

Dedication

For all the great four-legged friends
that have shared their life with us:

Molly, Brandy,

Chester,

Blue, Fluffy, Hops, Brutus,

Abby & Lou

and to those dreamers who
stare deep into the essence of the universe—our friends.

THE JOURNEY TO WHISPERING GARDENS®

Imagine living in a land of gardens, in a place called Whispering Gardens.

One day you discover that the myths and legends your grandfather told you are true.

Fairies are real. Nature is ruled by magic.

And we all possess magical powers that we may discover—if we just learn how to listen to “the Whispers.”

That is our journey...





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TIME TO LEAVE

The freezing chill of winter arrived early on Backbone Mountain. Threatening storm clouds swept across the setting sun, throwing long dark shadows over the Pepper family's small igloo home.

Inside the igloo, Moonflower cuddled in her favorite chair by the warm cozy fireplace. She imagined she was in a far-off place, as she read from her Grandpa Caraway's old tattered diary about his many adventures.

Shivering from the cold, Papaw Pepper reached the front door of the igloo. The howling wind swept his big black-raccoon tail against his furry white face as he forced the door open. It slammed shut behind him, and he breathlessly announced, "We are going home!"

Moonflower looked up from Caraway's diary and replied, "Home? But we are home, Pa!"

"No! I mean home where Grandpa Caraway always told me I should be, not here on this freezing mountain!" Papaw explained.

"That icy wind out there must have frozen your noggin, dear," said Papaw's wife, Scarlet. The smell of apples and cinnamon filled the room, as she sliced a piece of pie. "Here, have a piece of warm apple pie and a cup of hot cinnamon cocoa."

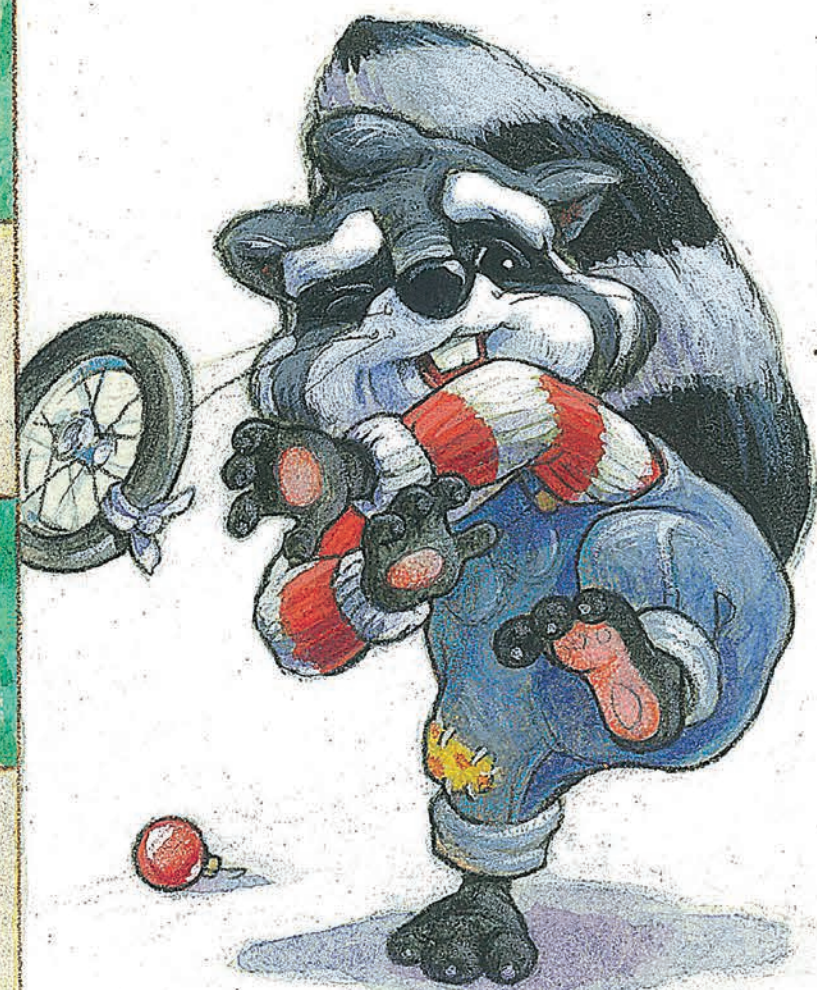
Papaw ignored the apple pie and whipped his red scarf off. "It's not normal for winter to come two months early. The mighty freeze is coming. I can feel it in my bones! I can taste it! I don't think we should stay here another day."

A deafening crash of thunder shook the top of the igloo roof. Papaw's son, Licorice, jumped ten feet in the air and landed right on Moonflower's lap. The two of them clutched each other and stared wide-eyed in fear. The entire room became silent. All that could be heard was the crackling of the burning pine logs in the fireplace.

"It's Icclus!" cried Moonflower, piercing the silence. "Caraway wrote about him in his diary."

"Icclus? Hah! He's only a story Grandpa made up," laughed Licorice. "Icclus the ice cube creature! Have you ever seen him?"

"Well...no....," sighed Moonflower. "But it could be true."



Papaw rushed over to a big wooden storage trunk in the corner of the room. He poked his head deep inside and frantically searched for something. In desperation, he began throwing stuff out of the trunk over his shoulder.

"Aha! There it is!" exclaimed Papaw. He pulled out a dusty old wooden box.

"Grandpa Pepper left this oak box for our family. Hopefully it will save us from the coming freeze and take us off this dreadful mountain to a safe new home!"



Licorice climbed up on the chair so that he stood eye level with Papaw and asked angrily, "How can you believe all of those stupid stories of grandpa's world adventures? He left grandma and you alone when you were my age to go on one last adventure, and he never came back! All he left you was a stupid diary full of stories and that worthless dusty box! No one has ever believed in that junk."

Moonflower watched Papaw's shoulders slump, as he stared silently at the wooden box. She looked at her father and thought how she loved to read about Caraway's adventures. She had always believed in his stories.

Papaw fumbled with the lid of the oak box but couldn't get it open. Licorice frowned impatiently. Moonflower reached up and gently touched an engraving of an oak tree on the top of the box. Suddenly a tiny orange glow peeked out of the box. Like a music box, the lid sprang open on its hinges, and the glow disappeared.



"Did you see that glow, Papaw?" Moonflower asked in amazement. "No, sweetheart, I didn't," he answered sadly. Moonflower thought her father was saddened by Licorice's mean words.

"Well I'll be darned, look at this!" Papaw exclaimed.

On the inside of the box lid was an inscription. Papaw read to his family:

"To My son and family,

I leave to you this Magic Box.

When the mighty Freeze comes to Backbone Mountain,
this Box and Map will protect and lead you on an adventure
to a Glorious place of Peace, Beauty and Harmony.

A place called WHISPERING GARDENS,

A Place Called Home.

"Whispering Gardens?" Moonflower asked eagerly. "Caraway mentioned Whispering Gardens in his diary! Do you know where it is, Papaw?"

Looking out the window, Papaw saw a bright flash of lightning streak across the sky, silhouetting the dark mountain tops. "No, I don't," he replied sadly. "It's somewhere out there."

"Is there anything else in the box?" asked Moonflower.

Papaw reached into the box and brought out a very old, folded piece of parchment paper. He opened it to reveal a map.

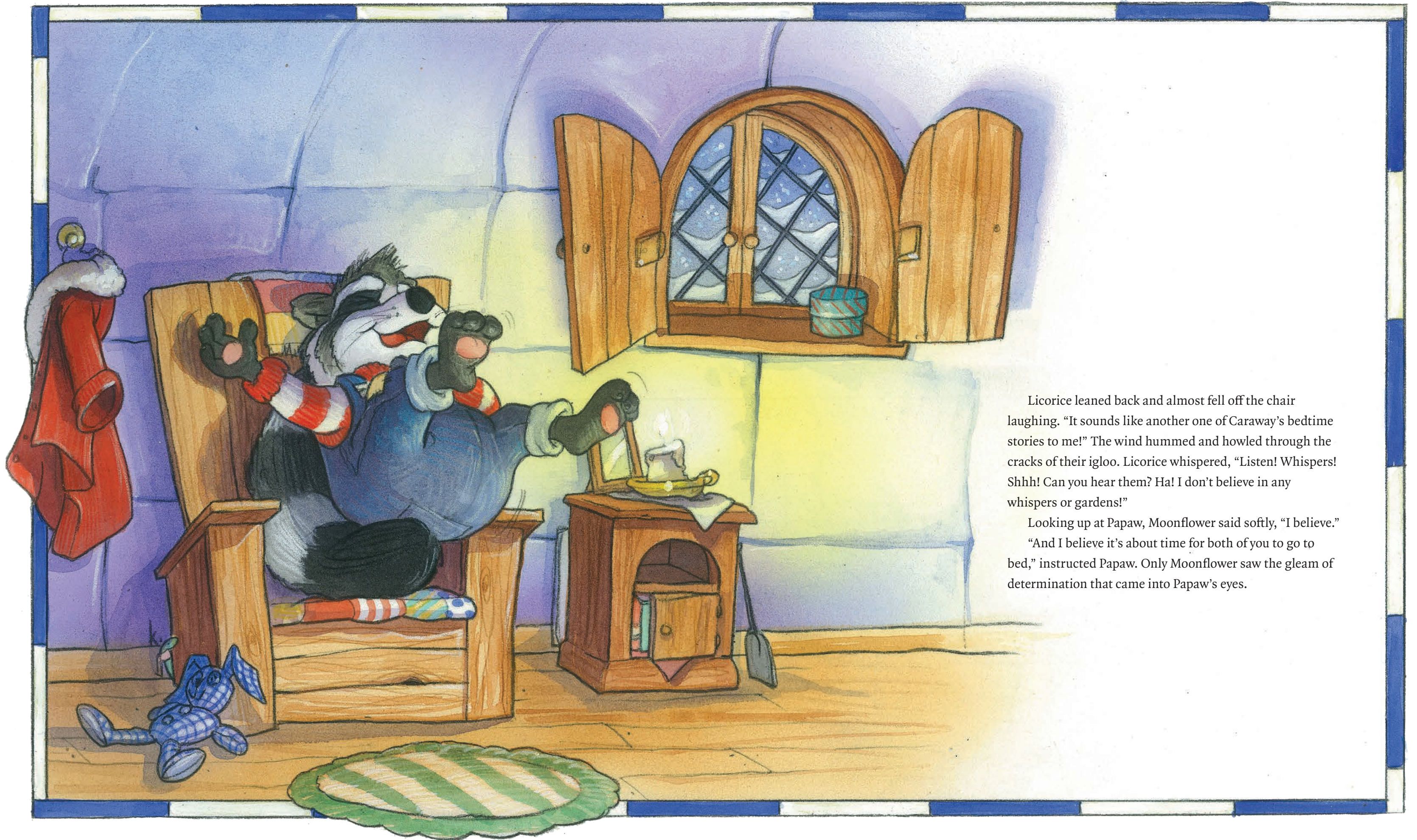
Papaw read from the map:

Whispering Gardens is hidden away from the
present-day world yet lies as close as your own imagination.

One day you will discover that the myths and legends your grandpa
told you are true. Nature is ruled by magic. Fairies are real.

We all possess magical powers that we may discover
if we just learn how to listen to "the Whispers."

THE LAND OF WHISPERING GARDENS



Licorice leaned back and almost fell off the chair laughing. "It sounds like another one of Caraway's bedtime stories to me!" The wind hummed and howled through the cracks of their igloo. Licorice whispered, "Listen! Whispers! Shhh! Can you hear them? Ha! I don't believe in any whispers or gardens!"

Looking up at Papaw, Moonflower said softly, "I believe."

"And I believe it's about time for both of you to go to bed," instructed Papaw. Only Moonflower saw the gleam of determination that came into Papaw's eyes.

Papaw tucked Moonflower and Licorice into their cozy beds.

Moonflower opened her sleepy eyes and asked, "Pa? You believe the box is magic, don't you?"

"Do you, honey?" he replied.

"Yes. I just know we will find Whispering Gardens someday," she answered.

Papaw patted Licorice on the top of his head and said, "Sleep warm, my little adventurer."

Then he brushed his paw through Moonflower's soft fur. "Goodnight, and sweet moonbeam dreams." Papaw gently kissed her soft cheek as she floated off to sleep. As he left the room, he thought, "Now to work! I have a lot to do tonight if we're going to ever get off this frigid mountain."

