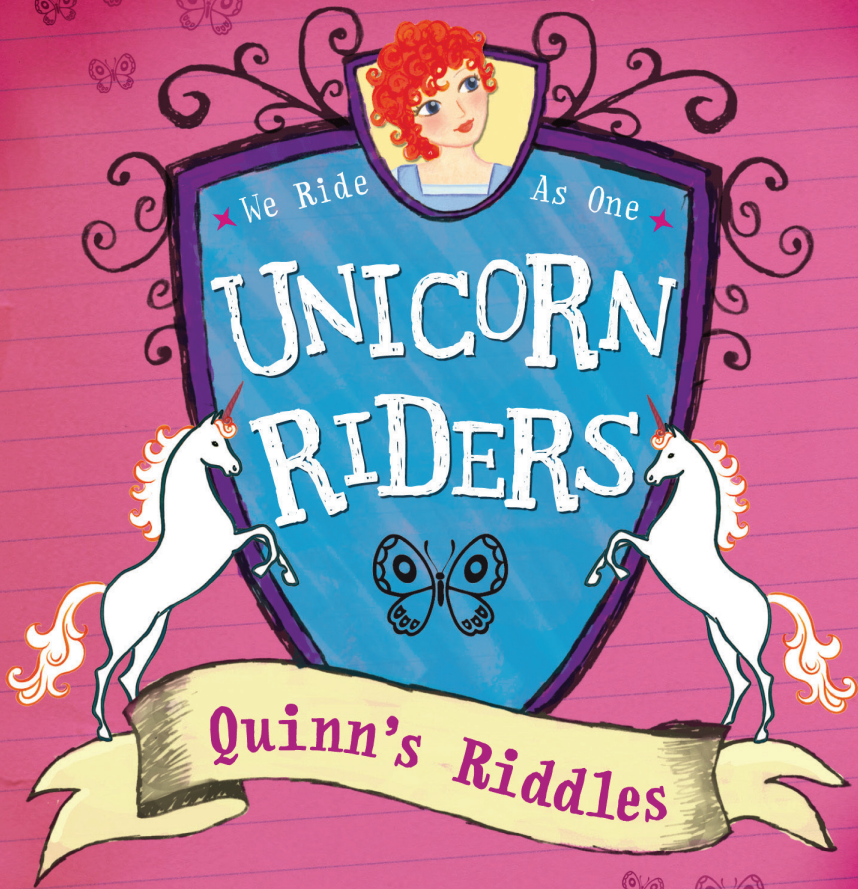


Aleesah  
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NB. This is an **ADVANCED UNCORRECTED CHAPTER SAMPLE**. Please note contents and publishing information are subject to change. When quoting from this book, please check publishing details and refer to the final printed book for editorial accuracy.



## • CHAPTER 1 •

QUINN OFFERED A GREEN APPLE to her unicorn, Ula. “There you go, my beauty. You deserve it.”

Ula plucked the apple from her Rider’s hand, crunching on it delightedly. Juice dribbled down the mare’s chin and onto the long grass beneath her.

Like all unicorns, Ula had magical powers. One of her unique skills was being able to send mind-messages to her Rider. Gently, she placed the words *Thank you* in Quinn’s mind.

“That’s my messy girl,” Quinn laughed as she scratched Ula’s silky forehead at the base of her spiralled ruby horn. Right where she liked it.

Quinn was thrilled with Ula today. They had been the best performers during the morning’s



trick-riding lessons. Trick riding, or mounted gymnastics as Jala, the Unicorn Riders Leader, called it, was an important part of being a Unicorn Rider. The stunts, which came in handy during their adventures, required perfect balance, cooperation and trust between unicorn and Rider.

Today was the first time Quinn and Ula had won the trick-riding competition, so it was a special day. It meant their skills were improving. And it was a good excuse for a treat.

“Quinn, there you are!” Krystal called as she came sprinting up.

Like Quinn, Krystal wore a Rider’s uniform. But while Quinn’s uniform was pale blue with the symbol of a butterfly embroidered on the front, Krystal’s was orange, her symbol a sparkling diamond.

Jala took great care in selecting each girl’s



symbol when they arrived at Keydell. A Rider's symbol reflected her personality, so it had to be just right. Quinn's butterfly represented change and lightness. Krystal's diamond signified clarity, wisdom and beauty.

"What's happening?" Quinn asked as Krystal danced impatiently from one foot to the other.



"There's a message from the palace," Krystal said. "Jala wants everyone in the meeting room immediately." She rushed off.

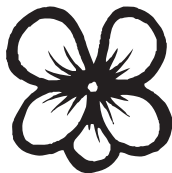
*I wonder what the message is about?* Quinn thought.

Quinn gave Ula a final pat, then hurried past the stables, across the courtyard where the Riders and their unicorns assembled before missions, and into the meeting room.

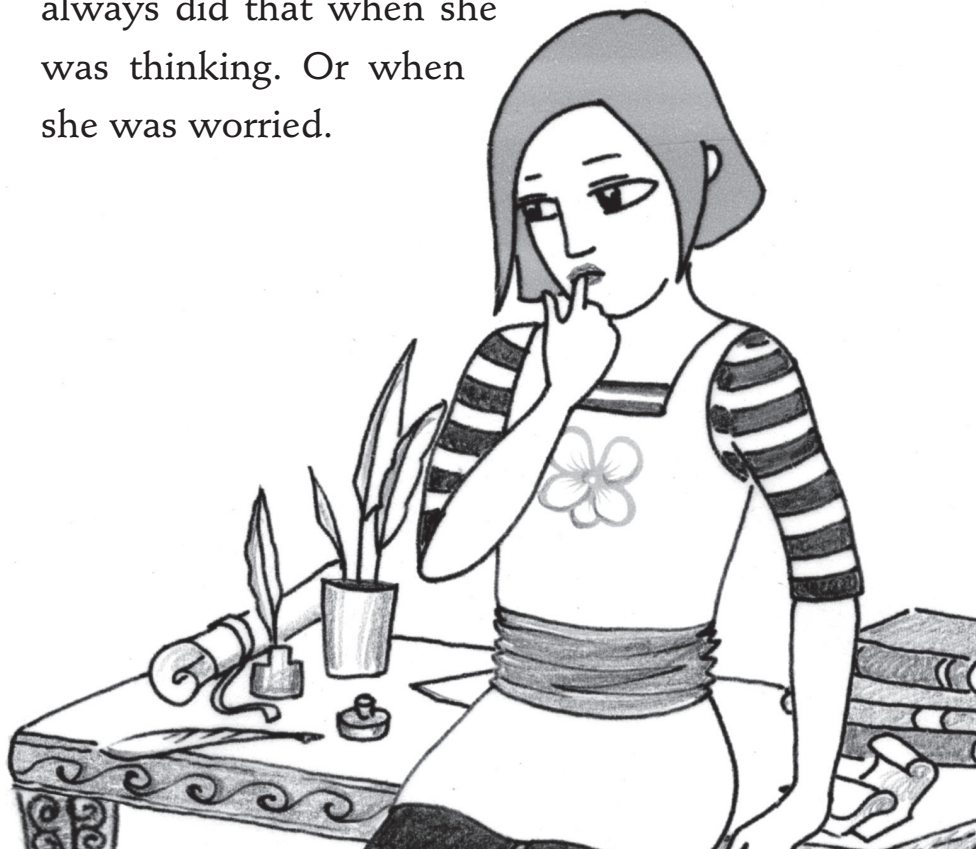
Jala was there already, pacing the floor. Her shoulders were hunched, her brow puckered with worry. Willow, the Head Rider, sat

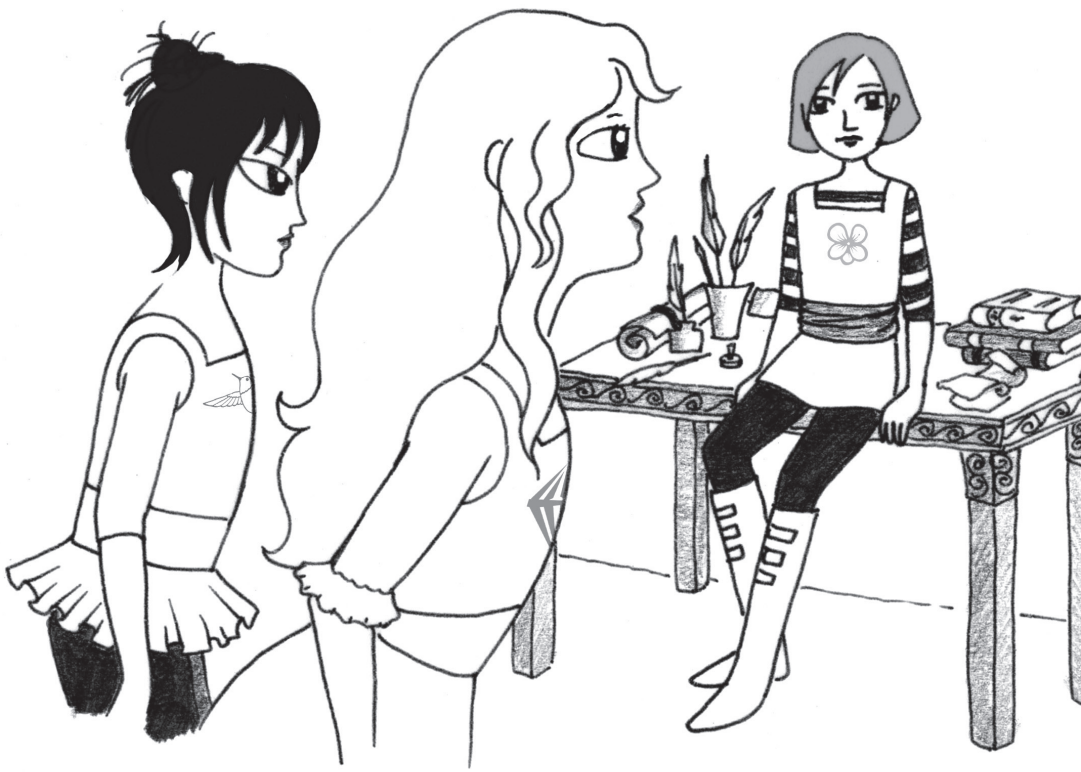
perched on the desk at the front of the room.

Willow was the most experienced Rider. She was tall and slender, and her hair was cut into a short, sharp bob. Willow's uniform was forest green. Her symbol was a purple violet, which stood for watchfulness and faith.



Quinn guessed that Jala had already told Willow about the mission. The older girl was chewing her fingernails. Willow always did that when she was thinking. Or when she was worried.





Quinn's stomach tensed. This must be bad!  
Jala fixed Quinn with a stern gaze. "Where are the other two?"

Quinn blushed. "I don't know."

She squeezed in among the soft, plump cushions lining the bay window. Sunlight streamed in through the glass, warming her face. Outside she saw Old Elsid, the groundskeeper, watering the roses.

Brisk footsteps pattered down the hallway.





All eyes swivelled to the door. Krystal slipped in, looking flustered. Ellabeth tramped in after her, her long dark hair scrunched up in a messy bun.

Ellabeth wore her red uniform with its symbol of a hummingbird embroidered on the front. Her symbol stood for energy, persistence and loyalty. Like the hummingbird, Ellabeth was always fluttering about or chattering. She hardly ever sat still or stayed silent.



“What kept you?” Jala demanded.

Krystal clicked her tongue. “Ellabeth was in the pavilion. She didn’t hear me calling.”

“I was practising my self-defence moves,” Ellabeth said, whirring her arms around and striking a pose.

“You should have been doing something useful,” Krystal chided.

“Self-defence is useful. You never know when you might need it. Anyway, what were you doing that was useful?” Ellabeth said. “Brushing your hair?”

Quinn rolled her eyes. *Do they ever stop bickering?*

Jala held her hand up. “Riders, enough. Sit down. You have a mission.”

The atmosphere in the room changed instantly. A ripple of nervous excitement splashed through the girls, and they spoke all at once. It had been weeks since their last adventure, when they escorted Queen Heart on a trade mission to Costaneera in the south

of Avamay. Every Rider itched to escape the compound. The girls knew their unicorns would be eager for a gallop too.

“I’m glad you’re all so keen,” Jala said. “Although I must warn you: this mission is a dangerous and perplexing one.”

“What is it?” Krystal asked. “Tell us!”

“Yeah, don’t keep us waiting,” Ellabeth said. “What’s going on?”

“Quiet, Riders!” Willow shushed them.

The girls fell silent.

“Thank you, Willow,” Jala said. “Now, here’s the news: Prince Simon has been kidnapped.”



