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opening extract from

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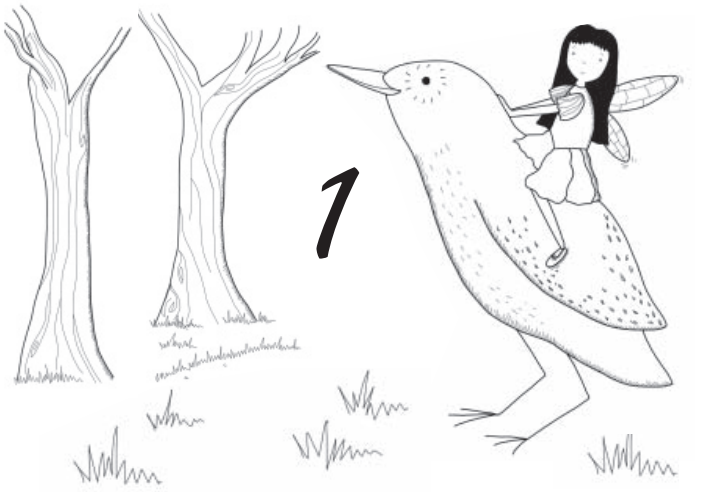
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For Yi Lan Taylor and Megan Shaw
with lots of love



1

Maddie felt as if she was in a special magical land as she weaved her way in and out of the trees, just out of sight of the main path that ran through the woods behind her grandparents' house. She could hear Grandpa talking to his dog Milo as he walked along the path, but otherwise the woods were silent.

It was a sunny day and rays of light were penetrating the leafy roof above her. Maddie was pretending to be a flower fairy who lived deep in the forest and she was



searching for some suitable flowers to wear as a garland in her hair. Maddie had long light brown hair which was curly at the ends, and which she usually tied back in a pony-tail to keep off her face. Today it kept getting caught in the twigs as she walked under the trees.

After she had made a yellow crown out of some long-stemmed buttercups, she joined her grandfather on the path. Grandpa had just thrown a stick for Milo to fetch and Milo, who was a very excitable Jack Russell terrier, was barking loudly as he ran off into the woods after it.

"I really like going for walks with you, Grandpa," Maddie told him, slipping her hand into his. "When Mum's with me she won't let me do *anything*." Maddie's mum had come with them yesterday on their afternoon walk, and she had fussed





over Maddie the whole time. She had been too worried to let Maddie run off into the woods after Milo and she had nearly had a fit when Maddie started to climb a tree.

"Your mum's just worried in case you get ill again," Grandpa said. "I'm sure she doesn't mean to spoil your fun."

"Well she *does* spoil it," Maddie said crossly. "She spoils everything. She treats me like a baby and it's not fair!"

"She's just feeling very protective of you, because of what happened," Grandpa said. "She'll get over it. You just need to give her some time. Now . . . I wonder what's happened to Milo."

Milo hadn't returned with the stick and he wasn't barking anymore either. They waited for several minutes but he still didn't return, even when Grandpa called him.





"Do you think he's all right?" Maddie asked.

Grandpa didn't look too concerned. "He might have found a rabbit hole or something. Why don't you go and have a look for him? Don't go too far though. Give me a shout when you find him."



So Maddie set off into the woods and soon spotted Milo crouching on the ground next to a large tree stump. His bottom was sticking up in the air and his black-and-white stumpy tail was wagging furiously. Maddie was about to shout out to tell Grandpa she had found him,





when she saw that Milo had spotted something in the grass. Whatever it was, Milo seemed fascinated by it. At first Maddie couldn't see what he was looking at, but then the object moved suddenly and Maddie saw a flash of yellow whizzing across the ground and darting away through the trees. Before Maddie had time to shout out, she heard a noise behind her and her grandfather appeared.

Milo started to roll about on the ground, yapping with excitement again, as Maddie told Grandpa what she had seen.

"It must have been a butterfly," Grandpa said.

"I don't think it was," Maddie said, frowning.

"Or maybe it was a fairy," Grandpa teased. "Some folks say that they live in these woods."



"*Really*?" Maddie had always believed in fairies but she had never actually seen one.

"They say that if you believe in fairies and you come for a walk here often enough, you're bound to see one sooner or later," Grandpa said, smiling at her.

Maddie looked at Milo, who was now sitting up, wagging his tail. "I wonder if *Milo* believes in fairies," she said.

Grandpa laughed.

"I mean it, Grandpa," she said solemnly. "Aunt Rachel told me that you can only see fairies if you believe in them, so if Milo believes in fairies it means he'll be able to see them, which means it really *could* have been a fairy he was looking at just now." Aunt Rachel was her mother's sister and she was the only one in the family, apart from Maddie, who believed that fairies were real.



Grandpa was still smiling, but Maddie was looking very thoughtful now.

"Milo, *do* you believe in fairies?" she asked, crouching down in front of the little dog and looking straight into his eyes.

Milo cocked his head and pricked up his ears and his tail started wagging furiously. And as she stared at his eyes, she thought she saw, reflected in them, a tiny fairy in a yellow petal dress.

She instantly looked around her, but there was no sign of a fairy or anything else. Maybe she was imagining things.

"We'd better be going now," Grandpa said, starting to lead the way back to the path.

As they got there, they heard heavy footsteps approaching, and suddenly an elderly man (who looked about the same age as Grandpa) appeared. He was dressed



in an old-fashioned brown tweed suit and he was carrying a large canvas bag over his shoulder.

"Hello, Horace," Grandpa said, not sounding particularly surprised to see him. "Maddie, this is Mr Hatter. He lives along the road from us. His garden backs on to the woods too."

Horace Hatter frowned as if he didn't really have time to stop and chat.

Grandpa didn't take the hint though. "Horace and I were at school together," he told Maddie. "We were both in the stamp collecting club – not that my collection was anything like as impressive as Horace's." He chuckled. "Horace was always mad about collecting things. If it wasn't stamps or coins, it was birds' eggs or butterflies. Isn't that right, Horace?"



"Once a collector, always a collector," Horace grunted.

"Did you let the butterflies go after you caught them?" Maddie asked, not liking the thought of butterflies being captured.

Horace looked at her as if he thought she was very stupid. "Of course I didn't let them go. I have twenty glass cases full of them – all correctly labelled. I can't abide collectors who don't label things," he added, glancing at Grandpa, who he still remembered had kept *his* stamp collection in an old envelope when they were boys. "If you don't mind, I'd better be getting on," he said curtly, brushing past them to continue along the path.

"He's not very friendly, is he?" Maddie whispered, as soon as he was out of sight.

Grandpa laughed. "He was always a bit eccentric was old Horace. Don't worry. He

hasn't collected butterflies in a long time. Now . . .. You and I had better start heading back. We've already stayed out longer than I meant to. We don't want your mum to start worrying about you, do we?"

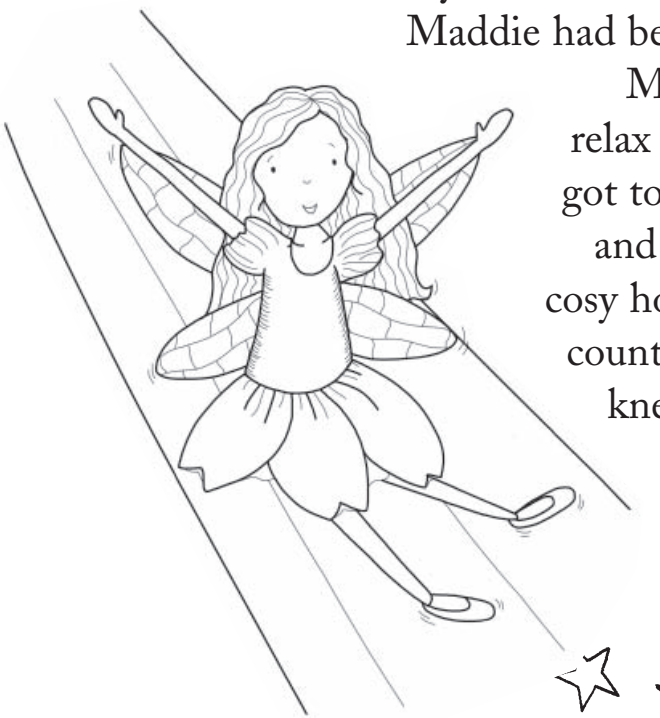
"Mum's *always* worrying about me so what difference does it make?" Maddie said impatiently.

"Come on, Maddie. You're very precious to her – you know that."

Maddie pulled a face and was about to reply when she spotted a streak of yellow whizzing past the dark green leaves of a nearby tree. She was lifting her hand to point it out to Grandpa when a ray of sunlight broke through the trees and shone straight into her eyes. When she escaped from its glare she couldn't see anything up in the treetops except greenery.

Slowly she followed her grandfather back along the narrow path towards home, still thinking about fairies. And though she didn't know it, a flower fairy in a yellow petal dress was now using the ray of sunlight as a slide, shrieking with delight as she slid down it and landed with a bump on the springy mossy floor.

Maddie's mother was waiting anxiously for them when they arrived back.



Maddie had been hoping Mum would relax when they got to Grandma and Grandpa's cosy house in the country and she knew her dad had been hoping



the same thing. (It was Dad who had suggested they came to stay here for the summer, and he was coming to join them in a few weeks time when he was on holiday from work.) But so far – and they had been here for nearly a week - Mum was being as overprotective as ever.

Maddie had had to plead with her to be allowed to go out with Grandpa and Milo that afternoon. "What if you get an asthma attack again?" Mum had said, looking worried. "How will Grandpa get help if the two of you are alone in the middle of the woods?"

"I'll have my inhaler with me," Maddie had protested. "I'll be fine."

And she'd been right, hadn't she? She *was* fine. But just because they had arrived home a bit later than expected, Mum had got herself all worked up as usual.





Mum had always worried a lot about Maddie, but the reason she had been especially anxious recently was that that spring Maddie, who had suffered from asthma since she was tiny, had caught a nasty chest infection. It had triggered off a flare-up of her asthma and one evening, when Maddie and her mum were alone in the house, Maddie had become so wheezy that her inhaler hadn't helped. Her mum had called '999' and she'd been taken to hospital immediately, but by the time they got there she'd been so ill that she'd had to be admitted to intensive care.

Maddie was completely better now – apart from having to use her inhaler in the same way she had always used it – but her mum still hadn't recovered from the shock. Now if Maddie got even the slightest bit wheezy, Mum immediately panicked and

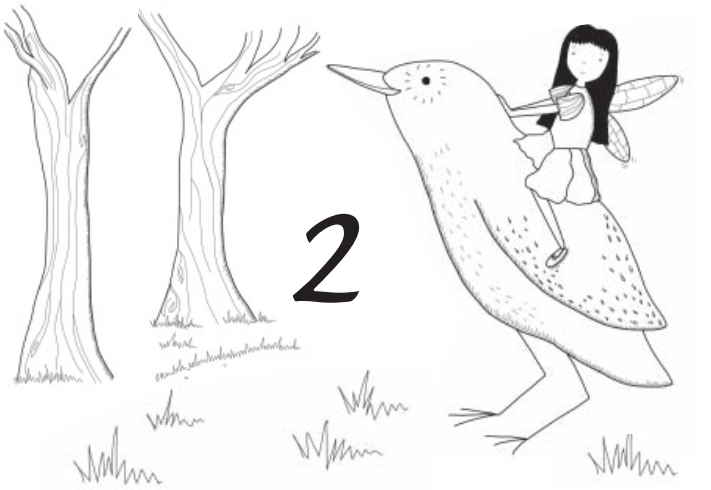


she always got very twitchy if Maddie was out of her sight for too long.

"We aren't that late," Grandpa told Mum. "And I'm sure the fresh air and exercise will have done Maddie good. Anyway, didn't the doctors say that you should carry on as normal now that she's well again?"

"It's easy for *you* to stay calm," Mum retorted sharply. "*You* weren't there when-" She broke off abruptly and her eyes filled up with tears as they always did when she remembered the night when Maddie had been rushed to hospital in a blue light ambulance.

But for once Maddie's eyes were filling up with tears too. "I'm *better* now, Mum," she snapped. "And I hate you treating me like I'm different to everybody else!" And she stomped out of the room.



2

After that Maddie's mum didn't say anymore about Grandpa and Maddie being late home, and that evening as they sat round the table to eat together Grandpa told the others about the yellow fluttery thing that Maddie had seen in the woods. "I told her it was probably a fairy," he said, winking at Grandma.

Mum smiled at that. "Do you remember when Rachel took me off into the woods in the middle of the night because she said the fairies had invited us to a party?"