

Lara
the Black Cat
Fairy

Special thanks to Narinder Dhami

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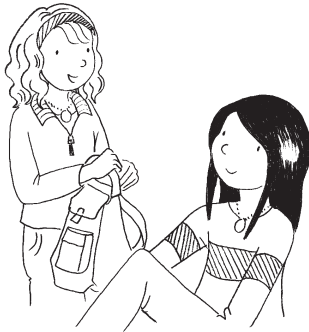
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“Come on, Kirsty.” Rachel Walker picked up her backpack and smiled at her best friend, Kirsty Tate. “It’s time for our next activity—we’re going on an orienteering expedition.”

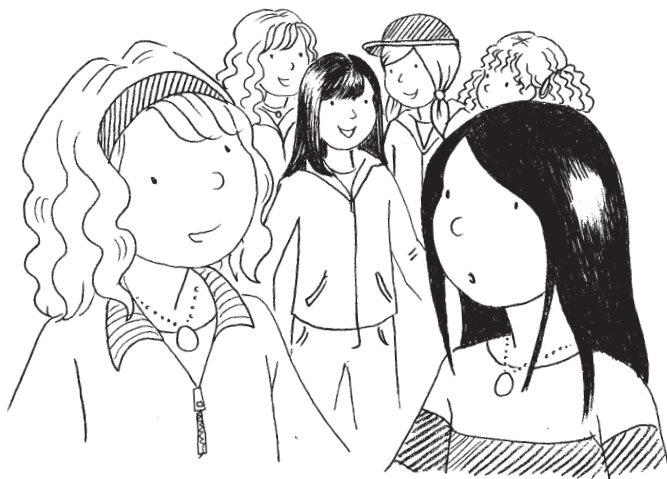
“Oh, great!” Kirsty exclaimed happily, lacing up her hiking boots. “I’m really looking forward to it.” Then she grinned. “But, to be honest, I’m





not exactly sure what an orienteering expedition is!”

Rachel and the other girls in the cabin—Emma, Natasha, Katie, and Catherine—smiled sweetly at Kirsty.



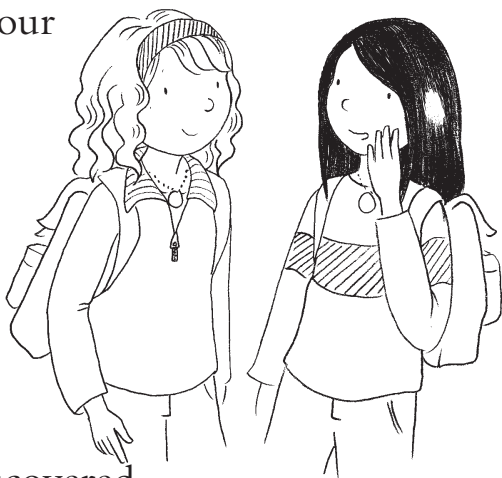
“Orienteering is when you use a compass and a map to find your way to a specific place,” Emma explained. “All the different teams try to get there first. It’s a lot of fun.”



“It sounds fantastic,” Kirsty agreed.


“I’ve enjoyed all the camp activities so far,” Rachel remarked to Kirsty as their bunkmates went outside.

Kirsty nodded. “And it’s been even *more* exciting since our fairy friends asked us for help!” she whispered.



On the day the girls arrived at the camp, they discovered that Jack Frost had been up to his old tricks again in Fairyland. This time he and his goblins had kidnapped seven magical animals from the Magical Animal Fairies.





The magical animals were very rare because they helped spread the kind of magic that every human and fairy could possess—the magic of imagination, luck, humor, friendship, compassion, healing, and courage. The fairies trained the magical animals for a whole year to make sure the animals knew how to use their powers. Then they could spread their wonderful gifts throughout the human and the fairy worlds!

But Jack Frost was determined to keep the animals from using their magic gifts. He wanted everyone to be as grumpy and miserable as he was! So he and his goblins had stolen the young magical animals and taken them to his Ice Castle. But the animals had managed to escape into the human world, where




they were now hiding. Of course, Jack Frost sent his goblins after them, but Rachel and Kirsty were determined to find the young animals first and return them safely to Fairyland. The girls knew they could count on the Magical Animal Fairies for help.

“I’m glad we found Sizzle the dragon yesterday,” Rachel said, as she and Kirsty left the cabin. “Ashley was so happy to see him again, wasn’t she?”



Kirsty nodded. “I hope we find the other animals soon,” she said anxiously. “Remember



what the fairies told us—the magical animals can’t always control their powers because they haven’t finished their training yet.”

“But they really tricked Jack Frost and his goblins when they escaped from the Ice Castle, didn’t they?” Rachel laughed.

Rachel and Kirsty joined their bunk-mates, who were standing with the girls



from the cabin next door. Edward, one of the camp counselors, was there, too.

“Ah, there you are,” Edward said, smiling at Rachel and Kirsty. “Here’s

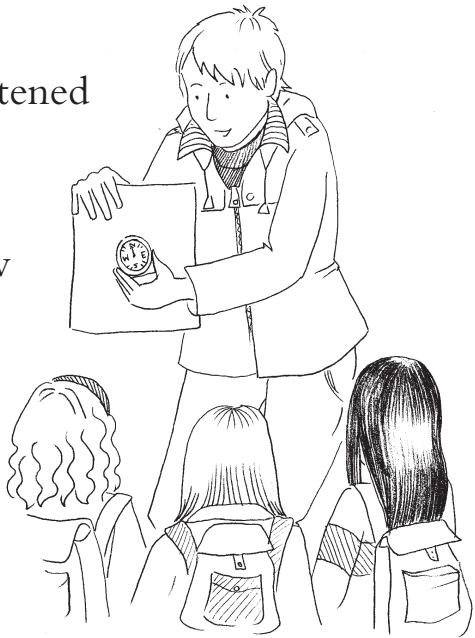
your map and compass. Now, you’re all





going to walk due west for twenty-seven paces, and then you'll find your mystery location!"

Everyone listened carefully as Edward explained how to place the compass on the map and watch the magnetic needle to find out which direction was north.



"Hold the map steady, Kirsty," said Rachel as the needle swung around. "Look, that's north."

"So west is *that* way," Kirsty said,

pointing to her left. "Come on, Rachel!"

Some of the other campers had already headed in that direction, and Rachel and Kirsty followed them, counting each step under their breaths.

"Twenty-four, twenty-five," Rachel murmured. Then she stopped and burst





out laughing. “Look, Kirsty, we’re at the Mess Hall!”


“Nice work, everyone,” called Edward as he hurried out of the Mess Hall. He began handing out bottles of water and granola bars.



“That was easy, wasn’t it? Now we’re going into the field to try a longer route, so follow me!”

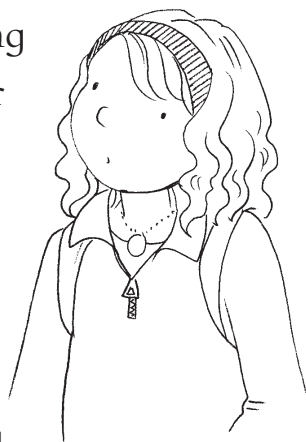
Edward strode off and everyone rushed after him. Soon they were out in the fields that surrounded the camp.

“In orienteering, it’s really important to use your compass correctly,” Edward explained, opening the gate into the



field. “Because this is a race between different teams, you need to find the shortest route between the points on your map. If you don’t, you won’t win!”

“I’m enjoying this, aren’t you, Rachel?” Kirsty remarked, taking a sip of water. “I never thought maps and compasses could be so much fun!”



Rachel was about to reply when a soft, muffled noise suddenly caught her attention. She stopped and cocked her head to one side.

Meow! There it was again!

“I can hear a cat,” Kirsty said, glancing around at the long grass.

“Me, too,” Catherine agreed.



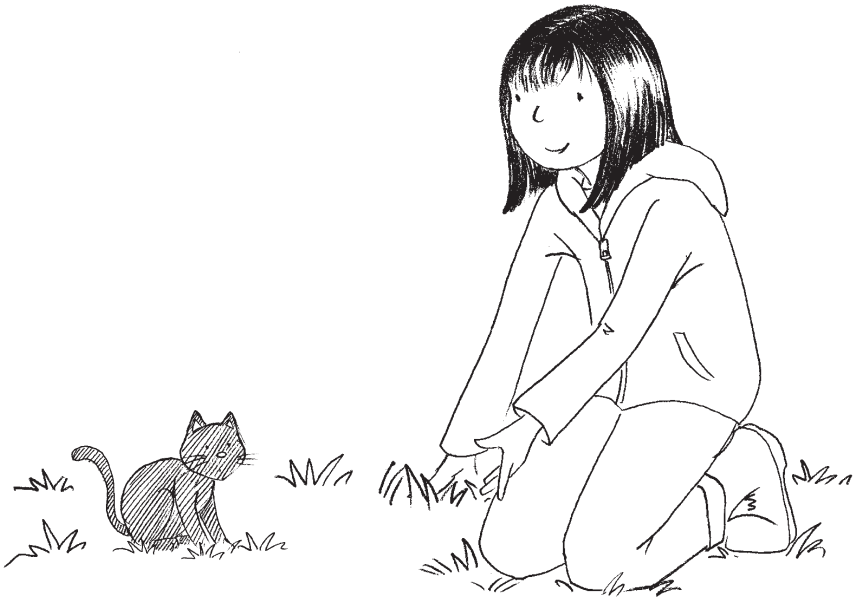
Suddenly, Rachel noticed a tiny, jet-black cat in a patch of fuzzy dandelions. The cat was batting at the plants and chasing the fluffy white seedlings as they floated off into the air.

“Look, there it is,” she pointed out. “Isn’t it cute? I wonder where it came from.”



“It’s probably from one of the farms,” Edward replied. “There are a lot close by.”

“Oh, I love cats,” Natasha said eagerly. She knelt down on the grass and held out her hand. “Here, kitty!” she cooed.



The cat stopped playing and looked over at the group. She had beautiful, emerald-green eyes and her black fur gleamed in the sunshine. As the cat began to purr loudly, Kirsty gave a gasp.

“Rachel!” she whispered. “The cat’s whiskers are shimmering!”

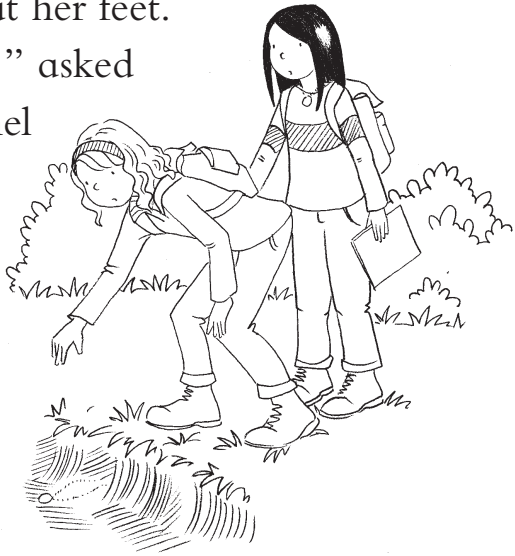



“I know, I can see it, too!” Rachel murmured, her heart thumping with excitement. “It must be fairy magic!”

Before the girls could say anything more, Rachel suddenly felt her gold locket slip from her neck. She made a grab for it but missed, and it fell into a shallow ditch at her feet.

“Is it broken?” asked Kirsty as Rachel bent to pick it up.

Rachel examined the clasp and shook her head. “No, it must have just come undone, somehow,” she replied, frowning.





At that moment, a loud flapping of wings overhead made everyone look up. A large pigeon was swooping down toward them. Its bright eyes were fixed on the half-eaten granola bar in Catherine's hand.

“Help!” Catherine shrieked in alarm, as the pigeon grabbed the bar and flew off.



“Are you OK, Catherine?” asked Rachel. Before Catherine could reply, Natasha, who was still kneeling near the cat, gave a cry of pain.



“Oh, my hand’s itching!” She gasped, rubbing it hard. “I must have touched that patch of poison ivy—” She pointed to a patch of leaves with reddish stems. “But that’s weird. I don’t remember seeing it before!”



“Here.” Edward pulled a tube of cream from his bag and passed it to Natasha. “Rub this where it itches, and it will feel better.”

“Rachel, have you noticed that *three* unlucky things happened in the last minute?” Kirsty whispered to her friend. “This little black cat *must* be one of the missing magical animals!”

