

# Chapter 1

## A Helpful Hoot



“When they’re on land, loons are some of the clumsiest birds around,” said the deep voice coming from the TV.

Katie laughed. “They sound a lot like you, Eva!”

“Hey!” Eva complained, though her green eyes were sparkling. “I’m not clumsy *all* the time!”

“But in the air and water, loons are fantastic flyers and swimmers,” the voiceover continued.

“Well, we can’t be good at everything,” said Alex, putting an arm around Eva.

The three girls were sitting next to each other on Alex's bed as they watched TV.

“You might fall over a lot, but you make the BEST jewellery.” Alex held up her bead bracelet – earlier, Eva had given Alex and Katie the home-made jewellery as presents. Alex’s was purple, Katie’s was pink, and Eva had one that was silver.

“You’re right – our bracelets are beautiful!” Katie turned to Eva, biting her lip. “Sorry – I was only joking.”

Eva grinned and nudged Katie gently.  
“I know!”

The girls turned their eyes back to the TV on the chest of drawers in Alex's



bedroom. They lived next door to each other, and often had sleepovers like this. Really, they should have been asleep already, but Alex had insisted on watching just one more episode. She was addicted to nature!

“Loon feathers are so thick that they feel like fur – and these help them to swim well.”

Katie grabbed the arms of her two friends. “The feather! Should we go and check for it?” She jumped up from the bed. “I think we should – just in case!”

The three best friends had a very special secret. Sometimes a glossy white feather was left out for them in a hollow tree trunk in Katie’s garden. If it was there, they could take hold of it and travel to the magical Blossom Wood. Even more amazing was the fact that, whenever they were there, they weren’t girls, but owls!

“But we looked in the tree trunk just before we cleaned our teeth.” From the bed, Alex craned her neck towards her friend. Katie was standing up and tying back her long blonde hair as if she meant business.

“But that was ages ago – maybe it will be there now!”

Eva shuffled out from under the duvet.  
“I think we should go and check just in case. We haven’t been to Blossom Wood for over two weeks!”



*Two weeks IS ages*, thought Alex, leaping up too. For a second she worried about getting in trouble for going outside so late – but they were only going over to

Katie's garden next door. She wrapped her turquoise dressing gown around her pyjamas, and pulled the hood over her black curly hair to keep her extra warm.

Once they were all huddled into their dressing gowns and fluffy slippers, they padded out of Alex's bedroom silently. Alex lived with her parents in a bungalow, so they could dart out of her bedroom and slip along the central hallway to the back door without any stairs to worry about. They could hear twangs of music floating out of the living room – Alex's dad played the guitar, and it sounded as if her mum was singing along to an old jazz tune.

Alex, Eva and Katie tiptoed down the garden path, the frosty air biting at their hands. Just past Alex's vegetable patch, Katie skipped towards the wooden fence. There was a gap here, where last week

her brother had crashed his go-kart and broken a panel. Her mum had been furious, but Katie was pleased – it meant they could go easily between their next-door gardens. Perfect for tonight.

She bent down and squeezed through, emerging beside the end of the washing line. Eva went next, holding back her bobbed auburn hair so it didn't get



caught. Alex followed, not needing to crouch as much since she was the shortest of the friends.

“It’s freezing!” said Eva, hopping over to the path to get away from the frosty grass. The girls could talk here without worrying they’d be heard, because Katie’s parents were away for the night, and her brother was staying at their grandad’s.

“Come on,” called Katie, who was already sprinting towards the fallen tree trunk at the bottom of the garden.

But when Eva and Alex had caught Katie up, she was kneeling next to the trunk and shaking her head. “There’s nothing there!”

Eva sighed deeply. “Oh, I really thought it might be. I’ve missed Blossom Wood so much!”

Alex thought of all their friends there – Bobby the badger, Loulou the squirrel,



Winnie the wren – she missed them too. But at least no feather meant that there weren't any problems in the wood. Bobby only left the feather out if he needed their help.

Katie stood up and the girls began trudging back towards the broken fence, arm in arm. But Alex heard a noise that made her stop. The unmistakable hoot



of a barn owl. Did it mean anything? She shrugged – of course not, it was just nature. She skipped to catch up with Eva and Katie and heard it again. Louder this time.

“Wait a minute!” Alex called to her friends. She ran back down Katie’s garden, not caring that her slippers were getting wetter and wetter from the frosty grass.

“What are you doing?” asked Katie, her blue eyes wide as she watched her friend zoom down the garden path.

“It’s here!” cried Alex, feeling her heart racing faster than one of the loons from the documentary. Inside the trunk, the white feather glowed in the gloom.

Katie sped down the garden while Eva, already on the other side of the fence, leapt back through the gap. She tumbled right into the washing-line pole. “Oops!”

she said as she dusted herself down.

Moments later, all three girls were crouched inside the hollow chestnut tree trunk, with Alex claspings the feather super-tight. Just yesterday she'd been worrying that they'd never get to go back to Blossom Wood ever again. She wasn't going to let go of this feather for anything!

With her free hand, Alex grabbed Katie's, and Katie took Eva's. They squeezed their eyes shut, and waited...

The spinning began – slowly at first, as if they were on a carousel meant for toddlers, and then faster, as if they were on a merry-go-round. Soon it was going so quickly it felt like the craziest ride at a theme park. Eva's stomach swirled and she couldn't help but let out a squeal – she always felt like they were being thrown around inside a hamster ball. There was

great whooshing too, as wind whistled past their ears. They were buffeted this way and that, but they never let go of each other's hands, nor opened their eyes. They didn't dare!

Katie whooped in delight as she felt



her toes tingling – a sign that they were very nearly there. *But what will be waiting in Blossom Wood for us this time?* she wondered. Why did the animals need their help? She hoped it wasn't anything too serious...