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The Charm Bracelet
The Flower Fairies
The Third Wish

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CHAPTER ONE

The Secret Garden

essie felt better once she was in the secret garden. She sat down right in the centre of its smooth, small square of lawn and looked around.

Yes, here at least nothing at all had changed. This place still made her feel as safe and peaceful as it always had. Clustered around the edges of the lawn, her grandmother's favourite spiky grey rosemary bushes still filled the air with their sweet, tangy smell. Behind them the tall, clipped hedge still rose high on every side. When Jessie was little, she used to think the hedge made this part of her grandmother's garden very special. Its wall of leaves seemed to keep the whole world out.

But, thought Jessie, clasping her hands around her knees, it doesn't keep the world out. Not really. The secret garden's just a place at the bottom of Granny's real garden. It's a place where I can be alone for a while, and pretend things are still the way they were before Granny fell and sprained her wrist. Before Mum started worrying about Granny living alone, and decided she *must*, absolutely must, move out of Blue Moon, her big old house in the mountains, and come to live with us.

She remembered the last time she and her mother, Rosemary, had come to stay with Granny. It had been winter, nearly three months ago. There had been no talk of Granny moving then. Then, things had been very different.

Jessie had always loved winter at Blue Moon. Every evening, as it got dark, they would light a fire in the living room, and then Jessie and her mother would sit cuddled up on the big squashy chairs watching the flames while Granny made dinner.

'No, I don't want help. You sit down and rest, Rosemary,' Granny would say to Mum. 'You work too hard. Let me look after you—just while you're here. I love to do it.' And after a few minutes'

protest, Mum would agree, and settle back gratefully, smiling.

Then for a while the only sounds they would hear would be the popping and snapping of the fire, the purring of Granny's big ginger cat, Flynn, crouched on a rug, and Granny's voice as she moved around the kitchen, singing the sweet songs that Jessie remembered from when she was a baby. There was one song that she had always especially loved. *Blue Moon floating, mermaids singing, elves and pixies, tiny horses* … it began. Jessie thought Granny had probably made it up, because it didn't rhyme, and the tune was lilting and strange.

Inside Blue Moon it was warm, cosy and safe. Outside, huge trees stretched bare branches to a cold black sky that blazed with stars, and in the morning a dusting of white frost crackled under your feet when you walked on the grass.

It had always seemed strange and magical to Jessie. At home there were no big trees and no frost. And the city lights seemed to drown the brightness of the stars.

But if winter in the mountains was magical, spring was even better. In spring everything sparkled. The bare trees began to bud with new

leaves of palest green, and in their shade bluebells and snowdrops clustered. Bees buzzed around the lilac bushes that bent their sweet, heavy heads beside the house. Butterflies of every colour and size danced among the apple blossom. In spring it was as if Blue Moon was waking up after a long sleep. Everywhere there were new beginnings.

But not this spring, Jessie thought sadly. This spring was more like an ending. She'd been feeling sad ever since her mother had told her about the plan to take Granny home with them at the end of this visit.

'Don't you want Granny to live with us, Jessie?' her mother had finally asked her, as they drove up the winding road that led from the city to the mountains. 'You two have always been so close, especially since your dad died. I thought you'd love the idea.'

Jessie tried to explain. 'It's just that … I can't really imagine Granny away from Blue Moon,' she said. She turned her head away, pretending to look out the window, but really not wanting her mother to see the tears she could feel prickling in her eyes. 'And … I'll miss … coming up here,' she burst out. 'I'll miss the house, and the trees, and the secret garden.'

'Oh, darling, of course you will!' Mum took one hand off the steering wheel to stroke Jessie's long red hair. 'So will I. Blue Moon's my old home, remember. I love it, just like you do. But Jessie, it's been five years since Grandpa died. And you know how worried I've been about Granny living all alone without anyone to look after her.' She smiled. 'My dad might have been the artist in the family, but he was a very practical man all the same. You wouldn't remember, I suppose. But he was sensible, and took no risks. Which is more than you can say for Granny, bless her heart.'

Jessie in fact did remember Grandpa quite well, even though she'd been so young when he died. His name was Robert Belairs. His paintings had been sold all over the world and were in many books. But to Jessie he was just Grandpa, a tall, gentle man with kind blue-grey eyes, a short white beard and a beautiful smile. She remembered how he always let her watch him paint in his upstairs studio at Blue Moon. And she remembered the paintings he worked on there—the soft, misty mountain landscapes, and the fairyland scenes for which he'd become so famous.

It was the fairy pictures that Jessie had

especially loved. Sitting quietly on a stool beside him, she used to watch with wonder as a fantasy world came to life under her grandfather's brush, a mysterious and beautiful world full of golden light. Lots of these paintings hung on the walls of Blue Moon, because every year, on Granny's birthday, Grandpa had painted a special picture just for her. He'd finished the last one just before he died.

Robert Belairs' fairyland was a world of pretty cottages, treehouses and shining castles, and elfin-faced people in wonderful floating clothes. He always called these people 'the Folk'. The most beautiful and royal-looking of the women had long golden-red hair and green eyes like Jessie's own. This had pleased her very much, though she knew that Grandpa wasn't really painting her. He'd always painted his fairy princesses that way. People used to laugh and say that was why he'd fallen in love with her grandmother in the first place. Granny's hair was white now, of course, but when she had first come to Blue Moon to marry Robert Belairs her hair had been as red as Jessie's.

Grandpa's paintings were also full of busy gnomes, dwarfs, pixies and elves, thin little

brownies, and tiny flower and rainbow fairies with gossamer wings. There were sometimes miniature horses, too, their manes threaded with ribbons and tiny bells. Jessie had really loved those. She had thought her grandfather was very clever to be able to paint such pictures. Maybe he was a bit magical himself.

And yes, she remembered how carefully he had looked after Granny, too. When Mum and Jessie had visited Blue Moon in those days, it was Granny who cooked the delicious food they ate, who talked and laughed, who suggested all sorts of outings and adventures and never expected anything to go wrong. But it was Grandpa who packed the extra box of matches for the picnic, 'just in case'. It was Grandpa who took the umbrella when they went on a walk, 'just in case'. It was Grandpa who made sure there were spare keys to all the doors, 'just in case'.

Granny used to tease him about it. She'd reach up to pat his cheek, the gold charm bracelet she always wore jingling on her wrist. 'You always expect the worst, Robert. Don't worry so. All will be well,' she'd say. And he'd smile, and touch her hand. 'Better to be safe than sorry, princess,' he'd answer. And quite often he was right.

Jessie could understand why Mum thought Granny couldn't exist safely without him. But she just knew Mum was wrong. Her mind went back to the argument they'd had in the car on the way up to Blue Moon.

'Granny tripped over that stray kitten that came in!' she'd protested. 'That had nothing to do with being alone, Mum. That could happen to anyone, any time. And she only sprained her wrist.'

'But Jessie, it could have been so much worse!' Her mother had frowned. 'If she'd hurt her leg or something she could have lain there in pain for days without being able to call for help.' Her hands had tightened on the steering wheel. 'You have to be sensible about this, Jessie,' she'd said firmly. 'And so does Granny. Both of you have to listen to me for a change. What's needed round here is a bit of common sense!'

Now, sitting in the secret garden, Jessie realised that her mother was really very like Grandpa. She had his kind blue-grey eyes and his strong practical streak. She wasn't like Granny at all. But Jessie was. She knew that quite well. For one thing, she looked like Granny. She was going to be taller, of course: that was obvious, since already

they were about the same height. Jessie wore an old grey cloak of Granny's for a dressing gown when she came to stay at Blue Moon, and even when she was in bare feet it didn't trail on the ground.

It was from Granny that Jessie had inherited her red hair, green eyes and pointed chin. She had been named Jessica after Granny, too. But, more important than name or looks, Jessie and her grandmother shared a love of stories, songs and fantasy that made them really enjoy each other's company.

And there was something else. They simply understood each other. Jessie always knew how Granny was feeling about things, and Granny always knew how Jessie was feeling, too. It had been like that ever since Jessie could remember.

Was that why, when Jessie had run into Granny's bedroom after they'd arrived at Blue Moon an hour ago, she had immediately felt so worried and sad? Was that why she hadn't been able to bear staying there, but had had to escape to the secret garden? Was that why …?

Jessie sat perfectly still. Without warning, a thought had whirled into her mind. She began to shiver, her eyes wide and startled, her hands

gripping the soft grass. Suddenly she had become terribly sure of something. Granny was in trouble. Real trouble. It wasn't just a matter of a sprained wrist, or sadness, or loneliness. It was something far more dangerous.

She sprang to her feet. She didn't know where the thought had come from. But now it was there, she knew it was true. And she had to do something about it. She didn't know what. But she had to help. She had to!

She began running for the house.