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Opening extract from

Philippa Fishers Fairy Godsister

Written by

Liz Kessler

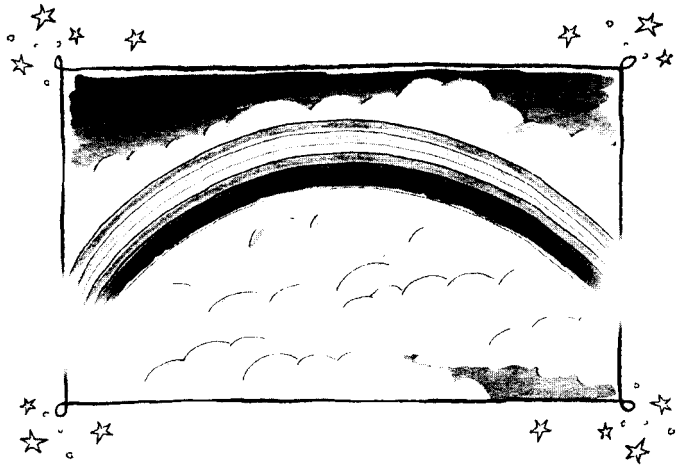
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ATC



'Right, who's next on the list?'

'I thought we could try this one.'

'For 3WD? You're sure? She hasn't worked directly with humans before.'

'We've all got to start somewhere.'

'Granted, but she does have particularly strong feelings about them. You know how she took the incident that happened last year to her friend.'

'That was a high-risk assignment. He was a bumblebee, for clouds' sake!'

'But still . . .'

'It'll be fine. We'll give her a flower life cycle. Nice gentle way for her to make contact. All she'll need to do is position herself perfectly and

she'll be picked with love and care and admiration. No danger of being swatted!'

'You're sure she's ready for this?'

'It's time she started on the extra tasks. She needs to start deepening her compassion. She'll have to if she's ever going to move on.'

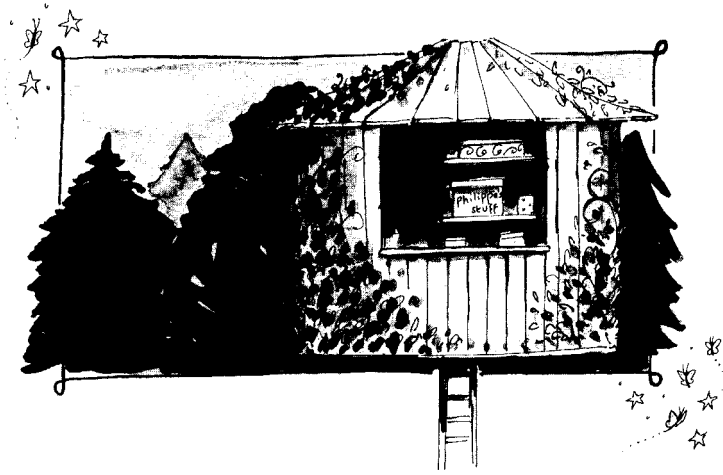
'We'll monitor the assignment closely?'

'Ray will cover it. He's supervised her before.'

'Well . . . OK. It looks like you've got everything covered. Let's do it.'

'Good. I'll tell 8WD we're ready to go.'

One
Treehouse



Sunday morning began with the awful realisation that I'd made the biggest mistake of my life.

It had all started on Saturday. The weekend began like any other. Mum and Dad rushing around packing puppets and balloons and face paints into the van for a party in the afternoon. There's nearly always one going on somewhere on Saturdays. They're party entertainers; the weekends are their busiest time. I used to go along to the parties with them, but then I – well, I just don't any more.

Birthdays, anniversaries, passing your piano exam – anything you want to celebrate and they'll be

there, singing, pulling rabbits out of hats, throwing custard pies at your big brother. Whatever it takes to make you smile.

Everyone thinks it must be great fun to have them as my parents. They think my home life must be like having a non-stop party. Um. Not quite.

It used to be fun, I suppose. When I was young enough not to get bored with making sausage dogs out of balloons every week; when I actually liked being driven around in a bright yellow VW camper with pictures of clowns and jesters and rabbits on the side; when I didn't know that there was any such thing as a problem that couldn't be sorted out with tickle therapy. I used to think my parents were the most incredible human beings on the planet.

Now I just think they're embarrassing.

This Saturday I didn't mind, though. I hardly even noticed them. I was busy putting the final touches to a present I was making for my best friend, Charlotte.

'Philippa, we're going now!' Mum called up the stairs.

'OK,' I shouted back.

'There's tofu rolls and veggie burgers for you and Charlotte.'

I rolled my eyes. Once, just once, it might be nice to have something normal like cheese sandwiches or fish fingers for lunch. 'Great!' I replied, hoping I sounded more sincere than I felt.

I looked up as my bedroom door opened. It was

Dad. He had a bright orange sun painted on one cheek and a black night sky with a crescent moon on the other.

'Which hand's the penny in?' he asked, grinning widely as he held his palms out.

I pointed to the penny in his left hand. 'That one.'

'Are you sure?' Dad winked, then he closed his hands, shook them, got me to blow on them and – hey presto – the penny had disappeared. It was a good trick. It was probably even better if you hadn't already seen it approximately three times a week for eleven and a half years, and if you didn't know how to do it yourself and you hadn't impressed your best friend many times over with the very same trick.

Still, I'd never say anything. It would only upset him, and I did secretly enjoy his magic. I liked it when he showed me how to do a new trick. I'd go away and practise it for days afterwards. Not that I'd ever do it in front of anyone except Charlotte. Just the thought of performing made me tremble. I'd *never* do that again.

'Neat,' I said, smiling.

Closing his hands again, Dad reached forward, tickled my ear and opened his palms. 'Hey, look where I found it! It was in your ear all the time,' he said. 'Now why didn't you tell me?'

I kept smiling. 'They'll love you, Dad,' I said.

He leaned over to kiss the top of my head. 'Be good, sunshine,' he said, before leaving me and

bounding downstairs to join Mum.

I watched the van drive to the end of the road and then I got back to the friendship bracelet I was making for Charlotte.

Charlotte had been my best friend since the first day of school. We were even in infants together so we'd known each other for nearly seven years – and she was moving house this weekend. Her parents had bought a farm hundreds of miles away. They were 'getting back to nature'. All home-grown food and solar panels and no phone or telly. They weren't even going to have a computer, and it was so completely in the middle of nowhere that they probably wouldn't even have mobile phone reception. They might as well have been jumping off the planet.

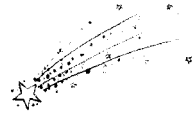
They were really excited about going, though. Even Charlotte. All I knew was that it felt as if someone was about to chop off one of my limbs. That's how close we were. Charlotte said she felt the same way, but I knew she was looking forward to her new life too. She was going to have a pony of her own and her parents said they'd get a dog and chickens. I was pleased for her. Really, I was. Just, how was I ever going to be happy without her around?

The friendship bracelet. She'd be here any minute. I wiped my eyes and got back to her present. It was a really complicated pattern, in turquoise, pink and purple: all her favourite colours.

I'd just threaded the last piece of cotton into place

when the doorbell rang. *That's the last time she'll walk round the corner to my house*, a heavy voice said in my mind.

I looked in my mirror, wiped my eyes again and practised smiling. *Don't think about it. Don't let her see how sad you are; don't make it hard for her,* I said to my reflection.



'I want to say goodbye to the treehouse,' Charlotte said as we ambled down to the bottom of the garden. The treehouse was 'our' place. We'd shared so many secrets and games there. The treehouse knew everything about our lives.

Dad had built it when I was a baby. He said it was a labour of love, because of something that had happened a long time ago. Years before I was born, he'd gone travelling. At one point, he'd run out of money and had nowhere to sleep. He met an old man begging on a street corner. Dad felt bad that he couldn't give the man any money, so instead he emptied out his bag and told him he could have anything he needed. The beggar took an apple from Dad and they got into conversation.

When Dad told him he had nowhere to sleep, the man mentioned this place on a nearby beach where there were huts built on stilts. Dad set off for the huts, and that's where he met Mum. She was working there for the summer. He ended up staying

there for three months and got a job there, too. Then they spent the next six months travelling together. They were married almost as soon as they got back.

He'd modelled our treehouse on those huts.

We've got some trees at the bottom of the garden. There's a clearing in the middle of the trees, and the treehouse is right in the middle of the clearing. It's huge and round and built on top of three tall wooden legs, with a wooden roof that looks like a giant umbrella. It's got three great big windows in the sides and a ladder that takes you into the hut through a trapdoor in the floor. If we ever moved, I'd miss the treehouse more than the house.

You could easily fit five or six people in there. Usually it's just me and Charlotte, though. Mum and Dad don't bother with it nowadays. Which I'm glad about because it's got so much of my stuff in there, I don't think I'd want them prowling around! It's full of private things, like my diaries, and notebooks filled with ideas for stories and lines of plays that Charlotte and I have started writing together, and letters and notes we've left there for each other.

It's also littered with cards and newspapers and hankies and other things from the magic tricks I practise on Charlotte. I probably do them really badly and look stupid, but it's still my favourite thing. When I'm doing a trick, it's like nothing else exists. Charlotte's always so kind about them. Her

favourite is the one where I make a pound coin disappear and then get her to peel open an orange and the pound is inside the orange. It's so easy, but she's never yet guessed how I do it. She tells me everything I do is brilliant. But that's a best friend's job, isn't it?

I won't have anyone to tell me I'm brilliant any more.

'You coming up?' Charlotte called from the top of the ladder.

'I'll wait for you here. I thought it'd be nice for you to do it on your own,' I said. The truth was it would probably make me cry if I had to listen to her say goodbye to our special place. Charlotte looked at me for a second, then she just nodded and climbed up into the treehouse.

I sat down in the clearing to wait for her. The sun had been trying to come out from behind the clouds all morning. Now it was trapped behind the biggest lumpy white cloud in the sky. As I watched, the cloud narrowed and lengthened, stretching into a new shape. The sun started boring holes through it, dusty bright rays poking out through the gaps in a giant fan. When that happens, I always think it looks like cosmic staircases coming down from heaven or from another planet, and that if we could only find a way to climb them, we'd be able to discover a whole new world that existed right beside ours.

I once told Charlotte what I thought and she

laughed and explained in great detail why it was scientifically impossible. She says I don't need other worlds anyway because I live in a dream world of my own half the time.

I must get it from Mum. She believes all sorts of crazy things like that. She reckons sunrays are fairies coming down to visit the world and look after all the humans. She used to sing a song to me which she said would make fairies appear. We'd sing it together sometimes.

Fairy come, fairy go,
Fairy, oh I need you so,
If I count from nought to nine,
At midnight, fairy please be mine.

We sang it every day for about a year and never saw a single fairy, so I eventually twigged that it was just a silly song she'd made up – even if she did try to convince me she'd got it directly from the fairies themselves!

I leaned back on my hands, singing the song to myself and letting the sun warm my face as it gradually broke free from the cloud, edging out so brightly I had to turn my face away.

As I looked down, I noticed a clump of daisies beside me. I picked a couple of them, slicing the stem of one and pushing the other through it.

Charlotte's shadow fell over me. 'What are you doing?' she asked, sitting down next to me.

'Making a daisychain.'

'Excellent, I'll join you. Not made one of those for ages,' she said, picking a couple of daisies of her own.

We worked in silence for a while, each lost in our own thoughts. Were hers the same as mine? Was she as sad as I was, or was she too busy being excited about going to live on a farm and having a pony of her own?

The thoughts made my eyelids sting. I turned away from Charlotte and concentrated on looking at my daisychain. I counted up the daisies. Eight. Almost enough. One more should finish it off. I was going to make it into a necklace and give it to Charlotte with the friendship bracelet.



The last daisy's always the hardest one to find. It's got to be long enough to fit the head of a daisy through the stem, and strong enough to stay in one piece and hold the whole necklace together.

The trouble was, the daisies were all looking a bit blurry through my tear-filled eyes so it was hard to know which one to pick. I quickly brushed the back of my hand across my eyes and continued the search for the perfect daisy.

As I stared, a breeze blew across the clearing, making the daisies dance and sway. One of them stood out instantly. It was taller than the others and it seemed to bend right over, towards me, almost as though it was asking to be picked. I reached out for it. As I did, a tear plopped out of my eye, landing on the daisy.

'Oops, sorry,' I said absentmindedly. The daisy nodded back at me, as though accepting my apology.

It had understood me! The daisy had heard me; it had answered me!

I turned to Charlotte, about to tell her, but then I remembered how she responded to the sunbeam staircase theory, and a hundred other ideas I've had over the years that she's pointed out are physical impossibilities. She'd only say the same about my daisy. And on this occasion I supposed she'd be right. Even I had to admit that flowers don't speak!

Turning back to the daisy, I reached carefully down to the bottom of the stalk and pulled it out of

the ground. As I did, the strangest feeling came over me. A kind of sparkling inside. That's the only way I can describe it. There was a buzzing sensation, starting in my fingertips, then spreading up my arms and into my body, filling me with an itchy tingle. I squirmed and wriggled as I took a closer look at the daisy.

Looking down at it in my palm, a thought filled my head. No, it was more than a thought. It was a kind of knowledge, almost a certainty. The daisy was a . . . no – it couldn't be. I was being ridiculous! It was probably just because I'd been thinking about Mum's silly song. I could still hear it over and over again, in my head.

If I count from nought to nine . . .

And I had done. The daisy had been the ninth one!

That was when I knew it was true – even if it sounded crazy, I absolutely knew it. *At midnight, fairy please be mine.*

The daisy was going to turn into a fairy at midnight.



I need to get one thing straight before I go any further, in case you're like Charlotte and too concerned with what's sensible and logical.

I don't actually believe in fairies.

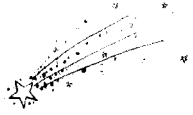
Or I didn't. I mean, I – look, I'm eleven and a half

years old, not a little kid. I'm about to go into the last half-term of Year 6. It's secondary school in a few months! I *can't* believe in fairies!

If someone had asked me last week if I did, I'd have said definitely not. I think.

I certainly wouldn't have thought there might be one living at the bottom of the garden!

But something deep inside me told me that there was. And you'll just have to trust me on this for now, OK?



I peeked at Charlotte, to see if she could read my thoughts. Her tongue was poking out at the edge of her mouth as she concentrated on her daisychain.

'Just got to get something from the treehouse,' I said. Charlotte nodded without looking up.

Closing my palm gently around my daisy, I crept up the ladder and searched around for something suitable to put it in. Rummaging through the old magazines and puzzle books, I found it. A small, oblong, copper-coloured tin with a picture of an oak tree on its lid. Mum had bought it for me in a gift shop when we were on holiday last year.

I'd been waiting for something special to put in the tin. And now I'd found it.

I grabbed a bit of dry grass that was lying around on the treehouse floor and pressed it into the tin. I know it sounds stupid but I wanted to make sure

the fairy would be comfortable. Then I put the daisy into the tin and placed it carefully on the window ledge. There isn't actually any glass in the windows; they're just big gaps in the sides with chunky wooden ledges. 'See you later,' I whispered to the tin, feeling a bit silly. Then I ran back down the steps to join Charlotte.

'Done it!' she said, brushing her legs as she stood up. I quickly found another daisy and completed my chain.

'It's for you,' Charlotte said, holding her daisy-chain out towards me.

'Snap!' I said, smiling as I held mine out to her, too.

Charlotte smiled back. 'Let's make sure we keep them for ever,' she said.

'For ever and ever!'

I slipped my new necklace over my head, trying to tell myself that the daisies wouldn't wither and die, and that our friendship wouldn't either.

'Come on, I've got you another present,' I said. 'It's in the house.'

Charlotte followed me up the garden and we chatted about lunch, presents, the weather, flowers, parties – everything we could think of, except the thing that was bigger than all the others put together: the fact that she was leaving tomorrow.



I went to bed early. Mum and Dad always let me stay up late on Saturdays, but I didn't want to. I didn't want to watch them larking about all giddy and excited, like they usually are when they've done a party. I think it's all the sweets they eat. They play music really loud and dance around in the kitchen. Mum sometimes plays her fiddle and Dad does a silly jig.

I used to dance with them. Occasionally I still do, when they won't take no for an answer, but to be honest, I never feel all that comfortable jigging about in the kitchen. Sometimes I try to get out of it by saying I need to do my homework. That makes Mum hoot with laughter. Homework is *way* down her list of priorities, compared with such important things as dancing and laughing.

They didn't push me tonight, though. Maybe they could see I was too miserable. Charlotte was leaving in the morning. She wanted me to go round and wave them off, but I couldn't face the thought of watching her drive out of my life.

I checked the radio clock on my bedside table. Ten to nine. This time tomorrow they'd be in their new home.

Then I remembered something else. The daisy! I almost laughed out loud as I remembered thinking it was going to turn into a fairy. That's what having a mum like mine does for you. Gives you strange ideas! Fairies – as if!

But there was still a bit of me that wondered if

perhaps it could be possible. I mean, what if it *was* true? What if it really *was* going to turn into a fairy?

If it did, it was going to happen in three hours! A shiver ran through me. The more I thought about it, the more I convinced myself it *was* possible. It was real. I was going to have a fairy of my own.

My head filled with questions. What would she be like? Would she be happy to live in the tin I'd made for her? What if she grew out of it?

I'd have to get another one. I'd look after her. She'd have a wand that sparkled and a bright white dress and a tiara in her hair – she'd look like all the fairies you read about in stories. Stories I used to read *ages* ago, that is. I don't read those kinds of stories any more – of course!

I laughed to myself. No, I couldn't do it. I couldn't persuade myself I was going to have a real live fairy in my back garden!

I picked up a new magic book that Dad had bought me last week, *The Magician's Handbook*. I opened it on a new trick: 'How to Make Paperclips Link Themselves.'

But after staring at the words for ten minutes, I realised I hadn't turned the page. In fact I hadn't even read a line. I couldn't get the daisy out of my mind.

What if . . . ? What if . . . ?

I couldn't stop wondering. Maybe I just wanted to believe it, to take my mind off everything else. I don't know. All I knew was that the thought

wouldn't go away – and the certainty was getting stronger and stronger.

I was getting jittery. Should I go down to the treehouse and look at the tin, see if anything had happened yet? Would I disturb the fairy if I did? How did it work anyway, the process of a daisy turning into a fairy?

I tried to go back to my book but still couldn't concentrate on it. That was a first. Reading about a new trick usually got my thoughts away from everything, whether it was thinking about Mum and Dad embarrassing me in a million ways in front of my friends, or girls like Trisha Miles at school picking on me and making me look stupid in front of the class. Or even the thought of Charlotte going away. My tricks could usually take my mind off anything. Not this, though. Maybe fairy magic was too powerful.

I got out of bed and wandered round my bedroom, feeling clumsy and heavy. What could I do? How was I going to pass the next three hours? Should I go to the treehouse? Should I just check?

I thought about the tin on the ledge, the darkness starting to grow around it. What if she was lonely or scared? My fairy, all alone, waiting in her little tin box on the window ledge. What if she came early? What if she'd gone by the time I went to see her? What if she woke up – or came round, or whatever it is they do – before she was meant to? She might not be fully formed.

A shiver snatched the back of my neck, twisting hairs into spikes and tiptoeing down my spine.

Don't think about it.

I looked at the clock again. It was nearly ten. Only two hours. I got back into bed, grabbed *The Magician's Handbook* and tried to read, wondering if the next two hours would ever pass.

A minute later, I drifted into a restless sleep.

I was being chased by a monster. It had short, thick legs like tree stumps and branches sticking out of its head. It was coming after me with a bunch of daisies, shouting angrily as it ran: 'You should have left them alone, you stupid child. Now look what you've done!'

I hid behind an oak tree. Could I climb it? It was surrounded by a beautiful daisychain, but when I reached out, the chain turned to barbed wire. I was trapped: the monster was closing in on me—

'N-o-o-o!'

I jerked up in bed, sweating and shaking, and even more convinced about the daisy. The dream – it had felt so real.

I blinked and squinted in the semi-darkness. The light from the moon was shining through the curtains where I hadn't drawn them together properly. It threw a menacing line of light on to the wall and carpet. I switched on the bedside lamp and sent the moon away.

Twenty to twelve.

My mind was suddenly racing with questions,

like a roundabout that wouldn't stop. What if she was a bad fairy? What if she didn't want to be in my treehouse?

Maybe it was cruel to keep her in a tin.

Maybe she'd want to repay the cruelty.

Somehow, things didn't look the same as they had done in the afternoon sun, and I couldn't comfort myself with doubts. It was going to happen – I knew it.

I got out of bed and pulled on my dressing gown. I drew it round me but I still couldn't stop shaking. Ten to twelve. *Think.* What should I do?

Eight minutes to twelve. Seven, six.

I couldn't do it, I couldn't let it happen.

I didn't want fairy magic. Why had I started this? Why did I have to make that stupid daisychain? The shaking turned into a full body rattle as I realised I had to get rid of the daisy.

I darted out of my room and ran downstairs, making sure to avoid all the creaky floorboards near Mum and Dad's room. Gently turning the key in the back door, I ran as fast as I could down the length of the garden, my feet damp from dewy wet grass.

Breathless, I clambered up the ladder, into the treehouse and across to the ledge.

'I'm sorry,' I whispered, picking up the tin. 'I'm really sorry.'

I carried it to the opposite window, the one that looked down on to bushes and shrubs. Then I