

The DreamRovers

Two families face persecution for their abilities to jump through dreams. Kenna, Walker, and 15-year-old Norma must keep their families united as they strive to find a home where all dreamrovers can live in peace.

Chapter 1:

Tapio leapt from a mountaintop, searching for the dream lady. He landed with catlike grace, then jumped again, soaring over valleys where animals lurked—a herd of deer, griffins, mountain sheep. He paused only long enough to see that the dream lady was not hiding among them before making the next jump. Again and again he leapt, until the mountains stopped and he could go no further.

The world beyond the mountains was hidden in swirling blue mist. The dreamscape. That's what the dream lady had called it. He could wake up right now—but she was out there somewhere, and wouldn't she be proud if he found her on his own? Images appeared in the mist, visible for an instant, and vanishing again. He focused on one of these, a turreted castle, and stepped forward.

Indigo mist filled the world. Tapio clawed his way through, fixed on the castle. At last he pushed through and drifted to the floor of a stone balcony.

He wasn't alone. An old man sat on a cushioned throne, idly petting a griffin-like creature that crouched loyally beside him. His bushy eyebrows went up. "Smallest nit I've seen yet," he said.

Tapio tried to imagine himself taller. It didn't work.

The griffin jumped at him. Its pointed beak dug into his shoulder, and though he felt nothing he screamed at the fear of it. Wake up, he thought. Wake up now. But nothing happened.

"You're some hero, picking on a child."

The dream lady!

Tapio pushed the griffin aside and stood up. There she was, tall and strong, her hair and skirts flowing without wind. Her back was toward him, facing the strange man, protecting him. Tapio relaxed. He was safe now.

"Nits make lice. Easier to squash them when they're small," the man said.

"Your seat is made of honey."

The man suddenly sank through his throne-like chair. He struggled to get up but the sticky substance clung to him, holding him down. "Cursed Dreamrover!" he snarled.

"And your griffin likes honey."

The beast raised its head.

"He won't attack me. He's mine!"

"Of course he won't. But I bet it's not too comfortable getting the honey nipped off you by that beak."

The man gave a terrified yelp as the griffin bounded at him. The dream lady turned her back on him and looked at Tapio. "Rule number one for influencing dreams: make it strange. Dreamers' minds can't resist playing with a strange new idea even if it's unpleasant. Especially if it's unpleasant."

"Is this a dream?" Tapio interrupted.

The dream lady paused. "Too fast, huh? Yes, this is a dream. His dream." She pointed at the man.

"Why can't I wake up?"

She smiled. "You can wake up from your own dreams, huh? That's pretty good for your age. You can't do that here because this isn't your own dream. You'll have to wait until your body wakes up on its own, or jump back into your own dream."

"I want to jump back." He looked out across the balcony but saw nothing but swirling mist.

"All right, come on." She took his arm, and then stepped off of the balcony. They were falling, falling through the blue mist, and Tapio could see nothing, not the castle or the mountains he'd been jumping on, not the strange man or the dream lady either. Then his eyes popped open, and he could feel his thick woolen blanket, the hard floor under his body. He could hear the bustle from the street outside his window, and smell the breakfast Mother was making. Somehow he'd woken up after all. He started to get up, then fell back in surprise. The dream lady was sitting cross-legged on his floor.

"Are you real?" he asked.

"Mostly," she said. "Are you?"

"Of course I'm real!" He peered at the empty sleeping mat where Mama usually slept. "You're the dream lady. Mama said you aren't real."

Her big eyes opened bigger. "What's your name?"

"Tapio. Tapio Filrenna."

Surprise again. "Filrenna," she repeated. "Maremma is your mother? Maremma Filsona?"

"Yep." He thought a moment, then added, "I'm not s'posed to talk to strangers."

She smiled. "I'm not a stranger, am I? I've seem you in dreams so often."

"Oh. Okay." She was great fun in dreams. She liked to play with him, to shape his own dreams into something new and interesting, not boring like most grown-ups.

"I like 'dream lady', but if you like you can call me Kenna. I'm a dreamrover. You ever hear of those?"

He shook his head.

"I thought not. It means I can..."

"That's enough!"

Mama appeared in the doorway. Her eyes were flashing like when Tapio did something wrong, but they weren't aimed at him. The dream lady stepped back. "I thought Tapio looked familiar," she said.

"I don't know which is worse, that you'd corrupt my son or that you'd haunt strange children without even knowing..."

"I wasn't haunting! Believe me, you'd know if I gave him nightmares."

Mama's lips hardened into a straight line. Tapio stared from one woman to another. Both were so strong. Who would back down first?

"You're a Rover. What are you doing hiding it from your son? He jumped into Fenton Filketo's dream on his own. He's lucky I stumbled onto him."

Mother gasped. Tapio thought he'd heard the name Fenton before. If so, it hadn't been good. "You've been training him! No one can jump without training."

"Well..."

"I don't want him trained! Do you know what people around here do to Dreamrovers? They won't hurt us if they don't know. Being a rover isn't illegal, just roving about in other people's dreams. And that's a perfectly logical law, I say."

"I don't..."

"Get out."

"I..."

"Get out!"

Kenna's huge eyes blinked. She took a small backward step, then another, then hurried forward, squeezing past Mama into the cabin. The front door slammed. Mama took a deep breath and then turned to Tapio. He shrank back. He'd never seen her act that way.

"I'm sorry."

Her voice was husky, shaking. No longer dangerous.

"I like her, Mama."

"I know. I'm sorry. But... Tapio, do you remember Papa?"

Mama talked about Papa sometimes. If Tapio thought hard enough he could picture someone big and strong and always smiling.

“Papa’s gone because he jumped into dreams he shouldn’t have. So is Kenna’s mother. So is my real father. Dreamroving is dangerous business, Tapio. Don’t go into other people’s dreams any more, all right?”

He nodded. Then he asked, “Does that mean I can’t see the dream lady any more?”

Mama let out a low, quiet breath. “Don’t go looking for her,” she said finally. “If she does come see you, I don’t see how we could stop it. But... tell me, all right? And don’t let her tempt you to go wandering anymore.”

“Yes, Mama.” He didn’t know how to jump like that anyway. He supposed she meant to keep out of the blue mist. He could do that. He thought back to the dream lady. At least he could still play with her, if only Mama didn’t scare her away.