

Magic Elizabeth

written by Norma Kassirer

illustrated by Joe Krush

Chapter One: Rainy Night

a breakfast serials story

It all began one rainy night at the end of a summer.

“As if we didn’t have enough troubles!” groaned Mrs. Chipley. “There it goes and rains on us!”

Sally, clinging to Mrs. Chipley’s plump hand, was almost running to keep up with her. The bright feather on

they stepped off the bus, the branches of the tall trees rattled like bones in the wind.

And now it was raining—a nasty, cold, stinging rain, mixed with wet leaves torn from the groaning trees. It splashed and flew about them as they hurried along the

gloomy street. Rain flew into Sally’s eyes and it dribbled unpleasantly beneath the collar of her coat. Sally’s long red hair, fluttering bannerlike behind her, gave their small procession a brave look. And yet Sally, at least, was not feeling brave at all.

“It’s a lucky thing your Aunt Sarah’s come back to town just now when we need her, with your mom and dad away on that business trip,” Mrs. Chipley went on.

“I don’t remember her at all,” panted Sally. “I was just a baby when she went away to California.”

“Going back again, too, pretty soon, your ma said,” said Mrs. Chipley.

“Only came back here to sell the house. But,” she went on, “your ma left me her name in case of an emergency.”

“I wonder what she’s like,” Sally said. But Mrs. Chipley did not seem to hear her.

“And if my daughter’s getting sick isn’t an emergency, then I don’t know what is!” Mrs. Chipley stopped so suddenly that Sally bumped into her. The woman peered up through the rain at a street sign.

“My glasses are all fogged over,” she said. “Can you read that sign, honey?”

Sally shaded her eyes and stood on tiptoe, squinting to



Mrs. Chipley’s black hat, which had started out so proudly erect, had gradually wilted, and now drooped sadly down the back of that lady’s stout neck. Sally’s red suitcase, its handle firmly gripped by Mrs. Chipley’s other hand, bumped in a steady rhythm against her right leg. But Mrs. Chipley strode purposefully on, as if she had no time to notice small discomforts.

The two of them had come all the way across the city on the bus, and during the ride the sky had darkened and the street lights had bloomed all at once. High-piling storm clouds snuffed out the light of the round orange moon. As

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make out the letters through the blowing shadows.

"It says Forest Road," she said at last.

"This is it," said Mrs. Chipley, nodding vigorously. Sally's hand crept back into hers. "Now watch the numbers on the houses," Mrs. Chipley said. "It's eighty-two we want."

"But there aren't any houses," said Sally, for as far as she could see, all down the street on either side were tall buildings.

"If it's Forest Road, it's got to be your Aunt Sarah's street."

The hand which clung to Mrs. Chipley's grew suddenly very cold. Mrs. Chipley squeezed it gently. "There, honey," she said, "you're not scared, are you?"

Sally shook her head. But she was scared. She was scared of the strange dark street with the rain splashing in the gutters, of the windblown shadows shivering over the walk, of the tall buildings looming over them and seeming to watch them with the glittering eyes of their windows. And of her aunt, whom she did not know at all.

Mrs. Chipley squeezed her hand again. "Now, don't you be scared!" she said kindly. "Why, you're eight years old, aren't you?"

"Almost nine," Sally answered.

"Well, now! That's too old to be scared of your own great-aunt. Watch for the numbers now, sweetie! Oof! We'll be soaked to the skin, and I have to run right back to the bus stop to get the train to meet my daughter. Can't even stop for a cup of tea."

"Ninety," said Sally. "It says 'ninety' on that building."

"There we go, then, it'll be on this side of the street."

"I'm scared," thought Sally. "Take me with you, Mrs. Chipley, I won't be any trouble, I promise." But she didn't say it. "Eighty-eight," she said instead. "Eighty-six."

"Oh, we're close! What's this?" Mrs. Chipley stopped.

"It's a house," whispered Sally. She knew now what it meant to feel your heart sink. Hers seemed to be somewhere

around her toes.

For a peaked roof could be seen just above the top of a line of tall scraggly bushes. It was the only house, as far as they could see, on the entire street.

As they stared, they heard a creaking sound and saw, almost hidden by the overgrown bushes, a pretty little wrought iron gate moving slowly back and forth in the wind. It seemed to Sally the saddest sound she had ever heard.

"What's the number on the gate, dearie?"

Sally put a hand on the gate to hold it still. The metal was cold and wet. She shivered. "Eighty-two," she said in a small voice.

"This is it, then, honey." Mrs. Chipley, still holding Sarah's hand, pushed the gate open with the suitcase she held in the other hand and led the way along a path.

"The house is dark," said Sally, her voice trembling.

"Never mind that," said Mrs. Chipley briskly. "I expect she's somewhere in the back of the house, no doubt in the kitchen hotting up that tea."

It looked, Sally thought in despair, like a witch's house. She was suddenly afraid that she might begin to cry. "Don't you *dare*," she ordered herself.

"A shame to have to refuse that cup of tea," Mrs. Chipley was murmuring.

Coldness shivered along the back of Sally's neck as they climbed the porch steps.

to be continued ...

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