

Chapter 2

Magdalena Hernandez

Three days passed with nothing but rain, even though August was usually bright and sunny, or at least it had been back home. Uncle Steve had said the weather in Massachusetts was pretty much the same as back in Pennsylvania, maybe a little cooler in the winter, but the way it was looking she wasn't so sure. He'd also said that if you don't like the weather in New England, just wait a few minutes and it would change. *That* certainly wasn't true.

"Hey honey," Dad said at breakfast, "how about we go to the library? That's, what, the third time you've read that one?"

She looked up from her book. "Fourth."

"Right. Fourth. Anyway, I thought you might like to get out of the house today, and somewhere more interesting than the lighting store."

"Okay," she said, managing a smile. They'd done the lighting store yesterday, and though it had resulted in a lamp so she could finally read comfortably on the couch, she still didn't see any reason why it should have taken twenty minutes to make a decision on the right one. Not to mention the new ceiling lights in the kitchen, and the lamp for her parents' bedroom...

"Great. I asked Steve, and he said it opens at 10, so we can leave in about an hour."

"You want to come Mama?" Cassie asked.

"No thanks," Mama replied, looking down at Julie, who was sleeping in her arms. "If there's any way I can keep her asleep, I'm going to try to take a nap."

Cassie frowned just a little. Back before Julie had been born, it was usually Mama whom she'd gone to the library with. The library had been one of her favorite

places in the world. She'd had her own favorite cozy chair, right in the corner of the older kids' section where she'd curl up with a good book under the window that looked over the garden while her Mama knitted and hummed softly to herself and the baby growing in her belly. She wondered what the new library would be like—probably all hard chairs and metal shelves like the book store at the mall that had closed a couple of years ago. She sighed.



This library was completely different from the one in Pennsylvania, though not like she'd imagined. Instead of a children's section, there was a whole children's wing, with one room for picture books, another for reference books and videos, and then upstairs, along with an open area for studying, there was nonfiction and poetry. Downstairs they had a play area too, with a train set and other toys, and the whole place was crawling with laughing, screeching toddlers and preschoolers, not quiet like a library should be at all.

It didn't take long before she was sick of the noise and had to retreat upstairs. There, the stacks were not as crowded, and she could browse along without being disturbed. After a time, she found a couple of books, one with stories about King Arthur which she'd never read before, another on animals, and sat down at one of the tables.

"Honey," Dad said, "are you going to be okay up here?" He glanced over at the upstairs librarian, who was busily moving her cart between the aisles, placing books back up on the shelves where they belonged.

"Sure Dad," she answered with a smile.

“Okay. I’m going to go look for a couple books for myself, and something for Mama, and maybe a movie too. I’ll be back in a bit.”

“I’ll be right here.”

He smiled and leaned over to give her a kiss on the forehead, then left out the door. The sound of screaming children wafted up from below for a few seconds, and then the big glass door closed behind him.

She looked down at her book and flipped through it, smiling to herself. The pictures were amazing, by some artist she’d never seen before, filled with bright colors and absolutely beautiful clothes. And the people were so well drawn, they looked almost real, like someone you might meet if you were walking down the street. She sighed and stared at the first picture for a good long time. It was Arthur, pulling the sword from the stone in the center of a town, while people all around watched. There were so many little details, two sparrows standing on the cobbled street in the foreground, a man pulling a stubborn donkey off in the background...

“Hi. Mind if I sit here?”

Cassie looked up to see another girl holding a stack of books and looking at her expectantly. She had long, dark hair, darker even than Cassie’s own, and smooth, light brown skin. She flashed Cassie a smile, revealing teeth crisscrossed by braces.

“Go ahead,” Cassie replied.

“I’m Magdalena, Magdalena Hernandez, by the way. That’s *Arthur and His Knights*, isn’t it?”

“Yes...”

“I love that book. Of course, I’m biased, you know. See the illustrator?”

Cassie blinked for a minute, then put her hand in the book and closed it, looking inside of the cover.

Staring at her was a pretty young woman with short, dark hair and big, brown eyes.

“Inez Her—” she started, then looked up.

“Yeah, she’s my aunt. She lives in New York—the city, not the state. It’s a hard book to find—it never sold that well, though I don’t understand why. Everyone I know says it’s just beautiful. You know, I bet this is the only library in Massachusetts that has it, except maybe one in Boston, and of course the one at school. We donated it.”

“Oh.”

“Do you like it?”

“The pictures are very pretty.”

“Inez is teaching me how to draw too, though I’m not as good as her of course. But I don’t get many lessons since she’s so far away.” Magdalena sighed. “But I’m getting better. Maybe I’ll show you some of my work some day. By the way, are you new here?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so. I recognize most of the kids in town my age, except some of the kids from the private schools, unless they go to my church, of course. Plus your bag says Sotherfield Elementary, and I’ve never heard of that. Where is it?”

“It’s in Pennsylvania.”

“Is it nice there?”

“Yes, mostly.”

“I’ve never been to Pennsylvania, though I’ve been all over Massachusetts and New England and New York, and once to Puerto Rico, where my family’s from, though I was just a baby then so I can’t remember it. I’ve even been to Montreal, three years ago, and I can remember *that*, mostly. Inez took us—she was painting some pictures of Old Town.” She smiled, then raised

her eyebrows. “Oh! I almost forgot! I never asked you what your name was.”

“Cassie,” Cassie replied. “It’s short for Cassandra. Cassandra Argyle.”

“Hello Cassandra Argyle. Pleased to meet you. Where do you live, Cassie? Are you here, or are you just visiting?”

“I’m here. 45 Noomen Lane. We just moved in.”

“Hey, that old place! That’s just a few blocks my house! Are you starting fifth grade this year too?”

“Yes.”

“I thought so. You look about the same age as me—I’m usually pretty good at guessing that sort of thing. I hope you’re in my class. I always like having new kids in my class. It makes the year that much more interesting, don’t you think?”

“I don’t know what class I’m in yet.”

“Yeah, they don’t usually tell you until the last possible moment. My Mom always complains about that. Don’t worry, though. I’ll show you around. I know *everybody* in school, and where all the classrooms are and everything.”

“Okay,” Cassie said quietly.

Magdalena smiled. “Great!” she said. “So, tell me about Pennsylvania.”



Dad showed up a few minutes later, while Magdalena was pointing through the pictures her aunt had painted in the King Arthur book. With him was a pretty woman with short, curly hair pulled back with a multicolored headband. They were talking together as they climbed up the stairs, and she was laughing when they opened the glass door to the room.

“Hi Cassie,” Dad said brightly. “I was looking at the movies when I bumped into Mrs. Hernandez here, and she said that she has a girl around your age—oh!”

“We’ve already met,” Cassie said. “Hi Mrs. Hernandez.”

“Hi Mr. Argyle,” Magdalena said with a smile, standing up and shaking his hand. “Good to meet you. I was just showing Cassie Inez’s pictures, Mom. She actually picked out the book herself, without me telling her about it or anything.”

“You like King Arthur?” Mrs. Hernandez asked. She had an accent, unlike her daughter, though it wasn’t so strong that Cassie had any difficulty understanding her.

“Yes,” Cassie said, smiling a little.

“Very good.”

“Listen,” Dad said, “Mrs. Hernandez and I were talking, and we were thinking that maybe Magdalena could come over to our house soon. Maybe tomorrow, or Saturday...”

“I’d love to!” Magdalena said. “But tomorrow Liz’s coming over—could I bring her too?”

“Are you sure?” Mrs. Hernandez asked.

“Oh, she needs to get out more anyway,” Magdalena announced. “It’ll be good for her. And Cassie doesn’t mind, do you Cass?”

“I guess not...” Cassie said.

“The more the merrier,” Dad answered with a smile. “Bring whoever you like. Do you girls like macaroni and cheese?”

“Sure,” Magdalena said brightly. “And I’m sure Liz will too. She eats just about anything.”