



CHAPTER 1

‘Annie, *DUCK!*’

Annie Boldfoot, bookworm and recently recruited adventurer’s apprentice, ducked. A knife went sailing over her head and hit the mast behind her with a *thunk*.

It wasn’t a real knife of course, but a rubber one – just like the hairy, eye-patched pirate who threw it wasn’t really a pirate, but her uncle Albert, dressed up as a pirate.

And they weren’t really on a ship in the Caribbean, they were in the overgrown backyard of Uncle Albert’s Adventureum. It was Annie’s fifth day of adventure training. So far she had learned how to build a raft, how to read maps and how to tell the difference between zombies and mummies. Today, the lesson was ‘How to outrun your enemies’.

‘Very good,’ Uncle Albert said, taking off his eyepatch. ‘You’re learning very quickly. Hmm, I wonder . . .’ He pulled a crumpled letter out of his pocket.

‘What is it?’ Annie asked.

‘A letter from an old friend of mine, Professoressa Lupo, who runs a museum in Rome, in Italy. She seems to have found a map to a lost treasure and needs some adventuring assistance. I thought it might be a good one for your first official adventure – but maybe you’re not quite ready yet.’

‘I’m ready!’ said Annie. ‘I can tie twenty-five different knots, and I can reverse the top ten most common curses, and I know the weaknesses of twelve mythical creatures. Please, can I go?’

Uncle Albert thought about it. ‘Alright,’ he said. ‘You are quite new, but you have learned very quickly. And this is a very straightforward



adventure. The only tricky bit is that the treasure is buried in the catacombs, but it’s nothing we can’t handle. If we go tomorrow, we should be finished adventuring by the end of the week.’

‘Hooray!’ said Annie. ‘My first official adventure! Wait, what’s a catacomb?’

But there was no answer – Uncle Albert had already bustled off to pack.

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The next day, Annie and Uncle Albert were on an aeroplane bound for Rome. Annie peered out of the tiny window beside her. Below, pillowy clouds spread out as far as the eye could see. She sat back in her seat with excitement. As well as being Annie’s first official adventure, it was her first time in an aeroplane.

‘How long until we get there?’ she said.

Uncle Albert had been having a nap, and

woke with a start.

‘What? Oh.’ He looked at his watch. ‘At least five more hours.’

Annie jiggled in her seat. Five whole hours to go! She was so excited about going to Rome she almost didn’t care about the treasure! She had read a lot about Rome before they left. There were ancient ruins everywhere in the city, along with Annie’s two favourite foods: pizza and gelato.



Uncle Albert fell asleep again. Annie reached under her seat and pulled out the special adventure pack Uncle Albert had given her before they left. It was made of sturdy green canvas and had all the things an

