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THE GOLDEN GIFT

“It’s a perfect day for a picnic!” Princess Sabrina said as she sailed across the water in Blue Lake. She was riding in her laurel-leaf boat.

Gurt the gilliwag sat behind her, paddling the boat. The green froglike creature was a close friend of the Sapphire Princess’s.

“Princess Sabrina,” Gurt said in his deep



voice, “this very golden afternoon matches your golden gift.”

That morning a golden basket had very mysteriously arrived at the gates of the

Sapphire Palace. A card was pinned to the basket. It read, *To the Sapphire Princess. Signed, A Secret Admirer.*

The golden basket was filled with bread, cheese, and chocolate. Each piece was wrapped in gold cloth and tied with a sapphire-blue ribbon.

Princess Sabrina loved the basket. She had

invited her three cousins to join her for a picnic that afternoon. Demetra, the Diamond Princess, and Emily, the Emerald Princess, had arrived. While they waited for the Ruby Princess, the three cousins sailed across the lake to Bluebonnet Falls.

“Let’s have a race!” Sabrina called to the Emerald Princess. Emily was on her knees, paddling a large green lily pad.

“I’m ready when you are,” Princess Emily said as she pulled up next to Sabrina. “Just say the word.”

Of the four Jewel Princesses, Emily was the most athletic. She ruled the Greenwood and spent her days climbing trees and riding through her lush green forest.

The Diamond Princess steered her boat

made of white gardenias between her two cousins. Demetra ruled the White Winterland, and everything she wore was glittering white.

“I think we should wait for Roxanne,” Demetra advised. “Wasn’t she going to join us?”

“Roxanne is *always* late,” Emily said with a frown. “If we wait for her, it will be sundown before we get to eat.”

Sabrina focused her dark brown eyes on the shore. There was no sign of the Ruby Princess.

“I agree with Emily,” Sabrina announced. “Let’s have a race ourselves.”

“No, no, no!” squeaked a yellow-and-pink butterfly as she landed on Sabrina’s finger. It was Zazz, Princess Sabrina’s palace adviser and best friend.

“Princess, if you race in this boat, you’ll lose,” Zazz sputtered. “Or sink. Just look at what we’re carrying. Gurt. That heavy gold basket. The napkins and tablecloths, and all of the royal china.”

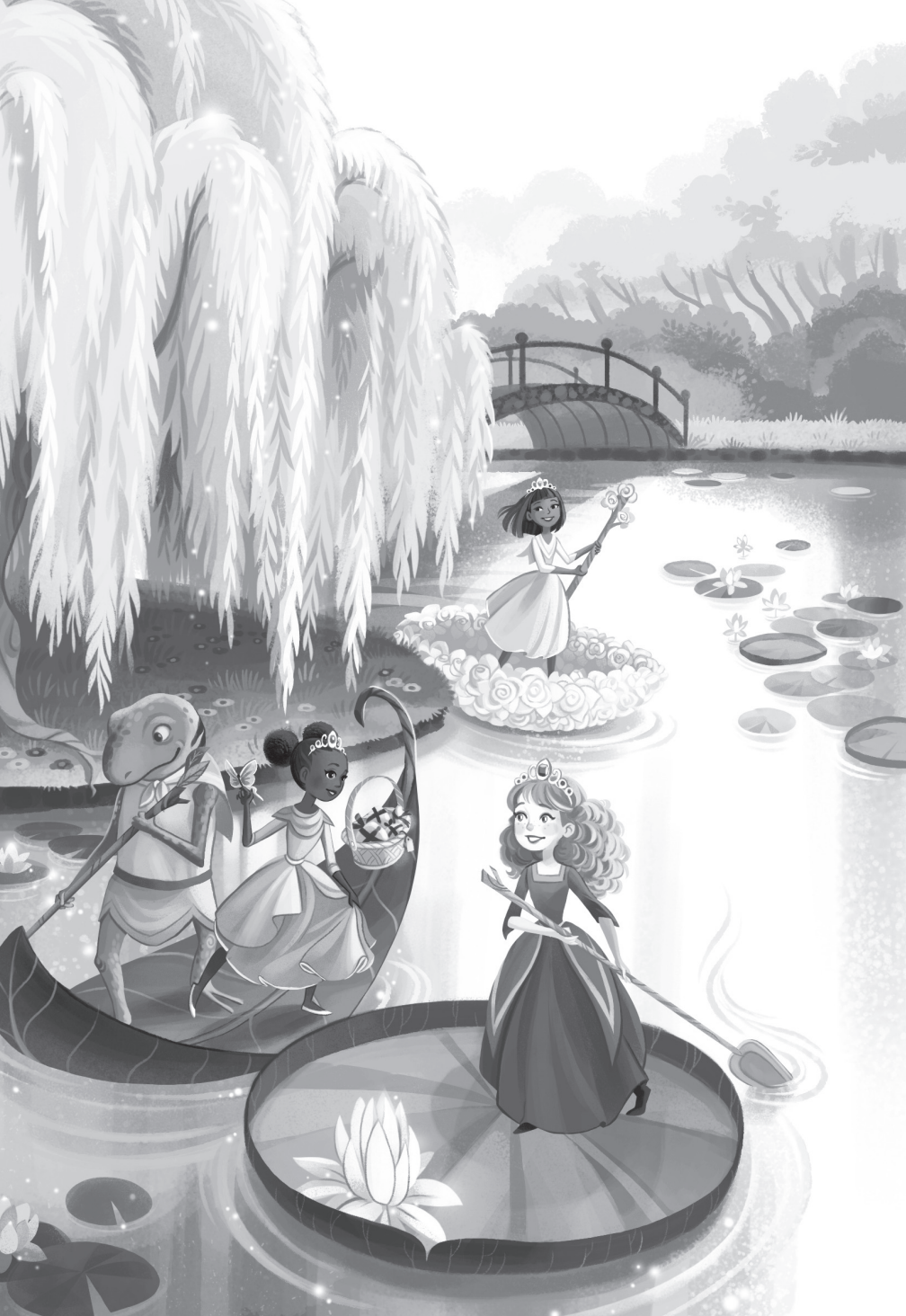
Sabrina put her face nose-to-nose with the tiny butterfly. “Then I’ll just have to get another boat. Any idea where I might find one?”

Blue Lake was dotted with boats. “I’ll call the nymphs,” Zazz said as she fluttered off the princess’s finger. “They’ll bring a leaf boat right over.”

“Don’t do that,” Emily called. “Sabrina, hop on my lily pad. We’ll race Demetra together.”

Sabrina stood up to leap onto Emily’s boat, but something tugged at her arm.

Sabrina spun around. No one was there.



Just Gurt the gilliwag calmly paddling away. She looked at the mysterious golden basket. It glittered in the afternoon sun.

“Come on, Sabrina!” Emily cried. “Jump!”

Before Sabrina could make a move, the basket danced across the bottom of the boat and leaped into her hands.

Emily gasped. “Did you see that?” she asked Demetra.

“I don’t like this,” Demetra said, shaking her shiny black hair. “Sabrina, you should leave that basket alone. You don’t know where it came from.”

“Don’t be such a worrywart!” Sabrina stared at the golden basket. “This is a present. A very magical present from a secret admirer. Full of wonderful food.”

“And I’m starving,” Zazz called from her perch on the boat’s bow.

“Me too.” Sabrina leaned forward and whispered to the butterfly, “Zazz, let’s not wait until we get to Bluebonnet Falls. Why don’t you and I take a piece of chocolate from the picnic basket right now?”

Zazz rubbed her little legs together. “I like chocolate. Yes, yes!”

Sabrina opened the basket. But just as her fingers touched the food, something jolted the boat.

“Whoa!” Zazz fell backward onto the floor of the boat and bent one antenna. “What was that?”

“I’m not sure!” Sabrina replied.

Thunk! Something hit the boat again.

"I'm afraid something is trying to sink us," Gurt declared, pulling his paddle into the boat.

"The water sprites must be playing a joke." Sabrina peered into the water. She was looking for the ghostly outline of the little sprites.

"If the sprites don't want you to see them, Princess, you won't," Zazz said as she tried to straighten her antenna.

"I'll try calling them." Sabrina cupped her hands around her mouth. "Hello? Anybody there?"

Nothing.

The Sapphire Princess leaned over the



side of the boat. She was so close, her nose nearly touched the lake.

All at once two huge yellow eyes appeared just below the surface.

Sabrina screamed and fell backward.