Revenge of Queen Rose



VALINORA TROY

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Books by Valinora Troy

The Lucky Diamond Series:

The Lucky Diamond

Revenge of Queen Rose

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To Marvin

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SIGN UP TO MY READERS NEWSLETTER!


HERSHA
SUELLA
TRIMAGE
LAND OF THULE
BARRA
SUR
RESINE
LOCKE
DREAN
SIDAR
KINGDOM OF KYLE
LEON
TURINA
Turina
FATAR
Mount Slant
Little Hills
Monument
Scatherina's Castle
Ruined City
Great Road
NIVRAM
Nilken Country
Last Outpost Of
The Diamond Realm
WEST
Blackhand Mountains
EAST
Great Forest
River Aloe
Demerai Plains
Witches Wood
Senten
Denstar
Lowdar
Mudflats
Whirlies

Chapter One

LUCKY



Vicky sat on the wall and kicked her heels against the stonework. In front of her a swathe of emerald green grass ran down to the sapphire waters of Crocodile Lake. West of her ran the long line of cragged peaked mountains, beyond which lay the Great Forest. Eastwards, farmlands, trees, and rivers stretched into the distance. If she looked behind her, she could see Mount Slant. Bathed in sunshine, the countryside looked very pretty, but Vicky, who had spent the first twelve and a quarter years of her life living in city slums, was already tired of her new home. No, tired was the wrong word. After two weeks living there, she was *bored*.

At least in Lowdar, there was always a rooftop to escape over, or a dangerous challenge to tackle. Fighting with the street gangs, persuading the wealthy kids to pay her for feats of daring, dodging the town guards… Vicky sighed. Following the defeat of Queen Rose, Lucky retreated to the Rock of Diamonds, Charlie disappeared, and now even Paul had left. She had *nothing* to do.

She tugged at the velvet pouch about her neck and slipped out her telescope. The silver tube shone brightly, bringing a smile to Vicky's face. It was the last gift she'd received from her mother, so she treasured it. Especially since she discovered it was magical. She held it to her eye and looked to the lake where the twins played. She could see and hear as clearly as if she stood beside them.

"Alan, be careful, you'll fall in!" Cathy sounded anxious.

Alan stood at the edge of the lake, water lapping his feet. Through the telescope, Vicky could see the sand where the thin roots of the rushes took hold, but then the bank of vegetation ended abruptly, and the lake proper began.

“Do you think if I threw a stone into the water, I’d wake the Guardians?” Alan said in the voice of one keen to try.

Vicky hoped not, for Lucky said that would be the end of the world.

“Vicky! Are you spying?” a silvery voice came from close by.

Vicky jumped and dropped her telescope. A three-inch-tall Diamond sparkled on the wall beside her. Lucky, the Diamond princess Vicky and her family had helped return to her home only a couple of weeks earlier. Vicky rushed into speech.

“No, no, I wasn’t! I was only… I mean, I am getting to know my telescope better, like you said. To understand its power.” She smiled placatingly.

Lucky twinkled in response. Now that Vicky knew her better, she could interpret the Diamond’s different light intensities quite well. She was sure the twinkle was benign.

“Don’t abuse it,” Lucky said, casting a little trail of light as she hopped onto Vicky’s shoulder. “I’m here to see you and Susan.”

Vicky returned the telescope to its pouch and slid off the wall, her long plait swinging wildly. She took the Diamond inside.

Vicky and her family now lived in one of the cottages at the foot of Mount Slant, built by the Nilkens to house guests of the Diamonds. Vicky wasn’t sure who the Nilkens thought would be staying there, for the ceilings were low, the furniture tiny, and the rooms small. Other Nilkens, she supposed. At least the windows fitted, it was dry rather than damp, and she could enter by the front door. All in all, a big improvement on her last home.

Lucky stood on the wooden mantlepiece, and blazed with light to greet Susan and Yvonne.

“We know the origin of Susan’s flute,” Lucky said after greetings had been exchanged. “It clearly came from the Thulian people and is imbued with much of their magical powers, the full extent of which we can only guess. Dulstar is anxious to study it in more detail, and I am sure Susan will allow him to do so.”

Susan, perched on a small stool, nodded, but Vicky detected her reluctance. She couldn’t blame Susan. She wouldn’t want her magical telescope taken from her, not even by the Diamonds, who were guardians of Nivram and all who lived there.

“But your telescope, Vicky, is baffling Dulstar,” Lucky said.

Vicky was delighted to hear this. “It’s really special, isn’t it?” Her telescope was clearly the best of the magical gifts their mother had bequeathed to her four daughters.

“Dulstar would welcome the opportunity to examine it,” Lucky said. “Although not as powerful as the flute, the mystery makes it a far more fascinating object in his eyes.”

Vicky's elation immediately dimmed. She didn't want to part with it. "It's simply a telescope," she muttered, though she knew this wasn't true.

Yvonne was sitting by the table, sewing, but she put down her needle and looked earnestly at Lucky. "Our gifts are so valuable to us, our only keepsake of our mother. We can't hand them over to anyone, not even – Mr? Lord? Sir? – Dulstar."

Vicky was pleased to hear Yvonne's support and nodded in agreement.

"You can be present for the initial examination, if that makes it easier for you, Vicky?" Lucky said.

This was tempting. The Diamond home was off limits to everyone, even Nilkens. "Inside the Rock of Diamonds? You bet!"

Lucky laughed and the dream shattered. "I'm afraid not. But I could get Dulstar to meet you at the entrance. Come up to the Rock whenever you're ready. I must go now. I have some things to attend to."

"Please stay longer," Susan said, getting to her feet. "We never see you anymore."

It was true. Since Lucky had been returned to the Diamond home a couple of weeks earlier, Vicky had only seen her twice.

"Is it wedding plans?" she said. "When are you and Charlie getting married?"

Lucky laughed. "As soon as possible. But it is so long since the last wedding in my family that my father is anxious to make sure it is conducted with all the proper ceremony our rituals demand. Unfortunately, we don't see eye to eye on our interpretation of what is required."

"Oh." Susan sounded disappointed. "That's a pity. Can we help?"

"No, no. Don't worry, I'll soon talk him around."

Vicky wasn't so sure. Charlie had told her that the King of the Diamonds was very stubborn. "I hope you'll allow us into the Rock for the ceremony."

"I'll see what can be arranged. Now, I really must go." With a bright flash and scattering of light, the Diamond was gone.

"Should we go up now?" Susan said. "I'd like to get it over with.′

"All right," Vicky said. "I've nothing else to do."

"If you have nothing else to do..." Yvonne began, but Vicky didn't wait to hear the end of the sentence.

It was a warm day in late spring, with summer rapidly approaching. The sky was a deep blue, and other than a few trails of white over the Blackhand Mountains, there was not a cloud in sight. Vicky set out for the path that led up the slope of Mount Slant but quickly came to a standstill.

“Oh, *thistles*!”

Susan gazed at her in surprise. “Thistles?”

Vicky’s cheeks grew warm. “That’s what Current says when he drops something or falls over things. This skirt is driving me mad.” Vicky preferred to wear leggings, which were far more suitable for scrambling over gutters and climbing rooftops. However she couldn’t use that excuse now that they lived in a nice little cottage, provided for by the Nilkens and protected by the Diamonds. To please Yvonne, Vicky agreed to wear a skirt for Lucky’s visit but how was she to know the thing would be so cumbersome? She regretted it already. She was constantly tripping over herself in her attempts to stride along at her usual pace.

“It looks very nice on you,” Susan said.

“But I can’t walk in it,” Vicky complained as she shuffled behind Susan. “Your skirt is a much better length, and it’s much looser. Why did Yvonne have to make me such a tight one?”

Susan laughed. “It was all the rage in Lowdar before we left, that’s why.”

Vicky continued to mutter complaints as she struggled to catch up with Susan, and she was more than a dozen paces behind when her sister vanished.

Vicky halted in surprise. “Susan?”

The air shimmered, and before she knew what was happening, a think opaque substance engulfed her and the world around her disappeared. She was encased in a bubble, large enough that she had to stretch her arms to touch the sides, which felt tough and rubbery, though it yielded a little under the pressure of her fingers.

“Yuk!” Vicky said, at the gooey texture. “Susan? Lucky? Charlie? Help! Is anyone there? Can anyone hear me? HELP!”

Her voice was deadened, as though she was inside a giant rubber ball. Maybe no one could see her either. Panic forced its way up from the pit of her stomach, she felt she had been buried alive. How long would she be stuck inside the sphere?

“Let me out! Help! Help!” Vicky thumped her fists against the bubble. It rocked under the force of the blow. Terrified that she would be pitched forward out of control, Vicky stopped moving.

The giant bubble, or whatever it was, stabilised and Vicky breathed more easily.

All right. No sudden movements.

She had no idea what strange thing had attacked her. Queen Rose, Vicky’s first suspect, had been banished from Nivram for a thousand years. Had some horrible monster from the Great

Forest burst through the mountain pass and found her? It was probably going to drag her back to its lair among the trees and slowly devour her…

"No," Vicky said aloud. "Stop thinking like that. Where it came from doesn't matter right now. How to get out, that's what matters here. Think, Vicky, think!"

Her telescope.

Instantly her fear of suffocation faded when she took out her telescope, a silver rod of hope. She held it to her eye instinctively, and wasn't surprised when the opaque substance cleared, revealing grassy slopes and blue sky above. Some distance ahead, four small cloaked figures pushed a large spherical shape up the lower slopes towards the Little Hills and the border with Paul's land. A splash of blue, like the colour of Susan's dress, was visible within the other bubble. Of course! Someone was after Susan's flute.

She didn't recognise the four creatures taking her sister away. Not Nilkens, Vicky was sure of that, and not human either. She tapped the wall of the bubble lightly with her telescope. Nothing happened. She tried it again, harder, and the sphere yielded slightly, but no matter how hard she hit it, the skin did not break.

A check through her telescope showed the other sphere had reached the rocks and boulders of the Little Hills. Soon it would be out of sight. Which meant there was only one thing for Vicky to do.

Follow it.

"Don't worry, Susan," Vicky said, although it was impossible for her sister to hear. "We're coming after you." It was silly to say *we* when it was just her, but it made Vicky feel better.

Vicky placed her hands straight ahead of her, resting against the bubble's skin. Her flesh crawled at its touch, but she gave it a little push as she stepped forward.

The giant ball, with Vicky inside, rolled forward.

Vicky tried not to get too excited. After all, she couldn't see a thing, she reminded herself, taking another step.

The bubble rolled on.

She took another quick peek through her telescope in time to see Susan's sphere disappear over a ridge.

"Thistles!" Vicky muttered. She'd never catch up. At a loss of what to do next, she rested the telescope against the wall.

The bubble moved smoothly across the grass.

Keeping one end of her telescope pressed to the bubble, and her eye against the other, Vicky stepped forward. The sphere glided across the ground. Keeping her balance became more difficult once she left the smooth turf for the rougher terrain of the lower slopes. If her hand slipped, the telescope lost contact with the bubble and it stopped moving. Soon her arm ached, and only the thought of Susan's predicament kept her going. Eventually she gained the ridge where last she had seen Susan. Ahead, the ground fell and then rose again in a series of ridges stretching towards a distant horizon. Susan had vanished from sight, so Vicky pressed on.

As long as she kept her telescope pressed against its skin, the sphere rolled faster. All she had to do was keep her balance. After a while, she stopped looking out, and left it to her magical telescope to find a safe path.

After several hours passed, Vicky regretted her impulsiveness. She should have gone straight for the Rock of Diamonds and told Lucky. Now she could end up following the other sphere for days, weeks even, without reaching Susan. In the meantime, she would slowly starve to death inside the sphere. Or die of thirst. Or, even worse—Vicky felt sick at the idea—suppose the air ran out? She would quickly suffocate.

This horrible thought made her stop, but the sphere rolled on and she had to walk with it or fall over. She looked through the telescope and instantly hope revived. She was cresting a hill and ahead, on the next summit was a large grey ball, which hovered momentarily before disappearing from view.

Susan had crossed into the Kingdom of Kyle. Vicky kept looking through her telescope as the sphere passed into the final depression and ascended the last ridge. Ahead was a blackened valley, shrouded in shadow, with no sign of Susan or her captors.

Vicky, reluctant to go any further, stopped in her tracks, but the sphere continued to roll. Vicky lost her footing and fell backwards, dropping the telescope. The sphere rolled forward and plunged down the treacherous slope at an ever-increasing speed until it dropped down into darkness.

Chapter Two

THE KING GETS ANGRY



Lucky and her father were in the outer chamber of the Rock of Diamonds. The King of the Diamonds was shorter and broader than his daughter. At the moment splinters of light shot out from every facet of the king, breaking into a rainbow of colours as they hit the chamber walls.

“We haven’t had a Diamond wedding in centuries,” he said. “Considering it’s my daughter who is involved, I insist it is done the traditional way, in the Prism antechamber.”

“Will you allow the children attend it there?” Lucky remained stationery while her father rotated and fumed.

“Of course not,” the king roared. “It’s impossible.”

“Then we’ll have to hold the ceremony here in the outer cavern.”

“But look at it! It’s so dingy.” The colours of the king’s ire separated into indigos, reds, and oranges before drifting to the ground. So much light shot out of him that the roof of the cavern, with its hundreds of Diamonds resting on the ceiling like a star-filled sky, were almost unnoticeable. They sang softly.

“Simple. Dignified. Exactly what I’m looking for.” Lucky paused. “What was that?”

“Nothing.”

The singing stopped. Lucky glanced towards the entrance of the Rock; a small archway filled with daylight. Something was wrong. Lucky hurried towards the entrance, her father grumbling as he followed.

The arch of light stretched taller as Lucky approached, and a few Diamonds stood before it, gazing upwards. One of these moved to meet Lucky. Both his voice and body shook as he spoke.

“The entrance is sealed.”

Lucky glanced sharply at him and then at the arch. Through it she could see the blue sky with tendrils of cloud, Crocodile Lake, and the surrounding countryside below.

The same view greeted her every day.

Yet there was something different about it, as if the picture was slightly out of focus.

She moved forward and immediately an unseen substance blocked her exit. She pressed a little harder, it yielded for a moment but then held firm.

"What is it, Lucky?" The king peered at her. "An invisible barrier?"

"Yes, Father." Lucky turned to the Diamonds standing close by. "Shimmer, check all the other exits to the sky." He nodded and sped away. "Someone fetch Dulstar. We need his knowledge."

"Preposterous," the king said. "I won't stand for it."

"Wait," Lucky said. Her father was impetuous. "We need to know exactly what we're dealing with before we take action."

The king turned a deep indigo.

"This," he said, "is my domain. *No-one* may attack it."

"It looks like Thulian magic," Lucky said thoughtfully. "As far as I can recall, the Thulians built safeguards and traps into their enchantments, though I cannot remember exactly what. But Dulstar probably will…"

"Dulstar!" The king snorted. "I'm not waiting while he trawls through a few centuries of dusty old histories."

He turned to the archway and before Lucky could stop him, a bolt of light flashed from the king and hit the invisible barrier with a forceful crack. The view trembled briefly, before a bullet of light flashed back from it directly into the king.

Lucky saw her father fall to the ground, his light extinguished, leaving only a pale green opalescence to illuminate his form. She dropped to the ground beside him.

"He's still alive." Relief saturated her voice. "Quickly! Take him to the healing room. Call as many as you can to help us bring him back."

One of the shocked Diamonds stammered. "How could anything hurt the king? Surely Thulian magic isn't that strong?"

"His own magic did this." Too late Lucky remembered the extra features that the Thulians liked to add to their spells. "The barrier reflected back most of his charge."

As they carried the unconscious king away the healing chamber, Lucky wished she had borrowed Susan's flute earlier that day. All her powers might not be enough to save her father from his own spell.