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Opening extract from

# The Sprite Sisters: The Circle of Power

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# CHAPTER ONE



# ARIEL FINDS HER POWER



FLAME SPRITE kicked off her bright red sheet and stretched out her legs. She pushed back her thick, copper-coloured hair from her face, opened her left eye and kept her right eye closed: she wanted to wake up slowly. In front of her something purple blazed. She opened her right eye and focused: it was her new bra.

Flame, eldest of the Sprite Sisters and thirteen years old yesterday, had just started wearing a bra. There it was, hanging from the back of the chair beside her bed – a bright purple lacy bra with padded cups and fluorescent pink piping.

Funny things, bras, she thought, and screwed up her nose.

She closed her eyes again and enjoyed the softness of her bed. The fresh smell of a summer morning wafted through the open window. She felt the warmth of the air on her face and could hear birds singing outside in the garden.

It was Sunday the tenth of June. Yesterday, she and her sister Ariel had their birthdays and a joint party – a disco in the huge dining room of Sprite Towers. It had been one of the best days of Flame's life. They had all danced for hours – she had danced with Quinn – the coloured lights flashing on the high ceiling and the DJ bouncing about behind his decks.

Sprite Towers had been lit up and alive. People had walked from room to lofty room, smiling and laughing. Outside, the garden had looked magical: Mum and Dad had hung hundreds of silvery-white lights in the trees and bushes. The seventy guests and family had eaten a delicious barbecue, sitting on rugs on the lawn. Then there'd been the disco. They'd had such fun.

Flame held out her long hands and looked at her fingers. They tingled and grew hot. She smiled.

There is a lot of power in these hands, she thought.

Along the corridor, high up on the second floor of Sprite Towers, Ariel, the youngest of the Sprite Sisters, lay against her pillows. She loved her bedroom, with its sugar pink walls and dove grey carpet and the way the sun streamed

through the window in the morning. She was thinking about the party the evening before. She was happy.

Nine! She was nine years old!

Oh – there it was again, this strange tingling in her fingers. She had felt it the day before.

Ariel held up her hands and looked at them: they were soft, pink and dimply on the back, as usual. She turned them over and looked at the tiny lines that ran across her palms. The tingly sensation started again.

Her fingers felt all hot and wiggly.

Ariel looked at her right index finger and pointed it at the line of six small furry teddy bears that sat on the shelf near her bed.

She had the strangest idea – and raised her finger ever so slightly.

The teddy bears lifted in the air and hovered, a few centimetres off the shelf. When she moved her finger down, the teddy bears plopped back on to the shelf.

This is very strange, thought Ariel. Her teddy bears had moved!

She looked at her finger again: it appeared to be the same pink, stubby finger as it was yesterday.

She looked around the room. Everything seemed the same.

She pointed her finger and raised it: again, the teddy bears hovered in the air. When she lowered it, they plopped down on to the shelf.

Ariel raised her finger a third time, and this time wiggled it about: the teddy bears rose up off the shelf and hovered in the air – wiggling.

Then she pointed her hot, tingly finger at a book lying on the floor beside her bed. It began to rise up in the air. She pulled her finger towards her and the book moved towards her, in mid-air. Then she lowered her finger and the book dropped gently on to her bed.

She did it again – lifted the book from the bed, but this time quickly pulled her finger away. The book banged down on the carpet.

Ariel Sprite clapped her hands with delight and decided she must tell her sisters.

'Are you awake?' called Ariel, as she opened the door of Flame's bedroom. She walked over the dark navy-blue carpet past neat shelves of books.

'Hmm . . . just,' yawned Flame. 'What's up?'

'I've got a secret to tell you,' said Ariel, climbing into bed beside her.

Flame smiled and sat up. She knew what her little sister was about to say.

Ariel waved her hands in the air as she demonstrated how she had made her teddy bears and book rise into the air.

The laughter in Flame's room woke Marina and Ash. They

came in to see what was happening and sat down on the bright red bed.

'I've got a magic trick!' said Ariel, in her breathy voice. 'Watch!'

She pointed her finger at Flame's purple bra. It lifted off the chair and hovered in the air. Marina and Ash laughed.

'Put it down!' said Flame, her green eyes flashing. She was very touchy about the bra.

Ariel lowered her finger and the bra dropped back on to the chair.

'Isn't it funny?' she said.

The girls smiled at their pretty little sister with her soft blond hair, huge grey eyes and ski-jump nose.

Ariel looked at her finger. 'It feels all tingly,' she said.

For a few seconds, her older sisters watched her in silence.

Then Flame said, 'Ariel, there is something we need to tell you.'

'What?' asked Ariel.

'You have a magical power,' said Flame. 'We Sprite Sisters all do.'

'What – you mean you can do this too?' asked Ariel.

'Not quite that, but something similar, yes,' nodded Flame.

'Oh,' said Ariel. 'So I'm not the only one?'

'No, sugar plum.' Marina shook her head and smiled her wide smile.

'I thought I'd finally found something you lot couldn't

do.' Ariel pushed out her bottom lip and rested her chin in the cup of her hand.

Marina laughed. 'There are lots of things you can do that we can't do, but magic isn't one of them!'

'Well, what tricks can you do?' challenged Ariel, raising her chin.

Marina opened her mouth to start to answer, but Flame interrupted.

'Each of our powers is based on one of the four elements,' said Flame.

'Why do you always do that?' said Marina, tossing back her dark, curly hair.

'Do what?' asked Flame.

'Butt in when I'm just about to say something!'

'I was going to explain to Ariel about our powers,' said Flame. 'SORRY!'

For a moment there was silence as Flame and Marina, only a year apart in age, glared at one another.

'Oh, stop it!' said Ariel. 'What's an element?'

'The four elements that make up the world are Fire, Water, Earth and Air,' said Flame. 'Our powers are each based on one of those elements. My power harnesses the element of Fire: I can burn and melt things or illuminate them. I can make bolts of lightning and light up a room – but that's because I'm thirteen now and my powers have grown stronger.'

'Wow!' blinked Ariel.

'I work with the element of Water,' said Marina.

'Is that because you have blue eyes?' asked Ariel.

'It might be,' replied Marina. 'But my magic power means I can control anything fluid and can feel if there is anything fluid around. I can do things like create a huge river, or make ice, or dry up all the water in something so there's none left.'

Ariel blinked again and her mouth dropped open.

'And I work with the element of Earth,' said Ash.

'I expect that's why you like growing things in the garden,' said Ariel.

'I'm sure you're right.' Ash smiled her quiet smile. 'My power allows me to do things like make holes in the ground to swallow things up, or make things grow roots like a tree, so they can't move. I can find hidden objects by moving my hands over surfaces and feeling what's underneath.'

Ariel stared at Ash in amazement.

'Close your mouth – you look like a goldfish!' said Marina, pushing up Ariel's chin.

'If we stood on the four points of the compass, I would stand at the East, which represents Fire,' continued Flame. 'Marina would stand at the South, which is the position for Water; Ash at the West represents Earth; and you, Ariel, would stand at the North. Together we form a circle – and we are balanced.'

Ariel looked at her three sisters as if they were aliens.

This stuff about elements and balance was all very strange.

She shut her eyes. When she opened them, she thought, everything would be exactly as it had been. They would go downstairs to breakfast and nobody would say anything about magic or powers ever again.

Ariel opened her eyes again and saw that her sisters were all looking intently at her. 'So – what's my power?' she asked.

'You work with the element of Air,' explained Flame. 'You will be able to create great winds and make things float in the sky.'

*'Fab-fantastic!'*

The Sprite Sisters laughed.

'How long have you all been able to do magic?' asked Ariel.

'Since our ninth birthdays,' replied Ash, who was ten and a half.

'Oh,' said Ariel. 'You never told me.'

'We had to wait until you were nine and you got your own power,' said Ash.

'So that's why I can lift things in the air today. . .' said Ariel.

'Yes, that's right – you were born at two minutes to midnight, which is why you did not have your powers yesterday,' said Flame.

The four sisters were silent for a moment.

'Listen, pumpkin – there's something else,' said Flame.

'What?'

'It is really, really important that you keep this magical power secret; that you do not tell anyone – even Mum and Dad.'

'But I want to tell Mummy,' said Ariel. 'I always tell her things.'

'I know,' said Flame. 'But you mustn't – really.'

'Why not?'

'Because Mum and Dad do not have magic powers and if they know we have, they will be frightened,' explained Flame. 'The only people who understand about magical powers are people who have them; that's just the way it is.'

'I'd still like to tell Mummy.' Ariel pushed out her bottom lip.

'I know it seems strange,' said Ash. 'Maybe one day you will be able to – perhaps when you are bigger – but not now.'

'Well, who else has magical powers?' asked Ariel.

'Grandma,' said Marina. 'Well, she did when she was young.'

'Grandma?' squeaked Ariel. 'I don't believe you!'

Her sisters laughed.

'It was Grandma who told me what the tingling in my fingers was, on my ninth birthday,' said Flame. 'She'd just come back to live with us here after Grandad had died and she put me to bed that evening. She was sitting here on my bed, like we are now. She asked me if my fingers were tingly and I told her they'd been feeling funny all day. I'd

wiggled them about, but the tingling just got stronger.

'Then Grandma told me that I had a magic power, just like she did. I did not know what she meant – I thought she was joking. I said to her, "Don't be silly, Grandma – that's the sort of thing you read about in stories! People don't really have magic powers!"

'But she was serious,' continued Flame. 'She told me that if I pointed my finger and directed the tingly feeling, I would be able to use my magic.

'She told me that it was very important to keep this power a secret. When I asked her why, she said, "If people find out that you have magic power, your power will fade. If you want to keep the power, you must hide it."

'Ariel, she is the only person in the whole world, apart from us three, who you can talk to about your power.'

Ariel had been staring at Flame, and by now her eyes were so wide they looked as if they'd pop out.

'Phew! Thank goodness I can tell someone.' Ariel thought for a moment. 'But if Grandma once had magical powers, why don't Mummy and Daddy?'

'We don't know – it's just one of those things,' Marina shrugged her shoulders. 'Grandma told us that magic powers run through the Sprite family: some of the Sprites have them and some don't. I don't think Dad has them.'

'Did Sidney Sprite have magic powers?' asked Ariel. Sidney Sprite was their great-great-grandfather, and the man who had built Sprite Towers.

'Grandma says he did,' nodded Ash, tucking her hair behind her ear.

'Marina, did you get a tingling in your fingers, too, when you were nine?' asked Ariel.

'Yes,' replied Marina. 'Flame told me what it was. At first, I thought everybody had magic powers, then I learned from Grandma that we were special.'

'What about you, Ash?'

'Same thing,' replied Ash. 'I was lucky as I was able to talk to Grandma, Marina and Flame. I think it must have been hard for Flame, though, being the first.'

The three younger sisters looked at Flame. She was silent for a moment, then nodded.

'Yes, it was,' she agreed. 'I often felt different from other people. Now I know that my sisters are the same as me, which feels good.'

'We're *all* a bit odd!' said Marina and her sisters laughed.

'I think our powers may grow much stronger, now that Ariel has hers,' said Flame. 'I think things could start to happen to us.'

'Like what?' asked Marina.

'I don't know,' said Flame. 'I just get the feeling that things will change now that we all have our powers.'

'You sometimes see things that are going to happen in the future, don't you?' said Marina.

'Hmm,' nodded Flame.

'Wow!' said Ariel. 'This sounds like it's going to be fun!'

'Listen, Ariel,' said Flame. 'There's one more thing to remember. It's very important.'

Ariel looked at the faces of her three older sisters. They all looked so serious, she thought.

'Our magic must only ever be used for good – never to hurt anyone or cause harm,' continued Flame. 'And you must not play with your power; it could be dangerous.'

Ariel looked down at her hands with a frown. 'OK,' she said.

'You'll soon get used to it,' said Flame, giving her little sister a hug.

The Sprite Sisters sat cross-legged on Flame's bed facing each other.

'We're in a circle,' said Flame, sitting as straight as a dancer. She looked down and thought for a few seconds. 'I think we should hold hands.'

'OK,' the others agreed. One by one, the four sisters took each others' hands. As Flame took Marina's hand, the circle was complete.

Flame shut her eyes.

'We call in our power,' she said. 'We call it in – NOW!'

For a moment, nothing happened. Marina, Ash and Ariel looked at one another and grinned. Flame kept her eyes shut.

'It feels all tingly,' giggled Ariel.

Then, suddenly, without any warning – *whoooshh!* A huge bolt of bright blue light surged through their arms and

bodies. It pulsed round and round the circle they had made.

'Crikey!' said Marina.

'Cool!' said Ash.

'It's beautiful!' said Ariel.

'It's the Circle of Power,' smiled Flame, opening her eyes. 'Grandma told me this might happen. She said if we all came together in a circle, our power would grow stronger. Whatever happens, we must hold together as sisters – hold the Circle of Power.'

The four sisters looked at one another and down at the bright blue light surging through their arms and hands. For half a minute, they felt the power in the light as they held the circle. Then they let go – and the light subsided.

For a while the Sprite Sisters sat silent on the bed. Flame and Marina shook their hands, as if to loosen them up. Ash stared at her hands, back and front. Ariel poked one of her fingers.

Then Flame turned and looked deep into her little sister's eyes. Ariel blinked at Flame.

'You're going to say something important to me,' said Ariel. 'You always look serious when you say something important.'

Marina and Ash smiled.

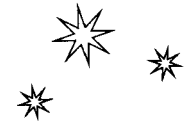
Flame nodded. 'Ariel, do you promise that you will keep this secret and that you will never misuse your power?'

'I promise,' she said, in her breathy voice.

# CHAPTER TWO



# ARIEL'S FIRST MAGIC



SINCE ANYONE could remember, Sprites had lived at Sprite Towers. The Sprite Sisters were born in the house, just like their father and his father and his father before him.

It was the sisters' great-great-grandfather, Sidney Sprite, the famous toffee manufacturer, who had built the magnificent house in 1910. Since then, four generations of Sprite children had slid down the banisters that surrounded the wide mahogany staircase at the heart of the house. Countless games of tag had been played across the rolling lawns and through the trees. Wonderful games of hide-and-seek had been enjoyed from the attics right