Chapter 1

Long, long ago, when trolls lurked in deep dark forests and ogres grumbled and mumbled beyond the distant hills, there was a small and ordinary village called Guttersbury. The villagers were ordinary too, and Aggie Lumpett, the only daughter of the road sweeper, was just as ordinary as anyone else … until her tenth birthday. On this particular birthday, Aggie’s father gave her a book of fairy tales. By her eleventh birthday she knew every single one by heart, and by her twelfth birthday she had decided what to do with her life. She was going to marry a prince and live happily ever after.

By her sixteenth birthday Aggie had realised this was unlikely to happen – princes did not come to Guttersbury looking for their brides. She gave up walking up and down the high street in her best white nightgown, read her stories all over again, and changed her plans. What she needed was a hero, a hero who would go adventuring and bring back everything necessary for Happily Ever After and Glorious Luxury. And, as she had seen no heroes wandering around Guttersbury in all her sixteen years, she would have to arrange this for herself. What she needed was the seventh son of a seventh son. The book said the seventh son of a seventh son was ALWAYS a hero; all Aggie had to do was find one.

Aggie Lumpett was a determined girl. She walked from village to village and farm to farm, and at last she found Garf Onion. Garf was the seventh son of a pig farmer and all he really cared about was pigs, but Aggie pursued him with such enthusiasm that they were married on her eighteenth birthday. They set up home in Pigsticking Farm, and many years later their seventh son arrived. Aggie was over the moon; at last she was the proud mother of the seventh son of a seventh son.

“He’s going to be a hero,” she announced, “so we’re going to call him Magnifico.” Garf Onion shrugged and went back to his pigs, leaving Aggie to begin the hero’s training. She was mildly inconvenienced by the arrival of an eighth son a year later, but she put his cradle in the barn and told Yurt, the oldest boy, to look after him.

“Magnifico needs me,” she explained. “He’s going to go adventuring one day and bring back gold and jewels and a princess, and we’re all going to live Happily Ever After in Glorious Luxury.”

“OK, Ma.” Yurt nodded. “What’s the baby’s name?”

Aggie Onion looked blank. “Don’t ask me. I’ve already had to think of seven names. You think of something.”

Yurt studied the baby. “Alfie,” he said, and Alfie Onion it was.