

ONE EXTRA SPARKLE

Ellie and the
Marriage
List



Tricia Seabolt



Lucy Rogers



Chapter 1

Ellie clunked down the hallway in her lucky T-shirt and hiking boots.

Clunk, clunk, clunk!

It felt good to make such big noises after waiting for her brother all morning.

Clunk, clunk, clunk!

With each clunk, her brownish ponytail bobbed, and her glasses slid further down her nose. With each clunk, she remembered all the times she'd had to wait for Ben this summer.

Ellie pressed her ear against the bathroom door and listened. "Yes!" she squealed. *Finally! No more shower sounds!*



“Ben!” Ellie called. “Are you ready *now*?”

“Ready for what?” Ben replied in his teasing voice.

“*You know!*” Usually, Ellie liked joking with her brother. But why did he have to take a super-long shower *before* their special hike? Ben used to take her hiking in the woods behind their neighbourhood a lot. Had he forgotten about the messy parts? What about the rabbit poo and watermelon-sized spider webs?

At least Mum had agreed with her. “Showering after the hike would make more sense,” she’d said. “You two come back from those woods smelling worse than a basket of Ben’s sweaty football socks!”

Dad had tried to cheer Ellie up before he’d left for the office. “Teenagers do funny things sometimes. When I was fifteen like Ben, my buddies and I had a contest to see who could go the longest without showering!” He said he’d made it five days before Grandma had told him he’d sleep outside if he didn’t wash the stench off.

Ellie had giggled a little at that part. But she hadn’t let herself get too cheered up. Besides, she didn’t think the teenager things Ben did were funny *at all*. In fact, they made her want to stay ten years old forever. The captain-of-the-football-team thing and his job-stocking-shelves-at-Albert’s-grocery-shop thing were especially terrible. Between these two very *not-funny* things, Ben was never home. Sometimes, Ellie wondered if he even remembered he had a little sister.

“Can you check the hiking backpack for me, El?” Ben called. “Make sure I packed the essentials – you know, cheese puffs and mini doughnuts!”

“I did!” Ellie shoved her fringe off her forehead. She’d checked the backpack lots of times already. She loved how Ben had remembered her favourite snacks and her *Guide to Forest Animals* book. But they would never get to enjoy them if he didn’t hurry!

Clatter, clatter, clatter.

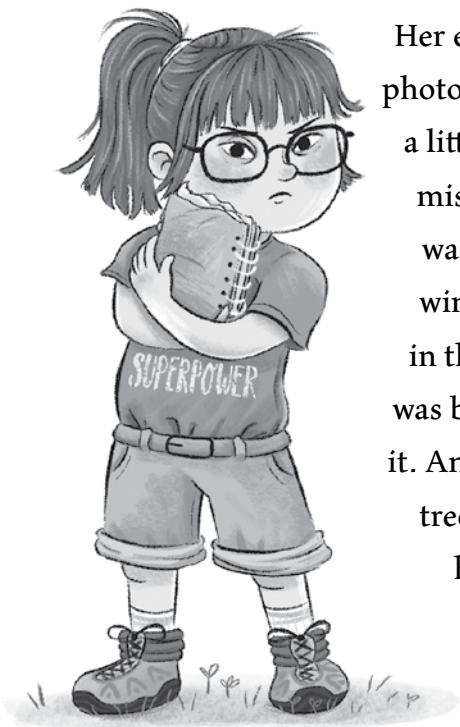
What was Ben doing in there? Ellie scanned the



photographs lining the walls because they were more interesting than the bathroom door. Her favourite was the one of Dad pulling a pound coin out of Grandma's ear at the family reunion. It made Ellie excited for when he finally got the real magician job he'd been dreaming of for so long. Then he wouldn't have to go to that boring office ever again!

Clatter, clatter, clatter.

Her eyes landed on a photograph of Ben as a little kid. He had a missing-tooth smile and was waving from the window of the treehouse in the back garden. That was before he'd outgrown it. And before the treehouse had turned haunted. Nobody believed Ellie and



her best friend, Ling, about the haunted part. But both girls knew what they'd seen during the spookiest sleepover ever. A sleepover so terrifying, they'd made a vow to never ever set foot in the treehouse.

"Let's look for a fox!" Ellie called, hugging her nature notebook. The cover was plastered with beetle stickers and *Ellie Anderson, Wildlife Artist* was scrawled in the corner. She'd been carrying it around all morning, imagining the pointy-nosed creature she'd draw inside.



"Don't foxes usually hide during the day?" Ben replied between the sound of drawers and cupboards opening and shutting. "How about a rabbit?"

"I have two rabbit pictures!" Maybe Ben had forgotten about that too. After all, he barely had time to look at her nature notebook anymore.

"Well, if anyone can track down a fox in broad

daylight, it'll be my sister!" Ben said. "Are you wearing your all-mighty lucky T-shirt?"

"Yep!" Ellie replied. If Ben would only open the door, he could see for himself. She saved her lucky T-shirt for hikes. Only hikes! It helped her find the coolest animals in the whole forest. Not only was it green, her favourite colour, but it also said *Down's Syndrome is my Superpower!* in glittery letters.

"Maybe it can help me find a great white shark!" Ben called. "That would be epic!"

"*Bennnnnn!*" Ellie reminded him they weren't going on an ocean hike as she patted the pocket of her jean shorts. *Good!* The fresh tube of orange, fox-coloured paint was still there.

Usually, she liked sketching with her triangle pencil because it had three flat sides to help her grip when her fingers got as tired and floppy as spaghetti. But special occasions



like hikes with her brother were perfect for using paint from the grown-up artist set she'd received for her birthday.

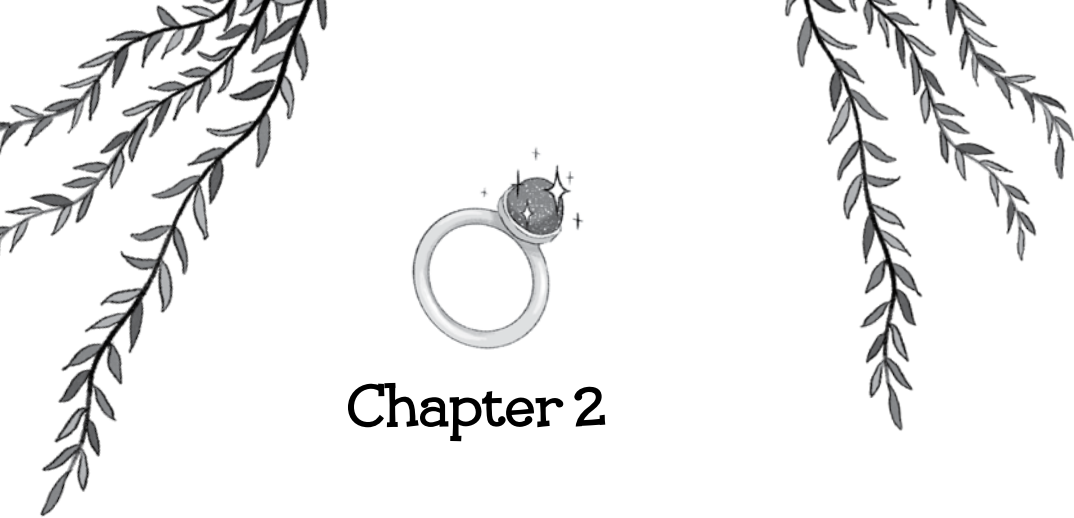
"I'm almost done!" Ben said. "I'll meet you under the weeping willow, okay?"

The weeping willow was the tree she drew under every day—the same one that held the haunted tree house. Once, Dad had told her that *weeping* meant crying. Ellie didn't blame her weeping willow one bit for being sad. After all, it had to carry something super creepy in its branches.

"Okay, El?" Ben prompted from behind the bathroom door.

"*Okay!*" Ellie grumbled. Then she clunked back down the hall, wishing her lucky T-shirt had the power to make her brother hurry up.

Clunk! Clunk! Clunk!



Chapter 2

Haunted treehouse or not, the weeping willow was the one thing that could make Ellie forget her angry-at-Ben-for-taking-a-shower-on-the-best-day-of-summer feelings. Nature notebook in hand, she marched across the back garden, following the branches that twisted above her like wild octopuses' arms.

"Hey, Ellie!"

She'd almost made it to her favourite drawing spot when she heard Ling calling. "Hey!" Ellie waved. Her best friend stood on her side of the raspberry-bush-covered fence in a long, grape-coloured sundress. Ling wore dresses every day because she

Chapter 2

was practising for when she became a film star.

"Sorry I can't come over today." Ling adjusted her sparkly-rimmed sunglasses as Ellie joined her at the fence. "But please ask me why! It's the best reason in the whole history of the world!"

"Why?" Ellie glanced over her shoulder at the far corner of her garden. She always drew on the same side of the giant weeping willow trunk. The side *without* the haunted tree house.

"Mum's taking me to Dance World after my piano lesson!"

Ling twirled in the grass, her long black hair floating behind her. "She's buying me a plush pink leotard!"

"You *have* pink ones!" Ellie reminded her. It was true. Ling had a whole drawerful of pink leotards.

"Those are *regular* pink," Ling said. "Regular pink leotards are too babyish now that I'm ten and a half. And none of the girls in my ballet class have a plush pink one yet. Not even Sophia!"

Sophia was Ling's BBF which meant *Best Ballet Friend*. But Ellie was Ling's BFF which meant *Best Friend Forever*. Ling said BFFs were the most important kind because you never stopped being best friends, even when you were old, wrinkly grandmas.

"Ling!" shrieked Zhi from the back door. "Did you drink all the orange juice?"



Ling flashed Ellie a smile before calling back, "Yep!"

"You're a brat! I barely got any!" Zhi slammed the door.

Zhi was Ling's older sister. She was in secondary school, but Ling said she acted like she was in preschool.

"She deserved it!" Ling told Ellie with a shrug. "She and Eddy hogged it all last time."

Eddy was Zhi's boyfriend. He had tattoos and drove a rattly car covered in bumper stickers.

"Was she sorry?" Ellie fanned herself with her nature notebook. It was so hot that the raspberry bushes smelled like fruit crumble baking in the sun.

"Nope!" Ling poked out her chin. "And yesterday she used my glitter-glamour nail polish without permission! Now I barely have enough for my pinky fingers!"

Ellie's own fingers ached to sketch whiskers and bushy tails. Drawing was how she forgot Ben

problems, like Dance World was how Ling forgot Zhi problems.

“How come you’re so quiet?” Ling asked.

Ellie wanted to tell Ling about Ben. But it made her mouth hurt to even think about the words. Instead, she glanced back at her weeping willow, waiting for her like a dinosaur-sized shaggy dog. Luckily, from this angle, the haunted treehouse was almost invisible beneath the thick leaves and branches. But the rope ladder leading up, and the yellow-as-a-lemon slide going down, were impossible to miss.

“Oh! I forgot to tell you the best part!” Ling said when Ellie still didn’t speak. “Dance World’s website says I’ll look like a blooming rose when I dance in a plush pink leotard!”

Imagining her BFF as a giant flower made Ellie giggle. It felt good to laugh after such a grumpy morning. Behind her, the bird rock band joined in, singing a happy tune from their stage in the tip-top

branches of her tree.

“Hey!” Ling crossed her arms as Ellie’s giggles got louder. “Shouldn’t you be hiking with Ben right now?”

And just like that, all her laughs dried up. Ellie’s shoulders slumped as she stared across the garden at the closed-tight back door.

“Ellie?” Ling prompted. “Are you okay?”

“Ben’s a slowcoach!” Ellie grumbled.

“Why? What’s he doing?” Ling asked. “I thought he had the day off from Albert’s and football.”

“He’s... He’s...in the...” It wasn’t only Ellie’s fingers that got the spaghetti feeling. Other parts of her did too. Even her talking muscles. Not only did it make saying big words hard, but it also made saying little words when she was full of big feelings hard too.

“He’s in the *where*?” Ling prompted.

“Shower!” The word burst out of her mouth sounding more like *showa*. ‘R’ wasn’t an easy sound to make, and the thought of Ben shampooing his

hair instead of hiking with her made it even harder to get right.

Ling wrinkled her nose. "But he'll get all gross in the woods anyway."

"I know," whispered Ellie.

"I have an idea!" Ling cried. "Come to Dance World with me instead!"

Ellie shook her head so hard her ponytail whipped her cheeks. "I need to wait for Ben!"

"You don't need Ben for *everything* anymore," Ling said. "Soon you'll be ten and a half like me. And that's almost a teenager!"

Before Ellie could say she never wanted to be a teenager and that she'd always need Ben, Ling screeched, "Here he comes now! But what's up with his hair?"

Ellie spun around to see her brother striding towards them with the hiking backpack. She gasped. Ling was right! Usually, Ben's brownish hair was a little messy like hers. But today it was stuck in one

place like a giant bike helmet!

"It's glue!" Ellie screeched. Ben would be in so much trouble when Mum and Dad found out!

"Nope," Ling said as Ben got closer. "It's gel. Eddy plasters that same stuff in his hair when he and Zhi go on dates."

Then Mr Yang called Ling in for her piano lesson. With a promise to hula hoop the next day, she took off towards her house.

But Ellie barely noticed. She was too busy wondering how many foxes Ben's hair would scare away.

