



Chapter Six

Down and round the stairs Lana ran, taking two, then three, then four at a time. She pelted across the hall, dodging the sleeping party guests, and bolted down the corridor to the kitchen. She sprinted past the cook and the kitchen boy, before leaping onto the table and reaching up for the top shelf of

the cupboard. But she wasn't tall enough! Her eyes wild, she scoured the room, searching for anything that might help her. There! A shelf full of cookery books! Vaulting down, she took the thickest of them and set it down on the tabletop, then another, and another until she had made a stairway to the top cupboard.

Up she sprang, knocking cheeses left, right and centre as she crawled back up the chute, suddenly happy to be back in the cold and the dark. Round and round she crawled, spiralling slowly upwards, until she reached a tight upward bend. Then, like a spider climbing a spout, she braced her hands and feet against the smooth walls, and began to inch her way upwards.

It was exhausting work. She started to

sweat, which made her hands and arms slip and slide on the walls. Soon, the only thing stopping her falling back down were the rubber soles of her shoes. She felt panic rising in her throat; how was she ever going to reach the top? The burning red eyes of the old woman flashed into her mind and Lana remembered the first part of the story – how the thirteenth fairy had ruby-red eyes. She shuddered. Somehow, no matter how exhausted she was, she had to get out. She had to get home. Taking a deep breath, she made one final scramble, determined to reach the top.

Which was when an extraordinary thing happened. With each tiny movement, Lana felt herself becoming lighter and lighter, until she almost seemed to be weightless.

Soon even the gentlest leg-push propelled her upwards, as if she was an astronaut in zero-gravity, and before she knew it, she was rushing headlong up the chute!

Then, just when she felt she was speeding out of control, the tube twisted, and she began to spiral again, slowing gradually, until suddenly her head struck something hard. She gave one final push and she was back in the supermarket, with her head poking out of the sherbet lemons tub, right in the middle of the pick 'n' mix!

'Dad!'

Lana rushed into her father's arms. She was so pleased to see him! There had been

no sign of him at the checkout, but she had finally found him waiting on a bench at the exit, surrounded by shopping bags, talking anxiously on his phone.

'There you are!' he exclaimed, hugging her tight. 'I was just calling Mum.'

'Panic over!' he said into the phone. 'She's here! See you in a bit.' He hung up, and his face clouded. 'Lana, where have you been? I thought I'd lost you.'

'I fell into a fairytale!'

'Lana, please, I'm not in the mood for games. You gave me quite a scare, disappearing like that.'

'It's true! There's a trapdoor in the pick 'n' mix. And it leads right to Briar Rose's castle.'

Lana's father shook his head in mock despair. 'Well, full marks for imagination.'

But you know better than to run off in a busy supermarket.'

'It wasn't my fault,' protested Lana.

'Lana, that's enough,' said her father firmly. 'I said there would be a Consequence. So that means no story tonight.'



For the rest of the day, Lana was on her best behaviour. She helped put the shopping away, remembered all her pleases and thank-yous at lunchtime, and spent the afternoon tidying her room. She didn't pester Harrison to play with her and she ate all her green beans at supper without being told. At bedtime she cleaned her teeth for two minutes, just like the dentist

recommended, and put her dirty clothes into the washing basket.

The reason was, of course, that she was desperate to avoid her Consequence. As scary as her encounter with the thirteenth fairy had been, it had left her burning with curiosity. Did she really go to Briar Rose's castle? The only way to know for sure was to hear more of the story.

'Are you all right?' asked her mother with a tone of concern, upon finding Lana tucked up in bed of her own accord.

'I thought I'd be good,' replied Lana, 'Because I really want to hear more of *Sleeping Beauty*.'

'Lana, you know that we said no to that story tonight because of what happened at Grimm's.'

'Please!' begged Lana. 'I've been so good all day!'

'Hmmm . . .' said her mother, as if she was in two minds.

'I even brushed my hair and left my clothes out for the morning.'

Her mother gave a tiny smile. Lana could tell she was winning her over.

'Pretty please?' Lana pulled a funny face, and her mother couldn't help but chuckle.

'Well, I suppose it can't really hurt,' she said. 'I'll go and get it. But if you do feel scared you must tell me. I don't want you having nightmares.'

Lana closed her eyes. A warm excited feeling bubbled up inside her at the thought of finding out what would happen next to Briar Rose. She heard her mother's footsteps padding

down the hall, the sound of a drawer opening, then the same footsteps padding back again.

There was a loud sneeze and Lana opened her eyes to see her mother sitting beside her, holding the big red-leather story book.

'Dust,' explained her mother, her eyes watering. 'Now, where were we?' she asked, leafing through the pages.

'Spindles,' said Lana. 'The king has just destroyed them.'

'Ah, yes,' said her mother. 'Spindles . . .'

And this . . .

Well, this is pretty much what she read to her ...

T rue to the king's word, after the banquet, every spindle in the kingdom was destroyed. The very act of spinning itself was declared illegal.

And with no spindles for Briar Rose to prick her finger on, the king and queen stopped worrying about the thirteenth fairy's curse, and life went back to normal. The king took up archery again and the queen got back into wild swimming.

So it was that on her fifteenth birthday, while the servants prepared her birthday lunch, and the king and queen were out pursuing their hobbies, Briar Rose decided to explore the palace. After wandering through the gardens, and browsing the books in the library, she spotted a spiral stone staircase that she had never seen before.

Briar Rose climbed up and up, round and round, until she reached a locked door. Sitting in the lock was a rusty old key. She turned it, and found herself in a tiny room in

a turret of the castle.

At the far side of the room, sitting with her back to the door was an old woman. She was working away at something, but Briar Rose couldn't quite see what.

'Hello?' said Briar Rose, but the old woman didn't seem to hear her.

'Excuse me?' said Briar Rose, reaching out to touch the old lady's shoulder. The old lady froze, as if in shock. Then slowly she turned, and the princess was alarmed to see that her eyes were ruby red.

'Forgive me,' said the old woman. 'I was so busy in my work I didn't hear you come in.'

'What are you doing?' asked Briar Rose.

'Why, don't you know what this is?' asked the old woman, with a mischievous grin. As she spoke, she held up a pointed stick,

wound with thread.

Briar Rose shook her head.

'It's a spindle, my dear. Watch.'

Briar Rose watched, spellbound, as the old woman unravelled the cocoon of a silk worm, spinning it into thread with the spindle.

The thread shimmered in the light, and looked so beautiful, that Briar Rose wanted nothing more than to press it to her cheek.

'Here, child, come, sit beside me and spin,' the old woman said.

Briar Rose sat and the old woman handed her the spindle. But the instant Briar Rose took hold of it, she pricked herself.

'Oh,' said Briar Rose, as a single drop of blood appeared on the end of her finger. And she slumped off the chair, onto the floor, falling into a deep sleep.

At that very moment, the king and queen stepped inside the front door of the castle, and they also fell into a deep sleep, right there in the hallway. The pages and footmen fell asleep. The cook fell asleep and the kitchen boy did too. The mice in the kitchen fell asleep, the servants fell asleep and so did all the guests that had just arrived for the banquet.

Just as the twelfth fairy had promised, a giant hedge of thorns immediately sprouted around the entire palace, growing tall and thick to protect everyone inside. Soon the hedge was so high that the palace was hidden entirely from view, even its highest turret, where Briar Rose lay sleeping.

'I saw her,' blurted Lana.

'Saw who, darling?'

'Briar Rose. Today, in the supermarket.'

'Oh, how exciting,' said her mother, playing along. 'Was she with Rumpelstiltskin?'

'Mum, I'm not joking. I was in the story! There's a trapdoor,' said Lana, unable to stop herself. 'In the pick 'n' mix. That little old man pushed me into it, and I ended up in the palace. And everyone was asleep! That's where I was when Dad thought I had gone missing.'

'Right,' said her mother decisively, and closed the book. 'I think that's enough of that.'

'But you haven't finished the chapter.'

'No, and I'm not going to. I knew these stories were too scary.'

'But it's true!'

'That's enough, Lana,' said her mother firmly, and turned out the light. 'This book is going away for good.'