

DREAM KEEPERS



MAP TO STARLIGHT HOLLOW

REBECCA LEWIS-OAKES

ILLUSTRATED BY
ANASTASIYA KANAVALIUK



The sound of giggles filled the cafe. Paisley never laughed so hard as when she was with her best friends, Bella, Fatima and Mai.

They usually met in the Sunny Wood town library after school, but it was so busy now after its make-over – *which we helped with*, Paisley thought to herself with a secret smile – that today they were hanging out in Sugar Scoops cafe. There were only two things that made it bearable not to be in their beloved library. First, they didn't have to be quiet, hence the loud laughter. Second,

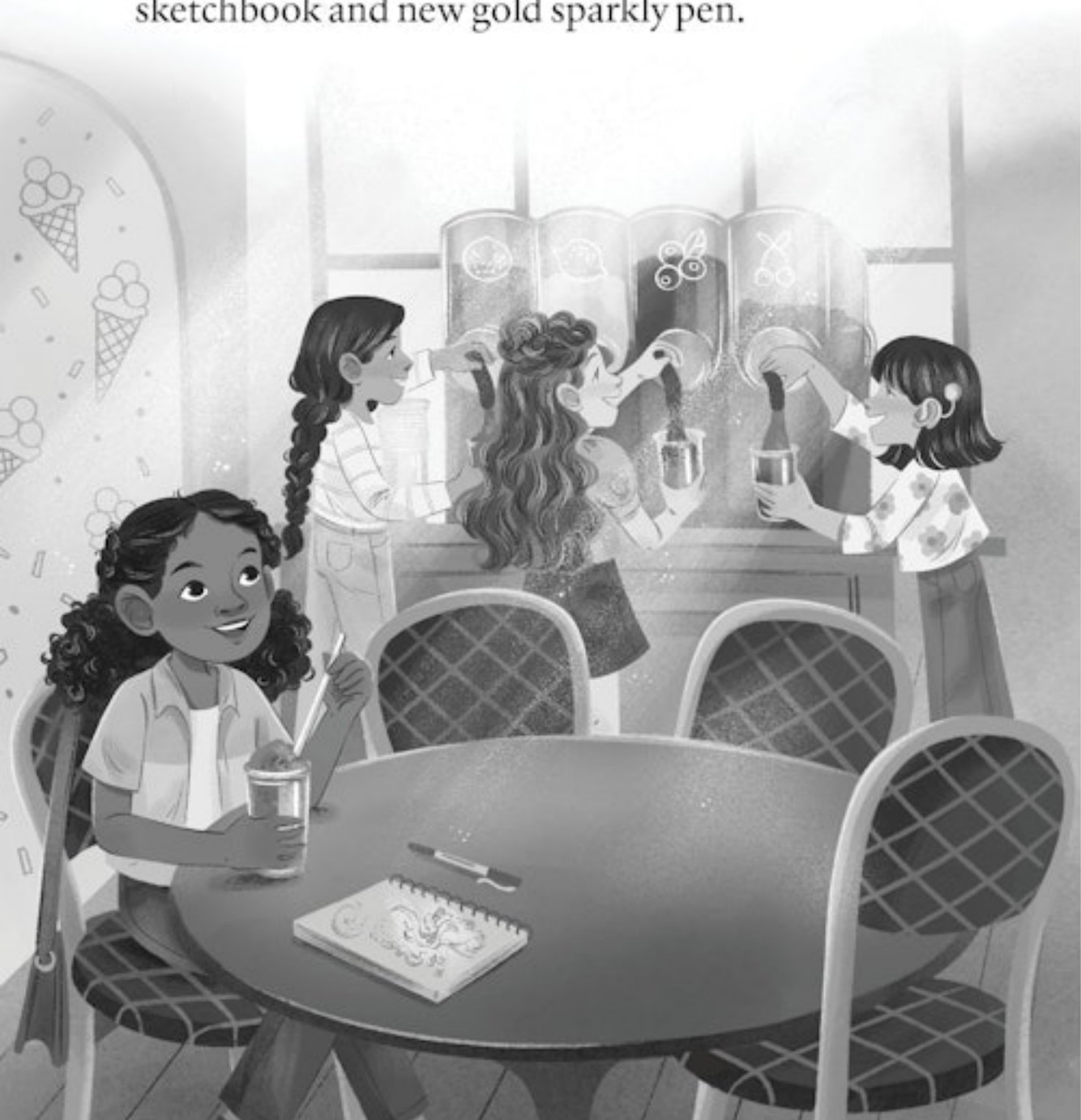
The background features three wavy, horizontal lines in a light gray, textured style. Scattered throughout are small, four-pointed stars and three stylized, five-petaled flowers in a dark gray color. The title 'DREAM KEEPER'S' is centered in a large, black, ornate serif font. The word 'DREAM' is on the top line, and 'KEEPER'S' is on the bottom line, with a large, decorative flourish on the left side of the 'K'.

DREAM KEEPER'S

MAP TO STARLIGHT HOLLOW

the little ice-cream parlour had also had a bit of a glow-up. There was a brand-new slushie station with four different flavours and colours to mix.

Paisley had got herself a bright orange slushie and sat down to sip it. Then she took out her sketchbook and new gold sparkly pen.



Paisley loved to draw. She couldn't remember a time when she wasn't filling pages with her doodles. Every time her family moved to a new place – which was *a lot* due to her dad's job – Paisley's mum would buy her a sketchbook to remember their travels. She had one full of drawings of the Eiffel Tower, croissants and *chocolat chaud* from their time in Paris. Another was packed with Shinto shrines, cherry-blossom trees and sushi from Tokyo. And she even had one brimming with endless white-sand beaches, coconut-milk smoothies and steel-drum bands from the year they'd spent in the Caribbean.

'We're an adventure family!' her parents always said. However, they'd been in Sunny Wood for two whole years now, which was the longest they'd stayed anywhere, and Paisley never wanted to leave.

THE
**DREAM
KEEPERS**
SERIES

SECRETS OF MOON WOOD
MAP TO STARLIGHT HOLLOW
SONG OF MIDNIGHT MEADOW



Look out for more soon!

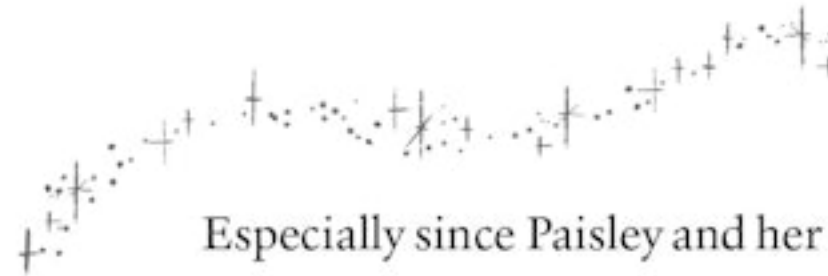
**DREAM
KEEPERS**

MAP TO STARLIGHT HOLLOW

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Especially since Paisley and her friends had a secret.

They were Dream Keepers!

At night, if they put their special token under their pillow, they woke up in Moon Wood – a magical midnight version of Sunny Wood. It was their job to look after the night-time town and to keep the dreams of Sunny Wood's residents sweet.

They'd discovered this when the apothecary shop in Sunny Wood had reopened. Its mysterious owner, Joya, had become a mentor to the girls, as she had once been a Dream Keeper herself.

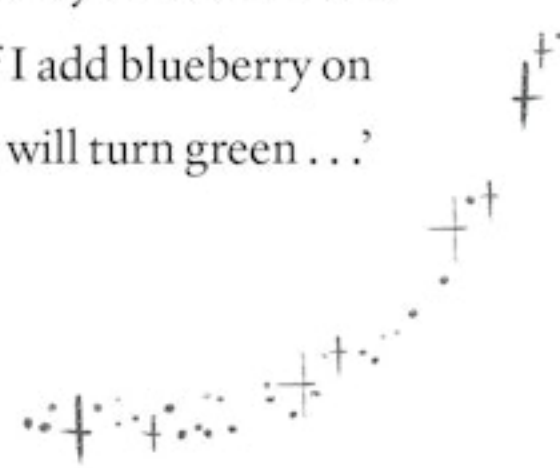
Best of all, each girl had their own Dream Guardian – an animal companion to help them with their work in Moon Wood. Paisley smiled as she found herself sketching her Guardian.

Quill was a jackalope – a rabbit-like creature with beautiful antlers. She and Quill had so much fun together, while they were taking care of the town.

And the work they all did in Moon Wood made a real difference. The Sunny Wood library had been really rundown before the girls had cleared up the Moon Wood library. This was because everything in Moon Wood and Sunny Wood was linked – what happened in one affected the other, meaning that Paisley and her friends had a big responsibility on their hands. But it was great fun too.

Right now in Sunny Wood, her friends were still fixing their own drinks.

'Are we allowed to mix flavours?' asked Bella, pushing the lever to release icy yellow juice into her cup. She tucked a long, curly red lock of hair behind one ear. 'I wonder if I add blueberry on top of the lemon whether it will turn green ...'



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For Madeleine, Theo and Freddie

R. L-O.

For my mom

A. K.

Paisley smiled. Bella always thought very carefully about everything. She loved books and often seemed as though she was daydreaming in one of the adventures she'd read about.



Fatima, on the other hand, was decisive and bold. She knew what she wanted and was never afraid to say it. She flicked her long, dark plait over her shoulder and pointed to the menu. 'It's "all you can drink". If you want a weird lemon-blueberry mix, you go for it.'



The girls watched as Bella took her friend's advice and mixed the slushies. The blue ice began to form a green line in the cup where it met the yellow lemon juice.



'It's working!' said Bella delightedly. Mai giggled and said, 'It's a slushie rainbow!' Then she started singing 'I Can Sing A Rainbow' and waving her arms in the air. Her short, shiny

bobbed hair swished back and forth, her cochlear implant peeking out behind her left ear. Paisley loved how confident Mai was. Mai adored music and drama, whereas Paisley was far too shy to stand on stage with everyone looking at her.

Fatima laughed. 'Can you have a rainbow with only two colours?'

Paisley stopped drawing and pointed her pen at Bella's slushie cup. 'It's actually a two-tone ombre,' she said, 'when it's one colour sort of merging into another.'

'I love that! "Ombre",' said Mai. 'Although *I can sing an ombre* doesn't rhyme as well.' She poured herself a half-cup of blueberry ice and topped it with cherry-red slushie, then took a sip. 'Mmm, but it tastes great!'

'Is that the Dream Tree you're drawing, Paisley? It's gorgeous!' said Fatima, sitting down

with her own lemon–orange drink that looked like a sunrise.

Paisley blushed. ‘Yes, this is my Moon Wood sketchbook,’ she said. ‘And I found this gold pen, which is just perfect for the Dream Essence, so I’ve been drawing the tree over and over again.’

The Dream Tree was the source of all the magic in Moon Wood, and it connected the dream town to Sunny Wood. It grew right out of the Moon Wood apothecary and there was a mini version in Joya’s Sunny Wood shop. When it bloomed, its flowers released golden Dream Essence – the magic that created sweet dreams.

Bella’s jaw dropped when she saw the drawing. ‘You’re so talented!’

Paisley blushed again. ‘It’s just practice,’ she said modestly.

‘It is not!’ said Mai, slurping her slushie.

‘You’re amazing – but the Dream Tree is a pretty magical subject, I’ll give you that!’

Paisley smiled. When they’d first arrived, Moon Wood had been overgrown and uncared for – it had been a long time since any Dream Keepers had been called to the magical town. The Dream Tree didn’t even have leaves, let alone the sparkingly beautiful flowers that now covered it. But when the four girls had started caring for the wood again, it came back to life, fuelled by the power of their friendship.

At that moment, the cafe owner, Portia, came to clear a table nearby.

‘Enjoying the slushies, girls?’ she asked. She had super-long braids, like Paisley’s mum had,



but she wore six hoop earrings in each ear and a nose ring, which her mum definitely didn't have. Portia pointed to Paisley's sketchbook. 'Ooh, I love that tree! I was thinking of getting something beautiful designed on the wall over there. Do you think you could paint it big, like a mural?'

Paisley's eyes nearly popped out of her head. 'What, me?' she squeaked. 'Paint a mural? Here?'

Portia laughed. 'Why not? Think about it,' she said as she headed back to the counter.

Bella clapped with joy. 'Paisley, you have to do it! That would be so cool!'

'Maybe we'd all get free slushies for life if you did!' said Mai, slurping the dregs of her drink. 'Ouch, brain freeze!' she giggled.

The friends were wowed by the idea of leaving their mark on Sugar Scoops in Sunny Wood. Full of excitement, they discussed designs for Paisley

to use as they finished their drinks.

Still chatting about how to paint a giant Dream Tree, Paisley and her friends said goodbye to Portia, and the Sugar Scoops doorbell tinkled as they left the cafe to go home.

Mai spun round and blew the girls a kiss. Then, with a huge wink, she said, 'See you tonight! Sweet dreams!'

Paisley waved and said 'Sweet dreams!' to her friends. It was what they always said when they planned to put their magical tokens under their pillows before they went to sleep, so they could meet up in Moon Wood.

Paisley smiled and hugged her sketchbook tight as she headed down the lane to her house. She might have travelled to lots of cool places, but her friends made Sunny Wood the best place she'd ever lived!





Paisley was still humming 'I Can Sing A Rainbow' as she put her key in the front door. She was about to call out 'I'm home!' but heard loud noises from down the hall, so she took off her shoes and tiptoed towards the kitchen.

'We can't tell them yet – it's not finalised,' her mum was saying.

A pot clanged on the stove and the kettle whistled as it boiled. Paisley wondered what wasn't finalised. Did her parents have a surprise for her and her brother?

Brandon's birthday *was* coming up. Maybe Mum and Dad were going to take them to the amusement park after all. Brandon was adamant he was tall enough for the biggest roller coasters now and he was desperate to go on every ride.

'They'll be excited, though. They love moving!'

Dad replied. 'It's all a big adventure.'

'*You* love moving,' Mum countered. 'And I'm proud of you for getting promoted, but we need to take a minute to decide how to tell them.'

Dad chuckled and Paisley could hear him give Mum a kiss. 'You're right. We'll sort out a proper plan and then we can tell them.'

Paisley couldn't move her feet even if she tried. She was frozen, stuck stock still.

Move?



Leave Sunny Wood?

Paisley didn't know what to do. She couldn't tell her parents that she'd been eavesdropping. But she also couldn't unhear what she'd just heard.

Suddenly the kitchen door creaked, jolting Paisley out of her shock. She ran as quickly and quietly as she could upstairs.

What was she going to do?

Paisley worried about it all evening. At dinner, when Mum asked why she was so quiet, she shrugged it off. She daren't say anything in case she blurted out what she'd overheard. She couldn't even concentrate on drawing. And, worst of all, Paisley was so distracted that at bedtime she forgot to put her pressed white rose token under her pillow, and slept fitfully throughout the night instead of meeting her friends in Moon Wood.



Fatima

Paisley! Where were you last night?

Mai

Yeah! We missed you!

Bella

Quill missed you too

Paisley

...

Mai

Helloooo? Are you there???

Paisley

...

Bella

Paisley, are you OK? Are you coming to Joya's after school?

Paisley

I can't believe it! I was so tired I forgot to put my token under my pillow! Can't wait to hear about what you got up to!

Bella

OK, phew, see you soon x

Paisley chewed her lip as she closed her messages. She wasn't *technically* lying – she *had* forgotten, just not for that exact reason.

But she didn't know what to say. How could

she tell her friends she might be leaving?

As Paisley brushed her teeth, she told herself that nothing was decided. Maybe they wouldn't even move. However, they had lived here for longer than anywhere before and her parents were probably itching to try somewhere new... She spat out her toothpaste and looked sternly at herself in the mirror.

Stop worrying. Just focus on school and go to Joya's afterwards and have a good time...

Despite her best efforts, though, concentrating at school was tricky and nothing in the apothecary could distract Paisley. Bella, Mai and Fatima were all engrossed in planning a berry garden for their Dream Guardians. Anything they placed under their pillow before they went to sleep would appear with them in Moon Wood and there were plenty of seeds in Joya's apothecary to look at.

While her friends debated what they were going to plant, Paisley nestled into the cosy window seat and buried herself in her sketchbook. She was trying to capture the miniature Dream Tree, the one that grew under a glass case on Joya's counter.

'Do you think Onyx would like cloudberry as a treat?' Fatima asked as she looked through seed packets on a shelf by the window.

'What even are cloudberry?' said Mai, also rifling through packs. 'Ooh, huckleberry – they sound fun!'

Bella nodded, running a finger down the page of a book called *More-ish Morsels in Moon Wood*. 'It says here that wolves eat wild blueberry in our world and cloudberry are similar, so, yeah, I bet Onyx would like them.'

Mai twirled. 'Pais, are you getting anything for Quill? Paisley? . . . Paisley!' Mai waved a hand in front of her friend's face and Paisley finally looked up.

Before Paisley could answer, a rattling of beads announced Joya's entrance. 'Hello, girls!'





The apothecary owner bustled through the green beaded curtain with a flourish, smiling as usual, her grey-streaked curly hair piled on top of her head in a purple scarf.

She went over to the seeds drawer with a big smile. 'If you sprinkle a bit of Dream Essence on the seeds, they'll grow even quicker.'

Paisley tried hard to focus on her sketch, but she kept getting the perspective wrong, because every time her friends mentioned Moon Wood it made her want to cry. Especially since she'd missed out on a trip last night. What if she didn't have many visits left?

The pen became scratchy on the page. Paisley looked at the nib, then shook it. Sometimes the ink needed help to run. Nothing about the drawing was going right today.

'Paisley! Earth to Paisley!' Mai waved a seed



packet. 'I said, will Quill like these?'

Paisley tried to recall what Mai had been saying before she'd caught Paisley's attention. 'Umm, yeah. I'm sure Quill will like poisonberries.'

That made Mai laugh. 'Not *poison*! *Boysenberries*!'

The other girls laughed too, but Paisley just kept trying to draw the Dream Tree while they went back to talking about seeds.

Then the ink ran out completely!

'Urgh. Stupid pen!' She slammed the pen down onto the page in frustration.

Mai put up her hands. 'Whoa, Pais! You can get another pen.'

'It's not just the pen,' said Paisley, biting her lip. She didn't want to cry.

Bella came over and put an arm around

Paisley's shoulders. 'What's up?' she asked kindly. 'You've not been yourself today.'

'Yeah, did you *really* forget to come to Moon Wood last night?' said Fatima, raising an eyebrow.

'You didn't go last night, Paisley?' Joya looked shocked.

Mai shook her head. 'And it wasn't as sparkly without her,' she added.

Paisley's lips wobbled – she really didn't want to worry them.

Luckily, Joya seemed to notice her discomfort and changed the subject. 'That's exactly like the Dream Tree, Paisley. It looks so happy – you girls must have been working hard in Moon Wood,' she said.

Her compliment cheered Paisley up a little, but as her gaze met Joya's kind eyes, she felt her lips wobble again. Joya sensed this too, and carried on.

'Actually, I was going to ask for your help with an important task, Paisley!' she said, disappearing behind the counter, where she rummaged for a minute before popping back up and smiling.

Joya held out an old parchment scroll, shaking it teasingly from side to side. Then she unrolled it and smoothed it out on the countertop.

Paisley got up and went over to look closer, grateful for the distraction. As she took in what was on the scroll, she couldn't help but let out an 'Ooh!'

'It's a Moon Wood map!' she said.



In the very centre of the parchment was an ink line drawing of the Moon Wood town square, surrounded by a few trees and then lots of smudges towards the dark edge of the paper. It looked like a storybook map, not like a geography one.

Fatima peered over her shoulder. 'Only the town square has labels. What are all the faded areas?' she asked.

Joya smiled and shrugged. 'That's what I need you to find out,' she said. 'It's been years since someone drew this . . . since the last time there were Dream Keepers in the wood. You can see how faded it is. Each set of Dream Keepers must explore the town and surrounding woods, then draw the map anew. So much changes in Moon Wood, and . . .'

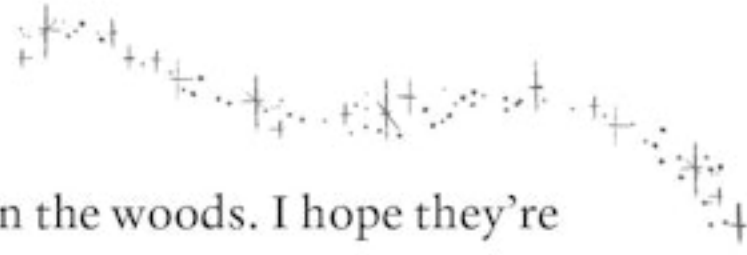
'And what?' Mai asked excitedly. But Joya's face was solemn.

She sighed and spoke again. 'Well, I'm afraid it's important to check where the Dream World now ends and the Nightmare Realm begins. The Dark Queen will be lurking in the shadows.'

Moon Wood wasn't only the source of sweet dreams for the residents of Sunny Wood. A terrible Dark Queen lived there too, spreading nightmares. When Paisley and her friends had restored the Dream Tree, they'd also awoken the Dark Queen.

Fatima scoffed. 'But we sent her away! We fought her off from the library, remember?'

Paisley shivered. The lightning-storm battle had been a dramatic and dangerous night in Moon Wood. The Dark Queen herself had appeared, a terrifying shadow figure in the sky, but the power of the girls' friendship had banished her – or so they thought.



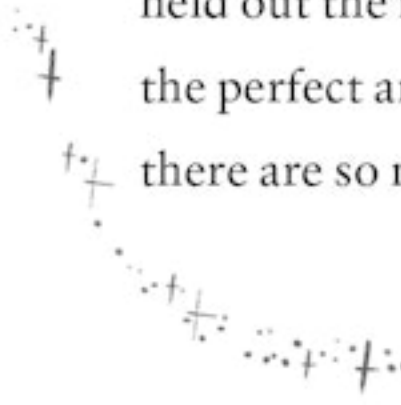
Joya's eyebrows raised at Fatima's words. 'She might be gone for now, but she always finds her way back. The entire wood needs your protection . . . the Dream Tree's protection.'

'How do we do that?' asked Bella.

'I can't tell you everything, I'm afraid,' said Joya. 'Some things you have to work out for yourselves. The magic might have changed since my time in the woods anyway! But I promise you have everything you need to spread light in Moon Wood. Start with the map. It needs a little -'

'Pizzazz?' suggested Mai, flipping her short hair back, breaking the tension and making everyone laugh.

'Pizzazz would be great,' said Joya, then she held out the map to Paisley. 'And I think I know the perfect artist to make that happen. Oh, there are so many more exciting places for you



girls to discover in the woods. I hope they're still there!'

Paisley smiled for the first time since they'd entered the shop. The map was beautiful but patchy. She loved the idea of putting her own spin on it. The miniature drawings were really accurate and tidy. Everything from the library to the fountain and cafe in Moon Wood town square were there, but the area around it had lots of smudges that faded to dark grey at the edges.

'Will you redraw the map, Paisley?' asked Joya. 'With all your help, of course,' she said to the others.

Paisley nodded, smiling shyly. 'I'd love to.'

Joya took a sharp intake of breath. 'I just hope these shadows haven't made it too far into the woods. The Nightmare Realm needs to stay at the

edge of the wood. Only the four of you can stop it overtaking Moon Wood, and keep the Dream Tree safe. '

The girls all nodded. They knew how serious the Dark Queen's threat was.

In fact, Paisley was so determined to get started that she'd forgotten all about her earlier worries. Her fingers were itching to take hold of the map.

'May I keep it?' she asked Joya.

'Of course!' Joya laughed. 'And take it into Moon Wood with you tonight. Once you reactivate it there, it will be yours and you can draw all over it. I hope you girls use it to have wonderful adventures. And as you explore, say hi to Aurora, my nightingale Guardian, if you see her.'

Joya packaged up their seeds, then bade a cheery goodbye to the four friends. Paisley smiled

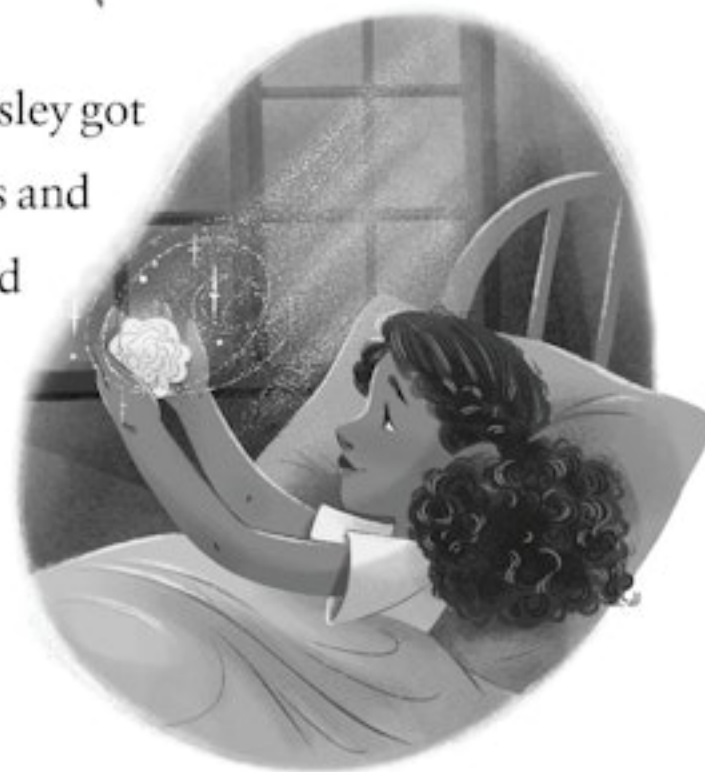
all the way home. She couldn't wait to see Quill tonight and tell her all about their new project.

But that thought set Paisley's lips quivering again.

If her parents really did make them move away, how much time would she have left to explore Moon Wood? Would she even be here long enough to complete the important task of drawing the map?



Later that night, Paisley got under her bed covers and picked up the pressed white rose that she kept on her bedside table. She raised it to the moonbeam



shining through her curtains. For a second, she considered putting it back on the bedside table. It was almost too painful to think about this being one of her last trips to Moon Wood. But then she thought about not seeing Quill for a second night, and slipped the rose and the map under her pillow.

Bella

Sweet dreams, everyone!

Mai

Can't wait to see you all soon!

Fatima

Don't forget the map, Paisley.
Or your token – ha ha!

Paisley

Got them ready! Sweet
dreams . . .



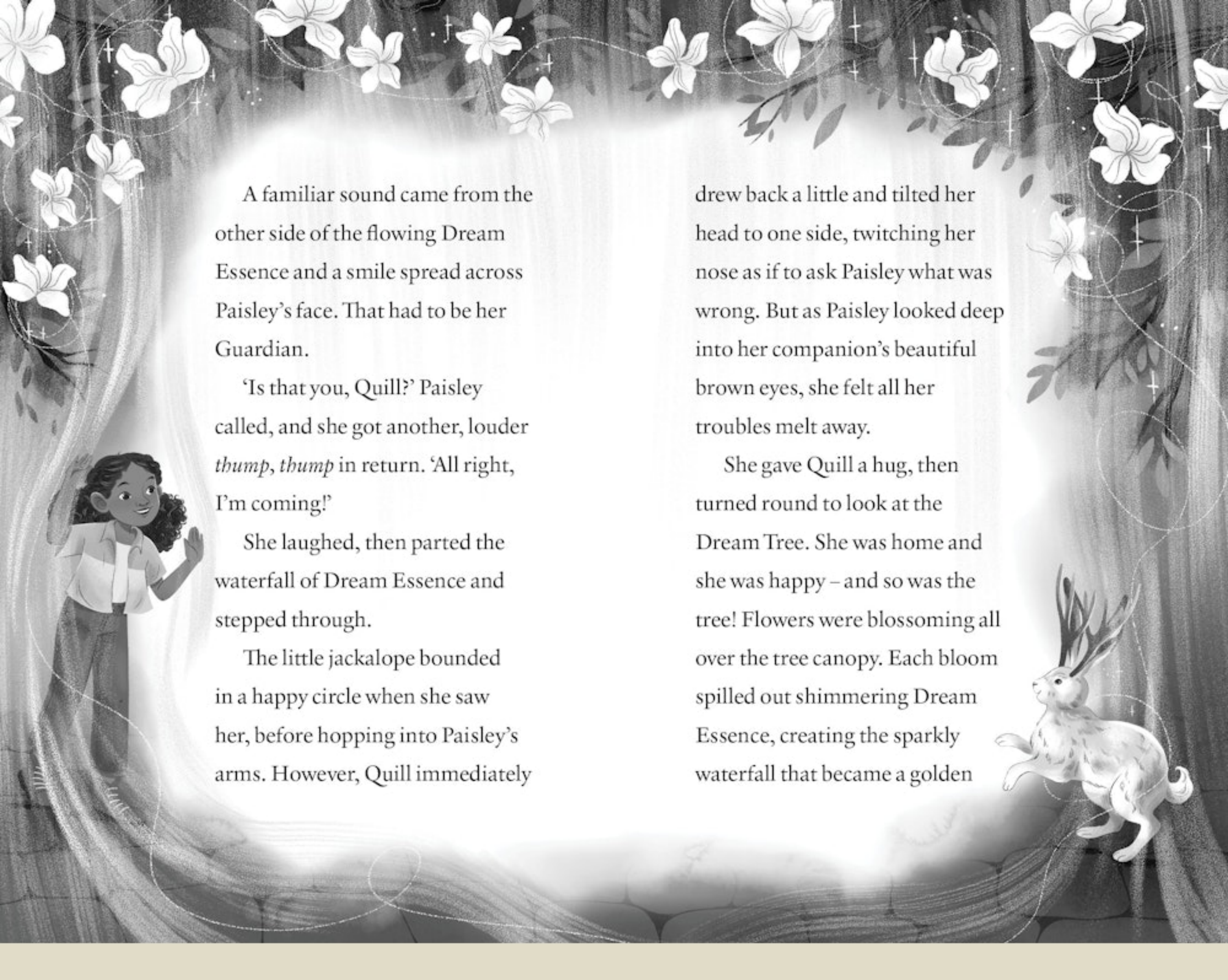
Paisley stirred in her sleep. The air smelled crisp, cool and full of possibility, just like it always did in Moon Wood.

Then, she opened her eyes to a waterfall of gold glitter. *How strange!*

She was also sitting on something knobbly and uncomfortable. She looked down and saw tree roots.

She was underneath the Dream Tree – and it was flowering more than ever before!

Thump, thump.



A familiar sound came from the other side of the flowing Dream Essence and a smile spread across Paisley's face. That had to be her Guardian.

'Is that you, Quill?' Paisley called, and she got another, louder *thump, thump* in return. 'All right, I'm coming!'

She laughed, then parted the waterfall of Dream Essence and stepped through.

The little jackalope bounded in a happy circle when she saw her, before hopping into Paisley's arms. However, Quill immediately

drew back a little and tilted her head to one side, twitching her nose as if to ask Paisley what was wrong. But as Paisley looked deep into her companion's beautiful brown eyes, she felt all her troubles melt away.

She gave Quill a hug, then turned round to look at the Dream Tree. She was home and she was happy – and so was the tree! Flowers were blossoming all over the tree canopy. Each bloom spilled out shimmering Dream Essence, creating the sparkly waterfall that became a golden



stream, flowing across the cobbled town square towards the woods.

‘It’s more magical than ever!’ Mai cried as she appeared in the square, across from Paisley.

Paisley’s fingers itched for her sketchbook and pencil, and instantly they appeared, as dreamed things always did in Moon Wood. Quill hopped over to greet Mai, then turned to look back at Paisley. The scene was so cute that Paisley simply had to sit down and draw it all quickly. Quill had

such a playful, expressive face, and Mai was framed by giant bluebells, almost big enough to be hats, and enormous daisy

flowers bending like an arch over her head. The square was illuminated by a soft glow of moonlight, and fireflies danced all around.

Then Paisley heard a loud purr and Crystal,



Mai’s silver-furred lynx Guardian, slinked out from the woods. Paisley smiled and added her to the sketch with a few quick pencil strokes.

Bella appeared next, from behind the Dream Tree waterfall, giggling and covered in Dream Essence.

‘Wow!’ she said. ‘The Dream Tree looks incredible! Joya was right – it must be happy.’

Paisley felt a light breeze and looked up. Bella’s white pegasus, Skye, swooped down from over the turreted library, her pink wings fanning them all as she landed gently on the cobbles.

Bella gave Paisley a hug and said, ‘I’m so glad you’re here tonight.’ Then she grabbed Paisley’s hand and pulled her over to the steps to see Skye.

The library was more beautiful than ever, with sweet-scented jasmine and clematis plants climbing up the spiral staircase on one corner.

The almost-full moon shone behind the roof, and plenty of stars looked down on them.

Awooooo!

Onyx, Fatima's ink-black wolf, howled from the edge of the woods. The sound made a kaleidoscope of butterflies fly up and flutter across the square towards the girls.

Paisley laughed and gently moved to the side as a fat bumblebee buzzed past her to the flowers climbing the library.

'Fatima will be here soon too – don't worry, Onyx!' And, as she spoke, Fatima indeed appeared right next to them.

'How am I the last? I went to bed super early tonight!' said Fatima, before running over excitedly to give Onyx a hug.

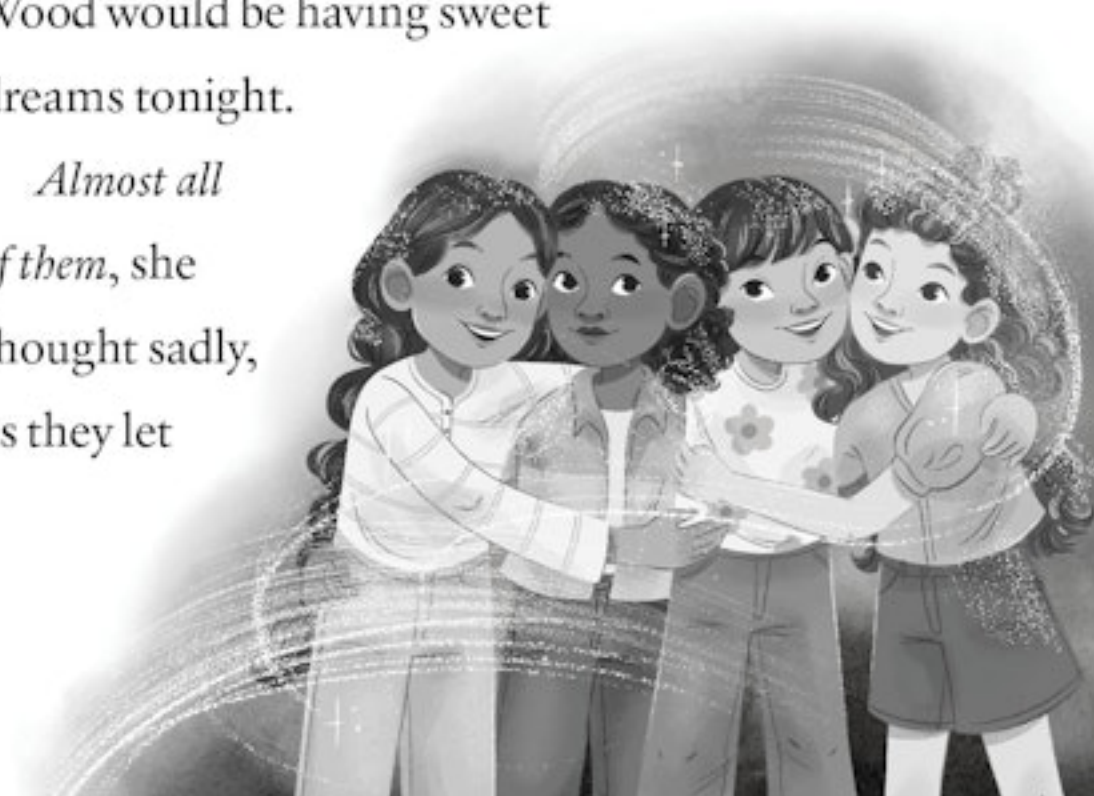
'We were just saying how happy the Dream Tree looks,' said Bella. 'Our hard work is paying off!'

Quill started jumping in and out of the waterfall of glitter from the Dream Tree, and the other Guardians copied her. The Dream Essence coated them with a dusting of sparkle. Mai pulled her friends into a big hug as they watched their animal companions enjoy themselves.

'I think it's us all being together as well,' said Mai. 'We're so happy you're back, Paisley. And Moon Wood is too.'

Paisley sighed happily and thought of how happy the plants and creatures of Moon Wood seemed to be, and how the residents of Sunny Wood would be having sweet dreams tonight.

Almost all of them, she thought sadly, as they let



go of their hug, then she shook her head. She was determined not to think about her potential move. Tonight, all she wanted was to enjoy the woods with her best friends.

Sensing that she was glum, Quill nudged her furry antlers under Paisley's arm.

Paisley stepped aside. 'That tickles,' she said, but Quill kept nudging until Paisley giggled. Her Dream Guardian was always there for her – she loved that about Quill.

'Did you bring the map?' asked Bella, turning to Paisley.

'Of course!' Paisley reached into her pocket and held it up.

The map seemed extra magical and shimmery in the moonlight. It still had the simple line drawings but now . . .

'Wow, it's moving!' exclaimed Mai, peering closer.

Sure enough, on the parchment, the leaves on the Dream Tree were wafting gently, and the golden waterfall had appeared.

'That wasn't there before!' said Fatima.

Paisley eagerly sat down on the cobbles and spread the map out, her friends gathering to look.

'Here's the town square. Is that the butterfly glade?' said Mai as a tiny illustrated butterfly flitted across the other drawings.

Bella clapped her hands in delight. 'Of course the map is even more magical in Moon Wood!' she said. Then: 'Oh.'

'What?' asked Mai.

'*They're* moving too.' Bella pointed to the dark outline of the map, where the shadowy borders that represented the Dark Queen's Nightmare Realm crept in. They smoked and swirled.





pointing to Starlight Hollow on the map.

All three Dream Keepers watched, shocked, as shadows crept into the glade and a shape emerged within them. The shape of a crown.

Bella looked up and met her friends' fearful gazes. 'The Dark Queen's there too.'

'Paisley *has* been captured!' said Fatima, her voice breaking.

Just then, the girls heard Aurora's beautiful song, and the golden bird swooped in to land on the cobbles. She was pecking at the ground.

'Aurora!' said Mai. 'It's terrible! Paisley's been captured!'

But Aurora ignored them, pecking at a cobblestone until it shifted. The Dream Essence river ran in a trickle around it, creating a second, smaller stream. Fatima watched with interest.

Thump, thump, thump.

Quill had dashed across the square and was now stomping the ground impatiently at the stile to the rosebush tunnel, where the main Dream Essence river flowed.

Bella shook her head. 'Sorry, Quill, she's not that way – that river leads to the waterfall. If we want to find Paisley, we have to follow the other path, through the wildflower meadow,' she said.

'Come on!' cried Mai. 'Starlight Hollow is miles away – let's start now!'

'No – look!' said Fatima, tracing a line on the

map. 'The waterfall and Starlight Hollow are actually really close and there's a . . . um, a . . . Is that a dam?'

Quill hopped in an excited circle. Fatima was right.

'I have a plan,' said Fatima.

'I have a plan too,' said Mai urgently. 'My plan is run to Starlight Hollow and free our friend from the Dark Queen's clutches! Why are you all taking so long? Let's go!'

But Crystal, Onyx and Skye went to join Quill. Even Aurora flew over to land on Skye's shoulder. The Guardians were in agreement – they had to go this way.

Fatima smiled at her friends. 'Don't worry – my plan is also to free Paisley. Follow Quill!'



Bella, Mai and Fatima hugged their Guardians tight, then set off along the Dream Essence river to help their friend. And banish the Dark Queen. Again.

Mai's teeth chattered. Fatima gave her a hug, but Mai shook her head.

'Thanks, but I'm not cold,' she said. 'I'm just scared.'

Fatima kept her arm around Mai's shoulder. 'Me too. But we defeated the Dark Queen before and we can do it again,' she said firmly.

Bella crossed her fingers. 'Maybe she's not even there. Maybe the map is wrong,' she said hopefully, but Skye whinnied in response.

Bella sighed. 'OK, the map is magic, and Moon Wood magic is never wrong,' she said. 'Fatima's right too, though: we can banish the Queen again.'

'Are you sure this is a good plan?' asked Mai.

All at the same time, Skye whinnied, Crystal and Onyx growled, and Quill stopped to stare hard at Mai.

Fatima laughed. 'They agree, see? Come on – all for one and one for all.'

Aurora and Quill led the way. The Dream Guardians stuck even closer to the three friends than usual as they all charged down the rose tunnel, following the path of the Dream Essence. It was a horrid feeling to know that they could be separated in this wood.

'Why would Paisley go off on her own like this, especially when we said we'd stay together?' Mai asked.



The other girls shrugged, also trying to figure it out.

Soon, they reached a point along the path where the river now split into two. One stream was flowing towards the waterfall, and the other was trying to head in the direction of Starlight Hollow, but – as Fatima had said – there was a dam blocking it. Dream Essence pooled up against it, flooding the ground in front of them, but unable to flow through.

Bella and Mai crouched down.

‘Why are you crouching?’ asked Fatima.

Bella whispered, ‘I’m scared of the Dark Queen.’

Mai whispered too. ‘I just crouched because Bella did.’

Fatima rolled her eyes. ‘We can do this, girls,’ she said. ‘Joya always says we have everything we need to spread light in Moon Wood. We have to

do it. To keep Sunny Wood safe. To keep Paisley safe.’

She held out one hand and the others put theirs on top of it. ‘Let’s go and save Paisley!’ they said together.

‘Do you hear that?’ Fatima said, moving further off the path, past the dam. She beckoned the others to follow, and the girls and their Guardians peeked past a hawthorn bush and into the glade beyond.

They’d arrived at Starlight Hollow, at least the map said so. Even in the palest moonlight they could usually see their way in Moon Wood, but tonight it seemed as though the shadows were pressing in on them.

‘It’s so dark,’ said Mai.

‘I can hardly see anything,’ said Bella. ‘Are you sure Paisley’s here?’

Fatima nodded and showed them the map. The golden trail following Paisley stopped right under her finger, beside to the 'Starlight Hollow' label. Next to it was the large, dark crown.

A cackle echoed through the air.

'There's our answer!' whispered Mai. Then: 'Over there!'

In the shadows they could make out a shape – no, two shapes.

One was Paisley with her trademark big curls. The other figure wore a sharp, glittering crown. The Dark Queen.

She was tall, her robes whipping around her in the cold wind. She looked like the eye of a storm, cackling and raising her arms up to the sky.

'I've got you now! One Keeper down, three to go,' she sneered. 'You're more foolish than I thought, to have fallen for my trick so easily. Now

that I've got you, I will keep you here in Moon Wood. That will stop your silly happy magic flowing back into Sunny Wood. And my nightmares will take over once again and stop all those pathetic "sweet dreams" from rising. Get ready to go to sleep here. For *ever*.'

Bella, Mai and Fatima looked at each other.

'Does she mean *just* sleep or . . . *something else*?' asked Bella.



‘I don’t know, but it sounds really, really bad,’ said Mai. ‘What’s your plan, Fatima?’

‘We need to act quickly,’ Fatima said, then she whispered her plan to her friends and the Guardians. When she finished, they looked disbelieving but determined to try. ‘Remember – if we dream it, we can do it,’ Fatima told them.

Hurrying back to the dam, the girls dreamed up some tools to help loosen the sticks, and Onyx, Crystal and Skye began nudging boulders and branches out of the path of the Dream Essence river.

Fatima gave Quill a hug. ‘Good luck!’ she whispered, as the jackalope scurried off through the foggy undergrowth to the Starlight Hollow to carry out her part of the plan. Aurora flew with her over the tree canopy to keep watch.

Now it was time to free the river, like Aurora

had showed them with the cobblestone back in the square.



Paisley struggled against the shadow vines that bound her legs to a tree, but pushing at their cold strength only made them wind tighter around her ankles.

Wraith had flapped out of her arms and landed on the Dark Queen’s outstretched hand.

‘Well done, my pet,’ she said, stroking the creature, then she turned her attention back to Paisley. ‘Where’s your silly little horned bunny now? None of your animals are a match for me.’

‘Quill is the bravest and best Guardian ever. She’s a jackalope, not a *silly little horned bunny*, and she’s coming for me. You’ll see!’ shouted Paisley, desperately hoping she was right.

‘She’s not here, though, is she? Your “Guardian”. Not guarding you very well – but then why would she? You’re the one who let me back into Moon Wood.’

Paisley’s eyes snapped up to meet the queen’s, shocked and confused by her words.

The Dark Queen smirked. ‘Oh yes, you did this. When you fell from the waterfall and landed so close to my realm, your sadness and loneliness called to me. I answered you – did you hear?’

Paisley remembered the horrible thoughts she’d had on the ledge next to the waterfall, waiting for Skye to rescue her. So it *had* been the Dark Queen in her mind, feeding on her worries.

‘Your pathetic whining gave me a great energy boost. Now I shall retake what’s truly mine,’ said the wicked queen.

Paisley’s heart sank. It was all her fault – her

worries, which she’d kept bottled up all week, had allowed the Dark Queen in.

What’s going to happen now? Paisley wondered. What did the Dark Queen mean when she said she’d keep Paisley here in Moon Wood? Would she see her friends again? And her family? Paisley didn’t want to move house, but she definitely didn’t want to leave her family! And if she stayed for ever in Moon Wood, would that really mean constant nightmares for everyone in Sunny Wood?

The vines tightened and Paisley felt one start to creep up her leg. A cold, slimy sadness dropped down through her chest.

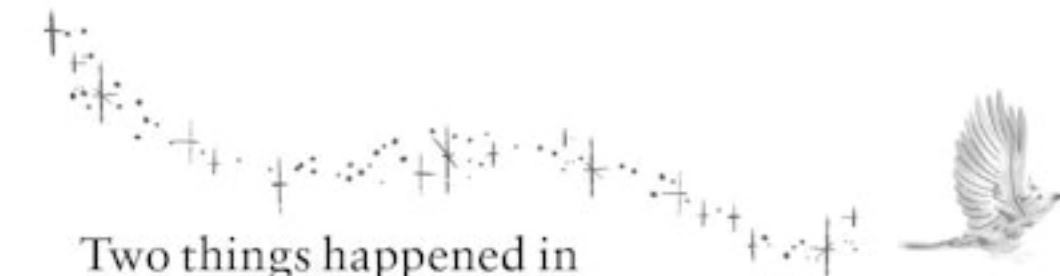


But wait, she thought. *That's what the Dark Queen said drew her to me.* Paisley had to think happy thoughts if she wanted to weaken the Dark Queen's power.

If only her friends were with her! They always had happy thoughts. What if she never saw them again? Paisley blinked her eyes, hard. She *had* to get rid of these sad thoughts but it was as if the Dark Queen's presence was making them harder to fight. If only she could draw something to calm herself down!

She nervously put her hand in her pocket, desperate for something to cling onto, and her fingertips tingled. Uh-oh, was that more dark magic?

But the thing in her pocket was solid, like a little toy or model. Paisley smiled when she realised what it was. Her little Dream Essence house!



Two things happened in that moment. First, Paisley heard birdsong and saw a flash of gold. At the same time, bursting out of the trees from across the glade, a pair of little antlers bobbed through the long grass.

‘Quill!’ Paisley yelled, then: ‘No! Stay back!’

She couldn't let her Guardian bound right into the Dark Queen's clutches!

‘Come here,’ cackled the Dark Queen, and a shadowy vine shot out from the undergrowth surrounding Starlight Hollow. It curled around Quill and lifted her high in the air, as if she was an aerial acrobat.

‘Quill, are the others here too? Send them away! Don't let them come to the Queen!’ Paisley cried out desperately.

‘Too late,’ called Fatima from behind a tree.



Paisley's heart leaped into her throat as she saw her three best friends step into the clearing, holding hands. Even through the pressing shadows, her heart flooded with joy to see Skye with them. But where were Onyx and Crystal? Paisley could only hope that they were safe.

'Are you OK?' Bella shouted.

'I'm caught in vines! Please – go back!' Paisley pleaded. 'I shouldn't have come here by myself. I don't want to get you in danger too!'

'Quiet!' ordered the Dark Queen, and vines shot up around Paisley's shoulders and mouth.

'*Mmf mmff!*' Paisley couldn't speak, but she saw her three friends look each other in the eyes and smile. They weren't abandoning her. They were going to take on the Dark Queen, together.

This incensed the evil sorceress. 'Stay back!' she shrieked, and sent out more of her wicked vines.

'Paisley, we need the moon!' called Bella.

Recalling the battle at the library, Paisley remembered they'd needed to let the moon shine in to activate the Dream Essence to its highest power. Her friends clearly had a plan, but they needed this last part to make it work.

'Think happy thoughts!' yelled Mai.

'I will not let you defeat me!' screeched the Dark Queen.

A racket of flapping burst through the woods. Bats streamed overhead. Quill struggled against her vines. The girls ducked down, but they didn't move from their spot. Skye whinnied and flew

straight through the flock, scattering the bats.

Paisley watched as her friends bravely stood against the Dark Queen and love rose in her heart.

I don't know about wishes . . . but dreams can come true . . . Joya's words came into Paisley's mind.

Paisley couldn't speak, but she felt the Dream Essence house in her pocket. She thought about home and her friends, and all their care and hard work in Moon Wood. She thought about how much she loved Quill, and her family, and her life by day in Sunny Wood. She let those happy thoughts burst out of her.

Suddenly the sky was awash with bright moonlight, in time for a golden wave to ripple through the trees and pour into the glade.

Sparkling Dream Essence flooded Starlight Hollow, with Onyx and Crystal riding the wave.

The Dark Queen shrieked in terror, but she was powerless to hold back the power of the magical stream. She flew up into the sky, in a rage.

Paisley gasped as the golden sparkles reached her. Instantly, the vines binding her faded away and she was free.

She took the Dream Essence house out of her pocket and squeezed it. The Dream Keepers' bravery had reminded her of the power of friendship, which was needed to combat the Dark Queen. Knowing that they'd risked so much for her tonight, Paisley was certain that she, Bella, Mai and Fatima would be friends for ever, no matter where she lived.

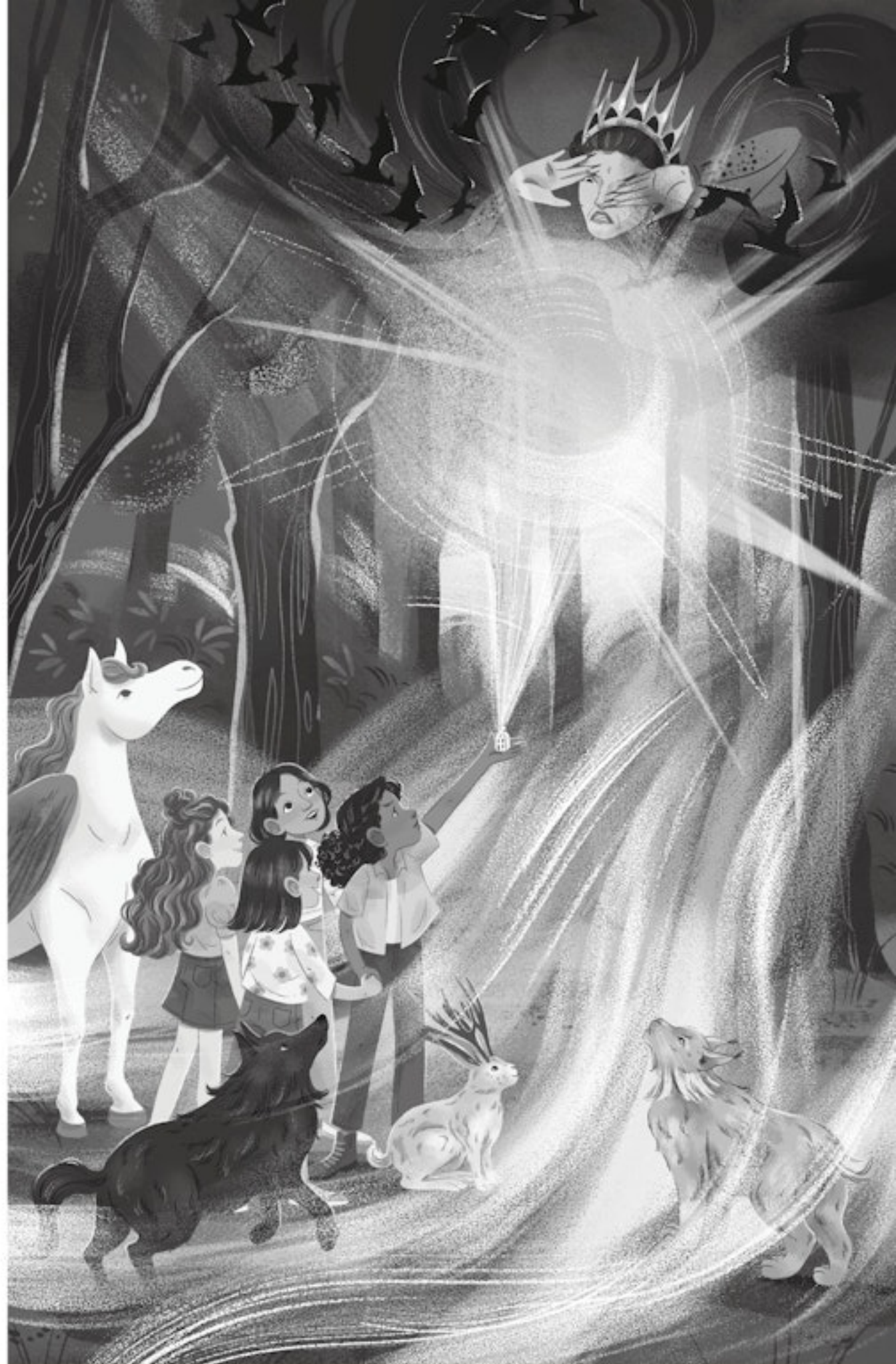
Great friendships are the gift of a lifetime, Joya had said – and, as always, she was right.

Paisley raised her Dream Essence house towards the Dark Queen, who was suspended in the sky.

‘I believe in our dream of Moon Wood,’ Paisley declared. ‘Not your nightmare vision.’

Quill’s vines were dissolved by the Dream Essence as it flooded through the glade and she bounded over to be reunited with Paisley. At that moment, Bella, Mai and Fatima reached her too, along with their Guardians. They stood together in the glistening glade, holding hands, and the Dream Keepers and Guardians stared down the Dark Queen.

Paisley wasn’t sure what came first. The bloodcurdling scream of the Dark Queen being shattered into shadows, or the lightning burst of Dream Essence that shot up from her little house. It erupted into a huge fiery, glittering fountain, right up to the sky – the light so bright that Paisley had to close her eyes to its brilliance.





Paisley didn't dare open her eyes. The brightness of the Dream Essence explosion had been dazzling. Was it over now? Had they won?

She couldn't hear the Dark Queen's wicked cackles any more, that was for sure, and she could feel Quill's soft fur, cuddling up to her legs. A warm breeze blew across her cheeks. Did she dare open her eyes? Was the Dark Queen truly gone?

Blinking cautiously, Paisley let out a gasp. She thought at first she had been transported somewhere else in the blast. But then she saw

Bella, Mai and Fatima also standing next to their Guardians. They were still in Starlight Hollow, but it couldn't have looked more different.

The full moon shone down from a clear sky and the pressing walls of shadow had disappeared. The river of Dream Essence had coated everything in its magical shimmer, and had now retreated to run round the outside of the glade, like a protective barrier.

'She's gone!' said Mai happily.

Bella ran over to Paisley and gave her a fierce hug. 'Are you OK?'

Before she could answer, Fatima shouted, 'Whoa!'

Where Bella had run, a trail of wildflowers had sprung up in the long grass. The Guardians scampered around, and vibrant, scented flowers bloomed



wherever their feet took them. Bella jumped onto Skye's back and flew a circle above the clearing. Snowdrops and crocuses and lily-of-the-valley burst out beneath the shade of the pegasus's wings until the entire glade had blossomed back to beautiful life.

'Look up here!' Bella called from somewhere amid the copse. Paisley and the others looked around until they spotted her. The hollow elm tree had grown into a three-storey treehouse! Bella and Skye were on a platform overlooking the tree canopy.



'Race you!' Mai giggled, and the others quickly ran to the tree, climbing a carved wooden staircase that had appeared inside the thick trunk.

When they were all together at the top, Paisley turned to her friends and sighed. 'I'm so sorry – this was all my fault. I let the Dark Queen in by bottling up all my worries and she fed on all my sad thoughts. I should have said something to you.'

'We will always be here for you, Paisley,' said Fatima solemnly. 'We were here for you tonight! We were so worried when you hadn't arrived, then we saw the map,' she continued, holding out the scroll.

'The map!' Paisley reached for it and carefully unrolled it. As the parchment unfurled, it sparkled with Dream Essence and the drawing of Starlight Hollow changed to show the golden river now running round it.



The girls took a moment with the view from their new treehouse. They could see all the way to the tips of the library turrets back in the town square.

‘I don’t know,’ said Mai. ‘Maybe you should wander off into the woods more often if we get to find treehouses like this!’

As they continued looking around, it became clear how far back they had pushed the Nightmare Realm’s shadows. The river didn’t just run round Starlight Hollow – it encircled the

whole of the wood, leading all the way back to the Dream Tree where it began. Aurora flew above the trees, which reminded Paisley of something Joya had said when she first gave them the map.

‘Joya said there used to be natural protection for Moon Wood that kept the Dark Queen at bay. Maybe it was this river and it’s taken Dream Keepers to restore its path.’

Fatima nodded. ‘It’s like a huge protective ring she can’t cross.’

Indeed, on the map, the grey swirls of the

Nightmare Realm were still there but were now merely a smudged border along the very edges of the parchment, kept out by the Dream Essence river's course.

Gazing at the golden horizon in front of her, Paisley let out a heavy sigh.

'What's wrong?' asked Bella. 'We defeated the Dark Queen again – aren't you happy?'

'Of course, but I may not have long to enjoy it.' Paisley had learned her lesson – no more bottling up her worries and sadness. She didn't want the Dark Queen making another comeback. 'My parents are serious about the move, guys. What if this is my last night in Moon Wood?'

She started to cry and her friends bundled in for a big hug.

'Paisley, we're best friends for ever! Nothing can change that,' said Bella, rubbing her back.

'Yeah, we need you. Even if you move away, we'll keep in touch however we can!' promised Mai.

'Um, I think you're all forgetting something,' said Fatima, and the others pulled back to stare at her. 'We come to Moon Wood *in our dreams*.'

'I know – that's what's so awesome. I'll miss it,' said Paisley.

'No – I mean . . .' Fatima tried again. 'Wherever you live, you dream, so maybe you could still come here at night?'

Mai pretended to faint. 'That is a *stunning* idea!'

Paisley laughed and felt a bit lighter. 'You're always so logical, Fatima.'

Bella hugged Fatima, and said, 'It was Fatima's idea to burst the dam to save you too. The Dark Queen must have put it there to stop the river from flowing through.'

Fatima blushed. 'Well, Aurora gave me the idea,' she said, uncharacteristically modest. 'And Crystal and Onyx did the bursting . . .'

Paisley pulled all three of her friends into a huge hug. 'I'm really grateful you did. And who knows? Maybe I will stay . . . I did dream it . . .'

She showed them the Dream Essence house, and the other girls all oohed and aahed.

'I didn't know you could do that with the Dream Essence!' said Mai.

Paisley shrugged, blushing. 'Neither did I. I was worrying about the move when I was playing with it and this sort of happened.'

The girls admired the little golden house. Its sparkles swirled and danced, hovering above Paisley's hand.

Paisley sighed again, happily this time. She desperately wanted to stay in Sunny Wood and

keep coming to Moon Wood with her friends, but now she knew for sure that the girls would be her friends for ever, no matter where any of them lived. And maybe, just maybe, she could come back to Moon Wood in her dreams, even if she was away from Sunny Wood in the daytime.

Onyx howled happily from the ground and the girls climbed back down the treehouse's spiral staircase.

Crystal was panting heavily at the base of a nearby elm tree, and Mai went over to scratch her ears.

'I'm thirsty too after all that battling of dark forces. I don't know about you, but I could do with a rainbow slushie,' said Mai, making everyone laugh.

They linked arms and used Paisley's Dream Essence house to light their way back to Moon

Wood town. When they arrived at the cobbled square, the little house flew off Paisley's outstretched hand and loop-the-looped its way over to the Dream Tree, then it burst into a cascade of sparkles, joining the other happy dreams of Sunny Wood.



For the first time since Mum and Dad had sprung their surprise announcement on Paisley and her brother, Paisley woke up relaxed and feeling well rested. She had the best friends in the world. In fact, in any realm! And with them she could face any challenge. Even moving away.

So when everyone was smiling at the breakfast table, Paisley gave herself a little pep talk. Although she didn't want to move, she loved her family and would accept whatever decision her parents made. It might take a while to settle in

somewhere new, but she knew deep down she'd be happy wherever they were.

'Finally, she's awake – now you can tell me!' said Brandon, grabbing a banana. A scraped-clean cereal bowl and plate covered in toast crumbs sat in front of him.

'Calm down, Brandon,' said Mum, and she gave Paisley a kiss. 'Morning, sleepyhead. Can I get you anything for breakfast?'

'I'm fine, thanks,' Paisley said, sitting down and reaching for her favourite granola. 'What do you need to tell us?'

Mum and Dad exchanged a look, then Dad said, 'Well, we listened to you both, and you know we really think of ourselves as an adventurous family . . . and we love to travel.'

This is it, thought Paisley. They've decided we're moving. Look happy!

'But,' Mum cut in, 'while there's magic in trying new things, we realise we've put down roots here.'

'And with strong roots we can all flower?' said Paisley hopefully, reminded of what Joya had said about the Dream Tree being able to flower because its roots were strong.

Mum smiled. 'That's very poetic. But, yes, we're really pleased with how happy you two are here – and what great friends you've made.'

'And the escapades you get up to,' said Dad, ruffling Brandon's hair. 'We realised that family life is an adventure wherever we are. And so . . . if it's all right with you, I've asked to take my promotion in Sunny Wood. We're excited to see what happens right here.'

Paisley and Brandon didn't answer. Instead, they both leaped up and almost knocked Dad over with a huge hug.

‘I think they’re happy about it!’ Dad said, muffled from under their embrace.



Mum laughed and joined the bundle. ‘Well, don’t get too comfortable, because it’s a Bank Holiday. We’re off to the DIY store.’

‘Why?’ asked Brandon.

‘I’ll be honest . . . I was looking forward to doing up another house. So, we thought, let’s do some redecorating here instead!’ said Mum.

‘Can I get some paint?’ asked Paisley, an idea coming to mind.

‘Of course!’ said Dad. ‘And, again, it’s a team decision, but I had a dream last night where our windowsills were sort of gold and sparkly . . . It actually looked pretty good . . .’

Paisley smiled. A gold sparkly house in a dream? Wherever could he have got that idea?



Paisley

Urgent news. Sugar Scoops ASAP.

Bella

OK!

Fatima

On my way.

Mai

I hope it's news I can handle . . .

As soon as they were back from the DIY store, Paisley ran to the town square to see her friends. She was so excited to tell them that her family would be staying in Sunny Wood!

As she opened the door to their favourite cafe, she saw her friends were already there – and they were holding a banner that said: WE'LL MISS YOU, PAISLEY!

Standing frozen in the doorway, Paisley covered her face.

'Oh no! We made her cry!' squealed Bella, running over to give her a hug.

'When you said it was urgent, we thought that your parents had decided they'd be moving right away,' said Fatima.

Paisley pulled her hands down. She was

laughing, not crying. 'We're not moving! I'm staying in Sunny Wood!'

While Bella and Fatima cheered, Mai hastily pulled the banner down and ran behind the counter. By the time Paisley had walked in and sat down at their table, Mai popped up again. She'd crossed out 'We'll miss you' and written 'We're happy you're staying' – there wasn't much room, so the words got really small and curled round the edge of the banner.



Paisley would have cried happy tears if her friends didn't make her laugh so hard. She was super happy that she could stay in Sunny Wood with them!

So it turned into a 'hurray you're staying' party and the girls had ice-cream sundaes with rainbow sprinkles. When they finished, Mai suggested getting more, but Paisley shook her head.

'What? No seconds?' Mai asked, pretending to faint.

'Maybe after. I want to tell Joya that I'm staying,' said Paisley.

The girls nodded in understanding. As they headed for the door, Portia came out from behind the counter.

'I couldn't help but overhear and I'm so thrilled you're staying, Paisley!' she said, grinning from ear to ear. 'Does this mean you

might be able to do that mural for me?'

Paisley nodded. 'I got the paint this morning.' Then she pulled something out of her pocket. 'And I, um, actually did a sketch already . . .'

Portia gasped as Paisley unfolded the Moon Wood map and studied it with delight. 'It's like Sunny Wood but all topsy-turvy,' she said. 'Like a magical town. I love it!'

Portia didn't know why the girls giggled so hard at that, but she did arrange a time with Paisley for her to start work on the mural.

The four friends went to the apothecary. Joya was so happy with Paisley's news that she turned the 'OPEN' sign to 'CLOSED' early and set up a little tea party for them in their favourite window seat.

They told her all about the Dark Queen coming back and how they had defeated her once again.

‘Well, I’m so proud of you all. Dream hard and you can make anything happen,’ said Joya, lifting the teapot to offer more mint tea.

Paisley blushed. ‘I still feel bad. It was sort of all my fault – I got us into trouble with the Dark Queen. I shouldn’t have followed Wraith.’

‘You weren’t to know,’ countered Fatima. ‘*And* you got us out of it by making that house out of Dream Essence.’

Joya gasped and almost dropped the silver teapot. ‘You . . . you *made* something out of Dream Essence?’

Paisley fluttered her hands as she spoke. It felt so intuitive at the time – she still wasn’t sure how to explain it. ‘It kind of . . . became like clay. Like sparkly gold-dust clay. And I was thinking about the move and about how it was my dream to stay here, and the Dream Essence sort of shaped itself

into a house. And then it burst the Dark Queen’s shadows away.’

Joya’s smile was wider than they’d ever seen. ‘You did your first Dream Work, Paisley. Oh, girls, this is very advanced Dream Keeping. This . . . this is the start of an even bigger adventure . . .’

Paisley blushed to the tips of her ears, and sipped her tea to stop tears of happiness from falling. She got to stay in Sunny Wood, with her best friends. Their hard work and dreams had made this happen.

And, by the sounds of it, there was even more magic to come . . .

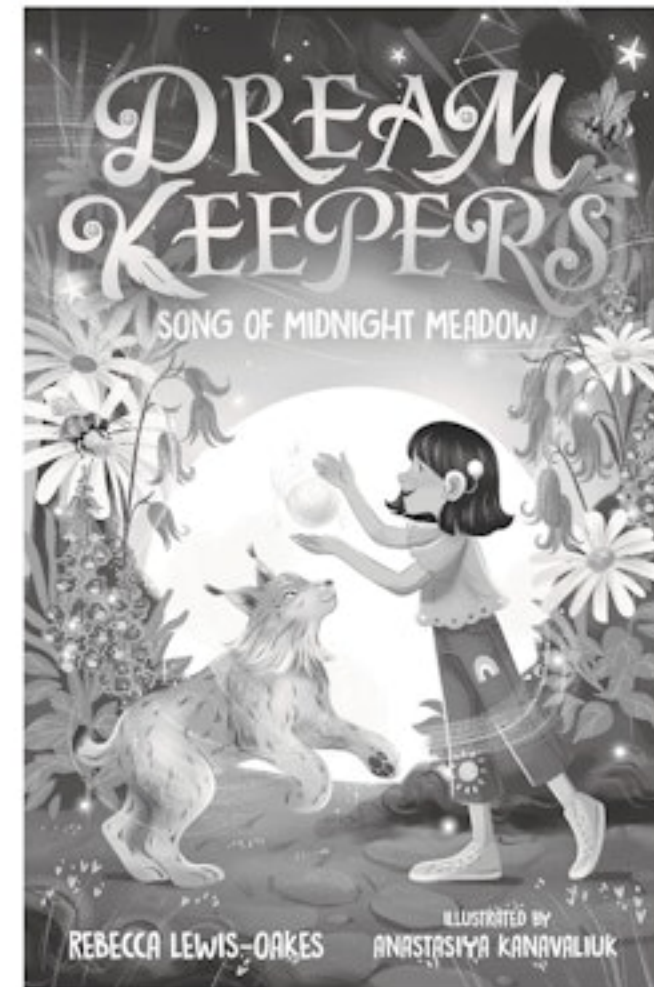


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