

# Chapter 1

Katie twisted the ring Auntie Jane had given her round and round on her finger, as she always did when she was nervous. The parcel just *had* to come today.

At last she heard the postman crunching along the neat gravel driveway, but she was far too shy to go running up to him. Instead she listened to Mum answering the door, and the postman asking how they were settling in. They'd





only been in the new house two weeks.

The new house really was a *new* house – just built. Katie found it strange that no one had ever used the cooker or the bath before they got there. The house looked exactly the same as all the others on the small estate, except that Mum had painted the front door a vibrant pink. In the fairy tales Katie loved reading, the houses always had secret passageways or hidden cupboards to explore, but in their own, every single nook and cranny was crammed with their things.

As soon as she heard the front door closing, Katie hurried into the hall. She didn't have to ask if the parcel had come – Mum was clutching a large brown-paper-



wrapped box! Katie knew it was what she'd been waiting for. A new house of her very own.

The moment Mum put the box down Katie pounced

on it and tore off the paper.

She could feel her heart

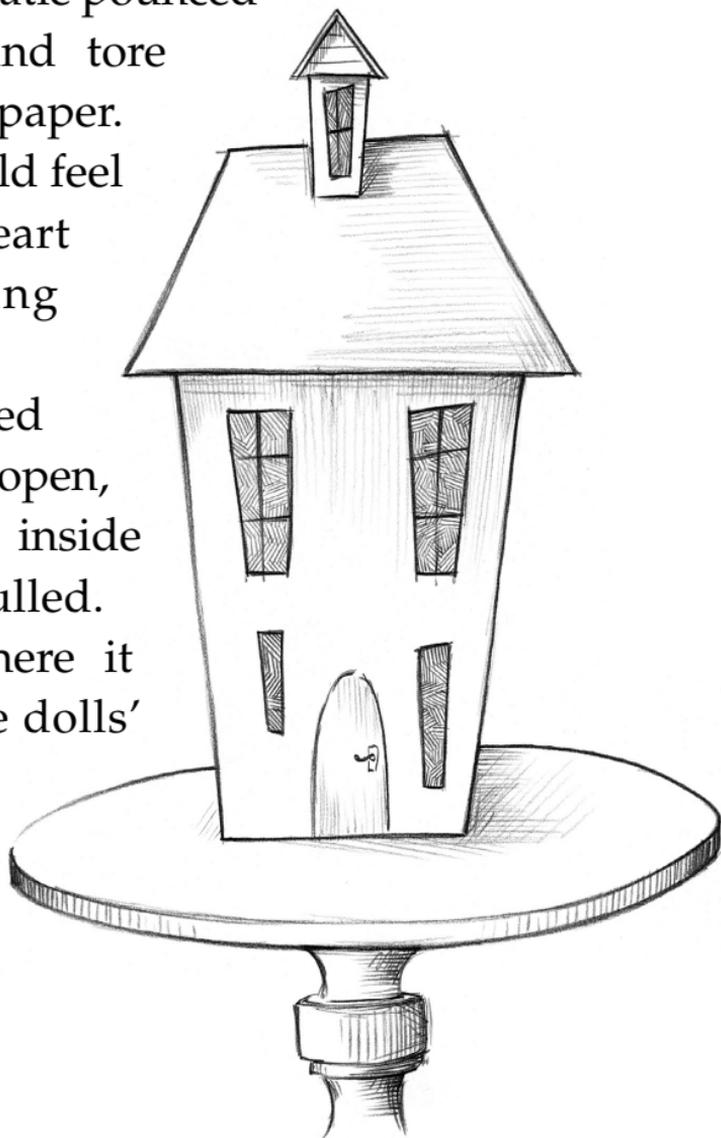
pounding as she

wrenched

the box open,

reached inside and pulled.

Then there it was, the dolls' house!





It was made of pink plastic with little cut-out windows and it had a yellow door with a tiny blue handle. Katie pressed down a catch on the roof and the whole front of the house swung open. Inside was a kitchen and living room, and stairs to the bedrooms above. "Four bedrooms! Just like our house," she cried, then added, "I mean, our old house."

"There's more inside the box," said Mum.

Katie delved in again and rummaged around. She fished out packet after packet of tiny



furniture – a sofa, beds, a table, wardrobes, kitchen cupboards, a grand piano.

Katie traced her hand over the pink tiled plastic roof – it was finally here, her very own dolls' house! She'd been thinking and

even dreaming about

one for absolutely

ages – and asking

and asking and

asking, of course!

Even though it

wasn't anywhere

near her birthday,

Mum had finally

given in and

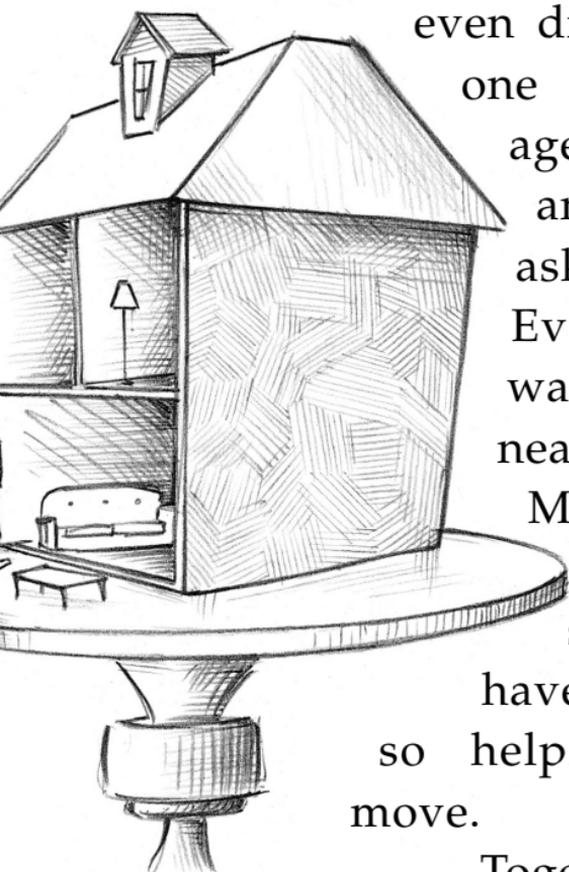
said she could

have one for being

so helpful with the

move.

Together they set





out all the dolls'-house furniture on the table. "There's everything you need to make a lovely home right here," said Mum.

"Yes, it's great, it's just a bit plain, that's all," Katie murmured. She thought for a moment, then had an idea. "Oh, I know!" she cried. "I can make it more unusual, so there's only one like it in the whole world. I'll paint the door, and make curtains, and do pictures to go on the walls, just like you did with this place!"

Mum was an artist, so she really had created the vividly coloured canvases that hung on their walls.

"Great idea," said Mum. "Look, it's a lovely day, why don't you take everything outside and get some fresh air?"

So Katie ran upstairs and grabbed

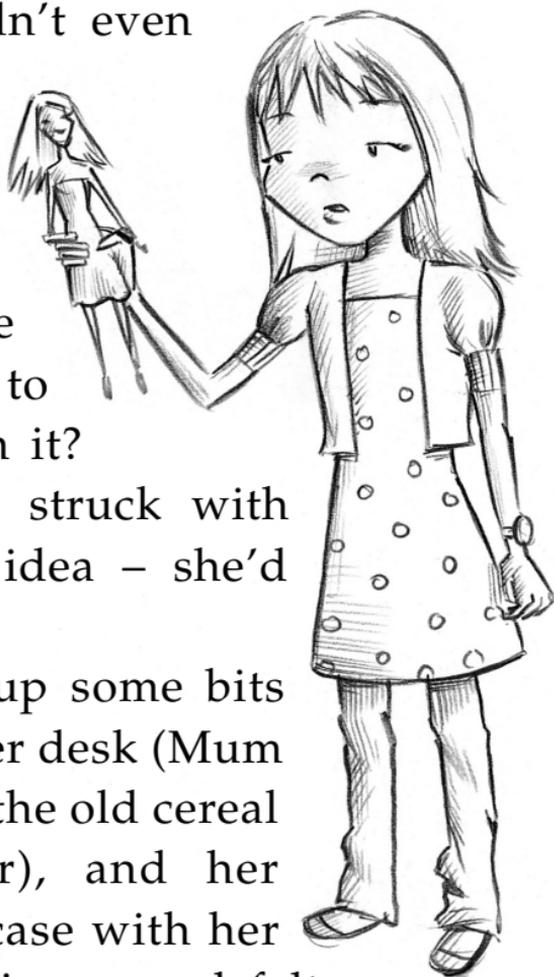


her paints and brushes and stickers and glitter and glue. She scooped up a handful of Barbies too, then realized they'd be far too big to fit into the dolls' house. She stopped still – she hadn't even thought about *dolls*.

What good was a dolls' house if she had no dolls to actually live in it?

Then she was struck with another great idea – she'd make some!

She picked up some bits of card from her desk (Mum always cut up the old cereal boxes for her), and her school pencil case with her blunt gluey scissors and felt pens



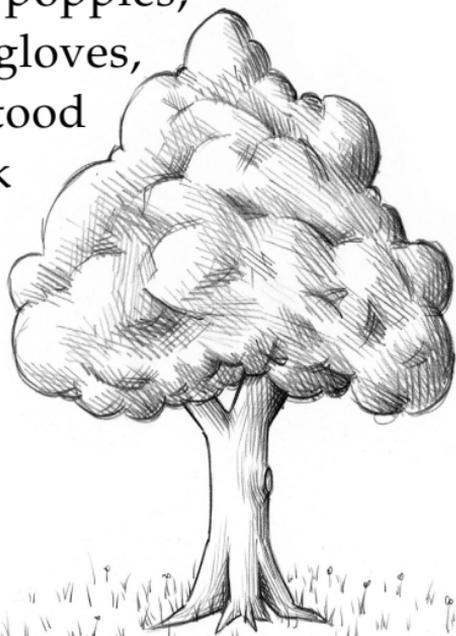


inside. She galloped downstairs and rummaged in the craft drawer for the bag of fabric offcuts. She could use the scraps to dress her dolls, and for making curtains, too, and maybe even bedspreads! Katie's heart was pounding again – who wanted a stuffy old dolls' house that was already perfect anyway? This would be much more fun!

Katie put all her things inside the pink plastic house, shut the latch and picked it up by the handle, like a suitcase. Then she headed outside. The garden was just a neat rectangle of turf, though Mum was planning borders and climbing plants and maybe even a vegetable patch. The developers had only put a thin strip of wire up as a back fence, and the neighbours soon changed theirs for

tall wooden panels that still smelled like that funny brown paint you put on them. But Mum liked the open feel and kept the wire, which made it so easy for Katie to bob underneath.

Beyond the fence was a patch of rough ground that hadn't been built on. It wasn't really big enough to call a meadow, but the grass was high and full of poppies, dandelions and foxgloves, and at the centre stood a grand old oak tree. Katie had discovered it the day they moved in. It was the perfect place for daydreaming, playing and making things.





Since no one else ever went there, Katie was starting to think of it as her own special, private place. She swished through the grass and set the dolls' house down under the tree, then she clicked it open and pulled out her art things.

And there, with the breeze rustling the leaves above her



and insects

buzzing

happily

around, Katie

spent a lovely

morning making the

dolls' house her very

own. First she

painted the

front door a

brilliant purple. Then

she stuck silver heart

and star stickers on the

plain pink furniture and arranged it in the different rooms, singing her favourite songs as she worked.



Next she started on the cardboard dolls, drawing out the shapes and then cutting carefully around them. She made four – one for each bedroom. Then she tipped her bag of fabric scraps out on to the uneven, tree-rooty ground and chose the material for their outfits. Two were getting groovy jeans and two were going to have funky skirts and tops. The cardboard dolls would have parties in the house all the time, Katie decided. She'd make them little paper hats and decorations and





even a tiny pass-the-parcel!



Planning her dolls' first party was such fun – but it made her feel lonely too. She wished she had someone to share it with, but her old friends were all back in London, busy with the end of term play. It was so unfair – she was supposed to be Cinderella, but the move to Dorset meant she was missing it all. Hannah Williams had snaffled the role instead.

Her new school wasn't *that* bad, she supposed, but she found everything there so new and strange – their rough work books were blue instead of orange, the lunch hall smelled different and you had a separate peg for your PE kit in the cloakroom. Her teacher, Mrs Borthwick, was a big cheerful lady with leggings and a grey blunt-cut

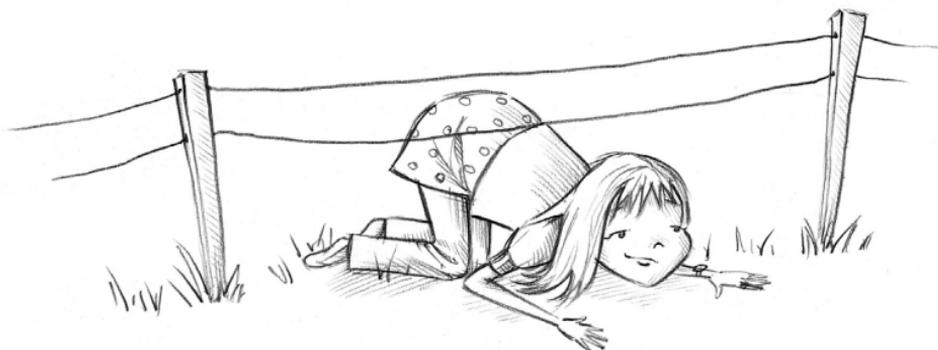
bob, and most of the children seemed nice too, but she hadn't made any real friends yet. She missed having girls to whisper secrets to and make presents for and play made-up games with.

"I must find a friend before the school holidays," she told herself firmly, picturing the hot, lonely weeks stretching out in front of her.

For a moment, Katie had the strangest feeling, as if she were being watched. She glanced all around her, but no one was there. She shrugged and began cutting out a stripy skirt and singing a new song, the one about the kookaburra and the old gum tree. She didn't even get to the second verse before she heard Mum calling her in to lunch.



Mum sounded so worried that Katie instantly leapt up, shouting, "Here I am! Over the fence!" She hurried inside, meaning to come back out straight afterwards.



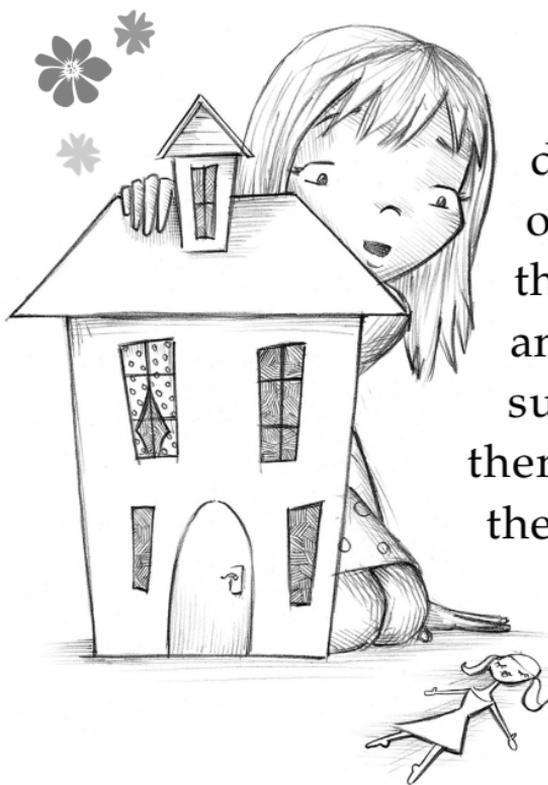
But once she'd eaten her fish fingers and beans and helped with the drying up they went to visit Auntie Jane. They all ended up going for a long walk then staying for tea and when they got home it was already bath time. By the time Mum had detangled and dried Katie's long brown hair, it was past bedtime and she said lights out straight away, as there was no time

for a story. Just as she was falling asleep, Katie remembered that the dolls' house was still under the oak tree. But she was too tired to get up again and fetch it in – so that's where it stayed.

First thing the next morning, Katie wanted to get straight on with her dolls' house project – there were the dolls' outfits to finish, and she hadn't even started on the curtains. She gave Mum a good morning hug and tried to hurry out of the back door – but Mum insisted she have a bowl of cereal first! Soon enough, though, Katie was outside, slipping through the wire fence and wading across the grassy meadow to the oak tree.

And that's when she got a huge surprise.





Her cardboard dolls were lying on the ground by the front door – and yet she was sure she'd left them safely inside the dolls' house, in their bedrooms.

Stranger still, there were blue polka-dot curtains hanging at a bedroom window.

Curtains she hadn't made.

Katie felt her stomach flip over. Had someone been here in the night, messing with her things? Suddenly something caught her attention. Strange sounds. Almost like *voices*. She froze, listening. But all she could hear were birds

singing in the trees and insects buzzing through the flowers.



But . . . aha! There it was again! Definitely voices, she was sure now. At first Katie thought they were coming from far away, but then she realized that they were very *close*, but just very *tiny*. They sounded beautiful – almost magical – like crystal wind chimes tinkling in the breeze.

Katie listened hard. She gasped. The voices were *right beside her*.

They were coming from *inside* the dolls' house.