

Yodels & Yo-yos

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Chapter One Through the Looking Glass

Eva Antonella Simona Tamatha von Brandt woke up on the last day of vacation to the sound of a wild animal being strangled in her living room. The howl made her gulp and shiver, but Eve wasn't too scared to move. Whatever it was, she was going to face it. Jumping out of bed, she raced down the stairs of her house, shouting all the way. "Grandma? Grandma Maria, are you okay?"

Her blonde hair flying out in every direction, Eve pumped her legs harder and ran down the dark hallway to the front of the house.

She yelled louder. “I’m coming, don’t worry, I’m coming--”

Just as quickly as it had started, the sound stopped and was replaced by a long, low laugh. Grandma Maria, dressed in her flowing yellow nightgown with her silver hair in braids, opened the door to the living room. Sunshine poured in behind her, so that she looked like a shining angel in the doorway.

Eve was running so fast she didn’t have time to stop. Before she could skid to a halt, she slammed straight into her grandmother’s waiting arms. Grandma Maria hugged her tightly and kissed the top of Eve’s head. “What’s wrong, little one? Bad dream?”

Trying to hear herself over the pounding

of her heart, Eve peered around her grandmother's waist into the room beyond. Everything was just as it had been the night before: overstuffed leather couches, bright blue and red rugs on the scuffed wooden floor, and the bookcase in the corner. Eve could see through the windows that there had been another ice storm overnight--the branches of the trees hang low and scraped against the glass like rattling teeth.

“I thought I heard a--” Eve looked up at Grandma Maria and hugged her a little tighter.

When Grandma Maria laughed, her whole body shook. Taking Eve by the hand, she walked back into the kitchen and poured them both a glass of juice.

“Half orange, half grapefruit, half

cranberry.” When she smiled, Grandma Maria’s gray eyes almost disappeared in a face full of wrinkles.

Eve had the same gray eyes that sparkled as she laughed. “No such thing as three halves of a whole, Grandma! I’ve been doing fractions since last year in third grade, and everyone knows that.”

Grandma Maria shrugged, sitting down heavily on a stool at the kitchen counter and squeezing her granddaughter’s hand. “You’re so smart, little one. What do I know of fractions?”

Eve was dying to know what the noise she’d heard had been, but she knew her grandmother wouldn’t tell until she was ready. She and Grandma Maria had only lived together in the high wooden house on Merryweather Hill in

Orinoco for a few months, ever since her parents went on the run, but already Eve understood that there were some things worth explaining that could wait until after breakfast. Or longer, if her grandmother thought the secret was worth keeping.

The girl's stomach growled, and Grandma Maria chuckled. "Sound like someone's up for sugar lemon crepes and homemade sausage patties, eh?"

Nodding like an ostrich, Eve grinned. Everything about her grandmother was warm and wonderful. Suddenly, nothing mattered to Eve except the feel of her grandmother's hands guiding hers as they poured the flour into the bowl and shared a wooden spoon to mix up the batter.

“But Mom, it’s the last day of vacation. I can’t be sick!” Aura stared at the thermometer in her mother’s hand, the blinking digital display flashing 100.8 degrees. “I promised Eve I’d teach her figure eights on the pond, and she’s getting really good at only falling down when she’s skating backwards!”

Aura Speltzman, aged ten, frowned as her voice cracked. She put her hand up to her throat, feeling the burn. Grumbling more softly, she felt the tears in her eyes.

“Sweetheart, I’m sorry.” Mrs. Speltzman tucked in her daughter’s purple unicorn comforter. “But you’ll see, in a few days you’ll be all better and there will be plenty of time for ice skating

once you're well."

Taking a sip of the warm milk her mother held out, Aura shook her head. Her curly brown hair jiggled around her face and her green eyes trembled. "I heard Frank talking about the weather. Said it's all set for an early thaw this week. There'll be no more ice ever."

Even as she said that, Aura knew it wasn't exactly true. In Orinoco, the winters came early and stayed late, even if sometimes they took a vacation in the middle. Marshall's Pond, behind their tall, tan-colored house, was often frozen enough to skate even on St. Patrick's Day in March.

"Still not fair." Feeling a chill from her fever, Aura snuggled deeper into the blankets.

“Does this mean I’ll also miss the first day back at school?”

Mrs. Speltzman stood up and opened the blue shades in Aura’s room, letting the sunlight dance rainbows on her daughter’s bed. “We’ll see about that, honey. For now, get a little more rest. You’ll feel better after a nap.”

Aura wasn’t asleep when the phone rang, and she heard her mom using her quiet voice downstairs in the kitchen. Taking a deep breath, Aura wrapped herself up in her comforter and crept halfway down the stairs to listen in.

“No, Eve, I’m sorry, Aura’s--”

“Eve!” Aura stumbled down the stairs, holding on to the banister so she wouldn’t trip over the long trail of blanket behind her. “Mom, let me

talk to her.”

Mrs. Speltzman rolled her eyes and handed her daughter the phone. Whispering, she added, “You should be in bed, young lady!”

Aura grinned, ignoring her headache and sore throat. She pressed the phone to her ear. “Eve? Eve, are you there?”

Eve’s voice sounded very close. “Your mom says you’re still sick. No skating then, right?”

Sighing, Aura nodded into the phone, forgetting that Eve couldn’t see her. “Nope. Guess it’ll have to wait.”

Just as Aura was about to hang up, Eve gave a shout. “Wait! I have an idea! Has your mom still got that cleared space where she’s going

to plant tomatoes in the spring? You know, that patch of ground outside the dining room window?”

“Yeah, sure.” Aura had no idea where Eve was going with this, but she knew her best friend was excited about something.

“Okay.” Breathing deeply, Eve started thinking. “Okay, put your mom back on the phone and go right back to bed while I figure all of this out. And no cheating! I want it to be a surprise.”

Aura wrinkled her nose and stared at the phone. “Mom, Eve wants to talk to you.”

Mrs. Speltzman wiped her hands a dishtowel hanging over the sink and took the phone. “Eve?”

Listening for a few moments, Aura’s mom smiled. “Will do. No problem. Everything will be

ready.”

Desperate to know what her mom and friend were planning, Aura tried to stall going back to bed. First she tried the obvious. “Mom, can I have another glass of strawberry milk?” Strawberry was her favorite flavor, and pink her favorite color.

Pouring the drink, Mrs. Speltzman laughed. “Then it’s back to bed for you, young lady. I’ve got work to do.”

Aura drank her milk as slowly as she could, sitting on the high stool in the kitchen and dangling her legs until they almost touched the floor. She still felt a little warm and sweaty from her fever, but she tried the next stalling tactic anyway even though she wasn’t hungry. “Mom,

can I please have a sandwich? You know, bologna, pickle, a smear of crunchy peanut butter?”

Mrs. Speltzman didn't argue with her daughter. That had been Aura's favorite sandwich for years, and her mom was happy to see Aura's appetite back. “Crusts off?”

“On.” Aura squinted in the sunlight, trying to figure out how to trick her mom into spilling the beans on Eve's secret plan. “Anything I can do to help?”

“Never going to work, Aura.” Mrs. Speltzman sliced the sandwich, added an extra pickle, and served it, zipping up her lips with her thumb and finger and pretending to throw away the key.

“Not hungry.” Aura was angry--first she

couldn't go skating, which she loved to do more than anything in the world, except maybe playing the xylophone with Eve in the school band at Orinoco Elementary School, and now her mother and her best friend were having fun without her. Aura slid off the stool and started walking slowly back up the stairs. "I'm bored, and I'm mad, and I hate being sick!"

Two hours later, Aura was still sleeping, curled up with the comforter over her head and her knees up to her chin. She didn't hear the soft knock at the front door.

"Come in." Mrs. Speltzman whispered and pulled Eve into the kitchen. "I think I've got everything we need."

Eve grinned and unzipped her backpack.

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