




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.

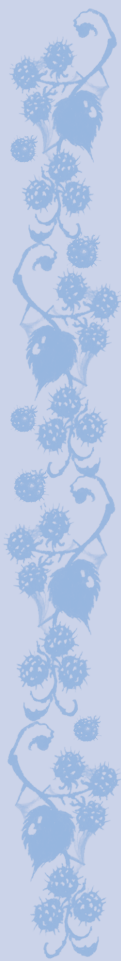
There are those who say that fairies have no troubles, but this is not true. Fairies are magical creatures, but they can be hurt—even killed—when they are young and their magic is not strong. Young fairies have no one to take care of them, because fairies make bad parents. Babies bore them. A fairy godmother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



Chapter Two
Daylight

 Flory slept in the wren house all the next day. When night came, she was awakened by thirst. Her wings ached, and her stomach growled. Trembling, she got to her feet and went to the door.

She stood by the door hole for a long time. Outside the cedar house, the creatures of the night searched for prey. The squeak of a faraway bat made her shiver. Hugging herself, she crept back to her place beside the twigs.

When she woke again, it was morning. Just

as a human person may wake in the middle of the night, a night fairy, if greatly troubled, may wake during the day. Flory blinked. She had never seen anything as blue as the sky outside her door hole.

She staggered to the door. The morning light made her head throb.

The cedar house overlooked a flower bed. A giant—from the smell, it was a giantess—had planted tulips there. They were vast balloons of color: butter yellow, blood red, pink with green stripes. The fountain was splashing in the sunlight, and the water was frothy with bubbles and alive with gaudy orange fish.

The brilliance of the garden made Flory rub her eyes. All the same, the colors thrilled her, making her heart race and her skin tingle. For a moment she forgot the pain of her broken wings. She pulled herself up to sit in the doorway, feet dangling. The wind ruffled the cherry blossoms above her head. She pulled

a cluster of petals nearer and drank the dew off them. Then she gorged herself on pollen, ripping handfuls from the blossoms.

After she had eaten her fill, she sat and gazed at the garden. There were no bats in sight: only butterflies—but they were no danger—and birds. Flory had never seen such noisy and energetic birds. They swooped and lunged from branch to branch, twittering and caroling and swearing at the tops of their lungs. All of them looked huge to Flory, but she knew that most of them ate seeds or small insects, not fairies. She wished she were a day fairy and could live in a world with birds instead of bats.

An idea flew into her head. Flory sat up straight and raised her chin.

“From now on,” she said firmly, “I will be a day fairy.”

Being a day fairy was not easy. Flory had never met a day fairy, and she knew little about their

lives. Day fairies are afraid of giants, and they live in the wild places in the world. Night fairies, on the other hand, have a daredevil streak; they like to see how close they can come to giants without being seen. Even the boldest fairy would not choose to live in a giant's garden, but Flory had no choice. Without wings, she couldn't escape, and she needed the shelter of the cedar house.

She soon found that her body did not like the day. Her skin liked to be cool and moist, not hot and dry. When the shadows fell, her whole body itched with alertness, and she found it hard to sleep. Sunshine made her eyes water, which made her irritable. It is always prettier when fairies are not irritable, but Flory could not help herself. She missed her wings, and she had to make a whole new life for herself, with no one to show her how.

She hauled the twigs out of the wren house and covered the floor with cherry blossoms,



casting a spell over them so they wouldn't wilt. She gathered thin blades of grass and wove them into baskets for the storage of fresh greens. With unskilled hands, she knotted together a dress of cherry blossom so that she could blend in with the flowers on the tree. The day after she finished it, a strong rain came and tore the blossoms away, which made Flory shake her fist at the sky.

She spent a great deal of time sitting on the peg outside her door hole, watching the garden. She noticed that the oak tree drew more birds than any tree in the garden. First one bird, then another, swooped at the tree and darted happily away. When she looked closely, she saw that there was a metal hook in the tree. Dangling from the hook was a clear tube full of seeds. It was this tube that drew the birds. They came to eat the seeds.

Flory shook her head, baffled. Fairies are born knowing certain things, and one of the

things she knew was that seeds come from plants, not from round tubes. All the same, the seeds smelled as if they might be good to eat. Just as she was thinking about the best way to climb down the tree, the door of the great house opened, and the giantess came out.

She was—if Flory had known it—a rather small giantess, but she was the largest creature Flory had ever seen. She had white braids that crisscrossed over her head, and woolly slippers on her feet. She lumbered over to the oak tree and filled the tube with fresh seeds.

Flory watched, holding her breath.

The giantess wandered over to the fishpond. She opened a tall can that had pictures of fish on the side, and sprinkled little sticks on the water. The fish came to the surface, gulping and flicking their tails. The giantess watched them, making cheerful noises. After five minutes or so, she waddled back into the house.

Flory thought about the giantess for a long

time. She knew that giants were supposed to be very terrible, but it was hard to be afraid of anything so old and so slow. She reached behind her back to scratch the scabs on her left wing. She had never been taught to be afraid of bats. The bat people and the night fairies had been at peace for a thousand years.

And yet it was a bat, not a giant, who had taken her wings.

"I'm not afraid of giants," Flory boasted aloud. It sounded so daring that she said it again, swinging her feet. "I'm not a bit afraid of giants. But I hate bats."

It was quite safe to say so, because the bats were all asleep.

"I hate bats," Flory repeated, "I hate, hate, *hate* bats, and I'm always going to hate them."

It seemed like a good decision. Flory lolled back against the side of the house, enjoying the fragrance of onion grass and grape hyacinths. She wondered if the grape hyacinths tasted as

good as they smelled. Tomorrow she would climb down the tree and find out. It would be a long trip, but she was quick and agile, and she didn't have a lazy bone in her body.

She shaded her eyes with her hand and gazed at the thorn apple tree. She admired its long, sharp thorns. If she could break the thorns off the tree, she might be able to make herself a pocketknife or even a dagger. She liked the idea of a dagger. If a bat ever attacked again, she would take out her dagger and stab it to the heart, and then . . .

Flory dozed. The spring day was warm, and she was dreaming of slaying bats. Suddenly the sensing feather on her left wing stirred. Something was nearby— a warm-blooded animal, a large animal. She leaped to her feet.

The squirrel was only inches away. He was huge, almost twice as big as the flying squirrels she had known: a mountain of shaggy fur and sharp claws. Flory knew he ate almost

everything that could be eaten: acorns, nuts, seeds, insects, eggs, baby birds. . . . She saw that his eyes were fixed on her and his nostrils were twitching hungrily.

Fear flashed through her like lightning. Her mouth opened, and she shrieked.

The squirrel leaped aside, startled. In an instant he was halfway down the tree, but Flory went on screaming. "Get away from me!" she shouted. "Don't touch me!" All at once, her mouth was full of words she had never spoken before. As she yelled them, the squirrel jumped straight up in the air as if he had been burned.

"That's right!" Flory cried. "Go away, or I'll sting you again!"

The squirrel tore off across the yard. Flory watched him scramble up the wooden fence and disappear over the top. She put her hands up to her mouth. She was smiling.

"I said a magic spell," she said. She did not know where the words of her spell had come

from, but she was overjoyed. “I can take care of myself.”

She had discovered a new spell, a stinging spell. Fairies are not taught magic as human children are taught the alphabet. Fairies are born with the seeds of spells in their minds. As they grow older, the spells grow too, like the little white teeth that sprout from a baby’s gums. The stinging spell had come to Flory because she was old enough to use it—and because she needed it.

“I like that spell,” said Flory. “I’m never going to forget it. I’ll practice it over and over—and if I ever see a bat again, I’ll sting him until he squeaks.”