



Riding a Unicorn

Rose galloped her white unicorn over hill and dale trying to outrace her worries — and her parents, too. They were no more than half a mile behind her in the family coach.

Her long, glossy brown hair streamed behind her, whipping in the wind. Before they'd all left home that morning, her maidservant had arranged it carefully in curls and waves, all held in place with jeweled clips and fancy sky-blue ribbons that matched the stripes in her blue-and-white dress. One of the jewels was carved with the initials BR, for Briar Rose. Because of a certain Grimm's fairy tale, she was also known as Sleeping Beauty. But she had always preferred to simply go by her middle name, Rose.

She held on tight as she and her unicorn soared over a low stack-stone fence. "Good boy," she murmured when they reached the other side. "Almost there. We'll make it before sunset." A curl blew into her face and she shoved

it back. After a long day of riding, her hair was now a wild tangle, and the pins and ribbons all askew.

Up ahead she spotted a magnificent turreted castle, which stood at the heart of the realm of Grimmlandia. All around it were trees, gardens, and rolling hills of lush green lawn dotted with colorful objects, which were still too far away for her to make out clearly.

Slowing, Rose pulled up on a grassy bluff. Equal measures of excitement and trepidation filled her. That castle was Grimm Academy, and it was to be her new school from now on. Her home, too, because it was a boarding school, which meant she would live there.

Her tutors back at the palace had explained that the Academy was really two castles in one. Its middle section was a long, four-story stone building that spanned the sparkling blue Once Upon River like a tall bridge that was connected to Pink Castle on one end and to Gray Castle on the other.

She counted three turrets at the top of each castle. Brightly colored flags flew from poles that extended high from the turrets and also from the outer stone walls.

Leaning forward, Rose lay her cheek along her unicorn's soft, snowy mane. "There it is, Starlight," she murmured to him. "So what do you think of it?"

Her unicorn tossed his head, as if in approval. She'd named him Starlight because at night his horn gleamed almost as bright as a star. He'd been a gift to her from a fairy on the day she was born. Thirteen fairies had attended the party held at her family's palace for her christening that day. Only twelve of them had been invited, though. The thirteenth fairy, angry at being overlooked, had crashed the party and put a curse on her. Which was so *not* her fault!

Yet that had been the start of all of her problems. And it was the reason she'd been sent to this school. Her parents hoped that being here would protect her from that dratted curse. It was supposed to go into effect on her twelfth birthday — just five days from now, on Friday.

She raised her head from Starlight's mane. A shiver swept through her even though the day was warm. Not wanting to think about that curse right now, she started riding for the school.

The closer she got to it, the more details she was able to see clearly. Like that those dots on the lawn were actually *people*. Grimm Academy students, by the look of them. When she drew nearer, her eyes lingered on a group of four interesting-looking girls dead ahead. They stood in a cluster near a beautiful garden, laughing and talking.