back.”

Kara studied the wax seal. It was a crown of icicles. She recognized it from a book she’d read about the Enchanted Kingdom’s royal families.



“Aspen!” she cried.

“Bless you,” Zed replied.

“No! Aspen, the ice princess. This message is from her,” Kara explained. “It looks important. Maybe we should open it.”

“We can’t!” Zed cried. “Royal messengers are *not* allowed to open the messages they carry. I could lose my job.”