



Chapter One  
*Flory*

 Flory was a night fairy. She was born a little before midnight when the moon was full. For the rest of her life—and fairies can live hundreds of years—that hour, a little before midnight, would be the time when her magic was strongest.

Flory was at home in the dark. Like all night fairies, she cast a silver shadow, which helped her to hide in the moonlight. She had great sharp eyes that sparkled like blackberries under dew, and a tangle of dusky curls.

Her wings had thin feathers at the tips. These were her sensing feathers. If there was a mouse nearby, Flory felt its body heat through her feathers. If it was about to rain, her feathers felt the water in the air.

Flory was proud of her wings. Night fairies, like moths, often have drab wings, but Flory's were pale green with amber moons on them. These wings were the cause of Flory's great trouble.

There are those who say that fairies have no troubles, but this is not true. Fairies are magical creatures, but they can be hurt—even killed—when they are young and their magic is not strong. Young fairies have no one to take care of them, because fairies make bad parents. Babies bore them. A fairy godmother is an excellent thing, but a fairy mother is a disaster.

Because fairies do not look after their children, young fairies have to take care of

themselves. Luckily, they can walk and talk as soon as they are born. After three days, they will not drink milk and have no more use for their mothers. They drink dew and suck the nectar from flowers. On the seventh day of life, their wings unfold, and they fly away from home.

On the night of Flory's peril, she was less than three months old. It was a windy night: cool and sweet with springtime. Flory was coasting on the breeze, letting it toss her wherever it liked. She was still very tiny—as tall as an acorn—and her green wings glittered in the moonlight. A little brown bat swooped down upon her, caught her, and crunched up her wings.

Flory cried out. If she had been a little bit older, she might have shouted a spell to sting the bat's mouth. If she had been a hundred years old, she could have cast a spell to make her wings grow back in an instant. But the cry



that came from her was no spell at all, only a sound of pain and loss.

The little bat, realizing his mistake, opened his mouth and spat. He stammered, "So sorry!" but Flory did not hear. There was blood on her wings, and she was falling through the night, spinning like a maple seed.

She landed on the branch of a cherry tree. She grabbed hold of a clump of white blossoms and clung to them, shaking. Never before had she known pain. For the first time in her life, her eyes filled with tears, but she did not cry. She knew she must think what to do next.

She peered through the blossoms. Three trees stood together: the cherry tree, a thorn apple, and an oak. They were not wild trees. Flory had been born in the woods, and she knew at once that a giant had planted them—a stupid giant, who had not given them room to grow. She had fallen into a giant's garden.

Flory turned, gazing all around. The garden

was surrounded by a high wooden fence. At one end was a fishpond with a fountain, and a brick patio with an iron table and two chairs. Beyond the patio stood a huge house made of bricks.

Flory let go of the cherry blossoms and ran her hand up her back, trying to feel what was left of her wings. All but one of her sensing feathers had been bitten off. There was a double ruffle of wings going up her spine, but it was narrow: only as wide as her hand. She knew at once she would not be able to fly. Flory's mouth opened and a great sob came out.

The sound frightened her. Bats have keen hearing. Now that she had no wings, she must be careful not to call attention to herself. The night was full of hungry creatures: bats, owls, even the crawling snakes. She gazed up and down the tree trunk. Perhaps she could find a crack in the bark where she could hide.

But the cherry was a young tree, and its

bark was smooth. The nearby oak was riddled with holes, but they were big hollows that might be homes for bats. At the thought of bats, her blood ran cold.

All at once, her eyes fixed on a strange shape. Dangling from the limb of the cherry tree was a little box made of wood. One side had a peg sticking out and a door hole the size of a small dandelion. Flory did not know giants well enough to know that they sometimes made houses for birds and hung them in the trees.

Flory stared at the box, head cocked. She sensed that it was empty. It would make a good hiding place: not too small, but not too big. No bat would be able to fit its wings through the door. A twig grew close to the little box. She darted to the end of the twig, clasped her hands around it, and swung downward, feeling with her feet for the wooden peg. When her toes touched it, she stood, balancing like an acrobat.

The box smelled of cedar, which was good—Flory was fussy about smells. The words *A Souvenir from Niagara Falls* were written in a half-moon over the door hole. Flory could not read, but she liked the picture underneath: a blue waterfall surrounded by rainbows. She climbed up, perching on the edge of the door hole. Then she hopped down.

Inside it was pitch-dark, but Flory's eyes were made for the night, and she had no trouble seeing. The floor was littered with twigs, left over from a time when the house held wrens. Flory shoved the twigs into one corner.

All at once she was so tired that her knees felt weak. She knelt down and curled up on her side—fairies do not sleep on their backs because of their wings—and thought about warm things: the breast feathers of a bird, the softness of a mulberry leaf, the nubbins of pussy willow. As she thought of them, her tiny body stopped shivering, and she fell asleep.