

The Fairy Chronicles #45



Eglantine and the Laughing Owl



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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.

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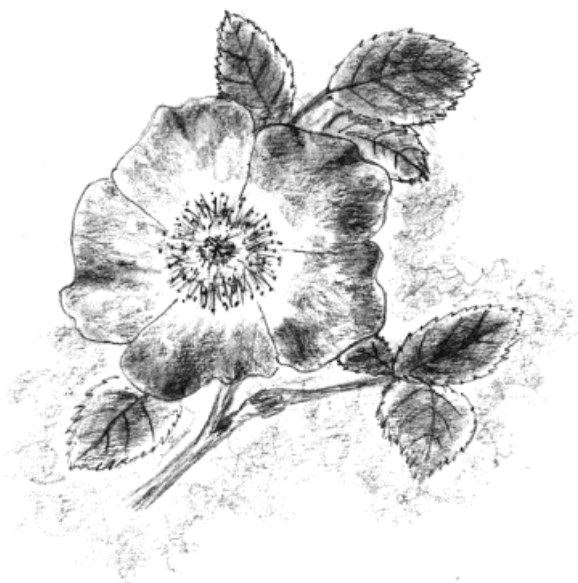
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Chapter One

Glorford Manor

As usual, spring break was incredibly busy for many of the fairies of the Southwest region, but not necessarily busy due to fairy activities. On Sunday, Cygnet Davis celebrated her twelfth birthday with a party in her back yard that included many of her fairy friends. The group played games, climbed around in the treehouse, unwrapped presents, and consumed an enormous amount of their favorite foods and sweet treats.

Cygnet was a tall black girl with long, curly dark hair. Her fairy spirit came from a type of rose known as eglantine, which was

also called sweet brier. Since fairies were free to choose their own fairy names, and vary them to be more individual, Cygnet decided that she preferred to be called Eglantine.

In fairy form, Eglantine's vibrant pink, flower-petal dress had yellow stamen filament accents, forming spindly frills and fringes on the sleeves and skirt. She also had tall, gauzy pink wings that were pointed and lacy. Her fairy wand was a cygnet feather, specially arranged for her by her mentor, Madam Jonquil, upon finding out Eglantine's real name. Cygnets were baby swans, and the downy-white feather was fluffy and ultra-soft. The wand itself was full of swan enchantment and was capable of creating tiny waterspouts since that was one of the magical gifts associated with

white swans. The feather also had a purity about it that could help Eglantine make wise decisions when holding it because swans were very pure magical creatures, similar to unicorns, and were filled with a clarity of thought that included non-biased ideas, excellent reasoning, and good advice. And since swans were able to communicate with other beings by mere thought, the enchanted feather sometimes sent Eglantine thought messages.

Eglantine's own gifts were those common to all rose fairies and included resistance to cold and a vigorous, hearty nature with nearly endless energy, which was sometimes difficult to distinguish from the energy that most young girls seemed to have anyway. Also, since sweet brier roses were very prickly, with fairly vicious thorns,

Eglantine had defensive capabilities relating to this and could fight, if necessary, though most fairies preferred not to, of course. These hearty roses also bloomed for very long periods of time, so they were known as a flower of persistence and second chances. For eglantine fairies, this lore was much more than simply symbolic because these particular rose fairies often found themselves in situations relating to mistakes, regrets, and making amends. Finally, since the fragrance of both the blossoms and leaves of the sweet brier was very similar to apples, Eglantine had an ability relating to deception and disguise. She was often able to confuse and manipulate others into thinking they were seeing, hearing, or smelling something else, almost like an expert power of persuasion relating to tricks

of the eye, ear, and nose. This was a very powerful gift, though slightly hard for eglantine fairies to master due to the varying degrees of resistance other creatures had to being tricked.

Eglantine had just spent a very full Monday morning with two of her fairy friends, Faith Llewellyn and Stephanie Ryan. For nearly four hours, the three had worked on bead projects, gone skating, drawn sidewalk chalk pictures, played croquet, and climbed about in the treehouse.

Faith's fairy spirit came from a purple-blossomed clover, and she wore a clover barrette in her long blond hair. Her fairy dress was covered with dark green leaves; but the shoulder straps and belt were made of purple blossoms that looked like tiny fireworks explosions. Clover's wings were

tall and purple, and she carried a rainbow cactus thorn for her wand. Her special fairy gifts included enhanced luck and the ability to interpret dreams. She was also very creative and a notorious daydreamer.

Stephanie was a heather fairy with short blond hair. In fairy form, Heather's dress was made of tiny, pale purple heather blossoms; and her lavender wings were very large and wispy. She carried a vanilla bean wand that smelled wonderful. Heather's special fairy gifts included grace, beauty, fairness, and a kindness toward others. Also, since the ornamental heather plant was used in various parts of the world to make brooms, in addition to being an important food source for many animals, anything associated with the plant was highly valued and greatly appreciated for its usefulness.

Heather's twin sister was an aloe fairy, but Aloe was attending a music workshop at a local college for most of spring break, so she wasn't spending much time with her sister this week.

In the early afternoon, the girls left the house with an enormous picnic basket. Eglantine's neighborhood was only partially developed and bordered a large stretch of woods. The fairies, being the adventurous spirits that they were, often liked to explore the woods and have picnics among the dense trees.

After changing into fairy form behind a clump of loblolly pine trees a good ways from the house, the girls flew off into the forest. The picnic basket that Eglantine and Heather were carrying between them was automatically shrunk down with them when

they transformed into fairies, but it was still somewhat heavy and made for a slightly awkward flying pattern that included a few dips and swerves, and nearly dropping the load once when Heather had to readjust her grip.

After flying for nearly a mile, the fairies set down in a small clearing to enjoy their lunch. However, upon unpacking the basket, they suddenly heard something rather odd, something that sounded like loud, shrill, high-pitched chattering.

“What is that?” asked Clover.

Eglantine, with a confused look on her face, just shook her head.

“Maybe some kind of a squirrel signaling danger?” suggested Heather, but doubtfully.

“It’s a little too high-pitched for a squirrel,” said Clover.

“Exactly,” said Eglantine. “Squirrels can definitely squeak, but they are not that shrill. It’s probably some sort of bird.”

They heard the noises again a few moments later. This time the sound was almost like a loud whistling, followed by a trilling chuckle and a kind of crazy hooting.

Deciding to investigate, the hungry girls grabbed handfuls of celery and carrot sticks to tide them over until they could eat. Then they flew in the direction of the strange sounds.

After only a short jaunt through the dense Spanish oak and cedar trees, they came upon an abandoned manor house. The property was extremely overgrown, with out-of-control bushes and weeds filling in about the trees that seemed to be milling in crowds around the yard, as though waiting

to be picked up and taken to a roomier lot. Even the crumbling brick walls of the enormous, three-story house were covered with thick English ivy and spiky bougainvillea that had apparently not been trimmed or tended to for many years. Obviously, no one had lived in the manor for quite some time.

A bent iron sign hanging sideways from a chain above the rock arch entryway to the front drive indicated that this was Glorford Manor. Having finished munching on their veggie sticks, the girls cautiously flew over the archway and into the front lawn area of the property, though there was no longer a lawn, of course, as overgrown as the ground was with bushes, vines, and crabgrass. As they neared the huge, cracked stone columns standing on either side of the double front

doors, the fairies heard the shrill chattering sounds again, this time even louder. They were definitely heading in the right direction to discover the source of the mysterious noises.

“Maybe it’s some kind of monkey,” whispered Heather. Her friends just shook their heads, like that wasn’t a very good guess. Heather agreed with their doubts: Monkey didn’t sound quite right as the producer of the odd sounds.

The left side of the front door was slightly off its hinges, and the crack that the askew door afforded at the top was plenty large enough for the fairies to enter, which they did, cautiously. Since no one was living in the manor, the girls didn’t really think they were breaking into someone’s

home, and they were very curious as to what or who was making the unfamiliar noises.

The inside of the house was dimly lit by struggling rays of sunlight, fighting their way through the ivy and shards of broken glass covering the windows. Two holes in the ceiling of the main hall extended all the way up through the floors of the house to the roof and also allowed a small amount of light in from above to illuminate the debris-covered floors and faded furniture in the ancient manor.

The girls quickly determined that they would definitely have to do their exploring of the various parts of the house in fairy form because it would not have been safe to walk anywhere other than the first level for fear of falling through the floors of the dilapidated structure. Indeed, they would

also need to keep watch for falling bits of ceiling and whatnot in their travels.

Hearing the high-pitched chattering once more, which began with a fast-paced trilling and ended with a sharp shriek, the fairies were drawn to an old parlor room, the door of which was situated to the right in the front hall. Upon entering the room, they alighted on a low shelf of an old bookcase near the door. This room had even less light than the entry hall, so the girls waited for their eyes to adjust in order to see more clearly before exploring anything farther in.

In addition to a nearly full room of old-fashioned furniture, paintings, and bookshelves packed with knickknacks, about half of which seemed to be broken, the high-ceilinged parlor also contained an enormous, towering fireplace made of sand-

colored bricks with an ornately-carved stone mantle. The flue of the chimney must have been open because a pile of old ashes in the grate was swirling to and fro, making soft *swishing* sounds in the otherwise quiet of the manor.

The quietness didn't last long because the girls heard the odd noises once more in the form of a loud shriek and several short barks that seemed to come directly from the chimney of the fireplace.

After a moment of being startled by the not-totally-unexpected but-nonetheless-surprising sounds, the fairies again speculated as to what type of animal, bird, or reptile might be making the noises.

“It almost sounds like laughing,” whispered Eglantine.

“But what sort of creature, other than human beings, can make laughing sounds?” asked Clover.

“A hyena,” answered Heather. But for some reason, that didn’t sound right either.

After a few more moments of speculation, with none of them coming up with anything better than their previous guesses, the girls left the security of the bookcase and flew toward the strange fireplace. Alighting on the mantle, they were reluctant to explore the inside of the chimney since they had no idea what might actually be living up there.

As they walked along the ledge, the girls could see that a few of the bricks of the fireplace were very oddly colored, standing out from the rest of the stone blocks in noticeable contrast. There was no obvious

pattern of placement for the different-colored ones; they seemed to be scattered randomly, about fifteen in all at first count.

After waiting nearly twenty minutes, and hearing nothing else unusual, the fairies decided to leave to return to their picnic spot. Since they had no intention of doing anything dangerous like impulsively flying up into a dark chimney to try to discover an unknown creature, and because they were only expected to be away from Eglantine's home for two hours in total before needing to check in with her dad, the fairies decided that the smart thing to do would be to come back some other time to explore the secrets of the manor.

The bright and sunny clearing and the allure of the picnic basket full of delicious foods were much-welcomed by the unsettled

fairies, who were anxious to leave the dark and somewhat scary house behind for the day.

Chapter Two

The Spring Pageant and Fairy Circle

Eglantine spent the early part of the next morning working on a craft project at the dining room table. Sorting through the pine needles she was using to construct the coiled basket, she wondered again about the strange sounds they had heard the day before. After reasoning everything out, she decided that the creature was most likely some type of bird, but she didn't know what kind.

The fairies wouldn't have time to return to explore Glorford Manor today because they were scheduled to participate in a Girls Club pageant in the evening, and they needed most of the day to make the final

arrangements such as decorating the hall of the local Senior Center, getting refreshments ready, and giving their costumes the final tweaks to prepare for the performance.

After nearly an hour of sewing on the basket, Eglantine was extremely frustrated and just about ready to give up. Her father, who worked as a chef at a restaurant in the evenings, usually stayed with her during the day while her mother worked as a manager at the local utility company. Having started a pot of soup for lunch, Mr. Davis came out of the kitchen to check on the basket progress.

“This is such a hard project,” complained Eglantine.

“Well,” answered her father, “if basket-making were easy, everyone would do it.”

“But I’ve already made about six mistakes and had to take out who knows how much stitching. I think I’ve really only added two rows this morning.”

“Let me see,” her father said, taking the oval-shaped basket bottom from her and examining the stitching closely.

“I feel like throwing it away and starting over,” said Eglantine with a strained voice and a huge sigh. “Otherwise, I am going to have to undo half of the last row to fix the latest mistake—that missed stitch,” she added, pointing to a small gap in the row of stitching.

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” said her father. “For one thing, mistakes often give character to creative creations. Sometimes I make my best recipes out of mistakes. This small missed stitch, left in

your project, could serve to give the basket character. In the same way that people aren't perfect, the things we create don't have to be either. And even though we learn from our mistakes, and improve our techniques, we shouldn't feel that our less-than-perfect work doesn't have value or doesn't deserve to exist.

"I definitely think this project deserves a second chance to exist," he added. "So don't throw it away. The color is really beautiful, and the smell of the pine needles is nice. If you don't want the basket when you are finished making it, I would love to put it in my den. It would be perfect to use as a nut or candy bowl, or for other snacks to enjoy while I watch basketball."

When her father went to check on the temperature and add ingredients to the

simmering soup, Eglantine examined her basket more closely. Her father was right. The barely-noticeable missed stitch did add a little something to her work, almost like a signature. And probably, once the basket was complete, only she would ever notice the missing stitch because the mistake was not in a noticeable or prominent place.

As she sat working for another hour, Eglantine breathed the smell of the dried pine needles that she had gathered right from the back yard, beneath the loblolly trees; and she enjoyed the feel of the basket taking shape in her hands. She no longer wanted to throw it away, even with the frustration she had previously experienced; and she didn't even get too upset when she stuck herself with the sewing needle while stitching.

The Girls Club Spring Pageant was entitled, *Celebrate Women Throughout the Ages*. Eglantine's father dropped her off at the Senior Center just after an early lunch, whereupon, she joined many of her friends in decorating the stage and the tables in the audience. By the time the Girls Club sponsors brought in pizza for everyone at five o'clock, and hurried the girls' eating so that they would have plenty of time to don their costumes, the rec room of the Senior Center had been transformed into a lovely showplace.

In the bustling dressing room, Eglantine hurriedly put on her Susan B. Anthony costume. Her character needed to be one of the first presented on stage because she was announcing the middle part of the pageant.

As soon as she had made her way across the stage and back, with Teasel reciting the summarized details of the life of Susan B. Anthony, Eglantine rushed to change back into her regular dress. Ten minutes later, she relieved Teasel and began her own recitations to give details about the lives of Helen Keller, Pocahontas, Queen Victoria, Annie Oakley, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Laura Ingalls Wilder while Fern, Dragonfly, Hollyhock, Brandtii, Sandpiper, and Arabesque portrayed these famous women.

Some of the donated and borrowed costumes were completely authentic, and many of the girls were thrilled to be able to wear interesting hats and button-up shoes, and to carry old books, cameras, and other historical accessories. The button-up shoes were something of a time problem for a few

of the girls though, since not many of them were familiar with how to use the tool to get them buttoned. (The shoes also weren't very comfortable.)

The audience enjoyed a variety of refreshments in addition to the show, and many of the parents and sponsors took multitudes of pictures to remember the evening.

When the pageant ended, Eglantine's mother took her home, while her father headed to his restaurant for the night. Once home, her mother immediately noticed and praised the progress on the basket, which was still on the table in the dining room.

The next morning, the fairies held their regularly scheduled spring break Fairy Circle, which was somewhat sparse in numbers this year because a lot of the girls,

and even some of the mentors, were away on spring trips with their families. The exciting talk about fairy travelers was mainly focused on Silica's trip to Hawaii. Very few of the other young fairies had ever visited our 50th state, and they very much envied the glass fairy's ability to return to visit family on occasion. Dandelion, who also had family in Hawaii, frequently talked about what a beautiful place the islands were. Hawaii also had a lot of important history surrounding it. Tea got to go with Silica on this spring trip because she had spent the last six months doing odd jobs on weekends and evenings to earn the money for her plane ticket.

While they visited with one another, the fairies enjoyed their usual fairy treats of powdered sugar puff pastries, homemade

fudge, lemon jellybeans, peanut butter and marshmallow crème sandwiches, raspberries, and root beer. They also had orange-iced molasses cookies and cashew brittle made by Madam June Beetle.

In addition to the conversations about fairies away on trips, a question by Madrigal sparked a small discussion concerning dragonflies. The region was just starting to see a few dragonflies, which were much more numerous in summer and fall. Madrigal, as one of the slightly younger fairies, often liked to ask questions of the slightly older and more experienced girls. Since there were a couple of experts on hand, she asked Blue and Dragonfly, “Why do dragonflies seem to like cars, and why do they hang out in parking lots sometimes?”

Sterling, Dove, Rosemary, Fern, Pumpkinwing, and Clover all gathered around to hear this discussion.

The dragonfly fairies seemed to have the answer to the question without even having to give the matter much thought.

“Dragonflies sometimes like to take long journeys,” began Blue. “And they know that they are very beautiful creatures. You see, they can sometimes be quite vain.”

“Yes,” added Dragonfly, understanding where Blue was heading and taking up her story perfectly. “They enjoy looking at their reflections, so they use the cars like mirrors, especially chrome bumpers and grills, to make sure they look their best before continuing on their journeys.”

“Often in their travels,” continued Blue, “they don’t have the luxury of water to use

as a mirror. And because even the paint on cars is usually shiny enough to see their reflections, dragonflies can use the hoods and roofs too to check themselves out.”

“Also,” said Dragonfly, “the cars’ shininess reminds the dragonflies of the water where they like to play, so they don’t mind hanging out in parking lots just like they would at lakes or ponds.”

Blue finished this narrative (somehow with a straight face) by adding, “They sometimes have dragonfly conventions in parking lots too, just to get away from the lakes and ponds for a bit, like for a vacation.”

Dragonfly nodded in agreement, also keeping a straight face.

As the two dragonfly fairies flitted off toward the refreshment table, Madrigal

thought seriously about what Blue and Dragonfly had said, not realizing that the slightly older fairies were pulling her leg.

“Maybe they just think they are seeing another dragonfly when they see their reflections, and they are trying to visit,” offered Dove, who was not quite as gullible as Madrigal.

This was likely a better answer than the one the other two had offered; however, since Dove couldn't possibly be as much of a dragonfly expert as Blue and Dragonfly, none of the fairies seemed to want to believe that her explanation was best, though it was certainly more plausible than the concept of vain insects and organized dragonfly conventions.

Chapter Three

A Strange Lamp and An Answer to the Mystery

Eglantine’s treehouse, being three stories high and completely wonderful in other ways too, had somewhat turned into “fairy central” during the times when school was out. Since this headquarters of sorts was perfectly situated next to the woods, and was close to where many of the fairies lived, Eglantine pretty much had daily visitors on weekends and especially during times such as spring break when the girls had more free time.

The next morning, Thyme and Raven joined Eglantine, Clover, and Heather for a

day of fun in the treehouse. However, the two hadn't a clue that exploring an ancient, crumbling manor house was also on slate for the day.

Packing up a big bag of peanut butter and marshmallow crème sandwiches and apples, Eglantine told her father that they would be exploring the woods and hanging out in the treehouse for most of the day. Mr. Davis gave consent, as long as the girls checked in just after lunchtime.

Thyme's real name was Sarah Richmond; and she had short, dark red hair. Her leafy, bright green dress had accents of purple flowers; and her sparkling wings were very tiny. Thyme carried a dried pine needle for her wand that came from her family's Christmas tree on the day she was born. For her fairy gift, she had the ability

to communicate well with bees and other insects. She also had endless energy and enhanced efficiency.

Harper Borden was Raven's real name, and she had short red hair too. So it was as though two redheaded twins had arrived to spend the day, except that Raven and Thyme were not at all related to one another. Raven's dress was made of glossy black feathers; and she had tall, feather-fringed wings. Her pointy slippers matched her dress; and she carried a fancy, antique hatpin for her wand. Since ravens were known as prophetic birds and keepers of all truths, Raven's fairy gifts involved being able to sometimes see the future with visions, and the ability to see truth even when it was hidden deeply within.

The group flew quickly to the manor, and upon entering via the crack over the door, Eglantine deposited the bag of sandwiches and apples on a dusty settee in the foyer. Then the girls made their way to the room with the mysterious fireplace, hoping to find some way to discover the source of the strange noises.

Clover and Thyme hovered in front of the brick wall façade above the fireplace mantle, while their friends stood along the stone ledge below them.

Thyme was the first one to touch one of the strangely-colored bricks. The one she was positioned close to was a mossy green color. The brick also had a kind of pale green glow to it. However, when she tentatively reached out her hand to lightly touch the surface, her fingers met no

resistance and seemed to disappear partway into the brick. Evidently, this brick was not a brick at all. With her friends all watching intently, Thyme again placed her hand on the brick that wasn't really there and pushed it in farther. Her hand and arm disappeared all the way up to her elbow this time. She couldn't feel anything but air inside the brick.

Heather, Eglantine, and Raven, watching from below, were silent. However, Clover, now hovering shoulder to shoulder with Thyme, whispered, "Don't try to push in any more just yet, since we don't know what might be on the other side."

Thyme nodded and withdrew her arm quickly. Then she and Clover landed next to their friends.

Just as they were about to start forming a plan as to what they might do next, the five fairies suddenly became very sleepy, and they all heard a strange voice that was both deep and soft say very quietly, “Try the red brick next.”

The red brick was situated at the farthest point of the fireplace from the fairies’ current location, and was only about three inches higher than the mantle ledge upon which they stood.

“Yes, the red brick is the best choice,” the soft voice creamily added.

The girls weren’t sure if these smooth and silky words were just in their heads, or if the voice was coming from somewhere in the parlor. And at this point, they were getting too sleepy to really care because the sluggishness they had all caught seemed to

be growing. Also, for some reason, the suggestion the voice had offered sounded really good. To the fairies' heavy-lidded eyes, the dark red, shimmering brick appeared very warm and alive, like an extremely pleasant object awaiting their touch. Plus, with the girls' currently foggy brains keeping them from thinking clearly, there was no reason to suspect any danger from whatever persuasive force was drawing them toward the brick at the far end of the mantle.

“The red brick,” murmured Heather, nodding, as she followed her friends down the mantle path in a trusting manner.

As the group drowsily made their way along the ledge, with slow, staggering steps towards the red brick, Clover suddenly caught herself, and shook her head to try to

relieve some of the sleepiness. She stopped walking, and out of instinct, peered closely into the darkened room. When her eyes met an unusual sight in one corner, she grabbed the arms of Raven and Eglantine who were nearest to her. This shook some of the drowsiness out of them too, and they also looked toward the corner of the room where Clover was staring.

An old ceramic oil lamp, shaped something like a fat teapot, complete with a spout and handle, sat upon a small round table. The sight of the antique lamp was not what was unusual, since an old lamp would be perfectly placed in the parlor of an ancient manor house. What was strange was the grayish-green wisp of smoke curling up out of the spout.

With all of the fairies now staring at the lamp, the wisp became about twice as thick, and the girls felt even sleepier than they had before. Their heads became thicker, their eyelids heavier, and they were all ready to curl up and take a nap, right there on the stone mantle if necessary.

“Yes, the red brick would be very good,” the soft voice smoothly suggested. “Just step right through it.”

The lure of the red brick and the lulling voice was truly too much to resist this time. It was as though some kind of powerful sleep magic was drawing them toward the end of the mantle, along with the sound of the silkily-pleasant voice.

Suddenly, a very loud shriek pulled the fairies out of their trance, waking them completely. A shrill chatter followed the

shriek and seemed to be coming from a dark gray brick directly above their position in the center of the mantle. The gray brick was glowing like a softly-lit, plugged-in nightlight.

As the girls glanced at the lamp once again, they noticed that the spout was no longer giving off the wispy vapors. And since they were now clear-headed, the fairies were anxious to investigate the noises behind the gray brick. As they flew up about a foot to hover in front of it, they glanced down at the red brick. It was no longer shimmering and seemed oddly cold in comparison to just a few moments before when the lure to get closer to the warmly-lit stone had seemed nearly irresistible.

The girls decided that for safety, they would hold hands, like a chain, while

Eglantine entered the gray brick slowly to see what might be inside, and to determine if there was any danger. Forming a line, the fairies held tightly to one another, with Raven grasping Eglantine's hand in an almost painful grip so as not to lose hold of her friend in case anything unexpected were to happen. As they were getting ready, the fairies heard the odd, trilling chatter once more; but this time the noise wasn't quite as loud as the blast that had drawn them out of their sleepy trance.

Eglantine took a deep breath, and with a last look at her friends, flew slowly forward, disappearing into the gray brick. Her foot caught slightly on the sand-colored brick immediately below the gray one, confirming the girls' suspicions that the strangely-

colored bricks were passages, or doorways, of some sort. *But doorways to where?*

Eglantine's friends barely had a chance to worry about her entire body, along with Raven's hand, disappearing into the gray stone because they heard her voice a mere moment later. "There's a woods in here! It looks safe." The rose fairy's head and shoulders suddenly popped back through the gray brick as she added, "The trees are really beautiful and peaceful, and I think it's fall, instead of spring." As her friends smiled at this wonderful discovery, Eglantine said, "Let me go all the way in without anyone holding onto me. I'll come right back to make sure we can get home okay, then we'll all go through the brick."

Her friends nodded. However, Thyme, who was feeling the need to be extremely

cautious, said, “Good thinking, but if you don’t make it right back, we will go for help, rather than follow you in.”

Eglantine nodded her agreement. “Good idea.” But she was fairly sure that the area behind the gray brick was safe. She just had a good feeling about it.

Raven, who could also sense these sorts of things with accuracy, wasn’t getting any inkling of danger either.

With her friends all holding their breath, Eglantine flew quickly into the gray brick, this time managing not to bang her foot, or any other part of her, on the surrounding chimney bricks. She popped back through not quite two seconds later to face her smiling friends. “Here I am, all safe and sound!”

Since all of the girls wanted to explore the strange and peaceful woods, and because there didn't seem to be any danger, they decided to risk all going in together. However, Heather had a good idea. She frequently carried string in her pockets to play string games. (A bit of string was often handy to have for other reasons too.) Raven and Clover also had lengths of string with them. By tying the pieces together, the girls fashioned a rope, of sorts, which they tied to a candlestick retrieved from a bookcase and placed on the mantle under the brick. Then, one at a time, the fairies flew slowly through the gray stone passageway to the woods on the other side, with Heather coming through last, holding the end of the string. She left the dangling string-end hanging out of the opposite side of the gray brick.

A fireplace identical to the one in Glorford Manor stood on its own in the middle of the trees, with no house or any other manmade structure in sight.

Many of the trees in the forest were gently dropping their colorful leaves as Eglantine had noticed. And the woods were situated next to a gigantic, glistening lake of still water. Many of the trees fringing the lake were draped with tendrils of thick moss, as though they were wearing gauzy blankets.

The treed area surrounding the fairies was shadowy, but not at all scary; and the air seemed warmer and muggier than the cool March weather they had been having at home. But fall was often warm in their region of the country, so even though the time of year was different, there was no

reason to assume they had traveled far from home. However, the girls were slightly disoriented by their surroundings because the trees at home were budding leaves instead of dropping them.

In the still and quiet woods, a rustling behind one of the larger spruce trees quickly drew their attention. The scuffling noise was followed by a short shriek, exactly like the ones the fairies had heard previously. Deciding to approach cautiously, the girls walked around the base of the tree, instead of flying. They didn't want to startle whatever creature was making the sounds. They walked slowly, but steadily. After all, there was safety in numbers; and they certainly didn't pose a threat to any other beings, so there was really no reason to expect trouble.

As they rounded the tree, stepping almost soundlessly upon a blanket of pine needles strewn with damp maple leaves, the girls could see through the forest to a small meadow in the distance that was full of golden grasses, gently waving at them.

Upon circling the tree nearly three quarters of the way round, the fairies came to a complete stop when they found themselves face to face with the answer to their mystery; and they all smiled.

Chapter Four

The Laughing Owl and the Fig Wasp

The creature was a tiny owl, about seven inches high, and he gazed somewhat warily at the fairies with his enormous, dark orange eyes.

The girls had never seen an owl like this before. He certainly didn't resemble barn owls or sooty owls, or any other kinds of owls they were familiar with. He wasn't an elf owl, or a spotted owl, or a great gray owl either. His coloring was mainly yellowish brown with light brown stripes on his wings and tail. The feathers around his face were mostly white with a bit of reddish-brown streaking on his neck. His tail tips were

white, and he had splashes of white on both shoulders.

“Oh my,” exclaimed Eglantine, admiring the lovely little creature. “What kind of an owl might you be?” she asked, not particularly expecting to get an answer.

“I am a laughing owl,” the bird responded, surprising the fairies with his squeaky little words.

“But I am still an owlet,” he added, breathlessly. “I won’t be full grown until next year.”

The girls could see that this was true because many of the owl’s feathers were still small and downy, and he definitely didn’t quite look all filled-in yet.

“My real name is Cygnet,” said Eglantine, “which means baby swan.”

“So human beings get named after birds sometimes?” the owlet asked in surprise.

Eglantine nodded as the owl continued his orange stare, which was now less wary since he was making friends with the fairies.

Heather was thumbing through her fairy handbook in an attempt to learn more about the strange little owl.

“We’ve never heard of a laughing owl before,” said Raven.

“I’m not surprised,” trilled the owlet. “Laughing owls are extinct in your world. My name is Innin, by the way,” he added, blinking solemnly.

“We are pleased to meet you,” responded Clover.

“Likewise,” answered Innin, again blinking.

“Do you fly at all,” asked Eglantine, “since you are not yet full grown?”

“No, not yet,” the owlet answered. “But laughing owls don’t fly much anyway. We prefer to run. That’s part of the reason we became extinct.”

The fairies were a little confused by the owl’s last statement, but they didn’t get a chance to ask a question at this point because Innin continued somewhat excitedly with, “This is how we like to run.” As he said this, Innin zipped around the base of the spruce three times, stirring up a brief flurry of pine needles and maple leaves. The fairies laughed and clapped their hands as their new friend skidded to a stop to resume staring at them with his warm and glowing eyes.

Heather had finished looking up laughing owls in her handbook, but at this point, she didn't share anything she had found out with her friends. Instead, she said, "Can you tell us where we are?"

"Certainly," said Innin. "You have come to the Land of Daini."

"We've never heard of that before," said Heather, looking at her friends who were all shaking their heads.

"Can you tell us more about Daini?" asked Eglantine.

As though reciting from a book, Innin, bobbing his head up and down, told them, "The Land of Daini is a duplicate world where at least one of everything that ever existed on earth still exists." At the confused looks on the fairies' faces, the owl added, "Human beings are given fleeting

chances to come to Daini to retrieve things that have been lost or destroyed.”

“That is really interesting,” said Raven.

Eglantine nodded in agreement as she said, “Almost like a place of second chances, so that we can correct some of our mistakes.”

The laughing owl again bobbed his head as he said, “Very good. You understand the purpose of the Land of Daini, which is sometimes called the Land of Second Chances.

“I have been wondering why no one has come to fetch me yet,” Innin told the fairies, adding, “I heard that someone came for the ivory-billed woodpecker a few years back.”

The girls didn’t quite know what to say to the knowledgeable little owl, who continued a moment later with, “It’s a little

lonely here, but I am patient. I don't mind waiting."

"Maybe we are supposed to bring you back," offered Clover, with her friends nodding.

"Oh no," answered Innin. "That's not the way it works."

As the fairies looked at him quizzically, the owl tried to explain. "All of the others sent to the Land of Daini know exactly what they are looking for. They have been specifically sent here and have been given instructions, or a directive of some sort, to fetch a particular creature or item. Also, any person or group of persons making a visit to this world may only bring one thing back. If you weren't sent to bring back something specific, you must have

happened on the doorway to Daini by some sort of an accident.”

“Actually, we heard you calling,” said Heather with a smile.

“I guess I am a little loud sometimes,” said Innin sheepishly. “I should move farther away from the fireplace when I feel like squawking,” he added with a firm bob of his head.

“Anyway,” the owlet continued, “others who come know exactly what they are looking for. You shouldn’t take me back unless you are positive that you should.

“One lady came and got a spoon.” Innin nodded emphatically as the fairies looked at him with surprised expressions. “That *was* really odd,” he said. “It must have been a terrifically special spoon.”

“Or a magical one,” said Heather.

Since they had been gone for some time, and the girls were expected back home to check in with Eglantine's dad after lunch, the fairies decided that any further exploring in the Land of Daini would have to wait. And though Innin would have liked to have talked with the fairies a while longer, he understood their need to return home.

"Maybe we can come back some other time to visit," suggested Eglantine.

The owlet nodded and bid the fairies goodbye as they made their way back to the fireplace.

The gray brick with the string hanging from it was easy to locate, and the girls had no trouble getting back through to the parlor of Glorford Manor.

The lamp on the table was silent at present, and had no suspicious, wispy

vapors issuing from its spout; but the fairies eyed it warily as they flew past to exit the room. They knew by instinct not to touch the lamp. Who knows what magic it might contain? Whether good or bad, it was best to be completely safe and avoid the object for now. Plus, there now seemed to be something cold about lamp, almost as though it had turned itself off or retreated into something of an icy or changed state, just like the red brick had.

The girls still had about forty-five minutes until they were due to check in at home, so they decided to have their sandwiches in the side yard of the manor next to a clump of overgrown rose bushes, which were, amazingly enough, sweet briars. The scent of apples from the rose blossoms complemented the juicy apples

accompanying their yummy, peanut butter and marshmallow crème sandwiches.

While they were eating, the fairies saw something interesting in a birdbath about fifteen feet from their lunching spot. A small squirrel, standing on his hind legs, was doing a sort of dance on the edge of the bowl of the bath. His fluffy tail twitched furiously to a song apparently only he could hear, while he sidled back and forth along the rim of the bath bowl.

The fairies packed up their lunch remains quickly and flitted over to the birdbath to say hello to the talented squirrel. However, as they approached, he jumped down and bounded off through the vines and bushes, his tail still gyrating wildly. The fairies didn't follow but smiled at the squirrel's

skittish departure as they landed on the rim of the birdbath.

As they were just turning to leave, they heard a tiny voice say, “I wonder if you could help me.” The speaker, who was not readily visible, then added, “The squirrel didn’t have the answer, though he certainly put on a nice little show.”

Trying to locate the voice, the fairies looked closely at the center of the birdbath, which was filled more with moss and strings of ash-tree pollen than with water from the recent rains. No wonder they hadn’t noticed the speaker until now: Why he was only about the size of a bee, and was nearly the same color as the crumpled and holey sycamore leaf upon which he was perched in the center of the bath bowl.

“I am a fig wasp,” the enchanted insect told the fairies, somehow knowing that the girls were unfamiliar with what type of a creature he was.

“We are pleased to meet you,” stated Raven, who was the first to get over the slight shock of meeting a talking wasp.

“Hello,” added Clover.

“What might we help you with?” asked Eglantine, remembering what the fig wasp had said first.

“I am on an important quest,” the wasp told them. “I only stopped for a moment for a drink. I must find a fig tree very soon. Only fig wasps can pollinate fig trees.”

The fairies didn’t say anything right away. But their brains were working hard, trying to remember where in the area had fig trees.

While he was hopefully, and patiently, waiting for an answer from the fairies, the wasp added, “I came from the North. I covered about six miles so far today and passed no fig trees.”

“Mrs. Crawford,” announced Thyme, firmly. As her friends looked at her, she nodded earnestly and said, “I am almost sure that Mrs. Crawford still has fig trees in her back yard. I have to admit I swiped quite a few a couple of years ago,” she added somewhat guiltily. “I used to fly through her yard as a shortcut to Arabesque’s house.

“But she had too many that year,” Thyme said breathlessly, and hastily, in an effort to assuage her feelings of guilt, “and they were getting ripe too fast. I don’t think she missed the ones I took.”

Her friends smiled at one another, and Clover laughed. None of them imagined Mrs. Crawford even noticed the missing fruit. And even if she did, they didn't think she would have minded sharing a few figs with a fairy.

“Where does this Mrs. Crawford live?” asked the fig wasp.

Since the girls still had a little time before they were due to be back at Eglantine's house, they offered to show the wasp, instead of just telling him.

The trip to Mrs. Crawford's back yard wasn't much of a detour for the five fairies. And the wasp, who was overjoyed to find six fig trees at once, thanked the girls earnestly.

“By the way,” he added, “did you notice that interesting blue thing in the back of that

field we just passed?” The fairies shook their heads as the wasp said, “Well, fig wasps have excellent eyesight. That’s why I noticed the color. Anyway, whatever it is, it’s bright blue and tucked into that tangle of jasmine vines, all the way at the back by that old cedar fencepost.”

“We’ll have a look,” said Eglantine. With this, the fairies bid the wasp farewell as he made his way to the farthest fig tree to begin his work.

The girls speedily flew to the place the wasp had indicated in the vacant lot next to Mrs. Crawford’s house, where they made yet another exciting discovery on what was turning out to be a rather amazing day, even by fairy standards.

Chapter Five

Alabaster and Accordions

“What’s it for?” asked Heather.

The fairies were standing waist-deep amidst the tangle of Asiatic jasmine vines directly in front of a turquoise-colored stone egg that was beautifully marbled with gray lines and streaks. The egg was just about the size of a normal chicken’s egg.

“It’s alabaster,” answered Raven, running her hand over the cool surface. “Alabaster eggs are just for decoration. Or maybe they are something that collectors like. I don’t know exactly, but my aunt has a whole bowl of them in her kitchen, different colors.”

“Since this is a vacant lot,” said Eglantine, “I don’t think we should just leave the egg here.”

“We should take it back to the treehouse,” suggested Clover.

Thyme agreed. “Good idea.”

Eglantine briefly transformed to regular girl, picked up the egg, then *popped* back into fairy form so that the egg would be resized for easy carrying. Then the girls rushed home to check in with Eglantine’s dad.

Mr. Davis had spent his busy morning cooking and baking, and the girls were treated to a wonderful snack-meal of various meat and cheese-filled empanadas. They also enjoyed buttery, black raspberry scones.

After the hearty and delicious gourmet treats, Thyme and Clover both phoned home to check in, as was the rule at their houses when gone for more than just a couple of hours. Then the girls retreated to the treehouse, where they changed into fairy form to lounge about on the large throw pillows scattered over the second floor.

At this point, Heather told her friends what she had discovered about the laughing owl from reading her handbook. “They were also called white-faced owls,” she said. “And they were numerous in New Zealand in the *1800s*, that is, until the late part of that century when they started to become rare.”

As her friends listened with interest, Heather continued. “People from Europe brought in cats and stoats, which are a type

of weasel. And because the laughing owls mostly ran around on the ground to hunt and travel, they couldn't survive those kinds of predators, so they became extinct."

"So because people introduced something that wasn't supposed to be there," Clover said, wide-eyed, "the laughing owl was basically wiped out?"

Heather nodded, and the rest of the girls remained silent.

After a few moments of thinking, Thyme said, "But I thought extinction mostly happens because it's meant to be, as part of evolution, because some species are just not meant to exist anymore, like the dinosaurs."

"Not in cases where human beings are just careless," Eglantine said.

At this point, the girls didn't discuss the issue of extinction any further because it was a rather sad thing to think about.

After a few more moments of silence, Eglantine told her friends, "You know, it's strange that we met two enchanted creatures in one day. Bewitched animals and insects are actually kind of rare."

Her friends agreed that this had been a very strange day indeed, with many surprises.

"Maybe they were meant to teach us something," said Raven.

"You mean more than just the obvious lesson about human beings causing the extinction of other creatures?" asked Thyme.

“And about helping others, like what we did for the fig wasp, when we are able to?” interjected Heather.

Raven shrugged, and the fairies sat silently on the pillows, again pondering for some time.

“What should we do with the egg we found?” asked Eglantine, breaking the silence after nearly five minutes.

“Let’s just keep it here, in the treehouse,” said Raven.

The others agreed, and Eglantine added the beautiful blue egg to the cedar keepsake box, on the shelf of the third floor, in which she usually kept playing cards, a writing pad and pencil, and granola bars.

After saying goodbye to her friends about an hour later, and watching them flit off in various directions toward their homes,

Eglantine went inside to clean her room and help her father with laundry and making dinner.

In the evening, based on an odd little thought suggestion she received from her wand, she decided to read the newspaper. When the wand gave her the further thought of—9L, she realized why this reading activity was meant to be. Page 9L included ads for garage sales, announcements of pets for adoption, and posts of rewards offered for lost items. Near the bottom of the page, a small ad read, *Lost: One alabaster egg, turquoise in color. Please return to 109 E. 6th Street, above the shop.*

This was incredibly exciting! Tomorrow, Eglantine would have the opportunity to return the lost egg to its owner. And Raven, Heather, Clover, and

Thyme were scheduled to come again in the morning for another visit, so they could go with her.

Her friends arrived just after breakfast. And even though they had all already had their morning meal, none of them could resist having luscious cinnamon rolls, fresh from the oven and covered with gooey icing. Mr. Davis was a complete magician and genius in the kitchen. In fact, Eglantine's friends all wondered how she managed to stay so slim, with her father working this kind of magic at home pretty much all of the time.

The girls also thought he must have been up and baking before dawn to have come up with this morning's delicious and cinnamony creation. Mr. Davis did confess that he sometimes prepared his dough ahead

of time for baked items, storing it in the freezer or refrigerator. This was the case this morning. Though he had added all of the extras such as pecans and brown sugar, and mixed up the icing fresh, the dough had been made last week and stored in the freezer.

Mr. Davis then offered to give the girls a few cooking lessons over the upcoming summer, so they could get an early start on learning their way around a kitchen, if they wanted to. Thyme, Clover, Heather, and Raven all eagerly agreed. Eglantine smiled. Since her father knew that she didn't particularly care for cooking, and since he had no other children at this time to pass his skills on to, he was always seeking out eager learners of his craft. Also, he was a man who firmly believed that all food should be

tasty, since there was little reason these days for it not to be so, with the easy availability of spices, extracts, brines, and other means of seasoning.

After the cinnamon rolls were consumed and the milk glasses drained, Eglantine told her father that they were planning to go downtown to do a little shopping. This was fine with her dad. As long as they checked in around the middle of the day again, the girls were free to do pretty much whatever they wanted to on their spring break. Eglantine agreed that they would be back by one o'clock, or call if they were going to be later for some reason.

As the fairies made a quick stop at the treehouse to retrieve the egg, Eglantine explained to her friends about the

newspaper article and her plan to deliver the lost egg to its owner.

It took nearly thirty minutes to discreetly fly all the way to 6th Street because while in fairy form, and since there were five of them, they had to be careful about being seen. So they ended up taking a lot of detours through fields and parks in order not to be visible to morning walkers and people traveling in cars. Even though Raven could usually fly about without much worry, it would have looked mighty strange for a stem of heather, a pink rose, a sprig of thyme, and a blossoming clover to be sailing around, even in the breezy springtime.

When they came to 6th Street, Eglantine rechecked the address on the newspaper clipping. The number was marked on the door of the downtown shop, but the store

itself was so tiny that they nearly missed it. The sign on the door read, *Okos Accordions—Sales, Museum, Lessons.*

The shop itself wasn't open yet, which didn't bother the girls because they knew they needed to call above the store anyway. A tiny red door at the far end of the storefront was marked as *Private Residence—please use other door for business.*

Downtown was still fairly deserted at this time of morning. However, the fairies didn't want to take any unnecessary chances, so they flew into an alley to change to regular girl form before entering the building.

The tiny door opened to a narrow stairway that led to an apartment on the third floor, immediately above the two-story

accordion shop. The stairwell smelled like oranges. As the girls made their way to the top of the first flight of stairs and made the turn to ascend the second, Eglantine put her hand in her pocket and touched the egg. In addition to being cool and smooth, the stone also felt tingly this morning.

As they were climbing, Raven, in a whisper, told her friends, “I am almost certain this has something to do with our adventure yesterday at the manor and in the Land of Daini.”

The fairies stopped on the stairs in surprise. Raven’s instincts about these sorts of things were almost always correct. She nodded and added, “This egg and the accordion shop are somehow connected to the laughing owl.”

When they reached the third floor, Thyme knocked on the door to the apartment.

A tiny, dark-haired woman wearing blue-rimmed eyeglasses and a silky blue dress and slippers answered the door almost immediately.

“Hello there, young ladies,” she said. The woman had some sort of slight accent, but the girls weren’t able to tell where she might be from. As the fairies responded politely to the greeting, the woman added, “I am guessing you are not here to sign up for accordion lessons.”

“You’re right,” replied Eglantine. “We are answering the advertisement about the lost egg.” With this, she produced the egg from her pocket and held it out to the tiny

woman. “We found it in a vacant lot,” she added.

“Please come in, girls,” the woman said, without taking the egg. Instead, she backed into the living room and bustled about, removing several newspapers and books from a couch and two armchairs to make room for the visitors.

The girls filed into the apartment and took the seats the woman offered. There was some sort of air of mystery surrounding them, but no danger, as far as any of them could tell. The smell of oranges was even stronger in the woman’s home, as though she had just squeezed some fresh juice.

“My name is Kashi Okos,” the woman told them. “And I did not lose that egg.”

At the girls’ surprised looks, Ms. Okos added, “However, I was given a message to

run that ad; and I have something very important to tell you.”

Since it was obvious that the visitors were rather startled by what she was telling them, Ms. Okos tried to explain. “In addition to running the accordion shop and museum, and giving lessons, I am a seer.” As she said this, Ms. Okos gave Raven a sharp look, as if identifying another person with the same prophetic gift.

“I am also known as a wise woman,” she told the girls, “because my advice is often sought by those in times of difficulty. But related to the seer part, when visions and dreams come to me, I am often told to deliver messages. Of course, I didn’t know there would be five of you,” the wise woman added, “but I definitely have a message for one or all of you.”

Chapter Six

Secrets of the Chimney

Wide eyed, the girls sat quietly and listened intently as Ms. Okos prepared to continue. However, before telling them the message, she suddenly got up from her armchair and said, “I smell apples, for some reason, and that makes me hungry.” With this, Ms. Okos left the room to make a brief visit to her kitchen, returning with a bowl of nuts and a bag of taffy, both of which she passed around.

“Am I correct in assuming that you have recently taken a magical journey?” asked Ms. Okos, taking her seat again.

The girls looked at one another, not quite knowing how to answer, since their lives were basically filled with magic all of the time.

“Perhaps one to the Land of Daini?” the seer added.

Eglantine nodded.

“Are you magical creatures, like witches or nymphs?”

“Fairies,” replied Heather.

“Oh, this makes perfect sense then,” said Ms. Okos. “The Land of Daini is just the sort of place fairies would be sent to.”

The wise woman definitely had the girls’ attention as she quietly continued. “First, I need to tell you about the fireplace at Glorford Manor. Oh, I’ve never seen it, you understand,” the seer told them earnestly. “Not many people come across it. But I

definitely know enough about it to tell you some things.

“The fireplace at Glorford Manor was constructed of bricks brought from an enchanted castle in Europe, a mysterious castle of the ancient, medieval world. Some of the bricks of the chimney are actually portals to other worlds. These are basically doorways, but they look like bricks. At this time, three portals have been positively identified; and we think we know of two others. Of course, there may be quite a few more; but we can’t be sure at this point.”

“Who is we?” interrupted Thyme.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t share that with you,” responded the seer. “The less people who know, the safer the beings who monitor such things are.”

A few moments later, after taking an accordion down from a shelf behind her chair, adjusting the shoulder straps, and playing a few soft and woeful notes, Ms. Okos went on with her story.

“The gray brick leads to the Land of Daini. The green brick is a doorway to the realm where gnarlbeasts originate. And the red brick is a portal to a place called NetherSek.

“You don’t ever want to go there!” Ms. Okos told them loudly and firmly, startling the girls by her change in tone, and a wailing screech of her accordion. She nodded very seriously as she proceeded to lock eyes with each of the fairies to stress the importance of what she had just said.

Breaking the serious mood slightly, the seer played a few additional, melodious

notes on her instrument as she added, “For one thing, NetherSek is a land where fairy powers and magic will not work, not at all. And pixie dust won’t even glitter there. For a second thing, the land is inhabited by evil genies who do not like fairies. For that matter, they don’t like any other magical beings either, at least not the ones who work for good.”

“Could one of the genies be living in this world, inside the manor?” asked Eglantine.

“Yes, that’s possible,” answered Ms. Okos. “Why do you ask?”

“Because we were somehow drawn to the red brick,” said Clover.

“And we got really sleepy,” added Heather.

“Oh-ho!” the seer exclaimed. “You dodged a bullet, you five. What broke the

trance, or were you just somehow able to resist?”

“The sound of the laughing owl,” said Eglantine.

“Ah!” said Ms. Okos, quickly standing up and depositing the accordion back on its shelf. Sitting down again, she leaned forward and said, “We’ve come to the message that I am supposed to deliver: You are supposed to bring back the konki seed, not the laughing owl. The owl’s purpose was just to help you discover the doorway.

“Though I think he saved your lives too,” added the seer, in a most serious tone.

The girls nodded, realizing they were indeed lucky not to have been drawn into NetherSek.

“Anyway,” said the accordionist, “I don’t know where to tell you to look for the konki

seed, and I don't know what you are supposed to do with it once you find it, but you might ask the owl or others in Daini if they know."

The girls nodded in understanding, and they thought the wise woman's suggestion to ask the owlet was a good one. In fact, they had been hoping to see their little friend again.

"By the way," added Ms. Okos, "before I forget. The other two chimney portal possibilities that we suspect include doorways to both Avalon and Atlantis."

How exciting! The girls were speechless for a few moments after this, imagining the incredible prospect of travel to either or both of these mysterious and magical places.

"But no one has yet figured out how to open those doorways," the seer told them.

“We think the genie might live in a lamp in the parlor,” said Raven, backtracking a little in their conversation.

“That would make sense,” said Ms. Okos. “Genies seem to get themselves trapped in lamps sometimes, for some reason. Whatever you do, don’t touch the lamp. When genies get themselves into lamps, there usually has to be some action or power to help them out again, and touching the lamp might be that action.

“I recommend a bit of pixie dust applied to your foreheads before you enter the parlor again. That should help keep you awake if he tries to push or pull you into NetherSek again. Also, don’t touch any of the other bricks of the chimney if you can help it,” Ms. Okos warned. “All of Glorford Manor, and especially the parlor fireplace, is pretty

much still a complete mystery, even to some of the most powerful magical beings in this area who have been studying the house for years. We can't be sure you won't get pulled into someplace else like NetherSek if you aren't careful."

"We'll be careful," promised Eglantine, with the others nodding.

"Also," said Ms. Okos, smiling broadly, "did you know that laughing owls, when they existed, were thought to be attracted to accordion music? Isn't that an odd coincidence?"

The girls agreed. Though at this point, it was hard to think of anything related to such an important adventure as being mere coincidence because the whole thing seemed more like destiny.

As they were preparing to leave, the seer gave them a few final words of warning. “You shouldn’t return to the manor after you retrieve the seed. That’s not part of the message; but for some reason, I have a strong feeling about that. It just wouldn’t be safe.”

Raven immediately spoke up. “I have a strong feeling about that too, and I agree.” This was something she had planned to mention to her friends. It was good that Ms. Okos was giving them the same information, as a kind of reinforcement, so the girls wouldn’t be tempted to do any more exploring of the manor once their mission was complete.

After bidding the accordionist goodbye, and while they were descending the narrow stairs, Raven also told her friends, “I can see

the truth in the importance of our task. Something about the konki seed is incredibly important to all of mankind.”

When the fairies returned to check in with Eglantine’s dad just before lunch, Thyme and Clover both called home again. For some reason, Heather and Raven also had to check in at home today too. The other girls privately decided that they were likely supposed to have done this the day before, and that they might have gotten into a bit of trouble for failing to do so.

This was actually true because all kids out and about with friends were supposed to check in with their parents regularly to let them know what was going on. That was just the way it was supposed to be, so that kids could stay safe and parents wouldn’t worry so much.

All of the Girls Club members had had a safety lesson at their meeting the previous month that included the rule for them to always check in. The meeting also included safety information about making sure parents were always carbon-copied on any email communications that kids had with adults, including messages from teachers, relatives, and Girls Club sponsors. This was fine with the girls since information about secret fairy activities were never included in emails from fairy mentors who were also often Girls Club sponsors. The fairies still practiced the age-old method of using nut messages, which were much more fun than emails.

Chapter Seven

The Konki Seed

Two, soft-sided picnic coolers were packed full of a gourmet lunch for the girls to take to the treehouse. However, Eglantine told her dad, “We’d like to explore the woods more today and have our picnic there, if that’s okay.”

“Okay by me,” said Mr. Davis. “You have your compass in your pocket, don’t you?”

Eglantine nodded and smiled. When the family had moved into the house by the woods nearly three years ago, one of the first activities had been a lesson in how to read a compass. And this had happened

before Eglantine was allowed to set even one of her toes beyond the first tree at the edge of the woods. Her dad had also shown her a detailed map of the area, so she would know that the highway was on the West side of the woods, and the river bordered the Northern part. Of course, since she was a fairy and could fly, if she ever got lost in the forest, she could just zoom up high enough to easily locate her house. But her parents didn't know this, and they were always careful.

When the fairies reached the manor, before even entering, they opened the pouches on their belts and withdrew a good quantity of pixie dust to spread across their foreheads. They also lit their wands with little whispers of, "*Fairy lights.*"

As they slowly flew through the door of the parlor, the fairies eyed the lamp fretfully, and Eglantine's wand issued a strong thought to her—*The genie is awake! Be careful!*

We will, she answered in thought, as they passed the table on their way to the mantle. Sure enough, before the girls even landed on the stone ledge, they once again saw wisps of grayish-green smoke issuing from the lamp, and they heard the deep and soft voice say, "Hello, fairies. It's Geret again, and I invite you to visit my homeland in the heart of NetherSek."

From their position under the shimmering gray brick, the fairies had a clear view of the red one at the far end of the mantle. But this time, they didn't get sleepy at all and felt no urge to head toward

the glowing red portal. Kashi Okos had been right. Pixie dust was able to protect them. Indeed, as they stood watching the lamp closely, it seemed rather funny to the fairies that this genie thought he could so easily manipulate them with a few mere magical words and wisps.

Unknown to the fairies, Geret, inside the lamp was able to smell Eglantine's apple fragrance. And with her powerful gift of deception, which Eglantine herself was not even aware that she was using, she distracted the evil genie, and fooled him into thinking he was smelling apple turnovers. Coupled with the scent of Heather's wand, the fairies heard him exclaim, "Oh, how heavenly! Apple turnovers made with vanilla—just the way my Great Gumpa, the

master of all pastry chefs in NetherSek, used to make them.”

Eglantine and the others smiled at one another and shrugged as they few up to enter the gray brick. The candlestick and string were still in the same spot the girls had left them the day before.

Innin was also in almost exactly the same spot they had left him, and he seemed to be expecting the fairies, as though he had been patiently waiting for their return.

“You were right,” Eglantine told him breathlessly. “We are supposed to bring back the konki seed.”

The little owl nodded.

“Do you by any chance know where we can find it?” asked Clover.

Again, the owlet bobbed his head. Then he scurried around the trunk of the tree

twice and came to stop in nearly his exact starting place. With his little toes, he unearthed a glowing orange seed, about the size of a large pea, from the blanket of pine needles in front of him. He stared solemnly at the fairies as he pushed the seed towards them.

“I thought this was likely what was going to get to go back next,” Innin said, “because the mushi fly told me he was expecting to be fetched next month.”

“We’ve never heard of a mushi fly,” said Raven.

“Well,” responded the owlet, “mushi flies are the only insects that can pollinate the flowers of konki plants. So there has to be a konki plant blooming for there to be a reason for someone to fetch the mushi fly.”

Eglantine and her friends nodded their understanding, as Innin added sadly, “I guess the world is not safe enough yet for someone to fetch me.”

“I guess not,” said Heather, who leaned forward to stroke the neck feathers of the sad little owl.

“But I am patient,” said Innin. “I can wait.”

After a few moments of silence, with the fairies all moving forward to pet the owl, Innin suddenly added, “I just wish I could get across the lake.”

“Why?” asked Raven. “What’s across the lake?”

“I don’t know exactly,” Innin answered. “For some reason, I feel like that’s where I am supposed to be waiting for the person who is going to fetch me. But it’s such a

large lake. And since I can't fly yet, and I can't swim either, it would be a long walk, or run, to get round to the other side. I best just wait until I can fly."

"Well, let's go down to the shore to take a look," suggested Eglantine. "Maybe we can find a way to help you get across."

"Okay!" exclaimed Innin, perking up considerably.

With this, the owlet dashed toward the lakeshore, weaving a path through the dense trees and stirring up clouds of leaves and pine needles in his haste. The fairies had quite a difficult time keeping up with the speedy little bird.

They were breathless by the time they reached the edge of the water. The calm surface of the blue lake looked like an immense mirror, shining softly from the

slanted rays of light hitting the areas not shaded by trees. Around the edges, dense trees and brush thickly grew.

After they admired the lake for a few moments, with Innin squinting somewhat since the sunlight was brighter than what he was used to in his favorite spots among the trees, the fairies flitted through the fringe of trees at the edge of the water, trying to find anything that might help the owl.

Even though there were five of them, the fairies weren't sure they could have safely carried Innin across, since he was somewhat of an odd shape for carrying, and since they wouldn't have wanted to accidentally drop him. Also, fairy-resizing didn't usually work on living creatures such as animals and birds. That's why the pets of fairies

seldom accompanied them on their adventures.

While exploring a small lagoon of the enormous lake, Thyme made the all-important discovery of the item that was going to help the owlet reach the other side. Hovering beneath the branches of a willow tree whose leafy tendrils were dipping into the water, she came across a large, abandoned nest, floating slowly to and fro with the gentle current, almost as if dancing a slow waltz in the arms of the willow branches.

“This is perfect!” exclaimed Eglantine, approaching Thyme’s position, with the little owlet looking on from the shore. “This nest is still sound,” she added, shaking it somewhat to check its construction and state of deterioration. “We can pull you across

on this. The lake appears to be fairly still, so I think you will be safe.”

As the fairies dragged the nest toward where Innin was perched on the shore, he told them, “This nest is familiar to me. I wonder if I might have been hatched in it.”

“Maybe you were originally from the other side of the lake,” suggested Clover, “and the nest floated across by accident.”

“He may have floated over, but I don’t think it was an accident,” countered Raven. “Remember, we heard him calling. That’s how we found the doorway. And I am certain that the konki seed is immensely important to the world.”

As Raven said this, Eglantine suddenly grabbed for the pocket of her dress, to make sure the all-important seed was still there,

and safe, since that was their primary mission. It was.

The little owl stepped gingerly from the land into the nest as soon as it bumped into the shore. Then, as fast as they could, the fairies pulled the makeshift boat across the still waters of the lake. Though the water was a beautiful blue color, the glassy surface made it somewhat difficult to see very deeply, so the fairies mainly only caught glimpses of their own reflections as they flew.

“Wheeeeeee!” cried Innin, as they picked up speed near the middle of their journey. The fairies laughed at the delighted, and delightful, little owl.

As they flew, the laughing owl told them, “You are supposed to plant the konki seed outside the manor, next to the sweet

brier bushes. He stared intently at Eglantine as he said this. “It should only take you a minute,” he added. “The seed doesn’t need to be planted very deep, only around an inch.”

Eglantine nodded in response.

They reached the other side without incident, whereupon, Innin stepped from the nest and sighed deeply and serenely. “Yes,” he said, “I think this is where I am supposed to be.”

The fairies said goodbye to their little friend and departed swiftly, anxious to return home to plant the konki seed.

On the trip back across the lake, the fairies flew quite a bit higher than they had on the journey over, and they were able to see more clearly into the depths of the lake. At one point, the girls saw an immense

creature in the water below that looked exactly like photographs they had seen of the Loch Ness monster.

Thyme was the first to find her voice after this sighting. “It’s a good thing we were only sent to fetch a seed. How would anyone carry a creature like that out of here, and how would it fit through the brick doorway?”

“By magic,” answered Heather, with Raven and Clover nodding in agreement.

“Perhaps the fireplace brick isn’t the only entry into the Land of Daini,” suggested Eglantine.

As they approached the lonely fireplace, standing still among the trees, marking the near-end of their journey, the fairies could hear Innin’s laughing and chattering from

across the lake. This filled them with happiness, and hope, and made them smile.

Chapter Eight

It Only Takes a Minute

Upon entering the parlor through the gray brick, the fairies noticed that the lamp was active again. The smoky green wisps seemed even thicker than before and were curling up about twice as high above the lamp as they had previously. Once again, as they stood on the mantle ledge, the girls heard the silky voice. “Try the red brick, ladies.”

Thanks to the pixie dust that remained on their foreheads, the words and wisps again had no effect.

However, though they were still on their guard, the fairies were not prepared for what happened next.

Apparently, a gnarlbeast had taken up residence in the parlor fireplace. That, in itself, was not unusual. Nor was the appearance of the gnarly, root-like creature descending from the chimney into the parlor, because gnarlbeasts always came out of the chimneys in which they resided for exactly one minute each day, since that was the only time they were awake. What was surprising on this day was that this particular gnarlbeast, who usually confined his smashing and breaking activities to the knickknacks on the bookshelves, instead chose to head for the table with the lamp.

A mere instant after the brownish-gray blur that was almost quicker than the eyes of

the fairies streaked across the room, the lamp lay smashed into sixty pieces on the parlor's hardwood floor.

After surveying his work for several moments, the gnarlbeast then zipped back across the room and up the chimney, since his one waking minute was coming to an end.

As the girls were quietly leaving, they noticed that the red brick on the mantle no longer glowed. It was quiet and cold again.

The fairies planted the konki seed in the side yard near the sweet brier roses in view of the birdbath. Eglantine's cygnet feather wand spouted a tiny fountain of water to give the bright orange seed a good watering in.

While the girls were flying home, they discussed their adventure.

“Maybe the laughing owl is too special and important to take a chance on people destroying or losing him again,” said Heather.

“Right,” agreed Thyme. “He’s going to have to stay in that protected place until people can learn to take more care, and probably also until a safe habitat can be prepared for him.”

The fairies were solemn on the rest of their flight through the woods toward Eglantine’s house. They were all silently thinking that with the state of the world today, it might be a very long time before someone could fetch the owl.

The girls had another interesting discussion upon reaching the treehouse. It had long been a topic of fairy conversation as to what purpose gnarlbeasts served in our

realm, since they sneaked in seemingly mainly to cause a lot of destruction that children and pets often got blamed for. The fairies couldn't believe they had actually found the answer to the question: What good is a gnarlbeast?

“Some things are meant to be,” said Raven, “even if we can't see their purposes right away.”

“Yes,” agreed Clover. “In this case, something that is usually bad had a good impact.”

“And it only took a minute for the gnarlbeast to smash the lamp,” said Eglantine.

“Just like it only took a minute to plant the seed,” said Raven.

In keeping with this conversation, the girls decided to brainstorm a list of ideas of

other things that might only take a minute, but that might be incredibly important to the world. They discovered that they had a pretty good list in just a few minutes of pooling ideas. And after recording them in a notebook, Eglantine recited the ideas for her friends. “It only takes a minute...

To recycle various things

To make the bed so mom won't get frustrated

To share important information

To help someone who needs help

To give directions

To clean up after ourselves

To tell a joke

To buy another person an ice cream or a soda

To make a sad person happy

To smile at someone
To thank a teacher
To bring in the newspaper
To make someone laugh
To come up with a good idea
To make a difference in the world
To say something kind
To give someone a compliment
To sharpen a friend's pencil
To teach a child something
To take out the trash so my brother doesn't
have to
To write a note to a friend
To lend a book to someone
To pick up trash when we see it
To hug someone
To say hello to a neighbor
To make someone feel special

About an hour later, as the girls were getting ready to leave for home, Thyme said, “Just think, we only really explored one room of Glorford Manor. If that single room could hold so many secrets, and so much magic, imagine what the rest of the house might contain.”

This was an interesting thought. But the fairies knew they could not return. They needed to heed the seer’s advice to stay safe. They had done a job and now it was over. They weren’t willing to get into trouble just for the sake of curiosity. That was what killed the cat. No. Better safe than sorry. And even though it was fun to speculate what other secrets and doorways the manor might hold, they didn’t plan to take the risk of going back, unless they had to for some important reason.

Heather had another theory as to why they weren't supposed to go back. "What if the *safety* Ms. Okos mentioned doesn't even involve us?" she said. At her friends' confused looks, she tried to explain her thoughts. "I think we are probably supposed to stay away from where we planted the konki seed. What if it isn't safe for people to get near it while the plant is sprouting and growing?"

"Exactly!" exclaimed Eglantine. "The safety Ms. Okos was referring to was probably related to the plant. If it was delicate enough to go extinct, who knows what impact we might have on it, even with good intentions. If we went back to the manor, we might interfere if we tried to check on the plant or give it a little water."

Clover, Thyme, and Raven all thought this was a good explanation as to why it wasn't safe to go back to the ancient house.

Maybe people sometimes just needed to stay away from things and let well enough alone, especially relating to nature.

The girls all had other plans for the rest of the week, so they didn't congregate in the treehouse again for the latter part of spring break. Eglantine worked on finishing her basket; and she helped her dad with the cooking on a couple of occasions, which was actually more fun than she thought it would be.

On Friday, several of the area fairies, including Eglantine, received postcards from Silica. On the reverse side of the

beautiful picture of the Hawaiian waterfall,
a hurried note was scratched:

Having a terrific adventure.

Will tell all next week.

See ya soon,

Leilani

Late Friday afternoon, Eglantine thought she might want to go skating with Thyme, so she called her. However, Thyme breathlessly responded, “I can’t. I’m on my way to an accordion lesson with Ms. Okos.”

“Oh, okay,” said Eglantine. “Have fun.” She had no idea that her friend was interested in learning to play the accordion.

Eglantine made a visit to the accordion shop herself on Saturday morning, where

she tried once again to give the alabaster egg to Ms. Okos.

When the accordionist shook her head, Eglantine said, “But I don’t know how to find the person it belongs to.”

“You don’t need to find that out,” answered the seer, smiling. “The egg belongs to you.”

In the forest across the lake, Innin had discovered something wonderful in his new waiting spot. A magical, silver-framed window was floating in midair right next to a beautiful birch tree. The window looked out upon an odd house perched on a hill. (The house and hill were only visible through the window frame, and not behind it.) One of the lower panes of glass in the window was etched with scrolling cursive

letters forming the initials *FF*. Of course, the little owlet couldn't read the letters, but he could see the marks.

As Innin gazed through the silver window, he heard a rather odd sound like chattering and laughing that seemed to be coming from the house on the hill. *Could it possibly be another laughing owl?*

Maybe I am not the last laughing owl, thought Innin. *Perhaps there are others in other protected lands. There is hope for us after all.*

As he watched through the window, the owlet heard another sound—that of strange and soulful music coming from the house. As the music ended, Innin cooed and hooted to the house, and the other bird answered with a trill and a bark. This calling to one another went on for some time, of course.

Late in the evening, when the hoots and chatter finally died down, Innin waited patiently for whoever was eventually going to fetch him.

The Fairy Chronicles Series

Marigold and the Feather of Hope
Dragonfly and the Web of Dreams
Thistle and the Shell of Laughter
Firefly and the Quest of the Black Squirrel
Spiderwort and the Princess of Haiku
Periwinkle and the Cave of Courage
Cinnabar and the Island of Shadows
Mimosa and the River of Wisdom
Primrose and the Magic Snowglobe
Luna and the Well of Secrets
Dewberry and the Lost Chest of Paragon
Moonflower and the Pearl of Paramour
Snapdragon and the Odyssey of Élan
Harlequin and the Pebble of Spree
Dove and the Parchment of Dulcet
Cricket and the Enchanted Music Box
Blue, the Mermaid, and the Fisherman's Tale
Aloe and the Spring of Hale
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Minnow and Mr. Keen – the Brilliant Troll
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Jasmine, the Journal, and Magnolia's Sacrifice
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Dandelion and the Box of Illusion
Hollyhock and the Christmas of the Swans
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The Glass Fairy
Berylline and the Tree of Joy
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Laurel and the Inn of the Whispers
Apple and the Legend of the Western Star
Tea, Sterling, and the Heart of Fire
Scarlet, Willow, and the Two-Foot Witch
Obsidian and the Last Brownie Prince
Helenium and the Really Very Confused House
Azure and the Butterfly Fairy Convention
Snowdrop and Four o’Clock Meet the White
Elephant and the Dancing Rabbit
Aurora and the Lights of Marfa
Journey’s End

The Fairy Chronicles Chronology

The timeline of the series, beginning with *Marigold and the Feather of Hope* and ending with *Journey's End*, spans ten years. Marigold is nine when the series begins and eighteen when she becomes Aurora's mentor. The final two books of the series form a double, ending bookend because Marigold has a large presence in *Aurora and the Lights of Marfa* (as she did in *Marigold and the Feather of Hope*), and the Feather of Hope is a key factor in *Journey's End*.



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The Wishbone Miracle
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