



♥ CHAPTER ONE ♥

Exploring
the Woods

Princess Summer raced downstairs, her golden hair bouncing on her shoulders. She was so excited that her friends had come to visit! Jumping down the last two steps, she ran toward the door.

Summer's mom, the queen of Mirrania, came into the hallway. "Wait a minute, Summer! Where are you going?"

"I'm taking my friends to the woods to show them all the animals," said Summer.



“What about your hair?” said the queen. “Have you brushed it?”

“I think I did.” Summer flicked back her hair. “I’m sure it looks all right, anyway.”

The queen sighed. “Well, don’t forget that the photographer’s coming today.”

“I won’t. See you later!” Summer rushed out the door.

The sun beat down on the walls and pointed towers of the palace. Straight ahead lay a neat lawn full of bright flowers, with the wild forest just beyond.

Three princesses were waiting for Summer at the bottom of the palace steps. Maya was smiling shyly, her dark braid hanging over her shoulder. Lottie was practicing cartwheels on the grass. Rosalind stood with her arms folded, tapping her foot impatiently.

Summer’s heart lifted as she ran toward them. She’d met the girls at



Maya's palace, in the kingdom of Lepari. They had climbed a steep mountain to rescue a snow leopard cub from terrible danger. It had been an amazing adventure!

Lottie and Rosalind had explained that they'd set up a secret club for rescuing animals and it was called the Rescue Princesses. She'd felt so happy when they'd asked her to join. She loved animals and always wanted to help them. Now she had friends who felt that way, too!

Each Rescue Princess wore a ring with a magical jewel. The jewels let them call one another when they found an animal in trouble. Summer's jewel was a beautiful purple amethyst. She touched it and smiled.

Lottie stopped cartwheeling and looked at Summer. The breeze ruffled her curly



red hair. “We’re all ready, Summer! What did you want to show us?”

“Lots of things!” replied Summer.

“There’s a whole forest full of animals and birds beyond that gate.” She pointed to an old wooden gate in the corner. “It was dark when you all arrived yesterday, so I couldn’t show it to you. But I know you’ll like it. We have amazing animals here in Mirrania. There are kangaroos, possums, and koalas, and in the evening, you can see bats flying around.”

“Awesome!” cried Lottie.

“Oh, I almost forgot! First of all, you have to meet Kanga.” Summer gazed around the garden, calling out, “Kanga? Where are you?”

A blue-and-yellow parrot flew down to the topmost step by the front door. He put his head to one side and looked at the girls.



“Oh yes! I remember you telling us you had a pet parrot,” said Rosalind, smoothing her short blond hair. “But why do you call him Kanga? Isn’t that a better name for a kangaroo?”

Kanga opened his beak and gave a loud squawk. Then he bounced down the palace steps one by one. He looked so funny that the girls had to laugh.

“You see! That’s why I called him Kanga,” said Summer. “Sometimes he bounces along instead of flying.”

“He’s a parrot that acts like a kangaroo!” Lottie grinned. “I think I’m going to like this place!”

Kanga hopped a few more times before spreading his wings and flying up to Summer’s shoulder. “Are you ready for an adventure, Kanga?” she asked him.

Kanga bobbed his head in reply.
The princesses followed Summer



through the gate that led out into the woods. They stepped over tangled bushes and pushed their way through the trees. Their shoes scuffed up the reddish earth. High in the branches, birds were calling to one another. One flew past with a low, swooping cry.

“It sounds so strange out here,” murmured Maya.

“It smells different, too,” said Lottie. “It’s a fresh sort of smell — I really like it!”

Rosalind jumped as a furry animal with a bushy tail ran past. “Summer! What’s that?”

“It’s a brush-tailed possum,” Summer told her. “There’s a whole family of them living in here.”

The little possum poked its pink nose out of the middle of a bush, and its whiskers quivered. Rosalind bent down to look. “I like him. He’s cute,” she decided.





“I know an animal that’s even cuter,” said Summer. “Come and see!”

With Kanga still riding on her shoulder, she went over to a tall tree with a pale trunk and blue-gray leaves. “See that furry gray animal halfway up? That’s a mother koala with her baby on her back. We call the baby a joey.”

At the sound of Summer’s voice, the baby koala turned its head and looked down at the girls with big black eyes.

“He’s gorgeous!” cried Maya. “Look at his beautiful fur and fluffy ears!”

Rosalind folded her arms. “I still like the possum best.”

“I’ve always wanted to see a koala,” said Lottie. “I didn’t know they carried their babies on their backs like that.”

“They only do that once the joey’s old enough to live outside his mother’s pouch.” Summer saw their puzzled faces



and added, “The pouch is like a furry pocket on her stomach.”

“Is the baby koala all right?” said Maya suddenly. “I thought I saw him drop one arm, as if he was going to let go.”

Summer looked up, shading her eyes. “Don’t worry. He’s used to riding on his mother’s back.”

As they watched, the mother koala pulled a bunch of leaves off the tree and began eating them. Then a rumbling noise started up in the distance. It quickly grew into the deafening growl of a motorcycle. Kanga ruffled his feathers and looked alarmed as the sound came closer. Then suddenly it stopped.

Summer frowned. “That sounds like a motorcycle. I wonder who it is.”

“I want to find more koalas.” Lottie ran to the next tree. “They’re my new favorite animal!”



“Why don’t we go farther into the woods —” began Summer, but she broke off as she heard her mom’s voice. “Oh no! My mom’s calling me. I bet the sound of the motorcycle was the photographer arriving. Now I have to go and have my photo taken.” She made a face.

“What’s wrong?” asked Rosalind. “Don’t you like having your picture taken?”

“I don’t usually mind,” replied Summer. “But this isn’t a normal photo. It’s something much worse! In our kingdom, every prince or princess has a special picture taken after their tenth birthday. Everyone in the kingdom sees it, and it even gets shown on TV!”

Just then, the queen of Mirrania appeared at the edge of the trees. Her face was pink, and her crown had slipped sideways on her neat hair. “Summer, why are you taking so long? Bill Fleck has



arrived, and he's setting up his camera right now."

Kanga gave a loud squawk and flew away to the top of the highest tree.

Summer sighed. "I've got to go," she told the other princesses. "Stay here and watch the animals if you want. You can still have fun even if I can't!"

