

The Fairy Chronicles #29



Larkspur and Alyssum
Meet Sniggerbly Wiskerfink



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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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Chapter One

The Tunnel

Her elbow propped up on the back of the couch, chin in hand, Rebecca Wright stared thoughtfully out of the living room window, daydreaming. Puffy cloud pictures formed in her mind, though they didn't particularly resemble the clouds in the sky. *A Clydesdale horse, four pumpkins, an eagle, an ostrich feather, and a castle with a moat,* she thought. When her mind got tired of cloud pictures, it turned to flowers, specifically, one kind of flower. *Knights-spur, delphinium, bluebell, rocket lockspur, dolphin flower, blue dolphin flower....* Rebecca was thinking about all the different

names for the larkspur—her favorite flower. She thought it was pretty nifty that larkspurs had so many different names, and that people all over the world who admired the beautiful flower had thought of such an interesting variety of names for it.

But the reason Rebecca loved the larkspur above all other flowers had nothing to do with the names. Rebecca favored that particular flower because she was also a fairy, and her fairy spirit came from the larkspur flower. Rebecca's best friend, Whitney Hansen, was also a fairy and had been given the fairy spirit of an alyssum flower. The girls were in the same class at school, lived only a few blocks apart, and were both about to turn eleven in the next couple of weeks.

As a fairy, Larkspur wore a shimmering dress made of purplish-blue flower petals. The dress came to just above her knees, and her sparkling blue wings were very large and billowy. She had short blond hair and carried an enchanted matchstick for her wand. For her special fairy gift, Larkspur had a lightness and fickleness about her that allowed her to pass through life without taking things too seriously. She was always good-natured, lighthearted, and flexible with the ability to see the good in things even when presented with problems. People throughout the ages had seen the cheerfulness and flexibility in larkspurs, which is why the flower ended up with so many different and joyful names.

Alyssum had dark brown hair and wore a dress made of tiny white alyssum blossoms.

She had small white wings, and her wand was made from the minute hand of an antique carriage clock. When she listened closely to her wand, she could hear faint ticking noises. Alyssum's fairy gift was the ability to sense value in everything, even things overlooked by others. She was able to look beyond appearances to find worth and use in all things of the earth. She also had the gift of resiliency because alyssum flowers were very springy. It had taken Alyssum about five times as long as any other fairy to learn how to fly, and she still had difficulty slowing her wings to make a smooth landing. Since she tended to land hard most of the time, Alyssum had earned the nickname "Crashing Alyssum" among her fellow fairies. Luckily, because of her fairy gift, she never got hurt. Evidently,

alyssum flowers were very tough and could withstand hard bounces.

This was a lovely, autumn Saturday morning and the beginning of a long holiday weekend from school because Monday was Columbus Day. Alyssum was due to arrive at Larkspur's house in less than an hour to spend the day and for a two-night sleepover. The girls didn't have any special plans for the weekend, other than skating and exploring the vacant lot and adjoining field behind Larkspur's house.

When Alyssum arrived, the girls checked in with Larkspur's mom who was busy at her sewing machine. Then they immediately set off to explore the vacant lot with two red apples in their pockets for snacks. The last time they had been exploring, the girls found several old and

valuable marbles, and two beautiful chunks of quartz crystal. Today though, when they reached a clump of bushes in the center of the lot, they crouched down and *popped* into fairy form. Flying would make field exploring more fun. The girls didn't have to worry about being seen because non-magical people couldn't recognize fairies in fairy form; and if anyone happened to see two flowers sailing through the air, the sighting would likely be dismissed as normal since it was a day with a goodly amount of breeze to it, rather blustery in fact.

The fairies next made their way through a broken board in the fence bordering the back of the vacant lot and flew into the hilly field beyond. After admiring the golden fall grasses rippling with the wind, they flew

directly to a far corner of the field and landed on a rocky cliff ledge near the base of a small mountain. On a previous adventure, the girls had noticed a narrow opening in the rocks, like a small tunnel. But they hadn't had enough time to find out where the crack in the rock led that day, so they made plans to explore the tunnel another time. Today was perfect because Larkspur's mom wouldn't be expecting them back until lunchtime. So they would have nearly two hours to discover the secrets of the tunnel.

The hole in the rock was very small, just barely big enough for the fairies to stand up, so they didn't fly in. Instead, they walked into the tunnel. As they traveled, Larkspur's billowy wings scraped the sides and top of the narrow passageway. The path through

the stone wasn't very long, just about four feet, and it opened up into a small woodsy clearing. A slender brook ran through the tree fringe and across one corner of the clearing, making gurgling noises, which joined with breeze-rustled leaves to create a kind of crisp autumn music. Several paths branched off in various directions from the clearing; and a quaint little cottage sat in one corner, tucked into a thick growth of poplar and elm trees. A hammock was slung between two of the trees, and the fairies could see that it was occupied. Some sort of furry creature was slowly swinging in the hanging bed.

Chapter Two

Sniggerbly Wiskerfink

The fairies flew across the clearing to reach the cottage. As they got closer, they could see that the creature resting in the hammock was a polecat. He had a cinnamon-colored coat that glistened brightly, even in the shade, with just a bit of gray fur speckling his nose and ears.

“Hello,” said Alyssum.

And Larkspur added, “I’m Larkspur and this is Alyssum.” Both fairies smiled at the polecat, who actually smiled back at them.

“Hel-looo fairies,” he drawled. “So nice to have visitors,” he added, almost sadly. “I rarely have visitors, and I have never had

beautiful fairies visit my cottage.” The girls blushed a little at being called beautiful. Then the polecat introduced himself. “I am Sniggerbly Wiskerfink.”

The fairies looked at one another. They had never met a talking polecat who lived in a cottage and swung in a hammock. But they were even more surprised and amused by his name.

“We are pleased to meet you, Mr. Wiskerfink,” said Larkspur. “What a lovely cottage and bit of woods you live in.”

“Oh, yes,” responded the polecat. “I like it here very much. My cottage is very comfortable; and I am lucky to live in such a pretty, woodsy place.” Sniggerbly Wiskerfink paused and stared at the girls with giant brown eyes before going on. “But I can’t get out much, which means I

have to do without some things, so my life here is very hard at times.”

“What kind of things do you need?” asked Alyssum. “Maybe we could help get them for you.” Larkspur nodded along with her friend’s words. Both girls were always helpful toward others, and they didn’t like to see people struggle. If there was a way they could help Mr. Wiskerfink get what he needed, they would be more than willing to do it.

“Oh, there are so many things; and I don’t like to trouble you.” The polecat paused for a moment, looking sadly at the girls, as if he hardly dared ask them for help, but might be on the verge of doing so. However, he didn’t ask them to do anything right away. Instead, he said, “By the way, I have another name.” Looking at the girls

with huge sorrowful eyes, he added, “Bootless,” sounding very pitiful. Then, pointing to his feet he told them, “You see, I have no boots; and my poor feet get oh so cold, ever so terribly cold.” If possible, Sniggerbly Wiskerfink’s voice sounded more and more pitiful with each word. His eyes became even wider and filled with tears as he went on sadly. “If I only had boots and warm feet, I could be happy.”

Larkspur and Alyssum were surprised to find out that the polecat liked to wear boots. The girls knew that fancy hamsters wore invisible shoes, because some of their friends had met a talking fancy hamster once, and had helped the hamster obtain a new pair of invisible blue shoes. But they never thought a polecat would want to wear boots.

When the girls didn't say anything, Mr. Wiskerfink continued, shaking his head. "But I can't walk so far to try to get boots with nothing on my poor cold feet. If only someone would help me get some boots."

"But where would we find boots that would fit a polecat?" asked Alyssum, very much picking up on Sniggerbly Wiskerfink's hints, and wanting to help him if she could.

"Oh," said the polecat, promptly perking up. "I know of a shop not too far from here, in a little village, where you can get soft boots for someone my size. But it is too far for me to walk without proper footwear. Of course, I would need two pairs, to equal four boots, one for each of my feet." The polecat waved his four feet in the air as he said this and wiggled all of his many toes.

Then Larkspur said kindly, “Just tell us were to go, and we will try to get them for you.”

“Wonderful!” exclaimed Mr. Wiskerfink. Pointing to one of the many paths on the east side of his clearing, the polecat told the girls, “There is a cobbler who cobbles for all kinds of creatures in a small shoe shop down that path. His name is Mr. Footswell. He will have soft boots that will fit me. Just tell him who the boots are for, and he will put them on my tab.”

“We’ll be back as soon as we can,” said Alyssum.

“Oh, thank you...thank you so much,” said Sniggerbly Wiskerfink emphatically. “When I have warm feet, all will be well.”

The girls gladly set out on this errand for their new acquaintance, and neither of them

thought anything about his request. They were just happy to be able to help. They made their way down the winding path through towering trees creaking gently with the wind. Beautifully-colored fall leaves rustled on the ground below them. The forest was cool and breezy, and very peaceful, and the fairies were almost sorry to come to the end of the trail and reach the small village. Right at the end of the path, before entering the village, the fairies changed into regular girl form with two small *pops*. They had no way of knowing if the cobbler was a magical creature or an ordinary human being.

Mr. Footswell's *Cobble Shop* was right next to the *Town Bakery*. The smell of bread and donuts made the girls' stomachs rumble a bit. They still had their apples in

their pockets; but since they were on an important errand, they didn't stop for a snack break. As they entered the shop, the door knocked into a bell hanging above it. At the sound of the bell, Mr. Footswell came out from his work area in the back to greet the customers.

The cobbler was a tiny man, only about four feet tall, and very jolly. His hair was curly and gray, and his face was round and red. He smiled pleasantly at the girls when they entered his shop. However, as they made their request, Mr. Footswell looked sharply at them. Then he said, "Yes, I have a two-pair of soft boots that will fit old Sniggerbly; and I will put them on his tab." As the cobbler turned to a shelf to retrieve the boots, the girls heard him grumble and say in a low voice, "As usual, old Bootless

couldn't manage to make it down the path himself.”

“His feet were too cold to make the journey without proper footwear,” Larkspur explained.

Mr. Footswell snorted and responded, “How many polecats do you think actually *need* boots to wander around the forest?” The girls didn't say anything.

As Mr. Footswell was wrapping up the pale green boots, they heard him say under his breath, “No, old Bootless can never be bothered to get his toes damp from the leaves. He just gets others to run his errands for him.” Then, louder, the cobbler said, “After you give him the boots, try to make it a point the next time you see him to notice whether or not he is actually wearing them.”

Larkspur and Alyssum pondered the cobbler's advice as they left the shop. At the beginning of the path through the forest, the girls changed back into fairy form so they could fly the rest of the way to the polecat's cottage.

Chapter Three

A Bowl of Cherries

Sniggerbly Wiskerfink, still reclining in the hammock, was overjoyed to see them return carrying the parcel. The fairies briefly changed back into girl form to give the polecat his boots, so the boots would be the right size. (Anything fairies were carrying with them when they transformed always changed sizes with them. And the polecat would not have had any use for teeny boots that would have barely fit a pocket-sized doll.)

“Oh, lovely...” breathed the polecat, stroking the soft green boots. “They are perfect. Thank you so much. Now my feet

will be warm enough to travel.” Alyssum and Larkspur smiled at one another. It made them feel good to help Mr. Wiskerfink.

When Alyssum looked at her watch, she noticed that they would need to be getting back for lunch so Larkspur’s mom wouldn’t worry. They only had about twenty minutes until lunchtime. The girls were just about to tell Sniggerbly Wiskerfink that they needed to be heading home, when he whined softly, in a very pitiful voice. “Of course, even with the beautiful boots, I can’t run my errands this afternoon because I have hurt my paw.” As he said this, the polecat’s huge brown eyes filled with tears and he sniffled.

“Well...” said Alyssum, “we have to be getting back for lunch so Mrs. Wright won’t worry, but we might be able to come back in

the afternoon to help you.” Larkspur quickly agreed, nodding. Both girls would be more than willing to help Mr. Wiskerfink, especially if it would allow him to rest his hurt paw.

“Wonderful!” exclaimed the polecat. “Let me just tell you what I need, and maybe you can bring it back with you after your lunch.” The girls thought it was very sensible, and efficient, to avoid making a double trip, so they quickly agreed.

“I need a bowl of fresh cherries,” said the polecat, his eyes glittering.

Larkspur and Alyssum looked at each other somewhat doubtfully. “Cherries might be hard to get this time of year in this area,” said Alyssum. “I think we have passed the season when they are available.”

“But I really need them,” whined Bootless, his chin quivering. The sniffing had also started again.

Now the fairies had noticed that there was a table on the small porch of the cottage, and on that table sat six peaches. The table also held a small pyramid of red grapes that had been taken from their stems. So Sniggerbly Wiskerfink already had fresh fruit available to him.

Larkspur suddenly had a good idea. Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out the red apple. “Would this be okay instead?” she asked. Alyssum also offered *her* apple to the polecat.

“Oh no, no, no!” cried Sniggerbly Wiskerfink, suddenly sitting forward. “It has to be cherries. Don’t you see! I need Life’s ‘Bowl of Cherries’ especially with my

hurt paw, to help it heal properly.” He dangled his front left paw as he said this, and winced terribly, as if he were in a tremendous amount of pain.

“We’ll try to get a bowl of cherries for you,” said Larkspur immediately. She didn’t like to see anyone in pain, and always felt that those who suffered should have the things they needed, and wanted.

Alyssum too was anxious to help in any way she could, and her brain immediately began thinking about how to get fresh cherries this time of year. She had been with her mom to the grocery store last week and couldn’t remember seeing any, so they would have to look elsewhere.

The fairies bid the polecat farewell, and told him they would return early afternoon after doing their best to find him a bowl of

cherries. On the trip back through the rock tunnel and across the field and vacant lot, they decided that the best course of action would be to check the specialty food market on Mill Street, to see if the store had any fresh cherries this time of year. However, the market was nearly a mile from Larkspur's home. The girls ate lunch as fast as possible and got on their bicycles. They would need to hurry to reach the store and get back, since they knew Sniggerbly Wiskerfink would be waiting for the cherries and hoping for them to return quickly.

On their way to the specialty produce market, Larkspur and Alyssum ran into Thyme and Honeysuckle, also riding their bicycles. After hearing about the errand, Honeysuckle and Thyme were anxious to accompany their friends on the quest to

obtain fresh cherries. None of the girls was expected back home until late afternoon, so they would have plenty of time to find the cherries and deliver them to Mr. Wiskerfink.

“So, you met a real talking polecat,” said Honeysuckle, interestedly. “And he *needs* a bowl of cherries?” Larkspur nodded.

“Did he tell you how he had been bewitched to be able to speak?” asked Thyme. “Enchanted animals are not super-common.”

“No,” answered Alyssum. “We didn’t ask. I think it might have been rude to inquire since his paw was hurting so much, and he really seemed to need the boots and cherries in a hurry.”

As the girls were riding along, Alyssum’s tire hit a rock in the street, and she crashed her bicycle. It seemed that flying was not

the only thing Alyssum sometimes had difficulty with. But thanks to her fairy gift, she wasn't hurt. She had just one small scrape on her elbow, which didn't really bother her. After only a brief pause for Alyssum to remount her bicycle, the group was on its way.

Luckily, the specialty store did have some beautiful, dark red, fresh cherries. The girls pooled their pocket money and bought a big bag of the cherries, along with a pretty yellow bowl since Sniggerbly Wiskerfink had specifically said he needed a "bowl of cherries."

They rode their bikes back to Larkspur's house and parked them in the garage. Then they put the cherries in the bowl and made their way to the clump of bushes in the

vacant lot to change into fairy form before heading to the clearing and cottage.

Alyssum and Larkspur were anxious to get the cherries to Mr. Wiskerfink, and Thyme and Honeysuckle were excited about the prospect of meeting a talking polecat, so the fairies flew fairly fast.

When the girls were about halfway through the tunnel, they heard singing coming from the clearing. “*Life is just a bowl of cherries....*” As they left the tunnel and began their approach to the cottage, they heard more of the lilting song. “*...you can’t take your dough when you go, go, go.*” Sniggerbly Wiskerfink was singing, and he had an absolutely beautiful voice.

The fairies were all familiar with the famous song, *Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries*, but they were surprised that the polecat

knew the words. They thought it was mainly a “people” song, and they were amazed that an enchanted polecat would enjoy popular song lyrics.

Sniggerbly Wiskerfink was no longer in his hammock. Instead, he was lying stretched out on his back, in the crook of a low tree limb, scratching his light brown belly. The polecat didn’t see the girls at first and continued to sing. “...*so how can you lose what you’ve never owned? Life is just a bowl of cherries...*” He stopped singing as he noticed the visitors.

As Larkspur introduced Honeysuckle and Thyme, Mr. Wiskerfink replied, “I am pleased to make your acquaintance.”

Again, the fairies briefly changed into regular girl form so that the cherries would be nice and big for Mr. Wiskerfink to eat.

Alyssum placed the bowl on a flat rock right next to the hammock. Then the girls *popped* back into fairy form as Mr. Wiskerfink scampered very quickly down the trunk of the tree, his eyes on the cherries.

The fairies were happy to have gotten the fruit for the polecat; but they were starting to wonder if maybe he was just a bit lazy, since he no longer seemed to have a hurt paw. Sniggerbly Wiskerfink also was *not* wearing his new soft green boots. In fact, the boots were nowhere to be seen.

“If you hurt your paw, how did you climb up into the tree?” asked Larkspur.

“Oh, it took a long time for me to reach that limb using only my other three paws,” said Sniggerbly Wiskerfink earnestly. “Climbing down was much easier, since I could use my back legs more.”

The girls didn't bother to argue that it seemed as though the opposite were actually true—he appeared to use his front paws quite a lot on the descent from the tree. They were mainly just happy to have been able to find the cherries; and they hoped that the fruit would make Mr. Wiskerfink happy, since he seemed to want it so badly.

The polecat carefully placed the bowl of cherries on his porch table next to the six peaches and the pyramid of red grapes. He stood back for a moment to admire the affect of the colorful cherries added to his collection of fruit. Only the day before, Sniggerbly Wiskerfink had persuaded a friendly bluebird to get the grapes for him, one by one, from a faraway field. The endeavor had taken the bird nearly three hours. So far, the polecat had eaten none of

the grapes. He kept them on his table just to look at.

And the peaches were actually getting a bit overripe. It had been three days since a passing pie salesman had made a trip to a peach orchard to obtain the six peaches for the polecat. The pie salesman had gotten home very late that day and was scolded by his wife for missing supper. But it had been impossible for the salesman to refuse the urgent pleadings of the enchanted polecat with the hurt paw. None of the peaches had been tasted at all. Truthfully, Sniggerbly did not like peaches or grapes or cherries. But he had managed to convince others that he simply had to have them, or he would suffer.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you,” said the polecat contentedly. With that, he sat on the edge of his porch, watching the fairies

and thinking very hard about the next thing
he wanted to ask them to do for him.

Chapter Four

The Goose

“Well, we are happy that we could get the cherries for you,” said Alyssum. “We’ll be off now, and let you enjoy them.”

“Oh, don’t go yet!” cried the polecat. “Stay and visit for a while.”

The girls couldn’t see any harm in this and agreed to stay for a bit, since they wouldn’t be missed at home until much later in the afternoon.

Honeysuckle was just about to ask Mr. Wiskerfink if he wouldn’t mind telling them how he had become enchanted, but she didn’t get to because the polecat said, “I thank you so much for helping me get the

cherries. But if I don't have my friend the goose here to enjoy the fruit with me, I think I will just feel terrible." Then he added, with much sorrow in his voice, "I can't truly enjoy this wonderful fruit, if I know that my friend the goose can't share it with me. He has shared seeds with me many times, and I would feel awful not to share my bounty with him. He lives nearby, but of course I can't travel with my paw in such bad shape."

Mr. Wiskerfink was now dangling his front *right* paw as if in agony. Alyssum and Larkspur looked at one another, but didn't say anything about the *opposite* paw being the one that was now hurt.

Looking at the girls slyly out of the corner of his eye, the polecat made his

request. “I wonder if you could fetch him for me.”

The fairies agreed to help right away. What harm would it do to find a goose, who supposedly lived nearby, and bring him to afternoon tea at Mr. Wiskerfink’s home?

Pointing, the polecat told the fairies, “The path just to the left of the one to the village, by that gray rock, leads to the goose’s house.” Mr. Wiskerfink went on, a little breathlessly. “Now, he will likely be very reluctant to come with you. He may even hide or run from you. The goose has been my neighbor for many years and though he often shares seeds with me, he doesn’t like to accept anything in return.” The polecat paused for a moment before going on, sadly. “He so rarely allows me to treat him to anything. But, please, do your

best to bring him back. I can't touch this wonderful fruit unless I know the goose can enjoy it too. It would mean so much to me to repay some of his kindness toward me over the years."

The four fairies didn't hesitate. They immediately flew across the clearing and entered the path to the left of the one leading to the village. After about ten minutes of flight, the girls came upon a small, hilly meadow filled with tall, red and gold autumn grasses, waving and rippling in the afternoon wind. The goose's home was a small, brushy hut on the far edge of the meadow. He was sitting near the entrance.

As the fairies approached, the goose got up and quickly took off running through the long grasses. He was not in the mood for company, not even fairies, who were usually

nice to visit with. And this goose was very smart. He had lived near Sniggerbly Wiskerfink for many years. The polecat often sent people to fetch him, which was really no fun at all for the goose. Only last month, Sniggerbly Wiskerfink had sent a dwarf to fetch him. Now dwarves are not to be trifled with, and there was really no getting around the persistence of Dwarf Jones. After nearly twenty minutes of chasing him around the field, Mr. Jones had simply used dwarf magic to freeze the goose in place, before leading him on a short leash down the path to the polecat's cottage.

The goose was not bewitched and could not speak, so he was not able to tell others that he did not want to visit Sniggerbly Wiskerfink, or that the polecat regularly sent people on this pointless errand. But when

the goose saw that four fairies had actually been conned into this task, he decided that he had had enough. First thing the next morning, he would be moving, at least five miles away, to get away from his terribly annoying neighbor.

The fairies chased the goose around the meadow for nearly half an hour, telling him that his neighbor, Mr. Wiskerfink, wanted to share fresh fruit with him, and that they were sent to fetch him. They also told the goose that Sniggerbly Wiskerfink couldn't travel with a sore paw to make the invitation himself. Amidst a good deal of squawking and flapping, the fairies repeatedly pled with the goose to accept the polecat's hospitality. But the goose ignored their pleas and continued to run from them, so the fairies finally had to give up. However, they found

a loose goose feather near the brushy hut, and took it back with them to Mr. Wiskerfink's cottage, so they could prove to the polecat that they had at least made it to the meadow and had tried to convince the goose to come back with them.

When the fairies arrived back at the clearing with the feather, but no goose, Sniggerbly Wiskerfink was very disappointed. In fact, he turned downright sulky. "It's okay," he said in a whiny, nasal voice, sniffing. "I know you did your best. But sometimes I think the goose doesn't like me. I wonder if any of my neighbors really like me, since they never come to see me. I guess the goose is just being polite when he shares seeds with me, but he is not truly my friend, or he would come see me when I need a visitor with my hurt paw."

The dangling paw was now the *left* one again. Honeysuckle and Thyme also noticed the change of hurt paw, but they didn't say anything.

“Well, just try to enjoy your fruit this evening on your own,” said Thyme. “It should be eaten up soon, so it won't spoil.”

“That's right,” said Larkspur, “enjoy the fruit now because you can't take it with you.”

“Life is short,” agreed Alyssum, “like your bowl of cherries. You shouldn't try to save them. They won't keep.”

“Thank you,” said the polecat softly. Then with more sniffing, and in a weepy voice, he said, “I appreciate that you tried to help me.” With that, Mr. Wiskerfink limped over to the hammock and toppled himself into it, still sniffing.

None of the girls knew what to say to the downcast polecat to cheer him up, so instead, they said goodbye. Sniggerbly Wiskerfink hung his head sadly and waved at them slightly with his hurt paw, the *right* one this time, wincing as he did so.

The fairies flew back across the clearing and walked through the tunnel to return home. Thyme and Honeysuckle were immediately wise to the fact that they had just been sent on a “goose chase,” but it had actually been somewhat of a fun adventure so they didn’t complain.

Hardly anything ever bothered Alyssum and Larkspur, because they were always so good-natured. They were a little sorry that Sniggerbly Wiskerfink wasn’t happy. And they were somewhat ashamed that they had bothered the goose by chasing him. But it

was unlikely the goose would be permanently traumatized for having been chased for a bit by a group of fairies.

Honeysuckle and Thyme picked up their bikes at Larkspur's house. After saying goodbye to their friends, the two set off towards their homes.

Alyssum and Larkspur went inside to a wonderful dinner of pepperoni pizza, salad, and root beer. Then they had fun after dinner curling each other's hair, painting their toenails, and watching TV.

Chapter Five

Pickles and Pinecones

The girls were very surprised the next morning when a large blackbird delivered a nut message to Larkspur's bedroom windowsill. Nut messages were the way fairies liked to send letters and notes to one another. However, the message this morning was not from another fairy. Evidently, Sniggerbly Wiskerfink knew how to use nut messages and had sent the two young fairies an urgent note. The message was short and to the point: *I desperately need your help! Please come at once!*

Larkspur and Alyssum didn't particularly have any plans for the day, so they didn't

mind at all making another trip through the vacant lot, adjoining field, and tunnel to visit Mr. Wiskerfink at his little cottage in the clearing. He was swinging and swaying in his hammock when they arrived. The yellow bowl on the porch table was still full of cherries; and again, Mr. Wiskerfink was not wearing his new boots. So today, Alyssum asked the polecat, “Why aren’t you wearing your new green boots? It’s rather cool this morning, even more so than yesterday, and I’m sure they would help to warm your cold feet.”

“Oh, dear me...” began the polecat, “I should have explained better on the day opposite tomorrow.” As the girls looked at each other, wondering if Mr. Wiskerfink might be trying to confuse them, the polecat went on, rather breathlessly. “My feet *are*

dreadfully cold. But with my hurt paw, I can't wear footwear right now.” (Mr. Wiskerfink raised his *back left* paw and wriggled his toes at the girls.) “Perhaps next week,” he continued sorrowfully, “when my paw has healed, I will be able to wear my lovely new boots.”

The fairies didn't say anything to yet another change of hurt paw, or argue with the polecat about his urgent request the day before to obtain the boots as soon as possible on the pretense that they were needed for immediate use. Instead, Larkspur pleasantly asked, “What can we help you with this morning?”

“Thank you so much for coming so quickly,” responded the polecat, smiling at them. “I hardly dared to hope. I must make a trip tomorrow to visit a sick friend. I will

be *hobbling* down the path to see her very early in the morning. In order to help make her well, I need to bring her a list of things. I promised to get the items for her, and I would hate to break a promise.” Mr. Wiskerfink then recited the list of things he was going to need to bring to his friend’s house: “Chartreuse pinecones, ginger beer, huckleberries, Shasta daisies, pink pickles, and macadamia nuts.”

Alyssum and Larkspur looked at one another rather doubtfully. Not only would they have great difficulty in finding these items; but also, they really couldn’t see how any of these things would truly help Mr. Wiskerfink’s sick friend get well. And they were starting to think that even if they did find all of these items, there might not be much point, if the unworn boots and uneaten

cherries were any indication of what might occur with these next “urgently needed” things.

Larkspur was just about to tell the polecat that she didn’t think they could find the items on his list, when Mr. Wiskerfink, who had been closely watching their expressions, told them, “Now, it will take me nearly all of the morning since I am moving rather slowly with my sore paw, but I can get most of the things.” (The soreness had moved again, this time to the *right front* paw.) Again, the girls didn’t say anything, but listened carefully as the polecat finished with, “I really only need help getting the pink pickles and chartreuse pinecones.”

Sniggerbly Wiskerfink stared hopefully at the fairies with his huge, chocolate-brown eyes. Larkspur and Alyssum could see their

reflections in these enormous eyes. His request now didn't seem so unreasonable. Always willing to help, the girls accepted his explanation for not wearing the boots; and they didn't feel the need to ask why he had not eaten any of the fruit from the table on his porch. (Like the cherries, the peaches and grapes remained untouched.) Two things out of his list of six seemed reasonable to ask for help with. And if these items might cheer up his sick friend, the fairies were glad to help get them.

“Well,” said Alyssum, “it might take us awhile, but we will try to find the pink pickles and chartreuse pinecones.”

“Thank you *soooo* much,” said the polecat earnestly.

“We'll be back as soon as we can,” said Larkspur.

The fairies flew across the clearing and climbed back through the tunnel. After changing to regular girl form behind the bushes in the vacant lot, they walked slowly toward Larkspur's house, trying to brainstorm how to get the two items.

“Okay,” said Alyssum, “we are usually good at this kind of thing, so let's think.”

“Right,” agreed Larkspur, then she added, “Pickles are not normally pink. We could look all day and never find any, so....”

“So...we will need to make them pink,” said Alyssum, picking up her friend's train of thought.

As the girls were sitting on the front porch talking things over, they noticed one of their fairy friends skating by on the sidewalk. Dove was happy to see Larkspur and Alyssum and stopped for a visit.

Likewise, the two brainstorming fairies were happy to see Dove. They told her about their adventures so far on the weekend and asked her advice about the pickles and pinecones.

“Well,” said Dove, “this is tricky. The pickles will still need to be edible, so it might be hard to make them pink. Easter egg dye or red food coloring might work, but they would be a bit of a mess to deal with.”

“Would red soda maybe work?” asked Larkspur.

“Maybe,” responded Dove. “Red soda would likely be less messy than egg dye or food coloring, but soda may not be red enough to....”

“Beet juice!” exclaimed Alyssum, suddenly excited.

Her two friends just looked at her funny, not quite understanding, so Alyssum explained. “My mom makes pickled eggs with vinegar, sugar, and beet juice. The beet juice turns the eggs dark pink.”

“Perfect,” said Larkspur.

And Dove added, “Good thinking. Beet juice stains everything. I don’t think soda would have been strong enough, and I doubt you can avoid making at least a little mess.” Taking off her skates, Dove followed her two friends into the house.

Mrs. Wright was busy cleaning in the back of the house and didn’t even notice that the girls were in the kitchen. There were several cans of beets and two jars of dill pickles on a high shelf in the pantry, but one of each would be enough.

After getting a chair to stand on to reach the items, Larkspur brought them to the kitchen counter. She carefully unscrewed the lid of the pickle jar and drained off as much of the juice as she could into the sink. The smell of pickles made the girls' mouths water, but they were doing something important so they didn't pause for a snack. Larkspur used a can opener to open the can of beets. Then she poured the juice from the beets over the dill pickles. The pickles now looked dark pink with a green tinge to them, which was probably the best they could have done with red food coloring or Easter egg dye anyway, so they were satisfied. The only mess made was a bit of beet juice dripped on the counter, which was wiped up right away.

Putting the can opener away and storing the opened beet can in the refrigerator, the girls carried the pickle jar with them to the front porch. Then they talked about the pinecone problem. Larkspur and Alyssum were glad to have Dove visiting them because she was very creative and artistic. Even at the young age of ten, Dove was already a master at throwing pots and an expert in weaving intricate baskets. She immediately told her friends, “There’s really no way to get around the fact that chartreuse-colored pinecones do not exist. You will have to make them too. I suggest acrylic artist paint.”

Since there was a hobby store only about four blocks from Larkspur’s house, the girls decided to make a trip together to find the paint. When they reached the store, they

discovered that the shop didn't stock any chartreuse paint. But the clerk told them that an in-stock color called lemon-green would likely be as close to chartreuse as they could come without seeking out a larger art supply store, the nearest one being about twenty-five miles away. Opting for the lemon-green, the girls once again pooled their pocket money to buy the paint. Larkspur already had paintbrushes at home since she sometimes liked to do watercolor pictures.

On the way back to the house, the girls made a detour to cross through a park with many spruce and fir trees so they could pick up a few pinecones. When they reached the house, Dove collected her skates and set off for home. She was expected for lunch, and didn't want to be late.

After shutting themselves in Larkspur's room for fifteen minutes and quickly painting the pinecones lemon-green, the girls made peanut butter and marshmallow crème sandwiches for lunch. They also each ate a bowl of the canned beets while waiting for the paint to dry on the pinecones. The beets were really quite tasty, straight from the can and cool from the refrigerator.

Next, they put the pinecones into a paper lunch sack and collected the jar of pinkish-green pickles from the porch. The girls checked in with Larkspur's mom before leaving for the vacant lot and field. Mrs. Wright didn't ask any questions about the bag of pinecones or the jar of pickles. She wanted the girls to have fun on their long weekend, and she didn't mind if they took pickles or bags from the kitchen.

When the fairies reached the clearing again and gave Mr. Wiskerfink the jar of pickles and bag of pinecones, they hurriedly told him that couldn't stay for the afternoon because they had some other things to do at home. They wanted to work on bead projects and play games for at least part of the day, rather than just running errands. This was fine with the polecat, as he now had his pickles and pinecones; he also knew how to get in touch with the helpful fairies whenever he wanted something else.

After Larkspur and Alyssum left for home, the polecat put the jar of pickles and bag of pinecones into a trunk in the bedroom of his cottage. In the fairies' absence, Sniggerbly Wiskerfink had not made any effort to obtain macadamia nuts, Shasta daisies, huckleberries, or ginger beer. And

he had no plans to visit a sick friend any time soon. But he was very pleased that the girls had been able to find the two items he had requested.

Chapter Six

The Spirit of Useless Pursuits

As the girls were coming back from their latest errand for Mr. Wiskerfink, they met another fairy friend—Dewberry. Unlike the surprise run-ins with Thyme, Honeysuckle, and Dove, Dewberry was specifically coming to visit Larkspur and Alyssum for a particular purpose. She followed the two girls to Larkspur's room to talk; whereby, Alyssum began to tell Dewberry about the events of their weekend so far. But she didn't get very far because Dewberry had something important to tell her friends. She stopped Alyssum in mid-story, after hearing about the goose chase, but before learning of

the pickles and pinecones errand. “I came as soon as I heard from Honeysuckle what you guys had been up to,” said Dewberry, “and I need to tell you some things about this polecat, also known as Sniggerbly Wiskerfink, and sometimes called Bootless.” Dewberry was the fairy gifted with great knowledge and wisdom, and she smiled at the surprised looks on her friends’ faces. “Did either of you think to consult your fairy handbooks about him?” she asked.

Larkspur and Alyssum looked at one another, shaking their heads, and Alyssum asked, “But what would we have looked under?”

“How about Sniggerbly Wiskerfink, useless pursuits, polecats, or goose chases,” suggested Dewberry, somewhat sarcastically. Dewberry was easily the least

gullible or innocent of any of the fairies in this region. Not much could ever be put over on her because of her immense wealth of knowledge, and the wisdom she was beginning to develop with that knowledge. But Alyssum and Larkspur were extremely interested to learn more about the polecat, even if they had to listen to a friend who was a bit *know-it-all* in her attitude.

Dewberry was less sarcastic and sounded sympathetic as she went on to tell them everything she knew about Sniggerbly Wiskerfink. “He is the Spirit of Useless Pursuits, but he doesn’t have much control of magic, so he is not terribly powerful. However, he can expertly influence others with his ploys to gain sympathy and his pleas for help.” Dewberry smiled as she went on because this was somewhat of a

funny situation for her friends to be in, and Bootless himself was rather an amusing creature. “Unlike most magical spirits, Sniggerbly Wiskerfink cannot change into various forms. Long ago, the Spirit of Useless Pursuits irritated another, slightly more powerful spirit so much with his requests to perform futile errands that the other spirit used dark magic on Bootless, and cursed him to remain in the form of a polecat forever.

“You might not believe this next part,” Dewberry added, “but Mr. Wiskerfink actually persuaded Madam Monarch to fetch special fireplace matches from New York one time, many years ago. That adventure is described in the handbook.” Dewberry laughed as she went on. “Of course, San Antonio is just down the road, and matches

from a store there would have been just fine. But Sniggerbly Wiskerfink had to have the special ones from a fireplace shop in New York.” Finally, Dewberry said, “But don’t tell Madam Monarch that you know about her excursion to New York, because she is still terribly embarrassed for having made such a pointless trip. The handbook warned me not to mention it to her, since she regrets having been taken in by Bootless all those years ago and is still self-conscious about the whole affair.”

Dewberry didn’t stay long. She was on her way to her favorite weekend hangout spot, the public library, to do her favorite activities, read and study, in order to continue adding to her enormous cache of knowledge.

As Alyssum and Larkspur discussed their adventures more that afternoon, they both decided that even though Bootless had sent them out on pointless errands and fruitless pursuits, they actually didn't mind much. "The cherries made him happy at first," said Alyssum, "until we couldn't get the goose to come for a visit."

"And the boots will help warm his feet this winter," added Larkspur, "so I'm sure they will eventually get worn."

Alyssum further pondered, "And we can't really say that the quest for cherries was a 'fruitless' pursuit, now can we?"

Larkspur laughed at her friend's cleverness.

But later in the afternoon, while the girls were playing a game of *Go Fish*, a gray squirrel hopped up onto the windowsill to

deposit a large pecan nut message. Again, the note was not from a fellow fairy. Mr. Wiskerfink was once more asking for their help. The message read, *Come quickly! I need your help right away!*

The girls were reluctant to go back to the clearing so soon; but they thought it would be rude not to respond, especially to such an urgent message. Alyssum and Larkspur were always willing to help others, even the Spirit of Useless Pursuits. Plus, with patience, and offering friendship to the polecat, the girls were optimistic that he might someday change his tune, and send others on fewer pointless errands. Sometimes, all that was needed for disagreeable creatures to become more civilized was a friend or two, to make them feel appreciated and to set a good example.

Chapter Seven

Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse

When the girls arrived at the clearing, the Spirit of Useless Pursuits was again stretched out in the crook of the low tree limb. He was very happy to see them. The girls didn't tell the polecat that they knew he was a magical spirit. Instead, Alyssum addressed him very pleasantly and politely. "Hello, Mr. Wiskerfink. What can we help you with?"

"But we have to tell you," interjected Larkspur, "we might not be able to help you much after this afternoon. Tomorrow, we both have to catch up on our homework; and we will be busy with school from now until

Thanksgiving, with no more long weekends.” Alyssum nodded at her friend’s words. Though neither of them minded helping the polecat one more time, they couldn’t neglect school or chores around the house or other important things. Mr. Wiskerfink would have to find a way to meet his needs without them, at least until they had another long break from school and more free time.

Being told that this was the last time of helping him for a while didn’t faze the Spirit of Useless Pursuits at all. He nodded understandingly, and said, “I know how busy young girls are these days, and I appreciate your helping me so much this weekend.” Then the polecat’s tone changed, and he sounded sad and pitiful as he went on. “I am just so lonely. That’s why I have

enjoyed your visits so much this weekend. With my sore paw (waving his *right rear* paw slowly), I haven't been able to get out to visit my neighbors at all for the last two months. And I haven't had a visit from my good friend, Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse, for nearly six months. He lives just down that short lane."

Mr. Wiskerfink was pointing to the path farthest to the right, and the widest, of the many trails leading away from his clearing. "If you could just convince my friend to visit me for the evening, I will be so happy; and I won't feel lonely any more. It's such a terrible thing to be lonely." Next, very dramatically, Mr. Wiskerfink added, "Sometimes I think I might die of loneliness."

The girls couldn't see any harm in taking a message to Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse, requesting that he visit his friend, Mr. Wiskerfink. But Alyssum did warn the polecat, "We will not have time to chase a horse around, so if he doesn't want to come, we will have to leave it at that."

After a slight pause, the Spirit of Useless Pursuits said, "Okay," in a slightly wounded voice. "But please try to convince him to come."

"We will," assured Larkspur, adding, "We just learned our lesson with the goose. We can't force others to visit you."

Mr. Wiskerfink agreed, nodding. "You're right," he said. "It would be rude to insist."

The fairies flew quickly away down the wide path far to the right.

Mrs. Astor lived in the Great House on the hill, just at the end of the wide path, and her Pet Horse was grazing on the sloping lawn in front of the house. The horse didn't seem surprised at all to see the fairies; and when the girls asked him if he wouldn't mind coming with them to visit Mr. Wiskerfink, Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse immediately went to retrieve his hat and handbag from a nearby fencepost, where he handily kept them for easy access when setting out on visits to friends. Both hat and handbag were very classy. The hat was pea green. Its wide brim sported a pink polka dot ribbon, and was decorated with none other than Shasta daisies. The handbag was bright red with a brushed gold clasp and a thin braided strap.

Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse was a painted or pinto horse. He was half rust colored and half cream colored with just a splotch of light gray on his nose. But he seemed somewhat small for a horse or even a pony. Larkspur and Alyssum thought this was likely due to their current perspective. Being so small, it was sometimes hard to recognize how big things were supposed to be, especially when the fairies changed their sizes so often. And neither girl had been around horses enough to know what size they were really supposed to be.

As Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse trudged along the wide path toward the clearing and cottage, he didn't speak to the fairies flying alongside him. Larkspur and Alyssum assumed he was like the goose, a regular animal, non-bewitched, who couldn't speak.

They didn't know that Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse was normally one of the most talkative creatures on the planet. So they couldn't tell that anything might be out of the ordinary. Other than clopping horse hooves, crunching leaves, and a slight buzzing hum from the fairies' wings as they flew (fairly quickly to keep up with the pace of the horse), the forest was silent.

When the group reached the clearing, Sniggerbly Wiskerfink was overjoyed to see them. Larkspur and Alyssum couldn't stay for a visit. They didn't want to worry Mrs. Wright by showing up late for dinner. So they quickly bid Mr. Wiskerfink and Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse farewell and flew directly to the rock tunnel.

Now a visit from a friendly horse should have been a happy occasion for the polecat.

However, it was not meant to be. In fact, Mr. Wiskerfink was now in absolutely the biggest trouble of all his life. No sooner had the fairies disappeared into the tunnel, than Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse became something quite different. The pea green hat with the polka dot ribbon fell off his head, and the thin braided strap of the bright red handbag slipped from his shoulder. With an unzipping action, as though taking off a horsehair overcoat, Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse transformed into a giant wolf. And this was not just any wolf. His name was Grim Grundleson, and Sniggerbly Wiskerfink had once tricked him into an extremely useless pursuit that lasted nearly a week.

The polecat had somehow managed to convince Grim Grundleson that the Wolfpack High Commander had given

orders for Grim to perform the lengthy task for the polecat, which of course wasn't so. But that is a very long story about an extensive and pointless journey that began with Mr. Wiskerfink reciting an ancient legend involving wolf indebtedness to polecat royalty, which was an entirely untruthful tale. However, the legend doesn't really matter much now because we must get back to the events in the clearing, in which Grim Grundleson was preparing for his dinner, which tonight would consist entirely of polecat.

The wolf had planned this very carefully. He was somewhat of a smart wolf and knew that one day Sniggerbly Wiskerfink would send someone to fetch his friend, Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse. So Grim sent Mrs. Astor's Pet Horse off on a long holiday to

Denmark, so the horse could see something he always wanted to see, *The Little Mermaid* statue, and visit with other talking horses in various parts of Europe. Grim Grundleson had arranged to have a dummy horse suit made up. Then he patiently waited, biding his time, until the polecat sent someone to fetch the horse.

Truthfully, even though Grim was fairly smart, as far as wolves were concerned, he couldn't exactly remember how to get back to Mr. Wiskerfink's cottage. That was why he needed someone to lead him there. Plus, he would need to take the polecat by surprise. Magical spirits were mainly only vulnerable when taken by surprise. Otherwise, Mr. Wiskerfink would likely be able to scamper up the trunk of a tree and escape off through the treetops. Or the

polecat might be able to send for help, or have enough time to summon up some magic to help him, though the Spirit of Useless Pursuits rarely used magic because he was so good at using his influence and wits to achieve his ends. With the element of surprise, Grim Grundleson now had the polecat cornered.

Fortunately for Mr. Wiskerfink, polecats and magical spirits were slightly smarter than wolves. Though Mr. Wiskerfink was in a state of shock when the wolf shed his horse suit and announced his intention to have polecat for dinner, the Spirit of Useless Pursuits managed to convince Grim Grundleson to let him write a note to say goodbye to his dear mother before being eaten. The wolf didn't have any idea that Sniggerbly Wiskerfink didn't have a mother,

because the wolf wasn't quite smart enough to figure that out. Then the polecat offered Grim some of the cherries in the yellow bowl. This was very clever of Mr. Wiskerfink because the wolf couldn't resist luscious, fragrant, dark red cherries. So this bought the Spirit of Useless Pursuits some time, while the wolf was eating the cherries, for a mockingbird to deliver a nut message to Larkspur and Alyssum.

Most of Sniggerbly Wiskerfink's neighbors were too mad at him, due to his antics over the years, to care whether or not a wolf devoured him; but the polecat hoped that the two fairies would be more sympathetic. It was just after dinner, and the girls were getting out beads to work on a couple of projects, when the mockingbird arrived with the hazelnut. Larkspur sighed

as she opened it. Alyssum looked over her friend's shoulder and both girls read the message at the same time: *Help! Help! I am in terrible trouble! Wolf!*

“Oh, this is too much!” cried Alyssum.

Larkspur couldn't say anything because she was choking with laughter. And both girls promptly fell over on the bed, rolling around and giggling madly for a full two minutes.

Finally, Larkspur sat up and wiped the tears of laughter from her eyes, saying, “He is actually ‘crying wolf.’”

Alyssum, still red-faced and snorting with laughter, managed to eke out, “We should have expected this after the goose chase.”

Neither girl particularly wanted to make a trip back to the clearing, even though it

was only early evening and still daylight outside.

“I can’t imagine that he actually needs help,” said Larkspur, “but it might be fun to hear what he wants now, and we can always say no.”

Alyssum agreed. “You’re right. He probably wants us to move the bowl of cherries two inches to the left on the table, or he might need us to go ‘up a hill to fetch a pail of water.’”

“But the hill would likely not be anywhere around here,” said Larkspur.

“Right,” agreed Alyssum, adding solemnly, “the hill is probably in Brazil.”

“Or maybe on the plains of Spain,” said Larkspur. And both girls burst out laughing once again. But the fairies decided to go to the clearing anyway, just for fun.

Larkspur told her mom and dad that they were going to take a short walk.

As the girls were leaving the house, they happened to run into another fairy friend, Thistle, who was coming by to say hi. Thistle was having a sleepover at Dove's house, and had decided to take a walk to say a quick hello while Dove was helping her mom with the after-dinner dishes. They wouldn't allow Thistle to help wash dishes, since she was a guest. Dove had told Thistle about Sniggerbly Wiskerfink and the girls' adventures over the weekend. So when Thistle found out that Larkspur and Alyssum were once again heading off to see the polecat, she was anxious to go along. She very much wanted to meet Mr. Wiskerfink.

Chapter Eight

Turning the Tables

Alyssum and Larkspur told Thistle about the polecat's latest note as the three made their way toward the tunnel. Thistle too thought the "Wolf!" message was very funny. "He must think fairies are all really gullible," she said.

Just as the girls emerged from the tunnel, the wolf finished the last cherry in the yellow bowl, and was now anxious to have some meat for dinner. The fairies flew across the clearing and arrived just in time. Thistle, whose gift was fierceness with the ability to fight, faced off with Grim Grundleson. Even a giant wolf, nearly the

size of a small calf, couldn't intimidate one of the fiercest fairies of all time. Immediately, Thistle pulled out her porcupine quill wand and sent orange sparks flying at Grim Grundleson's head, scorching his ears and making him back away.

Larkspur and Alyssum didn't quite know what to do, and just mainly stayed out of the way, gasping in fear for their friend.

But Thistle was very bold and never feared these kinds of encounters. She studied both karate and fencing and was an excellent fighter even without fairy magic. As the wolf lunged at her, she landed on his head jabbing her quill into the fur on his forehead and giving his ears several hard kicking swipes. She didn't really want to hurt him. She just wanted to get his attention and let him know that she meant

business. Grim shook his head very hard, but he didn't cause Thistle to lose her balance. She simply took off from his head. He snapped at her, but she was already out of range. As she flitted about, above of the wolf, evading his snarling jumps and lunges, Thistle sent more orange sparks flying from the tip of her wand.

Wolves did not like sparks, or fire, not to mention being poked and kicked about the ears. And despite Grim Grundleson's large size, he was not up to a lengthy show-down with a fierce fairy. Most creatures knew they couldn't stand up to a fighting fairy like Thistle. Thistle had won battles with both gremlins and goblins before, so a wolf didn't pose much of a threat to her. The short battle ended with Grim Grundleson scurrying down one of the paths leading

from the clearing with several *yips* of frustration and a final *growl* of complaint.

After making sure the wolf was truly gone, the three fairies approached Sniggerbly Wiskerfink. He was shaking all over and was so upset that his dark, cinnamon-brown fur had turned a weird grayish-tan color. He looked very pale and ghostly. The fairies were surprised by the first thing he said to them. “Your cherries saved my life.”

The girls just looked at each other.

After a long pause, Mr. Wiskerfink added, “I have something important to tell you, but I am too shook up right now to get it all out. Can you come again in the morning to talk to me briefly? I promise I won’t ask for any more favors or send you

on any errands. I just need to tell you something important.”

Larkspur and Alyssum recognized that the polecat was indeed very distressed, so they agreed to come for a short visit the next day. They thought it was likely the polecat wanted to fess up about being the Spirit of Useless Pursuits, and possibly express regret that he had conned them into performing pointless tasks for him.

But when the girls reached Larkspur’s house, and Thistle was leaving to head back to Dove’s house, she warned her friends, “Be careful about what he tells you tomorrow. Even though he truly needed help this time, I’m not sure you should trust him.” Alyssum and Larkspur agreed to be wary of the Spirit of Useless Pursuits.

When they went to the clearing after breakfast the next morning, Mr. Wiskerfink was sitting on the steps of his porch looking very downcast. He was still a bit pale, but not as ghostly gray as the previous night.

Before giving the Spirit of Useless Pursuits a chance to speak, Larkspur told the polecat, “First of all, Mr. Wiskerfink, we need to tell you that you were extremely lucky Thistle was with us yesterday evening.” Alyssum was nodding, as Larkspur continued. “Neither of us would have known what to do with a wolf. And the errands you had previously sent us on didn’t make us think you were talking about a real wolf in your note.”

Sniggerbly Wiskerfink gave them no argument. Instead, he nodded solemnly and said, “I very keenly felt my luck yesterday, I

can assure you. And now I need to tell you the important thing I could not last night because I needed to collect myself to do so.” The Spirit of Useless Pursuits sighed very deeply as he went on. “I am a magical spirit even though I must stay in the form of a polecat.” Since the girls already knew this, they had no reaction and showed no emotion. However, they were very surprised by what Mr. Wiskerfink said next. “When any creature saves the life of a magical spirit, the spirit is indebted to that creature. So I am in your debt and must grant any request you ask of me if it is in my power to do so.”

This information was a tremendous surprise for the girls. But after only a brief consultation in whispers, the fairies knew exactly what they wanted to request of the

spirit. “Mr. Wiskerfink,” began Alyssum, “we would like you to go an entire year without asking anyone to do favors or run errands for you.”

The polecat had expected this. He didn’t complain, though he hung his head dejectedly as he told the girls, “I agree.”

Larkspur and Alyssum smiled at one another, but they were a tiny bit sad that the polecat was so unhappy.

“By the way,” said Mr. Wiskerfink. “The wolf is no longer in these parts. An eagle told me he saw Grim Grundleson heading toward the far North. I guess he thought I had learned my lesson, or that I might have fairies around all the time to deal with him. I don’t think he will be back.”

That afternoon, while Larkspur and Alyssum were studying for a spelling test

and working on math homework together, they discussed their adventures involving Sniggerbly Wiskerfink more thoroughly. And the girls' always-looking-on-the-bright-side attitudes were reflected in this conversation. "It was so nice of Mr. Wiskerfink to tell us that the cherries saved his life," said Larkspur.

And Alyssum added, "So he really did make the most of his cherries, like living life to the fullest, literally."

"I think his experience with the wolf might make him appreciate the *Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries* song more from now on," said Larkspur, "since the best things in his life are truly only on loan—like getting help from others, having warm feet, experiencing happiness, having friends, and enjoying the fruits of the earth."

“And I think it was wonderful of him to be so completely honest with us about having to fulfill a request since we helped to save his life,” said Alyssum.

Larkspur finished their upbeat discussion with, “This was such a fun weekend!”

Neither of the girls felt that any of their time had been wasted, and neither dwelled on feeling briefly frustrated that the polecat had initially taken advantage of their good intentions, running them about on useless errands. They both felt very good that they were truly able to help Mr. Wiskerfink. They went back to their spelling lists and multiplication problems feeling very satisfied.

The next weekend, Larkspur and Alyssum made another trip to visit the Spirit

of Useless Pursuits. They found Sniggerbly Wiskerfink a little ways behind his cottage, running in an exercise wheel, just like a hamster or gerbil wheel, but polecat sized.

The girls were overjoyed to see that Mr. Wiskerfink was wearing his new, soft green boots. “You are not ‘bootless’ today!” cried Larkspur. And Alyssum actually laughed out loud with happiness to see the polecat with no sore paws, wearing his boots, and running in a large exercise wheel.

Mr. Wiskerfink was happy to see the girls. Breathless, he stopped running and hopped down from the wheel to talk to them. “I know,” he said, pointing to the wheel, “I’m going nowhere in there. But it’s actually a lot of fun.” Then, smiling at the fairies, he added, “The best way to keep my promise to you is to stay home for the entire

year. The fewer creatures I come into contact with, the less tempted I will be to ask others to perform futile tasks. The wheel gives me something to do. A wizard friend of mine obtained it for me. I didn't ask, he offered," added the polecat hurriedly.

As the girls looked at one another somewhat doubtfully, Mr. Wiskerfink told them, "Yes, I actually do have some friends, believe it or not." The fairies did believe it, because they too considered Sniggerbly Wiskerfink to be a friend.

Larkspur and Alyssum visited the polecat many times over the next few months; and the Spirit of Useless Pursuits kept his word to them, not just because he had to, but also because he wanted to.

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
Pumpkinwing and the Week of Opposites
Minnow and Mr. Keen – the Brilliant Troll
Teasel and the Halloween Mysteries
Calliope and the Land of Bliss
Heather and the Basket of Understanding

Honeysuckle and the February Garden
Sandpiper and the Ship of Pools
Brandtii and the Perils of Prima Della, Top
 Strawberry, and Big-Wag
Ginger and the Purple Ibex
Swan and the Realm of Hollowness
Larkspur and Alyssum Meet Sniggerbly
 Wiskerfink
Clover and the Flying Turtle
Arabesque and the Return of Clack Palaver
Thyme and the Magic Dollhouse
Bumblebee and the Maze of Regret
Fern and the Candle of Friendship
Cherry and the Adventures of Pwensfourth-
 Greeves Mistookan
Ambrosia and the Elemental Fairies
Jasmine, the Journal, and Magnolia's Sacrifice
Raven and the Children of the Rainbow
Pennyroyal and the Last Rhinoceros
Lilac and the Secret of Obsidian
Sparrow and Edelweiss's Ghost
Quince, Amethyst, and the Forever Journey
Dandelion and the Box of Illusion
Hollyhock and the Christmas of the Swans
Eglantine and the Laughing Owl

The Glass Fairy
Berylline and the Tree of Joy
Meadowsweet and the Magic Fountain
Jewels and Superheroes
The Adventures of Red Zipper
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*.



Works by J.H. Sweet

The Fairy Chronicles
Clock Winders Series
The Wishbone Miracle
The White Sparrow
Juan Noel's Crystal Airship
The Heaviest Things
Foo and Friends
The Time Entity Trilogy
Cassie Kingston Mysteries
The Gypsy Fiddle

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