





# 1



## EMILY THE COURT JESTER

Princess Emily slowly peeked around the trunk of the big elm tree. From where she hid, she could see Staghorn, the palace gardener. He was trimming the mulberry bushes that lined the path to her home in the Greenwood.

“Watch this,” Emily whispered to her friend Arden, who stood a few feet behind her. “This is going to be so funny!”

Staghorn aimed his clippers at a small

bush. Just as he snapped them shut, Emily tugged on the string she was holding. The bush leaped away from the dwarf.

“Hey!” Staghorn cried, nearly falling backward. “What’s going on?”

Emily covered her mouth. Her green eyes sparkled. Her red hair shook with laughter.

Staghorn adjusted the glasses perched on the end of his nose. “My eyes must be playing tricks on me,” he muttered.

He opened his clippers again, leaned toward the bush, and snapped the blades together.

Emily tugged on the string once more. The bush sprang in the air.

“Whoa!” Staghorn fell forward.

Emily couldn’t help it. She burst out laughing.



“Hey!” Staghorn shouted, rubbing his nose.  
“What’s so funny?”

Emily danced out from behind the tree.

Staghorn’s face turned a bright red.  
“Princess Emily!” he cried. “I didn’t see you.”

“Of course not, Staghorn,” Emily said with a giggle. She gave him a big hug. “I was hiding.”

His furry eyebrows met in a frown. “Then

it was *you* who made the bush hop away from me?”

“Yes!” Emily showed him the string she’d attached to the bush. “Wasn’t that funny?”

Staghorn stared up at the Emerald Princess for a long time. “Yes, Princess,” he said finally. “It was very funny.”

Emily pointed at him. “You should have seen the look on your face when the bush leaped in the air.”

“I’m sure I looked very surprised,” Staghorn said, brushing off the knees of his brown trousers.

“You looked positively silly!” Emily declared.

“I’m glad I made you laugh.” Staghorn gestured down the path. “Now if you’ll excuse me, I had better get on with my work. I have to do some pruning in the Twisted Vines.”

Emily hugged the little man once more. "Thank you, my dear Staghorn. You are a very good sport!"

She watched the dwarf hurry off into the trees. Then she turned to Arden. "Wasn't that fun?"

The beautiful white unicorn blinked her brown eyes. "I think it may have been fun for you. But I'm not so sure about Mr. Staghorn."

"Oh, he loves tricks," Emily said, picking a tiny bluebell and braiding it into Arden's mane. "Staghorn is like a grandfather to me. I've been teasing him since I was a little girl at the Jewel Palace."

Emily and her three cousins grew up in the Jewel Palace. It sat at the heart of the Jewel Kingdom.

"Did you see his face?" Arden asked.



Emily shrugged. “Staghorn always looks a little grumpy. That’s why he’s so much fun to play tricks on.”

A bell chimed high above them. It came from the Emerald Palace, a magnificent tree house held up by six huge cedar trees.

On the tip of one of the pinecone-covered turrets was a carved wooden clock. Emily had been given the clock by the people of the Greenwood when she was crowned the Emerald Princess.

*Ding-ding-ding!*

The clock chimed again.

“Did you hear that, Arden?” Emily asked. “It must be noon.”

Arden turned her head. “Weren’t you supposed to meet Princess Roxanne now?”

Emily’s big green eyes widened. She covered her mouth with her hand. “I almost



forgot! We're supposed to meet at the edge of the Greenwood."

Princess Roxanne was the Ruby Princess, and she lived high in the Red Mountains. Roxanne had been visiting Demetra, the Diamond Princess. Demetra was the oldest cousin. She ruled the White Winterland.

“Arden, would you mind giving me a ride?” Emily asked. “We’ll reach the border much quicker that way.”

“Hop on, Princess.” Arden ducked her head and bent one knee.

Emily hiked up her green velvet skirt and climbed onto the unicorn’s back.

“I have a special surprise for my cousin.” Princess Emily patted the small package she held in her lap. “But I need to be at the border before Princess Roxanne.”

“Surprise?” Arden asked as she cantered beneath the rustling leaves of the Greenwood. “What is it?”

Emily bent close to the unicorn’s ear and whispered, “If I told you, it wouldn’t be a surprise.” She patted her friend’s neck. “Now, let’s hurry, please!”

Arden broke into a gallop. She leaped

lightly over a fallen log, then ducked under a low-hanging branch.

Emily threw her head back and flung her arms out to the sides. “What a wonderful day!”

Ahead, they could see bright light where the Greenwood ended and the Rushing River began.

