



Mae the Panda Fairy

by Daisy Meadows

SCHOLASTIC INC.

For Lara, with love

Special thanks to Rachel Elliot

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Kirsty Tate gazed happily at the rows of bushes, her bare arm resting on the open window as the car traveled along the bumpy country road. Pretty red, yellow, and pink flowers were tangled among the green leaves. She could smell the tangy aroma of cut grass and the earthiness of freshly turned soil.





“We’re almost there, girls,” said Mrs. Tate from the driver’s seat. “Look!”

She slowed the car and pointed at a sign at the side of the winding road.

2 MILES—WILD WOODS NATURE RESERVE

Kirsty smiled at her best friend, Rachel Walker, who was sitting beside her.



“I’m so excited,” said Rachel. “The sun’s shining, we’ve got the whole



summer vacation stretched out ahead of us, and a whole week to spend here at the reserve with the animals.”

It was the start of summer vacation, and Kirsty and Rachel were on their way to Wild Woods, their local nature reserve. Rachel was staying with Kirsty, and their parents had arranged for them to spend every day that week at the reserve as volunteers. As the car turned up a rough, narrow road, their hearts raced with anticipation.

“I can’t wait to help out as a junior ranger,” said Kirsty.

“It will be so cool to see the animals!”

At the end of the road was an archway, printed with green words:

WELCOME TO WILD WOODS
NATURE RESERVE





Mrs. Tate drove through the archway and stopped the car next to a small wooden hut. The door of the hut opened and a tan woman with dark brown hair came out. She was wearing khaki shorts, a white shirt, and hiking boots. She waved at them and smiled.



“Look, there’s Becky,” said Mrs. Tate. “She’s the head of Wild Woods.”

Rachel and Kirsty jumped out of the car, and Becky walked over to them.

“It’s great to see you,” said Becky, shaking their hands. “I’m really glad that



you'll be spending the week with us. It's great to meet young people who are interested in conservation."

"We can't wait to get started!" said Rachel excitedly.

"I thought you could begin by exploring the reserve on your own a little," said Becky. "It's the best way to get a feel for it. I'll meet you back here this afternoon and give you your first task."

"That sounds great!" Kirsty cheered.

"A real adventure!" Rachel added.

"These two love adventures!" said Mrs. Tate with a laugh.

The girls exchanged a secret, happy glance. Kirsty's mother had no idea how many adventures they had already had! They were friends with all the Rainbow Magic fairies, and had often visited





Fairyland and helped foil Jack Frost's evil plans.

They grabbed their backpacks and some supplies for the day.

“Do you have everything?” asked Mrs. Tate kindly.

Kirsty peered into her backpack.
“Camera, notebook, raincoat, pens, binoculars, sunscreen . . .”

She grinned at her mother.
“Yes, I think I've remembered everything!”

Mrs. Tate kissed her and gave Kirsty a hug. “Have a fantastic time,” she said.





Rachel and Kirsty waved good-bye and hurried down a winding path into the reserve. As soon as

they were out of sight, Kirsty

paused and took a deep

breath of fresh air. “I

feel as if there’s no

one else for miles and

miles,” she said.



“It’s wonderful!” Rachel smiled, turning around slowly on the spot. “I can see dragonflies, bumblebees, and even a kingfisher!”





They were standing beside a large pond, which was surrounded by cattails. Everywhere they looked, they saw animals. Hares peeked at them, ducks paddled nearby, and otters slipped into the water. Kirsty fumbled





in her backpack and pulled out her camera.

“This place is incredible,” she said, taking picture after picture.

“Look over there,” said Rachel, pulling out her camera, too. “The frog on that lily pad looks just like my stuffed animal at home.”

“He does look familiar,” Kirsty agreed, looking through her camera lens and zooming in. “Hang on—that’s no ordinary frog! It’s Bertram!”

Their friend, a royal frog footman from Fairyland, waved and came hopping over to them.





Rachel and Kirsty knelt down beside the edge of the pond and smiled at him.

“Hello, Rachel and Kirsty!” he said in a surprised voice. “I didn’t expect to meet you two here!”

“We didn’t expect to see you, either,” said Rachel with a giggle.



“I have relatives in the human world,” Bertram explained. “I just visited them.”

“We’re here helping out at the nature



reserve,” Kirsty explained. “We’re taking a little tour.”

“Yes, this is a very nice nature reserve,” said Bertram. “Not as good as the one in Fairyland, of course.”

“I didn’t know there was a nature reserve in Fairyland,” said Rachel.

“Oh, yes. It’s wonderful there,” said Bertram. “Would you like to visit?”

“Yes, please!” said Rachel.

“We’d love to!” Kirsty exclaimed. “But how can we get there without fairy magic?”

“Should we use our locket?” asked Rachel. “They still have a little bit of fairy dust inside them.”

“There’s no need for that,” said Bertram with a smile. “I have a little magic of my own!”

