

Chapter 1

Paper Magic



“Spin me faster!”

“It’s my turn on the swing...”

“Race you to the top...”

Words ghost into the room through the open window.

“Just once,” Marina wishes.

She looks out at the park like it’s a miniature world of blue-gloss carnival glass, paper trees, and tiny play-dough children. Except it’s the park that’s real and she is the one trapped inside the box. Tears well up in her eyes.

A child appears, just for a moment at the top of the climbing frame. Marina imagines which voice belongs to this boy with the mess of copper-red hair.

"Beat you!" He cheers then disappears from view again.

Marina longs to play in the park, to be like the other children. But she can't.

She just can't...

~ ~ ~

"Have you tried on your new uniform yet?" Mum asks from the doorway.

"No." Marina looks down at the blue check tunic neatly folded and untouched at the far end of the window seat.

"Come on Marina. This is the third time I've asked." Mum plants her hands on her hips. "School starts tomorrow."

Marina folds her arms tight across her chest.

"Now!"

Mum's tone startles her.

Mum stalks across the room, shakes out the folds in the uniform, and starts to pull it over Marina's head.

"I can do it myself."

Mum thrusts the tunic into Marina's hands.

She slips the tunic over her T-shirt and struggles to work it past her hips, tugging the hem down to just above her knees. "Happy?" Her arms cross again.

"Yes, cranky-pants." Mum smiles, ignoring Marina's attitude. "It fits perfectly. Now you can take it back off and fold it ready for tomorrow. I'll be in the garden."

~ ~ ~

Morning sunlight slants through the lace curtains, turning dust motes into specks of coloured light. Marina stirs the gems of dust with clever fingers, watching the specks swirl and disappear into the pattern of shadows across her useless skinny legs.

All knobby knees and ankles. Yuck! She thinks.

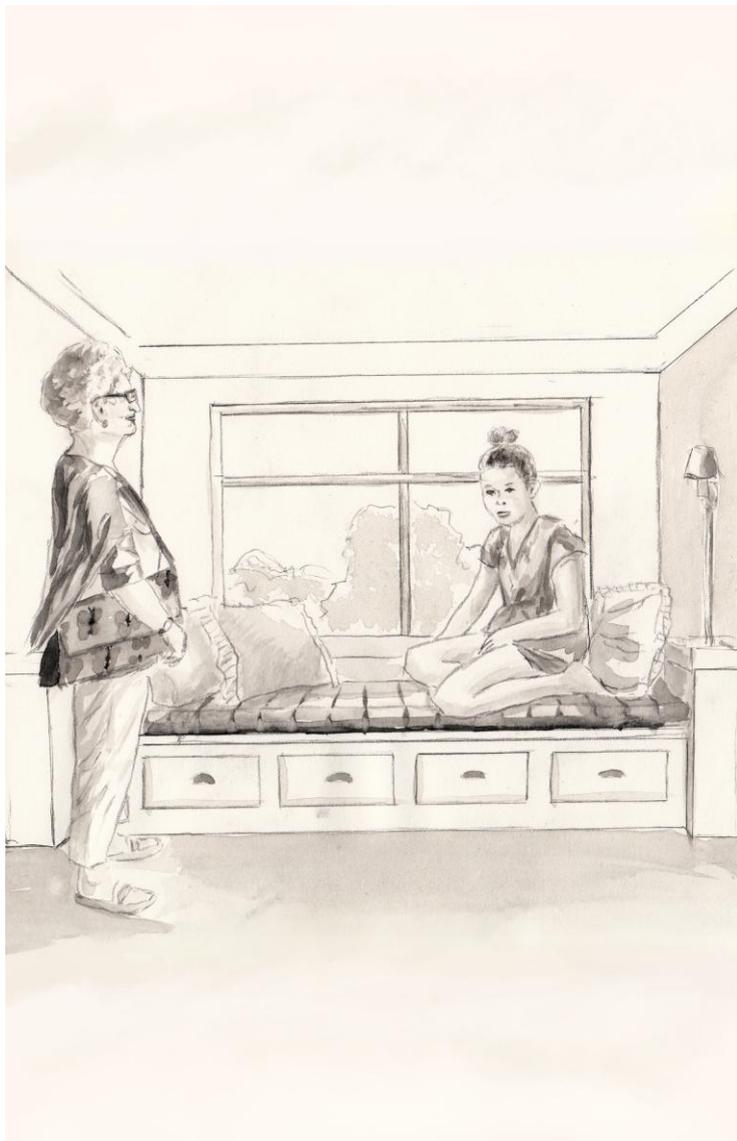
“I’ll wear the stupid tunic,” Marina calls to the empty doorway. “But I’ll wear it over my long pants.”

She hopes there are no cruel boys like Colin at her new school. His eyes would squint into glittery slits every time he snuck close enough to whisper mean things only she could hear.

Seeing her uniformed reflection in the glass makes Marina’s stomach do fish-flips. The holidays are over. She’s starting at a stupid new school tomorrow and she doesn’t have any friends. Marina pulls the stupid blue check tunic off and throws it onto the floor.

“Why the frowny face, dear?”

Marina twists around as Nana sweeps into the bedroom. Patterned scarves swirl like a bright mist around her. Mischievous eyes gleam from a face that’s been wrinkled by a million smiles.



“Nana.” Marina’s frown melts away as she’s swallowed in a lavender and cinnamon hug. Her hand automatically dips into Nana’s bag, touching the smooth glass inside. She pulls out a crystal ball bigger than both her fists held together and presses it to her eye. It glows with sunlight and rainbows shimmer out from a tiny crack deep in the glass.

“It’s like the crack in the tea cup,” Nana murmurs with an airy gesture of her hand. She says the same thing every time Marina stares into the glass.

Nana loves being mysterious and often doesn’t make any sense at all. People say she is odd and whisper behind their hands when they meet her. Marina knows that feeling all too well. But Nana has a special magic. She can always make her smile when she visits. And she can usually charm Mum into letting Marina try new things.

And even better, Marina thinks, Nana always brings a gift. Last visit, she bought a

basketball hoop for the back-yard. Now, Marina can score goals from almost halfway across the yard.

Nana slips a pad of brightly coloured paper from her patchwork bag.

“Oh, don’t look so hard done by,” she says, as Marina wilts in disappointment. “It is magic paper, after all.”

“Oh, that’s just silly!” Marina pouts.

“There’s magic everywhere, dear, if you know how to look for it.” Nana waves an imaginary wand.

With a sigh, Marina slumps her chin onto her hands gazing back out at the park. Marina likes summer days. She likes the rich sounds and sharp colours, the warm feeling of sunshine on her arms and face. But the heat today makes her sticky and uncomfortable.

“I wish there was a cool breeze,” Marina says at last.

Nana sits down next to her and hands her the pad. The first sheet of paper is

shiny-pink and smells like bubble gum when the wrapper first crinkles open. Marina breathes in the candy smell and turns the sheet over in her hands, running her fingers over the smooth surface, trying to feel the magic.

Marina lays the sheet down and begins to fold, *scratching* her thumb nail along it to make a sharp crease. Fold and *scratch*, fold and *scratch*—into a tight paper fan. She holds it up by her face.

Nothing happens.

Marina gives Nana an *I told you so* look.

“Concentrating is a big part of magic,” Nana says.

Marina concentrates on the paper. She even pulls a face, making her forehead furrow.

Again, nothing happens.

She throws the paper down. “I can’t do it. I can’t do anything.”

“You have to believe, dear. And you have to wish with all your heart.” Nana

smoothes a crumpled edge of the fan and places it back in her granddaughter's hands.

Marina takes a deep breath, closing her eyes. She wishes so hard her nose wrinkles up and her eyes squeeze tight enough to see sparkles behind her eyelids. Peeking through her eyelashes, Marina sees a fine pink silk now covering the frame of polished cherry wood. White blossoms spray across the silk and delicate gold symbols run along the edges of the fan.

"The paper *is* magic!" Marina rubs at her eyes but the fan is still there. *Flap-flutter-flutter*. A cool breeze washes over her face, tickling loose strands of mud-brown hair from her freckled cheeks.

"I knew you could do it." Nana flushes with pride. "You can do anything...If you put your mind to it."

Nana is right. She always is.

Marina looks out the window to the park. She has to go before she loses her courage. Before she changes her mind.



Marina scoots across the window seat and eases herself into her wheelchair.

She has to go now, while the magic is still in the air.

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