

# Chapter One

**I**t was hard to believe it had only been a fortnight since the final echoes of the Fricassee Fairy's diabolical cackling had faded into silence. The book that mysteriously appeared on Peter and Belinda's shelf had long ceased to glow bright red and, for two weeks now, remained tightly shut. Quietly it lay on the brother and sister's night table, full of stories still waiting to be told.

Reading the story within had brought the volume to life that fateful night. But now the book, it seemed, had a mind of its own — an uncanny ability to pick and choose when to transport the reader through its stiff, white pages into the swirling land of Enchanted Thyme.

The Phair siblings, Peter and Belinda, found it incredibly hard to concentrate in the days that followed their nocturnal

adventure. At school, they found it even harder not to tell friends what transpired the evening they convinced their Dad to start reading from the mysterious tome. For in so doing, the book popped open and, much to their amazement, produced three winged mice!

But as always in life, that was then and this is now. And each day since, Dad good-naturedly agreed to read them a chapter before bedtime. Much to their disappointment, Belinda and Peter were left to sleep undisturbed in their own beds. The strange events did not repeat themselves. They did not visit the land of a Queen under the terrible spell of insatiable hunger. They did not fight to stay out of the jaws of Creepy, the dreadful monster-beast. And they most certainly did not take a ride high above the clouds, nestled in the hand of a big-hearted giant. Perhaps it had just been a dream after all.

“Don’t you dare tell anyone about what happened,” warned Belinda once again as she and Peter waited for the school bus. This had become a morning ritual, something she said more as a reminder to herself than anything else. Not sharing what had happened was difficult, but both agreed being teased about it would be much worse.

Today was one of those particularly crisp mornings when the season seemed to turn on a dime and blades of grass stood stiff, not green, but pearly grey.

Peter was lost in thought. It was almost impossible for him not to brag about his adventure. He had kept it

to himself for so long he felt like bursting. Imagine — he, an eight year old, had overcome tremendous dangers in the Forbidden Forrest. It was in the underbelly of a castle that he befriended a huge, green gargoyle named Gothel. Together, they had masterminded the solving of a very tricky riddle while attempting to save a pint-sized Queen from the terrible spell of eternal hunger.

*How valiant*, he thought. *How incredible, how unsur-*

“Yo, Peter, what’s up?” interrupted new friend Jared as he swaggered up to the bus stop.

“Who? Wh-who me?” sputtered Peter like a hoot owl. “Nothin.’ Nothin’s up. Why? Did I look like something was up?” he protested, eyes darting toward his sister.

Jared wrinkled his nose, “You OK? You don’t look so good.”

“Me? Couldn’t be better. Serious.”

Peter had just discovered that if he used the word “serious” at the end of a sentence people here would take whatever he said — well, more seriously.

“You’re gonna be at basketball practice later, right?” inquired Jared with what Peter thought was a mildly suspicious edge to his voice.

This was exactly the question Peter had been dreading. For when they recently came to this new school, he imagined sports would be a great way to fit in. He would excel and all sorts of cool guys like Jared would admire him. Sadly, this was hardly turning out as planned.

Peter hated every minute of practice. Besides being smacked in the face with a ball on day one, he discovered that everyone around him was easily a foot taller. This earned him the nickname “Shrimp,” and even though, for a short guy, he could play a pretty mean game, he was paranoid that at any moment he would morph into a dreaded “durr,” an outcast, a “clumsy shrimp.” If only he could tell Jared and everyone else that he had recently become a secret superhero of sorts.

*If only*, he thought longingly.

Belinda wasn't having any better day of it. She kept thinking about her friends Basil, Marjoram, and Rosemary; for she had grown quite fond of the Royal Kitchen Mice. She wondered how big-hearted Orgoglio the Giant was fairing against the dark powers of the Fricassee Fairy. And she was especially sure that without her and Peter, everything would be in total disarray.

What would it take for her and her brother to get back to the land of Enchanted Thyme? They tried everything. Each night they chose the very same volume for Dad to read them, in hopes that they might hit just the right chapter to bring the book to life. Was there more to it? Something they overlooked? She pondered ... perhaps a secret word? Maybe a gesture? Or a way of-

“The third president of the United States?” resounded Mrs. Norsdack's wheezy voice. “... Belinda? I just asked you another question. Are you paying any attention? Do

you know what's going on?"

Belinda snapped to and looked around. She hadn't even heard the first question. Now she was at a complete loss.

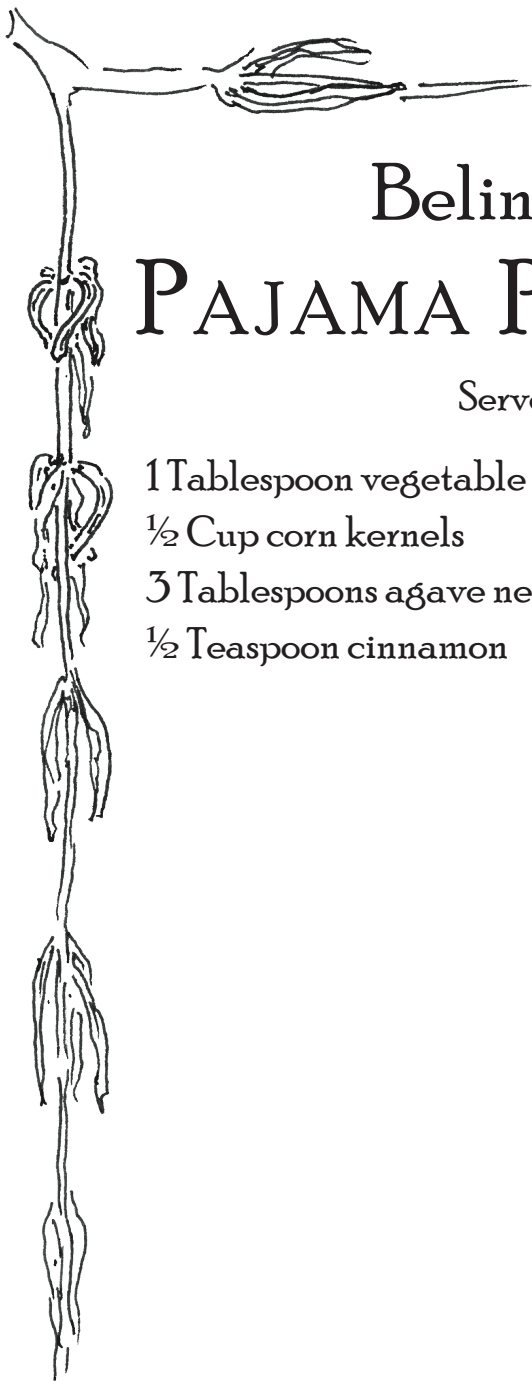
As she tried to collect herself, up popped Jennifer Rich's hand. Her tan arm was covered in trendy bangle bracelets which she gleefully clanged whenever possible. Dressed head to foot like a Hollywood starlet, she stood up. Striking a pose, Jennifer always had the look that whatever she wanted, she got.

"Thomas Jefferson," declared Jennifer with a deliberate toss of her highlighted blonde mane.

"Yes!" glowed Mrs. Norsdack like a light bulb. "Obviously you studied yesterday's assignment — not like some." Mrs. Norsdack's beady eyes scanned the room and landed on Belinda, where they zoomed in to bore a hole with laser-like intensity.

*Bzzzzzzzz* rang the last period bell of the day, just in the nick of time.

"Whew!" sighed Belinda as relief washed over her. Now she could meet Peter, go home, and begin all the sisterly duties that made her feel so grown up and important! Pajamas never looked so good.



Belinda's

# PAJAMA POPCORN

Serves 4

1 Tablespoon vegetable oil

$\frac{1}{2}$  Cup corn kernels

3 Tablespoons agave nectar

$\frac{1}{2}$  Teaspoon cinnamon



## Preparing to Pop!

- Have an adult place oil in 4 quart pot over medium-high heat.
- Add corn kernels and cover tightly.
- Once the first kernel pops, turn heat to medium low.
- Count “1 pajama popcorn, 2 pajama popcorn, 3 pajama popcorn” ... All the way to 5 before you hear the next kernel pop. If one pops before you get to 5, start from 1 and try to reach 5 again. Once you reach 5 before a kernel pops swirl the pot so the un-popped kernels fall to the bottom and start the game again. When u can reach “5 pajama popcorn” for a second time, turn off the heat. Pour popped corn into bowl. Add agave nectar, sprinkle with cinnamon and serve when cool.

~ SWEET DREAMS ~