
Becoming Piper Pan

Book 2 Preview Chapter by Lindy MacLaine for Piper's Merry Band

June, 2015



CHAPTER FOUR

The Dream Keeper

While the other girls squabbled about which corner of the sand-cushioned cave they'd sleep in, Midge headed to the shadowed depths of the cavern. She felt restless, tired of logistics and chattering.

It had taken nearly all day to get here. The packing and preparing to go hadn't been so hard, none of them had more than the backpacks they'd come with. Of course there were the new joy jumbles Belle was trying to teach them to make, and they'd had to argue a bit over who got which of those.

The time-consuming part had been later. They'd walked to where they'd left the dugout, and found it full of water, as they hadn't had the good sense to stow it properly upside down. They'd had to use their hands to bail the water out, because although still pixie-dusted, it weighed too much to turn over and dump out, even with all seven of them. She'd tried to explain to the others about the origins of the term "water-logged," but no one had wanted to hear it.

Then it had taken more time while Stinky stroked and flattered Belle into producing a bit more pixie dust to give the dug-out and its passengers the much-needed lift to launch it into the sky. It had seemed awfully funny to paddle a boat through the air in broad daylight, but they'd done it.

They'd gone "the long way 'round," as Belle called it, avoiding Sincoraz' mountains. Then there'd been the detour to Slightly's Gulch to be sure the three pirate captives they'd left last night in the dark were all right. Pudge had insisted on the latter. Midge still found that odd—Pudge could be such a bully, but here

she was all soft hearted about the pirates, not wanting any harm to come to them. They'd seen them scooting and hobbling along, two with their hands and feet still tied behind their backs, the third's hands tied in front. His peg leg made him slow enough.

Midge wondered if they'd figure out the obvious anytime soon. Peg-Leg could untie the others, then they could untie him. She supposed they'd have to be willing to do that very un-pirate-like thing: cooperate. Fortunately, Pudge hadn't insisted they approach and offer sustenance. Thank goodness for small blessings.

Finally they'd arrived at Mermaid's Lagoon, where Belle had given them a tour and suggested they settle in. It was too late in the day for flying lessons, according to Belle. She'd looked kind of nervous, and while she and Zonk had exchanged looks, neither of them had pressed.

Midge knew Zonk was anxious for Piper to show up. Midge was too. But right now she just needed some alone time. She wished she had a good book to curl up with, in a solitary corner. Well, she didn't have the book, but she could find a quiet place, with any luck.

Walking with one hand on the rock wall, she started when the cold face of it grew warm. She knew perfectly well that the further you went into a cave, the colder it became. Everything she'd read verified the fact. Unless, she thought, unless there's an underground hot spring flowing here, providing thermal heat.

The interior of the cavern wasn't just one big room. The wall she followed cornered, becoming a passageway. She'd have to be careful, Midge thought, a curious shiver running down her spine. She'd never considered herself an adventurous sort. Quite the opposite. But here in the Neverland, she'd plotted

battle plans and actually put them into motion. Assigning herself to set the fire aboard the Jolly Roger last night had been way more than she'd thought she could really *do*.

She shuddered, remembering the thrill of launching the lantern at the crewman who'd surprised her in the captain's quarters, the terrifying victory of seeing the flames leap up, the scramble to get back up the ladder and on deck with the crewman on her heels. Her heart thudded and her palms began to sweat. Luckily, Piper had shown up. If she hadn't, surely the man would have caught and imprisoned, if not killed her. It didn't bear thinking about.

And Belle would have gone up in flames if not for Piper's bravery. Midge was glad for Piper's courage. And still amazed she'd found some of her own.

She came back to the present and further amazement when instead of the black dark of a subterranean cavern, the air in front of her grayed and brightened. Midge kept her hand on the warm wall, though she now had enough light to see by. She walked forward into a glowing cavern

Midge gasped. It was lovely. A steaming pool occupied the center of the room—proof of her theory that natural hot springs flowed nearby. Stone steps, or seats of varying heights, ringed the cavern. They seemed to have been carved from the walls themselves. Smooth and inviting, they called to Midge's desire to curl up with a book, or just lie down and daydream.

Most startling of all were the shells. Nautilus and conch shells, lit from within like gorgeous custom lighting. Some sat on the stone platforms. Some lay in small pigeonholes, recesses in the rock wall. They appeared to have been fashioned just for this. A number of shells hung from stalactites, suspended by filaments of spider web, woven just so.

Midge hardly dared breathe. It was like waking up to find the sun shining after weeks on end of rain. It was so perfect she didn't want to risk disturbing it. *How did this place come to be*, she wondered. *Who used this bathhouse*, for that is what it seemed to be, *and what happened to them?* And most of all, *what makes the shells glow?*

"Thewe you awe!" Thumb's hand slipped into Midge's, and the little girl leaned against her, sighing in contentment.

"Sure. Here I am," Midge replied, surprised she'd been missed, most especially by Thumb, who she'd thought had eyes pretty much only for Zonk. Thumb's hand was warm in hers, reassuring. "Isn't it beautiful?" Midge said.

"Uh-huh." Thumb nodded, her namesake planting itself in her mouth. "ike magic."

"It *is* magic." Belle's wings thrummed as she hung above the steaming pool.

"What's magic?" Stinky predictably appeared in Belle's wake, followed by the twins, Pudge and finally Zonk.

Flim put one hand in the water and grinned at her sister. "*Hay que bañarnos.*"

Flam responded by peeling off her clothes and climbing in. "*Sí*," she agreed. Flim followed suit, happily splashing her sister and giggling.

Apparently the water was perfect soaking temperature. "Why not?" Midge said, stripping off her own clothes. "My clothes need it, too," she announced, plunging the pile into the pool and forcing them under, where she used her feet to "launder" them. It felt heavenly.

"Ha!" Pudge laughed, jumping in without bothering to remove her clothes.

Stinky held back, but Zonk took the reluctant girl's hand and stepped with her, carefully into the pool.

Belle squeaked and flew to a position of safety, landing next to a glowing shell ensconced in the wall, out of the way of the splashing, squealing, laughing melee.

After a few moments of revelry, the girls' noise quieted to sighs and moans of delight elicited by the delightfully warm burbling water.

"You were saying?" Midge said to the fairy. "I mean—I assume you were about to explain this place and these lights to us, right?"

Belle arranged herself artfully on her tiny ledge. "I was." The little old fairy seemed to make sure she had everyone's attention before going on. "This is a magical place. It was the cavern of the Dream Keeper."

Midge perked up. This was going to be interesting. She glanced at the rest of the girls, and saw that they, too, were looking at Belle with bright-eyed attention. "I thought these were the mermaids' caves," Midge said.

"That's right," Belle replied. "The Dream Keeper was a mermaid."

The girls whispered and muttered among themselves.

"Shush!" Midge commanded. "I want to hear this!"

"Dreamkeeping is a skill that can be taught," Belle explained. "In the Crystal City, every fairy takes classes in dreamkeeping. It's one of the services fairies provide to their very-own people. But it comes more easily to some than others. Every once in a while, a being is born who is one of those rarities: a natural Dream Keeper. Mellisandra was one of those rarities."

"Whose dreams did she keep?" Midge asked, "and how did she keep them?"

Belle pointed to the glowing shell beside her. "This is someone's dream. Mellisandra listened to whoever's dream this is. In her magical way, she captured the dream, and contained it here, where it inspires not just the dreamer, but others as well."

"Why would you do that?" Midge shook her head. "I don't get it."

"Maybe I do," Zonk said. A funny, shuttered look had come over her face. Different from her usual poker face. "The dream is safe in there, right?" She looked at Belle for confirmation.

Belle nodded. "Safe, protected, but also nurtured. It has room to breathe and grow. It's light will never burn out."

"Huh," Pudge allowed. "You're sayin' once it's in there, no one can crush it. No one can blow it out by sayin' 'that's a stupid dream!'"

"And no one can talk you out of it if they don't know what your dream is." Midge narrowed her eyes, thinking it through. "But why tell the Dream Keeper at all? Why not just keep your dream to yourself?"

"Yeah!" Zonk demanded.

When Zonk looked like that, Midge thought she was scary. Or maybe, she thought, reconsidering, maybe the tall girl was actually *scared* under that tough glare.

Belle looked surprised. "You mean you don't know?" she said.

"Know what?" Stinky smiled her totally-in-love-with-Belle smile.

"You have to say your dreams aloud in order for them to come true!"

"Why?" Zonk growled.

"You have to say it to know it," Belle said. She looked around, and tried again. "It's a way of stating the truth and making it your own."

“You mean if I never say my dreams aloud, I might not let myself know I really want them,” Midge said, understanding coming all at once. “You mean if I keep it quiet, I can fool myself into thinking I want it when I might not, or I might think that I don’t want it when I really do.”

“Of course!” Belle sounded like this should be the most obvious thing in the world. She sighed. “Look. This is related to why I was trying to teach you to fill your joy jumbles. You have to fill it with specific things, specific thoughts, memories, dreams. You can’t fill your joy jumble with a bunch of vague notions!”

“*Como qué?*” said Flim.

“Like what?” translated Flam.

“Like... ‘sugar and spice and everything nice’.” Belle answered. She actually looked a little ticked off about it.

“What about ‘frogs and snails and puppy dog tails’?” Midge teased.

“Now *that’s* specific!” Belle said. “Everyone knows what a frog or a snail is. It might help to say what kind of puppy dog tail, but basically it’s clear. That’s what I like about boys,” she continued. “They’re easy to understand. No guessing!” Belle’s voice got louder and more shrill. “Whereas with girls, what *kind* of sugar? *Which* spice? And what in the bubbling bog is ‘*everything nice*?’”

Midge just stared at the fairy. She glanced at the others to see if they knew what Belle was so mad about. Pudge’s mouth hung open. Flim and Flam had their heads cocked at identical angles. Stinky looked like she might start to cry, and Thumb was blinking fast, not a good sign.

“Your issue. Not ours,” Zonk told Belle.

“Anyway,” Midge said, eager to head off confrontation. “You’re telling us we need to be clear, specific, and truthful about what really makes us happy in order to fill our joy jumbles.”

“Right!” Belle’s face broke into an amazed grin. “You’ve got it!”

“And back to the Dream Keeper thing being a skill,” Midge said, eager to get this paraphrasing thing right, “You’re saying not everyone can invite a dream out without damaging it.”

“She didn’t say that.” Zonk glared at Midge.

“No, I didn’t,” Belle sniffed, “but I meant it.”

“And not everyone knows how to put it safe and intact in a place where it can shine and breathe and grow,” Midge said.

“Brilliant,” Belle trilled.

“And you said there are only a few real Dream Keepers around,” Zonk finished.

Belle stared back at Zonk. “Right.” She flushed.

“So fairies aren’t necessarily good at dreamkeeping,” Zonk pressed.

“No.” Belle turned even redder.

“You can be my Dream Keeper!” Stinky said, reaching toward Belle.

Belle flew to Stinky’s shoulder. “Yes, I can be *your* Dream Keeper,” Belle replied. The grandmother fairy threw a glare at Zonk, making it clear whose dream she couldn’t safely keep.

“OK, then,” Midge said. “I think I get it.”

“Can humans be Dream Keepers?” Pudge asked.

Belle looked sad. “Perhaps,” she said. “But they’re rare.”

Pudge pinched her lips. She got a funny look on her face that reminded Midge of trying to make a thing real just by wishing it. Midge couldn't imagine Pudge ever being a Dream Keeper. Pudge had a big mouth and she was mean. But Midge knew *she* wanted things other people might not understand, or think she could have, or do. As far as she was concerned, they each deserved to have their dreams. Even Pudge.

"Are there any Dream Keepers left in the Neverland?" Midge asked.

"No." Belle seemed suddenly busy trying to brush an invisible spot off her spandex shirt. "But there is one natural Dream Keeper in the Crystal City. He is quite old now. His name is Ayotunde."

"Can we meet him, d' ya think?" Pudge asked.

Belle shrugged. "I don't know," she said. "But long before we get to that," she flew over the girls, emphasizing her words, "I need you to start filling your joy jumbles, then I need you to get some sleep so you'll be set for tomorrow's flying lessons"

"What about Pip?" Zonk demanded.

"She'll get here," Belle said. "Mind your business, I promise you she's minding hers. I'll be right back." Belle zipped out of the cavern.

Zonk glowered, but climbed out of the bubbling pool. Midge followed, and the two set about spreading clothes to dry on the warm stone seats.

Belle reappeared, holding the bag of joy jumbles. "You can get to work on these while your clothes are drying. Flying lessons start bright and early."

