

The Fairy Chronicles #41



# Sparrow and Edelweiss's Ghost



J.H. Sweet

7-11  
Age

3-4 Hours  
Reading  
Time

At the end of the summer, Sparrow takes a trip to Germany to visit her pen pal, a winter wren fairy. While there, Winter and Sparrow team up with Emerald, one of the Jewel Fairies. The three are invited to stay at a castle that is rumored to be haunted. Following several mysterious events, the girls discover the ghost of an edelweiss fairy who disappeared over a century ago. Amidst whirlwind visits to Holland, Denmark, and Austria, the fairies somehow find the time to work with a mermaid and an ancient knight to free Edelweiss's spirit and rid the castle of an evil spriggan.

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J.H. Sweet



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## Chapter One

### Summer Send-Off

Although it was a lot of fun, and very relaxing, to hang upside down in the tire swing and watch the sparkling dandelion seeds drift by on this sunny, windy, summer afternoon, Kirsten Hernandez couldn't linger in the oak-tree swing for very long. "I must go inside and pack!" she said excitedly to a passing squirrel. The squirrel nodded his understanding to the upside-down head with a red freckled face and dangling dark brown hair.

Truthfully, she was already nearly fully packed. This was Wednesday, and Kirsten would be leaving on a trip to Germany with her mother early in the morning. Not many eleven-year-olds were able to travel like this, but Kirsten's mother's business often took her overseas. And because this business trip was happening in the summer, Kirsten was very excited to get to go along. Her father wasn't going to be able to make this trip because his work was keeping him in town, at present.

Kirsten's life was exciting in other ways too. In fact, the last three months had been extremely eventful. At the beginning of the summer, Kirsten had discovered that she was a fairy. Her fairy spirit came from a sparrow, and she was called Sparrow by other fairies.

Since finding out about her fairy spirit, Sparrow's life had been quite a bit different than she ever imagined it might be, not only because being a fairy was a lot of fun,

but also because fairies had an important job to do that often made a real difference in the world. Fairies were tasked with the responsibility of protecting nature and fixing serious problems, most commonly problems caused by the mischief of other magical creatures.

By a strange coincidence, Sparrow had already taken an unexpected, secret trip to Europe the previous week. She had gone with Lilac, Amber, and Tea (a rose fairy) on an adventure that took them to all seven continents in one day. However, the fairies had had no time to sightsee or have other fun because they were on a mission to break the *Seven-Continent Curse* in order to free a princess and several others trapped on a mysterious island.

In fairy form, Sparrow's dress and wings were made of tiny, reddish-brown feathers with some buff, gray, and cream ones mixed in. Sparrow carried a fresh dandelion stem for her wand, enchanted not only to perform fairy magic, but also for the petals to stay bright yellow and silky soft. She most often carried her sunny wand on her belt, next to her fairy handbook and a small pouch of pixie dust.

Each fairy was given a special gift, and sometimes multiple ones, relating to her fairy spirit. One of Sparrow's unique fairy gifts was the ability to be inconspicuous. She was often able to fly around unnoticed and slip in and out of places undisturbed. Her gift was similar to the disguise abilities of Madam Chameleon, but was related to psychology, instead of camouflage. (Many people don't even notice sparrows, though they are one of the most common birds in existence.) Sparrow also possessed excellent eyesight, which was a gift common to many bird fairies.

The trip to Germany was especially exciting because Sparrow was going to get to meet her pen pal, Arabella Weber, for the first time. Arabella was a winter wren fairy and was also eleven years old. She preferred to be called Winter, instead of Wren, since there were quite a few wren fairies in her area and she wanted to be able to distinguish herself from the others. Plus, Winter was a really pretty name.

On this special vacation, Sparrow was also looking forward to going with Winter on day trips to places like Holland and Denmark. And when her mother finished with her work, Mrs. Hernandez was planning sightseeing adventures for the two of them in Germany and Austria. Sparrow had recently spent much time poring over books about these countries in anticipation of the many things she hoped to see.

She also thought it was pretty neat to have a passport because not many girls her age got to travel to other countries. Obviously, some of the fairies were able to travel in conjunction with their jobs; but as far as non-magical travel, most of Sparrow's friends didn't get to visit places like Europe.

Sparrow was so excited about the trip that it was hard to calm down. As she sat with her passport in her lap, she tried to scratch out a few leaf messages to her friends. The fairies were all using leaf messages this year, instead of nut messages, due to a shortage of nuts in nature.

*Dear Jasmine,  
Well, I'm off tomorrow, and I'll miss you. But I'll see you again in three weeks.*

*See ya soon,  
Sparrow*

The note sounded kind of lame, and she was thinking twice about sending it when the doorbell rang. Since she knew her mother was busy packing, Sparrow sprang up and zipped down the hallway to answer the door.

Jasmine, Obsidian, and Tea had come to see her off. They had a full grocery bag and a couple of packages with them.

“I was just about to send goodbye messages to you guys,” chirped Sparrow. “Now, I don’t need to.”

“We won’t stay too long,” said Tea, “since you are probably packing. But we brought you a couple of things.”

Mrs. Hernandez had just come from the back of the house to greet the girls.

“We got a little something for you too, Mrs. H,” said Jasmine, handing Sparrow’s mother a small package. The present was a small bottle of perfume and a t-shirt with their hometown logo on it. Mrs. Hernandez thanked the girls and went to resume packing.

Sparrow’s own package contained a t-shirt similar to the one the girls had given to her mother. She also received a large sack of lemon jellybeans and a tiny collectible stuffed animal, one that had been missing from her menagerie and one that she very much wanted.

After squealing with excitement, and hugging each of them, Sparrow led her friends to her room, whereby, they proceeded to help her repack everything, which was just

fine with Sparrow because it was nice to have help in deciding what to take with her.

The grocery sack her friends had brought contained food and sodas for a small send-off party. Since Sparrow wasn't supposed to snack in her room, the girls moved to the kitchen where they enjoyed butterscotch chip cookies, petit fours, and cucumber dill sandwiches. They also drank root beer of the fancy sort (from bottles instead of cans). Mrs. Hernandez joined the girls for a toast at the end of the celebration.

"To a wonderful and exciting trip!" exclaimed Obsidian.

"Here, here!" said Jasmine.

After clinking root beer bottles, and nearly choking on the bubbles from the large gulps of soda, Obsidian, Tea, and Jasmine hugged Sparrow and her mother goodbye and left for their homes.

As her friends were heading out the door, Sparrow suddenly remembered. "They didn't have colored pencils when I went to get school supplies," she told Tea. "Would you get me a box when you go shopping, and I'll pay you when we get back?" (Since school was set to start only two days after their return from Europe, Sparrow and her mom had already shopped for most of her clothes and school supplies.)

"Sure," answered Tea. "No problem."

In whispers, on the front steps, Obsidian told Sparrow, "We'll take notes for you at Fairy Circle this weekend, in case there's anything important going on, and since you won't get to meet Eglantine and Madam Jonquil."



Sparrow was a little sad about not getting to meet the two newest fairies in their region, but she wouldn't have missed the trip with her mother for anything.

After her friends left, Sparrow packed up a bag of the leftover lemon jellybeans to take with her to share with her pen pal. She sighed as she went through her luggage one more time to recheck the list her mom had made of things she *had* to pack. Everything was there, along with a lot of other things that she wanted to take and that would fit into the bags.

Next, she got her camera bag ready. Sparrow loved to take pictures, and the camera had been a present for her last birthday. When everything was set to go, all she had to do was wait, which was the really hard part.

Strangely enough though, Sparrow had no trouble getting to sleep that night, which might have had something to do with how smart her mother and father were in making their daughter spend most of the day weeding the flower bed, skating, swimming at the public pool, and hanging out in the back yard. Since Sparrow was very tired from such a busy day, it was easy to sleep soundly.

Getting up at five in the morning was not much fun for summer, except for today. The shuttle to the airport was due to pick them up in forty-five minutes, so Sparrow hastily watered the plants in her room, then checked the note she was leaving for her dad giving instructions to care for the hanging airplane and ivy plants, and the pot of white butterflies on her dresser. Everything looked in order, so Sparrow quickly donned the clothes she had already laid out the night before, washed her face, and lugged her bags downstairs.

At this point, her mother took charge of her passport, since it was such an important travel item. Then the two hastily ate bowls of cereal and grabbed their pre-packed snack bags from the refrigerator.

After quickly brushing their teeth, they had seven minutes to spare to catch their breath, and hug and kiss Mr. Hernandez goodbye, before the shuttle arrived.

Thirty-five minutes later, they unloaded their gear at the San Antonio airport. Sparrow was a little nervous about flying, and about spending time in airports. Since there was so much in the news about delays, and other travel glitches, she hoped everything would go smoothly.

They had no problems getting through the process and boarding the plane, though everything seemed to take forever. Sparrow was glad that she had brought a mystery novel to read and a book of word search games to work on.

Seventeen hours later, after a stop and change of planes in Chicago, they landed in Germany. Sparrow and her mother were tired, but very happy to have made it to their destination without any serious problems.

## Chapter Two

### Winter and the Haunted Castle

A little car took them from the airport to meet up with Winter so that Sparrow could get settled before her mom set off on her business travels. Sparrow would be staying with Winter for nearly two full weeks, then her mother would be joining her at the end of that time for a few days of sightseeing before they returned home.

Sparrow had exchanged pictures with Winter, but the two had never met. She was both excited and nervous as the car pulled into a gravelly lane and made its way up to a quaint, two-story stone house.

Upon meeting, the two pen pals quickly felt very comfortable with each other, as is the case with many girls their age, no matter what countries they live in. And because Sparrow and Winter already knew so much about one another from their letters, the girls right away felt like old friends. They shared jellybeans as they talked. It seemed apple strudel was the favorite jellybean flavor of fairies in Germany.

Winter and her family spoke three languages—German, Dutch, and English. However, since Sparrow and her mom only knew English and Spanish, the group conversed in English most of the time.

Sparrow's mom was able to stay for lunch but had to leave soon after because she needed to catch an afternoon train. After making sure that both Sparrow and Mrs. Weber

had her phone number in case of emergencies, Mrs. Hernandez kissed her daughter goodbye and left for her business travels.

After her mother left, Sparrow followed Winter to her room so the two could talk about fairy things without being overheard. As they closed the door, the girls *popped* into fairy form and flew to sit on Winter's bed. Winter's wings whirred somewhat during flight, which was a different noise than the swishing sounds Sparrow's wings made.

In fairy form, Winter wore a dress of tiny, brown and gray, downy feathers; and she had large feathery wings. She also wore a soft, gray-feathered headband and silky brown slippers adorned with plumes of wren feathers. Wrens were generally loud birds, compared to their size, and because of this, Winter had the fairy gift of the power to command attention. She also had many musical abilities because wrens fell into the category of songbirds. However, the beautiful, springlike, trilling quality of wrens' voices could also be loud and distracting on occasion, so these musical qualities were a gift of distraction as well as lyricism. Wrens were also known as cave dwellers because they tended to hide in caves and crevices, so Winter had the additional gift of being able to evade and hide from pursuers. Even in regular girl form, she had never lost a game of *Hide and Seek*. Winter had curly dark hair; and the soft green stem of her chicory wand was tipped with a bright, bluish-purple flower that perfectly matched her sparkling eyes.

Winter's bedroom was enormous. She had inherited it from her brother when he left for university last year. However, the girls would not even be staying in the large

room because Winter had a very big surprise planned for her friend. Mrs. Weber had already let Mrs. Hernandez in on the exciting secret. The girls were going to stay at a nearby castle for Sparrow's visit. And that wasn't even the most exciting part of the surprise: Blumenthal Castle was rumored to be haunted.

Winter's grandfather, who had once worked for Josef Blumenthal as caretaker and gardener, had arranged the stay at the castle. Grandfather Weber currently resided in a small cottage on the castle grounds. The current owner of the castle, William Blumenthal, son of Josef, considered Winter's grandfather to be a good friend, as well as a permanent Blumenthal Castle fixture; and he welcomed Mr. Weber's visitors, even for fairly long stays such as the one the girls were planning. And because Grandfather Weber's cottage was really too small for overnight guests, the visitors would naturally have to stay in the castle.

Winter didn't live far from her grandfather; and her parents often encouraged her to spend a lot of time with him, especially in the summer. This gave Winter's parents an opportunity to get a lot done, without any kids around.

Winter had stayed with friends in Castle Blumenthal several times before when her grandfather had arranged it. And each time on her previous visits, she had heard strange noises. As she related this information to her friend, Sparrow's dark eyes grew nearly as large as saucers. However, she wasn't frightened. The prospect of spending nearly two weeks in a mysterious, haunted castle was thrilling!

When Winter's grandfather picked up the girls, and their bags, in his small orange car, he first took them to his

cottage. While they were having milk and gingerbread cookies, Grandfather Weber told Sparrow, “You know, a long time ago, a young girl who looked a lot like you came to stay in the castle. Her name was Sophie Hahn. She had dark hair, about your length, dark eyes, and was about your height. She was around your age too.” He nodded and stroked his whiskers as he went on. “A hundred and fifty years ago, yes. And it was a summer much like this one, hot and dry.” The nodding turned to shaking as Grandfather Weber added, “She just disappeared one night without a trace.”

Sparrow was startled by this statement, but Winter just smiled as her grandfather finished the story with, “No one ever found out what happened to her, and they say her spirit still wanders the halls of the castle.”

Before the girls, and their bags, were taken up to the castle, Grandfather Weber gave some small instructions. “Now you are pretty much free to wander the whole castle, with one exception. Mr. Blumenthal lives and works in the East Wing, so that part of his home is off limits. He also spends some of his time in the Summer House on the East Lawn, so avoid that too.”

The girls solemnly nodded their understanding. Then, lugging their heavy suitcases, they accompanied Grandfather Weber over the lawns, across a small moat bridge, and up the stone steps leading to the West Wing where they would be staying.

Blumenthal Castle was not one of those huge castles, of the sort that might have been used to house high royalty. It was more of a baron or knight-sized structure. However, the castle was very beautiful and fanciful. The outer

stonework was a kind of pale golden color, and was very sculpted and intricate. The castle looked to be about five stories high and had many interestingly-shaped windows, turrets, and balconies.

Inside, the stone walls were a mixture of pale gray and gold. The furniture seemed giant to Sparrow, who was used to normal-sized house furniture. Many of the wooden tables and chairs were elaborately carved, and several of the stone tables looked like marble. Along one side of the main hallway in the West Wing, dark green stone pedestals sat beneath each window, almost as though they were standing guard. Smooth, speckled, stoneware pots were displayed on top of several of these green, chest-high columns. Winter's grandfather explained that the pedestals were made of malachite and were very valuable. The ceilings were so high, their voices echoed loudly, especially Winter's, since she was somewhat loud by nature anyway.

The girls were staying on the second floor. By the time they reached the stairway, their arms were getting somewhat tired from their load, so they shifted the bags to make it up the stairs and down another long hallway. As they traveled along, Sparrow marveled at the numerous paintings and fancy rugs hung on the walls.

The bedroom was gigantic. Sparrow thought it was probably about fifteen times the size of her room at home, and at least five times that of Winter's. Three enormous beds placed on different walls occupied the room. Each had a matching vanity table, along with a wooden dresser that was taller than the girls. Winter's grandfather explained that a set of Blumenthal triplets used to live in

the castle, and when the three girls were very young, they shared this room.

Before unpacking, Grandfather Weber took Winter and Sparrow on a tour, even though Winter pretty much already knew her way around. However, the tour and some instructions were most welcome by Sparrow because she had never stayed anyplace that didn't have electricity. The castle had been modernized with fairly up-to-date plumbing, but no electricity had ever been installed. Instead, the girls would be using candles and oil lamps for light during their stay.

The bathroom they would be sharing was down the hall from their room. Mrs. Hofstedter, the housekeeper for the West Wing, was just coming out of the bathroom having deposited fresh towels in the cabinets for the guests. She didn't smile, but nodded to the girls instead. The tall housekeeper's dark blond hair was pulled back into a tight bun, and she wore a straight black dress and shoes. She had thin lips and bright spots of pink color high on her sharp cheekbones. Sparrow thought she looked very strict, and she made up her mind right away not to cause Mrs. Hofstedter any extra bother during their visit.

During their stay, the girls would mostly be fending for themselves as far as food, so the tour of the kitchen on the ground floor was pretty important. There was an old icebox, the kind that used a block of real ice to cool the food since there was no electricity, and a huge wood-burning stove. The wooden icebox was filled with milk, cheese, lunchmeats, spreads, and fruit. A large pantry at the other end of the roomy kitchen was filled with foods that didn't need refrigeration.



While the girls and Grandfather Weber were examining the food stores, Mr. Blumenthal came into the kitchen for a snack. The owner of the castle was a very tall man with reddish-brown hair, and he was dressed in tan slacks and a short-sleeved blue shirt. However, he didn't stay for long. After saying hello to Winter and Grandfather Weber, and introducing himself to Sparrow, Mr. Blumenthal left the kitchen with an apple and a plate piled high with cheese, cookies, and green grapes.

As Grandfather Weber said goodbye to the girls to head back to his cottage, Winter and Sparrow helped themselves to some cookies and grapes to take with them back to the triplets' bedroom.

After unpacking, and climbing a stepstool to reach Sparrow's bed, the girls snacked on their cookies and grapes while talking. At one point, Sparrow brought up what Grandfather Weber had said about the young girl who disappeared. The story had spooked her a little because of what Winter had said about hearing noises.

Winter smiled as she told Sparrow, "Don't worry, my grandfather always tells children that story because he likes to scare them a little."

The girls spent the rest of the afternoon and evening exploring the floors and rooms of the castle, being careful to stay away from the East Wing. Even though the rooms and furniture were large and sturdy, a lot of things in the castle seemed to creak and groan. Some of the outer staircases were made of wood and were particularly creaky. Chairs, dressers, bookshelves, wardrobes, mirrors, and even fireplaces also seemed to make a lot of noise for some reason.

Shortly after dark, the fairies went downstairs by lamplight and ate dinner together in the kitchen, sandwiches and fruit, before going back up to their bedroom. A huge wardrobe in the bedroom was completely filled with old board games and small toys such as skipping ropes and spinning tops. There were even two jigsaw puzzles in wooden boxes on one of the higher shelves. The girls eyed the puzzles somewhat fretfully, but didn't worry too long about them. As long as the jigsaw puzzle boxes remained unopened in the presence of the fairies, the girls could not get trapped in them.

Both Sparrow and Winter were too tired to play games and instead chose to read for a while before bedtime. After brushing their teeth and changing into their pajamas, they read for nearly an hour by lamplight and candlelight before saying goodnight.

Sparrow had never slept in such an enormous bed and almost felt lost in it at first, so she decided to sleep near the edge to feel less small. This made her more comfortable in the strange, creaky, echoing castle, and she was able to relax. However, just as she was drifting off to sleep, she had a terrible thought; and it bothered her so much, she just had to share it with her friend. She relit her bedside candle and called to Winter. "Hey, what if the girl who disappeared here was really a fairy, and she got trapped in one of the jigsaw puzzles in the wardrobe?"

Winter sat up and lit her candle too. Climbing out of the depths of her bed, she crossed the room to join Sparrow on her bed. "That's an interesting thought," Winter said. "But could those puzzles be a hundred and fifty years old? Did they even have jigsaw puzzles back then?"

“I don’t know,” answered Sparrow. After a pause, she said, “You’re probably right. Those puzzles likely aren’t that old.”

“We could talk to Madam Sage about it tomorrow,” suggested Winter. (Madam Sage was Winter’s mentor and was planning to take the girls on a sightseeing trip early in the morning.)

“Good idea,” said Sparrow. Even though she was fairly certain that Winter was right about the age of the puzzles, it would be nice to have an older fairy’s opinion about the idea.

Then both girls said goodnight, and after blowing out their candles, fell quickly asleep.

## Chapter Three

### Miniatures and Signs

Mrs. Hofstedter woke them early in the morning, just before dawn. She simply entered the room and announced, “Time to get up and get going. You need to get washed up, dressed, and breakfasted because Mrs. Zimmermann will be here in one hour.”

Beatrix Zimmermann was actually Madam Sage. Mrs. Hofstedter had been apprised of the girls’ planned activities during their stay. And she was not just the head housekeeper of the castle, she was pretty much the boss of anyone staying there, so she would be giving plenty of instructions if she saw fit.

The early morning wake-up call was much appreciated by the fairies, because they wouldn’t have wanted to keep Madam Sage waiting. The girls sprang up out of bed, grabbed their bathrobes, and ran down the hall. The large bathroom had more than one tub, so the girls were able to get bathed quickly. Then they rushed back to the room to get dressed. Less than thirty minutes after rising, they were in the kitchen having eggs and German apple pancakes under the approving eye of the castle housekeeper. She was pleased that the girls hadn’t dawdled. The castle only had a cook on weekends, and German apple pancakes were not much good cold. Plus, Mrs. Hofstedter wouldn’t have wanted to have to entertain Mrs. Zimmermann, amongst her other duties, if the girls had taken their time in getting ready to go.

After breakfast, and thanking the cook for such a wonderful meal, Sparrow and Winter rushed back upstairs to brush their teeth and grab their cameras and belt pouches. Belt pouches were really better than purses for travelers, and Sparrow never much liked carrying a purse anyway.

Madam Sage arrived within two minutes of the girls coming back downstairs. The fairy mentor was nearly as tall as the housekeeper; and she had short, curly, very blond hair.

In fairy form, Madam Sage wore a flowing, pale green dress with light purple flowers nestled among the leaves; and she had tiny, frosty-green wings. However, Madam Sage wouldn't be taking fairy form during the sightseeing trip, so for the time being, Sparrow could only imagine what she might look like as a fairy.

Since the sage herb was part of the mint family, and was grown for a variety of uses including kitchen, ornamental, and medicinal, Madam Sage had a multitude of fairy gifts involving things like expert gourmet cooking, distraction of others with her beauty, and healing abilities. And since sage was nearly as fragrant as mint, she also had the gift of intoxication, which could occasionally lure others into something like a mild trance. Madam Sage carried a small brown kiwi feather for her wand.

The ladies walked about a quarter of a mile to a bus stop to begin their sightseeing trip. Sparrow was very excited because they were going to Holland for the day. While they were waiting for the bus, Winter and Madam Sage explained that Holland was also called the Netherlands. Sparrow thought both names sounded very

fanciful and fairylike, and she couldn't decide which one she liked better.

As soon as they boarded the bus, Winter and Sparrow quietly asked Madam Sage about the possibility that the young girl who disappeared in the castle may have been a fairy who got trapped in one of the jigsaw puzzles.

Madam Sage thought the theory was interesting, but told them, "Well, I don't know how far back jigsaw puzzles go, but I doubt those in the wardrobe are all that old because jigsaw puzzles were not very common in this part of Germany even when I was growing up."

This information was reassuring to Sparrow and Winter. However, Madam Sage did add, "Even with the slightest chance that the puzzles are that old, if the girl was a fairy and became trapped, there wouldn't be anything now that we could do to help her because fairies age normally even when trapped in puzzles. So, certainly, she has passed on."

The girls thought this made sense, and they were both hopeful that this was not how Sophie had met her end.

They changed busses once to reach their destination of Scheveningen, which was home to a magical place called Madurodam. Madurodam was magical because it was an entire miniature Dutch city.

As soon as they arrived, because the bus trip had been fairly long, they ate a quick lunch. Even though lunch in another country was a lot of fun, they rushed to finish because there was going to be so much to see in the miniature city.

As they entered Madurodam, Sparrow could barely breathe. Though she loved dollhouses and model train

dioramas, and had seen quite a few of them over the years, she had never seen anything like this.

The city was enormous and contained everything that a real Dutch city would have. Most of the colorful buildings were around waist and chest high, and all of the landscaping was real. The tiny trees, shrubs, and gardens were all live plants, though Sparrow was not familiar with these particular plants, chosen especially for the miniature city to look just right with the scale of the model buildings and people.

The girls and Madam Sage loved viewing the entire town, but they were especially fascinated by two things, which quickly became their favorites. Outside of an enormous church, a huge wedding was in progress. Sparrow took ten pictures of the beautiful wedding participants and the church. Their second favorite thing was the fireboat. There was a pond in Madurodam, representing a harbor; and every hour, a fireboat would take off from a dock and go out to spray water on another boat that had caught fire. The show was so much fun!

Her mind all atwirl at the fancy of it, Sparrow was still having a little trouble breathing because she was so taken with this perfect little fairy haven. She thought it would be really cool to visit at night, in fairy form, when no one else was around, and *really* tour all of the buildings, and take walks in the gardens and parks.

At one point, Sparrow noticed several people tending to one of the gardens with tiny scissors and spoons. They were pruning a few bushes and planting a few more. Madam Sage explained that these were local university

students who came and acted as gardeners to keep Madurodam pristine.

As the fairies took a break from touring the city, they sat on a bench and had a soda, at which point, Madam Sage told Winter and Sparrow, “Not much has changed here since I was a little girl.”

“This was already built when you were a girl?” asked Sparrow, surprised.

“Oh yes,” answered Madam Sage. “In fact, I was named after the honorary ‘mayor’ of the town at that time, who was also a princess—Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands.”

“You mean there were real princesses in your time too?” said Sparrow, wide-eyed.

“There are real princesses now, Sparrow,” said Winter, “especially in this part of the world.”

“Well, I’ve heard of the Queen of England,” responded Sparrow, “but I didn’t know the world still had princesses.” (Even though Sparrow had recently met a princess during her last fairy adventure, Princess Enkelli had been from a much different time, much longer ago.)

“There are definitely modern princesses,” confirmed Madam Sage. “And I’m not even all that old, dear,” she added with a smile. (Madam Sage was really only in her forties, but young girls often seemed to think women in their forties were pretty old.)

“But Beatrix became a queen,” said Winter.

“Of course,” said Sparrow, nodding. “That would naturally happen to many princesses.” Winter and Madam Sage thought Sparrow’s reaction to modern princesses was very charming, and they smiled at her wide-eyed wonder.



Next, the ladies went to see the fireboat show again. They stayed in the miniature city for a full three hours, then they absolutely had to leave or they would miss the bus back.

On the bus ride home, the girls got to see a few older wooden windmills in the countryside, which was one thing Sparrow had hoped to see on her visit to Holland.

They got back well after dark, but it was fun to walk from the bus stop to the castle in the darkness. However, when they reached the castle, the excitement for the day wasn't over yet. Another fairy was waiting for them at Grandfather Weber's cottage. This surprise was arranged much earlier, but Winter and Madam Sage had been keeping it a secret.

Emerald was one of the Jewel Fairies and was from Michigan. She was visiting family in Germany for the summer and had been spending some of her time with Winter. Emerald's real name was Laura Bauer, and she was a year younger than Winter and Sparrow.

In fairy form, Emerald wore a glowing, dark green dress covered with tiny, sparkling emeralds. She had smooth, glassy slippers that matched the color of her dress; and she wore a green, jeweled ribbon to pull back her long, dark blond hair. Emerald's wand was a long crystal shard that matched her fairy spirit gemstone. The emerald wand emitted a soft green glow from its place on her fairy belt.

Jewel Fairies were very rare, so rare in fact that usually only one of each existed at any given time worldwide. And the gifts of the Jewel Fairies were slightly different than those of regular fairies. They were often more powerful and could easily be compared to the gifts of superheroes.

Emeralds are a very hard stone, fairly close to diamonds on the scale of hardness. Emerald's fairy gift related to this. She had a kind of shield power that allowed her to deflect forces directed at her. She could also ward off evil spirits to protect those near her. This gift made her one of the most powerful fairies to ever exist. However, Jewel Fairies had to be just as cautious as regular fairies when using their powers. In fact, Jewel Fairies did not even have assigned mentors. Instead, because they were so powerful and had to be so closely monitored, the elves were their advisors.

Emerald had another fairy gift as well. Since all emeralds contain water molecules, she was able to manipulate water somewhat. With the exception of Aquamarine, not many fairies in the world had control over the powerful force of water.

Emerald would be staying with Winter and Sparrow in the castle for the next week and a half. With the third bed in the monstrous bedroom now filled, the three girls thought they might pretend to be the royal Blumenthal triplets, which was just about as exciting as being fairies.

However, the girls were not destined to get a good night's sleep on their first night together. Very early in the morning, the weather turned stormy, waking the girls. The lightning, thunder, and pounding rain was very frightening. Since they couldn't sleep, they lit candles and all piled onto Winter's bed to sit up and talk for a while.

In addition to the sounds of the storm, the fairies heard something else. Loud banging noises seemed to be coming from down the hall, as though a window had been left open to flop around, or a loose shutter was pounding in the wind.

The girls changed into fairy form to investigate. Instead of taking the candles, they lit their wands, which were easier to hold than candles. The dandelion flower, chicory stem, and emerald shard didn't like the spooky, stormy weather any more than the fairies did. Though the tips of the wands glowed brightly, the girls could tell that the wands were watchful and still. And the dandelion, which was used to much warmer summer weather than what Germany was currently experiencing, shivered in Sparrow's hand. Emerald glowed softly as she flew in the darkness, which gave some comfort to the fairies.

Sure enough, in another large, unused bedroom down the hall, a window was open and was being knocked about with the force of the storm. The room looked eerie because the furniture was draped with white dust-cover sheets that looked a lot like the shapes of ghosts. The girls didn't particularly want to admit to each other that they were scared, but they flew very closely together for protection as they made their way across the room. It took all of them to close the window, but they finally managed to shut and secure it.

Just as they were leaving to go back to their bedroom, Emerald noticed something on the floor. The girls landed to examine her discovery. A few feet from the window, in a layer of dust on the floor, the raindrops from the open window had formed something very distinctive. The shapes were letters in the form of an actual message! The phrase was short, but very clear. "Please, Help Me!"

The girls were speechless. *Who or what had written this message?* Raindrops weren't alive, at least not in a way that would allow them to write out messages to fairies.

As they stood very close together, with their toes lined up directly along the bottom of the letters of the three words, the fairies heard more banging noises, this time from much higher up in the castle.

Eager to leave the room with the ghostly draped furniture and spooky raindrop message, the new triplets flew to investigate the upper-floor noises. They used an outer, stone stairwell that was spiraled. After the dizzying flight up three more floors, they came to a narrow hallway that led to an arched doorway. The banging noises were very pronounced behind the door, so the fairies, as a team, turned the iron handle and pushed the heavy door inward.

This room was a circular turret room that had a very high, pointed dome ceiling with thick wooden beams and rafters. This turret was obviously used as a small library and was filled with bookshelves stocked with old books. The furnishings also included numerous chairs and small tables upon which sat a good number of oil lamps and candles. A small fireplace occupied the far side of the room. The bookshelves extended nearly as high as the tall ceiling; and a maze of spindly ladders leaned against the shelves, some of them tilted at odd angles to access hard-to-reach books.

The banging sounds came from a very high, small window. The right half of the arched window was flopping around with the force of the storm. However, before the fairies could fly up to fasten it, a movement from the fireplace drew their attention.

A small creature that looked to be made of gnarled tree roots was descending from the fireplace chimney. He was about eight inches high, and his branchlike feet and hands

clung to the cracks in the stones on the side of the fireplace for a moment before he jumped down. When he landed in the ashes of the fireplace grate, his shiny dark eyes reflected the light from the fairies' wands as he stared at them. This was a gnarlbeast.

Gnarlbeasts were nasty creatures, sneaked into our world somehow from another realm; and they liked to sleep up chimneys. They were only awake for one minute of every day. However, during that time, they set about smashing things in the homes in which they resided. There was only one remedy for a gnarlbeast—a complicated fairy spell called the *Anti-Gnarlbeast Charm*.

The girls decided not to stay. For one thing, none of them had ever encountered a gnarlbeast before, and they didn't know how vicious the creature might be. Plus, they would have needed permission from an older fairy to perform the *Anti-Gnarlbeast Charm*.

As they backed out of the library turret room, they saw the gnarlbeast knock several books off of a low shelf before jumping up to one of the tables and hurling a candlestick across the room. Just as the fairies were closing the door, they saw the gnarlbeast climb back up into the fireplace chimney, since his one waking minute was coming to an end.

The storm was calming somewhat, so instead of trying to reenter the room to secure the window, now that the gnarlbeast was sleeping again, the fairies made their way quickly back downstairs to their bedroom, anxious for some sleep.

Upon returning to the bedroom, the girls discovered something else very unsettling. Evidently, one of their own

windows had not been secured tightly. The left half of the window next to Sparrow's dresser was standing open slightly, and the healthy wind had blown melted candle wax from the lit candle across the top of the dresser. But that wasn't what was unsettling. The wax had formed the shape of a perfect arrow that pointed to an enormous painting next to Winter's bed.

The scene of the painting was that of a fox hunt. Hunters dressed in bright coats and mounted on horses were surrounded by hunting hounds ready to take off for the hunt. Upon flying to the painting to examine it more closely, the fairies found nothing remarkable about it, except for its size, which was about that of a door to a large refrigerator. But, then, huge rooms like this would need large paintings as decorations.

The girls were very tired, and since they couldn't tell anything more about the painting in the dim light of their wands, they decided to wait until daylight to examine it further. However, Sparrow did clean the wax off the dresser before the girls went to sleep. She didn't want anything to be overly suspicious if Mrs. Hofstedter came in and took a good look around.

Then, despite the strange encounters of the night, the girls tumbled into bed and fell quickly asleep. As Sparrow was drifting off, she decided that it was a very good thing she had two friends with her. There's no way she would have ever been able to sleep in a spooky place like this by herself.

## Chapter Four

### A Voice in the Dark

In the morning, the storms and dark shadows had completely passed; and the day wakened bright and smiling with sunshine. Refreshed with sleep, even after their early-morning adventure, the girls washed up and headed down to a wonderful breakfast of fresh strawberries, cinnamon raisin strudel, and milk.

While they were breakfasting, they discussed their stormy night excursion. In the sunny kitchen, the strange goings on and the odd signs of the raindrop message and wax arrow didn't seem so frightening; and the girls made up their minds to spend at least part of the day investigating.

However, they were going to have to wait until later, because the three had plans for the early part of the day. After cleaning up in the kitchen and brushing their teeth, they first went to visit Grandfather Weber, bringing him some of the strawberries and strudel. Then Sparrow called her mom from the cottage telephone to check in. Everything was fine with her mom's business travels, and Mrs. Hernandez was happy that Sparrow was having such a good time.

The girls couldn't spend much time talking to Winter's grandfather because he had to leave for a doctor's appointment. However, the late morning was going to be busy anyway because Madam Sage had something special

planned for the girls. As they waited for the fairy mentor, the girls strolled about the castle grounds and fished around in the moat with sticks.

When Madam Sage arrived, they all sat outside together under a tree to talk. The girls were anxious to tell Madam Sage about the gnarlbeast. However, for the moment, they chose not to tell her about the strange signs.

As soon as they related the information about the gnarlbeast to her, she said, “Oh, I’m so glad you didn’t close that turret window. It is open for a very important reason. It is an entry point for gnarlbeasts to make their way into our realm. I guess I should have already told you about that magical window, but I had no idea you would even discover it during your stay.”

The girls listened carefully as Madam Sage went on. “I know it seems strange to keep an entrance open to allow gnarlbeasts to access our world, but we must sometimes be careful about interfering with things such as this. Castle Blumenthal contains many mysteries. And it is currently home to several gnarlbeasts. Perhaps the window is only one of many passages from the realm in which they live, but it is certainly part of the reason why there are so many gnarlbeasts in Europe. Though fairies sometimes send gnarlbeasts back to their true homes using the *Anti-Gnarlbeast Charm*, we don’t want to seal the window because we don’t know the exact purposes of the creatures. There might be really good reasons for their existence in our world.”

Madam Sage smiled as she continued. “The fairies in this area have not much worried about the gnarlbeasts living in Blumenthal Castle because they don’t do much



damage in there. Most of the furniture and belongings housed in the castle are large and sturdy, so the gnarlbeasts can't cause too much harm with their smashing.

“And Mr. Blumenthal himself, though not a magical being, is a man who very much acknowledges the existence and importance of magical things, so he is careful about how much impact he has on the castle. He tries very hard not to disturb mysterious things, which is one of the reasons he has never had electricity installed in the castle.”

Madam Sage finished the discussion with a warning for the girls to stay away from the window in the turret library so that the gnarlbeasts' doorway would remain safe.

The fairies didn't have any questions after this, but they couldn't sit and talk much longer anyway, because they were due to take a short trip with Madam Sage.

The four ladies trooped behind the castle and across the grounds for nearly a mile to reach a beautiful manor house where they were expected for luncheon.

Wistinhausen Manor was very tall and beautiful, and looked almost like a castle itself because of its pointed roof spires, ornate brickwork, and many spindly chimneys. The inside, however, was much less fancy than the interior of Blumenthal Castle. The furniture and other belongings had a very comfortable, lived-in look to them; and the manor was equipped with most modern conveniences.

And although the luncheon was a casual and comfortable experience for the fairies, Frau Wistinhausen had prepared an extremely elaborate and lavish mid-day meal for them. There were many elegant and dainty sandwiches on a lot of different types of bread, tiny sausages on sticks, an interesting assortment of pickles and

jams, and a platter containing some very strong cheeses. For dessert, they had both tea and coffee with their many fancy choices of tortes, mini-pies, tarts, and a towering Black Forest cake. The cherries in the deep chocolate cake were so dark, they were almost black; and there were so many layers of real whipped cream, the girls thought they were in dessert heaven. This was a luncheon they would not soon forget.

They all chatted happily together, while Madam Sage and Frau Wistinhausen tried not to laugh at the girls who were politely trying not to completely stuff themselves full of the sweets, while at the same time none of them being able to resist a second piece of the amazing Black Forest cake. But this was their vacation, and a few indulgences should be allowed.

About an hour later, after a tour of the manor, the guests thanked Frau Wistinhausen for the lovely visit and meal, and left.

The fairies were very glad that the walk back to the castle was so long because they would have been very uncomfortable sitting down after such a huge meal and sweet-feast.

After Madam Sage left, the girls made their way back up to their room, where they discovered something interesting. They had hurriedly made their beds in the morning so the covers weren't perfectly smooth. A small book lay in one of the crumples of the covers on Sparrow's bed, very near her pillow. The book was open to a specific page that contained very old-fashioned handwriting, but only one statement. The scrolling letters read, "*The eyes of the hound.*"

The fairies didn't have any idea what this might mean, but they were fairly certain that the placement of the book on Sparrow's bed was no accident. This was likely related to the signs they had received the previous night. Believe it or not, with the excitement of the trip to Wistinhausen Manor, they had almost forgotten about their intent to investigate the painting.

Since the book was very old, and the back cover seemed almost ready to come off, the girls were careful in handling it. Emerald gently held the book open as Sparrow gingerly flipped the pages. The book was a diary that had once belonged to Sophie, the girl who had disappeared! This was so amazing! *But who had put the book on Sparrow's bed? And what did this message mean?*

The fairies had intended to examine the painting thoroughly this afternoon anyway, but they were even more intent on doing so now because of the entry in the diary.

A lot of hounds occupied the painting. The girls stood in front of the canvas and looked at each hound in turn closely, specifically the eyes of the dogs. They saw nothing strange at first. However, when Sparrow *popped* into fairy form and flew around to look again, she discovered something interesting. Emerald and Winter had also transformed and hovered next to Sparrow as she pointed out the eyes of a particular hound very near the bottom of the painting. The centers of his eyes were inset with smooth, dark brown crystals. Since no light was currently shining on the painting, the round stones were hard to make out. But due to her excellent eyesight, and her tiny fairy eyes being so close to the painting, Sparrow had noticed the outline of the crystals.

Winter gently prodded the stone in the hound's left eye with her finger. Though the crystal depressed like an elevator button, nothing happened. Then she pushed on it harder. Still nothing. However, when she pressed a third time, Sparrow did the same with the dog's right eye. With both crystals depressed at once, the picture moved. It was as though a bar was placed directly down the center of the canvas because it began to rotate like a revolving door. When the painting reached a point where it was sticking out into the room in an exact straight line to the edge of Winter's bed, it stopped, revealing a hidden passage. The girls looked at one another excitedly. Then, taking a deep breath, they slowly flew through the opening. They lit their wands as they moved gradually forward down a narrow stone passageway.

They made two right turns to follow the passage without discovering anything of significance, other than a change in the walls from stone to wood after the second turn. At this point, the fairies came upon a dead end. The only piece of furniture in the passage was an ancient oval mirror standing on a large easel just in front of the dead end. As they looked it over, the girls couldn't tell that there was anything out of the ordinary about the mirror, other than its large size, which was in perfect keeping with the scale of the rest of the furniture in the castle.

Slightly disappointed, the fairies made their way back to their bedroom. They were relieved to discover that the painting had not closed itself while they were exploring. The girls hadn't even thought about the possibility of that until now, so they were glad they hadn't become trapped, seeing as how they had forgotten to safeguard the entrance

by propping it open with a book or a shoe or something. However, at this time, they didn't have any idea that the mystery involving the raindrop message, candle-wax arrow, painting, and old diary might be dangerous. They were just elated to have discovered a hidden passage in an ancient castle. And they wondered if the Blumenthal triplets had known about it. Plus, since it appeared to lead nowhere, they wondered what it might have been for. Perhaps it was an ancient hiding place in case of an invasion of the castle. In that case, why wasn't it also an escape route of some sort? The fairies thought they might explore the passageway again later, taking more time, in case they missed something on their first trip.

They played a few games in the late afternoon because, in addition to being fun, they thought this might help to clear their brains so they could think well enough to figure out what the mysterious happenings might mean.

Shortly before dark, the girls went downstairs to the kitchen. Because of the enormous luncheon, they weren't much hungry, but they thought it would be good to have a snack. Mr. Blumenthal was just coming out of the East Wing on the second floor when the girls made it to the center stairs. He nodded to them slightly, then made his way to a small side staircase and headed up.

While they were getting their snacks from the kitchen, the girls briefly discussed the possibility that either Mr. Blumenthal or Mrs. Hofstedter had put the diary on Sparrow's bed. Perhaps one or both of them knew of something mysterious going on at the castle and wanted help, in a roundabout way, to solve the mystery.

They also pondered the possibility that they should inform Madam Sage of everything. However, they decided to wait on this. Since they didn't intend to use too much fairy magic, they thought it would be best to wait to tell her anything, especially since they didn't know much yet themselves. The exception, of course, would be if some emergency arose. However, they couldn't particularly imagine an emergency occurring, since they were safe inside the castle, having encountered nothing more than an empty passage, spooky signs, and a gnarlbeast so far.

After reading for a while, the girls went to bed early. They were somewhat tired from the previous night and the busy day.

They weren't asleep long when they were all three wakened by a noise that sounded much like someone crying. And the sound seemed to be coming from the passageway behind the painting.

The girls got up cautiously and lit the candles beside their beds. Then they *popped* into fairy form, withdrew their wands, and approached the painting. Nodding to one another, they flew down to the crystal eyes of the hound. As Sparrow and Emerald depressed the crystals, the painting revolved to reveal the hidden passage. As it opened, the girls thought they heard a call for help amidst the crying.

They traveled slowly at first. While they were anxious to help the crying person, they also needed to be careful. Plus, this was pretty scary.

The crying was louder as the girls reached the place where the stone walls turned to wood, at which point, there was another loud cry for help. "Please, someone, help me!"

The crying voice seemed to be coming from behind the wooden wall to their left. Directly at the point on the wall where the cries were the loudest, the fairies landed on the floor because it seemed that the crying was mostly coming from the lower part of the wall.

Upon examining the barrier, and finding no doorway, or secret sliding panel, or anything else that might help them reach the person in trouble, Winter suddenly had a good idea. She reached into the pouch on her belt and pulled out a large handful of pixie dust. As she tossed it at the partition in front of her, for an instant, the whole wall glowed bright yellow. Then, though the aged and darkened wood of the wall was still present, the surface became somewhat transparent. In a very small room behind the wall, a glowing spirit sat upon a tiny bed.

The ghostly spirit was that of a fairy in fairy form.

As the three flesh-and-blood fairies gazed in upon her, the spirit raised her head to look at them, at which point, Winter gasped in start. “Edelweiss!” she exclaimed. Then after a short pause, she added, “Edelweiss fairies are so rare...”

“...as rare as the moonflower fairies of North America,” added Sparrow, basically finishing her own thought, and that of her friend.

“Exactly,” breathed Emerald. “They are singular, I believe, just like the Jewel Fairies. Usually, only one exists worldwide at any given time.”

Edelweiss rose from the bed slowly, her pale face full of wonder and surprise. Even in her ghostly radiance, the fairies could tell how beautiful she had once been. Her white dress was made of wooly, furry-looking edelweiss

petals with clusters of small yellow flower centers scattered over it. She had cloudy, pale yellow wings and wore several edelweiss flowers tucked into the curls of her dark hair.

Edelweiss flowers themselves were once incredibly rare, growing only on perilous mountaintops. The flowers were also a symbol of purity and a source of mysticism. Since they were largely inaccessible because they grew in inaccessible places and were difficult to find, they were said to hold the spirit of the mountains and served to protect mountaineers from harm and capture. Edelweiss flowers were also the flowers of queens and were synonymous with bravery since those seeking the flower often had to endure long journeys and hardships.

While the three fairies were staring at Edelweiss, and while the ghostly fairy was trying to find her voice, a thought suddenly occurred to Sparrow. “By any chance,” she said, “is your name Sophie?”

Edelweiss gasped sharply and was finally able to speak. “Yes! Yes!” she exclaimed.

Then, with all of the fairies now smiling, the three living fairies sat down in front of the wall separating them from Edelweiss.

The ghostly fairy also took a seat while wiping a few tears from her cheeks. With a sniff, she said, “For all of the years I have been crying in this chamber, no one has ever found me before.”

“Why are you here, and what happened to you?” asked Winter. “The stories about your disappearance are all just mysterious ghost stories. No one knows what happened.”



“I was ten when it happened, all those years ago,” began Edelweiss. “I am from Austria, but I came to visit the triplets. While I was here, I heard funny noises downstairs near the old library. I was flying around by myself, having a look round, when some sort of evil being came after me. He looked like he was made of stone. The creature wasn’t a gargoyle; I think he might have been a spriggan. Anyway, first he trapped me in a trunk with some sort of spell. He left me there for nearly two days. Then, when he came back and opened the trunk, he hurled some sort of terrible curse at me.

“My wand tried to protect me,” the spirit fairy added. “You know rowan trees are supposed to provide protection against spells and bewitchment.” With this, Edelweiss produced her wand from out of thin air. It was a lovely twig from a rowan tree with a single, shiny white berry clinging to its tip. Then she went on. “But all it could do was whisk me away to this chamber in the castle. I guess this wall is made of rowan wood. I lost consciousness when it happened. When I woke up, I was already in spirit state, so I guess the evil creature must have actually killed me. But for some reason, probably related to the curse he enacted, I can’t pass on like I am supposed to.

“I have seen the stone creature a few times in this passageway, so be careful and keep watch for him. I think he roams the castle sometimes. However, while I am in this secret room, and protected by the rowan wood, he has never been able to do any further harm to me.”

Edelweiss sighed as she continued. “But I am forever trapped here. I long for my spirit to move on. I wish I knew how to make that happen. My handbook doesn’t

have that answer. I have tried a few spells with my wand, but nothing has worked.”

“Well, we are pretty good problem solvers,” said Sparrow. “And we are going to be in the castle for over a week longer. Maybe we can find some way to help you.”

Emerald and Winter were nodding, and Edelweiss was smiling happily, though she could not speak because she was crying again, this time with tears of joy.

“Oh no!” said Winter suddenly. “I just remembered that my mom is taking us to Denmark for sightseeing tomorrow, and we’ll be staying overnight there. So we won’t be able to come back until the following night.”

“Right,” said Emerald, “and it would look suspicious to try to cancel, especially since your mom planned the trip for us and is excited about taking us.”

Edelweiss looked a little frightened at their words, so Sparrow reassured her. “We will begin working on this right away, but we can’t miss the trip with Winter’s mom. We will come back to see you the night after next, we promise.”

Edelweiss nodded at her new friends as Emerald added, “It might take us a little while anyway, to figure out how to help you. We’ll have to do some fancy brainstorming.”

The rowan wall was starting to look cloudy and more like solid wood again, and the girls outside were having a little trouble seeing the ghostly fairy. But instead of using more pixie dust at this time, Sparrow put her hand on the wall and firmly told Edelweiss, “Don’t worry. We are on the case, and we will find a way to help you. We’ll see you again in two nights.”

Edelweiss nodded and smiled just before her new friends lost sight of her behind the rowan-wood barrier.

Upon exiting the passage and closing the painting, the girls stayed up for some time, discussing the situation. At this point, they couldn't come up with any good ideas as to how to help Edelweiss. However, they were patient, and they hoped their new friend would be too. And after all, she had been trapped for over a century and a half, so a few more days probably wouldn't be too much of an ordeal.

## Chapter Five

### Mermaids and Wax

After a quick breakfast in the morning, the girls got their small overnight bags from upstairs, then descended the side steps and waited on the outside of the moat for Winter's mom. She arrived within a few minutes, and they crowded into the tiny car. Then they took both a train and a bus to get to their destination.

Since they were specifically going to Denmark to see the statue of the Little Mermaid at Langelinie in Copenhagen, Mrs. Weber had brought a copy of the fairy tale, *The Little Mermaid*. They read parts of the story to one another on the long journey. The fairies all loved mermaid tales, and fairy tales, and love stories; and this book was all three rolled into one. By the time the girls had read the tale nearly all the way through, they decided it was pretty much the most perfect story ever written.

After stopping once for lunch, and a few more times to see other interesting sights, they arrived at their hotel in the late afternoon. Then they set off to see the statue.

The Little Mermaid was sitting serenely on a small rock out in the water. The girls each had a brochure about her history, and they were sad to learn that some people over the years had vandalized the sculpture. However, her caretakers had always been able to restore her; and she was as beautiful as ever.

Sparrow took about a zillion pictures of the beautiful mermaid because she knew that she and her mom weren't going to have time to visit Denmark once her business trip was done.

Late in the day, while Mrs. Weber did some shopping, the girls took a walk by themselves. As they strolled along a secluded seawall and enjoyed being splashed by the salty sea spray, Sparrow, with her keen eyesight, spotted something in a small cove ahead. Some type of creature was lounging on a rock in the sea. Walking as fast as they could, the fairies descended the steps of the seawall and made their way a short distance along an isolated shore to a place in the cove where there were several enormous rocks sitting out in the water. These were much larger rocks than the one the Little Mermaid occupied, and they had many ledges.

Making sure no one was around, the girls *popped* into fairy form and flew out to one of the largest rocks.

At first, Sparrow thought she might have seen a seal. But what was waiting for the fairies on the rock ledge was much more interesting. It was a real mermaid!

“Hello, fairies!” she called to them.

Emerald, Winter, and Sparrow were delighted with their adventure to Denmark so far. They landed next to the mermaid on the rock and responded in polite greeting while she introduced herself as Vanda.

Vanda was an older mermaid, perhaps around the age of a grandmother mermaid, and she was very beautiful. She had long, yellowy-green hair and turquoise-colored fins, streaked with yellow. She wore a seafoam-colored tunic and a waistlet of tiny blue pearls.

Upon finding out where the fairies were from, and exactly where they were staying in Germany, Vanda had something very interesting to tell them. “I am familiar with Blumenthal Castle. Be wary of the castle because a spriggan resides there.”

This was the second time the girls had heard the word spriggan recently. Edelweiss had mentioned that she thought the stone creature that kidnapped and cursed her might be a spriggan. The fairies couldn’t believe they had forgotten to look this up in their handbooks to find out more about the creatures.

However, Vanda didn’t mind telling them. “Spriggans are wicked spirits who live in and around old ruins, crypts, castles, and barrows; and they specialize in guarding hidden treasures. Spriggans look to be made of stone, so they can generally stay hidden while doing their jobs. They are not very numerous, and the ones who are experts in their field tend to guard many treasures at once and, therefore, move around quite a bit. They also snatch children, mainly those who get too near the treasures they are guarding.”

The fairies quickly related to Vanda the details about the disappearance of Edelweiss and her current situation, whereupon, Vanda stated, “She probably got too close to the treasure concealed in Blumenthal Castle.”

“Is there really a treasure in the castle?” asked Emerald.

“Oh yes,” responded the mermaid. “Castle Blumenthal contains a vast treasure secreted somewhere in the structure. However, it is a cursed treasure, so no good would ever come of anyone finding it.”

“Do you have any idea how we might help Edelweiss’s spirit?” asked Sparrow. “She longs to move into the

hereafter, and we want to help free her from the room behind the rowan wall.”

“I really don’t have that answer for you,” Vanda replied. “However, I know something else about Blumenthal Castle that may help you. The next full moon occurs in three nights. At that time, something special will happen to the mirrors inside the castle.” When the girls looked puzzled, the mermaid added, “I don’t want to give too much away, but the mirrors will reveal something that might help you figure out how to free Edelweiss’s ghost.

“And two more things about spriggans,” Vanda added. “They are said to bring blight to healthy plants, and they can also cause whirlwinds.” With this, the mermaid bid the fairies farewell and dove into the sea to return to home.

It was getting a little late, and they felt a need to hurry. After flying to shore, the fairies changed into girl form and jogged back down the beach and along the seawall to meet Winter’s mother.

The trip home the next day took until late afternoon. Winter’s mom dropped the girls off at the castle, and they trooped wearily upstairs to the triplets’ bedroom. Mrs. Hofstedter had placed fresh flowers and a bowl of fruit in the room during their absence. She had also changed all the sheets, done a bit of laundry for them, and basically aired the room out. The windows were opened wide, and a pleasant breeze was circulating.

The girls visited Edelweiss’s spirit shortly after dinner. They told her what the mermaid had said. The spirit looked puzzled for a moment, then she smiled and told her new friends, “Yes, mirrors in the castle are very *special* during the full moon.”

Edelweiss wouldn't elaborate further and simply said, "You'll see tomorrow night." However, she did state, "The current Mr. Blumenthal took most of the mirrors out of the East Wing where he lives. I think he might have gotten tired of the raucous antics that occur during the full moon. That's probably how the oval mirror got moved into the passageway, about fifteen years ago, I think."

At the questioning looks on the faces of Sparrow, Emerald, and Winter, Edelweiss shook her head, laughing, and said, "You'll see. You'll see. There's no reason to rush the mirror thing, believe me. The full-moon mirror event has been going on the whole time I have been here, and it's never made any difference to my situation. I think the mermaid might have made a mistake when she mentioned that, but who knows."

"So, does Mr. Blumenthal know about this passageway?" questioned Emerald. "Or did someone else move the mirror in here?"

"I would think he knows about it," answered Edelweiss. "I imagine Mr. Blumenthal knows most of the secrets of the castle. I pretty much only get small amounts of information from my handbook about some of the goings on in the castle, whenever it can figure out what is going on. That's how I knew there were visitors in the triplets' room—my handbook told me. But this is an older handbook and might not be as up-to-date as yours.

"I never saw who moved the looking glass in here," added Edelweiss. "It just appeared one day. I naturally assumed Mr. Blumenthal had it stored here when my handbook told me he moved a lot of the mirrors out of his living quarters around that same time."



Before they left for the night, Winter asked Edelweiss, “By the way, where were you exactly when the spriggan got you?”

“On the first floor, just to the right of the door to the old library, very near the side entrance to the West Wing.”

At this point, Sparrow made sure to tell Edelweiss, “If we can’t figure out a way to help you by the time we are set to leave, we will tell the older fairies in the area about you so that they can work on figuring this out.”

Edelweiss agreed and thanked the girls for their help, and for finding her.

Then the three wished the spirit fairy goodnight and promised to visit again the next day after they did some looking around and brainstorming. They were very hopeful that they could figure this out themselves without having to involve Madam Sage, or others. However, they all agreed that if they ended up not being able to find a way to help, it would be a good idea to inform Madam Sage, so that the mentor could help, or consult others such as local witches and sorcerers who might be able to find a way to free Edelweiss.

When they got back to the room, Sparrow looked for Edelweiss’s diary. She thought it might be nice to return the book to its original owner. However, when she searched for it in the drawer in which she had placed it, she could not find it.

The sun had already gone down, but Emerald suddenly remembered something, and she felt it couldn’t wait until morning. “We need to go downstairs,” she said.

This was fine with Sparrow and Winter, especially since they all wanted to have a look at the old library. They

flew downstairs quickly, with their wands lit for easy exploring.

Emerald dragged them outside first through the West Wing side-door entrance. A clump of bushes sat a few feet to the right of the steps. By wandlight, the girls could see that the tops of the shrubs looked as though they had been scorched. Many of the outer branches of the bushes were a bright, rusty-red color and were dying off.

“This is blight,” said Emerald.

“I wonder if it means the spriggan is near,” asked Sparrow in a frightened voice.

As quickly as possible, the girls went inside. Next, they examined the walls on either side of the door to the old library. They found nothing particularly interesting. Then, the three of them turned the iron handle and pushed the heavy door open.

Very few books occupied the shelves, because most of the contents of the library had been moved many years before. However, the room wasn't empty. Several large pieces of furniture were draped with dust-coverings. The old library currently housed something else very interesting too. Along one whole wall, twelve wax figures stood. They were evidently being stored there because they weren't particularly posed. They just stood in a straight line, very close to one another. The figures were dressed in period clothing that looked to be from around the early *Nineteen-Hundreds*.

The fairies flew around the figures for several minutes, looking at the elaborate dresses, tailored coats, and fancy accessories of the men and women. The colorful materials

were very rich and beautiful, and some of the buttons looked like jewels.

The girls would never have guessed that they could be in any kind of danger, so it was an incredible surprise to them when one of the figures, an elderly woman with white hair, suddenly came to life and attacked the fairies, swatting at them with an ivory fan she had been holding in her hand. Next, another female wax character came after them, brandishing a sturdy, lavender-colored parasol. The men also came to life, waving their waxy limbs and trying to grab the girls. In the confusion, the fairies were separated almost at once. One of the advancing men nearly managed to toss his hat over Emerald, and she was knocked out of flight for a moment when the brim of the hat brushed her wings. But she managed to get away.

Because the library was so crowded with moving figures, and the draped furniture seemed to be in odd places, the fairies were disoriented, and they couldn't find each other right away. Plus, with so many tall wax figures waving their arms, the girls hadn't been able to find a clear route to be able fly up high enough to be out of reach.

Fortunately, most fairies can fly well enough to evade these kinds of advances. Plus, these three in particular had gifts to help them in this type of situation.

Sparrow, retreating from four of the advancing wax figures, slipped behind a draped sofa. When her pursuers lost sight of her for a moment, she landed and proceeded to stand perfectly still. When the figures rounded the corner to look for her hiding place, they could not see her. Her gift of inconspicuousness was working perfectly.

Likewise, on the other side of the library, three of the scary wax characters in pursuit of Winter couldn't find her either, because she was expertly tucked between several books on one of the library shelves.

However, Emerald, very near the door, looked to be in trouble. She had not quite caught her breath from the near miss of the hat, and she was trapped on the floor. Five of the wax figures surrounded her closely, and because they were so tall, and had their arms raised, she couldn't fly up to get away.

Winter left the shelf where she was hidden amongst the books and flew towards Emerald while loudly chirping, trilling, and warbling. Since she was basically making an incredible amount of noise that would easily have been the equivalent of about ten birds, the figures surrounding Emerald were distracted, and the Jewel Fairy was able to slip between two of them to get away.

Winter and Emerald then rose hovering together high into the air. Sparrow left her hiding place behind the sofa and joined them. Since the fairies were all now airborne, the figures couldn't reach them, so they began throwing things at the fairies instead. The girls dodged books, candlesticks, and a vase while backing towards the door. Emerald used her shield gift to deflect several of the hurled objects, while Sparrow and Winter opened the library door. As soon as her friends were clear, Emerald turned and zipped out the door after them. Then they all three pushed the heavy door shut.

Outside the old library, the girls tried to regroup after the scare, while facing the door in fear that the figures might leave the library to come after them.

After a few moments, when none of the wax characters came bursting through the door, and the sounds in the room began to quiet, the girls decided that the bewitched figures probably couldn't leave the library. However, the fairies were confused. *Why did the figures attack in the first place?*

Feeling lucky to have escaped, the tired girls flew quickly up to bed.

## Chapter Six

### Salt and Vinegar

In the morning, the girls were scheduled to take a trip with Winter's grandfather to see the salt mines, so after breakfast, they all crowded into Grandfather Weber's small orange car. The trip to the mines took nearly two hours, but there was a lot to see on the way. They stopped several times so that Sparrow could take pictures and for the travelers to stretch their legs.

When they reached the mines, the excursion turned out to be even more fun than the girls had anticipated because visitors to the mines got to dress in miners' clothing to make the tour. They wore gray, white, and black, loose-fitting outfits with black caps that resembled headscarves.

The girls and Grandfather Weber also got to ride a slide down into the mines. Some people in the tour preferred to take the stairs, and those who couldn't manage the stairs rode in an elevator, but the fairies definitely wanted to ride the slide. And Grandfather Weber didn't get to play on slides very often, so he wanted to too.

These particular salt mines were no longer used to mine salt; they were mainly just a tourist attraction to show the process of how salt was mined. Since the girls were pretty much only familiar with table and cooking salt, they marveled at the many different-colored crystals and minerals in the chunky walls of rock salt.

The tour group also got to ride on a small ferryboat across an underground lake to reach another part of the mines. There was even a wall of rocksalt crystals that people could lick if they wanted to. Of the group, only Winter was brave enough to lick the wall that probably hundreds of thousands of other people had also licked over the years. In response to Sparrow's, "Yuck!" and the face Emerald was making, Winter simply replied, "Salty!"

When the tour ended, the girls each picked up a small souvenir box of various salt rocks and some postcards from the gift shop. At one point while they were shopping, another girl, around the same age as the fairies, approached Sparrow and began speaking to her in German.

Sparrow was somewhat shy and felt uncomfortable because she didn't understand the words. She didn't want to seem impolite, but she didn't quite know what to do or say. When the girl paused and looked at Sparrow expectantly, Sparrow simply said, "Ummm...I'm sorry, I don't understand."

Fortunately, Winter saw the problem from across the shop and made her way over to her friend to translate. It turns out that the girl was interested in where Sparrow might be from, since she was wearing the t-shirt with her hometown logo that her friends had given her during their little send-off party.

The girl was very friendly, and the three spent several minutes talking while Emerald and Grandfather Weber were making their purchases. Upon leaving, their new friend, whose name was Heike, even gave Winter and Sparrow a hug and a kiss on the cheek. This made Sparrow feel better about not speaking the language, and she was

reassured that she hadn't offended Heike by seeming not to want to speak to her at first.

On the way home from the mines, Grandfather Weber suggested that the girls spend some time later looking up information about salt and salt mines. "You might be surprised," he said, "as to where all that salt originally came from—the sea." He nodded as he added, "All salt comes from the sea, and the salt in the rocks in salt mines is ancient."

At home in the afternoon, the girls got washed up because Grandfather Weber was cooking dinner for them in his cottage. He was an excellent cook and was preparing two very special German dishes for his granddaughter and her guests. But because of the long cooking time of one of the dishes, the whole meal took nearly three hours to prepare, so they would be eating rather late.

While the dinner was being prepared, the girls visited Edelweiss and told her about what had happened with the wax figures. The spirit fairy was very troubled and fearful for her new friends. "Oh, just stay away from that area!" she exclaimed. "What if the spriggan is around and snatches you too? Believe me, you don't want to end up in here. And you might even end up someplace worse since you don't have rowan wands.

"I never even got to say goodbye to my family," she added sadly. At this point, Edelweiss choked up and started crying.

The girls were subdued and silent for some time after this. Finally, with Edelweiss's further urging, they definitely agreed to stay away from the old library for the time being, but they were almost afraid they would



eventually have to go there again to find a solution to the problem. Then they said goodbye to the troubled spirit and left for dinner.

When the girls arrived at the cottage, they crowded around the table, smelling the wonderful smells, their stomachs growling and their mouths watering.

Grandfather Weber had made both schnitzel and ruladen, two extremely yummy German recipes. They also had a kind of pickled purple cabbage and some excellent German potato salad served warm. The girls spritzed their schnitzels with lemon wedges, pulled the toothpicks out of their ruladen roll-ups, and set to work on the feast. An hour later, they were so full that they could barely manage the slices of apple pie Grandfather Weber set before them—but they did somehow manage.

It was nearly dark by the time the girls made their way back up to the castle and to their room.

When the sun set completely, and the full moon was visible, the fairies waited apprehensively, keeping watch on the three vanity mirrors in their room. They had decided to wait for whatever might happen in fairy form.

As they sat on Emerald's pillow, they heard a lot of noises in other parts of the castle. After waiting for around thirty minutes, with nothing extraordinary happening in the mirrors of the triplets' room, the fairies were just making up their minds to investigate some of the sounds, and seek out other mirrors, when they heard noises in the room next door. The sounds were very distinctive: running horse hooves, along with a horse's neighing and some metal clanking.

They didn't have time to be frightened, or even to think about being frightened, because across the room, Winter's vanity mirror suddenly came alive with movement. Transfixed, the fairies watched a horse and rider gallop into view, as though they were watching the scene on a television screen.

Then the rider dismounted, peering into the candlelit room at the fairies. "Visitors!" he exclaimed. "Excellent!"

The girls couldn't find their voices right away because they were so surprised to be facing a tall knight in full armor standing next to his glistening black steed.

"Hello, hello!" the knight cried. Next, gesturing, he added, "Come closer so I can speak with you."

The girls flew slowly to the vanity and landed next to Winter's brush and comb, before introducing themselves to the enchanted knight.

"Sir William Richard Vinegar at your service," he replied. "However, you can call me Sir William."

"But we usually call grown-ups by their last names," said Emerald, tentatively.

"Then you can call me Sir Vinegar."

The girls smiled at the friendly knight. And they didn't even have to ask any questions about what he was doing in the mirror, or how he became enchanted, because he launched into that explanation right away. "I am under a curse," Sir Vinegar announced. When the girls' eyes all widened, the knight shook his head and waved off the event as completely unimportant, adding, "Oh, that happened hundreds of years ago. But let me tell you more about the curse," said Sir Vinegar eagerly. "I can only visit this world during the full moon and only in the mirrors of

Castle Blumenthal. And no, the curse can't be broken. It is one of those *Irreversible Curses*." When he again noticed looks of concern and sympathy on the fairies' faces, the knight said, "Oh, don't feel badly for me. I don't mind living in mirrors. And I love this castle. It was only just built when I was a young knight, and I was one of the first travelers to visit Blumenthal Castle.

"By the way," said Sir Vinegar, "I noticed that the wax figures in the old library are all moved. Did you by any chance go in there?" When the girls nodded, the knight asked with concern, "Were there more than three fairies? Did you all make it out?"

"There were only three of us," answered Sparrow. "We just barely made it out."

"The wax figures are cursed," said the knight. "There are a lot of curses in this castle," he added, sighing. "The figures come to life and try to kill anything alive five minutes after the library door opens—if anything alive is still in the room at that time. Mr. Blumenthal and Mrs. Hofstedter know to only stay in that room for four minutes at a time, to be on the safe side. Just don't go in there again if you can avoid it. The bewitchment only works inside the library, so the figures can never walk out of that room. I guess if Mr. Blumenthal really wanted to, he could get rid of them, as long as they could be carried out in less than five minutes each trip.

"The curse on the wax figures was put in place by a spriggan," Sir Vinegar added, "who is *supposedly* guarding some kind of vast hidden treasure." The knight rolled his eyes as he said this, and from the sarcastic tone of his voice,

it was apparent that he didn't particularly believe a treasure was hidden anywhere in Blumenthal Castle.

"I think the treasure story is just an excuse by the spriggan so that he can commit curses whenever he likes," Sir Vinegar said. "Three years ago, he cursed Mrs. Hofstedter's hairbrush. It got stuck in her hair so badly, they had to cut it out. She's never been able to use it since. It gives off electric shocks if anyone tries to touch it."

At this point, the girls eyed Winter's hairbrush beside them somewhat fretfully.

"The spriggan isn't always here," the knight continued. "*Supposedly*, he guards several other treasures in various castles, barrows, and crypts. He just slips in and out whenever he feels like it to cause trouble and curse things. He cursed a garden hose once about thirty-five years ago that almost strangled Mr. Weber."

Winter was very surprised to learn that her grandfather had almost been strangled by a bewitched garden hose. She had never heard that story.

When the knight paused in his speech, Sparrow said, "Sir Vinegar, we met a mermaid and she told us that you might be able to help us."

"There aren't any mermaids around here," stated Sir Vinegar flatly.

"We met her in Denmark," responded Emerald.

"Oh," said the knight. "Please continue," he added politely.

"We have been trying to figure out what can be done to help Edelweiss," said Sparrow.

The knight smiled as he said, "I'm glad you have already met her because I was going to bring that up next. I

feel really terrible about what happened to her. The spriggan took her specifically because she was an edelweiss fairy. He thought she was a threat to the safety of his treasure. There are many legends concerning edelweiss and edelweiss fairies; and the spriggan, being incredibly superstitious, saw her as a definite threat to the safety of his treasure.”

Sir Vinegar sighed as he went on. “When they were searching for her right after she disappeared, no one thought to search that trunk because there’s no way a ten-year-old girl would have been able to fit into such a small trunk. None of the searchers knew that she was a fairy and could fit into tiny places.

“Believe it or not, in the hundred and fifty years since she has been trapped, you are the first magical beings who have visited that might be able to help her. The gnomes around here wouldn’t have the ability to free her spirit. Plus, they only come into the castle on rare occasions. And Mr. Blumenthal took the mirror out of the Summer House, so I can’t even communicate with the gnomes outside anymore. The closest witches are about a hundred miles away, so I have never been able to contact any of them.

“So, finally,” the knight added, elatedly, “someone has come!” He was fairly bouncing up and down in his armor, very jubilant, as he told the girls, “Well, I have discovered a way that Edelweiss can be freed, but I have never mentioned it to her because I didn’t want to get her hopes up. Plus, there was no way to predict how long we might actually have to wait for a magical being to arrive that could take matters in hand. And now, three at once! This is splendid! Simply splendid!

“And the timing is so perfect,” Sir Vinegar said with a wide smile. “I am allowed two days in the castle mirrors with each full moon, so I will be able to meet you again tomorrow. However, you have to complete a very important project between now and then. You will need to obtain three items that once belonged to Edelweiss. If you are able to do that, there is a way that she can be freed.”

The girls nodded their understanding as Sir Vinegar added, “A fortune teller, who had set up her tent on the castle grounds for a local fair, once told me about a spell that could free trapped spirits. And she mentioned that the spell required three of the trapped spirit’s belongings to enact it. Unfortunately, before I could ask the fortune teller if she could contact someone to help Edelweiss, the woman disappeared.”

As he prepared to depart, the knight said, “Meet me in the turret library tomorrow as soon as it is dark.”

The girls nodded in agreement while Sir Vinegar remounted his horse and gave them his parting words. “Many more mirrors to visit tonight. *Ta ta for now.*”

Only a few moments after he left, the girls heard Mrs. Hofstedter shouting from her bedroom down the hall. “Go to a different floor, Sir William! I am very tired tonight, and I am in no mood for your shenanigans!”

Evidently, the knight had a healthy respect for the housekeeper because the second floor was quiet after this.

## Chapter Seven

### The Window and the Cornerstone

The fairies decided it was too important to wait until morning to talk to Edelweiss. She was still awake in her tiny room. When Sparrow related to her what the knight had told them, she shook her head disbelievingly. “I can’t believe this is finally happening,” she said smiling. “I will finally be able to move on.”

“But only if we can obtain some of your old belongings,” said Winter, hopefully, while trying to caution Edelweiss that they still had a ways to go to free her spirit.

“That’s why I’m so happy,” responded Edelweiss, “because that should be an easy thing. I came here at least twice a year because the triplets were my cousins, and we liked spending time together. I doubt any of my clothing or shoes is still around, but I don’t think Mr. Blumenthal or Mrs. Hofstedter, or anyone else, would have thrown away my books and toys. My bedroom was across the hall and three doors down from the triplets’ room.”

“The one where we saw the raindrop message,” said Sparrow.

“You saw that?” said Edelweiss. “It worked?”

The three fairies nodded.

“Yes, that was my room. I used my wand and did what my handbook told me to do, but I didn’t know if the *Message Spell* worked.”

“We saw the arrow of candle wax too in the triplets’ room, and we got your diary,” said Emerald.

“My diary?” asked Edelweiss, confused.

“Yes, with the message about the hound’s eyes,” Winter told her.

Edelweiss shook her head. “I lost my diary the year before I disappeared. I didn’t even know it still existed. I just sent the other two messages.”

The girls didn’t know what to say because they couldn’t imagine who had placed the book on Sparrow’s bed.

Edelweiss next went on to specifically describe the many belongings she had had with her while staying in the castle including her hand mirror, dolls, perfume bottles, combs, barrettes, toys, books, and games. Emerald had a pad of paper and pencil with her and recorded the list of items.

When the list was finished, the girls all said goodnight, anxious for some sleep.

Despite their excitement, and Sir Vinegar making a racket in the higher parts of the castle, the new triplets were able to drift off shortly after climbing into their beds.

Grandfather Weber had more plans for the girls the next day, so very early, before breakfast even, the fairies began searching for Edelweiss’s belongings. They started in the dusty bedroom across the hall, the one the spirit fairy had once occupied. They performed their search in regular girl form so they could open and close drawers and doors more easily. By uncovering the furniture and searching the wardrobe, drawers, and an old sea chest, they were able to find two things that belonged to Edelweiss: an automaton toy of a monkey that would play a drum when activated, and a large doll with blond hair wearing a blue velvet dress.



Next, while carefully avoiding the two wooden-boxed jigsaw puzzles, they went through the contents of the wardrobe in the triplets' room. In a drawer near the bottom, they were elated to find another of Edelweiss's possessions: a metal bank depicting the figures of Jonah and the Whale.

Excited to have such an important task done for the day, the girls *popped* into fairy form, which caused the items they were holding to also change sizes. Then they carefully carried the three objects in to Edelweiss. These were definitely her toys, and she was very happy to see them again. The fairies decided that leaving the objects in the passageway was probably the safest thing for now. Then they said goodbye to the spirit fairy and hastened down to breakfast.

They really only had time for cereal with grapes because they didn't want to be late. Grandfather Weber was waiting for them outside of his cottage, and they again crowded into his small orange car.

They only had to drive about an hour this time to reach a gingerbread cookie factory. What fun! And the smell of the factory was something the girls would never forget in all of their lives.

After touring the factory and watching the many types of gingerbread cookies being made and packaged, and after stuffing themselves full of samples, they visited the gift shop and were soon on their way back to the castle.

Upon their return, after all three girls had phoned their mothers to check in, the fairies once more visited Edelweiss. She had enjoyed her day very much, looking at her toys and thinking about being free.

Emerald, Winter, and Sparrow hoped very much that they would be able to help their new friend with whatever spell the knight had in mind.

In addition to thanking the fairies again for their help, Edelweiss was anxious to tell the girls something else. “I just remembered something today that I haven’t thought about for years. When I was imprisoned in the trunk, I overheard the spriggan telling someone about the cornerstone of the castle. He said it was magical because it was the first stone placed. I don’t know who the spriggan was talking to, or why he was telling them, but it sounded like what he was saying was important. When I was very young, we were taught the history of the castle. The cornerstone is just to the side of the West Wing entrance steps. It is a slightly different color than the golden stones. The cornerstone has more of a pink hue to it. I don’t know if any of this is important, but I thought I would mention it.”

Whether it was important or not, the girls were glad to have the information, and they thought it was very interesting.

Winter, Sparrow, and Emerald shortly said goodbye and gathered the three toys for the spell. As they went downstairs to make sandwiches and instant chocolate pudding for supper, they left the important items in the room under Emerald’s pillow.

Before going back upstairs to get Edelweiss’s toys, the girls headed down the main hall of the West Wing. Just outside the entrance steps, they looked for the cornerstone. Even though the evening was looking dusky, the pink-hued stone was easy to locate. It was larger than the golden ones

surrounding it. Evidently, at one time, the cornerstone had been inscribed with either words or dates, or both, because faint carvings were visible near the bottom of the stone. However, the letters or numbers were so weathered, they were not readable.

Though they were happy to have located the cornerstone, there was no more time to examine it this evening because it was fast approaching night. The girls hurriedly went back up to their room, *popped* into fairy form, retrieved the objects from under Emerald's pillow, and made their way up the outer spiral stairs to the turret library.

They waited anxiously for Sir Vinegar. The only mirror in the library was smashed, probably the work of the gnarlbeast, but there were still some large pieces of the glass. They hoped the pieces would work so they could see the knight when he appeared for the night. They didn't have to worry about an encounter with the gnarlbeast because, though varied by individuals, the waking minutes of gnarlbeasts were always the same each day; and this particular gnarlbeast's minute would not occur until early the next morning, since it happened that way before.

A few minutes after the castle slipped into darkness, and just as the fairies were lighting their wands, Sir Vinegar appeared in the shards of the looking glass. His horse was grazing in the grass behind him.

"There's a book with a red cover, and no title, on the shelf directly below that open window," the knight stated. He was indicating the gnarlbeasts' entry window.

The girls flew up right away to retrieve the book. However, they never made it as far as the window.

Unknown to them, they had been followed all the way up to the turret library by the spriggan, who had just returned to the castle and had seen them snooping about the entrance to the West Wing.

The spriggan was a creature about two feet high, and he looked to be made of weathered gray stones. It could be said that spriggans resemble gargoyles, though not as intricately carved and without detailed animal or human features to particularly distinguish them. This spriggan might have been better described as looking like a small gray snowman, though not nearly as round because he was not made out of distinctive balls. He had a few coal-colored flecks mixed in with his gray, and his shiny eyes were nearly black. Mostly smooth, as if he were sculpted of river stones, the creature had only a few pointed features, here and there, mainly on the tips of his shoulders, knees, and nose.

Since the castle was mostly made of stone and the spriggan looked just like stone, he was often able to travel around unnoticed. And the evil creature was also something of a shapeshifter who could fit into tight places very well and even flatten himself out ultra-thin at times to look even more like a stone wall or floor if needed. Spriggans sometimes liked to take on the shapes of gravestones to conceal themselves in graveyards. They were also very athletic and could climb if desired.

The spriggan was fairly flattened out, and was clinging to a crack in the wall just to one side of the tiny, arched window. He growled as the fairies neared, and they stopped dead in midair. Then the nasty creature threw a

book at them. They backed away slowly, not sure of what to do.

Sir Vinegar couldn't see very well from his position far below, but he did recognize the spriggan. "Retreat! Retreat!" he shouted. "He will curse you!"

Sparrow and Winter flew backwards immediately. However, Emerald did not. She had a very grim look on her face as she calmly hovered in front of her friends, and she was glowing more brightly than ever.

The spriggan gave her a very dirty look, then sprang at her from the crack he was clinging to. She dodged easily as Winter and Sparrow retreated even farther behind her. The spriggan landed loudly on one of the stout wooden rafters. The beam was plenty large enough to hold him, and now that both of his hands were free, he proceeded to mash them together like he was making a snowball, all the while muttering strange words. When he finished muttering, he threw open his hands, as though flinging out the newly-made mutter-word snowball, and shouted, "*Kern-entkernan!*" A bright red flash came out of his palms and shot towards Emerald.

She didn't even need to raise her hand or her wand. Her shield gift was working perfectly and deflected the red flash right back at the spriggan. His eyes wide with surprise, he wasn't fast enough to dodge his own curse. The red flash hit him square in the chest, knocking him backwards and apparently freezing him up as though he had turned to real stone. The force of the evil spell caused him to sail backwards in an almost graceful arc, and he went right through the open gnarlbeast entry window,

disappearing in a small white flash, almost like sunlight glinting off of a windshield.

Barely a moment after the white flash, a gnarlbeast entered the window with another flash, this time pale yellow. He eyed the fairies warily but didn't cause any problems. Instead, he immediately headed for the fireplace. He moved so fast, he was like a quick, gnarly streak scaling the walls; and they barely saw him disappear up the chimney.

"The one that's already in there is not going to like that," said Sir Vinegar, noticing what had just happened and shaking his head. "One of them will have to move."

Sparrow and Winter quickly rejoined Emerald.

"Ooops," said Emerald, somewhat sheepishly, indicating the window. "I didn't really mean for that to happen."

"Well, it was his own fault," said Winter.

Sparrow was nodding. "Yes. It looks like he managed to turn himself into real stone."

"I wonder where he ended up," said Emerald. Her friends shrugged, and the girls flew to the shelf below the window to retrieve the red book.

The book was fairly thin and not too heavy, and the fairies managed to fly safely down with it to a point in front of the mirror where they had placed the three toys. Though it had no title, the book contained magic spells to counteract hoodoos, curses, whammies, jinxes, bugaboos, and hexes.

By looking up spriggan curses in the index, they were able to find a spell that would work to free a trapped spirit.

And they were relieved to discover that it was a simple spell that could be performed by either witches or fairies.

Sparrow followed the fairy version of the spell exactly. First, she sprinkled pixie dust on the three items. Next, reading carefully, she pointed her dandelion-stem wand at the toys and slowly stated, “*Entlassen, Spiritus, Sophie Hahn, Edelweiss.*”

The toys glowed softly in the light of the fairies’ wands, and in the moonlight making its way through the turret windows. However, since nothing more happened, the girls weren’t sure that the spell had worked because the glowing of the objects could have just been due to the pixie-dust coating.

As fast as they could, they replaced the red book on the shelf, gathered the toys, and sped downstairs. Sir Vinegar arrived on horseback in Winter’s vanity mirror just as the fairies burst into the room. The girls quickly depressed the eyes of the hound to open the painting and flew down the hall to find Edelweiss. She was still in her room but was smiling happily.

“I just made it through the wall and back again,” she stated. “But I don’t think I have much time.” The spirit was even more ghostly and transparent than before as she floated through the wall to land next to her three friends. Sir Vinegar trotted up in the oval mirror at that moment.

Edelweiss was fading fast, and her voice was beginning to sound faint. She hurriedly thanked the girls and Sir Vinegar before saying, “Please, keep my toys. I hope you will enjoy them as much as I did.” Then, with a soft smile, and a flutter of her pale hand, the edelweiss fairy simply faded from sight.

“I’m so glad the spell worked,” said Sparrow, relieved. “I mean, we are still pretty young to manage magic like that.”

“Well,” said Sir Vinegar, “spriggan curses are not that powerful, just mostly nasty. So there was not much danger of your spell not working to put things to right. Plus, you might be more powerful than you think.”

Sparrow, Winter, and Emerald thanked the knight for his help and said goodnight.

Sir Vinegar responded, “Thank *you*, young ladies, for making my heart lighter. I feel nearly as free as Edelweiss.

“However, right now, I’m off to try to give Mr. Blumenthal a bit of a spook. He still has his shaving mirror in the East Wing, and if I’m not mistaken, it’s just about the time of night he likes to shave.”

The fairies smiled as the knight galloped off on his steed.

Just as they were about to leave the passageway, the girls noticed something lying at their feet. Three tiny flowers had evidently fallen from Edelweiss’s hair. Silently, they picked up the treasures and carefully tucked them into their belts.

The girls weren’t a bit tired after the adventure in the turret; and with the spriggan out of the way, they decided to go outside to explore the cornerstone. They had a pretty good idea that this was where the treasure was located, if in fact there was a real treasure in the castle, because the cornerstone was very near where Edelweiss had been snatched. The position of the stone was also a good explanation as to why the spriggan had cursed the wax



figures, in order to drive people away. The cornerstone was basically under the floor of the old library.

The moonlight was so bright by the stone steps, they didn't even need their wands. And in fairy form, they were able to see things very closely, much as they had with the painting. Again, Sparrow's superior eyesight was what did the trick. She spotted a rectangle place near the top of the cornerstone that looked like an outline and didn't quite fit with the rest of the stone surface. Upon closer scrutiny, they discovered that the rectangle was definitely a separate brick. With all three of the girls working their hands into the cracks around the smaller stone, and tugging on it, they managed to slide it out. And the brick came out rather smoothly, which surprised them. Struggling somewhat because of the weight, they placed the heavy stone on the ground. Next, the fairies peered cautiously into the hole.

Sparrow led the way as they entered with her wand held high. Winter was so close behind her that when Sparrow paused for a second, the two bumped.

Because the castle was a large structure, the cornerstone was very large. However, the stone was not solid. The fairies had only traveled about two feet when they reached an opening in the stone, and what they found inside was truly amazing. The secret opening was nearly four feet across and probably as deep, and the cavity was almost completely filled with a massive assortment of gold and jewels. In addition to old coins and loose gemstones, there were piles and piles of beautifully-wrought jewelry inset with magnificent sapphires, rubies, diamonds, emeralds, pearls, and more. Bracelets, earrings, tiaras, necklaces, brooches—it was all here, in mounds.

Gazing down at the treasure from the narrow brick entryway, the girls couldn't speak. After a few moments, Emerald was the first to find her voice. "Don't touch any of it," she said.

When her friends looked at her questioningly, she said, "Call me superstitious, but I believe what Vanda told us about the treasure being cursed, and I definitely think there's something sinister about this."

Winter agreed, stating, "I'm getting bad vibes from it too, even though it is very beautiful."

"We should leave," said Sparrow. "The spriggan might have set up other curses, and it's probably not safe for us to be inside the stone, especially since no one knows we are here."

The fairies made it safely outside, whereupon, they replaced the brick they had removed.

Breathing hard from lifting the heavy stone, they landed on the ground next to the cornerstone. As they sat down together for a few moments to regain their strength, they discussed the treasure.

"Boy, think of the good that much wealth could do," said Winter.

"Yes," agreed Emerald. "But if it is a cursed treasure, it could also do a lot of harm."

"I guess it depends on how it was acquired," said Sparrow. "At least, that's how it usually works in legends about treasures. If it was ill-gotten, then the spoils usually can't do much good in the world."

"Right," said Winter, nodding. "Trouble always follows gold and jewels with that kind of history. Also,

enormous wealth often corrupts those who come into contact with it.”

“Plus, people and their actions are what are really important in the world,” Sparrow said shrewdly. “Human beings are the real treasures of the earth, not things like gold and jewels. However, since people are only human, and can be tempted or fall under curses, we should probably leave the treasure where it is.”

“I agree,” said Emerald. “I don’t think the good it might bring is worth risking the possible evil and destruction it might cause.”

Winter agreed with her friends.

And right there in the moonlight, the three fairies made a pact never to tell anyone about the treasure in the cornerstone of Blumenthal Castle; and they kept this promise to one another all their lives.

## Chapter Eight

### Edelweiss

Madam Sage visited the castle again the next morning, and the girls told her almost everything about what had happened. (They left out any mention of the cornerstone and their discovery of the treasure.)

The fairy mentor was happy that they had been able to help Edelweiss, and she stated, “There hasn’t been an edelweiss fairy in these parts for a very long time. Perhaps the trapped spirit was the reason. Now that she has moved on, maybe another edelweiss fairy spirit will come to us.”

After the adventure, the girls still had four days left to spend in the castle. The first day, they took a bus to town to go shopping. Sparrow and Emerald were anxious to obtain some souvenirs and gifts to take home to friends. In one store, they found beautiful bookmarks featuring pressed edelweiss flowers, which included a legend about an ancient knight’s bravery on a perilous journey to obtain a single edelweiss flower to save the life of his queen.

On the second day, they were invited to another luncheon at Wistinhausen Manor, which was just as lovely and scrumptious as the first one.

The fairies also spent a lot of their remaining time exploring more parts of the castle, and they visited Grandfather Weber every afternoon. On one of their afternoon visits, he said, “I know a lot of strange things happen in Blumenthal Castle. I hope you weren’t too

scared during your stay.” As the girls smiled and shook their heads, Grandfather Weber added, “Good. I figured you would be okay because the West Wing isn’t all that mysterious. The super spooky stuff is concentrated in the East Wing.” His eyes were twinkling at the girls’ wide-eyed expressions, but he didn’t elaborate.

As they made their way back up to the castle for the evening, they speculated about what might go on in the East Wing.

“What could be more mysterious and spooky than windows to other realms, spirits trapped in walls, bewitched wax figures, cursed treasures, and enchanted knights in mirrors?” said Emerald.

“I don’t know,” responded Sparrow. “Probably just lots more of the same.”

However, Winter did warn her friends, “My grandfather likes spinning tales. That’s probably all that is.”

“But his story of the girl who disappeared was true,” countered Sparrow.

“Maybe we’ll get to stay in the castle again sometime,” said Emerald, “and get the chance to solve another mystery.” The fairies all thought that would be tremendous fun.

On the final day of their visit, the girls presented Mrs. Hofstedter with a lovely glass paperweight containing an edelweiss flower. For some reason, the gift was a great shock to the housekeeper. After removing the tissue wrapping from the paperweight, and nearly dropping the gift in surprise, the housekeeper turned completely white and stared at the girls.

After a few moments of silence, with Mrs. Hofstedter continuing to stare at them, Sparrow cleared her throat and said, “We hope we weren’t too much trouble, and we wanted to do something nice for you, but we couldn’t think of what.”

The housekeeper finally found her voice, and the girls were very surprised by what she had to say. “You have already done something nice for me. Sophie Hahn’s mother was my great-great-great-great aunt. Throughout the generations, our family has never been able to find out what happened to Sophie. However, a fortune teller once told me that her spirit was trapped somewhere in the castle. The woman also said that magic could help Sophie and that magical beings were plentiful in the world. She told me to leave Sophie’s diary out for visitors to find. She also said that if I was patient throughout the years, eventually someone would find a way to free her spirit, at which time, I would receive an edelweiss flower as a gift.” After a short pause, Mrs. Hofstedter added, “Thank you for whatever you did to make this happen.” With this, the stoic housekeeper simply turned and walked down the hall, clutching the small paperweight to her heart.

While they were packing, the girls decided how they were going to split up the toys Edelweiss had given them. Since Winter had a doll collection, the girls unanimously decided that she should be allowed to keep Edelweiss’s doll. Emerald collected monkeys, so she wanted the automaton. Sparrow had no problem with this because she had always liked the story of Jonah and the Whale, so she had hoped to keep the bank. Emerald and Sparrow left the toys fairy-sized for easy packing.

Sparrow's mom picked her up early the next morning. With quite a few tears, and a lot of hugs and kisses, Sparrow said goodbye to her friends. She also hugged and kissed Grandfather Weber. Then, waving from the car, she set off on another adventure.

Before returning home, Sparrow and her mom set out on an even grander, though slightly more rushed tour than the one Sparrow had already experienced with her friends in Holland and Denmark.

First, they went to Salzburg in Austria to see the Mirabell Gardens. Sparrow and her mom took a lot of photographs of the lush, colorful, and perfectly-manicured gardens. While shopping at a tiny gift shop near the gardens, by coincidence, Sparrow and her mom both picked out the same necklace for themselves—a beautiful, cloisonné edelweiss. Fortunately, the shop had two of them. They wore the lovely pendants right away. Sparrow also picked out numerous collectible pins to take back to her friends.

After the trip to Austria, it was back to Germany to visit a safari park, a factory that made table china, and another one that manufactured nutcrackers.

Their final stop was the most spectacular of all—Neuschwanstein Castle. Sparrow found out that the name Neuschwanstein actually meant New Swan Stone.

“How would you like to stay in *this* castle?” her mom asked.

Neuschwanstein Castle was a brilliant, beautiful, glowing, and whimsical stone creation. Inside, the tapestries, paintings, and furniture were even fancier than those of Blumenthal Castle. The structure was also much

larger and taller. However, given her pick of places to say, Sparrow would have chosen the smaller castle, though she did wonder if Neuschwanstein held as many mysteries as Castle Blumenthal. Since swans were very mysterious creatures, she thought this might be possible.

After their whirlwind adventure, the two weary travelers returned home, which was a good thing. With only two days left before school was set to begin, Sparrow needed to catch her breath and come back down to earth somewhat. Castle and fairy adventures were wonderful things, but everyday life in the real world was important too, and it was good to be home.



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Aurora and the Lights of Marfa  
Journey's End

Though the entire story of *The Fairy Chronicles* follows a specific timeline, the individual adventures are stand-alone books that can be read in any order.

## About the Author

J.H. Sweet is the author of *The Fairy Chronicles*, *Wind Horses and Horned Lions*, *The Wishbone Miracle*, *The White Sparrow*, *Foo and Friends*, *Juan Noel's Crystal Airship*, *The Time Entity Trilogy*, *The Gypsy Fiddle*, *Cassie Kingston Mysteries*, and *The Heaviest Things*. She lives in South Texas and has a degree in English from Texas State University.

[jhsweet.com](http://jhsweet.com)  
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