

MISS UNICORN

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illustrations by Floor de Goede

pp. 8–20:

To the jury

Ayla has to go to the bathroom three times in a row.
That's because she's nervous.
No – she has to go four times.
Five!

There is a line for the bathroom.
Because *everyone* has to go.
Everyone wants to have one more look in the mirror.
Everyone is afraid of the jury.

The jury for **Miss Unicorn**.
The contest is in two months.
But today the jury will choose who gets to take part.
If you win, you become
Miss Unicorn.
And you get a golden horn.
That **glitters** and **shimmers** and **shines**.

If you win, you get your hair braided every day.
Every day you get your tail dyed.
You get to sing songs and do dances on TV.
And then of course you get to sign your hoofpri...

AYLA LAYLA TO THE JURY!

Ayla is next!
First her heart leaps,
and then she does.
But wait – Grandma is saying something,

[**Text in the illustrations:**

Next to illustration: Grandma Malika (Ayla lives with her)
Balloon (Grandma): Knock their socks off!]

and so is the nice girl sitting next to her.

[**Text in the illustrations:**

Next to illustration: Sweetiepie

Balloon (Sweetiepie): Ooooh, I wish you soooo much luck!

Balloon (Goat): Ayla Layla, hurry up!]

Before the jury

Ayla opens the door.

She enters the room.

She shuts the door behind her.

And she looks up.

There sit the three members of the jury.

The woman in the middle is Vaca Rootbeet.

She knows her from TV.

Ayla swallows.

Everyone on the jury is big.

And Ayla is small.

But Grandma said:

“Knock their socks off.”

What she meant was:

Sing as beautifully as you can.

So Ayla takes a deep breath

and sings:

“La la la.

Life is a ...”

“STOP!”

cries the jury.

Ayla stops.

But she was just getting started!

Did she do something wrong?

“Should I ...” she says.

“NO,” cries the jury.

“But ...” says Ayla.

“THANKS,” cries the jury.

“Uh ...” says Ayla.

“BYE,” says the jury.

So Ayla turns around.
She opens the door.
She leaves the room.
And she shuts the door behind her.

[**Text in the illustrations:**

Balloon (Grandma): What? Back already? You didn't even get to finish your song?

Balloons (Sweetiepie):
That's a good sign!
They saw what you can do right away!

Ooooh, how special!

Balloon (Goat):
Results by email in two weeks.
Thanks for coming.

Next!]

Sweetiepie

Now Ayla has to wait two weeks.
That's when she hears if she can take part in the contest.
But in any case, she got to meet Sweetiepie.
Sweetiepie, the pretty little girl horse who sat next to her.
And who calls almost every day!

[**Text in the illustrations:**

Balloons (Sweetiepie):

Exciting, huh? I think it's soooo exciting! Do you think it's soooo exciting too?!

I had to dance for the jury for ten whole minutes, and then whinny for a really long time. Next I had to kneel down and bow.

So I don't think they were sure, and that's why I won't be allowed to take part.

You made it for suuuure. With your voice! And your walk! And your eyelashes! I wish I had your eyelashes!

Do you have lots of girlfriends? Do you think you might like another one?

Shall we...

if you want...

maybe...

play together sometime?]

They decide to meet up.
At Sweetiepie's house.
Because she has a unicorn room.

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And they meet up lots more after that.
In the park.
At the river.
In the dunes.

One day they are prancing along.
But then they hear *ping*.
They have to stop, because Sweetiepie wants to check her iPony.

[Text in the illustrations:

Balloons (Sweetiepie):

I got an email!

From the jury!

I made it!

WHINNY-WAHOO!

WHINNY-YIPPEE!

You need to run home and check, too.

Then we can have a unicorn party to celebrate!]

But there won't be a unicorn party.
Yes, Ayla also got an email.
Grandma had already read it.

[Text in the illustration:

From: jury@missunicorn.yes

To: malika.al.sayida@grandmaofayla.yes;
joaniemother@unicornia.yes;
glittertwo@fab.yes;
fatherhorse@sea.yes

Subject: No

Sorry.
Your child was not chosen.
No Miss Unicorn.
Too bad.

Want to know why?
Log into our site.

Miss Unicorn]

Grandma logs into the site.
And explodes.
Because what does she see?

[Text in the illustrations:

Why can't I take part?
Name: Ayla
Reason: ZEBRA

Balloons (Grandma):

ZEBRA? ZEBRA? WHY?

Is there something wrong with zebras? So can't a zebra become a unicorn?

WHAT A ROTTEN JU...

pp. 32–42:

The others

The next day, Ayla is still sad.
And Grandma is still angry.

The next *next* day, Ayla starts to forget about it a little.
But Grandma is still angry.

Then the next next *next* day, Ayla gets angry too.
Because why can't a zebra be a unicorn?

Grandma and Ayla have another look at the email.
And then they see that it wasn't sent just to Ayla.
It was also sent to other girls.
Grandma says: "I'm going to write to them.
I want to know why they weren't allowed to take part.
And then I'll invite them over."
"Grandma," says Ayla. "Do we have to?"
"Yes," says Grandma. "We do."

Grandma emails.
Grandma calls.
And Grandma bakes an oat cake.
Because a few days later, there will suddenly be five of them.
At Grandma's house.
All of them unicorn-dreamers.
And all of them NO.

[Text in the illustrations:

Why can't I take part?
Name: Joanie
Reason: PONY, SO TOO SMALL

Why can't I take part?
Name: Tinker/Swing
Reason: BOYS

Why can't I take part?
Name: Meg
Reason: ARE YOU JOKING? WAAAAY TOO SMALL]

At the start of the afternoon, no one says much.
But Grandma brings in the cake.
And mini-cookies for Meg.
So then there is munching.

And suddenly everyone is talking.
About how long a unicorn horn needs to be.
And which color.
About bows and barrettes for your hair.
About the contest.
And about the jury.

[Text in the illustrations:

Balloon (Joanie): I went in. I bowed, and before I could raise my head, they yelled STOP!

Balloon (Tinker): We did six dances, and they even smiled.

Balloon (Swing): Yes, but then all of a sudden they asked: Are you actually girl horses?

Balloon (Tinker): So we said: No

Balloon (Swing): And they instantly said: STOP!

Balloon (Meg): I'M GOING TO BEAT THEM UP!]

Meg is funny.
“Have another cookie,” Grandma tells her.
But Meg frowns, and her forehead wrinkles.
They can't see this,
because it's a very tiny forehead.
“I mean it,” says Meg. “I'm going to beat them up!”
“Who?” Joanie asks.
“That jury!” cries Meg.
“Ha ha,” they all say.
“I MEAN IT!” Meg roars,
making waves in her little fishbowl.

“No hitting allowed,” says Joanie.
“But I'm angry, too!
Why can't we take part?
Because we're smaller than the others.
Because we have stripes.
Because we're boys.”

[Text in the illustrations:

Balloon (Swing): Huh? You're not a boy, are you?

Balloon (Tinker): No, you dork! We're boys]

“She means,” says Ayla, “that we can’t take part because we don’t look like what the jury thinks a unicorn should look like.”

[Text in the illustrations:

Balloon (Swing): I don’t get what she’s saying at all.]

“Simple,” says Joanie.

“This is how the jury thinks:”

“And this is us:”

“So we don’t belong. According to them.”

“But we do!” cries Swing.

“Tinker and I look in the mirror every day.

And we see unicorns!

Our whole life. Right, Tinker?”

He almost starts to cry.

Tinker nods. He almost starts to cry, too.

Then all of them nod.

And all of them almost start to cry.

Okay, so not Meg.

She shouts: “WE’RE GOING TO BEAT THEM UP!”

Grandma says: “You’re right, all of you.

This is wrong and we can’t let it happen.

We have to think of something.”

“FIRST WE’LL BEAT UP THAT VACA!” shouts Meg.

“AND THEN THE REST!”

“No hitting allowed,” says Ayla. “So we won’t do that.

But... we will write a very, very, very angry letter.”

The angry letter

Dear Jury,

We are not allowed to take part.

Because we are a zebra (Ayla), boy horses (Tinker and Swing), small (Joanie), and way too small (Meg).

But there’s nothing we can do about that.

The stripes are not going to go away (Ayla) (and she doesn’t want them to).

We were born boys (Tinker and Swing).

And small is beautiful (Joanie and Meg).

A jury has to be strict.

We get this, of course. Duh!

But why do you also have to be mean?

We are very angry!

Unless we’re allowed to take part after all.

So can we?