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Opening extract from
**The Tender Moments of Saffron
Silk**

Written by
Glenda Millard

Illustrated by
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Published by
Phoenix Yard Books

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The *Kingdom of Silk* series:

The Naming of Tishkin Silk

Layla Queen of Hearts

Perry Angel's Suitcase

All the Colours of Paradise

Plum Puddings and Paper Moons

The Tender Moments of Saffron Silk

Nell's Festival of Crisp Winter Glories

The Tender Moments of SAFFRON SILK

by Glenda Millard

Illustrated by Stephen Michael King



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For Hepsey — G.M.
For David and Melissa — S.M.K.

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1. A Daddy and His Daughter

'I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set him free.'

The shed on which these words were chalked belonged to Ben Silk. Ben often saw angels but none of them were made of marble. They were live and loud with cherry-tart cheeks and bare feet, wearing daisy-chain halos on their tumbling hair and wings made of wire coathangers and chicken

feathers. Some days they danced amongst the tussocky grass where new lambs play. On others they might wander between the soft blue folds of the hills or sleep in the sun on bales of sweet yellow straw, their wings tethered to the clothesline like cloudlets. These were the children of the Kingdom of Silk.

The words on the wall of Ben's shed belonged to a famous painter and sculptor called Michelangelo, who lived many hundreds of years ago. Ben was not a famous painter or sculptor; he was father of the sometimes-winged children, drove a beaten-up old Bedford truck and collected things other people had no use for. He was excellent at playing harmonica, cotton-reel knitting, and building tree houses and many other useful things. His shed was cluttered with items such as planks from disused jetties, railings from rickety bridges, decaying fenceposts from forsaken farms, unlabelled tins half-filled with paint, bent bicycle wheels, ropes and pulleys, inside-out umbrellas, wire coathangers and chicken feathers in hessian sacks.

It was Saffron, the fifth of Ben and Annie Silk's daughters, who wrote Michelangelo's words on the

wall of her daddy's shed. Saffron was well informed about historical figures such as Michelangelo, Joan of Arc and Cleopatra. She had also studied the myths and legends of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses. But one of the most interesting living people Saffron knew was her daddy, because of his ability to see things that other people could not. Extraordinary and unexpected things like mermaidly ladies in driftwood branches, wild horses rearing from red gum fenceposts, wings in wire coathangers and angels in the cabbage patch.

The gift of seeing, like all special talents, takes practice and practice takes time. Ben often practised on his Seat of Wisdom, which had once been a dentist's chair. He positioned his seat directly under a skylight in the roof of his shed so he could see birds flying and clouds passing and so he would know he'd been there too long if he could see the moon and stars.

Sometimes while he was wondering how best to show other people what he could see, Ben knitted tea cosies or odd socks. On other occasions he watched dust fairies floating in streams of light and, from time to time, he pulled a lever and

lowered the chair just enough so he could draw finger pictures in the sawdust on the floor. Now and then he just sat and thought. Thinking deeply was encouraged at the Kingdom of Silk. At first glance it would be easy to conclude that Ben was wasting time, but Saffron knew better. She believed wholeheartedly that her daddy would one day be as famous as Michelangelo and would go down in history as the Seer of Cameron's Creek.

Seeing what other people could not wasn't the only thing Ben did when he sat in his Seat of Wisdom. It was there, long before Saffron was born, that he dreamt of making Naming Day Books for his children and of a ceremony at which they would be presented. In the weeks and months before each ceremony, Ben spent hours sorting through his collection of useful pieces of wood. From these he would carve covers for the books to protect the precious memories of his children's lives; their minutes, hours, days and years.

When Ben shared his dream with Annie, she made paper to cushion the words she would write for each of her babies. Pages and pages she made from torn wallpaper scraped from old walls.



Each sheet was embedded with secrets from past inhabitants of their house on the hill. Each leaf was scented with smoke from fires that once warmed other people's children. There were enough pages to hold everything Annie knew about the babies who had grown in the quiet dark inside her; the moments before, during and after their births on the bed that Ben made and the wonderful celebrations of their Naming Days. But, wisely, Annie always made more pages than she knew how to fill. Empty pages for moments yet to be lived. Words yet to be spoken on days yet to dawn. For she knew that every baby held mysteries only time would reveal.

Of the seven Naming Day Books, only one was complete. It was the one made for Tishkin, the youngest of the Silk sisters. For time is a gift and Tishkin's time with her family was as brief as the spring daisies that yellow the hills of Cameron's Creek. The perfect amount of time it took for her family to fall in love with her. Tishkin comes to them still, in the wind, the rain and the sun, and in the rustling of leaves they hear her name. But although she is for always and forever at the heart



of the Kingdom of Silk, she leaves no footprints in the garden. The other books belong to Tishkin's brother, Griffin, and to her sisters, the Rainbow Girls: Scarlet, Indigo, Violet, Amber and Saffron.

When Perry arrived at the Kingdom of Silk, he already had a name. The golden letters on the suitcase he brought with him stood for Perry Maxwell, God's Dearest Angel. He was called Perry Angel for short. There was no need for a Naming Day celebration. But the Silk family were fond of merrymaking, ritual and ceremony, so when Griffin's best friend, Layla, suggested a Day of Cake and Thankfulness to welcome Perry to his new home, they readily agreed.

Days after Saffron's birth, Ben held her in his arms while he sat on his Seat of Wisdom as he had done with each of her four older sisters. They gazed at one another in the soft, sawdusty silence. Ben turned his small and precious child this way and that under the single yellow light bulb. He gazed at her starfish fingers, seashell ears, pearly nails and rockpool eyes. He watched her salty lashes sweep slowly open and shut like sea anemones and tried to imagine what sort of person his tiny girl might

grow up to be.

You might think that Ben, Seer of Cameron's Creek, would have unravelled the mystery of babies, at least by the time his fifth daughter was born. But Ben had learnt that every baby is unique, and even after a year had passed it seemed there was more that Ben and the rest of the Silk family did *not* know about the newcomer than they did.

On the day of her naming ceremony, Saffron was still buttercup fresh, spring lamb new, a little mystery to them all. Ben raised his face to the sky and declared to the universe:

*'All we know about our fifth daughter is that
her hair is more lovely than marigolds.
All we know is
she is more rare and more precious
than the costliest spice.
All we know is
she is more beautiful to us than Aurora,
goddess of the dawn.
And for all that we know
we name this small and precious mystery
Saffron Silk.'*

After Ben had finished speaking, Annie placed a tiny circlet of white flowers and yellow ribbons on Saffron's head. Ben's words, and everything else that happened on Saffron's Naming Day, were recorded in her book. The wreath was dried and framed and hung on the wall above Saffron's bed. Annie painted its likeness in Saffron's Naming Day Book along with the following caption:

The flowers in this garland are freesias. They were grown from bulbs that Nell Silk was given by a stranger on her wedding day. The bulbs were transplanted from Nell's city garden to the Kingdom of Silk when she came with her son, Ben, and his wife, Annie, to live here. In the lore of flowers, the freesia represents innocence. The yellow ribbon signifies hope, happiness and kindness.

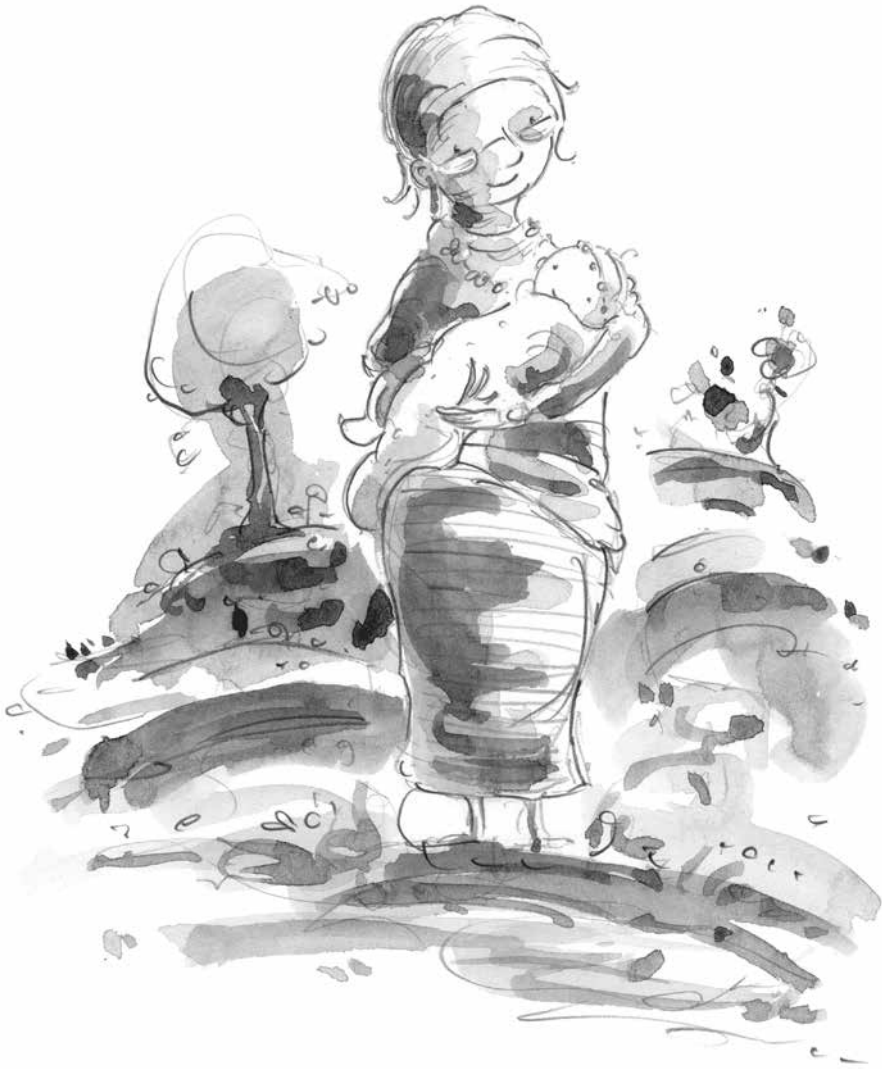
There are photographs of Saffron wearing a long white dress embroidered with buttercups and love by her wise and wonderful grandmother, Nell. Faded snapshots show her sisters playing in the sappy spring grass, trying to catch apple

blossom in butterfly nets. In others, Amber and Barney Blacksheep watch curiously from the comfort of the old wicker pram in the shade of the Cox's Orange Pippin tree. Barney, an orphaned lamb, wears an organza bonnet and a knitted pink vest sprigged with ribbon rosebuds. If you look carefully at some of the photographs you will see that Amber is feeding Barney Blacksheep sugar-coated aniseed rings from Nell's handbag.

In Saffron's favourite photograph, she is cradled in Nell's arms. Her daddy has just finished reading his declaration and her mama is placing the garland of flowers on her marigold curls. The three people she loves most in the world are all looking at her with love and wishfulness in their eyes. It was probably one of the first tender moments in Saffron's life.



Not many people expect the world's leading authority on tender moments to be a small white-haired woman who doesn't drive a car or know how to operate a computer and who has no



ambition to learn how to. Nell Silk never attended a university because they do not offer courses in subjects such as the observation of tender moments. There is no technology, no textbook, no diagram or formula with clear instruction on how to identify and preserve them, pressed like forget-me-nots, between the pages of one's life. It is a hand-me-down skill usually passed on by wise and wonderful grandpeople to their children and grandchildren.

Some of these wise people live in mud huts or in homes made of ice or even in holes in the ground, and some live in palaces with golden taps and crystal chandeliers and heated toilet seats. Some wear diamonds in their teeth, some wear animal skins on their backs and some wear almost nothing at all. But each and every one will tell you that the skill of capturing a tender moment is the most wonderful thing they possess. It is more like magic than almost anything else in the universe, except perhaps reading hearts or books or seeing things that other people cannot. The observation of a tender moment brings unspeakable pleasure equally to the giver, the receiver and the observer.

According to Nell, life was a mixture of moments. Some are tiny and tender, like holding a just-hatched chick to your cheek. Others, like falling in love with a new baby, linger far longer. These moments can make your heart soar above the clouds for days or weeks or months, before they settle quietly, comfortably around you, like a hand-knitted scarf. Occasionally, there are heavy grey moments that make your heart ache for longer than you thought possible.

On the day of Saffron's naming, no one could tell what sort of moments would fill the pages of her book, but everyone hoped the tiny tender ones, those that make the soul tipsy with ordinary happiness, and the quiet comforting kind would far outweigh the others. This was their wish for her from the beginning, even before they learnt she had to go away.



Z. Bluebirds and Firebirds

Saffron first saw the firebirds when she was at school. She wasn't alarmed, since she knew her daddy also saw things other people didn't. Besides, it was during her Joan of Arc phase, so she thought it possible the birds were a vision from the heavens. But she didn't tell anyone else about them.

Saffron, like her older sisters, had been home-schooled until Tishkin died. Then Annie became



The Tender Moments of Saffron Silk

ISBN: 978-1-907912-32-0

First published in Australia in 2012 by ABC Books for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

This edition first published in the UK by Phoenix Yard Books Ltd, 2015. Published by arrangement with Rights People, London.

Phoenix Yard Books
Phoenix Yard
65 King's Cross Road
London WC1X 9LW

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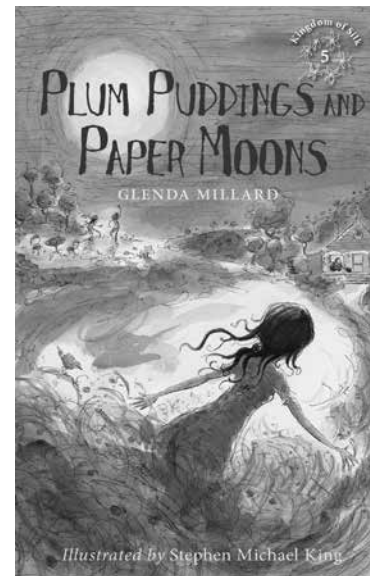
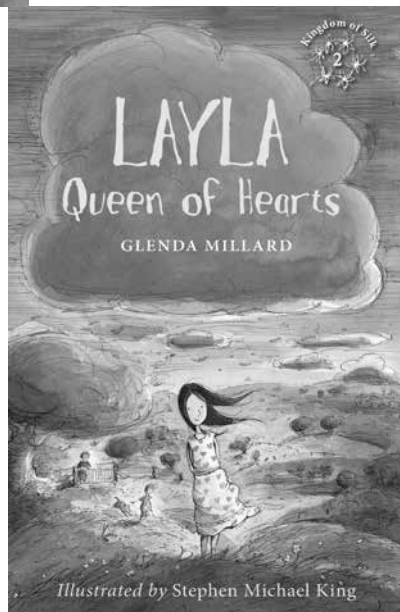
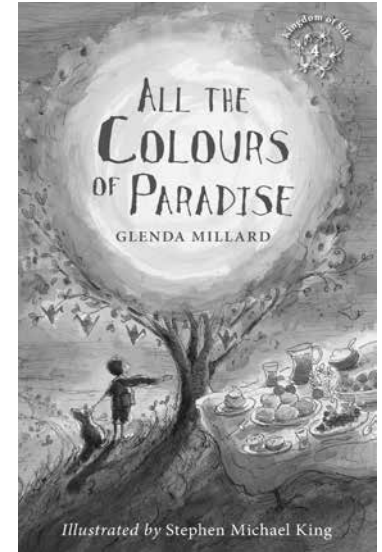
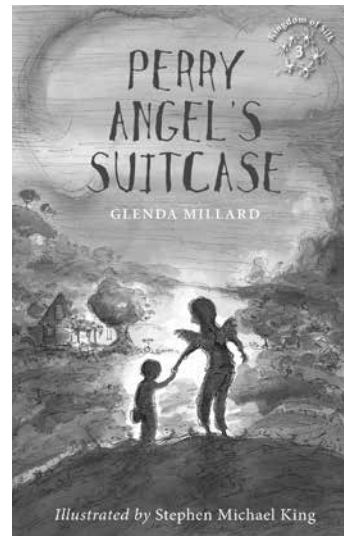
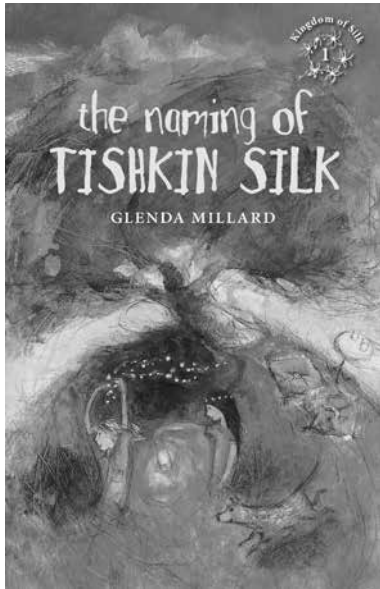
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