

A Magical Journey

Use Your Imagination Books

the First book

An Unusual Day in Fairyland



"I believe in fairies."

Sharone Stevenson

A MAGICAL JOURNEY BOOK SERIES

The First Book	An Unusual Day in Fairyland
The Second Book	The Search Begins
The Third Book	A Ball of Golden Light
The Fourth Book	Hall of the Silver Threads
The Fifth Book	Back to Fairyland

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Dedication

“We dedicate ‘A Magical Journey – Use Your Imagination’ series of books to all children on our beautiful planet Earth. May their pure sweetness and sense of wonder be kept alive as they experience their journey through life.”

Sharone Stevenson

Parent's Page

The power of the imagination is to the mind, what the breath is to the body. It is one of our most valuable gifts. But, like any other faculty, it needs to be developed. If parents nurture and enrich this natural gift in their children, it will grow and become one of their most powerful allies and resources.

Within the 5 books that make up 'A Magical Journey' - Use Your Imagination series, there are purposely no pictures. The words themselves bring the stories alive. The colorful and rhythmical language is the catalyst for the imagination to jump into action. You won't find scary witches or frightening creatures, but instead, you'll find loveable characters with personalities that put a smile on your children's faces, and a warm glow in your heart; the perfect bed-time story.

A Magical Journey is a Chapter Book. that can be read to your children, even if they can already read. As the stories unfold, you'll share their feelings and laughter, and observe the amazing ability of their creative minds. Later, as the children learn to read, those odd shapes on a page known as text, holds the key to the pictures in their minds. Then when they pick up a book and open it, they immediately jump into the joyous world of 'getting lost in the story'.

At the end of each book there is a simple project to do, as well as a relevant question for them to answer, which relates to the story. Learning about good manners, solving problems, and discovering new ideas is never out of date.

Imagination is the basis of everything we have to-day, and the new discoveries in the future. I hope that through 'A Magical Journey—Use Your Imagination Books', all children find the creative path to the magic of the imagination. The future of our world rests in the minds of these children.

Sharone Stevenson

Prologue –

A soft gentle breeze floated over the meadow where the fairies play. But today it was quiet except for one tiny fairy who sat under the leaf of a tall blade of grass. She wrapped her arms around her knees and placed her tiny head on them. Her silver hair shone from under her tiny blue cap and it danced in the sunlight like jewels on a crown. Her blue gossamer dress floated gently as the breeze danced around her, but she didn't even notice it.

“What’s the matter little fairy?” asked a tiny elf as he walked past her, happily swinging his large pot of yellow paint in one hand, and a paint brush in the other. “Why are you so sad on this beautiful day? I’m going to paint the red tulips yellow. Why don’t you come along with me? It’s going to be fun.”

“Oh, excuse me. I didn’t see you coming?” she said, as she quickly stood up and tried to smile. “There’s nothing wrong, but I just feel like being alone today.”

“Alright, then I’ll be on my way. But, if you need me to talk with you, just call me and I’ll come over straight away. Mother Nature will not even miss me, I hope!”

“Thank you so much. I won’t forget. Have fun painting the tulips.”

The little fairy sat down again and looked up into the sky and wondered if she would ever fly so high. Sometimes she wished she were a bird so she could fly up and touch the blue sky and be able to look all around. Fairies only flew fairly close to the ground, as the breeze would toss them around and they’d lose their way. She was bored and wanted something exciting to happen, but nothing exciting ever happens in Fairyland.

“I’m tired of being sad,” she sighed. “Maybe if I sing, I’ll feel better, but I don’t think so.” She wiggled her feet and pointed her dainty toes, but they would not even try. She shook her body to open her wings, but they refused to as well. So now she could not even fly, and worst of all, they didn’t even want to try. She stamped her feet angrily and fisted her hands. Tiny, silvery, shiny, tears wandered down her face and plopped on to the grass. She covered her sad little fairy face and held her head in her hands.

Then, slowly, something started to change. Her dainty fairy head lifted. Her downturned mouth slowly turned into an upturned mouth. She stood up straight and pulled her shoulders back and lifted her head proudly. A tiny sparkling laugh rippled out of her mouth as she turned and waved to a tiny elf who watched her closely from the tulip patch.

The gentle breeze played around her, but she tried to push it away, but it would not go away. So, she walked over to where the grass grew very tall, and slipped quietly between the long green blades, and simply disappeared.

An Unusual Day in Fairyland

It was a very unusual day in Fairyland. A beautiful rainbow filled the sky. As it never rains in Fairyland, everyone was very excited. Big brown bumblebees buzzed about the orchard and whispered to the flowers. The delicate dancing butterflies overheard what they said, and fluttered over and told the yellow buttercups.

The nosy grasshoppers rubbed their long lanky legs together and told the news to anyone who was listening. It's hard to keep a secret in Fairyland.

A gnarled old apple tree stood in the middle of the orchard. Its twisted branches drooped towards the ground. On one side of the old splintered trunk a tiny door was open. Three small slotted windows, placed in a gently winding pattern, went up to the top. Several birds, which had been resting peacefully on the branches, heard all the commotion below, and quickly flew down to see what it was all about.

At the top of the tree house in her tiny kitchen, Mrs. Pippin was busy making apple-cinnamon cookies. She looked out of the window to see why the birds had left in such a hurry. As she didn't see anything unusual, she went back to her baking.

Mrs. Pippin knew that once Mr. Pippin caught a whiff of cinnamon, he would be clambering up the stairs a little faster than his old legs generally took him.

On this unusual day, Mr. Pippin was busy in the garden weeding the

rhubarb patch. He wore a ragged green sweater with three tarnished brass buttons down the front, and dark brown pants that blended with the foliage. His old tortoiseshell spectacles rested on his fat little nose. In fact, with his little round face and bright red cheeks he looked rather like a rosy apple.

“Oh, my aching back,” he groaned, as he slowly tried to stand up straight. But, as he did so, he suddenly noticed something most unusual resting on the ground. Under a leaf of the largest rhubarb plant, tucked tightly back against the stalk, was something most peculiar.

“Well, my goodness gracious me! What do we have here?” he pondered. “This is very strange indeed.”

He moved a little closer and slowly bent down to get a better look.

“Hmm! It looks like a very large raindrop. But, I’ve never seen one this size. I wonder what it could possibly be?”

He pushed his spectacles back to the top of his nose, and scratched his bald head. He hoped that would help him remember where he’d seen something like this before. But, even that didn’t help this time.

“Perhaps my wife will know the answer to this one,” he mumbled to himself, and ambled back to the tree house as fast as his short stubby legs would take him.

“Mrs. Pippin, Mrs. Pippin!” he called loudly, as he stumbled up the twisted staircase and burst into the odd little kitchen just off the hall way.

“I have found something most unusual under a large leaf in the rhubarb patch,” he said, excitedly. “It looks like a very large raindrop, but it isn’t one. I can’t think what it is, or where it came from. Would you please come and take a look? Maybe you will know what it is.”

Mrs. Pippin laughed gently. She floured her hands and started to mix the cookie dough.

“I can’t imagine why you wouldn’t know Mr. Pippin. You’re clever,

and have your spectacles on, so you should be able to see well. Can't you think just a little bit harder? I must finish off my baking."

Mr. Pippin went over to her and laid his hand gently on her shoulder.

"But you must come Mrs. Pippin. I think you'll know the answer. I have scratched my head as hard as I can, and I still don't know."

She looked up at him and noticed that his little round cheeks were red with excitement, and his big round brown eyes sparkled.

"Obviously it's something quite unusual," she thought, as Mr. Pippin generally didn't get this excited.

"Oh, all right dear, if you insist," she said, and went and fetched her spectacles. "First, let me put the cookies on the trays so they'll be ready to bake when we get back."

Mrs. Pippin followed him down the dark crooked staircase and out into the garden. They walked down the path towards the shady spot where the big rhubarb plants grew.

"Give me your hand Mrs. Pippin, the ground is rough here," he said politely, as they wound their way between the rhubarb plants towards the largest one in the center.

"I really think this is wasting my time dear," she persisted. "I must go and put the cookies in the oven. And what could possibly be under a rhubarb leaf that you don't know about?"

"Please be patient dear! Just give me a few moments and you will see what I mean." He went around to the other side of the plant and crouched down. He carefully pulled back the wide green leaves one by one.

"Ah! Yes, it's still here," he said in a whisper. "If you lean forward just a little Mrs. Pippin, you will see it."

Mrs. Pippin quickly put on her spectacles, and straightened her lace bonnet. She gathered her long red skirt and white lace petticoats together, and leaned

as far forward as she could.

“Oh, my goodness! Oh, my dear!” she said excitedly. “I see what you mean Mr. Pippin. It’s most unusual. No wonder you were surprised.”

She pushed back her glasses, which had now slipped down to the end of her plump little nose, and leaned even farther forward to take a closer look.

Mr. Pippin leaned over too, and asked his wife rather excitedly, “What do you think it is dear?”

“Well, you most certainly are right Mr. Pippin. It does look like a very large raindrop, but it isn’t clear, and it doesn’t sparkle. In fact, you can’t see through it at all. I must say I have never seen anything like this before.”

Mrs. Pippin stood up, let out a deep sigh, and clasped her hands together over her plump chest. After a few moments she smiled, and said excitedly, “Do you know what I think it is Mr. Pippin?”

“No! I don’t dear. I can’t imagine what you’re thinking.”

“Well, I feel there’s something magical about it,” she said breathlessly, as her body began to tremble.

Mr. Pippin reached out and managed to catch hold of her arm, just as she was about to topple over.

“Oh, do be careful Mrs. Pippin,” he scolded. “You almost fell right on top of whatever it is. And you know, I don’t believe in anything magical. There simply has to be a logical answer.”

Mrs. Pippin stepped back, smoothed down her skirt, and shook the dirt off her shoes. She turned to Mr. Pippin, and he could tell by the look on her face, that she knew exactly what to do.

“Well, nevertheless,” she replied firmly, “as we don’t know what it is, we must ask someone who might know.”

Mr. Pippin took another look, just to make sure he had really seen it, and then went around to the other side of the rhubarb plant.

“Yes, I agree. That’s a very good idea Mrs. Pippin. As a matter of fact, I was just going to say that myself.”

Mr. Pippin led his wife back on to the garden path. They walked back to the house as fast as their short little legs would take them. By the time they got to the top of the stairs they were both puffing and quite out of breath.

“Sit down dear, and I’ll get you a glass of freshly made apple juice,” said Mrs. Pippin kindly.

“Thank you dear, that would be very nice,” he replied as he sat down. He was only too glad to rest his feet again. They seemed to ache an awful lot these days.

Mrs. Pippin took off her white lace bonnet, and hung it on a hook behind the kitchen door. She pushed her tiny curls back into place, and laid her spectacles on the wooden shelf right next to the door.

Carefully she placed a new red check napkin over a large serving plate, and placed several freshly baked apple-cinnamon cookies on it.

“Here you are dear,” she said, as she put the plate on the table. Then she poured some fresh sparkling apple juice into two glass tumblers.

“Do you know anyone who might know the answer to this very unusual problem?” asked Mr. Pippin, as he rocked back and forth on his old wooden rocking chair. This was where he did most of his ‘good’ thinking.

Mrs. Pippin, whose knees weren’t so good any more, shuffled over to her old favourite chair, and slowly lowered herself into its seat. She sat back, folded her chubby little hands in her lap, and paused for a moment.

“Well, first of all, we’ll have to keep this a secret,” she said sensibly. “We don’t want any of the village folk knowing about this and wandering

all over the garden.”

Mr. Pippin nodded. “Yes, I agree. I’ve worked hard to keep the garden neat and tidy, and I don’t want it trampled down.”

For the next few moments, the only sound in the little kitchen at the top of the tree house, came from the wooden rocking chair, as Mr. Pippin rocked slowly back and forth. They both remained very quiet as they did their deepest thinking.

“Mr. Pippin,” said Mrs. Pippin suddenly, making him jump. “I think we should go and talk with Mrs. Ladybird. She’s very smart, and knows about most things. And I do know she can keep a secret.”

As they drank their sparkling apple juice, and ate the freshly baked apple-cinnamon cookies, they both did some more very deep thinking.

Mr. Pippin nodded and said, “Yes, Mrs. Pippin, I’ve given that a great deal of thought, and I do agree with you.”

“Good!” she replied. “Then why don’t we go over there straight away, and we’ll take the rest of the cookies for her children.”

Mrs. Pippin got up, folded the red check napkin and tied the corners into a big knot. She put the empty glasses in the sink, and leaned out of the kitchen window. She looked down at the orchard to the rhubarb plant with the biggest leaves.

“I wonder if it really is a magic raindrop?” she said to herself. “If it is, then it’s the first one I’ve ever seen.”

Again she took her best lace bonnet off the hook behind the kitchen door, and tucked her tiny curls under it. She wrapped her finest white lace shawl over her shoulders and tied the two ends into a soft knot.

“This is indeed a most unusual day in Fairyland,” she said, as she followed Mr. Pippin down the dark crooked staircase. They closed the door behind them and went down the garden path.

CHAPTER TWO

Mr. Pippin opened the little white gate that parted the white picket fence, and they stepped out into the lane that led to Mrs. Ladybird's house. The air smelled sweet and fragrant as Mr. and Mrs. Pippin walked down the lane on their way to Mrs. Ladybird's house. But today, everything felt just a little bit different, but they didn't know why.

The soft green grass on both sides of the lane was covered with white daisies. Their tiny faces reached up to the sun as they basked in its golden rays. It seemed as though everything was just perfect in Fairyland.

Mr. and Mrs. Pippin walked arm in arm along the rough gravel path. Occasionally they would chat with each other, but most of the time they didn't talk. They both enjoyed the peace and quiet of the countryside.

Well, it was peaceful, until a nosy young grasshopper rudely interrupted it, by landing right in the centre of the path, just in front of them.

"Oh! Good morning Mr. and Mrs. Pippin," he said cheekily, as he jumped up and down in a most annoying manner. "And where might you be going today?" he asked.

"Never you mind where we're going," said Mr. Pippin angrily. He wondered why anyone would be rude enough to ask such a question.

Suddenly, Mr. and Mrs. Pippin were surrounded by a group of spindly grasshoppers, all springing up and down nonstop.

"Would you like us to go with you? We'll make sure you're quite safe," sniggered one of the grasshoppers.

"No! Be off with you. We don't need your company," he said sternly. He pulled Mrs. Pippin closer to him and they walked a little faster.

"Isn't anyone teaching the young ones any manners these days?" he mumbled to himself. "It's not even safe going for a walk down the lane."

Mr. Pippin didn't like things to change, but he knew they were. He

felt that the old ways were the best, and he was glad that his parents had taught him how to behave. He gently squeezed Mrs. Pippin's hand and smiled to himself. He wasn't going to let anything upset him today. It was just a perfect day in Fairyland.

Mrs. Ladybird lived on the edge of the village. From the brow of the hill they could see her cottage in the distance. A soft gray curl of smoke puffed out from the crooked chimney. The cottage was tiny, but she seemed to have enough room for all her children, even with the new baby.

Mr. Pippin pressed down the latch of the old brown wooden gate. The rusty hinges creaked but refused to move. So, he lifted it and pushed it back just wide enough for them to squeeze through.

"Cooee!" called Mrs. Pippin, as she looked around to see if anyone was in the garden. "It's just us – the Pippins!"

"Oh! Hello Mr. and Mrs. Pippin! How nice to see you," said a gentle voice from behind the freshly washed bed sheets that flapped in the breeze.

"Hello Mrs. Ladybird. Where are you?" laughed Mrs. Pippin.

Just as she spoke, the wind which was playing tricks again, swished the clothes to one side. And there, standing on tiptoe, on a round wooden stool, was tiny Mrs. Ladybird hanging out the freshly washed clothes.

"Away with you wind! Stop teasing me! I want you to dry my clothes, not annoy me," she scolded.

"If you don't mind waiting a few moments," she said, peering at them from between the white billowy sheets, "I'll just hang up the rest of the washing, and then I'm finished."

"Please, just take your time Mrs. Ladybird," said Mr. Pippin politely. But, he didn't really want to waste any time. He was anxious to get

back to his garden, and to keep an eye on those cheeky grasshoppers. There was no telling what they could be up to while he was away. He thought that most young grasshoppers were such a nuisance these days.

Mrs. Ladybird finished hanging up the washing, and stepped around the clothes basket. She went over to greet Mr. and Mrs. Pippin.

“How nice to see you both again,” she said graciously, as she shook hands with them. “Won’t you come in and have a cup of tea.”

Mr. and Mrs. Pippin looked at each other and nodded. “Well, thank you, that would be very nice Mrs. Ladybird,” replied Mrs. Pippin politely.

Together they walked up the mossy gravel path towards the house. On one side of the path was a flower bed that badly needed weeding. A few old rusty garden tools were thrown in a heap on the top. Mr. Pippin wondered why the tools weren’t hanging in the garden shed.

“Surely the children have been taught to help with the gardening,” he said to himself. He knew that Mrs. Ladybird had enough to do just looking after all of them.

Mrs. Ladybird opened the front door, and led Mr. and Mrs. Pippin into the living room. Even though the house was old and very small, it was clean and tidy.

“Please do sit down and make yourselves comfortable,” she said, as she pointed to some old high-backed wooden chairs with well worn needlepoint cushions. “I’ll put the kettle on and make some tea.”

Mrs. Pippin sat down and placed her bundle of cookies on the table. Mr. Pippin stood for a few moments while he waited for Mrs. Ladybird to come back. He shuffled uneasily from foot to foot as his legs began to ache. After a while, he got tired of waiting, so he pulled out one of the chairs on the other side of the table and sat down.

Over in the far corner, close to the kitchen, was a tiny white wicker

crib with a dainty pink frill gathered around the top of the outside edge. On her way back from the kitchen, Mrs. Ladybird peeped into the crib.

“Mrs. Pippin, come and see Anne, my newest baby,” she said proudly, as she beckoned Mrs. Pippin to come and take a look.

“Oh! I’d love to,” she said happily, and got up and went over to the crib.

Mr. Pippin shifted uneasily on his chair. He always felt quite uncomfortable when women talked about babies. He simply wanted to get on with the business, which to him, was far more important.

“How can I get them to listen to my story, and not talk about babies for the rest of our visit?” he wondered to himself.

Then, he remembered the freshly baked cookies in the red check napkin, just waiting to be eaten.

“Er – excuse me Mrs. Ladybird!” he stuttered. “We thought you might like some extra cookies for your children,” he said as he pushed the red check napkin across to the other side of the table. “My wife baked them only this morning, and they’re still warm.”

The two women looked at baby Anne and then smiled knowingly at each other, as only mothers do.

Mrs. Pippin sat down again, and untied the red check napkin.

“Thank you so much,” said Mrs. Ladybird, as she handed Mrs. Pippin a large plate for the cookies. “They won’t last long around here,” she laughed.

Mrs. Ladybird took her best china tea set from the cabinet and laid the table. She placed a well used silver teaspoon in each saucer, and a freshly ironed white linen napkin by each plate.

When she had finished laying the table, she pulled out one of the old wooden chairs and sat down.

“Mrs. Ladybird,” said Mr. Pippin, “we have something very special

to ask you. We know you're good at solving problems, and felt we could trust you with our secret."

Mrs. Ladybird blushed a deep crimson red, and placed her cool hands on her hot cheeks.

"Oh my goodness! I can't imagine how I can help you Mr. Pippin," she said, feeling most embarrassed. "But, if there's anything I can do to help, I'd be only too pleased, and I do love secrets."

That was all Mr. Pippin needed to hear. Immediately he sat up straight, cleared his throat, and took a deep breath. Just as his rosy red cheeks looked full enough to explode, the front door suddenly swung open. The room filled quickly with noisy little ladybirds running all over the place.

"Children! Children! Please mind your manners," said Mrs. Ladybird crossly. "Can't you see we have company?"

Poor Mrs. Ladybird felt more embarrassed than ever. She rushed over to the door and waved her arms frantically in the air. She took hold of some of the little ladybirds closest to the door, and shooed them back outside. But immediately they flew back in again, as soon as her back was turned.

"Please excuse them Mr. and Mrs. Pippin, I don't know what is wrong with them today. They aren't usually this naughty."

Mrs. Ladybird straightened her round little back, and stood as tall as any ladybird could.

"Everyone! Back outside right now. Can't you see that I am visiting with Mr. and Mrs. Pippin?"

"But mother," interrupted the eldest boy tugging at the corner of her apron, "we have something important to tell you."

"Yes Mother! Something *very important*," chorused the rest of

the ladybirds excitedly.

She looked from one to the other, and noticed that they most certainly did look unusually excited. Their little red cheeks glowed almost as brightly as their tiny red backs. But she remained firm.

“Not now children! It can wait until later. Off you go! All of you! Out into the garden!”

The children knew that this time she really meant it. So they all went back out into the garden, and huddled together in a group. She could hear them whispering and giggling as she turned to go back to the table.

“Oh children! Please wait a moment,” she called. “I’ve just remembered that Mr. and Mrs. Pippin brought some freshly baked apple-cinnamon cookies for you.”

She went over to the table to get the plate of cookies, and Mrs. Pippin handed it to her, hoping they might calm the situation.

“Go and sit under the apple tree and share them among you, and I mean *share*.”

Mrs. Ladybird closed the door, straightened her skirts, and went back and sat down.

“Please forgive me for the interruption Mr. and Mrs. Pippin. My children are so full of energy today. They seem very excited about something, and I can’t imagine why.”

“Oh, there’s no need to apologize Mrs. Ladybird. It’s nice to see such a happy family,” said Mrs. Pippin kindly.

CHAPTER THREE

The two women settled back in their chairs and sipped their tea. Mr. Pippin, who wasn't used to the noise and confusion of young ladybirds, sat unsteadily on the edge of his seat.

"Maybe I should start to tell you about our secret," he said rather impatiently.

"Oh yes! Please do! I want to hear all about it," she replied.

Once again, Mr. Pippin sat up very straight and again cleared his throat. His nostrils flared as he took a deep breath. His chest swelled so much that the twisted old buttons on his ragged green sweater just about popped off. As he slowly and carefully began to tell his story in every possible detail, he sounded exactly like the school teacher that he used to be. When he got to the part about the mysterious raindrop that he'd found in his garden, he watched Mrs. Ladybird to see if she really understood exactly what he was saying. His big brown eyes peered questioningly into hers.

"Well, what do you think about that Mrs. Ladybird?" he demanded.

As he let out the rest of his breath, it accidentally came out sounding like a whistle, and this made his face redder than ever.

Then once more, he settled back in his chair, took out a large white linen handkerchief and mopped his very moist warm brow.

"Well, Mr. Pippin, I must confess it is indeed most exciting. I don't quite know what to say," replied Mrs. Ladybird. "Mother used to tell me all kinds of stories, but that was a long time ago."

Mrs. Ladybird paused for just a moment and then said, "But, come to think of it, I do remember her telling me something about a magic bubble, but I don't recall anything about a magic raindrop. I'm sorry, that is all I can think of. I really can't be of any help to you Mr. Pippin."

Mrs. Ladybird nervously stirred her tea far more times than she usually did. She picked up the cup and saucer and took a sip of tea, and then placed them back on the table. She tried not to look at Mr. Pippin as she felt his brown eyes still staring down at her.

So she got up and went over to the crib and rocked it gently back and forth, trying very hard to remember anything else her mother might have told her. Then she looked back at Mr. Pippin and smiled sweetly.

“You are indeed a very smart man Mr. Pippin. I can’t think why you don’t know the answer yourself. But, if you wish, I could go with you and take a look. I’d like to see it anyway.”

Mr. Pippin nodded his head in agreement, and puffed out his chest. He liked being called ‘smart’. After all, school teachers are supposed to be smart and know about most things.

“Very well then,” he replied. “When can you come?”

“Well, if you like, I can come right now. I will walk with you back to your garden. My eldest girl can watch Baby Anne.”

“That is just excellent,” he replied, easing himself out of the tiny chair that had held him tightly in its grip.

Mrs. Ladybird opened the door and looked for her children. But they weren’t anywhere to be seen.

“Lily! Lily Ladybird!” she called. “Please come here for a just a moment dear. I need you to help me.”

Her eldest daughter suddenly appeared from behind the rusty rain barrel, and flew quickly over to her. She was followed closely by the rest of the little ladybirds.

“I’m going to walk with Mr. and Mrs. Pippin back to their house. Please keep an eye on Baby Anne while I’m away. I won’t be long.”

Lily Ladybird walked over to the crib, opened a book and sat down.

The younger children looked at each other, and again whispered and giggled.

“Now children, say goodbye to Mr. and Mrs. Pippin, and go back to your games,” she said firmly. “I don’t want you bothering Lily Ladybird while I’m away.”

The little ladybirds lined up in a row and put on their very best smiles. “Goodbye Mr. and Mrs. Pippin,” they said together, and quickly ran out into the garden.

Mrs. Ladybird picked up the cups and saucers and placed them in the kitchen sink. She hung her apron on the back of a chair, and wrapped her threadbare hand-crocheted shawl around her shoulders.

She knew her children were up to something, but didn’t know what it was. But, right now she had something very important to do, and they were old enough to behave while she was away for a few minutes.

“Lily Ladybird! I’m off now dear,” she said, as she opened the front door.

“Come along now Mr. and Mrs. Pippin. I can’t wait to see what your secret looks like,” she said in a laughing whisper so the children wouldn’t hear.

But, perhaps it was too late. Mrs. Ladybird’s children most certainly knew something that she knew nothing about.

Maybe they already knew what the secret was, or then again, it could be something else.

Mrs. Ladybird breathed a sigh of relief as she walked down the garden path with Mr. and Mrs. Pippin. Her children were just too much to cope with today, and she was glad of an excuse to get out in the fresh air for a few moments.

As they walked along, the two women chatted about children and all things that women talk about. Mr. Pippin walked silently along, still trying

to come up with an answer himself. As they got closer to the rhubarb patch, Mr. Pippin walked a little faster to get ahead of them.

“Careful now ladies, we are almost there. Just follow in my footsteps,” he said, hoping they wouldn’t trample down any of the leaves.

Then he crouched down and lifted up a large rhubarb leaf. He pointed to the most unusual raindrop, resting at the bottom of a long red rhubarb stalk.

“There it is Mrs. Ladybird,” he said excitedly. “Take a good look and tell me what you think it is?”

Mrs. Ladybird folded her tiny wings over her black spotted back, and leaned forward as far as she could.

“My goodness gracious me! It’s quite different from what I imagined it to be,” she said as she turned to Mr. Pippin, whose face was embarrassingly close to hers. She turned back and looked at the raindrop again, and then stood up.

“Mr. Pippin, I don’t know what it is,” she said. “I really can’t help you, but it certainly is quite different from anything I’ve ever seen before. Mr. Pippin looked surprised, and a bit disappointed. He felt sure that Mrs. Ladybird would know the answer.

“Are you quite certain you don’t know what it is?” he asked again.

“Yes, Mr. Pippin,” she replied firmly. “I am quite sure.”

Mr. Pippin bent down a little lower this time, and took an even closer look. Mrs. Pippin leaned over his back, and also tried to get as close as she could. In fact she leaned out so far, that her white lace bonnet fell over her eyes, and she struggled hard to push it back in to place.

“Mrs. Pippin, do be careful,” he said as he turned to her, and helped straighten her bonnet.

He stood and waited while she pushed her tight little curls back under it, and

then moved back away from the big green rhubarb plant.

Mr. Pippin wondered what they should do next. Then he suddenly came up with a plan that might just work.

“Mrs. Ladybird, maybe if we all go and sit in the orchard, you might remember something else your mother told you. And we won’t be overheard there,” said Mr. Pippin who was now getting uncomfortably warm.

“Yes, I think that is a good idea Mr. Pippin, and it will be cooler underneath the apple trees.

“And I must say, I agree too!” nodded Mrs. Pippin. “An excellent idea Mr. Pippin.”

Mrs. Ladybird and Mrs. Pippin stepped back on to the path and went towards the orchard.

Before leaving, Mr. Pippin put the rhubarb leaf back in place so no one would know they had been there. Suddenly, from somewhere above him, a grasshopper jumped out and landed right on the edge of the leaf.

“Get out of here right now!” said Mr. Pippin angrily brushing it away. But the lanky grasshopper got a quick look at the unusual raindrop, and did the biggest hop he’d ever done. He landed back on the garden path, quite out of breath and extremely excited.

“Hey guys! Guess what!” he called to his friends. “It’s true! There really is a magic raindrop in Mr. Pippin’s garden.” He kept jumping up and down higher and faster than he’d ever done before.

“The rumour we heard was true. I saw it for myself,” he boasted.

“Where is it? Where is it?” asked the other grasshoppers impatiently. “Can we go and see it right now?”

He paused for a moment, and looked at all the little round eyes staring up at him, waiting for him to give them an answer.

“Gosh! I really am important,” he thought to himself, as he puffed out his tiny thin chest.

“We want to see it right now!” demanded a bigger grasshopper standing right under his nose.

“Yes, right now,” they all said mimicking him.

“Yes! All right!” he said waving his arms in the air trying to calm them down. “But before we do that, we must send out another message to everyone in Fairyland. This time we must let them know it’s really true.”

The grasshoppers immediately jumped into action. They gathered in a circle, closed their eyes, and rubbed their lanky hind legs together until they ached. But, finally the message was sent out. Everyone who heard it, stopped what they were doing, and headed over to Mr. Pippin’s garden. Very soon a faint murmur of voices quickly turned into a ripple of excitement.

“Shush! Please be quiet everyone and keep back. We mustn’t let them know we’re here,” said the ‘important’ grasshopper. “Quick! Find a place where you can see, without being seen, and don’t make a sound,” he ordered.

The orchard was a perfect place for hiding. They scurried behind the long green blades of grass, and jumped up into the wild flowers and peeped out from between the petals. They all watched as Mr. and Mrs. Pippin, and Mrs. Ladybird walked into the orchard and went over to the garden seats that were shaded by the trees.

As Mr. Pippin sat down on the beautifully carved oak seats, and touched them lovingly as he remembered where they had come from. He closed his eyes and heard the same voice again.

“Mr. Pippin,” said a slow deep base voice. “Mr. Pippin,” it said again.

Mr. Pippin, who had been in the orchard raking up the last of the Autumn leaves, stopped and looked around. There was no one there, so

he went back to raking the leaves.

“Mr. Pippin!” the voice said again. “I am talking to you. Please pay attention!”

Mr. Pippin looked around again and said anxiously, “Where are you? I can’t talk to you if I can’t see you.”

“Look up above you, as high as you can,” the gruff voice said.

Mr. Pippin peered up into the broad branches of the old oak tree, and suddenly saw an old tired and badly wrinkled face.

“Yes, it is me,” the voice said as the sad eyes looked down at him. “Now you can see how miserable and old I am.”

Mr. Pippin’s mouth dropped wide open, and he just stared and stared.

“Well, are you going to help me or not?” the gruff voice demanded.

“Oh, oh, yes, of course I am,” he stuttered. “But how can I help you?”

The tree let out a deep slow sigh, and its last few dry crinkly leaves fluttered to the ground.

“Well,” he started to say, “as I have nothing else to do now, I have been doing a lot of deep thinking. The conclusion I have finally come to, is that I want to be something else.”

Mr. Pippin was shocked. He shook his head, and rubbed his eyes. “This must be a dream,” he said to himself, and turned and started to walk back home.

“Stop! Where are you going to Mr. Pippin? I haven’t finished what I had to say.”

Mr. Pippin put his garden rake down and went up and stood close to the tree.

“That is better,” said the face in the tree. “Please, do be patient. It

has taken me a long, long time to make this decision, and now it is going to take just as long for me to tell you.”

“I am very busy, and I must get back to my work,” said Mr. Pippin nervously. “And why did you have to make a decision? I don’t quite understand you.”

The gnarled old oak tree struggled hard to get its thoughts in order. Then, in the fastest way it had ever spoken, which wasn’t fast at all, it said, “I want you to cut me down!”

Mr. Pippin gasped and asked, “But why? You are still strong, and your leaves in the summer give us shade in our garden. We would miss you very much.”

“Thank you. That is nice, but I am so tired of being high and mighty. I want to be something else. Something much more humble, and of course, useful.”

“Have you decided yet what that is?” asked Mr. Pippin, now feeling sorry for the old tree.

“Yes, as a matter of fact I have,” it said. “When you have cut me down, please carve me into four beautiful garden seats, so you can still enjoy me in the orchard.”

Mr. Pippin suddenly opened his eyes as a noisy bee buzzed by his nose. He smiled to himself as he remembered how much care he had put into carving the oak seats. As he relaxed in the shade of the apple trees, the oak seat he sat on gave one loud creak as he lovingly stroked it.

High above them, a cloud of white blossoms and crimson buds spread out in a lacy pattern. The golden sunlight filtered through the leaves of the apple trees on to the green grass below, touching it with streams of dancing golden light. The soft hazy blue of the bluebells stretched before them like a blue carpet.

The violets bowed their heads, pretending not to notice that anyone was there. A cheeky robin hopped across the grass with a worm in its beak. He'd been too busy waiting to catch a worm, so he hadn't heard the special message. The unseen audience gathered closer, creeping and fluttering quietly along.

Mrs. Ladybird knew that Mr. and Mrs. Pippin were waiting for her to come up with an answer. She shifted around on her chair trying to get comfortable, and spread her big black skirt over her knees. She gave her wings a shake, and folded her delicate hands in her lap.

Mrs. Ladybird looked at Mrs. Pippin and said to her in the softest voice, "The only most unusual thing I can remember my mother telling me, was something about a Golden City Behind the Sun. But, I can't recall her telling me anything about a very unusual raindrop."

Then she wriggled to the edge of her seat and leaned forward, and Mr. and Mrs. Pippin leaned forward too. In fact, their heads nearly touched.

"I think," she whispered to them, "because it's so unusual, it just has to be a *magic* raindrop."

She was so embarrassed by her last remark, that her throat started to tickle quite badly. She knew that Mr. Pippin would think her very strange indeed, and she was positively sure *he* didn't believe in anything magic.

Mr. Pippin turned quickly and looked around. He thought he'd heard something moving in the grass. But, there was nothing there. Then, he got up and went over to a bunch of bluebells. He bent down and picked the one with the biggest dewdrop in its bell, and gave it to Mrs. Ladybird.

"Here Mrs. Ladybird, have a sip of dew. Your throat must be quite dry."

Mr. Pippin handed her the delicate blue flower. She put the fluted

edge to her lips and let its cool nectar slip down her throat.

“Thank you Mr. Pippin. The dew was very fresh. The fairies must have placed it there early this morning.”

Mr. Pippin returned to his seat. He put his right elbow on the arm of the chair, and rested his forehead on his fist.

“I wonder what we should do now,” said Mrs. Ladybird, as she cast her eyes back to the rhubarb patch. She wished that she knew the answer.

For a moment, no one replied, as no one had an answer. Then all of a sudden, old Mr. Pippin sat up straight, and beamed from ear to ear.

“Well!” he said proudly, as he rested his clasped hands over his round tummy. “I think the best thing to do, is to take turns watching it.”

“What a good idea.” I knew you would come up with a plan,” said Mrs. Ladybird.

“I will take the first watch,” he continued, “and then Mrs. Pippin, you can take over from me. Mrs. Ladybird, would you be able to spare a little time out of your busy day?”

“Of course Mr. Pippin! I wouldn’t miss this for anything. My eldest children are quite capable of looking after the younger ones. But there is one thing I won’t do, and that is, leave them alone at night.”

“I quite agree,” replied Mr. Pippin. “I think I’ll ask Mr. Owl if he can do the night shift. He is a good fellow, and can be trusted.”

This seemed like an excellent plan to them all, and was easy to put into action. All it took was time and lots of patience, and that wasn’t such a bad thing to learn anyway.

“I’ll go home now dear, and pack you a lunch, and bring you another sweater just in case you need it,” said Mrs. Pippin kindly.

The two ladies headed back to their homes, both going off in different directions. Mr. Pippin was glad to sit down again, and have time to do some

more thinking. It was all rather exciting, and he just wasn't used to this much excitement. This was quite different from working quietly in his garden.

“Well, this is indeed a strange state of affairs,” he thought to himself. “Fancy my garden being chosen for such a mystery. But then, it's one of the tidiest gardens around. So, of course it was chosen,” he boasted.

He wriggled around on the oak seat several times, trying to get comfortable. The warmth of the morning sun made him feel sleepy again. Strange pictures of huge rhubarb leaves and dancing raindrops flashed before his eyes.

“Maybe the fairies in the Golden City Behind the Sun know all about this,” he said as he dozed off to sleep.

This thought startled him so much that he woke up and gave himself a shake. “Did I actually hear myself say, ‘The Golden City Behind the Sun?’”

He glanced around to see if anyone might have heard him talking in his sleep. “Oh my goodness me! I did!”

Do you think anyone else heard him?



*If you didn't know the answer to a question,
would you ask someone else to help you with it, or just
try and solve it yourself?*

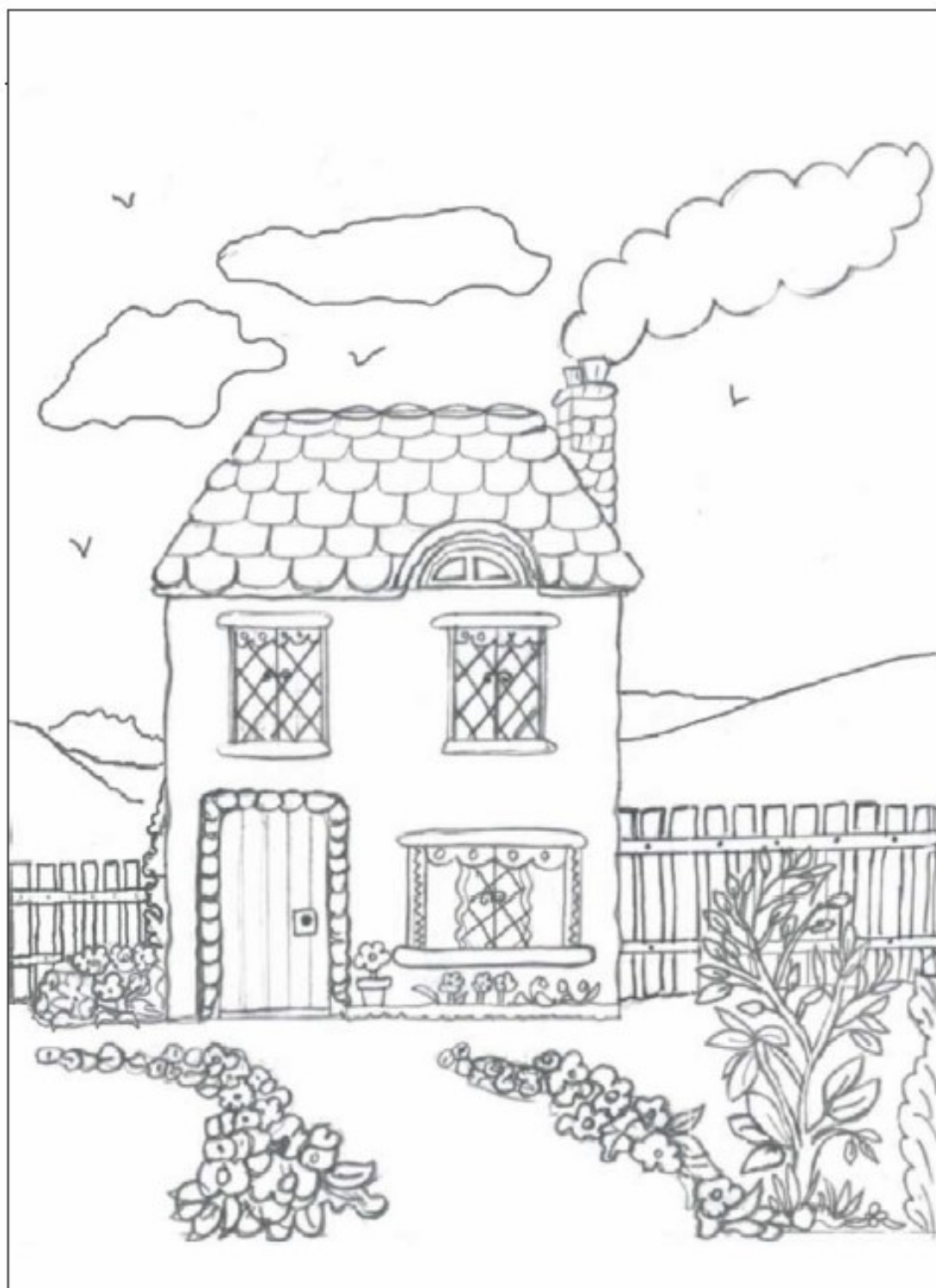
Project

On the next page is a drawing of Mrs. Ladybird's house for you to colour.

Take out your pencil crayons and choose the colours you think she might like. Then, draw some rusty old garden tools beside the flower beds.

Don't forget to print your name at the bottom of the picture.

Mrs. Ladybird's House



Colored by _____

All About the Second book

The Search Begins

Fairyland is just buzzing with excitement. Everyone saw the rainbow that appeared in the sky yesterday, and that is most unusual because it hardly ever rains in Fairyland.

Fairy Rose Light has called a ‘Special Meeting’ and the fairies are gathering together and waiting for her to begin. Do you think that Fairy Blue Light might be there too? I just can’t wait to meet her. How about you?

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