

# Wishing for Water

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## Chapter One

## Breakfast

“Come and get it!” Frank, Aura’s step dad, yelled up the stairs. Aura Corinne Speltzman, a fourth-grader in Mrs. Narelle’s class at Orinoco Elementary School, pulled on her favorite green-and-purple striped sweater, grabbed her black velvet headband, and slid down the banister. Aura Speltzman might sometimes miss the bus, but she was never, ever late for breakfast.

“Ta-dah!” Frank smiled, his blue eyes shining. Frank was always smiling about something, whether it was teaching Brad Pagliaro about yo-yos, showing Aura how to lace up her ice

skates, or arriving home with surprise flowers for Aura's mom. Although Aura sometimes wished her dad still lived in the wooden house on Merryweather Hill, Frank had been there for her since before Aura could remember. He was family.

As Aura skidded into the kitchen, holding her socks in one hand, she saw Frank at the stove. Before she could say anything, Frank turned around.

“So, what do you think? The perfect outfit for the perfect feast, no?” Frank was dressed as a clown dressed as a chef; two ridiculous costumes, one on top of the other.

Aura started laughing, a round sound that gushed out of her belly and into the warm kitchen air. She gulped for breath, slamming her hand on

the counter to try to stop herself.

From head to toe, Aura's step dad was a walking joke. His floppy white chef's hat perched on the dome of a black top hat, and his nose was hidden by a round knob of bright red plastic . Under his apron, rainbow suspenders held up a pair of pink and orange polka dot pants that ended in shoes the size of skateboards.

Frank pretended to be hurt. Reaching up, he tweaked his own nose, which let off a loud 'shreeee' and made Aura jump.

"You don't like?" With a loud sigh, Frank began to pull a blue silk handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his fake tears as he sniffed. As Aura watched, the blue became yellow, then white, gold, silver and a shimmering scarlet. The

faster Frank pulled, the faster the handkerchiefs spilled out, until his feet were covered in soft, colorful hills. He looked like he had a tail, because the line of fabric was still attached to his pocket.

Aura stopped laughing long enough to jab her thumb at the trail of fabric that was piling up on the kitchen floor. “How’d you get all of those in there?”

Frank’s grin flashed across his face, and he winked. “Magic.”

“No such thing,” Aura said, winking back. Not unless you count friends arriving on lightning bolts and potions in the attic and the magic of a mountain song calling back old ghosts.

As Aura was thinking of all her adventures with her best friend, Eva Antonella Simona

Tamatha von Brandt knocked on the back door and walked in.

Blowing on her hands, Eve added her frozen breath the steam from the stove. “Cold out there--does spring ever come in the northlands?”

Eve’s family had moved from Florida before Christmas, but her parents were on the run because they had stolen art and money. Eve lived in a tall, gray house on the other side of Marshall’s Pond with her grandmother, Grandma Maria, and Eve wasn’t a big fan of the long, dark winters of the upstate tundra.

Aura pointed out the window at the frozen pond. “Cold means a few extra days of skating before it’s too thin.”

Eve rolled her eyes, hopped up on a stool

next to where Frank was still cooking, and reached for her already-poured glass of strawberry milk. “Thanks, Frank. Room temperature, just the way I like it.”

Picking up her glass, Aura peered through the murky liquid. “Extra pink.”

Digging in his other pocket, Frank put on his best booming voice. “Did someone say ‘extra pink?’” He pirouetted like a ballerina, spatula in one hand and plastic roses in the other.

Leaning towards Aura, Frank nodded his head seriously. “The first flowers of spring, madam. Put your nose right in there and take a whiff.”

Aura knew Frank well enough to see there was a trick. She nudged Eve, saying, “Go on,

smell them! I bet they smell like...”

Before she could finish, Eve squealed. As she breathed in the fake flowers, Frank squirted her with a hidden water gun in his fist! Eve jumped off the stool and grabbed a handful of flour from a leftover plate next to the sink. She held it out, walking with big, slow steps towards the tall chef-clown. “And now, for my final act...”

Frank ducked as Eve tossed the flour, which landed mostly next to the frying pan on the stove. “You win,” he said, hiding behind the door that led into the dining room. “And to make up for it, I’ll show you what I’ve got planned.”

Eve laughed and wiped her wet face with a napkin. “This had better be good.”

Frank stood up straight, as stiff as a soldier. “To begin, my lovely ladies, a first course of fruit, yoghurt, and homemade granola.”

Eve squinted at the bowl of honey-toasted oats, pistachios, almonds, cranberries and dried peaches. “I’m betting Mrs. Speltzman made that and told you it was breakfast. No need for all the rest of this. Am I right?”

“You got me.” Frank scooped fruit, yoghurt and the crunchy topping into three matching bowls and handed each of the girls a shiny spoon.

“Mom left early this morning,” Aura said, her mouth full of raspberries and yoghurt. “Meditation starts at six on Saturdays.”

Eve frowned. “What kind of medication?”

Her eyes widening, she gripped Aura's hand.

"Your mom's not sick, is she?"

"Meditation." Frank picked up the story while Aura chewed another spoonful of granola.

"It's learning to breathe and relax, with music and candles and quiet."

"Nothing to it." Eve chomped noisily through another spoonful of the yummy granola and shrugged. "Just like we learned in science class: inhale, exhale, repeat. Why does she need a class?"

Frank scrunched up his eyes and rested his chin in one hand. "Excellent question. Guess it's because sometimes, grownups forget how. So we find someone, a teacher, to help us remember."

Turning to Aura, Eve raised her eyebrows.

“So, if kids are pretty good at this breathing thing, how come adults don’t learn from us?”

Saved from answering Eve’s impossible question by the next course of breakfast, Frank picked up soup ladle and dipped it into the aluminum batter bowl. “Strawberry milk flavored mini-waffles, anyone?”

Eve and Aura ate three tiny waffles each, shaking powdered sugar and pouring maple syrup so thick that they had to eat their waffles like stew. Frank made a plain waffle for himself, which he topped with peanut butter and a pinch of cinnamon.

Patting her belly, Aura looked up at Frank, who was still busy at the stove. “I left space for bacon. Is there bacon?”

Clapping his hands as he put down the spatula, Frank grinned. “And what would Saturday Stepdad Special breakfast be without bacon, Miss Aura?”

He turned to Eve. “And now, for my amazing finale, I bring you: bacon and eggs!”

As he raised his voice, Frank twirled around. Faster and faster he turned, until he was a blur. Stomping his huge clown feet, Frank went around and around, spinning and spinning and spinning until...

“Fire!” Aura screamed, staring at the line of flashing flame that twisted with Frank. “Fire!”

Frank stopped, his eyes coming to rest on the cord of flames that began on the stovetop and was lazily curling along the line of colored

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