

*A whimsically told tale full of adventure, Woodencloak's endearing troll princess heroine will enchant middle-grade readers as she plunges into peril and discovers how brave she truly is.*

— CARRIE ANN NOBLE, AWARD-  
WINNING AUTHOR OF *THE MERMAID'S  
SISTER* AND *THE GOLD-SON*

*Woodencloak is a delightful adventure that turns fairytales upside-down and redefines heroism. With engaging characters and fantastic worldbuilding, this is a story you'll delight in, no matter your age!*

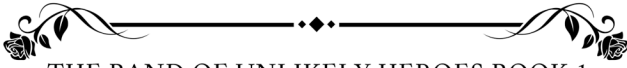
— AVILY JEROME, HAVOK EDITOR AND  
AUTHOR OF *THE AMULET SAGA SERIES*  
AND *THE BREEDING*



*To my husband and family who tolerate me when my body is there, but my mind is elsewhere. I love you so much more.*



# Woodenloak



THE BAND OF UNLIKELY HEROES BOOK 1

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# CHAPTER I



Horra Fyd hunched forward on her granite throne, her bottom numb from sitting so long. The starched lace on her collar poked her troll earlobes.

“Sit up!” Horra’s royal instructor, Woodsly, hissed at her.

King Divitri, Horra’s father, slid a glance at her from atop his high-backed quartz throne.

Horra squirmed under her father’s intense perusal. Anyone who didn’t know the king wouldn’t catch the tic in his cheek, a giveaway to his displeasure. Horra, however, knew it by heart. An urge to sigh grew, but she stifled it.

Her hobgoblin maid had chosen a dress of pure, stiff torture for Oddar’s weekly Goblin Court. If sitting through hours of trivial arguments weren’t uncomfortable enough, her dress tipped the scales.

“Tailfeathers,” she muttered low enough that her father wouldn’t hear.

Woodsly, however, did. He made a note on his parchment. *Vinegar!* The rigid fabric prickled her neck.

Her royal troll schoolmates sat on the opposite side of the thrones in the galley. They got away with passing notes and whispering.

Horra ignored them and turned to listen to a group of shopkeepers requesting aid for a sudden pest invasion.

*Boring!* Horra's attention waned.

"How close are we to the end?" Her father's voice boomed, making the gulpy heralds jump. Their overlarge heads atop scrawny bodies bobbed to and fro furiously. It was almost entertaining enough to take Horra's mind off her stiff dress.

Horra shifted as her collar poked again. *Stupid recapper laundresses!* Always using prickly powder in the wash to get back at her because she was messy.

When she turned sixteen and became Queen of Oddar, she would outlaw prickly powder in the royal laundry soap. There were many things she would outlaw, including long, boring Goblin Courts.

A high-ranking messenger stepped in the center of the aisle, clicked his tongue, and smacked his fist against his chest in salute. "Queen Stella Toppenbottom of the Fairy Overkingdom has requested an audience with your Majesty."

Not another royal meeting! This was going to make an already unbearable day longer. Besides, what in the world brought a fairy queen across the Wilden Lands to Oddar? Fairies never visited them. Had a troll stuck a warty toe on their glittering land?

Her father nodded. "Let her come."

The messenger stepped back and bowed.

Two of Oddar's mightiest trolls pulled the iron rings set in the carved, marble doors. They creaked heavily, and rock dust whirled to the floor as they opened.

Six graceful male fairy guards strutted in, their diaphanous wings twitching. Waning light rays shifted, coalescing into a

haloed spotlight as a regal woman stepped across the threshold. Gold, shimmering fabric danced around her nimble body. Her crystal slippers crunched against the rubble on the floor. A diamond tiara sat upon her white-blond head, and she held a bejeweled scepter topped with a pearl globe. Her iridescent wings fluttered softly at her back.

*The fairy queen!* Horra recalled her mother, who loved telling scary stories, reading about fairies. They were pretty and fluttery and irresistible to most creatures. The fairy's ability to bewitch gave Horra nightmares as a young troll. She shook the memories off.

Behind the regal fairy glided two equally grandiose girls. They both wore silky pink dresses and silver heels. A blonde wore a pale pink gown with floral trim. The other, a brunette, wore a darker pink gown with ivy trim. Their crowns and wings weren't as pronounced as the queen's, but there was no doubt these were fairy princesses.

Horra slid a glimpse across the royal peerage. The male trolls' gazes were drawn to the fairies, their eyes wide and enthralled.

She contemplated what it was that was so unappealing about the creatures. There were so many things, from their shimmering wings to the delicate nature of their slim bodies. If one sneezed too hard, would they break in two? Explode into glitter, perhaps? Without their magic and beguilement, what could they do?

Her kind, with their dark green skin and brawny bodies, were built for hard work, fighting, and war. They were much more fierce than these gleaming creatures.

King Divitri nodded in deference. "Queen Toppenbottom, it is my honor to welcome you to Oddar. You've come a long way. How can I help you?"

The queen dipped her head. "King Fyd. Thank you for

welcoming our most unexpected visit. I'm afraid I come with dire news. Is it possible we have a private audience?"

Queen Toppenbottom's sweet voice jangled like wind chimes. It grated on Horra's patience. She turned from the effervescent light, which danced in happy circles around the fairies.

The Overkingdom sent so many complaints to Oddar that her father no longer responded to their beautiful scripts sent via whimsy bird messengers. Possibly, the fairies had grown tired of their birds not returning and their messages being ignored.

Every male eye of the Goblin Court, down to the youngest heralds, was riveted to the fairies. Annoyed, Horra shifted away to a view of Skog Marsh out a side window.

Woodsly tapped his quill on the parchment. Of all creatures in the room oblivious to fairies' charm, it had to be her woodgoblin instructor! His bark was thicker than she'd realized.

Horra sat up straighter but kept her glimpse of the marsh. It was almost time for the bog bogies' croaking song. She loved falling asleep to their melodies.

Woodsly cleared his throat, an obnoxious *clackity* sound, which, though quite normal for a woodgoblin to make, disturbed her troll senses. A fact Woodsly knew full well.

Horra reluctantly glanced at him.

He frowned at her.

She frowned back and twisted to gaze through the window once more.

The air was full of overripe sweetsuckle flowers coming off of the fairies in waves. It assaulted her nose. She ground her teeth together to keep from sneezing. Her ear twitched at the stiff collar again. She made plans to burn the dress when she got back to her bedchambers. *IF* she ever got back to her bedchambers.

Jingling laughter echoed across the chamber.

Oh, bother! She was forgetting her manners. Horra pasted her social smile back on and turned toward the princesses.

A head taller than any creature present, an ambassador's son and her classmate, Torren chuckled at her before following their classmates out of the courtroom. She narrowed her eyes and glared back. He knew how much Horra loathed performing formal duties and teased her endlessly about it.

"Are you finished daydreaming?" Woodsly clacked, startling her.

*Vinegar!* Would she ever be free of her tutor's disapproval?

She was surprised to realize her father and the queen were gone. How long had she been distracted?

The princesses leaned into each other, a flurry of warring pinks, their tinkling voices a tittering mish-mash she couldn't make out. They reminded her of the beautiful fizzes that invaded the swamp in an epidemic of colorful wings during the spring and fall seasons. She had a board in the lab with dozens of them pinned to it.

Behind them, the four remaining male fairies stood on alert with their arms by their sides and wings fluttering at their backs.

"Come. Let's show our honored guests around while your father and the queen meet."

Woodsly held the ladder so Horra could climb down from the throne. Though her chair was smaller than the King's, she was still short enough to need help descending.

Heat spread across her cheeks. Normally Woodsly honored her enough to wait until everyone dispersed from the throne room before producing the ladder. Obviously, her mud-headedness irritated him enough not to show her preference. "Show them where?"

She took his slim-limbed hands in her chubbier ones so she

could get down without turning around. For years she hadn't grown as normal trolls do, and Woodsly had left her hanging on the throne a time or two when she'd been too petulant.

Woodsly stepped back and folded his hands in front of him. "Princess Horra, where do we start a castle tour when we have royal guests?"

She ignored the stupid collar prickling her ear once more. Taking a deep breath, she straightened. "If you will please follow me."