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Opening extract from

Charmseekers: The Queen's Bracelet

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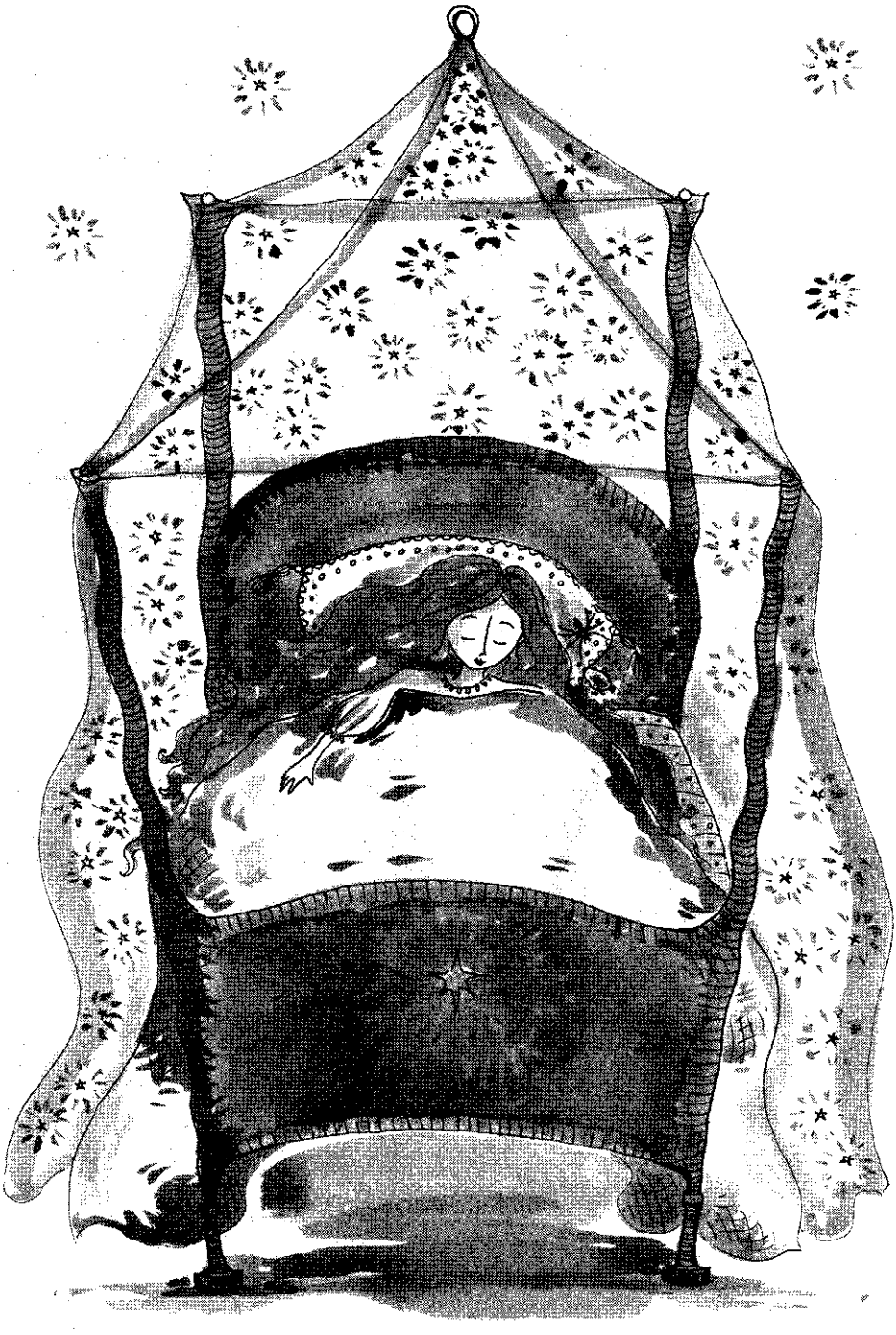
The Thirteen Charms of Karisma

When Charm became queen of Karisma, the wise and beautiful Silversmith made her a precious gift. It was a bracelet. On it were fastened thirteen silver amulets, which the Silversmith called 'charms', in honour of the new queen.

It was part of Karisma law. Whenever there was a new ruler, the Silversmith made a special gift, to help them care for the world they had inherited. And this time it was a bracelet. She told Queen Charm it was magical because the charms held the power to control the forces of nature and keep everything in balance. She must take the greatest care of them. As long as she, and she alone, had possession of the charms, all would be well.



One

The two moons of Karisma shone brightly over the palace. Inside, Queen Charm slept peacefully, unaware of the enormous spider crawling over her bed.

The young queen had placed her charm bracelet under the pillow for safe-keeping. She had been warned to take care of it. And she did. So long as she had the bracelet, all would be well. The Silversmith had made that very clear. But should it fall into the wrong hands . . .

The spider moved swiftly. Silently it scuttled under the snow-white pillow, gripped its prize and eased the bracelet out. Thirteen silver charms glinted in the moonlight.

"Got it!" said the spider, Morbrecia. "Mine at last!"

The Silversmith wakes with a start.

"Something is wrong!" she tells herself.

She senses evil in the air. If the worst has happened . . . if, as she fears, the charm bracelet has fallen into the wrong hands . . . there will be consequences. Karisma will change. The laws of nature, so carefully held in balance by the magical bracelet, will fall apart.

"Hushish!* This is a bad business!"

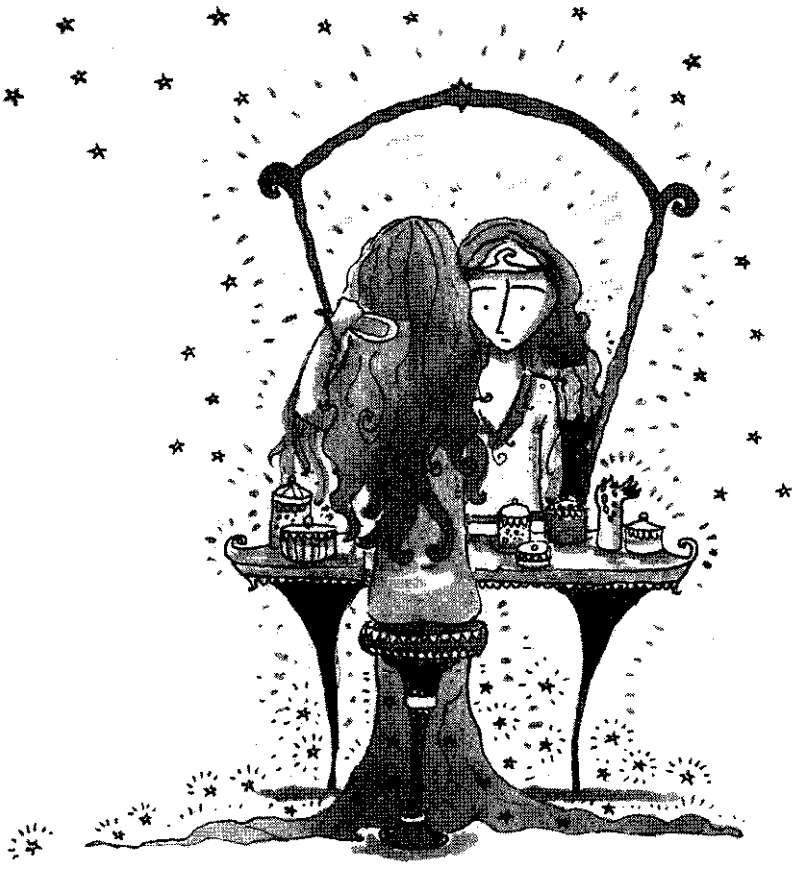
Her sense of foreboding persists. It grips like a vice, tighter and tighter, until she is convinced the bracelet has been stolen. Who by? She has her suspicions. And, if she's right, it won't be easy getting it back!

She throws off the coverlet. Her gossamer robe shimmers like a shower of stars, as she crosses the room, to sit at her dressing table. A look of anxiety clouds her face. She brushes her hair vigorously, as if to rid herself of these terrible thoughts. She will go to the palace first thing in the morning to see Charm.

But first she must find someone to help look for what is lost. A seeker who will search far and wide. One who will care enough to carry out this quest and not give up, no matter what dangers lie ahead.

She rises and goes to the window, flings it wide

* **Hushish** – a word used to express dismay



to breathe the chill night air. She gazes in wonder at the two moons casting their silvery-blue light – there's such a strange aura about them tonight! – and, away across the heavens, to the brightly shining Outworld* . . .

* *

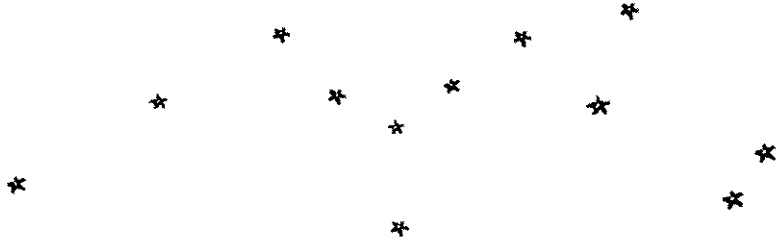
* **Outworld** – the name Karismans call our world

"Quisto!*" she exclaims. "The box! How could I forget!"

How indeed! She recalls transporting herself to the Outworld to place a special box there. Few possess the magic power to 'transworld', as it is known, and even she had done so only once – to accomplish a secret mission. With her gift of foresight, she had predicted the box would serve a purpose in the Outworld, at some time in the future. Now it seems that the time has come.

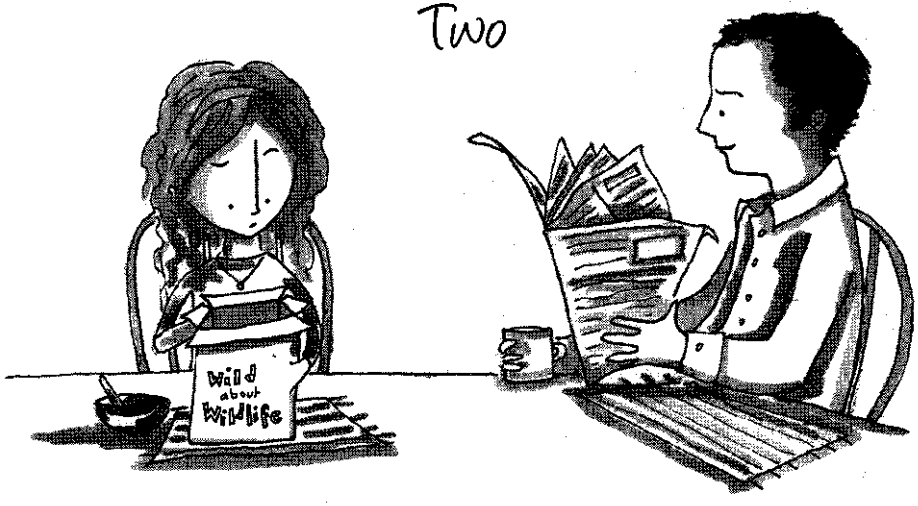
The Silversmith closes her eyes, snaps her fingers, *click*! She's in a trance, 'seeing' far, far beyond the boundaries of Karisma. Who has the box? Who? Ah, yes! She breathes a sigh of relief. It's someone very special . . .

She has found her seeker!



* Quisto – an exclamation of surprise

Two



Sesame Brown was munching a mouthful of muesli when she exploded.

"Dad! Did you know orangutans in Borneo are starving?"

A pumpkin seed flew across the breakfast table. It landed near her dad, Nic Brown, who was sitting opposite.

"Uh-huh," mumbled Nic, brushing the stray seed aside. He flicked through the pages of his newspaper. "It's here somewhere . . ."

Sesame looked up from reading *Wild About Wildlife* on the back of the cereal packet. She rolled her eyes.

"Dad, are you listening? This is serious!"

Nic put down his paper. Sesame was so like her mum, Poppy. She had Poppy's big brown eyes and Nic loved the way they flew wide open when she was cross. Like now.

Sesame went on reading.

"The rainforest which is their natural habitat is being cut down by unscru . . . un-*scrooo*-pu . . . "

"Unscrupulous?" offered Nic.

"Yes," said Sesame. "*Unscrupulous* timber operators, to clear the way for palm oil crops. The orangutans have no food and nowhere to live."

"How awful," said Nic, sneaking another look at his paper.

"AND," said Sesame, banging her spoon on the table to emphasise the point, "if something isn't done about it soon, wild orangutans will become EXTINCT!"

"Terrible!" agreed Nic.

The sudden *BANG* made him jump. He decided to give Sesame his full attention.

Again Nic was reminded of Poppy. She would have been as concerned about the orangutans as their daughter was now. And, when Sesame took an interest in something, she made it her business to find out all about it!

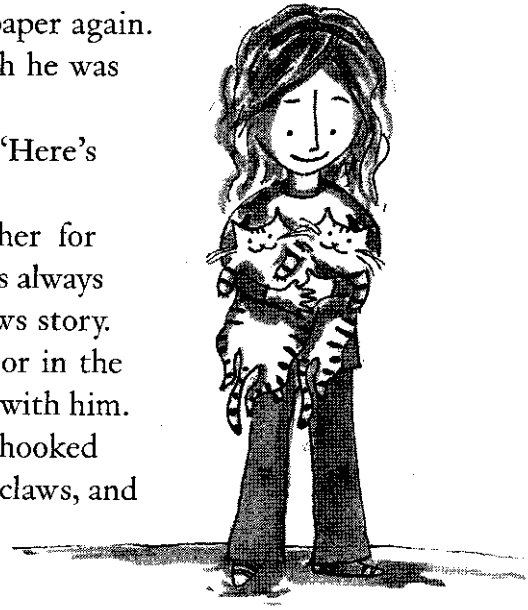
Poppy Brown had died in a car accident when Sesame was a baby. She had been a journalist, writing about the environment, climate change and things

like that. And, like Sesame, she was crazy about animals – wild ones, tame ones, anything with whiskers, paws or claws. Not to mention ponies! Sesame was pony-mad too.

Just then Sesame's two little kittens, Chips and Pins, scampered across the floor.

"Oooo! Come here," she said, scooping them up and giving them a cuddle. The plight of the orangutan, it seemed, had been temporarily forgotten.

While Sesame stroked the kittens, Nic picked up his newspaper again. He found the photograph he was looking for.



"Look, Ses," he said. "Here's one of mine."

Nic was a photographer for THE DAILY TIMES. He was always rushing off to cover a news story. Sometimes, at weekends or in the holidays, he took Sesame with him.

Carefully, Sesame unhooked herself from the kittens' claws, and put them down to play. Then she looked at the picture. Three glamorous models wearing swirly skirts, tops and jackets were posing outside a new shop. **TIP TOPS** had just opened on the High Street.

"Oh Dad! Why didn't you take ME?" she wailed.