

Chapter 1

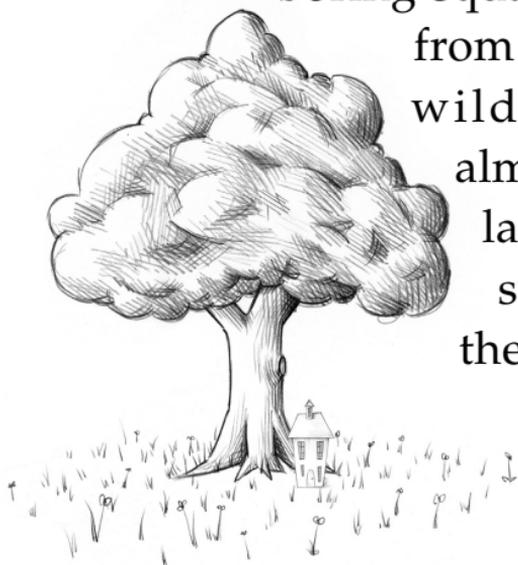
Katie skipped ahead of Mum all the way home from school, trying to get her to walk faster. As they rounded the corner into the newly built close, she felt her heart leap with excitement. The houses were all the same, small and brown, like tiny Lego boxes – well, almost. Katie was proud that theirs stood out from the crowd. Mum, an artist, loved all things bright and beautiful, so she'd painted the front door a vivid pink.





But it wasn't the house that Katie was excited about. She just couldn't wait to meet up with her four new friends. Once inside, she hurried through the living room and kitchen, dropping her school bag on the way. She was heading for the back door, but Mum made her sit down and have some orange juice and a homemade flapjack first. Then she was gone, dashing across the garden and under the wire that separated their boring square patch of lawn

from the overgrown, wild-flower-strewn almost-meadow that lay beyond. Katie swished through the tall grass, thick with dandelions and poppies, humming a





song that one of her new friends had taught her.

As she reached the oak tree and saw the dolls' house beneath it, she couldn't help smiling.

Although it was just like any other, it certainly wasn't ordinary. Incredible as it sounded, Katie's new friends lived *inside* it – and they were *fairies*.



When Katie had first seen them, she'd hardly believed her eyes.

She'd left the dolls' house outside one night under the old oak tree, and when she returned the next morning she got a big surprise! Four tiny fairies called Bluebell, Daisy, Rosehip





and Snowdrop had moved in!



Together, Katie and the fairies had transformed the pink plastic dolls' house into a beautiful home. Bluebell had decorated the walls with pressed-flower pictures and there were rose-petal covers on the sofas and polka-dot curtains at the windows. They'd even made a string of tiny sparkling fairy lights to keep the house cheerful at night.

Then Katie had painted the words "The Fairy House" on the front door in lovely swirly letters and given it to the fairies for their very own. Luckily Mum had allowed her to keep it under the oak tree in the almost-meadow.

Katie loved the way the Fairy House was becoming part of the landscape, with Snowdrop's wonderful window boxes cascading



with pink and purple flowers, and the grass growing taller around it as summer settled in.

Daisy and Snowdrop popped their heads out of Bluebell's bedroom window and waved to Katie. "Hurray! You're back!" Daisy cried.

"Come on in!" added Snowdrop. "You'll have to shrink first, of course!"

Katie grinned at them – she was really looking forward to more fairy fun! She crouched down beside the Fairy House and pressed the tip of her little finger on to the tiny blue door handle, which Bluebell had bewitched with fairy dust.

"I believe in fairies, I believe in fairies, I believe in fairies," she whispered. She gasped in delight as the top of her head tingled. Then a



great whooshing sound roared in her ears and everything around her seemed to be getting bigger and bigger and bigger.

But, of course, she was getting smaller and smaller and smaller. And suddenly she was fairy sized!

Just as she was about to go inside, Bluebell and Rosehip came whizzing round the tree. Bluebell

was flying determinedly ahead, with Rosehip close behind, reaching out to grab her foot.





Bluebell spotted Katie and just as she slowed a little to wave, Rosehip tagged her ankle. "It!" she cried triumphantly.

"That wasn't fair!" shouted Bluebell, hovering in mid-air with her hands on her hips. "I only slowed down to say hello to Katie!"

Rosehip tossed her fiery orange hair and did a mocking loop-the-loop. "We were still playing so it *does* count, actually," she cried. "You're it! Ha ha!" And with that, she zoomed past Bluebell, sticking out her tongue.

Bluebell lunged at Rosehip and Katie laughed as the two fairies became a shrieking ball of fluttering wings and flailing legs. They were the best of friends, but they also had hot tempers and were always falling out!





Just then, Daisy and Snowdrop rushed out of the door and swamped Katie in hugs. Bluebell and Rosehip came crashing to the ground, leapt up and brushed themselves down, the squabble forgotten. All smiles, they joined in the hug.

“We’ve made a skipping rope with woven grass,” Snowdrop said, pulling a long rope from the pocket of her dress for Katie to see. “Will you play with us?”

“Of course,” said Katie, “but first I have to tell you something – something very important. It’s about your fairy task.”

As soon as Katie said this, Snowdrop reached into the pocket of her dress again and pulled out the scroll they’d been given by the Fairy Queen herself. It said:

Fairy Task No. 45826

By Royal Command of the Fairy Queen

Terrible news has reached Fairyland. As you know, the Magic Oak is the gateway between Fairyland and the human world. The sparkling whirlwind can only drop fairies off *here*. Humans plan to knock down our special tree and build a house on the land. If this happens, fairies will no longer be able to come and help people and the environment. You must stop them from doing this terrible thing and make sure that the tree is protected for the future. Only then will you be allowed back into Fairyland.

By order of Her Eternal Majesty

The Fairy Queen

PS You will need one each of the twelve birthstones to work the magic that will save the tree - but hurry, there's not much time!



Katie had been given a ring by her Auntie Jane, which turned out to be garnet, the January stone. So they'd found one at least, but they still needed eleven others. Katie had got a book out of the library and read up on the twelve birthstones. Some of them were very expensive, like ruby, sapphire and emerald, and she had no idea how they'd lay their hands on such gems.

"I found out from Mum that the man who built our house and this whole close is called Max Towner," Katie explained. "I'll bet he's the one who's planning to knock down the tree! And there's a girl called Tiffany Towner in my class, who's *really* horrible and always getting into trouble. Mum said she's his daughter." The fairies all looked impressed with what Katie had found

out. "The problem is that Tiffany won't talk to me, because she thinks I'm a goody-goody," Katie continued. "I wanted to ask about her dad's plans, so I sat with her at lunch today, but she just ignored me."



"There is another way we could find out about Tiffany's father's plans," Daisy said slowly, a thoughtful look on her face. "One of *us* could make friends with her."

Katie stared at her, astonished. "But how?"

"By turning big and going to school instead of you!" said Bluebell excitedly.





“We could pretend it was an exchange day so she wouldn’t be suspicious,” added Snowdrop.

“What a great idea!” cried Katie. “But how do you turn big? Do you just use a sprinkling of fairy dust?”

There was a silence.

“Well?” Katie prompted. She realized that the fairies were all glancing at each other nervously from under their long eyelashes.

“Erm, not exactly *just* a sprinkling of fairy dust,” said Daisy reluctantly, fiddling with her long plaits. “There is a price to pay. For a fairy to



become a human, a human has to become a fairy, to take her place.”

“You mean *me*?” Katie gasped, eyes gleaming with excitement.

“It takes courage,” Daisy warned. “If something happened to one of you, the other would be stuck the wrong size for ever. Or if one of you didn’t want to turn back afterwards, the other one couldn’t. It’s not something to be taken lightly.”

All the fairies looked hopefully up at Katie, who stood perfectly still, feeling stunned. It was riskier than she’d thought – what if she got stuck as a fairy? She’d miss school, and Auntie Jane, and worst of all Mum would never see her again! She couldn’t even *begin* to imagine how awful that would be!

But then she remembered the fairies’ task, and how she’d



promised to help them in any way she could. If the tree were knocked down it would spell disaster for earth as well as Fairyland. Fairies looked after the seasons, and all the plants, trees and flowers. Without them there might be snow in June, or maybe constant rain, or perhaps the fruit and vegetables wouldn't grow and there would be nothing to eat. They could only imagine what the consequences would be – but one thing was certain, they wouldn't be good! Katie took a deep breath and stood up. "We have to find out if Max Towner is behind this plan to knock down the tree," she said, "and this is the best chance we have. I'll do it."

"Oh, Katie, thanks!" cried Daisy.

"Well done!" added Snowdrop.

Bluebell suddenly stood up. "I'll



do it too," she announced, and they all whirled round to stare at her. But no one said thank you or well done this time. In fact, no one said anything!

"What's the matter?" asked Bluebell.

"Don't take this the wrong way," said Daisy finally, in her gentlest voice, "but you'll never be able to keep calm with Tiffany. What if she says nasty things about Katie?"

"I'll control my temper," Bluebell promised. "As Katie says, we have to find out if Tiffany's dad is behind these wicked plans, and quickly. Besides, it'll be fun, like being a secret agent and





going undercover – I’ll blend right in.”

Katie giggled and clamped her hand over her mouth.

“What? What’s so funny about that?” Bluebell demanded.

“You won’t blend in with that blue hair!” Katie told her. “But if you’re sure you can handle Tiffany, I’m willing to switch with you. You’re very brave, Bluebell.”

Bluebell did a twirl of pride and finished it off with a curtsy.



“I was going to volunteer too,”

Rosehip grumbled.

“Bluebell offered first, so it’s only fair that she should turn big,”

Daisy told her. “We’ll all need to go to school anyway, to

look after Katie while she's small."

"Still not fair," Rosehip huffed, but she didn't say anything more.

"So we're agreed," said Katie. "Tomorrow we swap places!" She lunged over to hug Bluebell and they had an excited jumping-up-and-downy squealy hug and dance around together, which the others soon joined in, even Rosehip. While the risks worried her, Katie was impossibly excited about becoming a fairy, even just for one day!

"I have to go in for tea soon," she said breathlessly, when they finally broke apart. "But there's just time for a turn with your new skipping rope, Snowdrop."

Snowdrop beamed at her and unravelled the rope. Rosehip made up a special fairy skipping song



which she taught them all, and pretty soon, she and Katie were in together, chanting, “Flap your wings and stomp your feet, jump in, Bluebell, don’t miss a beat!” as Bluebell jumped in too.

The chant made Katie feel extra excited – after all, tomorrow she would be flapping her own wings,



not just singing about it! She'd be a *real* fairy!

The skipping was so much fun that Katie almost forgot the time, until her rumbling tummy reminded her. Worried that Mum would come out looking for her and she'd be nowhere to be





seen, she gave her fairy friends a quick goodbye hug.

For tea they shared one of Mum's home-made pizzas (Katie knew that Mum hid all kinds of vegetables under the cheese, but somehow it was still delicious!). Then after she'd helped with the drying up, Katie dug out her own skipping rope and asked Mum to play with her. They tied one end to the door handle and took turns at the other, and Katie couldn't resist singing Rosehip's skipping song.

"What a lovely tune," Mum remarked. "Where did you learn that?"

"Oh, my new friends sing it, at erm, school," mumbled Katie.

Mum beamed. "I'm so glad you're settling in so well, darling," she



said, and, grinning, she began to turn the rope faster and faster.

Katie giggled, feet flying. "Mum, stop it!" she cried, not meaning a word.

Katie felt bad for fibbing to Mum, even just a little tiny bit, but she had *tried* to tell her the truth about the fairies when she'd first met them. The problem was that, like most grown-ups, Mum didn't believe in fairies and couldn't see them, so she just thought Katie was talking about imaginary friends she'd invented!

Later that evening, Katie had her bath and did her reading as usual, and soon she was all snuggled up in bed. But she was just too excited to sleep!

Eventually she got up and crept over to her window. Squinting into



the darkness she could just make out the Fairy House, glowing with the daisy lights she'd helped to make. Although she couldn't see into its tiny windows, she had a feeling Bluebell was still awake too, gazing out into the almost-meadow, looking forward to her big day.

