

# GROWS THAT WAY

by Susan Ketchen

## Chapter One

Logan Losino is walking beside me. He's wearing his goofy knit cap pulled down over his ears, even though the sun is shining and we won't have snow for at least another month.

We're on our way to school. So why aren't I riding my bike?

My horse Brooklyn is walking behind us. I can feel his warm breath on the back of my neck as though he's looking for an opportunity to sneak between me and Logan, but we're walking so close together this isn't going to happen.

I'm wondering where I can put Brooklyn while I'm in class all day and whether I could tie him to my locker, and that's when I realize I must be dreaming—lucid dreaming, my specialty.

In lucid dreams I am in control and can do anything I want, which makes them different from my regular dreams, and from my regular life come to think of it. In lucid dreams I could probably even fly but usually I dream about riding horses. When I was younger, meaning a couple of months ago, these dreams were less realistic, sometimes even including a unicorn, but I've outgrown that sort of thing now. Still, I have no idea why I'm dreaming about Logan Losino.

I feel his fingers fumbling for mine, and then we're holding hands.

Did I want that?

I look up at Logan. He's grown. I decide to make myself the same height as him, something that will never happen in the real world because I have Turner Syndrome and I will always be a shrimp. I suppose I could make Logan shorter instead of making me taller, but that doesn't seem fair. And it's fun to be the height of a normal human being for a change. It's almost like walking on stilts.

Logan smiles at me through his mustache. Mustache? When did Logan grow a mustache? All I remember him having is a faint line of fuzz. I don't even like mustaches. My dad grew one last summer and I made him shave it off because he looked like Hitler and then his upper lip looked diseased because it wasn't tanned like the rest of his face.

“I like your beard,” says Logan.

I have a beard? My free hand flies to my face. I do have a beard. It’s soft and furry under my fingers. Great. More hair. I already have extra due to my low hair-line at the back of my head, but at least that’s hidden, and besides I like to think of it as my mane so I don’t mind it too much. Face hair would be way different. I feel kind of panicky, but then I notice that Logan really does like my beard, and he’s acting as though it’s normal for a girl to have a beard. So I guess it’s okay. And it’s only a dream. At least I’m pretty sure it’s a dream.

Then I see that Logan Losino is leaning towards me and his lips are puckered as though he’s going to kiss me and just in time Brooklyn sticks his great long head in between us so I guess Logan kisses him instead, and I feel an uncomfortable mish-mash of relief and disappointment at the same time. I hate feeling confused. It’s how I feel a lot of the time when I’m awake, so I start thinking that maybe I’m not in a dream at all, and that Brooklyn will be running loose on the school grounds while I’m inside being ridiculed for my beard.

And I feel so upset that I wake up. And it was only a dream. I stroke my cheek to be sure. Skin. Soft plain skin. Thank goodness.

Dad is rushing out the door when I arrive at the breakfast table. He’s late as usual but throws me a kiss.

Mom is standing at the counter quietly sipping a coffee. She’s still in her dressing gown.

“You okay, Mom? Not going to work today?”

“I’m taking a mental health day,” says Mom. “It’s important for psychotherapy professionals to model good self-care.”

“And it’s different from skipping out?” I’m not trying to be a smart-aleck. Really, I’d like to know the difference between skipping out and taking some mental health time. But Mom doesn’t hear it that way.

She frowns at me. “Of course I’m not skipping out. That would be irresponsible.”

“Okay, Mom.” I pour some Shreddies into my bowl and add milk until they start to float.

I hear the garage door opening, and the faint purr as Dad starts his car, followed by a lot of crashing grinding noise. Mom spills coffee on the counter as she puts down her mug. And I remember I was in a hurry last night and didn’t put my bike away in its designated parking spot beside our paper recycling bin. I was going to move it after dinner and I forgot.

“Oh no,” I say. I want to slide under the breakfast table. I want this to be a dream, something that I can change, or something that won’t be real when I wake up. I need my bike desperately, not so much for riding to school as for riding to the boarding stable where I keep Brooklyn.

Dad flings open the back door and fastens his eyes on me immediately even though I’ve leaned in behind the cereal box.

“You left your bike behind the Explorer!” he yells.

“You didn’t look?” Mom asks him. “You didn’t check your mirrors?”

The fire-breathing dragon turns in her direction. "I will not be criticized by someone whose car can basically park itself." My mom has a new Prius. Dad's right, it has a computer that can take over when you're parking, though Mom is afraid to use it, she says she doesn't like giving up control to a car.

"But Dad," I say, "Mom never uses the computer, she always parks manually."

"So wasn't that a total waste of money!" Dad yells at Mom.

Maybe I can slink off to my room without anyone noticing. I ease my butt off the chair.

"There's no need to raise your voice, Tony. That never solves anything," says Mom. She picks up her mug and takes a sip of coffee as though nothing major is wrong. Well, maybe she's right. No one's died. At least not yet. Though Dad looks like he's brewing an aneurism. Maybe Mom's right, and the best thing to do is to stay calm. This is what Kansas always tells me too, when I'm out at the barn. I settle my seat bones back on the chair, square my shoulders and lift my head as though there's a line pulling it up to the sky, just like how I ride: balanced and ready for anything.

"Don't you expect me to drive her to school now," says Dad, stabbing a finger in Mom's direction. "I'm late as it is, and it's about time she started to suffer the consequences of her behaviour."

This is odd. He's sounding more like Mom. The psycho-babble must be contagious. What would be more normal would be for Dad to be complaining about the cost of fixing what used to be a perfectly good bike.

"I can drive her," says Mom. "I'm not going in to work today. I'm taking a mental health day."

"She's modeling good self-care," I tell Dad, hoping he'll pick up the hint and do some deep breathing before his own head explodes.

Dad looks back and forth between me and Mom as though he can't decide which of us is the greater enemy. I feel sick when he settles on me, and only barely manage to hold my balanced posture. I stretch my neck taller, and Dad glares at me. He's never done this before, I know he loses his temper but usually it's when the computer seizes up, or because he and Mom are arguing. I've never been the focus, so haven't noticed before how small his eyes become as they sink back into his head, and how his lips get so thin that his mouth disappears, and the only thing left of his face is his great big nose. It's as if he's transformed into a totally different person or some sort of predatory bird with a beak specially designed for tearing apart small animals. I don't know whether to laugh or cry.

He grabs the Shreddies box and flings it at the counter, leaving me totally open to attack. "You will walk to school, Sylvia."

Then instead of pecking me to death, he pivots and slams the door behind him. Through the kitchen window I see my bike airborne before it lands in a tangled heap on the lawn . . . .