

ISABELLE DIBB



THE
LEGEND
OF
BLUEBELL
FOREST

BOOK ONE



CONTENTS

Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	14
Chapter 3	25
Chapter 4	40
Chapter 5	51
Chapter 6	65
Chapter 7	81
Chapter 8	99
Chapter 9	114
Chapter 10	122
Chapter 11	135
Chapter 12	145
Chapter 13	164
Chapter 14	177
Chapter 15	185





CHAPTER 1



Glad to be out of the bustling village, Evelyn hurried home on the well-worn path through the woods. The water of the shaded river sparkled through the trees, and she could already hear her family's mill, though it was still a couple of minutes downstream. *Splish, splish.* Evelyn loved the soothing, fluttering sound the waterwheel's wooden slats made as they dipped into and then lifted out of the river.

A rabbit rustled in the thick carpet of bluebells that the forest was named for, and a squirrel with a big, fluffy tail ran down a mossy tree trunk.

From her pocket Evelyn pulled some crumbs left over from her daily delivery of bread rolls to the inn. Each day, she carefully collected the crumbs from the bottom of the basket. She loved watching the woodland animals cautiously creep from their cover in the trees and bluebells, then relax as they munched the tasty morsels. She scattered the crumbs on the path and watched to see whether an animal would come to get them.

While she waited, Evelyn sat down on a rock to catch her breath. Tired from carrying the heavy basket now filled with vegetables purchased at the market, she was glad to pause and appreciate the soft language of the woods. Even with countless birds singing and all the creatures going about their business, Bluebell Forest was still much quieter than the village, with its hurry and commotion.

Suddenly, a shrill animal cry rang through the forest. Evelyn quickly glanced around,



trying to gauge where the sound was coming from. The cry came again, closer this time. Alarmed, she looked up to see a bird spiraling downward—coming right toward her!

On one of its outstretched wings, several feathers were sticking out in odd directions. The bird was clearly in distress. With a final sad call, it plummeted into a tree and lay limply on one of the twisting boughs.

Ignoring the rough bark scratching her hands, Evelyn deftly pulled herself into the tree's branches.

With nimble movements, she soon reached the bird, but was careful to keep her distance, not wanting to frighten the injured creature that lay in a helpless heap.

“It’s a pigeon,” she whispered, studying its soft gray body and the shiny green patch of feathers on its neck. “Don’t be afraid,” Evelyn cooed.

Curious, the pigeon stretched its neck out

toward Evelyn. “What’s your name?” the girl asked, reaching out and cautiously stroking the bird. She thought for a minute, then decided, “I think I’ll call you Pam.”

From a nearby tree came a sound she had never before heard in the forest: tinkling bells. Surprised, Evelyn looked up and drew in a sharp breath.

A golden-colored falcon was perched on the limb of a nearby tree, its keen eyes fixed on her and the pigeon. Its sharp beak was hooked like one of the gleaming sickles the farmers used to harvest grain. Evelyn got the feeling that this fierce-looking falcon had been the cause of poor Pam’s pain.

The falcon took a step forward, revealing a cluster of bells secured to its foot with a bit of leather.

Quickly, Evelyn picked up the soft, trembling pigeon and cupped it protectively in her

hands. It was lighter than she expected for its size. Evelyn was more surprised, though, to feel something stiff and smooth on one of its legs—a tiny scroll of paper.

Her mind burning with curiosity, Evelyn swiftly snapped the thin thread that attached the paper to the bird's leg. The paper was so tightly rolled that it was only the size of Evelyn's little finger. *This must be a carrier pigeon!* she thought in excitement. *I've read stories of pigeons flying long distances to deliver notes, but we've never had any birds that could do that in this area. What could the message be?*

Evelyn started to unroll the paper but was interrupted by a whistle sounding through the woods.

Much to her relief, the falcon turned its piercing gaze from Evelyn and Pam. It gracefully extended its wings and lofted itself into the air.

Hearing footsteps, Evelyn stuffed the tiny

paper into her pocket. A moment later, a boy came walking up the path. The large bird glided toward him and landed on his leather-gloved hand.

The boy appeared to be several years older than Evelyn, had blond hair, and wore an unusual dark blue jacket. Placing a small leather hood on the falcon, he took a startled step back when he caught a glimpse of Evelyn up in the tree.



“Hello. Are you all right up there?” he called.

“Yes, I’m fine, but this pigeon isn’t. Your falcon attacked it!”

Cradling Pam gently against the front of her dress, Evelyn climbed down from the tree as the boy came forward to give her a hand.

He looked apologetic but shrugged and said, “Well, he is a hunting bird.” Despite his words, a warm blush spread across his cheeks. “I didn’t mean for this to happen. I was just taking him out to get some exercise. Truly, I didn’t think he would hurt anything.”

“But look at this pigeon. Its wing is bleeding!”

The boy stepped forward to take a closer look at the injured bird. He suddenly raised his eyebrows. His eyes darted to the ground, scanning the forest floor. “Did it have a message on it?” he asked.

“Is this your pigeon?” Evelyn questioned, arching an eyebrow.

The boy hesitated and tilted his head. “Well, no . . . it’s not. But was there a message on it?”

“A message?” Evelyn asked. *How would he know about the message? Could he have seen the little roll of paper on its leg while it was up in the sky?* Not wanting to let the note fall into the wrong hands, Evelyn asked, “Why does it matter so much if the pigeon isn’t yours?”

“It doesn’t matter,” the boy replied, growing antsy. “But I can bring the pigeon home and take care of it.”

“No, no, I insist,” Evelyn responded quickly. She was eager to get a chance to help any creature, but she also didn’t want this sweet bird to end up near the sharp-eyed falcon. “I found it, and I have lots of practice nursing animals. If I have any questions, I’ll ask one of the neighboring farmers, who’ve taught me most of what I know about caring for various creatures.”

“Does your family not farm?” the boy asked curiously.

“No, we operate a mill on the river that flows through Bluebell Forest. People come from the village and countryside to grind their grain. The mill makes flour for our bakery, too,” Evelyn explained.

“Oh, do you live at Laughing Pipes Mill?” the boy asked, looking down at his falcon as he stroked its dark feathers.

Evelyn’s brow furrowed. “No. I live at Misty Creek Mill. I’ve never heard of Laughing Pipes Mill.”

“What do you mean?” the boy asked, looking confused. “Laughing Pipes Mill has been in this valley for over four hundred years, hasn’t it?”

“Our mill is named Misty Creek Mill,” Evelyn stated again. “It has been here for over four hundred years. I assure you that there is no

other mill in this valley, and I've never heard of Laughing Pipes Mill."

"But—" The boy stopped short, his blue eyes locked with Evelyn's green ones. It seemed as if he wanted to say much more but then changed his mind. He looked away from Evelyn's intense gaze. "Well, that's neat that you have a bakery. I haven't been to the village yet to buy anything. What kinds of pastries do you make?"

"We sell only a few types of bread and rolls, not any pastries. But our bakery is actually at our home out here in the forest. I only go into the village to make deliveries. My mother used to do it, but she has been very sick for a couple of years. Where are you from?"

The boy straightened out the leather straps on the falcon and removed its hood. "Not here, but I'm staying nearby." Then, looking up at the sun climbing higher in the sky, he said, "I should be getting home. Have a good day!"

Turning back in the direction he came from, the boy strode along the path, and the falcon took to the air and soared ahead of him. Evelyn suddenly realized she had never asked the boy's name. He had already disappeared around a bend in the path, but she called out, "Wait! Who are you?"

The boy didn't come back. Maybe he was too far away to hear her, but Evelyn didn't think so. *Is he ignoring me on purpose?* she wondered.

As she pulled out a little twig tangled in her long dark brown hair, Evelyn pondered the interaction. *I know everyone in the valley, and I haven't heard of any newcomers. Maybe this boy is staying with a relative. But why is he sure that there is a mill in this area named Laughing Pipes Mill? And why did he seem to know something about the message on the pigeon?*

I have some questions for him if I should ever meet him again, Evelyn thought with a smile

as she looked down at the pigeon. The bird reminded her of the message in her pocket, but home was so close. *And, she thought, the boy could still be nearby. I'll wait a little longer to open it.*

She cradled Pam against her with one arm and used the other to heft the loaded basket as she started running, gently but swiftly, her skirt swishing the bluebells beside the path as she went.

THE LEGEND OF BLUEBELL FOREST

BOOK ONE

Though Evelyn has lived at Misty Creek Mill in Bluebell Forest her entire life, she's never even heard of the legend of Bluebell Forest until a mysterious message falls from the sky. When a boy she has never seen before apologizes for the incident, Evelyn realizes that the newcomer may know a secret about the mill that she doesn't. As unexpected visitors arrive and they, too, seem to be hiding something, Evelyn discovers that untangling a long-forgotten legend could be crucial for rescuing her kingdom . . . and her family.




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