





On Wednesdays, Mei had jewelry-making class after school. It was her favorite time of the week. Mei loved bright, sparkly things, so making jewelry was a dream come true. She learned how to cut copper wire with one set of pliers. She twisted it into loops with another. She threaded beads in perfect color

combinations and gave her pretty creations to friends at school.

The class was held at the community center on the edge of the forest. On the first day, Mei made friends with two other girls named Aisha and Quinn. The three girls were all very different from one another, but together they just clicked. The second time class met, the new friends made matching bracelets. Mei's featured a gorgeous ruby-colored bead. Aisha's had a sapphire-blue bead, and Quinn's was jade green. The beads were only made of glass, but that didn't matter. Mei, Aisha, and Quinn had created the bracelets together, which made them worth more than diamonds.



They loved their jewelry teacher, Ms. Ahmed. She had long, dark hair and wore rings on every finger. She always brought a thermos of hot chocolate for the students to share and played music so they could sing along as they worked. Mei and Aisha were okay singers, but Quinn's voice was amazing.

Snow fell outside as Mei worked on her latest creation. She was making a necklace for

her mom, but she still hadn't finished when it was time to pack up. Time went by so quickly in this class!

Aisha and Quinn waved goodbye and dashed off.

"Can I stay a few more minutes?" Mei begged Ms. Ahmed. "It's Mom's birthday tomorrow and her necklace isn't ready yet."

"Sure. You keep working while I return the tools to the storage closet," Ms. Ahmed said, picking up a box of pliers.

Happily, Mei bent over the necklace again. As she worked, she became aware of a soft voice singing:

*Magic Forest, Magic Forest, come explore . . .*

Mei glanced around the room. Ms. Ahmed had left the music playing, but the singing wasn't coming from the speaker.

Mei looked out the window. Soft, sparkling snow carpeted the ground. The beautiful singing seemed to be coming from the nearby forest, but Mei couldn't spot anyone out there.

*Magic Forest, Magic Forest, come explore . . .*

The words seemed to get louder, and the red bead in Mei's friendship bracelet twinkled

brightly. Mei wrapped her fingers around the ruby. Heat spread through her, like when she wrapped her hands around a warm mug on a cold day.

Releasing her fingers, Mei gazed at the bead. Deep within the glass, a shape formed. It was a little like the swirl in a marble. But this was different. This shape looked like a tree, no taller than a fingernail. The tree was graceful, lush, and . . . *moving*. Yes, the tiny tree inside Mei's bead was swaying back and forth!

Was this a magical bead? Excitedly, Mei held her bracelet up to the light. As she watched, the red glow from the bead started

to expand. It grew larger and larger, swelling like a balloon of light. The whispery song became clearer.

*Magic Forest, Magic Forest, come explore.*

*Magic Forest, Magic Forest, hear my roar!*

The tiny tree had grown with the red glow, and now there were other trees, too. Soon they were taller than Mei! Her heart thumped. She began to spin around and around. It made her dizzy, but she couldn't stop!

A warm breeze wrapped around Mei and lifted her off the ground. She found herself



singing the words she'd heard, as though it was a song she'd always known:

*Magic Forest, Magic Forest, come explore.*

*Magic Forest, Magic Forest, hear my roar!*

Mei closed her eyes. All her life, she had longed to go on wild adventures. Now, finally, it felt like something truly magical was actually happening!