

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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THE LEGEND OF BLUEBELL FOREST

BOOK TWO



CONTENTS

Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	13
Chapter 3	33
Chapter 4	47
Chapter 5	64
Chapter 6	76
Chapter 7	88
Chapter 8	99
Chapter 9	113
Chapter 10	134
Chapter 11	147
Chapter 12	163
Chapter 13	175





CHAPTER 1



“I know where the other half of that legend is!” Evelyn cried.

Oliver’s eyes widened, and then he tilted his head as if in disbelief.

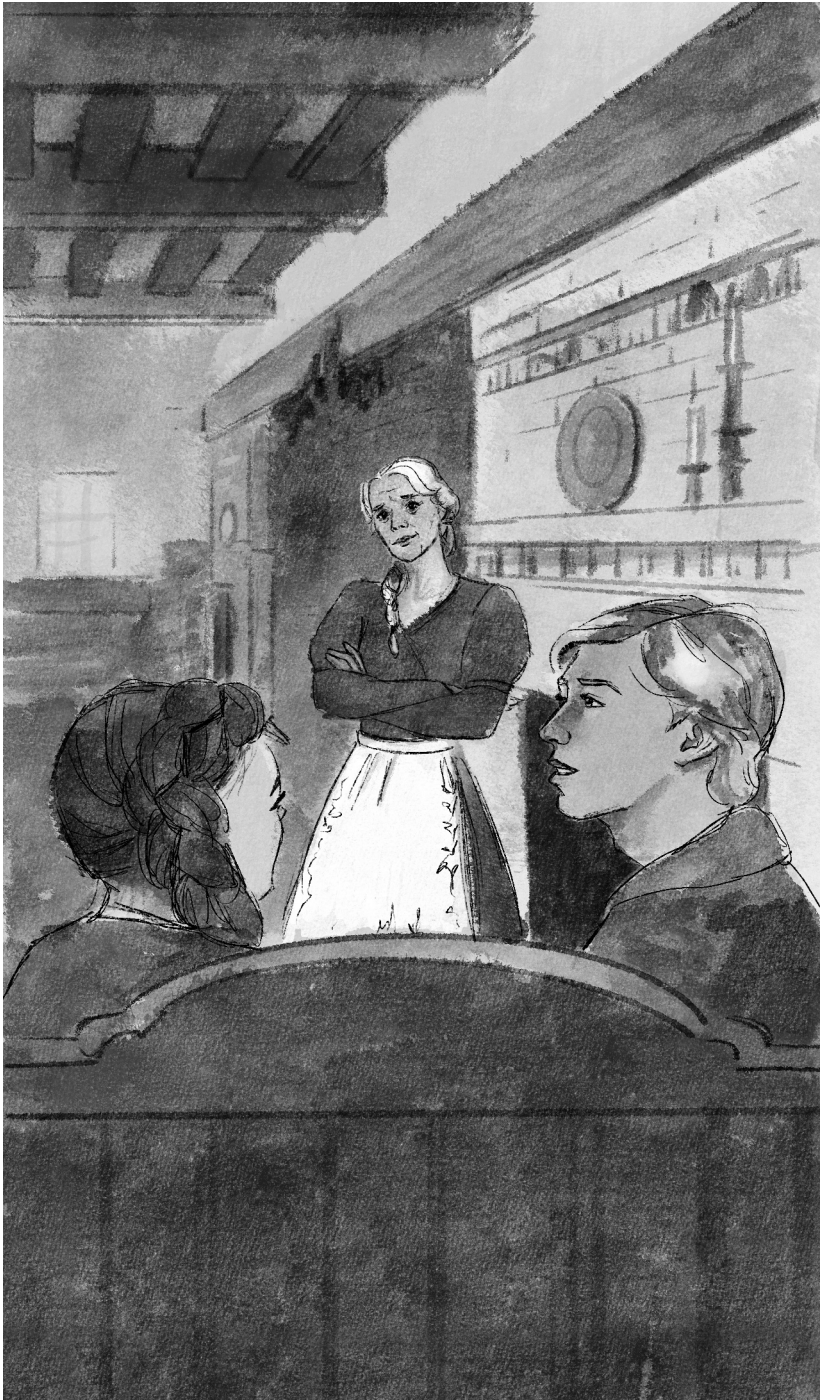
“I do,” Evelyn insisted. “A family is staying with us who just got here two days ago, and they have what I believe is the other half of that scroll.”

“Unbelievable,” Oliver whispered in shock. “We’ve wondered where the other half of that legend was for so long. How is it possible it’s here—at your house—in Bluebell Forest?”

“Can I tell them about your scroll and who you are?” Evelyn asked.

Oliver shook his head emphatically and looked first at Evelyn, then Nora, who stood near the fireplace in the living room with her arms folded, regarding Oliver in an amazed, curious way. “I cannot let anyone other than you two know about our identity. But, yes, you can tell this family about the scroll. In order to save the kingdom, we have to put the scrolls together to understand the legend.”

“That’s great, but first,” Nora said firmly, “you are going to take a nice warm bath and have a nourishing dinner. Then it would be wise to get to know this family more before you tell them about your piece of the legend. They have only been here for a couple of days, and to be honest, we don’t know their full story yet either. We must untangle this legend soon if we are to help the two kingdoms, but we must be prudent as well.



And we are going to help your sister get better too. Then we will all work together while you are being properly cared for.” She tossed her long gray braid over one shoulder.

“You mean we can stay here?” Oliver asked.

“Of course.” Nora smiled warmly. “I don’t care if you are a prince or a pauper—although I’m still surprised you are a prince—I’m not letting any children camp out in the forest alone.”

“I’m not a child,” Oliver said with a frown.

“I just turned eighteen, and I’ve camped many times before.”

“Well,” Nora chuckled and put her hands on her hips, “I don’t care if you are an eighteen-year-old prince who has slept under the stars for *one hundred* nights. You are not fully grown up yet, and you never know what could befall you in the forest. You’ll be staying here until you are safely with your parents again, and there will be no arguing. Although I’m afraid all of our rooms are

now taken, so you'll have to sleep on the couch."

"That actually sounds like a great plan," Oliver said, letting out a long sigh of relief. "But I do need to get my falcon and pigeons and other things from the forest. They're not far from here, only a five-minute jog."

"Very well," Nora replied. "Why don't you go get your things now while we start heating up water for your bath?"

Unable to contain her curiosity, Evelyn spoke up. "Wait one moment! I have a million questions, but I want to ask just one right now. How did you know that this was Laughing Pipes Mill?" Evelyn paused and laughed softly. "Well, I guess two questions. Was it you who dug up the stone plaque by the mill?"

With a nod, Oliver explained, "Yes, it was me. I hope you'll forgive me. As the king's son, I had access to our royal library, and it has old maps—very detailed maps of the kingdom. On the oldest

map I could find of Willow Lake Valley, your mill was named Laughing Pipes Mill. I also read an article about the grand opening of the mill, and it mentioned that a stone name plaque was installed in front. I wanted to make sure I had the right location.”

“Apparently you do,” Nora stated, shaking her head in disbelief. “All right, go on now. Go get your things.”

After Oliver left, Evelyn turned to her aunt. “I can’t believe that both families who have a part of the scroll are here in my home,” she breathed, her eyes dancing with excitement.

“I know,” Nora replied. “However, if both parts of their legend mention Laughing Pipes Mill, it makes sense that they would end up here. Yet I do wonder where Rosie comes from and how she got access to part of the legend.”

“I do think it is odd that Rosie and her children are going by their nicknames,” Evelyn noted.

“Me too,” Nora agreed. “Maybe it’s time I confront Rosie about that.”

Several minutes passed as each privately mulled over the mysterious turn of events. When Rosie entered the kitchen not long after and donned an apron, Nora shared with her that two more guests would be joining them at the cottage: a brother and sister who had been camping in the forest.

“The sister, Bridget, has been sick and needs to be tended to,” Nora explained.

“Oh, poor thing!” exclaimed Rosie. “Well, you two have been so kind to me and my family, so I want to extend that kindness to her and her brother,” she declared, rolling up her sleeves.

Nora, Evelyn, and Rosie set to work cooking dinner, making tea for Bridget, and boiling water for Oliver’s bath.

When the tasks were well underway, Nora finally posed the question that had been whirring

in Evelyn's mind for the past two days. "Rosie, I think you are withholding more information from us. It's odd that you and your children are all going by nicknames. What are your real names? If we are friends now, perhaps you can tell me and explain why you insisted on nicknames."

Evelyn listened intently as she steeped the tea in steaming water.

Rosie sighed, setting down a knife and distractedly gathering little rounds of carrots into piles. "Oh, Nora, I will be able to tell you everything one day. But I can't share everything about who we are right now. It is for everyone's good. Truly, we are here to try to find the pipes so that we can help save the kingdom. We have good intentions, and we are good people. But we have reasons to keep our identities private for a little while longer. Can you trust us still?" Her lips trembled the slightest bit.

With wise and kind eyes, Nora searched Rosie's face. Then, slowly, Nora nodded. "Yes, we will accept that for now and will not press you further."

"Oh, thank you," Rosie said appreciatively, grabbing Nora's hand and squeezing it. She turned back to the carrots she was chopping. "So, you said this boy and his sister will be staying here for a while?"

"Yes," Nora replied. "They also have a story of their own that they are not yet ready to fully share, but I trust them, and they need our help, so you will just have to trust *me* about them."

Rosie smiled. "I guess I owe that to you."

Just then, Oliver knocked lightly on the front door before entering, toting a pigeon cage and a couple of large packs.

"I hope it's all right that I left my falcon in the barn," Oliver said. "I think you'll find him a great help. He is an excellent hunter of ducks and rabbits."

“Oh, we would love some meat for our stews,”
Nora replied cheerily.

Evelyn turned from finishing the tea, eyeing Oliver’s load. Then, her eyes landed on the pigeon cage.

There in the wicker cage were two birds, both with familiar patches of green feathers glinting in the light of the kitchen. However, one had slightly fewer feathers on one wing, though it was moving with ease. Immediately, Evelyn knew this was the beloved pet she had taken in, if only for a few days.

“Pam!” she cried. Evelyn placed her hands on her hips and turned to address Oliver. “You *do* own the pigeon! I asked you if she was yours the day I met you, and you said no.”

Oliver smiled sheepishly. “These pigeons aren’t mine, Evelyn. They’re my sister’s.”

Evelyn frowned. “Same thing!”

“No, it’s not. I hardly know anything about the

pigeons. I don't handle them at all. In fact, the day my falcon attacked Bridget's pigeon, I didn't even know that she had released it."

"All right, all right," Evelyn conceded, carefully taking the pigeon cage from Oliver. "I'll find a safe place for these two and make sure they have food and water. You'd better hurry and take your bath while the water is nice and hot."

As Evelyn tended to the pigeons, she was grateful that at least *some* pieces of the last few weeks' puzzle were coming together, but a dozen questions still whirled around in her mind.

Returning to the kitchen, she picked up the cup of warm tea and headed down the hallway to the room they had chosen for Bridget. *Oh, Mama and Papa, I'm sure you had no idea you would be trapped in Heartwood Kingdom*, Evelyn thought. *And I definitely had no idea that we would be hosting a prince and princess here—here at Laughing Pipes Mill, which is apparently the*

*heart of a legend that is supposed to somehow fix
the disunity of the two kingdoms. Oh, how I wish
you were here!*



THE LEGEND OF BLUEBELL FOREST

BOOK TWO

When she learns of a new clue to the legend surrounding Laughing Pipes Mill, Evelyn is more eager than ever to discover what is hidden there. However, with Oliver and his sister at the cottage, more mysteries arise, and Evelyn and her new friends are left with a still bigger puzzle when they discover what is within the ancient mill. For Evelyn's family to return home and peace to be restored between the sister kingdoms, the mystery solvers of Laughing Pipes Mill must all work as a team, but that may be more challenging than it appears.



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THE LEGEND OF BLUEBELL FOREST

BOOK THREE



CONTENTS

Chapter 1	1
Chapter 2	13
Chapter 3	34
Chapter 4	45
Chapter 5	56
Chapter 6	73
Chapter 7	88
Chapter 8	100
Chapter 9	112
Chapter 10	132
Chapter 11	152
Chapter 12	164
Chapter 13	176
Chapter 14	195
Chapter 15	210
Chapter 16	225
Chapter 17	245
Chapter 18	256
Chapter 19	280
Chapter 20	298





CHAPTER 1



Dawn had unfurled its pale pink and orange streamers across the sky only minutes before, yet Evelyn was already in the kitchen, a clean apron tied over her light green dress.

The cottage brimmed with the usual yeasty scent of bread baking, but this morning it also mingled with the aromas of warm berries and roasting nuts. When Pip stumbled into the kitchen, awoken by the clattering of bowls and baking pans being busily jostled about, his foot sent a dark brown walnut shell skidding across the floor. “Those look like travel cakes,” he

noticed, rubbing his eyes and letting out a still-sleepy yawn.

“They *are* travel cakes,” Evelyn replied.

With eyebrows raised, Pip asked, “Why do we need those?”

Before Evelyn could answer him, Bridget walked in, her golden hair braided and pinned in a wreath around her head. As she surveyed the scene in the kitchen, her eyebrows rose in astonishment. “You really meant that last night about going on a journey?” she asked.

“I did,” Evelyn assured her. “Aunt Nora and I discovered that we both had the same idea, and we’ve been discussing it this morning. Are you up for it?”

“Where are we going?” Pip asked.

Nora rounded the corner from the pantry, carrying a small burlap sack full of nuts that clattered against each other as she moved. “First to the hills, and then wherever our quest to

fulfill the legend leads next.”

“We have to try to find the source of the mysterious sound. I think it could be bagpipes,” Evelyn explained.

Two halves of the same scroll had brought the royal families of Heartwood and Heartsong to Misty Creek Mill—or Laughing Pipes Mill, as the legend called the mill that had been in Evelyn’s family for generations. Three days earlier, the princes and princesses, as well as Evelyn and her great-aunt Nora, had followed the directions of the scroll and discovered a secret staircase beneath the four-hundred-year-old mill Evelyn’s family owned. Along with a set of beautiful bagpipes contained in a wooden chest and an encoded book that held the long-lost history of the kingdom, a carved tablet had been hidden there by the wrongfully dethroned King Hugh, instructing that, if the sister kingdoms were ever in danger of turning

against each other, one with a true heart must play a song on the bagpipes while the children of Heartwood and Heartsong sang. Oliver had volunteered to learn to play the bagpipes, but with the lack of music in Heartsong, the group knew of no one who might be able to teach him.

“What is the chance of that?” Bridget asked skeptically. She sat on a stool and began to help Nora shell the nuts. “None of us have actually heard bagpipes, so we don’t know if that is what they sound like at all.” Pip nodded in agreement.

“We don’t know what instrument, if any, makes the sounds in the evenings, but the hills are the only place we know to look to learn about music,” Aunt Nora said, “so we might as well give it a chance.”

“We have to try,” Evelyn affirmed, carefully sliding a pan of travel cakes out from the oven. “I’ve noticed that the sound always seems to

come from a certain part of the hills, although a broad one. The music seems to float around a bit.” She smiled and shrugged. “Still, I think we should head that way.”

“Where in the hills do you think it comes from?” Pip asked.

Evelyn tilted her head. “I think the music comes from the area where Mr. Frost lives. Though I don’t know exactly where that is, I’ve seen people point out the general direction. Also, I’ve heard that he used to play several instruments, so I think that is another reason we should go to his home first, though I doubt he has any knowledge of the bagpipes. I have certainly never heard anyone mention anything about *that* instrument.” She smiled, remembering how puzzling the pipes had been when they had first discovered them. “Still, maybe he has a clue as to what the mysterious sound is.”

“But that day Oliver first asked about the music, you said that people have explored the hills and never found anything,” Bridget reminded her.

“For them it was a matter of curiosity. Now the stakes are higher,” Evelyn pointed out. “We have the legend to solve . . . *and* we have two princes and two princesses on our team.”

Woken by the voices, Oliver strode into the kitchen, followed by Birdie. Rosie appeared a moment later and tousled her son’s strawberry blond hair as she came to stand by him. “Good morning, Pip. Good morning, all,” she said, looking over the group assembled around the large counter. “Everyone is up so early today. What’s going on?”

Together, Evelyn and Nora explained their hope of finding the music in the hills and the possibility that its source would help them learn about the bagpipes. “Perhaps Mr. Frost can help

us find whatever—or whoever—creates the melody,” Aunt Nora concluded.

From a pocket in her dress, Evelyn pulled a copy of the inscription from the stone tablet the group had discovered. *Through this instrument, two kingdoms united once can unite again, she read to herself. One who has a true heart must learn to weave its melodies. At the festival where the two kingdoms will become sisters once more, that one must share the pipes’ music and tell the story within the book.*

“On this journey, then, where are you planning to spend the nights?” Rosie asked. “Do you know which towns lie along the route?”

“Though we haven’t discussed our precise path yet, there are no villages on the way. Thankfully, the distance to Mr. Frost’s home shouldn’t take too long to cover, since he is able to make occasional trips to the village even while living out in the hills. Once we start

teaching the children of the kingdoms the song from the book, though, we will be traveling all over, even somehow to Heartwood to teach their children,” Nora replied.

“But . . . will there be inns along the way?”

Nora shook her head. “Not often, no. When we’re not in towns or villages, there will probably not be accommodations. Though I know little about the journey, I think we will mostly camp.”

Rosie cleared her throat, her voice tight as she spoke. “We will just sleep in the forest?”

“Don’t worry! It’s easy,” Oliver promised.

He sat down at the counter to help Bridget and Nora shell nuts. “My sister and I camped before we came to the bakery, and I’ve had other experiences with camping in the past. I’ll teach you how to make shelters in the woods from branches and leaves.”

“It is enchanting to sleep under the stars

when the weather is clear,” Bridget added. “I could spend hours gazing at them.”

As the conversation moved on, Rosie’s uneasy nervousness faded, but her brow remained creased in concentration.

“I still find it hard to believe we discovered that old book with the history of the kingdoms,” Aunt Nora remarked, shaking her head. “It is difficult to imagine that the king of Heartwood would destroy all the records in Heartsong after he took it over.”

“Yes, though it’s a good thing King Hugh was able to go into hiding at the mill and have the miller craft the bagpipes,” Birdie said.

While many people knew the story of the king who long ago divided his kingdom to give to his beloved daughters, there had always been a mysterious lack of written records in the sister kingdoms. The book hidden beneath the mill had explained that, after the two women passed

their kingdoms on to their sons, the king of Heartwood overthrew his cousin, King Hugh, who came to the mill to hide. At some point the kingdoms had split apart again, though Evelyn and the others still weren't sure why or when that had happened. By then, though, the king from Heartwood had banned and destroyed the musical instruments Heartsong used to be famous for, as well as any records that might have hinted at their quality and renown, and they had never made a comeback in the kingdom.

“What would you say if I told you that I found a wood carving as fine as the detailing on the chest beneath the mill, but it was in a tree?” Evelyn posed.

“That’s mine!” Oliver exclaimed. “I couldn’t think of where I left that carved pigeon; I forgot it there when we scouted the area.”

“Just like the first queen of Heartwood in the

story, we still carve wood,” Bridget said, “and the splendid forests bequeathed to her by her father are still there.”

“But though her sister, who was given the land of Heartsong, loved music, this kingdom has seen few instruments and little singing,” Rosie lamented with a sigh. “I wish the son of the first queen of Heartwood had never taken over this kingdom. It’s a shame that he destroyed its history—just because he was jealous of his musically talented aunt.”

“But we will fix that!” Birdie said. “Thankfully, King Hugh left the bagpipes and songs to soften the hearts of the kingdoms if they ever turned against each other.”

“How did he know that Heartsong and Heartwood would eventually split apart again?” Pip asked.

“I imagine King Hugh could see that the two kingdoms together were too large to be

ruled over by one person,” Aunt Nora said. “Perhaps they had grown larger since the time of his grandfather, who ruled the whole land before distributing it to his daughters. Still, I wish we had some insight into exactly why the kingdoms ended up divided again.” She paused her speaking for a moment to think, though her hands continued busily forming dough into little cakes. “Also, the people of Heartsong had loved Hugh as their king, and his mother and grandfather were beloved rulers too. I’m guessing the people were not very cooperative once the king of Heartwood took over.”

With that, Nora placed another batch of travel cakes in the oven and dusted the flour from her apron. “Now, there are blankets for bedrolls in the big chest in the living room and knapsacks on the top shelf of the hall closet. Let’s begin packing.”



CHAPTER 2



Never before had Evelyn embarked on a journey such as this. She loved the vast countryside speckled with farms and was especially captivated with Bluebell Forest, but a half-day's wagon ride to help family friends settle into a new farm was the extent of how far she had ever traveled from home. Evelyn hadn't even been to the tree-clad hills or any of the towns the stagecoaches and post carriers traveled between as they made their brief stops at the village.

Now the anticipation of seeing new places filled her with energy as she went about her

preparations, but when it came to packing, she had no idea where to start.

Neither, it seemed, did her aunt, though Nora had been all across the kingdom. Evelyn showed her the locations of various things in the cottage, and as they opened closets and bureaus throughout the house, every available surface quickly became draped with piles of clothes, cloaks, blankets, and bags. While Nora stood in the middle of one of the rooms, trying to sort through the items and decide what to bring on the journey, Rosie knelt on the floor, folding whatever Nora deemed unnecessary.

“It is so difficult to decide what to take,” Aunt Nora said, half to herself. “We can’t even foresee how long we will be gone; it could be a matter of days or a few weeks! And I’m not familiar with all that camping might involve.” Her half-muttered words softened into mumbling. “And whatever will I do without my books?”

Nora picked up a coat, gazed at it glassy-eyed, then put it down. She paced across the room to gather up a couple of woolen blankets, murmured something too soft to hear, and then set that pile down too. Since Nora's arrival, Evelyn had never witnessed her usually serene and organized aunt act as restlessly and indecisively as she was now.

Evelyn's mind flitted back to the moment when Aunt Nora had arrived in the wagon crammed full of luggage, including crates of ferrets and her many, many boxes of books. "Would it help to ask Oliver for some suggestions on packing?" Evelyn offered.

Even as Aunt Nora nodded gratefully, Oliver appeared in the doorway. "Did I hear my name?"

"Indeed," Evelyn responded, smiling. "As you know, it's the first time camping for all of us. What would you advise we bring?"

“Oh, that’s not too much trouble,” Oliver said. “First of all, pack light. We want to be prepared, but we don’t want to be carrying more than is absolutely necessary. When Bridget and I came, we each brought a change of clothes, a bedroll, and provisions.”

“And your falcon and my cage of pigeons,” Bridget added, slipping past Oliver into the room. “Don’t forget the maps, compass, and flint and steel. I brought a collapsible telescope as well, and my brother packed a small knife for cutting branches and food.”

“And carving wooden pigeons.” Evelyn smiled.

“Evidently,” Oliver said with a grin. “Also, my falcon can hunt rabbits and ducks, so we won’t need to bring too much food.”

“Provided the royal family gives permission,” Rosie said with a twinkle in her eyes.

“The royal family?” He motioned to Bridget.

“I would say I know some of them,” he countered, drawing a laugh from Rosie and the rest.

“It sounds like we should start with our clothes and food; then we can gather any other supplies we need after that,” Aunt Nora said, her shoulders dropping in relief at having some direction. After a few more instructions from Oliver and Bridget, everyone dispersed to do their own packing.

In her room Evelyn rifled through the drawers of her bureau and selected a few articles of clothing to bring: sturdy yet light-weight blouses for hiking in the heat of the day, a spare skirt, warm stockings, and a soft cloak for the cool dampness that followed sunset. She rolled all the items tightly and fit them into the bottom of her knapsack, glad to find that plenty of space remained on top for the travel cakes and other provisions. Next, she cinched

the leather straps over her rolled blanket and tested out the bag on her shoulders. Though the pack had weight, it was lighter than many loads of supplies she had carried home on the long walk from the village, and it was comfortable to wear.

Later that morning, the group reconvened in the kitchen, where Aunt Nora began distributing food into everyone's packs. Perched on stools by the counter, Birdie and Pip happily



munched on warm bread but carried no knapsacks. Standing beside them, Rosie held a knapsack, yet it was limp and empty.

Eyeing the three in confusion, Nora asked, “Do you need help packing, Rosie?”

Rosie sighed. “I have been thinking all morning, and I have decided that my children and I will not be going on the journey.”

Surprised at the announcement, Evelyn inquired, “Why not?”



THE LEGEND OF BLUEBELL FOREST

BOOK THREE

The neighboring kingdoms of Heartwood and Heartsong stand on the brink of war, and thirteen-year-old Evelyn holds the ancient legend that promises to reunite them. With the help of her Aunt Nora and the prince and princess of Heartwood, Evelyn must journey across the two kingdoms to fulfill the legend's decree. Yet with the scheming Demarco terrorizing them from the skies and the king of Heartsong captured and imprisoned, the group's chances of success feel ever more fleeting.



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