
BIBI AND THE BOX OF FAIRY TALES
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MEETING MISS MYRTLE

Bibi stared at her new home.

When her mum said they were moving to a house in the woods, she had imagined a thatched cottage with roses nodding a welcome beside the door. Instead, the chimney was crooked, the roof sagged, and the walls were draped in ivy. A single dandelion offered the only splash of colour.

But then the sun came out from behind the clouds and the windows twinkled cheerfully. Bibi looked at the cottage again. There was a twisted tower at one end; could that be her room? It might be fun to sleep up high, like a bird in its nest.

'Have you got the key, Mum?' she asked.





Her mother pulled a large key from her bag. 'I don't think anybody's lived here for a long time,' she said. 'Maybe it's been waiting for us?'

As the key turned in the lock, Bibi whispered, 'Please let it be all right, please!'

And the door swung open.

⁂

The hall was narrow, and it felt... *odd*, Bibi thought. *It's... it's as if the house is excited...* In the first room she found armchairs so worn it was impossible to tell their colour, and a lace of spiders' webs at the window.

'Mum! Come and sit down!' she called.

As her mother sank into a chair, a cloud of dust made Bibi sneeze.

'I'll find the kitchen and make a cup of tea.'

'Thank you, pet,' her mum said. 'What would I do without you?'

As she hurried from the room, Bibi thought *Maybe I'll check upstairs first? It won't take long...*

And so Bibi began to explore. There were two bedrooms with a bathroom in

between; the ivy covering the windows turned the sunlight dim and green. *And now for the tower room…*

The stair to the tower twisted round and round until Bibi felt dizzy. *It seems an awfully long way*, she thought… but still the stairs went on. At last, just as she was beginning to think she would climb for ever, Bibi found herself in front of a door. Turning the handle she walked in – and gasped.

⁘

Sitting in an upright chair was the strangest old woman Bibi had ever seen. She was so grey she was almost invisible, but when she spoke her voice was as sharp as a needle.

'You're here at last! Took your time, didn't you?'

Bibi blinked. 'Who… who are you?'

'Myrtle Hartleberry. Miss Myrtle to you. I'm your fairy godmother.'

'You can't be.' Bibi folded her arms. 'I don't believe in fairies. And I hate fairy stories. All those stupid princesses and pumpkins and ugly beasts that are princes in disguise.'

Miss Myrtle sniffed. ‘How very foolish. Why do you think fairy stories have lasted so long? You can learn a lot from them… if you want to, of course.’

‘Well, I don’t want to,’ Bibi snapped. The old woman’s outline was now so faint Bibi wondered if she was a ghost. *But ghosts don’t talk like that, she told herself. Like… like a cross schoolteacher.*

‘What are you doing here?’ she asked.

‘I’m your fairy godmother. And fairy godmothers grant wishes.’





‘Only babies believe in that kind of thing,’ Bibi said. ‘I’ve tried wishing for things over and over, and nothing ever happens.

‘And what, exactly, were you wishing for?’ Miss Myrtle asked.

Bibi wanted to say, *mind your own business*, but there was something about the fierce old lady that made her pause.

‘I want us to stay in one place. I’m sick of having to move around all the time …’ To her annoyance, Bibi found that she wanted to cry. Swallowing the feeling down, she said, ‘So there.’

‘I see.’ Miss Myrtle nodded. ‘Well, you’d better get busy.’ She pointed to the darkest corner. ‘If you can



open that box, you'll have a wish that comes true. It won't be easy, mind.' Her voice softened. 'But I suspect you're not afraid of hard work?'

Bibi didn't answer. She was looking at the box, surprised she hadn't noticed it before. It was *glowing* and painted a glorious scarlet, with swirls of gold and silver flowers... But Miss Myrtle was right: opening it *wasn't* going to be easy. Wrapped round the box were seven chains, each with a different padlock.

'What's inside?' Bibi asked. Miss Myrtle cackled with laughter.

'That's for you to find out! If you earn seven keys I promise – and a fairy godmother's promise is one to trust – you shall have a wish. What's more, the box will be yours to keep.'

'Huh.' Bibi tried to sound disbelieving. She didn't care about the wish; she knew that was impossible – but the box was the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. 'If I said yes – and I most probably won't – what kind of thing would I have to do?'

'Enter the world of fairy stories,' said Miss Myrtle, folding her hands in her lap.



Bibi made a face. 'All that stuff about going on quests?'

The fairy godmother raised her eyebrows. 'If you succeed in a quest, my dear, you'll earn a key. Earn seven keys... and you'll open the box.'

Bibi stared.

Miss Myrtle took off her spectacles and tucked them into a pocket. 'It's your decision. If you return, you'll find your way to the first story. One last thing... look out for Sylvestro. He'll keep you company...' and with that Miss Myrtle Hartleberry disappeared. All that was left was her chair, and as Bibi looked round, she saw the box had also vanished. In its place was... she rubbed her eyes. Had she seen the skulking shadow of a cat?

'It's all a dream,' she told herself. 'It has to be.' But, as she went downstairs, she couldn't stop thinking, *could it – just possibly – be true?* A magical box... and a wish?

Bibi made her decision. She'd come back.

'And I bet the room's completely empty!' she said out loud... but even as she spoke, the tiniest of hopes was flickering in her mind.

