

Believing Begins the Adventure.
Friendship Takes them Home.

Disney The Never Girls

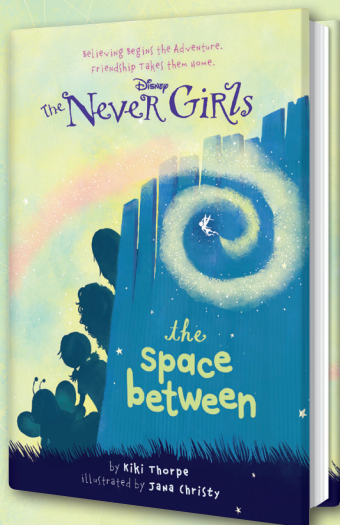


the Space between

by Kiki Thorpe
illustrated by Jana Christy

Chapter Sampler

Disney
The NEVER GIRLS
Believing begins the adventure.
Friendship takes them home.



It's not fair! Just as they were settling in at Pixie Hollow, Kate, Mia, Lainey, and Gabby have to go home! Tinker Bell says no kids have ever come back to Never Land, but Lainey refuses to believe it. Will she never get to ride a deer through the woods again? And how can she learn the languages of animals without the fairies' help? But even when they leave Never Land, its magic seems to follow them! That mouse in Lainey's kitchen—she's sure it was one of the fairies' dairy mice! Is there some kind of a splinter between the worlds?

Keep reading for a sneak peek . . .



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Disney
The Never Girls



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A STEPPING STONE BOOK™

RANDOM HOUSE  NEW YORK

Never Land

Far away from the world we know, on the distant seas of dreams, lies an island called Never Land. It is a place full of magic, where mermaids sing, fairies play, and children never grow up. Adventures happen every day, and anything is possible.

There are two ways to reach Never Land. One is to find the island yourself. The other is for it to find you. Finding Never Land on your own takes a lot of luck and a pinch of fairy dust. Even then, you will only find the island if it wants to be found.

Every once in a while, Never Land drifts close to our world . . . so close a fairy's laugh slips through. And every once in an even longer while, Never Land opens its doors to a special few. Believing in magic and fairies from the bottom of your heart can make the extraordinary happen. If you suddenly hear tiny bells or feel a sea breeze where there is no sea, pay careful attention. Never Land may be close by. You could find yourself there in the blink of an eye.

One day, four special girls came to Never Land
in just this way. This is their story.

Never Land

Torth Mountain

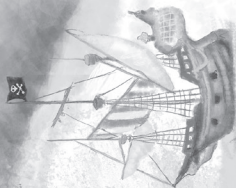


Skull Rock

Pixie Hollow



Mermaid Lagoon



Pirate Cove



Chapter 1

Lainey Winters was soaring.

For a brief moment, her heart seemed to stop. The ground fell away, and she rose up, up, up . . . and over the fallen log.

An instant later, she touched down again, bounding through the forest on the back of a doe. Trees flashed by in a blur of green. Lainey dug her hands deeper into the doe's fur. She held on tight as they darted around bushes and flew over stones.

Leaves crashed above. Lainey looked up and saw a squirrel racing through the trees. A tiny fairy sat on its back, her long brown braid swinging behind her. The squirrel leaped from branch to branch, keeping pace with the doe.

Lainey leaned forward, urging her doe on. The fairy did the same.

Ahead was a small clearing. In its center stood a tall maple tree, bigger than any other tree in the forest. From a distance, its branches seemed to sparkle and move. This was due to the many fairies who hummed around it like bees around a honeycomb. The maple was called the Home Tree, and it was the heart of Pixie Hollow, the Never fairies' world.

Lainey steered the doe toward the Home Tree. Even without looking up,



she could sense the fairy on the squirrel following above.

A few feet from the tree, the squirrel shot past Lainey. It landed on a branch and came to a stop just as Lainey and the doe pulled up at the Home Tree's roots.

Lainey laughed. "You beat me again, Fawn!" she called to the fairy on the squirrel.

"I wouldn't be much of an animal-talent fairy if I couldn't win a race against a Clumsy, would I?" Fawn replied, smiling.

Lainey slid off the doe's back, pushing the big glasses she wore up her nose. She didn't care about winning or losing. For her, the joy was in riding the deer, feeling it turn when she wanted to turn, knowing when it would leap. In her real life, the one where she went to school and lived

with her parents, Lainey had never even had a pet, not so much as a goldfish. But here in Never Land, she'd played hide-and-seek with wild hares. She'd listened to the songs of loons. She'd cradled baby hedgehogs in her hand. Things she'd never dreamed possible seemed to happen every day.

As Lainey patted the deer's back, Fawn flew down and landed on its head. She whispered something in the doe's ear. The doe ducked its head once, as if nodding. Then it turned and bounded away into the forest.

"What did you say?" Lainey asked.

"I told her next time I'd ride with her, and you could ride the squirrel," Fawn joked.

"I want to learn to do that," Lainey said.

Fawn raised her eyebrows. "Ride a squirrel? Don't you think you're a bit too big?"

Lainey giggled. "No, I want to learn how to speak Deer."

"You have to wriggle before you can hop," Fawn replied.

"I have to do what?" asked Lainey, confused.

"It's an animal-fairy saying," Fawn explained. "It means you have to start slowly. Talking to deer is tricky. They can be pretty snooty about accents. Let's hear how your Mouse is coming along."

Furrowing her brow, Lainey squeaked, "*Eeee-eee!*"

Fawn had been teaching Lainey how to speak the language of mice. So far, Lainey had only learned one squeak. Loosely

translated, it meant “Are your whiskers well?”

Two dairy mice that were sniffing around nearby lifted their heads to look at Lainey.

“Not bad,” said Fawn, nodding. “Now let’s hear you call that chickadee.” She pointed to a plump little bird sitting on a branch.

“But I don’t know Chickadee!” Lainey protested.

“It’s easy,” said Fawn. “Just go like this.” Pursing her lips, Fawn let out a whistle that sounded like
tseedle dee tseedle
dee deet. “You try.”

Lainey did her best to copy Fawn.



She pursed her lips and whistled. But all that came out was a sad *feeewp!*

To her surprise, the chickadee flew over and landed on her finger.

“How did I do that?” Lainey asked. Then she noticed Fawn laughing. “Wait a second. *You* called him over, didn’t you?”

“So what if I did?” Fawn said with an impish grin. “He wouldn’t have come if he didn’t want to. Animals like you, Lainey. I’d say you’re becoming a real animal-talent Clumsy.”

Lainey blushed.

Fawn pulled a sunflower seed from her pocket. She held it out to the chickadee, who took it in his beak and flew away.

“Well, I’m hungry,” Fawn said. “Want to see what the baking-talent fairies have whipped up today?”

Lainey shook her head. "I'm going to go find the other girls. See you later?"

"Sure," said Fawn. "I think there's a nest of robin's eggs that need a hand with hatching. Maybe you can help me." With a wave, she flew off.

Lainey started across the meadow, her spirits high. Fawn's compliment still rang in her ears. *A real animal-talent Clumsy.* Lainey couldn't help smiling every time she thought about it.

Maybe it's true, Lainey thought. *Maybe I really do have animal talent.*

Before coming to Pixie Hollow, Lainey had never felt particularly special. She wasn't beautiful like her friend Mia, or brave like her friend Kate. She wasn't good at sports, and she didn't get the best grades in school. In fact, Lainey hadn't

been sure she was good at anything at all.

But that had changed when she'd started spending time with the animal-talent fairies. Lainey was learning how to listen to animals and how to watch them. And she had a knack for it!

A real animal-talent Clumsy.

A rustling noise above her made Lainey look up. She paused to watch a flock of flamingos pass. She loved seeing the pale pink birds against the brilliant blue of the sky. The flamingos had been one of the very first creatures she'd seen in Never Land, and she never tired of watching them.

Lainey continued across the meadow and made her way to Havendish Stream. There she found Kate, Mia, and Gabby, her friends who had come to Never Land

with her. They were sailing boats with the water-talent fairies. Tiny fairies in red, gold, and green leaf-boats drifted around on the current while the girls blew wind into their sails.

The freckled, curly-haired fairy named Prilla was there, too. Prilla was the reason the girls had come to Never Land. She



had a talent unlike any other in Pixie Hollow. She could travel to the world of humans and back again just by blinking. One day, she'd traveled to Mia and Gabby's backyard and accidentally brought the four girls back to Pixie Hollow with her.

Prilla had discovered that she couldn't blink the girls back home, so the fairies of Pixie Hollow had taken them in. That had been days ago—or was it weeks? Lainey wasn't sure. Time passed strangely in Never Land, where every day was sunny and no one ever grew up or grew old.

"Hi, Lainey," Mia said. "Where have you been?"

"I was riding in the woods with Fawn," Lainey said.

Kate stood, brushing off the knees of her jeans. "We're thinking about going to

Skull Rock, just to see what it's like," she told Lainey. Kate had made it her mission to explore every corner of Never Land.

"Prilla says we might see a mermaid there!" Gabby chimed in excitedly. Gabby was only five, but she was every bit as adventurous as the other girls.

"We're not going for long," Mia added. "There's a fairy dance tonight, and I want to make sure we're back in time. The weaving-talent fairies are going to braid jasmine into my hair!"

"Want to come?" Kate asked Lainey.

Lainey hesitated. She wanted to go with her friends, but she also wanted to watch chicks hatching with Fawn. There were so many fun things happening in Never Land. Sometimes it was hard to decide what to do first.

Just then, they spotted a fairy flying toward them. As she came closer, the girls saw it was Skye. The fairy's rose-petal cap was crooked on her head, and she seemed to be out of breath.

"I've been looking all over for you girls!" she said with a gasp. "It's time!"

"Time for what?" asked Kate.

"Never Land is on the move again," Skye replied.

The girls looked at each other in dismay. They knew what that meant. It was time for them to go home.



Chapter 2

Skye, the seeing-talent fairy, was the one who had figured out how the girls had come to Never Land. She'd also figured out why they couldn't return home again.

As Skye had explained it, Never Land was unlike other islands. It drifted on the seas of children's dreams, moving wherever it wished. One day, it had drifted close to the world of Clumsies, so close that the tiniest bit of magic had pulled four unsuspecting girls to its

shores. Kate, Mia, Lainey, and Gabby had always believed in fairies, but their wildest dreams came true when they arrived there on Prilla's blink.

Then the island had drifted away again—and the four girls had been stranded.

But now Never Land was close to the girls' world again. "I saw the mainland with my own eyes," Skye told the girls. "Prilla can blink you back home again—right away! But you must hurry!"

"But what about Skull Rock?" said Kate.

"And the mermaid?" said Gabby.

"And the fairy dance?" said Mia.

"And the robin chicks?" said Lainey.

"If you don't go now, you might never make it back. Who knows when Never

Land will be this close to your world again?" Skye said.

The girls had always known this day would come. They just hadn't thought it would come so soon. Not one of them wanted to leave, but if they didn't, they might never see their families again.

So they would have to say good-bye—to the flower-filled meadow and burbling Havendish Stream, to the magnificent Home Tree and all the kind, lovely fairies who lived there. *And it isn't just a "see-you-later" good-bye*, Lainey thought. *It is really and truly farewell.* Children who left Never Land never came back, the fairy Tinker Bell had told them. They grew up too quickly and forgot about it.

With heavy hearts, the four girls went to their willow-tree room to pack.

Sunlight shone through the willow's branches as they entered, casting a jade-green glow over the room. Lainey looked at the hammocks where they'd slept, the firefly lanterns hanging from the tree limbs, the moss carpet on the ground.

"There isn't anything to pack," she realized. They'd come to Pixie Hollow with nothing but the clothes they had on.

"I want to take *something* home with me," Mia said. She picked up a tiny folding fan that a fairy had left behind. The fan was made from daisy petals held together with pine needles. Mia put it in her pocket.

Kate found an itty-bitty kaleidoscope that a pots-and-pans fairy had cobbled together from bits of scrap metal. A water-talent fairy had cast the lens from a single drop of dew. Gabby chose a daisy garland

that the garden-talent fairies had woven.
She placed it on her head like a crown.

“It’ll wilt, you know,” Mia warned her
little sister.



"I don't care," Gabby said, sticking out her lip.

Lainey looked around for a souvenir of her own. She considered her licorice-twig toothbrush or one of the firefly lanterns, but neither seemed right. She wished she could take a pet home with her—her doe, maybe, or one of the livelier squirrels. But of course, she knew the animals belonged in Never Land. Besides, her mother would never allow it—her mother didn't even like goldfish.

At last she picked up a mouse-herder's lasso. It was made of braided Never grass. Lainey slipped it over her wrist like a bracelet, pulling the end tight. She remembered the day Fawn had used it to lasso a wayward dairy mouse.

Thinking of that reminded Lainey of

her lesson earlier that day. *I'll never learn how to speak Deer now.* The thought filled Lainey with sadness.

Prilla appeared in the doorway of the willow room. Her bright, open face was unusually glum. "Skye says you must hurry. There isn't much time."

Taking one last look around their room, the girls followed Prilla out the door.

Beneath a hawthorn tree on the far side of Pixie Hollow was a ring of mushrooms. This was the fairy circle, where Pixie Hollow's magic was strongest. When Lainey and her friends got there, they were surprised to see all the fairies gathered together. Animal fairies, fast-flying fairies, water fairies, light fairies, garden fairies, harvest fairies, baking fairies, dressmaking fairies, art fairies,

storytelling fairies, and dozens more. Fairies from every talent had come to see the girls off.

Clarion, queen of the Never fairies, stood at the head of the fairy circle. Her wings were folded solemnly behind her in honor of the sad moment. She nodded to the girls to step inside the circle.

“The fairies have a parting gift for you,” the queen said. At her cue, Terence, a dust-talent sparrow man, flew forward. He held out a velvet sack no bigger than a peach pit.

“It’s a bit of fairy dust,” the queen explained. “Just one pinch for each of you. Perhaps one day you can use it to find your way back to Pixie Hollow.”

“How will we know the way?” Kate wondered. “Is there a map?”



The queen spread her hands. "I can't say for sure. Never Land drifts about on the waves, always moving. But some say that to get here from the mainland you should look for the Second Star to the Right and fly straight on till morning."

Thanking the queen, Kate took the bag of dust from Terence and put it in her pocket.

Several fairies and sparrow men came forward then to say special good-byes to the girls. Lainey searched the crowd for Fawn, but she didn't see her friend anywhere.

At last, Skye entered the circle. "You must go now," she told Prilla and the girls. "Never Land is on the move again. Soon it will be too late."

Kate, Lainey, Mia, and Gabby held

hands. Prilla landed in Gabby's open palm.

"Fly sa—" the queen started to say as Prilla blinked.

In that moment, all of Pixie Hollow winked out. The trees, the flowers, the sky, the fairy circle, and the fairies themselves—everything vanished. The rest of Queen Clarion's words were lost.



An instant later, the girls found themselves in Mia and Gabby's backyard. They looked around at the tall wooden fence, the neatly mowed lawn, and the tidy rows of petunias in the flower bed.

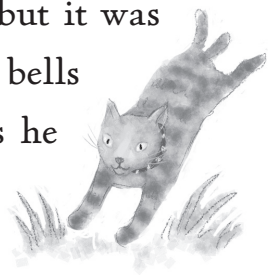
A soccer ball sat nearby in the grass. Lainey picked it up, turning it over in her hands. They'd been playing a game with the ball just before they blinked to Never

Land. That seemed like a lifetime ago. Like something she'd dreamed.

"Are we really home?" asked Gabby.

Kate pinched herself. "I think so," she said, but she didn't sound certain.

They heard a high bell-like noise, like the tinkle of a fairy's laugh. All the girls turned toward the sound, but it was only Mia's cat, Bingo. The bells on Bingo's collar jingled as he ran toward them.



Mia scooped the cat up in her arms. She buried her face in his fur. "Oh, Bingo! I missed you!"

"*Mrow*," Bingo complained as Mia squeezed him tightly. He wriggled out of her arms and wandered off to chase grasshoppers.

Just then, the back door to the house opened. “Gabby, are you out here?” called a familiar voice.

“Mami!” Gabby squealed. She went running toward her mother, her curls bouncing and her fairy wings flapping on her back.

Mia turned to Lainey and Kate with wide eyes. “What am I going to tell her?” she whispered. “We’ve been gone for *days!*”

“Remember what Prilla taught us about a blink,” Lainey reminded her. “When she travels on a blink, time moves differently.”

“Let’s hope it’s true.” Kate looked worried. “Otherwise, we’re all going to be in for it.”

“Do you think it’s the same if we fly to Never Land?” Lainey wondered. “Does time stop the same way?”

“Speaking of that,” Mia said, “what about the fairy dust? Shouldn’t we put it somewhere safe?”

“It’s plenty safe. I’ve got it right here,” Kate said, patting her pocket.

An odd look flashed across her face. Kate dug her hand into her pocket. Then she checked her other pocket. She turned both pockets inside out.

Mia frowned. “Kate, that’s not funny. Quit messing around.”

“I’m not joking,” Kate said in a choked voice. “The fairy dust—it’s gone!”

For Aida —K.T.

For Janee —J.C.

The publisher would like to thank Caroline Egan for her artistic vision.

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