

The Magic Shoebox

Once upon a time lived two little girls called Poppy, aged 5 and Rosie, aged 3. They lived in London with their parents and pet puppy called Spot. In the school holidays they liked to go and visit their favourite grandma Alice, who lived in a little village called Amberley in the heart of the Kent countryside.

It was a boiling hot midsummer's day when mummy Lola and Daddy Charlie dropped the little girls off at their grandma's around Friday lunchtime.. Granny made them some yummy cheese and ham sandwiches and a glass of homemade lemonade then the little sisters went up to their bedroom to unpack their clothes.

Suddenly, as Poppy opened the squeaky old wardrobe to hang up her summer dresses an old shoe box covered in dust fell out onto the floor. The girls opened the shoe box and inside they discovered a parcel wrapped in old newspaper. Carefully they tore the newspaper open and found an old torch and a small scroll which had been tied up with a tatty old blue ribbon. Poppy untied the ribbon and slowly unrolled the scroll, to reveal an ancient treasure map. At the bottom of the map was a big black seal of a skull and crossbones. In the centre of the map was an arrow and beside it the words 'buried treasure' had been written by hand in black ink,. The ink was very faint as the map was hundreds of years old. The girls looked at each other and squealed with excitement! However, when they heard their grandma's footsteps on the stairs they quickly hid everything under their bunk bed as they didn't want to get into trouble.

Grandma knew they were up to something but didn't say anything. Instead, she smiled warmly and told them that they could go and play in the garden for a couple of hours while she had an afternoon nap. Although Rose Cottage was quite small the garden was huge. There was a slide and swings for the children to play on, a sandpit, a big vegetable patch where she grew all her vegetables, a small orchard with apple trees and at the end of the garden a little field where Ned lived. Ned was grandma's beloved pet donkey which she had adopted from the Donkey Sanctuary after Granddad had died some years ago. When granny was small, her parents used to take her to the seaside and she enjoyed donkey riding. As she grew older she rode ponies and horses well into her 70s but Granny was getting on a bit now, she was nearly 90. Therefore, she decided to adopt a donkey. She also had a parrot called Squawky, a cat called Tiddles and a dog called Snoopy.

The girls ran into the garden and picked some carrots from the vegetable patch and skipped down to the field to see Ned. The old donkey was delighted to see them and trotted over to the gate where the girls stroked him and fed him with two gigantic carrots.

Next they played on the swings before sitting down under a shady willow tree to share the flask of apple juice and fairy cakes grandma had made them as a special treat. After they had finished their snack, Rosie pulled out the treasure map she had hidden in her sock and laid it out on the warm grass.

They both studied the map and discovered that the treasure was buried in an enchanted forest which appeared to be behind Ned's field. However, the girls could not see anything apart from another field with a big oak tree at the bottom.

However, they were not deterred and climbed over the fence into the next field. At the bottom of the field there was a tiny rabbit's burrow concealed with pink flowers that smelt of candyfloss. The girls picked a couple of flowers and smelt them. Suddenly, they felt really strange and the next minute they had shrunk. They were now the same size as the little flowers. They peered into the giant rabbit hole and just at that moment a gust of wind blew them through the rabbit hole and they landed with thud at the bottom. The girls scrambled to their feet and found themselves face to face with a family of bunny rabbits which were about five times bigger than they were.. After they had recovered from the shock and realised that the rabbits meant them no harm, Poppy explained to them that they were looking for an enchanted forest. Father Rabbit peered at the map as she pointed to a castle with a lake where the treasure was buried ." This way girls" said Daddy Rabbit and lead them through a very dark tunnel. Poppy remembered the torch was in her other sock and quickly found it. She remembered learning at school that rabbits could see in the dark but she certainly couldn't. Her mum had told her that if she ate more carrots she would be able to see in the dark too. But she and Rosie hated carrots.

After what seemed like forever the girls found themselves standing on the top of a hill. At the bottom it looked like a family of fairies were having a picnic. The girls ran as fast as their little legs would carry them and went to introduce themselves to the fairies who asked the girls to join them for acorn tea and blackberries. Politely they declined the fairies kind invitation but asked them if they could help them locate a castle with a lake. The fairies pointed to a bridge over a little stream in the distance and told them that a family of gingerbread men lived in a hut on the other side and would show them the way.

Meanwhile, back at Rose Cottage grandma had woken up from her nap and was making a cup of tea. It was nearly 5.30pm but warm sunshine was still pouring through the kitchen window. She decided to have her tea at the kitchen table before she prepared a light supper. They would eat in the garden by the fountain with the angel statue lit with fairy lights, then she would she run them a bubble bath. She knew it would turn cooler later so she would collect some logs from the garden shed while the girls watched their favourite video, Angelina Ballerina. . Then she would light the log fire in the sitting room, make them all a hot chocolate with squirty cream and marshmallows. She loved spoiling her grandchildren, especially as she only saw them in the school holidays.

Little did she know that her little granddaughters had been shrunk to the same size as her little finger and had found the secret map their granddad had hidden in the wardrobe just before he died. Granddad had been poorly and sadly passed passed away before he had chance to give the children the secret map he had found in an old book about pirates in the village charity shop.

Back in the enchanted forest the girls had crossed the rickety bridge over the stream, where mermaids and water babies frolicked happily.

And there a short distance from the bridge, hidden behind a dozen or so fragrant pink rose bushes was a hut made from toffee and chocolate. By now, the girls were getting hungry. and greedily broke off some of the doorknob which was made of fudge and gobbled it up! Suddenly, the door flew open and a rather fat gingerbread lady appeared holding a rolling pin. The girls were scared and clung on to each other but quickly relaxed when two little gingerbread children came running out of the kitchen covered in icing sugar and gave them a big hug. Their mother explained they had been baking apple pie and invited them in By now it was starting to get dark and Mrs Gingerbread

asked the children if they would like to stay the night. The girls thanked her and they all sat round the kitchen table and had a supper of cheesy beans followed by a glass of milk and a slice of apple pie. The girls asked where Mr Gingerbread was and Mrs Gingerbread told them that he had gone to stay with his sister for a few days. The girls told the Gingerbread family that they were heading to the castle to find buried treasure and they would set off first thing in the morning. The gingerbread children were delighted that Poppy and Rosie were having a sleepover and lent them a pair of their fluffy pink pyjamas. After a bedtime story and a mug of gingerbread hot chocolate the girls slept soundly curled up with hot water bottles on the sofa bed.

It was now 9pm and their grandmother was in a dreadful state. She had been searching for the girls for over an hour but they were nowhere to be seen. As she was standing by the field crying, Granddad appeared before her. He reassured her that the girls were safe and that he was watching over them. He told her not to worry and that they would be back Sunday teatime. Grandma was relieved but wondered where on earth the girls were. She didn't sleep very well that night.

The next day, Poppy and Rosie awoke at dawn and studied the map by torchlight. Mrs Gingerbread made them cocoa pops for breakfast and a packed lunch. However, before she gave them directions to the castle she warned them that there were dangers lurking ahead in the forest and that they must be on their guard. Deep in the forest lived a wicked witch, and the lake was home to a family of dangerous crocodiles. She went on to tell them that the spot where the treasure was buried was beside a little island in the middle of the lake guarded by an evil troll. She told them that several children had tried to find the buried treasure in the past but they had disappeared. However, she went on to tell them that there was an old gypsy who lived in a caravan by a haunted cave deep in the forest. Rumour had it that if you bought a few springs of her lucky heather she would tell your fortune and grant you magic wishes. She advised them to find the old woman and wished them good luck.

And so the girls set off once again deep into the forest. It was a sunny day but the deeper they got into the forest, the darker and scarier it became. They had been walking for over two hours when they came across a signpost saying 'Lucky Heather this way'. The children were exhausted so they sat down on a log to rest for a moment and eat their packed lunch before they continued their journey. Mrs Gingerbread had kindly made them peanut butter sandwiches and they each had a tangerine and a few smarties to share. They wolfed down their food followed by drink of strawberry juice.

Suddenly they heard a hissing noise behind them and jumped off the log. Slowly, the girls turned round and to their horror, a gigantic rainbow coloured snake was towering above them. They clung to each other as they were both very afraid and were frozen to the spot as its long fork tongue hung inches away from their faces. The girls screamed and suddenly the snake disappeared. In its place was a beautiful young princess who stood before them smiling. The princess told them that her name was Jasmine and that she had been cursed by the old gypsy after refusing to buy some heather from her. She also told the girls she would only be released from her spell on payment of a very large ransom. The princess explained that her parents the King and Queen of the Enchanted Forest had been kidnapped by the wicked witch so they could not help her. She also told the girls their castle was haunted by the spirits of dead pirates who had drowned when their ship had sunk

many years ago and their boat washed up in the Enchanted lake. So that explained the skull and crossbones on the map, Poppy thought to herself.

The girls told Princess Jasmine about the buried treasure and together they hatched a plan. It was starting to get dark by the time the princess and the girls found the gypsy's caravan. The princess hid behind a tree while the girls banged on the caravan door. A short while later the gypsy emerged hobbling with a stick.. She was over a 100 years old, tiny and frail with thin grey hair, a hunchback and big gold hoop earrings dangling from her saggy wrinkled ear lobes. The girls explained why they were there and the old woman let them in. The caravan was filled with sprigs of heather, lots of potions in old jam jars and shelves of books about magic.

The gypsy asked the girls to come and sit at the table and placed several sprigs of heather in front of her. She then went into a trance, babbling gobbledoo gook. Outside, the trees were creaking and it was now almost pitch black.

Several minutes later the trees stopped creaking and the old woman came out of her trance. She told the girls they had seven lucky wishes and to use them wisely. She also told them that the magic spell would wear off in twenty four hours and if they were still in the forest when the time was up they would be turned into frogs for the witch's cauldron.

Poppy fished out a ten pound note from her sock and paid the woman. She then told their fortune by reading their palms. She told Poppy that she would marry a handsome prince one day and live in a palace. Rosie was told she would become a famous actress. She gave the girls an apple each and told them to be on their way. The clock was ticking...

Poppy turned on the torch when they stepped out of the caravan then they grabbed the princess and went running further into the forest. The Princess told them to throw away the apples just in case they were poisonous. Rosie obeyed and threw hers into the bushes, but Poppy was not frightened and quickly ate hers!

It wasn't long before they heard cackling in the distance and saw the wicked witch that Mrs Gingerbread had warned them about. She was dropping live frogs into a big cauldron. The girls shivered with fear and remembered what the gypsy had told them.. After about ten minutes or so the witch returned to her house – an old ramshackle hut covered in cobwebs so the princess and the girls made a run for it. Fortunately, the witch was deaf and did not hear them!

Just before midnight, they heard water and shortly afterwards discovered the lake with the castle standing at the top of a winding hill. They were feeling very sleepy so they decided that it was time to make their **first wish**. And hey presto, a tree house appeared before them. A ladder was hanging out of the window and one by one they climbed the short distance into the tree house where a feast was awaiting for them and a sheepskin rug to rest their weary heads.

In the morning they scurried back down the ladder and within seconds the tree house had disappeared as though it had never even existed.

They found a very overgrown pathway leading to the lake which had obviously not been used for some time and Poppy remembered what Mrs Gingerbread had told her. Suddenly Princess Jasmine came to an abrupt halt in front of a gap in the hedge, running parallel to the lake. . Rosie was

shaking like a leaf and Poppy knew something was very wrong. It soon became apparent what had frightened the princess and her little sister. A giant scary monster that looked like a cross between a troll and a gruffalo was standing guard on the little island in the middle of the lake right by where the treasure chest was buried.

And so, it was time for **wish number two**. Without further ado, the scary monster had turned into a rosebush and was whimpering like a lost puppy! It was so funny that they all fell about laughing!

The next problem they had to overcome was the crocodiles. When they emerged from behind the hedge and looked into the lake four pairs of eyes were looking right back at them. Just as Mrs Gingerbread had warned them!

It was time now for their **third wish**! Seconds later the dangerous crocodiles had disappeared and in their place was a school of playful dolphins!

The sisters and their new friend cheered with delight but it was short-lived when they suddenly heard a ghostly cry coming from the direction of the castle and the clanking of chains. Poppy remembered what the princess had told her about the castle being haunted by the souls of the drowned pirates and a shiver crept down her spine.

The next problem was how to get to the treasure chest and bring it ashore. Time for **wish number four**! Ten seconds later they were sitting on the ground with tails hanging over the edge of the lake! They had been transformed into little mermaids! Rosie was delighted – she had always dreamt of being a mermaid since she was a toddler and now her dream had come true! Poppy and the princess were not so sure. They preferred their legs to a fish's tail but were chuffed to bits with their waist length long golden curls!

And with three giant splashes they were in the water playing with the mermaids and having a ball!! But time was ticking on. It was already 1.30pm and they only had 4 hours before the spell was broken. Although Poppy and her sister were having a magical time they missed their gran and knew she would be worried about them. Poppy told her sister and the princess that they must find the treasure chest and return to their grandmother's before they were turned into frogs for the witch's cauldron!

The lake was very deep and it took them quite a while before they found the sunken pirate's ship which was piled high with pirate skeletons. It was eerily quiet and the girls were quite afraid when suddenly they heard the high pitched squeaking of the dolphins. They swam over to where the dolphins had formed a semi circle and there lying on the bed of the lake was a huge treasure chest. The sisters and princess couldn't believe their eyes!

There was no way that they could carry it to shore so they decided it was time they used their **fifth wish**! Suddenly, a big water baby appeared sucking a gigantic dummy! She looked like a giant compared to the tiny mermaids! The water baby was so big she picked up the treasure chest with only one hand and swam to the surface. The girls followed but it took them some time before they reached dry land. However, they were over the moon to see the treasure chest lying on the bank beside the lake. As they pulled themselves out of the water, their mermaid tails disappeared and they were pleased their legs had returned!

Together they pulled open the lid of the treasure chest and were stunned by all the priceless gems inside. There were rubies, diamonds, sapphires, emeralds, pearls and thousands of antique gold coins dating back to the 13th century. As they were staring in disbelief at the treasure they suddenly saw the ghosts leave the castle and disappear into the sky. The castle was no longer haunted! Princess Jasmine was overjoyed. She could finally return home.

Back in Amberly grandma was looking at her watch. It was 3.30pm on Sunday and granddad had told her the girls would be home at tea time.

Down by the lake in the Enchanted Forest, Poppy was looking at her watch as well. They only had two hours to get back to the rabbit hole and they still had a lot to do.

Suddenly Princess Jasmine shrieked and to their dismay they saw that the dolphins had now turned back into crocodiles, the rosebush has turned back into a troll and they were all heading in their direction.

It was time for their sixth **wish**. To everybody's delight, a magic carpet floated from thin air and landed on the grass in front of them.

Next, a genie appeared. He quickly lifted the treasure chest onto the magic carpet and told the girls to jump aboard. The crocodiles and troll were hot on their heels and they only just managed to escape from certain death in the nick of time. As the magic carpet took off one of the crocodiles took a chunk out of it and narrowly missed Princess Jasmine's hand. She had a very lucky escape!

But they soon they forgot about the crocodiles and troll as they were flying through the sky above the enchanted forest. Firstly, they landed outside the gypsy's caravan. Poppy took a ruby out of the treasure chest and knocked on the old woman's door. She told her that the ruby was hers if she lifted the Princess's curse. The old woman muttered some more gobbledy gook as she had done before and swigged some purple potion out of one of the jam jars which caused a puff of smoke. The curse was lifted!

As promised, Poppy gave the gypsy the ruby and she let out the most piercing cackle which almost burst Poppy's eardrums.

She hopped back on to the carpet and moments later they landed at the old hut where the witch lived. Poppy knocked on the door and it creaked slowly open revealing the witch holding her broomstick. Poppy was holding a sapphire and the witch's eyes lit up. Although Poppy was a bit frightened of the witch she was in a hurry and calmly and politely explained why she was there. The witch told her that if they followed her on her broomstick she would lead them to the cave where the King and Queen were being held captive.

By the time they arrived outside the cave it was 5pm. The witch showed them into the cave, which was pitch black and full of bat droppings. Fortunately, Poppy had her torch with her and moments later they were face to face with the King and Queen who were sleeping on the floor chained to a rock. The witch muttered a spell and the next minute the chains disappeared and they were wide awake. Poppy handed the witch the sapphire and immediately she vanished.

It was now 5.15pm. The girls said their goodbyes to the Princess and her parents and jumped back onto the magic carpet. With minutes to spare they landed in front of the rabbit hole with the treasure chest. There was no way the chest would fit in the rabbit hole and besides they were far too small to carry it. Just as they were about to abandon it Rosie piped up that they had one more wish. In less than a second the chest was now tiny. The sisters grabbed one end each of the chest and ran for the hole.

But just as they reached the entrance the magic spell was broken and the treasure chest exploded. By sheer fluke, a diamond landed just inside the rabbit hole as the rabbit family arrived to greet them. The girls told them all about their adventures and asked if they could help carry the diamond for them. Father Rabbit picked it up with his teeth and they followed him through the warren and up to the hole leading to Ned's field.

Back at the cottage Grandma had a worried look on her face as she looked out of the kitchen window. Granddad had promised they would be back at teatime and it was gone 6pm. But, she needn't have worried as a few minutes later she spotted the girls dragging their exhausted bodies up the garden path. Grandma was so relieved and excited to see them. The children were zonked out and couldn't walk a step further. They both collapsed in a heap outside the kitchen door. And so poor Grandma, who was quite frail, had to scoop them up into her arms and carry them one by one into the sitting room. Gently, she tucked them up on the sofa with a blanket, kissed their foreheads and quietly closed the door.

A few hours later the girls woke up and rubbed their weary eyes. They called out for Grandma and she appeared a few minutes later with a tray of tea and some marmite soldiers.

"Are you hungry girls?" asked Grandma.

"Rosie gurgled as she stroked the cat, who had jumped onto the sofa.

"I had the strangest dream Granny" said Poppy.

Grandma smiled. "Well you can tell me all about it in the morning when you have had a good night's sleep. You girls must be very tired" replied Grandma.

As Poppy undressed for her bedtime bath that evening she pulled out the crumpled soggy map and the torch from her socks.

The torch seemed heavier than she remembered. She wondered why that could be and being an inquisitive little girl she opened the back of the torch and turned it upside down.

And, can you guess what fell out of the torch?

Yes, that's right a large sparkling diamond!

Poppy was stunned. It wasn't a dream after all. She and Rosie really had been on a magic adventure!

THE END