

CHAPTER 1



It was the wall-mounted Adventure Phone's nonstop mooing that made Pearly Woe do it.

She knew she shouldn't.

And she had tried her best not to.

She had even fled to the attic. But three rickety floors up, wedged between dusty trunks and teetering piles of junk, she still couldn't escape it. The phone's mooing was impossible to ignore.

And Pig wasn't helping. Not one bit. He had been squealing for over an hour now, his snout waving back and forth like windscreen wipers in a rainstorm, his pink eyes frantic as he paced in front of the phone, oinking, OINKY OINKY NO-NO! OINKY OINKY NO-NO!, which was Pig for *TROUBLE, I SMELL TROUBLE*.

But still the phone MOOED and MOOED and MOOED. So Pearly had traipsed back downstairs, checking her mobile phone yet again.

Still no coverage.

Still no messages.

“Dove diavolo sei?” Where on earth are you? Pearly pleaded in Italian, which was her go-to language when she was stressed.

And boy, was she stressed. Her parents had gone to Lemon Tree Village shops to get some milk and bread. It should have taken them less than an hour.

It had been three.

Sure, the heavens were chucking down rain like there was no tomorrow. Sure, the wind was bending the pines so they almost touched the ground. But three hours to get bread and milk? That was unheard of.

Maybe they’ve been swept off the road and into the swirling currents of the Lemon Tree River? Pearly worried. *Maybe they’ve been in a head-on crash with a semitrailer laden with steel girders, or live sheep – or both! Maybe they’ve taken a wrong turn and ended up in the African Animal Safari Theme Park and are surrounded by a mob of angry elephants...*

M00! M00! That phone. It wouldn’t stop.

Pearly stood before it, her hand poised, her teeth feasting on her bottom lip.

OINKITY! oinked Pig, which was pig for, *NO!*

“But it won’t stop,” wailed Pearly, before launching into her best piggy cursing. “Smoky bacon and pork chops! Leg ham and apple sauce!”

OINKITY! warned Pig again as a gust of wind lashed rain against the windows.

The glass rattled. The shutters flapped. Outside, something thumped to the ground. Woe Mansion felt as if it was being torn from its clifftop perch above the Lemon Tree River, as if its very foundations were bravely clinging to the rocky ground for dear life, and it would only take one particularly fierce gust to send the whole house hurtling into the sky. Pearly reached for the phone, fingers trembling.

OINKITY!

Pig was right. She shouldn't answer it – she knew that. The Adventure Phone was a secret landline for members of the Adventurologists' Guild. No one else had the number. Only Guild members were allowed to answer it.

Pearly was not a member. Not yet, anyhow.

But what if there's an emergency? Pearly fretted. What if there's an approaching tsunami or a category five hurricane or a one-hundred-year flood surging down the river?

Pearly wrung her hands. What to do?

M00! M00! Why wouldn't it stop?

OINKY OINKY NO-NO! Pig paced and squealed. TROUBLE, I SMELL TROUBLE.

The Adventure Phone never rang and rang like this. But then, her parents or Grandpa Woe were always

around to answer it. Maybe that was it!

Maybe it was her parents using the Adventure Phone because the mobile network was down. Maybe they needed her help. But why would they ring her for help? She was the last person they would call. In terms of who to rely on in an emergency, she was definitely not their go-to girl.

Maybe . . . maybe it was a TEST!

That was it. Her father loved setting tests.

Pearly had been training as an Adventurologist since the day she turned eight years old. And ever since that day, her father had been setting her tests. It was almost a hobby for him.

She could pass the test. She could!

She was far from being fully trained, and not exactly the most promising student, but surely she knew something that would help in a situation like this.

She racked her brain for inspiration.

If it was her father setting a test, then it would probably be something from *Rules and Guidelines for Young Adventurologists*, or the *RAG*, as everyone in the Guild called it. Ricky Woe was a stickler for rules and the *RAG* was like a bible to him. Pearly raced into the library and grabbed the book from her study table. It was well worn, the corners curling, the pages splattered with splotches of hot chocolate and smudges

of Vegemite and tomato sauce. She hastily opened to the page listing the rules.

Rule 1: Stay alive.

Of course.

Rule 2: Do not take or destroy.

Irrelevant!

Rule 3: Tread lightly.

Not helpful!

Rule 4: Do not disturb the balance.

As if.

Rule 5: Never answer the Adventure Phone – unless an authorised member of the Adventurologists’ Guild.

Dang.

She gave up on the rules and thumbed through to the “Guidelines for Surviving Sticky Situations” chapter. Surely this would count as a sticky situation. Wouldn’t it?

She slid her finger down the page, searching for something useful.

1. Take initiative ...
2. Think outside the square ...
3. Keep your eyes and ears open and your wits about you ...

Mamma mia! Pearly slammed the book shut.

This was not helping at all!

M00! M00! M00!

That was it. She couldn’t stand it any more.

“Basta!” Enough.

She had to answer it.

She must.

She did.

OINKY OINKY NO-NO! squealed Pig. *TROUBLE,*
I SMELL TROUBLE.

He was darn right.

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