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Opening extract from
Cherry Green Story Queen

Written by
Annie Dalton

Illustrated by
Charlie Alder

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For Camila Batmanghelidjh and all the wonderful
people who are involved at Kids Company

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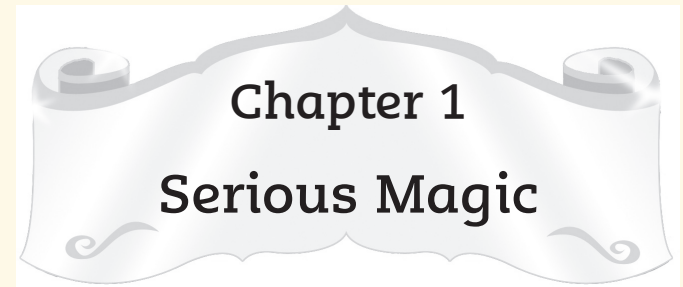
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Chapter 1

Serious Magic

“Mia’s doing it again,” said Billy in a whisper.

Juno was painting her nails. “Mia’s doing what?” she asked. She didn’t look up.

“*Wishing*,” said Billy.

Juno looked over at Mia. “How can you tell? She’s just looking out of the window.”

“Her eyes are closed,” Billy pointed out.

Juno went back to her nails. “She’s probably just thinking.”

“She’s wishing. I can *feel* it,” Billy insisted.

Juno rolled her eyes. “And what does wishing *feel* like when it’s at home?”

Billy fiddled with the sparkly little stud in his ear – the one he insisted was a diamond. “When it doesn’t work, wishing feels sort of *sad*.”

“Mia’s sad if she still thinks wishes come true,” Juno said under her breath.

Mia couldn’t hear their whispers. Her face was pale and her eyes were shut tight as she wished the same wish over and over. But when she opened her eyes, nothing had changed. She was still in Mrs Turvey’s messy sitting room. She was still a foster kid. She could have cried.



Then she saw Billy and Juno watching her and gave a little gasp. She'd been wishing so hard, she hadn't heard them come in.

"Were you wishing you could go to the ball, Cinder?" Juno jeered at her.

Billy shook his head. "She was wishing that she could live happily ever after, weren't you, Mia?"

Mia's eyes went wide with shock. "How did you know?"

Billy gave her a sad smile. "*Everyone* at Mrs Turvey's wants to live happily ever after."

Mia didn't know what to say. She'd been living in the same house as Juno and Billy since the start of the summer holidays. But she didn't *know* them. She didn't *want* to know them. Since she had come to live at Mrs Turvey's, she'd felt like she was in the wrong story, a story with no happy ending. She wanted to find

her way back to the *right* story, the one where her mum came back from the hospital and Mia got her real life back. Juno and the other kids were all part of the story that Mia was trying to escape.

Juno stretched out her hand to admire her shiny silver nails. "I'm guessing your Happy Ever After wish didn't work out then," she said. "Seeing as you're still here."

Mia's eyes filled with angry tears. Wishing had been the only thing she had left. It had been her secret. "It didn't work because I'm *stupid*, because magic isn't even *real*!" she shouted, and then she started to cry.

Juno gave her a funny little smile. "Maybe you just aren't doing it right."

"I - I don't know what you mean," Mia stammered.

Juno folded her arms. “Maybe everything isn’t about *you!*” she said. “Maybe Billy here would like to live happily ever after, did you ever think of that? Maybe you’re not supposed to hog all the magic for yourself.”

Mia had to blink away her tears. “I didn’t *mean* to hog the magic.”

“Sure you did!” Juno said with a scowl. “You think me and Billy are, like, these tragic *loser* kids that magic is too good for!”

Mia went bright red then because Juno was right. That was *exactly* what she’d thought. When Mia had wished to live happily ever after, she had only thought about herself. She was so ashamed she didn’t know where to look.

For a long moment, nobody spoke. One of Mrs Turvey’s cats strolled in and started to rub against Billy’s legs. Mia stroked the cat so she didn’t have to look at Juno.

Then all at once a wonderful idea popped into Mia’s head. “Juno, what if we all wished *together?*” she asked.

Billy looked impressed. “*Three* people wishing! That’s *serious* magic!”

Juno never ever looked impressed. She shrugged. “But what if I want something different?”

“We’re just wishing to be happy. The *magic* decides how we get it!” Mia explained.

Juno thought for a minute, then she grinned. “OK. But don’t try to make me hold hands.”

Mia giggled. “You don’t have to hold hands! We’ll all close our eyes and I’ll say the wish out loud. I’m going to wish for everyone at Mrs Turvey’s.”

Billy's eyes flew open. "Not Kyle?" he asked in dismay. "Kyle is really mean!"

"We've just been *into* that, Billy. Like you said, *everybody* wants to live happily ever. We can't leave people out," said Juno, closing her eyes.

"This time we've got to wish for everybody, even Kyle," Mia agreed.

For the first time in months, Mia felt happy and hopeful. Wishing had felt like such a lonely thing to do when you did it all by yourself. But three kids, joining their wishes together? That felt like serious magic, like Billy said!

She shut her eyes and said their wish out loud. "Please let every single person at Mrs Turvey's live happily ever after! Now you've got to wish so hard you see stars!" she told the others.



Juno gave a little gasp. “I can see stars already.”

“*And me,*” said Billy astonished.

Mia saw them too. Tiny gold stars dancing behind her closed eyelids.

A warm breeze began to blow in through the window.

It smelled like sunshine and roses and foreign spices.

“Mia, we did it *right!* It’s *working,*” Billy whispered.

They opened their eyes. And then the magic began.